

# The Wild Bird



**HULBERT  
FOOTNER**

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By HULBERT FOOTNER

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The Wild Bird  
The Under Dogs  
Officer!  
Ramshackle House  
The Deaves Affair  
The Owl Taxi  
The Substitute Millionaire  
Thieves' Wit  
New Rivers of the North

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*The*  
WILD BIRD

BY  
HULBERT FOOTNER

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THE WILD BIRD

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# THE WILD BIRD

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## CHAPTER I

### THE STAGE

AT the top of the long rise the stage halted, and the passengers started to climb aboard again. By walking up the hills they accomplished the double purpose of easing the horses' load and limbering their own cramped limbs. One of the passengers was an exceedingly pretty girl in a smart blue hat, and as upon every hill, there was a general contention among the male passengers for a seat beside her. The driver, as one possessing a prior right, patted the other half of his seat; a great, bearded prospector who had climbed in behind him, leaned out and reached the girl a paw like a grizzly's.

"Come in here with me, Nell. I got a story about Louis Riel I ain't told you yet."

In the third seat two younger men made common cause together. "Ahh, Mort'll talk you deaf, dumb, and blind, Nell," said one of them. "Sit here betwixt Pete and me and we'll let you do the talkin'."

A fourth man remained standing in the road to see which way the cat would jump, and prepared to act accordingly.

The girl hesitated, looking them over with a smile good-natured and contemptuous. Her prettiness was of the fragile cast, most potent with men; delicately hollowed cheeks and great brown eyes, perfectly disillusioned. She finally shook her head.

"I'm tired of you all," she drawled. "I'm going to ride with Miss Maury until the next spell."

This other feminine passenger had taken the rearmost seat of the stage, where she sat partly concealed owing to the fact that the last pair of side curtains was down. She moved over with a smile. She seemed almost as much fascinated by the decorative Nell as the men were. She was quite as pretty as Nell herself, and fresher, but hers was a beauty under cover. She simply kept it to herself, consequently none of the foolish men had discerned it. The old sailor hat she wore, which was both faded and a little warped, seemed to advertise the fact that she was not out hunting. From the first the men, intuitively recognizing that she had nothing for them, had let her alone.

The stage clattered on.

“What’s your first name?” asked Nell. “Here we been ridin’ together most a week. Nobody uses a handle to their name up here.”

“Ann,” said the other. She was rather shy with Nell, but bright-eyed and observant.

“You look like an Ann,” said Nell.

“What do Anns look like?” asked the girl with a delightful smile.

“Oh! . . . sort of household treasure.”

Ann laughed.

“What’s your graft?” asked Nell.

Ann looked puzzled.

“What do you do for your country?”

“I teach school.”

Nell stared. “Lord! did you expect to find any schools up here?”

“I didn’t come up here to teach,” said Ann evasively. “I just want to see the country.” To announce at large that she had come North to search for a father, would, Ann felt, render her ridiculous, and like all young people she had a dread of that.

“Well, there it is,” said Nell with a sweep of her arm.

The road was edging around the shoulder of a hill, and the wild raw valley of the Campbell River lay spread beneath them; all broken with rock masses in this part and scraggled with trees, mountains rising beyond.

“What part of the East you from?” asked Nell.

“Maryland.”

“Some different from Cariboo, eh?”

A picture of that fat land rose before Ann’s eyes. “As different as one country could be from another,” she said simply.

Nell took a cigarette from the breast pocket of her smart serge coat, where she kept a little row handy to her hand, lighted it and flipped the match over the wheel. Ann watched her fascinated.

“Have one?” asked Nell.

“Oh no,” said Ann, blushing and smiling. “It wouldn’t suit an Ann. But you do it beautifully.”

Nell shrugged. “They’ll kill me yet,” she said.

Nell blew clouds of smoke and regarded the broad backs of the men with distaste. “Lord, but I’m sick of them!” she said.

“Of whom?” said Ann.

“Everything that wears pants! There’s nothing to it!”

“I’ve been thinking about that,” said Ann shyly.

“The devil you have!” said Nell with a sidelong look.

“I mean I wondered how a woman like you could be content to stay in this rough country.”

“Too much competition in the cities,” said Nell dryly. “Up here I’m known. They call me the Queen of North Cariboo. Maybe you’ve heard. It’s something to be Queen even of a dump like this. . . . As for men, I expect they’re much the same everywhere. . . . Oh, this country isn’t so bad. At least we’re honest about things up here. A city with its newspapers and parsons and cops and old women makes me sick! . . . It isn’t the country I’m fed up with. It’s life in general, I guess. It’s years since I had a thrill . . . I shan’t stay up here always. I’m saving money.”

“Oh, I’m glad of that,” said Ann innocently.

Nell looked at her curiously. “You’re a funny kid. What is it to you whether I save?”

Ann blushed without replying.

“Do you save?” demanded Nell.

“A little,” said Ann. “But of course I’m blowing it all in on this trip.”

“You’re a nice one to be talking about saving, then!”

“But if you have to, you can go on teaching till you’re old,” said Ann simply.

Nell bit her lip and looked away.

Up in front Mort Levering threw back his shaggy head and yawned, ending with a bull’s roar that came echoing back from the hills. “Nell, hop over the seats and come talk to me,” he said playfully.

“I’m better occupied,” said Nell.

The other men laughed delightedly.

The whispered conversation on the back seat was resumed. “How old are you?” asked Nell with a strange curiosity.

“Twenty,” said Ann.

“I’m twenty-four,” said Nell.

Ann could not restrain her glance of surprise.

“You think I’m lying,” said Nell. “But I’m not. I been on my own for nine years now. It’s the cagey look you get that makes you seem older. I got

six years more before I'll begin to break. And you can fool men for years after that if you're clever. The big boobies!"

Ann had no comment to make.

"You don't care about men, do you?" asked Nell.

Again the charming, merry smile broke through Ann's shyness. "What makes you think so?" she countered.

"Well, for one thing, that hat," said Nell.

Ann was not in the least offended. "I thought I ought to dress as plainly as possible for a journey like this," she said.

"Back in Maryland did you have a fellow?" Nell asked with her poignant curiosity.

"No," said Ann. "I'm not attractive to men," she went on, with the air of one who had long made up her mind to the fact.

"You're prettier than I am," said Nell.

"That's nonsense."

"Believe me, I'm an expert," said Nell dryly.

"Then why do they never look at me?"

"You've got to show them you're willing to be looked at."

"I'd rather have some man discover me."

"You'll wait a long time, kid. Men are not discoverers, they're sheep! Look at the way they run after me. Just because I'm the fashion. I made myself the fashion. . . . Your time will come," she added darkly.

"I wouldn't go after a man if there was only one on earth!" said Ann with spirit.

"There always is only one," said Nell.

"It's more fun to be chased than to do the chasing," said Ann.

"Sure," said Nell, "but you'll find you've got to get him going before he'll set up a chase."

"I want to be swept off my feet unawares," said Ann.

"That's what all young girls say," retorted Nell.

Johnny Lovat, the driver, a "quarter-breed," pointed with his whip to a curious limestone scarp that crossed the valley below them. Out of a hole in this cliff, a mile away, the river issued foaming.

"That's the mouth of the second canyon," said Johnny. "Lariat Canyon some calls it, because there's a big round eddy in it you couldn't get out of no more than you was caught in a rope. There's eleven canyons in all in three hundred miles between Yewcroft and Ching's Landing where you take

to the river. Mostly they have walls as smooth like they was sliced down. Ole Father Campbell is one river the white man lets be. He had to build him a road alongside.”

Above the cliff the floor of the valley was smoother and the road descended from the side hills. The view of the travellers was now more restricted. It was old burnt-over land for the most part, with ruinous, black shafts sticking crazily this way and that, and piled fantastically on the ground. Patches of purple fire-weed mantled the ruins, and young aspen and birch were pushing up, preparatory to making all beautiful again. Over the trees, living and dead, they had glimpses of snow peaks to the east and west, and when they topped a rise more peaks closed in the view to the north. It was noon of a July day, and the sky was forget-me-not blue.

On the floor of the valley the old telegraph road was innocent of grading and the horses could not travel above a walk. Many of the mud-holes in shaded spots were historic. “Hadn’t never dried up within recollection of the oldest settler,” Johnny Lovat said. Around these places new tracks had been laboriously cut through the down timber. Their withered little driver was often reminded of a story.

“See that hole yonder?” he said. “On my last trip up but one I come across old Pop Hopper stuck in that there hole with his load. Must have been asleep when he druv in, ’cause everybody knows it. Us fellows hates to get behind Pop Hopper on the road. Allus got to stop somewheres to help him out. As the saying is, he’d get through quicker if he put his neck in the collar and let his hosses drive. He’s a character, Pop Hopper is; don’t have to freight; he’s got money.

“Well, this time I speak of I knew he was ahead of me ’cause I see streaks of egg yolk in the road. Nobody but Pop Hopper would load egg crates in the bottom of his wagon and bales of hay on top. And sure enough I comes on him sunk in the mud ’most to the tops of his wheels. And him just settin’ there waitin’ to be helped. Well, I took my hosses out, and some other guys come along too. All in all it took six teams pullin’ and about twenty men prizin’ to get Pop Hopper clear of the mud. And him standing alongside cussin’ us out like the foreman of a railway gang. That’s Pop Hopper’s way. He druv on crackin’ his whip, but the rest of us had to spell a while to rest up.

“Well, I’m damned if a couple of miles farther along he didn’t turn her over altogether on a little side hill. Yes, sir, when I come up, all four his wheels was turning in the air. And Pop Hopper a-settin’ there with his back against a tree eatin’ a little lunch. Yes, there was a bucket of pickles busted open right convenient to his hand.”

“Pop Hopper and Wes’ Trickett, they’s a pair,” said Mort Levering. “One on the land and one on the water. Ole Wes’ is as good a navigator as Pop Hopper is a horseman. I mind once I was aboard his crummy ole stern-kicker when he tried to take her up the Gisborne rapids, the water being low. Well, sirs, his rotten ole hawsers busted as fast as they could be carried up-stream, and ev’ry time they parted we’d settle back on a shoal, and Wes’ would go inside and take a swig of patent medicine. He buys ev’ry new kind he hears of, and keeps ’em all on a shelf at the foot of his bunk. I seen ’em there. They say he mixes different kinds together when he wants a new kick. One time when we jolted on a shoal she snapped her crazy ole stove-pipe short off and we had to lay to a couple of hours to fix that. When we were near to the head of the rapid one more rope busted, and Wes’ suddenly lost heart. We were a’most up, but he turned her ’round and went down again. Say, I was sore! He put me out on the shore, and there I had to spell until I could get a parcel of breeds to pack my outfit through the bush.”

After six days in the same company, everybody’s stock of stories was running low, and for long periods they rode in silence, uncomfortably shifting their positions on the hard seats, and yawning enormously. Time passed, said one, like a slow freight on an up grade. The men sat sideways for the most part, casting sheep’s eyes back at Nell, who ignored them.

Nell took off the smart blue hat, and pinning it to a side curtain, put her head down in Ann’s lap without so much as by your leave. Ann was greatly pleased by the childlike act. Ann gazed down at her with a half smile, marvelling at the real peachiness of Nell’s complexion, and the shine of her chestnut hair. After all she had been through! Nell was a great and fascinating enigma to Ann.

Nell slept or seemed to sleep, and Ann mused over her, fending her with her arms as well as she could, from the jolts. How terrified she had been of Nell the first day, seeing her so sure of herself, so sure of her men. But it had gradually passed, as she found Nell quite human. Quite human! it had compelled Ann to change all her notions about girls of Nell’s sort. Somehow it comforted Ann to discover that they were not as bad as they were painted. One did not have to be strange with them. To be sure, on the surface, Nell was as hard and wary as Ann had supposed such girls must be, but it was only on the surface. It was an assumption not greatly different from any other professional manner. Did not she, Ann, have to be hard and wary with her schoolchildren? There was really such a little difference between her and Nell. Yet it seemed to erect a whole world between them. But did it really? Or was that only an idea? Suppose she were Nell, and Nell were she, would

there be any essential change in either of them? . . . Such questions were not to be answered.

Meanwhile, Ann thought, what a satisfaction it was to see and learn life for oneself! That was surely the greatest thing in the world, and she would never get enough of it; to see; to know.

Johnny Lovat cried at last: "This is the last hill, ladies. Down at the other side is Ching's Landing where I bid you all a fond farewell."

"Hope to God Wes' Trickett'll be there with his ole wash-tub," muttered Mort Levering. "You never can depend on Wes'."

"He'll be there to-day, though," said Johnny. "He knows Nellie's coming in."

Nell rose and put on the blue hat. From somewhere she produced a tiny mirror in which she studied herself an inch at a time, tucking in her stray locks and powdering her nose. Ann watched every move, delighted.

"Hey, Nell!" cried Mort. "When we get up to the Fort, don't you give me the go-by for any of them slick guys up there, do you hear? Remember I made the trip with you, Nell."

"That's your handicap, Mort," Nell replied with her alluring insolence. "I'm tired of you before we arrive."

They had turned at right angles to climb the side of a rocky hill that ran straight athwart the valley. For some distance back they had glimpsed the dark wall ahead of them. They had passed out of the burnt country, and superb fir trees rose wherever a foothold was obtainable amongst the rocks. Under the firs a sort of raspberry bush spread great, pale leaves to gather up the attenuated sunlight. They could hear the tremendous voice of the river quite close now, but could not see it.

The road turned sharply on itself, into a rocky gulch, which would lead them, they could see, to the top of the height. There were no fir trees in the gulch; the trees peered over the top. The defile was filled with detached rock masses, amongst which the wagon track wound its slow way.

Suddenly, with ear-piercing yells, a dozen figures leaped out from behind the rocks, brandishing rifles. The leaders reared back against the wheel horses; all four kicked over the traces and plunged in inextricable confusion. The stage started to roll back down hill; Johnny Lovat jammed on his brake. All the male passengers sat in blank consternation. In Canada, hold-ups have never been common enough to educate the inhabitants in the proper technique.

A moment of consternation, then Mort Levering started to bellow: "You, Tinnett! You, Burnsey! You, Corning! I know you!" with sulphurous

profanity.

The seeming attack dissolved in a gale of laughter. The highwaymen slapped their thighs, dropped on the ground, rolled and whooped in unappeasable laughter.

Mort continued to curse them with unabated vigour. The other men in the stage took it more or less in good part. It was the only thing they could do. Nell was perfectly unruffled throughout. Ann was all eyes. So keen was her passion for experience, she felt she wouldn't have minded much had it been a real hold-up.

The men crowded close to the stage at Nellie's side, and reached up an odd bouquet of sinewy hands to grasp hers. Ann, peeping around Nell, had the impression of a stormy sea of masculinity. It was impossible to distinguish individuals.

"Nell! Nell! Nell!" they chanted. "*She's* all right! *Who's* all right? Nellie Nairns! *Wow!*"

There was a flushed quality in both faces and voices. They'd been drinking, thought Ann without alarm. Watching Nellie, Ann marked the half-contemptuous smile, calculated and seductive.

"Nell, you're a sight to heal sore eyes! . . . You're prettier than ever! . . . Nell, we haven't seen your like up here since strawberries ripened in the winter! . . . Nell, if you'll only stay up here we'll give you the damn town!"

A black-haired youth climbed on the wheel, and catching up Nellie's hand, kissed it. He was pulled down with yells and jeers. Apparently this was against the code.

Several of the men ran to the horses and began to unhitch them. "You, Johnny!" cried one. "Take your horses to hell! We're going to pull Nellie down to the boat by man power!"

When the group split up Ann could begin to distinguish individuals: a boy not seventeen with cheeks like roses; a thick Hercules, the wildest of the crew, red-haired, red-faced, red-armed, bawling with excitement; a black-visaged man, saturnine with a devilish grin; an old man, capering like a goat, snapping his fingers.

The male passengers climbed down and became one with the welcomers. That is, all except Mort Levering, who planted his great bulk stubbornly on the seat, and lit a cigar.

"Come on, Mort!" cried the red-haired one. "We're not going to haul your carcase!"

“Come on yourself, Red!” retorted Mort. “I paid my fare and I’m damned if I’ll walk!”

“You damned sure *will* walk, old man!” cried Red. “This is the Nellie Nairns special! Come on, boys! *Raus mit* him!”

A dozen pair of hands dragged Mort down amidst cruel laughter. They set him on his feet, jammed his hat over his eyes, and stuck his trampled cigar back between his lips.

“Take the driver’s seat, Nell!” cried Red.

She stepped nimbly over the backs of the seats, carelessly amused by the uproar. The boys whistled and cheered the display of silk stockings. Somebody shoved the whip into her hand, but she coolly put it back in its socket. A few men glanced askance at Ann in her corner, half hidden by the curtain, but none addressed her.

Four men held up the wagon pole and guided it; the rest ran ahead with a rope which was affixed underneath the wagon. They started with a jerk.

They toiled up the last few yards of the hill, and came out on a level space. The men broke into a run. It was a bare stony flat, the summit of the hill. They soon commenced to descend the other side faster and faster, with wild yells and whoops. The canny Nell’s hand went to the brake.

The river lay revealed now, placid, aspen-bordered in this spot. In the midst of all the excitement Ann had a glance of the river. Indeed the whole scene was etched on her retina. Ann’s eyes were starry; her lips parted. She was thinking: This is wonderful! I mustn’t miss anything!

Faster and faster they went down the stony track, the old stage lurching and swaying, the men yelling. It was like an old-fashioned fire engine going to a fire. They had two turns to make. They made them on two wheels. Only Nell’s hand tugging at the brake saved them from complete disaster. Ann admired Nell’s cool and queenly airs beyond measure, being herself quite incapable of that sort of thing. There was something about Nell that satisfied the artistic sense. Something rather terrible, too, in her good-natured sneer.

Far in the rear Mort Levering stumped down in solitary, injured dignity.

At the bottom of the hill they tore across a natural meadow, whooping; and making a wide turn, drew up smartly at the river bank. The men were breathless with yelling and laughing.

Below them, with her nose grounded on the shingle, Ann saw an absurd little stern-wheel steamboat with her name painted on the side of her pilot-house: *Tewkesbury L. Swett*. She looked as if she had been built by boys out of odds and ends in somebody’s back yard. Her emaciated smoke-stack had several kinks in it. On the deck a fat man with a grizzled, curly poll was

frantically waving a yachting cap. Ann supposed this would be Wes' Trickett.

Two men made a chair of their hands, and carried Nell aboard. Ann followed on her own two feet, the men falling back somewhat abashed. It was clear no one could tell just where she came in. Out on the deck Nell perched herself on the capstan, surrounded by her court: Ann sought a place inside the rough deck-house. A bale of hay supplied her with a seat where she could see all that went on outside, herself unseen. The mail bags and the express packages were carried aboard, and Mort Levering was still only half-way across the meadow.

“Pull out, pull out, Cap!” shouted Red, excited as a school-boy. “Serve him damned well right to be left behind!”

Cap'n Wes' Trickett (the yachting cap now balanced absurdly on his curly pate) pulled a long blast on the *Tewkesbury L. Swett's* piping whistle, and the company on board had the exquisite delight of seeing the fat Mortimer running like a deer across the grass, and down the bank. Homeric laughter greeted his arrival on board. He stalked away astern.

## CHAPTER II

### FORT EDWARD

THE smoothness of the voyage up-stream was delicious to shaken bones. Notwithstanding her interest in her surroundings, Ann fell asleep after supper, propped on her bale of hay in a corner of the deck-house.

She was awakened by a blast of the soprano whistle. The sun was still up; the river was broad; still and beaming under its level rays. On either hand rose high, green-clad hills hiding the mountain peaks farther back. Ahead, looking up a long, straight reach of the river, a little settlement was to be seen on a bend, crouching at the foot of the hills. This Ann knew for Fort Edward, her present goal.

At a mile's distance it was beautiful, the little man-made buildings standing out with a strange significance in the wilderness of untouched nature. Unfortunately its beauty decreased in inverse ratio as one drew closer. Still, the site was superb. In front of it the Campbell River swung completely around the forefoot of a hill and reached on up apparently in the same direction they were coming from. On the other side a fine tributary came in from the direction of the sun, the north-west. The settlement was at the joining of the rivers, a spot predestined for a town. In this place the high green hills drew back in a semicircle as if to give room for a future metropolis.

At a close view, though unbeautiful, the place was highly picturesque, sprawling amidst a perfect chaos of stumps. A few trees had been left standing, mostly with a crazy list to one side or the other. The little shacks, more like poultry houses than habitations for men, were of crass yellow pine, and some were covered with tar paper fastened down with tin spheres as big as silver dollars. A few older and bigger structures were of a queer hybrid construction, walled with logs and roofed with canvas. Out of the ruck rose one two-story building, quite splendidly ugly in the nakedness of freshly sawn pine.

Before the centre of the "town" there was a strong eddy where the two rivers came together. One stream was brown, the other greenish, and for a long way the waters did not mix. The steamboat kept to the Campbell River side, the greenish side. The river was in flood, and the current washed the very bank on which the settlement was planted. Along the edge of the bank as they approached, a fringe of men ran and gesticulated and shouted. Ann noted that there was not a single woman to be seen.

The top of the bank was on a level with the roof of the deck-house, and all the passengers climbed a ladder to the roof, the better to see. The uproar ashore was prodigious. What with the lack of a beach and the swiftness of the current it was no easy matter to make the little *Tewkesbury* fast. So many men leaped aboard from the shore to shake Nell's hand that the craft took on a dangerous list, and Cap'n Wes' Trickett quite lost his head in the confusion. Finally one who seemed to be in authority ashore ordered them all back, and shepherded them away from the edge, that the crew might have a show to make their hawsers fast to stumps. The steamboat settled snugly alongside the bank. There was no need of any plank to disembark.

In the pandemonium of cheers and whoops, separate voices finally made themselves heard: "Shut up! . . . Keep back! . . . Let's do things proper! . . . Give Cal a chance!"

The men divided into two groups, leaving an opening between. Through the opening came he who had seemed to be in authority. Ann was first struck by the odd fact that he had six or seven watch chains stretched across his middle, and from the bulge of his waistcoat pockets, watches must have been attached to them. He was a tall, middle-aged man with the figure of a muscular youth and a youth's fine carriage. His face was hard and seamed and quizzical. He had a bullet head closely cropped.

Nell was standing alone on the boat with a hand on her hip, smiling. The man stepped aboard and made her an elegant bow.

"Nell," he began in an oratorical voice, "as the so-called Mayor of this here burg, it's up to me to speak for the assembled multitude, see? Some might object that I ain't been regularly elected Mayor, so to speak, but the fellas just naturally started calling me Mayor, and I guess that gives me as good a right to the job as a wig and a gold chain. Though at that, I got plenty of chains as you see, being the general repository for them as is no longer able to look after their own valuables.

"Well, as I was saying, being the Mayor it is my duty to welcome distinguished visitors in our midst. Crown heads and presidents and the like. But we don't set no great store by such big bugs up here. Let 'em stay where folks is accustomed to crookin' the knee. Of course if any crown heads or presidents should come along we'd treat 'em right. We'd just prop 'em against the bar at Maroney's, and if they could stand up under mor'n two shots of Jack's squirrel whisky, we'd respect them as men.

"But, Nell, you got a better claim on us than any ole crown head or moth-eaten title-holder, see? Nothin' moth-eaten about you, Nell! You're the prettiest girl in Cariboo and the famousest. And we want you to know we

appreciate the honour you do us in paying us a visit. For though Fort Edward's bound to become the hub of North Cariboo in a coupla years or so (I own some lots here so you can believe what I say), at present I admit it's not much to look at. It's a leetle unfinished. Nell, you're coming amongst us is bound to make a hell of a lot of trouble for the authorities, which is me, but it's worth it! So I hereby present you with the freedom of our city, and if there's anything you want in the damn hole it's yours for the asking!"

He drew an immense rusty key from his pocket. Nell accepted it with a laugh, and hung it to one of the buttons of her jacket. Wild bursts of cheering broke out. The Mayor offered Nell his arm and they stepped ashore. The crowd opened to let them through, and fell in behind. Nell bowed to the right and left like royalty.

Ann, not knowing what else to do, tagged along behind, carrying her suit-case. When everybody turned their backs on the steamboat she experienced a horrid sinking of the heart; the place was so appallingly ugly with its muddy tracks leading away in different directions among the tree stumps. And not a woman in sight—except Nell. Ann's intuition warned her that from this time forward her path and Nell's would lie separate. Now that the journey was ended Ann had no idea which way to turn. She felt like a lost small child.

The crowd in front of her opened, and she beheld an antique democrat standing in the track, and Nell climbing into it. As she seated herself Nell caught sight of Ann, and with a barely perceptible motion of the head, indicated the back seat. Ann thankfully accepted the invitation. Nobody paid any particular attention to the girl in the old sailor hat. They took her perhaps for a servant of Nell's.

The Mayor gathered up the reins, and they proceeded, jolting over roots and splashing through mud-holes. The crowd accompanied them, some running ahead, some keeping up alongside, careless of how they were splashed. All were shouting facetious remarks with the design of attracting notice to themselves. Nell paid not the slightest attention. In the midst of the racket she and the Mayor maintained a polite conversation. Ann stretched her ears to hear it. Nell addressed the Mayor as Cal.

"Me and a coupla other hard guys keeps pretty good order here," Cal said. "You needn't be afraid."

"I shan't be," said Nell.

"It's true the Gov'ment has threatened to send in the Provincial police. That's along of a little fuss we had here last March before the ice went out. But since then it's been as quiet as a Sunday School. We don't want no

police here. There's few enough free places left on earth. . . . The fuss we had was this way. Joe Mixer drove down from Gisborne portage one Sat'day night. Joe always carries a big roll, and trouble naturally follows in his train. A cantankerous cuss! We had a woman living here then called Cleopatra. Know her?"

"No," said Nell.

"Nothing like your class, of course," said Cal politely. "A black-haired woman from Kimowin way. Say, she had a face you could break rocks on. She lived in one of them shacks yonder. I never did hold by a woman living alone in camp. Not that it's the woman's fault. But she's got to have a protector. Now the girls at Maroney's, that's different. Maroney's got to look after them. He's got to keep up the reputation of his hotel. I knew this Cleopatra would be the cause of trouble, but here she was, and I hadn't no way of sending her out in the winter.

"Joe Mixer and Cleopatra were old friends, and when he began to get loaded, he give her his roll to keep for him. A few hours later, being fully loaded by that time, he asked for it again, and she said he'd drunk it all up in her house. Well, Joe went out and got his team and hooked up to the corner of her shack and started to pull the whole caboodle over. Cleopatra, she snatched up a gun and let fly at him. She missed Joe and hit a fellow called Frenchy who was taking her part. He wasn't bad hurt though.

"Well, seems like at the sound of that shot all hell broke loose in this camp. Fighting broke out simultaneous everywhere, some taking Joe's part and some the woman's. We collared Joe and locked him up in a room in the hotel, but they fought on just the same without him. Let me see, how did it go? Mark Shand called himself Joe's champeen, but Frenchy's brother laid him out. Then Pat Radigan knocked out Frenchy's brother. Then Cleopatra sicked a Swede on Pat. Then later the Swede got fighting with another Swede, both near paralysed with squirrel whisky. They opened their knives and cut each other so bad one died and the other got the T.B. and had to go outside. We give the dead one an elegant funeral. But the affair gave Fort Edward a bad name just the same. But we're livin' it down! We're livin' it down!"

Cal jerked up his horses with an oath. Ann saw with horror what appeared to be a dead man lying athwart the road in one of the drier places.

"Here, you fellows!" roared the incensed Mayor. "Roll him to one side, can't you? Nice thing, sleeping it off right in the middle of the main street! . . . Another one of them Swedes," he added deprecatingly to Nell. "They ain't got no sense of decency."

The obstruction being removed, they proceeded.

A little farther along they came upon a man, strangely possessed. Staggering wildly in a circle, his aim seemed to be to butt his brains out against the log wall of a building hard by.

“Squirrel whisky,” said Cal laconically.

He handed the reins to Nell and jumped out. Several of the bystanders seized the man and held him, while Cal went through his pockets. Cal held up a big, showy watch and a clasp knife.

“You see, fellows, I got his watch and his knife,” he said. “Let him come to me and claim them when he’s slep’ it off.”

They drove on. Nell took these incidents as a matter of course. Ann’s eyes were big.

They drew up in front of the conspicuous two-story house which had a sign across it: “Fort Edward Hotel; J. Maroney.” Here Ann discovered that there were other women in Fort Edward. Four girls came to the door of the hotel, clad in babyish silk dresses, their crudely painted faces showing hideous in the daylight. They showed an air of humility towards the scornful Nell that was rather piteous. Ann shivered, and searched their faces without finding any answer to the riddle.

The building was in two parts; the newer, two-story structure of staring pine boards; and adjoining, a long, low shed without windows, built of logs. There was a wide wooden side-walk or platform in front of the whole, and there were two doors, one leading to the new part, one to the old. It was by far the most imposing edifice in Fort Edward. Everybody piled through the door into the old part of the building, leaving Ann at a loss on the side-walk.

She peeped in the door through which they had all gone. She saw a long dim room with lamps burning, tables around the walls and a clear space in the middle evidently for dancing. There was a bar across one end. Nellie, in a chair, was in the act of being lifted to one of the tables. Bottles and glasses were being thumped on the bar, and a loud noise of conviviality came out through the door. Ann, not acquainted with the etiquette of such a place, dared not enter. She longed for a mantle of invisibility.

She tried the other door. It admitted her to a smaller room, a sort of office or lobby. There was a pool table in the middle, and a rough pine desk at one side. In the far corner beside a window there was a man hunched in a chair with his feet up on the sill. His head was bent over a dog-eared magazine in his lap. He had a strange look there by himself when every other man in town was celebrating Nellie. Ann coughed. He threw her a

careless glance and went on reading. He had a face extraordinarily full of life. He was young.

“Can I get a room here?” Ann asked timidly.

“I don’t run the joint,” he said indifferently, without looking around again. His voice, to a woman, was thrillingly deep and resonant.

Ann sat down by the desk to wait for somebody else to come. Time passed. She studied the young man through her lashes. All she got of his face was an oblique view across a cheek with the end of his nose sticking beyond. There was a natural grace in his slumped attitude in the chair. His legs were long, and though so long, a swelling calf was revealed within the dandified Strathcona boots he was wearing, well-polished boots with soft uppers to the knee and elaborate lacing. A broad-brimmed felt hat was cocked askew on his head, the crown pinched to a point.

There was a door into the dance-hall adjoining. Though it was closed, the sounds of merry-making within were obvious enough. Ann began to suspect that the young man’s air of extreme indifference was all a parade. There was nothing of the Puritan about him. It did not seem natural for him to be sitting there alone.

He rose finally, and tossing the magazine on a table, stretched himself as frankly as an animal. With his legs planted a little apart and his arms flung out he was quite magnificent. His stretched bare throat was like a column of ruddy marble. Ann saw that he was not above twenty-four. His eyes were as blue as the sea. He threw her a curious glance, insulting in its indifference. Ann was not affronted. She rejoiced in the beauty of the youth, but it was nothing to her what he thought of her.

He sauntered part way towards the door into the dance-hall, then returned to his chair. There was something immature in his face, an uncertainty of purpose, a strain of wildness. This in connection with his visible strength and fire was rather disquieting. You would never be able to tell about such a man, Ann thought. He would be likely to fly off on any unexpected tangent, and whichever way he went his impetus would be tremendous.

Voices in the dance-hall approached the door. The young man plumped down in his seat again. Ann was sure then that his grand indifference was a pose. The door opened admitting Nell and a great burst of warm voices behind her. She turned in the doorway saying: “See you later, boys.” The door was closed, putting a damper on the noise.

There was a man with Nell, carrying her suit-case, a fat man whose forehead ran back to the middle of his crown, where it was stopped by a

little precipice of black hair. He wore a very dirty apron, and his face was greasy with complacency.

Nell gave Ann no notice. The young man never turned around. How strange, Ann thought, that the best-looking man in Fort Edward should go out of his way to ignore the Queen. It was certainly a studied affront. Nell evidently thought so, for seeing him, she stopped abruptly. Her face showed no change, but Ann marked the way her neck turned pink under the ears. The young man casually turned his head.

“Hello, Nell,” he drawled.

Ann burned with indignation for Nell. She thought: I’d slap his face good!

Nell betrayed no heat. “Why, hello, Chako,” she said in a voice that had the tinkle of breaking icicles. “I wondered where you were.”

The young man rose lazily. “I don’t hunt with the pack,” he said.

Nell looked him up and down with an enigmatic smile. (Heavens! what a handsome pair! Ann thought.) Nell drawled: “You’ve grown, Chako. Almost a man, aren’t you?”

The young man, taken aback, stared at her with gathering fury. Before he could get an effective answer out, Nell had started briskly for the stairs at the back.

“Show me a room, Maroney,” she said peremptorily.

Ann snatched up her valise and followed them. As they mounted, the young man went into the dance-hall, making the whole house shake with the slam of the door. Nell, on the stairs ahead of Ann, raised one shoulder and laughed.

## CHAPTER III

### DOINGS AT MARONEY'S

THE following days were for Ann like a fascinating and inexplicable dream. Or perhaps more like a sensational drama at which she had the poorest seat in the house; for she only obtained glimpses of the action, and tantalizing snatches of dialogue. The main stage was presumably the dance-hall, which Ann dared not enter. But the whole house seemed to vibrate with mystery and intrigue. There were arrivals and departures at all hours; scurryings and gigglings in the corridors; violent altercations in distant rooms; endless whispered conversations in out-of-the-way corners. One night below her window on the river bank, Ann heard the sounds of a woman's hurried, repressed sobbing, and the fierce whispering of an exasperated man. What would she not have given for the key to it all!

In the dance-hall there was an orchestra consisting of two banjos, a piano and a drum. The rollicking strains they sent up drove the solitary Ann half distracted. I could go down and dance without taking any hurt from it, she told herself. But for her, the invisible bars across the doorway into the dance-hall remained up. There was singing too, but Ann did not so much regret missing that. She could picture those poor girls mouthing and smirking. There was one better voice; Ann supposed that to be Nell's from the violence of the applause which always greeted it.

From time to time Ann saw Nell flitting between the hotel and the dance-hall. Nell's stage clothes had nothing in common, of course, with the abbreviated Mother Hubbards worn by the regular girls. Nell's dresses were expensive and marvellous; there was no end to them. Nevertheless Ann considered her less alluring in her make-up. Ann was glad to see that Nell never lost her contemptuous self-possession. Nell was the cause of a vast consumption of Maroney's liquor, but none of it was for her.

There was no regularity in the revels. From the hour of Nell's arrival the racket kept up for twenty-four hours around the clock without stopping. Then the dance-hall closed for the night, presumably to give everybody a needed sleep. Early on the second morning it started up again, and ran full blast all day and half the night, and started the third day at dinnertime. The roisterers made no distinction between day and night: the fun might run just as high at noon as at midnight. Always at intervals it would be interrupted by a fight. Then somebody would get thrown out on the side-walk with a crash, and the thrumming banjos would resume again. When customers of

more consideration got ugly, they would be assisted upstairs and locked in a room until they quieted down.

These first few days Ann was like a little ghost in the house that everybody passed without seeing. Not to be allowed to share in all the running to and fro, the simmering excitement, the gusty laughter was hard on her young spirit. It was not any moral sense that restrained her, but she just didn't know how to get into it. Her favourite post was the chair alongside the desk in the lobby, where she could glance into the dance-hall when the door was opened. Fascinating glimpses of a murky interior, with one face perhaps, an amazing face, thrown into strong relief by the light of a lamp. She could never find Nell in these glimpses. By degrees she learned that Nell never mixed with the common throng. Nell had her own little salon adjoining the dance-hall where she received privileged friends. Ann marked the door through which all the champagne was carried.

When they passed in the hotel Nell always ignored Ann. This hurt the latter, though she dimly understood that it might be due to a sort of delicacy on Nell's part. Ann longed for an opportunity to assure Nell that there was no necessity for it. The two girls were lodged in different parts of the house. Nell had the principal chamber at the head of the stairs. Once, as Ann came up, the door was standing open, and she made bold to step in. Nell was busy before the mirror.

"Hello!" said Ann.

Nell turned a cold face without speaking.

Ann felt pretty small. "What's the matter?" she asked.

Nell wiggled her pretty shoulders in annoyance. "Oh Lord! have we got to have a fuss!" she said.

"Why no," said Ann quickly. "I'm not the kind that fusses. But aren't we friends?"

"No," said Nell hardly. "I'm working now. I should think you'd understand. How can we be friends?"

"I just wanted to tell you I don't mind . . . things," Ann murmured a little lamely. "I just want to understand."

"The less you understand the better for you," said Nell cynically. "Oh hell!" she went on in a friendlier voice, "I know you're not one of the holy stuck-up kind, kid, but what's the use? I suppose you don't want a job like mine?"

"No," said Ann.

“Then there’s nothing to it. We’ve just got to give each other the polite go-by. No hard feelings on either side.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Ann said regretfully. “But I’m sorry. . . . Good luck to you!” she added, and turned to go.

“Same to you!” said Nell with a warm flash of the brown eyes. “You’re a dandy kid!”

Ann felt curiously flattered. It was something to win the approval of the scornful Nell. They did not speak to each other again.

The tall blond youth was much in Ann’s thoughts. What an odd name he had: Chako. He did not live in the hotel, and Ann obtained only fleeting glimpses of him on his way to and from the dance-hall. He carried himself as if he owned Fort Edward and all that it contained. Ann observed that most of the men in manner cringed to him a little. What Ann desired most of all was to see him and Nell together again. Those two struck sparks from each other!

One never-to-be-forgotten night Nell came into the hotel dining-room, bringing with her the red-haired Hercules that Ann had marked on the occasion of the mock ambushade. He was a handsome man of his type, confident and good-natured. He was quite grandly dressed in a three-piece store suit, boiled shirt and satin tie. There was but the one long table, and the two sat down almost opposite Ann. How thrilling it was to observe the man’s obvious infatuation, and to mark how Nell alternately led him on with her sleepy, soft brown eyes, and checked him with her contemptuous smile. There was something dangerous about the man, but Nell was not in the least intimidated. Something wild and strange, burning behind his bold, blue eyes; something that could not be put into words.

Ann could hear their conversation, but it was not brilliant. Ann told herself it was not what people said to each other that mattered, but the unspoken things that passed from eye to eye.

“Why don’t you settle down here, Nell?”

“Heavens, Red! This mud-hole would give me the hump in a month!”

“No, but I mean get a stake here. She’s bound to grow.”

“So is the grass in the cemetery. Are you trying to sell *me* lots, Red? Why don’t you give me a couple?”

“Maybe I will.”

“Now you’re talking!”

A few minutes later Ann received a redoubled thrill when the blond young man, Chako, came into the dining-room with one of the dance-hall

girls hanging to his arm. Ann instantly made up her mind that he had brought the girl to throw in Nell's eye, so to speak. Here was a situation!

The girl was clearly infatuated with Chako. She was rather a piteous creature. She had put off her ridiculous working dress, and had washed her face. Her appearance was not much improved thereby, for she had no figure, and her cheap waist and skirt hung lankily on her bones. The pallor of her face seemed more unnatural than the roses and lilies which usually decorated it. Her hair was hastily put up in a roll around the nape of her neck. She had nice eyes. When they turned on Chako a complete self-abandonment showed in them which hurt Ann. Ann thought: How terrible when one of those girls gets fond of a man! . . . I wish I could make friends with her.

These two sat down at the other end of the table. If Chako had brought the girl for Nell's benefit, his ruse was scarcely a brilliant one, for he took no pains to conceal his scorn of his companion. He looked a little sulky and sheepish. How Ann regretted that she could not hear what they said to each other. The rumble of the young man's deep voice reached her down half the length of the table, strangely stirring the woman in her. She thought, smiling at her own sensations: Heavens! a man like that is dangerous to be at large! He's *too* good-looking. It isn't fair.

Ann wondered if the truth might not be that Nell and Chako, each the most desirable of their sex, were secretly attracted to each other, and each too stubborn to give in. Or perhaps there was bound to be an obscure sort of rivalry between two, each of whom was supreme. Whichever way it was, the drama was not to be played out just then, for Nell and her friend presently rose and left the room without paying the slightest attention to the other couple.

That same night as the lingering summer twilight was drawing to a close, Ann was sitting in her room, resentful at having to stay in her room, when a tremendous uproar arose in the dance-hall below. A confused roaring of voices and tramping of feet came up, women screamed, a table was overthrown; the music stopped in the middle of a bar. Such a racket was not unusual, but as far as Ann was concerned this occasion was the last straw. She determined to see what was going on. Slipping downstairs, she ran across the deserted office, and boldly opened the door into the forbidden place.

A fight was in progress. The scene was like an old painting with strong contrasts of light and shadow. The middle part of the hall was built up higher than the sides. Under the ridge pole hung a row of big kerosene lamps with tin shades reflecting the light down. Thus the middle of the floor was

brightly illuminated while the sides were in a brown shadow out of which faces showed queerly. At first Ann could make out little of what was going on, the spectators milled around so. All she could see was two more wildly bobbing heads in the centre. On the outskirts Maroney, in his dirty apron, was brandishing both fists, and bawling to the principals to settle their troubles outside.

Other voices were shouting: "Stand back! Give them a show!"

Gradually the crowd pressed back, and Ann saw the fighters. Chako was not in it, and the wild beating of her heart quieted down. One was that red-haired man who had sat opposite her at supper. Was this the price he had to pay for supping with Nellie Nairns? Ann thought. There was a smear of blood on the bosom of his white shirt, but it was not his blood, for his purple face was as yet unmarked. He had been drinking hard since supper. His adversary was the swarthy saturnine fellow Ann had marked at Ching's Landing. She had heard him called "Foxy." His face was as yellow as saffron, the features fixed in a devilish grin; blood was running over his lips; one blue sleeve was ripped from shoulder to cuff.

Ann, thinking of Nell, glanced towards the near corner of the hall. The door of Nell's room stood open, and Nell herself was framed in the doorway, with a strong light behind her. She had changed to a sort of gipsy costume with a fringed shawl, and a red scarf around her head. She was leaning against the door frame, with one hand negligently braced against the other side. The attitude suggested a calm interest in the scene. The amazing girl! Ann thought.

Ann herself was revolted by the sight of the blood, but the need to see, to know, was imperious. Little by little she was drawn into the hall. She mixed in the outer rank of the spectators, and no one noticed her. To her it seemed as if Foxy was getting all the worst of the fight. He was lighter than the other man, and continually ran from him. But sometimes he stopped and delivered a blow which cracked like a shot under the roof, and jolted the red head sickeningly. The sallow man was beautiful in action; his tight trousers revealing the play of steely leg muscles. By comparison the red Hercules moved like a dray horse.

Red flung his arms around Foxy's neck and seemed bent on strangling him. There were some protests from the crowd. A man alongside Ann said to her without noticing whom he addressed:

"Hell! Everything goes short of murder!"

In his efforts to free himself Foxy went down with Red on top. Red seized hold of his shoulders and viciously banged his head against the floor.

Several men ran out and dragged him off. Foxy clambered to his feet, and stood swaying. Somebody dashed a glass of water in his face. He shook his black head like a dog; the fixed grin returned; those who were holding Red released him.

As the two men approached each other again, suddenly Maroney and his little gang of waiters and musicians came charging out of the shadows on the far side of the hall. The surprised fighters found themselves being hustled towards the door. Instantly everybody took a hand in the scrimmage, and absolute pandemonium resulted. Ann stood back terrified and fascinated. The initial momentum of Maroney's party was sufficient to accomplish his purpose. The crowd stuck for a moment in the doorway, then suddenly drained out like water through a hole, leaving the hall empty.

Ann followed. Outside the door there was a bench upon which she instinctively climbed. Though it was after ten o'clock there was still a bit of light in the sky. Wide though the walk was, the space was more restricted than inside, and the crowd gave the fighters the whole of it, gathering in groups at either end. Ann, on her bench, had the post of vantage like a referee. Nobody noticed her.

The end was not long deferred now. Foxy seemed to have acquired an access of strength from somewhere. With incredible quickness he dodged the heavier man's blows; ducking under his arms, spinning around, coming up behind him, planting his own blows almost at will.

"Dancing-master!" somebody yelled delightedly.

In a few moments he had Red swaying uncertainly. Finally with a straight arm blow to the jaw Foxy knocked him clean off the side-walk. He fell in the mud with a great splash, and lay there groaning.

They hauled him up, and half carried, half led him to the bench. Ann jumped nimbly down, and made haste to mix with the crowd. Foxy, panting, stood by looking on to make sure he had finished his job. It was only too evident that he had. Red's head was lolling on his chest. Foxy, with a shrug, turned eagerly back into the hall. Cal Nimmo, the "Mayor," led him by the arm, and the crowd pushed after, cheering. Ann followed.

Inside the cheering was redoubled. Men ran around in front of the victor, striving to grasp his hand. Various admirers thrust his coat, his hat, his collar upon him. Foxy and Cal pushed their way slowly towards the door of Nell's room, which stood invitingly open. Nell was not visible.

Suddenly from among the tables on the far side of the room, Chako strode into the full light. A frightened girl was pulling back on his arm; another had hold of his coat. It was obvious that Chako had been drinking;

his fine features were a little thickened, his eyes recklessly irresponsible. There was a curious peaked furrow across his forehead which gave him an aspect of terrible wrath.

“Chako! Chako!” the girls were gasping. “Don’t make any more trouble! What do you care, Chako? For God’s sake come back!”

Chako roughly freed himself of his encumbrances. The girl who clung to his arm was sent reeling back into the shadows. The uproar surrounding Foxy was suddenly stilled. All eyes turned on Chako.

“Ahh! you make me sick with your cheering!” he cried, with a violent thrust-away of his spread palm. His deep voice made the hall ring. “If it was Red who beat, you’d cheer him just the same! Always ready to lick the boots of the night’s hero!”

No voice answered him. He strode up to Foxy. “Red was my mark!” he said. “Only I was waiting until he sobered up. You thought you had something easy, didn’t you? taking him on when he was drunk. But you got to take me now!”

Foxy snarled in his yellow face, and gave ground. “Big talk!” he said. “When you see a man’s tired.”

Sundry voices were raised on Foxy’s behalf. “Can’t you see he’s tired? . . . He beat Red to a standstill. . . .”

“Shut up!” cried Chako with startling violence. A pin might have been heard to drop. Chako laughed contemptuously. To Foxy he went on indifferently: “Take your own time. But don’t put on too many airs, that’s all.”

Chako turned, and went back to his table and his girls. Foxy, laughing with his friends, proceeded to the door of Nell’s room.

Everybody sought their former seats, and Ann suddenly found herself standing conspicuously alone. She slipped out of the hall. She regained her own room, and thoughtfully undressing, went to bed, where she lay long, marvelling at life.

She had no more than fallen asleep, it seemed to her, when she was awakened by another outbreak in the dance-hall; the same hoarse voices and stamping, the same strange periods of silence, with sudden outbreaks of cries. She sprang out of bed with her heart in her throat, thinking of the magnificent youth. But before her trembling fingers could get her hairpins in and her hooks fastened, the racket died down; the banjos resumed their thrumming. She returned to bed.

## CHAPTER IV

### BEWITCHED

**B**UT she had not missed as much as she feared. In the morning she learned that it was Red Chivers who, returning unexpectedly to the dance-hall after his defeat, had attacked Foxy Nicholls and this time beat Foxy to a finish. This was the natural outcome, for Red had long been the undisputed champion of Fort Edward, and his defeat in the first battle had surprised everybody. It had only come about, they said, owing to the fact that Red was so drunk he could scarcely stand. Left alone after the first fight, he had gone to the river and plunged in to sober up. Then he had come back and redeemed his reputation.

Ann learned all this from Noll Voss at the breakfast-table. Ann had to have someone who could interpret to her what was happening about her, so she had frankly made up to this respectable, diffident man from the beginning. He came regularly to the hotel for his meals. Their intercourse was beset with difficulties, for Noll had old-fashioned ideas about women, and disapproved of Ann's curiosity. In fact it was his character to disapprove of most things. He was susceptible though, and Ann made no scruple to exert a little fascination in order to obtain what she wanted. Noll was a dull, plain man of about forty—what Ann called the pathetic age in an unmarried man.

“But what were they fighting about?” asked Ann, though she knew well enough by intuition.

Noll looked severely disapproving. “No good cause,” he said.

“But I want to know,” insisted Ann.

“Well,” said Noll, “Red Chivers sets up to be Nellie Nairns' best friend here, and Foxy, he aimed to cut him out.”

“Ah,” said Ann. “I heard that other young fellow—what do they call him? Chako . . . ?”

“Chako Lyllac,” said Noll bitterly.

“I heard that Chako Lyllac had challenged Red, too.”

“Pure devilishment!” said Noll. “He just can't abide that any man should be set ahead of him.”

“Is this Chako a good fighter?” Ann asked off-hand.

“Oh, he can fight,” said Noll. “A firebrand! He’s the worst of the lot. The only thing good about him is, he don’t stay long anywhere. He comes and he goes.”

“Where did he come from originally?” asked Ann.

“How do I know? He’s been knocking about the North since he was a young boy. They say he ran away from school. Some say his father is a bishop.”

“Very likely,” said Ann, smiling. “Bishops have that kind of sons they say.”

“Chako Lyllac makes me sick!” cried Noll. “With his drinking and his fighting and his swelling around.”

He would, Ann thought, glancing at the respectable man through her lashes. “Where did he get that outlandish name?” she asked.

“The Indians gave it to him.”

There was a little devil of curiosity in Ann that would not be appeased. “Are Nellie Nairns and Chako old friends?” she asked.

“Not that I ever heard of,” said Noll. “They’re both wild birds. I suppose they meet different places, coming and going. . . . What is it to you?” he added with a suspicious glance.

“Nothing,” said Ann with a shrug. “The boy is so good-looking, one can’t help feeling a little interested.”

This was bitter to the plain man. “Yah! good-looking!” he snarled. “His good looks never brought any woman no good! He’s a nuisance! Maroney would be glad enough to get him away from here!”

“Why?” asked Ann.

“Ahh! it ain’t fit to be talked about!” said Noll.

“But I want to understand these things,” said Ann.

Noll’s bitterness overrode his customary prudence. “Ahh! all Maroney’s girls are struck on him!” he said. “It spoils them! But Maroney can’t throw him out, or they’d go on strike.”

“I see,” said Ann. This provided her with a deal of matter to think about.

She presently resumed upon another tack. “Weren’t you in the hall last night?” she asked.

“I’m a working-man,” said Noll, puffing out his cheeks. “There’s few enough around here can say it. That’s what’s the matter with the place. All sitting round on their tails waiting for the railway to come across the mountains and make ’em rich without working!”

“It does you credit,” said Ann demurely. She gradually worked around to the purpose she had in mind. “But in the evenings . . .”

“In the evenings I go to bed!” said Noll.

“Don’t you ever visit the dance-hall? The music sounds attractive?”

“Don’t profit nobody that I can see, except Maroney. He’s getting rich off them poor fools.”

“I’d like to go in some night,” said Ann softly.

He looked at her aghast. “You’re joking!”

“Why shouldn’t I go?”

“Look at the fights they have in there!”

“Oh, if there was any trouble we could leave,” said Ann uncandidly.

“Any of them fellas would feel free to ask you to dance!” cried Noll.

“Well, it wouldn’t hurt me, would it?”

“You’d be labelled!”

“Oh, if anybody made any mistake about me, I could soon put them right,” said Ann. “There are plenty of cabarets in the East. Everybody goes.”

He merely stared at her.

“I’d rather go with you,” Ann said insinuatingly, “you’d be such a good protector. But if you won’t take me I’ll have to find somebody else.”

The moralist gulped, and struggled with himself. “Well . . . well, I’ll take you,” he said desperately, “if you’ll promise me you won’t dance with any of them fellas.”

“I’ll promise,” said Ann. “We’ll go to-night.”

Ann wore her old sailor hat in the dance-hall that night. A hat marked her off from all the other girls in the place; stamped her as the casual visitor. Noll Voss followed at her heels, wearing his Sunday suit and a rubber collar. His hair was carefully slicked down and brushed back over a finger. The respectable man was horridly uncomfortable, but as a matter of fact, their entrance did not create the sensation that he had feared. The people at the tables gave Ann a curious glance, and immediately resumed their talk.

“You see there’s no harm in my coming,” said Ann.

“I don’t like it! I don’t like it!” said Noll unhappily. “There’s going to be trouble to-night.”

It was true that the unusual quietness of the place had an ominous effect. It was well filled too. There was a great buzz of whispering at the tables.

Everybody had an expectant eye on the entrance doors. Just inside the doors the two biggest men on Maroney's staff had taken up their stand, and were scrutinizing all arrivals.

"What are those men there for?" asked Ann.

"To keep Chako Lyllac out," said Noll laconically.

Ann led the way across the dance-floor, and chose the end table on the other side. It was about the best point of vantage in the room. The bar ran across that end of the room. At one end of the bar were the two entrance doors, one from the hotel and one from the outside. In the corner at the other end of the bar was the door of Nell's dressing-room. It was closed.

Seated at their table, the two immediately dropped into a comfortable obscurity, and Noll Voss ceased to perspire. Ann had her opportunity at last to saturate herself in the strange atmosphere of the place, so different from anything she had known. No detail escaped her.

The curious construction of the dance-hall was due, perhaps, to the fact that the amateur builders had no knowledge of how to span a roof across a space as wide as they required. They had, therefore, first built a narrow hall some fifteen feet high, and had then run up a lean-to down each side. Some time later, on the side towards the river, it had been found necessary to build a lean-to on the lean-to, to provide dressing-rooms for the performers. The high space in the middle was the dancing floor. It was surrounded by varnished pine posts. Behind the posts under the low roofs of the lean-tos, were the tables. There were no windows. Night and day the hall was lighted by three big kerosene lamps hanging from the ridge pole. The tables were always in semi-darkness.

The orchestra was at the end of the hall opposite the bar. The banjos presently started one of the rippling airs, of which they had the secret, the piano thumping a two-chord accompaniment which never varied. Rollicking airs they played, that were long out of fashion, but more than once upon hearing them, a faint recollection had stirred within Ann. Perhaps they were songs that old people had sung to her in her babyhood.

A number of couples took the floor. There was nothing old-fashioned about the dancing, such as it was. It consisted of a lugubrious promenade round and round the floor, with a hitch to the left at mathematical intervals. There were not nearly enough girls to go round, and several pairs of men danced together with perfect gravity. It was all highly decorous.

Afterwards one of the girls took the centre of the floor, a girl with strange lemon-coloured hair, and proceeded to sing a sentimental song. This was a painful exhibition, and Ann averted her eyes from it. Painful, because

the poor girl's croaking voice was a dreadful mockery of music, and her efforts to please tragic. But it was all eminently proper.

"There is no harm in this place," said Ann to her escort.

"There's trouble brewing," Noll muttered. "It's too quiet to-night."

Maroney, the proprietor, seemed to share the same idea. The fat little man, with the retreating pompadour, moved uneasily around the edge of the floor, watching his customers narrowly, and keeping an anxious eye cocked towards the door. Cal Nimmo and several of his cronies had the next table to Ann, and Maroney continually returned to that table to air his grievances.

"They's been a fight here ev'ry night!" he said. "And las' night they was two fights. I'm fed up with it. I ain't narrer-minded. I don't aim to interfere with nobody havin' a good time, but I say times ain't what they was in the old days. I say if anybody wants to fight they gotter go outside. That's reasonable, ain't it?"

Maroney obtained but small sympathy from Cal. "Ahh, what do you care, Maroney," said the Mayor banteringly. "Makes everybody thirsty, don't it?"

"That's all right," said Maroney. "But somebody's going to get hurt in one of these scraps. Somebody's goin' to get done in some night. Then the news of it'll travel outside, and they'll send in the police to make an investigation. God! if there's anything I hate it's an investigation! They'll close me up, that's what they'll do. Then where'll you go for your fun."

"Oh, if they close you, somebody else will open," said Cal.

Maroney became almost tearful. "I got money in this place!" he cried. "Ain't I got no rights? You call yourself the Mayor of this town. You had ought to help me keep order, instead of encouraging them."

"Your money is nothing to me, Maroney," said Cal coolly. "I ain't your hired bouncer. I like to see a good scrap myself, and your dance-hall makes the best arena. My job is just to see that fair play is done."

"Well, there ain't goin' to be no scrap to-night!" cried Maroney passionately. "I told Chako Lyllyac not to come back here. If he comes in that door he'll be thrown out without a word said!"

"Well, there'll be a fight at that," drawled Cal amidst the laughter of his friends.

The door into Nell's dressing-room opened, and Nell appeared there, adjusting the skirt of a shimmering dress. She signalled to the bar-tender, who in turn whistled to the musicians. The banjoists played a sustained chord, and Nell walked smartly out on the floor, amidst stormy applause.

She passed immediately alongside Ann, but gave no sign of recognition. With her carmined cheeks, and smudged-in eyes, her professional smile, she looked scarcely human. Ann had no sensation of beholding one who was familiar to her.

Nell sang an innocent little song called "Lonesome." She had not much voice, but knew better than to force what she had. She was not engaged for her voice. She was wearing a dress of silver cloth, simply and artfully made, gathered over the hips, and softly wrinkled about her lissome waist. Her strutting walk about the floor while she sang emphasized the lissomeness. Surely no such silvery apparition had ever before been seen in Fort Edward. Ann, watching the rough faces at the tables, how their eyes beamed, understood much, and was prepared to forgive much.

The tall, massive form of Red Chivers issued out of Nell's dressing-room. He took up a conspicuous stand at the foot of the dance-hall in front of the bar, where he watched Nell with grinning delight, and something of a proprietary air. He was sober to-night, and clad in his best, a sanguinary dandy. Ann observed that Nell never looked at him during the course of the song and the promenade. Nell's smile was all-embracing, and she never looked exactly at anybody. There was a remoteness in the too-much-made-up eyes. Behind the posturing and the professional smile, Ann apprehended an inviolable personality.

Riotous applause greeted the end of the song. A shower of coins fell on the floor, and bills fluttered. Nell took no notice of these tributes. She bowed all around, and walked off. A waiter searched sharp-eyed for the coins, and pounced on them like a chicken on grains of corn.

With the disappearance of Nell the applause was redoubled. Every eye was on the door of her room. Above all the ordinary clapping could be heard the clack-clack of Red Chivers's huge, hard palms. Suddenly a similar sound was heard towards the other end of the hall, and heads turned that way. Chako Lyllac was seen standing out on the floor clapping a pair of hands no less formidable than Red Chivers's.

An indrawn breath of astonishment was heard all about the hall. Maroney's two men were still holding the entrance door, and Chako's appearance in the middle of the hall seemed like magic. But glances travelling beyond him saw the door to the girls' dressing-room standing open. That provided the explanation. He had been concealed in there. That room had windows through which he could have climbed.

The ordinary applause died away abruptly, but the two big men, their eyes fixed on each other, continued to beat their hands together. More than

half the length of the room separated them. Nell came out to the edge of the dance-floor and bowed. She gave no sign of seeing Chako. She returned to her room and closed the door.

Chako's legs were planted, his body a little thrown back, his curly yellow pate was bare. It hurt Ann deep inside her to look at him. And every woman here! she thought. That curious, peaked furrow ran across his brows. There was no boyish weakness in his face now, no humanity at all. He was the immemorial battler. So splendid, so strange to her, so inaccessible, the sight of him seemed to crush Ann's very heart.

Red, with a swagger, turned towards Nell's door.

"Keep out of that room, Red," said Chako, not loudly.

Red turned with a grin. "Hey?" he said.

"You heard me," said Chako.

"Have I got to beat you, kid?" drawled Red, looking around humorously at his friends.

"No, you've got to take a beating," said Chako with unchanged face.

"Listen to what's talking!" said Red with affected mirth.

"Take off your coat," said Chako.

Ann's eyes flew from one to the other, measuring them. She was half sick with anxiety. Chako was so much younger, so much finer than that coarse brute, how could he prevail in a brutal set-to? Both men appeared to be perfectly sober to-night.

"Let's go! Let's go! Let's go!" Noll Voss was gabbling at her side.

Ann felt as if the beating of her heart would kill her, but she shook her head.

"You must come," said Noll, catching her arm. "It's not a fit sight . . ."

Ann's pleasant eyes flashed on him surprisingly. "Be quiet!" she said. "I'm not going!"

Noll subsided sullenly.

Maroney had run out on the floor. To give him his due, he had courage. "Get out of my place!" he cried to Chako. "I don't want you in here! Get out!"

Chako looked down at him as from a height. "Back up—Maroney," he drawled. "If I hit you once you'd burst!"

"Get out, I tell you!" cried Maroney. "Get out before you're thrown out!"

“If any man wants the job let him try it,” said Chako, looking around. “If you set more than one on me I’ll shoot!”

Cries of protest rose. “Let them alone, Maroney! We won’t stand for any interference. Let them fight it out!”

Maroney turned on them, brandishing his arms, beside himself with rage. “Get out!” he cried. “All of you! Get out of my place! It’s closed for the night!”

A roar of laughter answered him.

Maroney shouted to his bar-tenders: “Close up the bar! Put out the lights! The place is closed!”

They started to obey. Meanwhile Maroney ran to the last one of the three big lamps. These let up and down on lines that were fastened to the side posts. Maroney lowered the lamp, blew it out, and taking it from its holder handed it to a waiter to carry out.

While he was doing this Chako and Red approached each other, their eyes holding in an unwavering grip. They were of the same height but Red had about fifteen pounds on Chako. But some of it was around his waist where it did not help him any. Chako’s belly was as flat as a plank. Moments seemed to pass while they faced each other motionless. A girl moaned hysterically. There was nervous laughter. A man’s voice cried: “Collide! Collide!”

“Want seconds, a time-keeper?” Chako asked.

“To hell with it!” said Red. “You won’t last a round!”

Chako struck at him like a cat. Eyes could not follow the blow, but they saw the red head jerked aside by the impact. Red gave over his smile. Red stepped back and swung his blacksmith’s right. Chako side-stepped it. Maroney blew out the second light.

There was no running about in this fight. The two biggest men in Fort Edward stood up to each other and doggedly gave and took punishment. The impact of fist on flesh was like the crack of a snake-whip. It did not seem so dangerous at first. They stood so firmly planted, it seemed impossible either could injure the other. But Chako reached Red’s nose and it began to bleed. A curious murmur of satisfaction went round the hall. Ann was more horrified by that sound than by the sight of the blood.

Red, infuriated, showed his teeth, and cursed Chako thickly. Chako’s face showed no expression whatever. His eyes were fathomless. Red fought furiously, always falling back to get space for his great swings, Chako following him up close with short-arm jabs. But Red caught him at last with

a sledge-hammer swing, and Chako went down. He caught himself on his hands, and scrambled clear. Wild yells broke from the onlookers.

Maroney blew out the last lamp.

The yells ended in an angry groan. There was a rush for Maroney, but he and his waiter escaped in the dark with the lamp.

The fighters had instinctively separated. It was not absolutely dark. The door into the girls' dressing-room stood open, and a shaft of grey daylight came through. Somebody ran to open the front door, and let in a little more light.

Cal Nimmo made his harsh voice heard above all the racket. "Fellows! We can go to the Japanese restaurant. The Jap is game."

Red's voice answered thickly from somewhere: "Ahh! I can see him all I want."

And Chako said: "Suits me!"

They rushed together. The crowd fell back behind the posts. In the murk the two figures no longer looked quite real. Their outlines were blurred; they seemed to float; they melted from one posture into another like figures of smoke. Only the sound of Red's thick curses was horribly human. Chako uttered no sound. They were so much of a size it was now impossible to tell which was which.

The smack of their blows was less often heard now. Unable to hit each other effectively, they wrestled, standing for moments locked in a lovely embrace. But their sobbing breaths betrayed the strain. They crashed to the floor. There was the sound of a dogged pummelling. The undermost figure threshed wildly.

Still locked together they began to roll. Over and over on the floor until they fetched up against the post beside which Ann was sitting. The upper part of their bodies went under the table. Ann jumped up and shoved it back. The two figures separated and rose up. One backed off. The other brushed against Ann in rising. It was Chako. She knew that young head.

"Ah, fight hard! Fight hard!" she breathed involuntarily.

He precipitated himself like a flung stone on the waiting shadow out on the floor.

Finally it could be made out that one man had changed his tactics. He continually retreated, refusing the clinches. And when the other opened his arms to embrace him, it was to be met with a blow. Over and over this trick was worked.

A confusion of cries arose from the invisible spectators:

“Red’s got him going!”

“No, it’s Chako!”

“Red’s clinching to save himself!”

“It’s Chako!”

In the end the bear-like one, whichever one it was, got the other in his hug. They crashed to the floor. It was down towards the rear of the hall. There was a furious struggle on the floor; rolling, threshing, bumping and pummelling. Then quite suddenly it ceased. One figure picked himself up, and the other lay there. It was so unexpected for a moment there was not a sound around the hall.

Ann breathed a sort of prayer: “O God! O God! Not the young one!”

Then the resonant voice of Chako was heard: “Make a light, somebody. He’s all in.”

It broke the tension. Sounds rippled around the hall again. Tears rolled down Ann’s cheeks, and she began to shake inside. Somebody vaulted over the bar and struck a match. He found one of the small lamps there, and lighted it. It had a glass reflector behind it that threw a shaft of light straight down the floor, revealing Chako standing there, looking down at Red. Red raised himself on one hand. His head was hanging.

When the light came up, an uproar was released. Some ran to pick up Red and drag him to one of the tables. Somebody yelled: “Good boy, Chako!” A chorus took it up. Men and women started for him.

“Keep away from me!” cried Chako, with that contemptuous thrust out of his open palm. He seemed to grow bigger in his scorn. “Shut your heads, you fools! I’m no man of yours!”

They fell back. The admiring atmosphere became hostile. It was all one to Chako. He started down the hall. Suddenly Ann saw Nell slip by her. The two met midway on the dance-floor. They had a clear space there to themselves. Everybody watched intently but none cared to venture close.

Ann was mad to hear what those two had to say to each other. It seemed to her that the whole meaning of what had happened would be lost to her if she did not hear. Swiftly as a darting lizard she circled back of the tables in the dark, and came to the post nearest to where they stood. She flattened herself against it.

She heard Nell drawl in her cool tones: “Thanks, old man. He was a coarse brute.”

Chako muttered: “That’s all right.”

“But what did *you* do it for?” Nell asked curiously.

“Ahh!” growled Chako, “he was too well satisfied with himself. I couldn’t stand it!”

Nell laughed. “You don’t want me,” she said.

“No,” said Chako bluntly, “too many after you. . . . If you’d come away with me . . . North, where there’s nobody . . .”

“No,” said Nell, “you and I weren’t made for each other. Both too much run after, I expect.”

“You shouldn’t have come out here to me,” Chako growled. “I don’t want to seem to turn you down before these swine.”

Nell laughed again. “A fat lot I care what *they* think!” she said. “Shake hands to show there’s no hard feeling, and let’s call it a night!”

Ann peeped around the post. She saw the couple oddly lighted up in the horizontal rays from the light on the bar. Their shadows reached down to the far end of the room. Nell laid her hand within Chako’s. Nell was laughing up in his eyes, and Chako was scowling sombrely down in hers.

“By God! you’re handsome!” he rumbled.

“Thanks,” said Nell, showing her beautiful white teeth.

She ran back to her room. Chako stood watching her with troubled eyes until she disappeared. Then he looked around him. Seeing his coat where he had flung it, he picked it up, and wriggled it over his shoulders. Without looking to the right or the left, he made his way to the entrance door and went out.

As soon as he had gone the whispering started up. A sniggering laugh went around; there was a loud guffaw. The sneer expressed in these sounds made Ann shiver. They did not understand; and what they did not understand they hated. Thirty seconds after Chako had gone, the usual empty clatter of talk and laughter filled the place. It was as if nothing had happened. The banjos were tuning up again. Maroney unconcernedly brought the lamps back, and the waiters darted to and fro with fresh rounds of drinks.

Ann’s sole thought now was of escaping. She had had her fill of the dance-hall. It was never to tempt her again. She was done for ever with the rôle of a spectator of life. Sitting on the bank, feeling herself safe, and watching the rapids course by, she had suddenly been sucked in, and now was being hurried down helplessly she knew not to what end. She was terrified half out of her wits by the violence of the emotions that seized her and shook her till she turned faint. She could not think nor understand. Her instinct was only to get by herself, to hide herself.

She waited until the music started, and the dancers provided a little cover. Then with a muttered word to Noll Voss she slipped across the floor and gained the hotel. She never waited to see whether her escort accompanied her. She flew upstairs and, thankfully gaining her own room, flung herself face down on her bed.

“Ah, if he would come North with *me!*” she whispered, pressing her face into the pillow. “If he would come North with me! . . . Oh, I am mad! . . . But if he would only come with me.”

## CHAPTER V

### ANN'S MISSION

To effect her purpose in coming North, Ann required the help of a man, but she found Fort Edward so violent and strange in all its ways that she allowed the first days to slip by without making any effort to become acquainted with the right sort of man. There was Noll Voss, but he would never do. Her instinct warned her not to tell him what she had come for. A well-meaning man, he was not a true son of the woods, but a settler. Moreover his notions about women were both absurd and aggravating. In her mind's eye Ann could see the look of horror that would overspread his face should she propose that they take a trip into the wilds together. And if she did go with him, she couldn't trust him; notwithstanding his moral ideas, there was something shifty in the man.

From the first Ann had marked Cal Nimmo, the "Mayor," as a good one to go to for advice. There was something very reassuring in the hardness, the squareness, the good-humour expressed in Cal's weather-beaten countenance. But he was rather a terrible figure too, with his cynical grimness, his air of no nonsense, and it required a good deal of resolution for Ann to nerve herself to the point of addressing him. In the days following Nellie Nairns' arrival he seemed extraordinarily busy. Ann had had but a glimpse of him on the wing to and from the dance-hall. She couldn't very well follow him in there. In brief, no opportunity to speak to him had presented itself.

Then came the night when Ann was torn up by the roots as it seemed to her. After that nothing in her life had the same significance as before.

On the morning after the fight in the dance-hall she drifted downstairs in the hotel a little earlier than usual. The place was wrapped in a quilt of silence. Even in the kitchen the business of the day had not commenced. Ann went outside. The sun had been up for hours; it was like midday in more southerly latitudes. It had been a big night in Fort Edward, and no creature stirred now. It was like a camp of the dead in broad day.

To Ann, after the violent upheavals of the night, the very world seemed changed—and for the worse. With feeling too much she was jaded and irritable. She was worn out, yet the demon of unrest pursued her. She could not keep still.

She drifted along the main street of the settlement—Dominion Avenue they called it, when they remembered. It ran straight across the blunt shallow peninsula on which Fort Edward was built, touching the Boardman River on one side and the Campbell on the other. It had been laid off a hundred feet wide, but the stumps had never been cleared, and the tangled skeins of wagon tracks twisted among them as crookedly as rivulets in sand. It was something of an undertaking for a foot passenger to get from one side to the other. The street was really distinguished in its ugliness. The closely built structures down each side were not all of a type, for old log buildings rubbed elbows with pert new clap-boarded stores with “false fronts.”

Ann saw more than one sprawling figure in the merciless sunlight. She was getting used to that now. She looked diffidently in their faces. She did not see the face she feared to see. Yet in her heart she hoped that drunkenness had laid Chako by the heels somewhere. For her secret terror was that he had flown straight out of Maroney’s to the North like the wild bird he was. Out of her reach for ever! She searched the face of each ugly building with pain. If only she could know that one of them held Chako safe for the moment, she could rest.

Noll Voss turned up at the hotel for breakfast as usual. Never had Ann been so glad to see him. She had to get information from somebody or she would go wild.

Noll was sulky. “You gave me the slip last night!” he said.

“It was too terrible!” said Ann. “I ran to my room.”

“Not till it was all over,” said Noll bitterly.

“What became of Chako Lyllac?” Ann asked with bated breath.

“Chako Lyllac! Chako Lyllac!” snarled Noll. “I suppose you think he’s quite a hero! Like all the other women.”

Noll’s feelings were of small moment to Ann. “I asked you a civil question,” she said coldly.

“I’ll tell you what happened to Chako Lyllac!” he cried. “When he left here he went to Siwash Jimmie’s place, the lowest den in town. He filled up on squirrel whisky and went crazy and wrecked the place. They sent up here for Cal Nimmo. It took six of them to hold him down. They locked him in a shed at Cal’s place to sleep it off. There’s your hero for you!”

Ann was conscious only of relief. He had not gone beyond reach.

“If you cannot speak civilly . . .” she said coldly.

Noll suspected that she was using him, but he could not resist her. He came crawling, as Ann knew he would.

“Ahh! I didn’t mean nothin’ against you,” he muttered. “That young waster just makes me mad!”

“Then Cal Nimmo is his friend,” murmured Ann.

“About the only friend he’s got,” said Noll.

How Ann’s breast warmed towards the hard-faced “Mayor.” She resolved not to let that morning pass without speaking to him. Meanwhile she mercilessly plied Noll with questions and Noll, willy-nilly, had to answer.

“I suppose Chako Lyllac will soon be leaving here.”

“As soon as his money’s spent.”

“Where will he go?”

“You can search me!”

“But he has to make his living somehow.”

“Oh, he works off and on; river-work with parties going up the Campbell or down the Spirit.”

“Are any parties getting ready to go on the rivers now?”

“Not that I know of. It’s getting late.”

“What will he do then?”

“Oh, go off to his friends, the Indians, I suppose.”

“But he must spend a lot of money here. Where does he get it?”

“He brings out a bunch of fur every spring. Traps all winter. And can’t rest till he’s drunk it all up!”

After breakfast Ann boldly carried a chair out on the platform, prepared to wait there all day if necessary until Cal Nimmo came along. Noll Voss hung about her abjectly. She tolerated him. He was still useful to her.

After all it proved to be no hard matter at all. All she had to do was to stand up and say: “Mr. Nimmo, can I have a talk with you?”

Cal snatched the hat off his bullet head. His keen eyes bored her through. “Why sure, Miss,” he said. “Let’s go inside.” He had the natural good manners that result from perfect assurance.

They stood by the side window at the rear of the room.

“I’ve been wanting to talk to you ever since I came,” said Ann. “But you always seemed so busy!”

“Busy! Sho!” said Cal. “What does it amount to?”

“It’s about my reason for coming here,” said Ann.

“I wondered about that myself,” said Cal. “But it’s a free country. There wasn’t no call for me to ask you.”

“I’m looking for my father, Joseph Maury,” said Ann.

“Never heard the name,” said Cal.

“Surely you must have heard of him!” said Ann, surprised. “He’s been in this country many years. Every year I have had a letter from him posted in this place!”

“That’s easy explained,” said Cal. “I suppose he goes amongst us under some other name.”

“But why should he?”

Cal shrugged. “We got some queer cusses up here,” he said dryly. He pulled up chairs. “Sit down, Miss. What sort of looking man is he?”

“I never saw him,” said Ann. “I know him only by his letters.”

“Hm!” said Cal. “Then any one of us might be your Dad for all you know. Even me.”

“I wish it were you,” said Ann boldly.

Cal grinned delightedly. “Same here!” he said heartily. “But no such luck for me!”

“In the winters he trapped furs,” said Ann, “and in the summers he prospected for gold. But he never found any gold, he said.”

“The usual story,” said Cal.

“Every spring he brought his furs out to Fort Edward and sold them, and bought his supplies and went back.”

It presently appeared that Ann had her father’s last letter. She read it to Cal.

“DEAR DAUGHTER,—I hope this finds you well. I am about the same as usual. I got your letter. I am glad you are well. I was late this year getting out. We had such unseasonable warm weather the snow in the mountains melted early and the rivers were in flood. I capsized twice, but I did not lose my catch. I got a touch of fever from getting wet and all, and had to spell a couple of days. I had good fur this year. After paying for everything I had a hundred dollars credit left. I send you a post-office order herewith. It ought to be twice as much. The traders here are both robbers. They’re in cahoots with each other. So no more at present from

“Your sincere father

“JOSEPH MAURY.”

Cal struck his fist into his palm. "I have it!" he cried. "Joe Grouser, that's what we called him. It was that touch about the traders being robbers. That's Joe Grouser! When was that letter dated?"

"Two years ago, June."

"That's right! That's the last time he was here. When he didn't show up last year there was some talk about it, but the traders here supposed he had carried his fur down the Spirit River. He had often threatened it."

"Tell me more about him," murmured Ann.

"Well, of all the quare ones he was one of the quarest," said Cal reminiscently. "Every year he'd come floating down the Campbell on a little raft with his catch. Every year he'd have a hell of a row with the traders over the price, and carry his fur from one to the other and back again. As a matter of fact Joe Grouser always got the best price going, because he wasn't in debt to the traders. Then he'd buy his year's grub, and quietly sit around getting drunk every day until the steamboat went up the river. She'd carry him and his outfit to Gisborne portage, Joe Mixer would put him across, and we wouldn't see nor hear of him for another year.

"He was a dogged man. Every year he carried in more than half a ton of grub without any help. He'd built himself a good size skiff for the purpose, he'd track that heavy boat all the way up the Rice River, the Pony River, the Little River, and him not a big man at that. Two hundred and fifty miles and how much farther I don't know. Going in with his grub it was easier, downstream work; but when he got to the Grand Forks of the Spirit, he went on up the Stanley. He was a strong-hearted man whatever you may say. Nobody knew just where he ranged. He was secret as a clam. No traveller, no Indian ever came upon his camp."

"What a life!" murmured Ann.

"You're right," said Cal. "What a life!"

"But you were his friend."

"As much his friend as he would let me," said Cal. "The fact was he hadn't no use for any man. He'd tell us to our faces what he thought of us, and it wasn't complimentary. But nobody got sore, because he was Joe Grouser, see? He was thorough. Nothing ever suited him; the country, the weather, his luck, life itself, rotten!"

"How unhappy he must have been!"

"Well, I don't know," said Cal. "When he was grouching away there was a sort of brightness in his eye. Certainly he got a satisfaction out of being different from everybody else."

“What did he look like?” asked Ann.

“Nothing remarkable,” said Cal. “A smallish man with a mistrustful, wide-open eye like a bird’s. Of late years he was somewhat withered up. He wore the batteredest felt hat in the country and always had the stub of a clay pipe under his nose. When he came floating down the river sitting on his bale of fur, he was all of a color with the dead logs of his raft. You had to look twice to see him at all.”

Ann murmured: “And yet in my village at home, they still tell of what a handsome man he was when he courted my mother, and how full of life.”

“Ah, well, Time plays the devil with us all,” said Cal, grinning. “Specially the gamey ones.”

“How should I set about finding him?” asked Ann simply.

Cal looked grave. “That’s quite a job,” he said. “We’ll talk it over again. First-off I want to make some inquiries. There are some fellows here who come up from Spirit River Crossing. They’ll know if he went down that way. I’ll see you again this afternoon.”

Ann’s heart beat thickly. It was terribly hard for her to drop the matter even for an hour or two, without having broached that which was far more to her than a father she had never seen. But she thought: the man’s eyes are keen; I must be careful. She ventured to say a little breathlessly:

“Shall I come to your house?”

“No, no,” said Cal quickly. “No fit place to receive a lady. I’ll see you here.”

He bowed to her gallantly, and went to join the men outside.

At dinnertime Ann gathered from the conversation at the hotel table that the steamboat was going up the river that afternoon. A fresh anxiety attacked her. Would they put Chako aboard and send him away?

Afterwards, observing the men strolling down to the landing-place to see the boat off, she casually followed after, a white-faced little figure with her head gallantly held. She did not think about what she was doing. She had as yet no coherent thoughts about Chako; what he was, or what he was to her. It didn’t seem to make any difference. She simply *felt*, and had to yield to her feelings.

The landing-place was at the other end of the street, the Campbell River side of the settlement. Noll Voss tagged along with her. The “working-man” didn’t seem to have much to do to-day except bother her. He was burning up with curiosity to learn what had taken place between her and Cal Nimmo, but Ann ignored his hints. He vented his spleen in muttered abuse of Cal.

“A bad actor! At his age, too! He’s back of all the trouble here. Calls himself Mayor of the place! They only made him Mayor because he can drink the most of any man here without showing it. Mayor! He had ought to be called the town barrel!”

Ann paid no attention.

The ramshackle little steamboat went off up the river, furiously kicking up the water behind. Ann, having satisfied herself that Chako was not aboard, returned to the hotel with a lighter heart. All the men were drifting back towards Maroney’s. Cal Nimmo fell in beside Ann. There was an off-hand friendliness in his manner that warmed the lonely girl’s breast. This is a man, she thought, comparing him with the peevish moralist on the other side of her.

Cal, taking it for granted that Noll Voss was not in her confidence, made no reference to their talk of the morning. He pointed out the sights of Fort Edward as they walked along. The Japanese Short Order Restaurant; smart fellows those Japs; sent out five hundred a month in post-office orders, and nobody had a word to say against them. Siwash Jimmie’s; that was the joint where the Swedes got cut up, that made so much trouble; the worst den in camp, but there’s always got to be one such place like a cesspool to collect the drainage.

Ann saw her opportunity. “I heard there was a fight there last night,” she said carelessly.

“Nothing out of the common,” Cal said, and immediately called her attention to the fine corner that was reserved for a church. There was considerable talk as to what kind of a church they’d have. As for himself, he didn’t care, so they got a real man for a parson.

Ann could now ask quite naturally: “Which is your house, Mr. Nimmo?”

He pointed between two of the buildings on the north side of the street to a comfortable looking log shack that stood a little way back amongst the scattered, leaning pines. “That’ll be across the track when the railway comes through,” he said with a grin, “the swell residential section, I reckon.”

Ann’s avid eyes devoured it. But no long lad lounged at the door; no yellow head showed at the window. All the rest of the way Ann was beating her wits for some innocent-sounding way to bring in Chako’s name. Her breast was crying for some word of him. But she dared not risk it; Cal was too keen.

When they got to the hotel Cal said with a look at Noll Voss: “Shall we go inside?”

Noll was obliged to remain out on the platform, biting his fingers.

They sat by the back window again. “What did you find out?” asked Ann.

“Your father did not go down the Spirit River last year,” said Cal. “I knew it before, but anyhow I asked those fellows.”

“Then you think . . . ?” said Ann.

Cal did not answer her directly. “You’re a sensible girl,” he said in a gentler voice, “and a plucky one, or you wouldn’t be here at all. It isn’t as if he’d been a regular father to you . . .”

Ann interrupted him quietly: “Then you think he’s dead?”

“I’m sure of it,” said Cal.

“How can you be sure?”

Cal said: “Well, I’m like a man who’s had but one book to read all his life long. I know this country chapter and verse. What is hardest for newcomers to understand is that nothing can be hid up here. That’s because a man must keep in touch with his grub, see? There are only two ways to get out of the Stanley River country, and I can tell you positively your father never came out after he went in there two years ago.”

“But he may still be there.”

Cal shook his head. “Not without grub. It’s possible he might have saved over enough year to year to see him through one season without coming out. But not two. Grub won’t keep that long. And it’s too late for him to come now. The Rice River is in full flood.”

“Haven’t I heard of men living off the country?” said Ann.

“For a short while, yes,” said Cal. “But seems as if a man must have flour and sugar to keep healthy. Even the Indians nowadays.”

“How dreadful to die alone!” murmured Ann.

“Sure, sure!” said Cal. “But remember it’s all over long ago.”

“What ought I to do?” asked Ann.

“Go back to your folks,” he said promptly.

“I haven’t any folks.”

“To your home, where you are known.”

She slowly shook her head. “I couldn’t do that.”

“What else can you do?” said Cal.

“I must go and see,” murmured Ann.

“What possible chance . . .” began Cal exasperated.

Ann stopped him with a gesture. “I can’t argue with you,” she said. “You know too much for me. Very likely you’re right. But I *must know!* I have

been preparing for this trip for a whole year. I could not turn back half-way without finding out.”

“I take you for a girl of sense,” said Cal. “This is just a fancy, like women have.”

“I can’t help being a woman,” said Ann.

“You don’t want to help it,” said Cal grimly.

“All right, I don’t want to help it,” said Ann.

He was silent for a moment, scowling, and thoughtfully tweaking his nose. “How much money have you got?” he asked bluntly.

“Six hundred dollars,” said Ann. “I suppose I must save out a hundred and fifty to get back home on.”

“Four hundred and fifty,” said Cal, “you couldn’t hire but one man with that, and buy the necessary grub and so on.”

“Isn’t one man enough?” asked Ann.

Cal looked at her with a grim smile. “Would you be willing?”

“Why shouldn’t I be?” asked Ann a little defiantly.

“Well, you’re a pretty girl,” said Cal. “Take away Nellie Nairns’ fine dresses and her paint box and she couldn’t hold a candle to you.”

Ann moved her shoulders impatiently. “To me that seems like an old-fashioned notion; that a pretty girl is in danger every time she’s left alone with a man. If I let him see from the first that I was simply on business, I’d be safe enough, I think.”

Cal looked at her with a sardonic and admiring twinkle. “I wish I could take you myself,” he said. “But I got a wife down in Kimowin. I never could square her.”

“Am I not right?” insisted Ann.

“Yes, I believe you are,” he said frankly. “There’s plenty of men who ain’t savages . . . Kind of hard on the man, though. . . . However, that’s not the difficulty. The difficulty would be to find a man with *nerve* enough to see you through and back.”

Ann knew a man, but she dared not name him. “Isn’t it their life?” she asked.

Cal shook his head. “Travelling with an inexperienced woman would be the same as travelling alone,” he said. “It would be a damned sight harder, because he’d have all the responsibility of you, see? . . . No, men generally show up better when they travel in parties, and divide the responsibility. Or at least in couples to bolster each other up. Most men begin to wobble when

they're thrown on their own. There's mighty few travels alone up here. It's a certain type; your Dad was one; young Chako Lyllac's another."

Ann's heart rose slowly into her throat; up, up, until she was almost suffocating. But she glanced out of the window, murmuring with an off-hand air: "Somebody told me Chako Lyllac was a good river man."

Cal laughed shortly. "One of the best," he said.

"Well then?" said Ann faintly.

"You were in the hall last night," said Cal. "I saw you. Think you'd be safe with Chako?"

"Why not?" said Ann.

"It's lucky you have me to advise you," said Cal dryly. "I've knowed Chako Lyllac since he first came up here, eight years ago, 1903, it was, I mind. Ever seen a Great Dane pup? That was Chako. He has growed some. I got a soft spot for the kid. They don't turn out many like that nowadays. But he *is* a savage. Absolutely. Knows no law but his own instincts. Wild as a lynx or an eagle! A woman might as well commit suicide as trust herself to him. He has no feelings."

In the face of this there was nothing for Ann to do but drop the subject—for the present. That it had been introduced at all was no small gain. Her secret resolve was unshaken. She told herself she knew better than Cal Nimmo: Chako *had* feelings, however deep he might hide them from men.

"I'll think it over," Cal said. "Give me a couple of days. . . . Better keep the matter quiet," he added. "I haven't said anything about the nature of your business. If it got about, you'd have plenty of volunteers. And without pay at that. But not the right kind. This fellow, Noll Voss, he'd go, though he don't know a river from a hole in the ground."

"I wouldn't make such a mistake as that," said Ann.

"Good girl!" said Cal.

## CHAPTER VI

### CHAKO'S ESCAPEDES

WHEN ANN came down to breakfast next morning Noll Voss greeted her with a smile of triumphant malice. Ann's heart began to beat. She perceived that she was about to learn something painful. She had no more than seated herself when he said:

"Your friend Chako Lyllac broke loose again last night."

Ann steadied herself. "He is not a friend of mine," she said levelly.

Noll went on with gusto: "This was at a new place that's lately opened, Bagger's Hole they call it. It's popular because the Bagger brothers brought in an outfit of real outside liquor, up the Oneen River and across Sineca Pass. Didn't pay no excise. There was a crowd there. Chako Lyllac was already drunk when he come in. He had a couple of shots by himself, like he always does, and then he got the notion that the company wasn't choice enough for him. He ran all the customers out of the place, and stood there like a lord by himself, drinking his whisky over the bar. Nachelly, the Bagger brothers didn't fancy having their business interfered with by him, and while one brother kep' him busy in talk over the bar, the other snuk up behind Chako and cracked him on the nut with a baseball bat!"

"The coward!" cried Ann involuntarily.

An ugly, pained sneer twisted Noll Voss's lips. "I thought you'd say that," he remarked.

"Was he badly hurt?" demanded Ann.

"Nah! His skull's too thick. He got his pretty yellow hair bloodied up, that's all. They sent for Cal. Cal took him home."

Ann saw that there was more coming. "Well?" she said. She felt like a drug addict. This was her poison, but she had to have it.

Noll went on: "Amongst the crowd at Bagger's was Bud Carrick. He runs the Independent cash store here. Bud went home and told his wife what had happened . . ."

"His wife?" said Ann, surprised. "Are there wives here?"

"Sure, most of the traders is married. And a few others. All the married people live a quarter of a mile up the Campbell River side. To keep the women out of town . . . Bud Carrick told his wife. She didn't say nothin', but as soon as Bud went to bed, she sneaked out and ran all the way to town.

Bust into Cal Nimmo's shack without so much as knockin', and plumped herself down beside Chako Lyllac's bed, and hugged him and cried, and carried on that he was her lover and her darlin' and so on. And her a woman thirty-five year old!"

The food on Ann's plate suddenly sickened her. "How do such stories get about?" she asked.

"I suppose Cal Nimmo told it," said Noll. "He was right there."

"And what did Chako do?" asked Ann.

"Chako hugged her back again, and called her all pet names."

This was obviously a fiction. Ann smiled scornfully at the thought of the young eagle condescending to call a woman pet names, and breathed more freely.

"Seems it's been going on for weeks past," said Noll unctuously. "Bud Carrick's a drinking man. They say Chako hung about his house every night, and as soon as Bud started for town, Chako went in."

"But Chako got drunk every night himself," said Ann.

Noll shrugged. "I'm only telling you what they say."

"Who says so?" demanded Ann. "Cal Nimmo?"

"Everybody," said Noll evasively.

"I don't believe a word of it!" said Ann.

"You wouldn't," said Noll, with his painful, twisted sneer.

"What do they say happened after that?" demanded Ann.

"Cal Nimmo took the woman home. They met her husband coming out to look for her. Cal was all for telling some story to smooth things over, but she was crazy-like, she right out with it that she was in love with Chako Lyllac and she didn't care who knew it. And called her husband every name she could lay her tongue to. He was wild. Got his gun, and was for going right back to put a bullet through Chako. But Cal argued with him. Cal told him he couldn't shoot a man who was flat on his back. Cal promised him satisfaction as soon as Chako was able to get up. Bud said he wouldn't fight him with fists 'cause Chako was twice as big as him, and Cal said they could settle it with pistols as soon as Chako was up!"

Pistols! All the blood seemed to leave Ann's heart. But she *would not* betray herself to the watchful, sneering man beside her. She glanced out of the window with a calm air. The sky looked blackish to her. Hateful, murderous place! Why had she ever come there? She carefully cut her food into small pieces and ate them one by one. She swallowed her coffee. Then,

having saved her face, she rose, and nodding coolly to Noll Voss in her usual manner, went slowly into the front room and up the stairs.

But she could not stay in her room. Not a minute! Not a minute! The ceiling suffocated her. She pinned on the old sailor hat with trembling fingers, and went out again. There was a back stairs that she had used before when she wished to evade Noll Voss. She gained the river bank via the back door of the hotel.

She sauntered up and down the main street, looking in the store windows, outwardly so quiet and self-possessed with her sombre eyes, such a *nice*-looking little thing, while inwardly great waves of emotion were sweeping through her, threatening to drown her senses. She was telling herself that this could not go on, this could not go on—but where was she to find any escape? Between the houses on the north side her sick eyes caught glimpses of Cal Nimmo's cabin off among the pines. It tormented her unspeakably. She dared not go any closer.

Finally she saw Cal coming across the waste of stumps between his house and the town street. She timed her steps so that they appeared to meet by accident in the street.

“Good morning, Mr. Nimmo,” she said, smiling as women can even when they are distracted.

“Good morning! Good morning!” he said, walking along with her. He did not appear to have anything on his mind. They were walking away from the hotel.

“What is this I hear about the excitement at your house last night?” Ann asked, laughing.

He fell in with her apparent mood. “Life is just one damn thing after another,” he said jocosely. “At least Chako's life is. He got laid out in one of the saloons last night. Some dame up the river heard about it and came running to our shack like a crazy woman.”

Then it's true! thought Ann with a bitter heart.

“That's nothing unusual,” Cal went on. “Seems as if all women, white *and* red, were bound to make fools of themselves over Chako. There's something about the lad . . . I don't know, not being a woman myself. They fling themselves at his head without shame. Scores of 'em! It's no wonder he gets restive.”

Ann suspected that the hard, keen, kindly man was exaggerating the case in order to cure her, or perhaps to forestall the disease.

“They say that he and her husband are going to fight it out with pistols,” she said, smiling still.

“Nothing to it,” said Cal. “That’s just a bit of embroidery. Of course the man was wild, but I reasoned with him. Chako told me he had never had anything to do with the woman. . . .”

“And you believed him?” asked Ann with tight nostrils.

“Oh, I know when he’s lying,” said Cal coolly. “I told her husband that. I told him his wife was just temporarily out of her mind, and ought to be treated like any other sick woman.”

“An attractive woman?” asked Ann indifferently and breathlessly.

“So-so. But as nice a woman as you’d care to meet. Just dazzled by his yellow hair, poor soul!”

Poor soul! echoed Ann’s heart. “What’s to become of her?” she asked.

“Her husband borrowed a skiff to carry her down to Ching’s Landing. I’m on my way to see them off. They’ll wait at the stopping-house until the stage goes. He’ll carry her out to her folks. By the time he gets back Chako will be off on the wing.”

One terror in Ann’s breast was laid, only to give place to a new terror. “When does he go?” she asked. Though she betrayed herself she could not help asking.

Cal shrugged. “When he will,” he said.

They came within sight of that part of the river bank that was used as a landing-place. A small group was standing there.

“There they are,” said Cal.

Ann stopped short. She could not face that woman. She could see her a couple of hundred yards away, just a broadish back clad in white shirt waist, black skirt, dejected looking hat. “I’ll go back to the hotel,” she said hurriedly.

“So-long!” said Cal genially.

All day Ann’s fever grew worse. She could not face her thoughts. She suffered cruelly without knowing why she suffered. It was as if a new Ann had suddenly arisen within her, an unrecognizable creature, who was mercilessly slashing at the orderly growth of years. Inside her, Ann felt as ravaged and raw as the town site of Fort Edward.

By this time she had made up her mind that Chako did not intend to return to Maroney’s after the scene with Nellie Nairns. Nevertheless she was continually watching for him. After dinner, sitting in the office where, without appearing to be actually on the watch, she could see all who arrived

on the platform outside, she saw Cal Nimmo enter the dance-hall. The new creature within her immediately whispered: He'll be in there for a couple of hours; you can't be supposed to know he's there; you could go to his cabin as if to talk over your matters with him. . . . Instantly her feet carried her out of the door and off the platform.

Half-way across the waste between the street and the cabin among the pines, her old self made a stand. She stopped short in the path, staring fixedly at the splintered comb of wood where the tree had broken off, as if in that she hoped to find the answer to the riddle of existence. Inside her she was being knocked back and forth like a shuttlecock.

Running to him just like the women you despise . . . !

I'm not going to make a fool of myself. I just want to see him.

You *are* making a fool of yourself. Cal has seen it already. Chako will see it instantly. There have been so many before you . . . !

Well, if he's common and cheap; if he's beastly it will cure me. . . .

It will *not* cure you. It's the look of him that has bewitched you. You don't care what he is. . . .

I've *got* to see him! This struggle is wearing me out . . . !

Seeing him will only make it worse. You've got to get the better of this thing. . . .

Just to see him will ease me. Then I'll start fighting it. . . .

You're making a fool of yourself, a fool of yourself. . . .

But her feet were already carrying her on.

She came to the door of the cabin shaking like aspen leaves. The door stood open. Inside, she saw a cot against the wall, the bedclothes all tumbled. She knocked with her trembling hand. There was no answer. Like a woman blind and senseless, moved by something outside of herself, she stepped across the sill. There was but the one room and she could see it all. There was another tumbled cot at the other side. There was no one at home. Ann stepped outside again, and looked guiltily around to see if she had been observed. Her breast quieted down. She was filled with shame and relief. She had a sense of having been saved in spite of herself. Something deep and quiet within her looked on in amazement at her senseless emotional gyrations. She was being whirled in strange eddies. But for the moment she was quiet.

She retraced her steps to the town street. As far as she could tell no one was watching her. Her intention was to go back to the hotel, but the old painful struggle recommenced, and she turned in the other direction. Since

Chako was not at home he must be in one of the drinking-places. Perhaps he would come out, and she would get a glimpse of him. That would be no harm, for he would not notice her, and in the street she would not have to speak to him.

Walking up and down in the lucid evening light, she gradually made out that all the revelry of the moment was concentrated in a certain one of the newer places, a clap-boarded store with a false front, and a little porch. Through the open door she glimpsed a crowd of men lined up in front of a bar, and the rumble of many voices came out. It was too dim inside for her to distinguish individuals, but there was little doubt that Chako was among them, for none of the other places seemed to be doing anything.

Ann shortened her promenade in order to pass the place more frequently, slackening her pace as she approached it. Once as she passed, the quiet self within her seemed to whisper: Hanging around outside a drinking-place to look at a man! She tasted the very dregs of shame, but could not drag herself away. She fancied she could distinguish Chako's voice among the others.

Later, as she was coming towards the place, the noise within suddenly swelled louder, and she quickened her steps. There was a sound of running feet, and in front of her a little man darted out of the door, squeaking with terror like a guinea-pig. A city man from his neat store suit, white collar and natty straw hat. Chako Lyllac followed at his heels, his brows terrible in rage—but it was a mock rage; his blue eyes were snapping with mirth.

The little man took off across the road, veering like a wild thing. He tripped over a root, and went down in a mud-hole with arms outspread. Chako, who had stopped on the edge of the porch, threw back his head and sent up a roar of deep-toned laughter to the sky. He planted his hands on his hips, and laughed until it hurt him, and he groaned with laughter. The other men poured out of the place alongside him. When the little man picked himself out of the mud and hobbled away, holding his dripping hands away from his body, the straw hat in one of them, the laughter on the porch was like a storm in the hills.

Ann was half hidden behind the end post of the porch. No one noticed her, and she could look her fill. She looked with all her sight, intensely, as if in that one look she would draw the very essence of Chako into her consciousness, there to keep it for ever. She was reassured by what she saw. Chako was drunk, but his soul had not abdicated. There was no sag in him. Drink only made him more scornful and reckless. He was as dandified as usual, the broad-brimmed stetson jauntily askew.

A painful weight seemed to lift from Ann's breast. She thought: Maybe he is a savage, but he's a glorious savage! What is life for but to spend! He makes all other men look like domestic fowls. I don't have to be ashamed of him!

The men pushed back into the bar-room, thirsty from laughing. Ann returned to the hotel. Her fever was allayed—or was it? At any rate she was filled with exaltation. She could think again. She lay on her bed for hours thinking. Or indulging her sensations. The painful struggle inside her was over. One of the two warring voices had prevailed.

It's all right, she told herself, I've got my grip now. I'd be safe in going away with him. My eyes are wide open. I know exactly what he is. I realize there can never be anything between us. We have no meeting ground. I realize that it would be suicidal to give in to him the least bit, and I shall not do so. Anyhow, he would never be attracted to me that way. But if he should be it wouldn't make any difference. . . . Perhaps I could help him. He *must* have a *soul* or he could not have that glorious look. But it's had no chance in these rough and brutal surroundings. Perhaps I could help him find his soul. . . . And oh! what a joy to be with him, to be able to look at him, to listen to his voice! That would be an experience worth living for—or dying for either. But he will never guess what I feel. I will build up a wall of friendliness between us. . . .

Life went on the same as usual at Maroney's. Outside on the platform the men lounged in the sun all day, sitting on the benches with their legs out, or leaning a negligent shoulder against the wall; smoking, chewing, whittling sticks, telling the interminable stories of the North. Every day was the same; every day was like Sunday. In the beginning Ann wondered about these men who seemed to have nothing to do, but gradually she learned that the crowd was always slowly changing; that the apparently aimless men were mostly adventurers out of the wilderness from one direction or another, who came into the frontier settlement half mad for companionship.

Inside the hall by day or night indifferently the banjos thrummed, bottles and glasses thumped on the tables, the girls lifted their raucous voices in songs. Maroney's was the "toniest" joint in town, and, except for the occasional fights that enlivened the proceedings, the crowd always comported itself with the decorum due to a high-toned joint. Ann always knew when Nellie came out to sing by the changed character of the applause. Ann was no longer tempted by the dance-hall, for she knew Chako would not come back there. She would have liked to talk to Nellie, though.

Her heart, big and soft with feeling, craved to love somebody. At intervals she saw Nellie flitting through the hotel, remote and inaccessible in her make-up.

During the next day or so it was borne in on Ann by degrees that Cal Nimmo was purposely keeping out of her way. Passing along the road on Sunday morning, she saw him slip into one of the stores. Then she was sure of it. She laid in wait for him on the platform that afternoon. He was for passing her with a salute, but she called him to her side.

“What’s the matter?” she demanded.

He affected an innocent air.

“Why do you avoid me?” she insisted.

Cal scratched his head with a jocose air. “Well, I reckon you and me’s got to have a fuss,” he said ruefully, “and I was just putting it off as long as possible, being but a weak creature.”

Notwithstanding the facetious manner, Cal’s grimness was evident, and a chill struck through Ann. Cal was rather a terrifying antagonist. She stiffened the back of her neck.

“It takes two to make a fuss,” she said. “And I’ve no intention of fussing with you.”

“Well now, that eases my mind,” he said, grinning, “for I allowed the fussing would come mostly from your side.”

“What’s it going to be about?” asked Ann.

“Come on, let’s take a little walk,” said Cal. “You can see those guys yonder just stretching their lugs to hear.”

Stepping off the platform, they turned to the left, that is to say in the direction away from town. Maroney’s was almost the last building on that side.

“Did you know you was gettin’ to be a fair-sized mystery around these parts?” Cal said. “Coming up on the same boat with Nellie Nairns the way you did, you passed unnoticed at first, but now the fellows are talking. They ain’t got so much to talk about, you know. And you can’t exactly blame them for talkin’. We never had an unexplained woman here before. Some wild theories are aired. Some have noticed the way you walk up and down the Avenue observing the speak-easies and the blind pigs, which are neither easy-spoken nor blind up here, God knows. They say you’re an agent of the excise department.”

“How ridiculous!” said Ann, blushing.

“Sure,” said Cal with his grin, “but I tell you, you have even compromised me. Because I am the only one you go with, see?”

“There’s Noll Voss,” said Ann.

“Oh, hell! anybody could see you’ve got Noll Voss thrown and hog-tied. A poor tool! He never had no luck with the women.”

They passed the last house. In this direction the horse trail followed the bank of the Boardman River, which was, for the moment, a peaceful brown stream with sylvan islands, picnic islands. On their right the pine forest rose dark and clean; there was no reminder of the scars of the settlement.

“Well, what are we going to fuss about?” asked Ann.

“Here’s where it begins!” said Cal. “Let’s sit down to it.”

They found a place where the low-cut bank had partly fallen, making a natural seat with a foot-rest. Here they sat in pleasant grass. The brown stream, flecked with foam from the rapids above, moved serenely past them.

“You’re a fine girl!” said Cal. “And I may say, a new kind of girl to me. You don’t lay back on your sex like they mostly do; you talk open to a man.”

“Well?” asked Ann, waiting for the inevitable qualification.

“I just want you to know I’m your friend,” said Cal simply.

“I do know it,” said Ann.

“Now this trip you propose to take,” he went on, “it’s plumb impossible! The more I think about it, the more impossibler it is!”

“I can’t see it,” said Ann.

“Of course you can’t see it. You don’t know nothin’ about it. You don’t know what it is to sleep on the ground in all weathers; to live day after day on sow-belly and pakwishegan. Pakwishegan is biscuit baked before an open fire; lies on your stomach like a stone. You don’t know nothing about the labour of trackin’ a boat up the rapids; capsizing in icy water; all the accidents of travel. Why, suppose you got sick.”

“I never get sick,” said Ann.

“Well, suppose your guide got sick then, or broke a leg?”

“He might break a leg if he stayed home.”

“Sure, he might. But we got a doctor here to set it.”

“Other women have made such journeys,” insisted Ann.

“Occasionally,” admitted Cal. “Wives of traders or missionaries who had to do it.”

“Well, I have to do it, too.”

“You haven’t got to,” he said. “That’s just the difference. It’s just a notion you’ve got. Your father is dead just as certain as if you saw him lying at your feet.”

“Then I’ve got to bury him,” said Ann.

Cal flung up his hands in mock exasperation.

“You haven’t found me a man then?” said Ann.

“There’s no such a man,” said Cal. “Leastwise there’s one, Frank Bower by name. But he started down for the Grand Forks just a couple of days before you got here.”

“You haven’t tried to find a man!” she said accusingly.

“No,” he admitted coolly. “There’s no man here that I’d trust to take you.”

There was a silence. Ann looked over the smoothly-flowing river with knitted brows. Cal glanced at her sideways to see how she was taking it.

She spoke at last in the carefully-reasonable voice one adopts towards a wrong-headed friend. “I appreciate your interest in me. But a friend can take too much on himself. You are not responsible for me.”

“The hell I ain’t!” said Cal, without violence. “Suppose you go into the North, and don’t come out again in a reasonable time, who’s got to go look for you? Me! . . . Responsibility! You people who live in civilized countries don’t know what it is! Every year you come North and dump yourselves on us. Not women, of course, but men. Is it any wonder it makes the men of the North sore to have their country advertised outside? Every year the tenderfeet come straggling in with their crazy notions and their useless outfits—or with none. And the men of the country have to drop their own work and go in search of them, and bring them in, and carry them through the winter, when there’s little enough grub for themselves. What outsiders never learn is that you can’t take a chance with the North. The conditions of life won’t give an inch.”

“But what’s that got to do with me?” asked Ann. “I can pay my way.”

“We were talking about my responsibility,” said Cal grimly. “As soon as you tell me your story I become responsible for you, because I know what you’re up against, and you don’t.”

There was a silence, longer than before. Ann’s face was pale. It did not betray her thoughts. She finally laughed, not quite naturally.

“Oh, well, this is a lovely afternoon,” she said. “And this is the prettiest spot I’ve seen up here. I said I wasn’t going to quarrel with you, and I’m not.”

Cal glanced at her shrewdly. "Now you're making up your mind you'll go ahead in spite of me," he drawled.

Ann flashed an angry, startled look at him.

"I expected it," Cal went on calmly. "You're a girl of spirit. But I want to tell you in all kindness, there's nothing doing. I'm the boss of this shebang, and what I say, goes!"

"You said it was a free country!" cried Ann.

"Free for them that can take care of themselves," said Cal, undisturbed. "The others must be taken care of."

"I won't be taken care of!" cried Ann hotly.

"Excuse me, but I don't see how you can help yourself," said Cal.

Ann stared at him, speechless with anger.

"Day after to-morrow," Cal went on deprecatingly, "that's Tuesday, the steamboat goes down to Ching's Landing to connect with the stage. . . ."

"I'm not going on her!" cried Ann.

Cal spread out his hands expressively.

Ann scrambled to her feet. "I'm not! I'm not! I'm not!" she cried furiously. "And don't you think it! This is the most high-handed thing I ever heard of! Outrageous! I'm not a wrong-doer to be ordered out of town! I'm my own mistress! I'll regulate my own life."

Cal got up slowly. "You've got to go, you know," he said with a regretful air.

"Why? Why? Why?" demanded Ann. "Am I not good enough for Fort Edward?"

"Too good," said Cal. "It's no place for a young lady. It's only by a sort of miracle you've escaped trouble so far. It will break any day. You haven't any notion of the fury of excitement a mysterious woman can work up in a crowd of idle and womanless men. God knows what direction it will take. They might run you out of town themselves."

"Then tell them who I am, and what I came for!"

"Not I!" said Cal grimly. "The situation would get right out of hand then. You'd have plenty of volunteers to take you North. Oh, a hell of a big expedition would be got up with every man in it at the head of it. And you wouldn't get five miles up the river before they'd be at each other's throats. Nice position for you, eh?"

"I don't care!" said Ann. "I won't be sent away as if I had done wrong. I have a right to stay at my hotel as long as I can pay my bills."

“I am the boss of this camp,” said Cal dryly. “I have only to say a word to Maroney . . . I hope you won’t make me bring him into it. An ornery cuss!”

Ann stared at him aghast. “You . . . you tyrant!” she gasped. “I know your kind. You’ve got a little power up here. It’s gone to your head! All you care about is making people feel your power! You ought to have lived in slave-holding days! Oh, I’m sorry I ever spoke to you!”

Cal received this tirade with a sheepish grin, and detached admiring glances at Ann’s flushed face. No weakening of his purpose showed, though. Tears finally choked off Ann’s utterance. She turned, and fled back over the wagon track.

She could not run the whole way back to the Settlement. When she dropped into a walk, there was Cal quietly at her side.

“I know you can’t abide the sight of me,” he said with his grin, maddening now to Ann. “But better let me walk back with you. It’ll make less talk.”

Ann was obliged to put up with his company. She managed to put on a pretty good face for their arrival at the hotel. She parted with Cal at the door in seeming amity, and flying upstairs locked herself in her room.

There, during the following hours, her feelings beat vainly against the hard fact of Cal Nimmo’s power, like the sea against rocky cliffs. By supertime she had achieved a certain measure of composure: she had made her resolve.

There is one man in this place who is not afraid of Cal Nimmo. Tomorrow I’ll ask him to help me, if I have to search for him in every drinking-place in town.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MEETING

UNTIL late that night Ann sat in her dark room with her arms spread on the sill of the open window and her head on her arms, thinking, she would have said, but giving her sensations free rein was nearer to it. Sunday was the biggest night of the week in Fort Edward, if any night could be the biggest where all seven were big. It was cold for the season, and unearthly still. The surrounding stillness seemed to wrap the sounds of the town in a strange medium, through which they issued a little changed, made more delicate. Drunken sounds mostly which swelled suddenly, and died away as doors banged open and shut. Succeeded by moments of silence, as if some awful creature had stretched forth a hand.

Her room vibrated with the sound of the distant banjos. When the dance-hall door was opened the whining, staccato music came around the corner of the house. A small drove of horses suddenly stampeded through the settlement, pounding and splashing. Men ran out and shouted curses after them. Their hoof-beats died away and could be heard minutes after, incredibly far off. The plink-plink of the banjos came around the house, suddenly shut off by the closing door. The horses came back from far off, making the heart beat with the furious pound of their hoofs drawing near. Pounding hoofs meant so much to our forbears. The horses passed. She heard another snatch of banjo music.

Sometimes amidst the ruck of sounds up and down the street, Ann could distinguish the quality of some one male voice. But never Chako's voice. Her breast was tormented because she could not know which roof covered him; because she could not know what he was doing. She was pretty sure he was not in Maroney's dance-hall below. But there were girls in some of the other places too. Ah, those girls! She could not bear the thought of them!

At this point she jumped up and paced her room, pressing her hands to her breast. It required all her strength of will to keep from running out to find him. Over and over she told herself that this was but one night amongst hundreds of others in his life. What happened to-night could make no difference. The truth must be faced.

She went sadly back to her window to stare at the roofs, one of which covered him. Ah, if she could only be with him, she thought, she would not care what he did. Because merely by being with him she could somehow keep the hands of her spirit on his spirit. If she could but make herself an

inch high and creep into his waistcoat pocket, and be carried with him wherever he went, she would know what he did, and need not so torment herself with imaginings.

Ann was awake early. That is to say, early for Fort Edward after a big night. She dressed and went out. The sun was high, the sky delicately glorious. Under such a sky the sordid street looked more than ever deplorable the morning after. A great hush brooded over the place. There are no singing birds so far North. One or two of the mongrel dogs of the North passed silently in and out between the houses on their rounds. They cringed past Ann.

Ann peeped at Cal's shack between the houses as she passed along. Door and window were both closed this morning. Unhealthy! she thought. In her heart Ann did Cal unwilling justice. She could not deny his qualities. She speculated on the curious relationship that must exist between the two men. Cal must love the youth in his own fashion, though he would deride that word. And Chako? Was he capable of loving any human creature? Probably not. So early in the morning, Ann's eyes were wide open.

As she approached the landing-place on the Campbell River side, she was surprised to see a man sitting on a low pile of boards there, his back towards her. Her heart began to beat. Every man in Fort Edward who could afford it wore a "stetson," but this one was cocked at a certain angle. And in connection with that breadth of shoulder!

It was Chako Lyllac. He did not turn around.

Ann stopped dead. Her heart stampeded like those horses in the night. Faster and faster until it seemed as if it must collapse. She could scarcely stand upright; she could not get her breath. How could she muster the strength to go up and speak to him if at fifty paces distance she was already fainting with terror! Terror dragged her in the opposite direction. How quickly her sinking legs would have found the strength to carry her to her room. But if she yielded to it she would regret it all her life . . . all her life! Step by step she went forward.

She made a little detour, so as not to come on him from behind, but from one side. He was facing the river. His long legs were stretched out, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his chin on his breast. The wild bird had come to earth. In the end Ann was obliged to speak to make him look up. Her emotion, and the iron repression she had put upon herself, made her oddly simple.

"Good morning."

He looked around quickly, scowled upon perceiving a woman, and grudgingly touched the brim of his hat in the manner of the country. He looked out across the river; comely, walled-up, forbidding.

Nevertheless, Ann sat down on another pile of boards half a dozen feet away. Having taken the initial plunge, she had herself better in hand. Her single glance into his face had startled her. It was pale and a little ill-looking. It was as scornful as ever, but there was a secret wretchedness there. So young-looking, and wretched! A great gush of tenderness filled Ann's breast, healing her own pain. He needed comfort; she thought about herself no more.

She did not consider what to say; it came out involuntarily: "What's the matter?"

It was not the wisest thing to say. He looked at her with quick resentment; derision too. Only her utter simplicity kept back the ribald retort that sprang to his lips. Somehow he could not be rude to her; but the scowl with which he looked across the river again was significant enough. He wished she would go away.

"Well . . . you seemed down on your luck," said Ann.

He looked at her again, surprised at her persistency. Still he did not speak. There was a changed quality in his scowl. In spite of himself, her friendliness reached him.

Ann was encouraged to go on. "I can guess how you feel," she murmured.

"What do you know about me?" he demanded harshly.

"Well, I've seen you from time to time during the past few days," said Ann. "I couldn't help it."

"Always drunk, eh?" he said with defiantly curling lip.

"Yes," said Ann.

"Well, what have you got to say about it?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Ann. "I'm not a moral reformer."

He stared at her incredulously. Clearly, this was quite a new specimen to him.

Ann was capable of being strangely honest with this man. "I thought it must be fine to be a little drunk," she said with a half smile. "If you could only stay that way. You'd get all there was out of life. . . . But the sobering up part must be horrible."

He stared. These were his own feelings, but he was incapable of putting them into words. It made him deeply suspicious to hear them on the lips of

another.

“And your money would always give out,” said Ann.

A note of jeering laughter escaped him.

“I suppose you’re broke now,” said Ann.

“Stony!”

“And feel rotten?”

“Putrid!”

“Oh, well, that will pass. You’re so healthy.”

In spite of him, she had got under his guard. “It would pass if I could get away from this damned hole!” he burst out. “God! how I hate it! With its bars stinking of rot-gut whisky and its women stinking of musk. I hate a stink. I hate the whole race of booze-sellers and store-keepers and city men with their hands in your pocket! They ought to be wiped out! . . . I hate all towns and settlements! It’s rotten the way people herd together in towns. I ran away from it when I was fifteen years old. I hate people. I am best off in the hills alone. There I feel clean. . . . But you got to come in sometimes to sell your fur and buy grub. And they sink their hooks into you. Oh, yes, they’re waiting for you! They drain you dry. God! I’d like to burn this place!”

Ann listening to this, his creed, realized how boyish and inflated it was, and loved him for it. There was a joy in her breast almost too great to be borne. She had made him open his heart to her; he couldn’t quite close it up again. She said softly:

“Well, why don’t you go?”

“I told you I was broke,” he said sullenly. “You can’t move around in this country without money. I’m in debt at the stores. Of course I could borrow. Cal Nimmo is just waiting for me to humble myself to ask him for a loan. But God! it near drives me mad to have to go cap in hand, and ask a man for money. I could kill him just the same whether he gives it to me or doesn’t give it.”

Ann hovered around the matter that filled her heart, not yet daring to open it. He was such a skittish colt! “No doubt you’ll get a job,” she suggested.

“There’s nothing doing right now,” he said gloomily. “I missed several chances while I was drunk, damn it!”

“Where would you go if you had your choice?” asked Ann.

His eye brightened. “Down to the Rice River,” he said promptly, “and back up the Rice to the foothills. That big triangle of country between the

headwaters of the Rice and the north fork of the Campbell is *my* range. No other white man has been in there. Too damned hard to get in. It's a hell of a fine country! Never been burned over. Moose alongside the streams; caribou in the hill valleys; goats and sheep on the mountains. Wherever you climb a little, there to the east are the peaks of the Rockies to fill your eyes. God! I wish I was there this minute!"

"But all alone?" said Ann.

"Oh, in the summer there is always a party of the Beavers pitching about somewhere. When I want company I look them up. I like the Indians. We get along fine. They are friendly. And they ask nothing of you. They leave you free."

Ann, desiring to keep him at this pitch of enthusiasm, said craftily: "I'm always hearing talk of the Rice River and the Stanley and so on, but I have no map. Won't you explain to me how they lie?"

"I'll show you," he said. This clearly was a task after his own heart. He broke a sliver off one of the planks, and dropping to his knees, used it as a stylus. The earth in front of where they sat was beaten smooth and flat. "Here's Fort Edward with the Campbell River coming down from the south-east, and swinging around in front of the settlement on its way south. Forty miles up the Campbell here's the portage, six miles across the height of land to Hat Lake, as they call it. My canoe is cached there . . ."

Ann knelt beside him on the earth. So close to him as that, she became aware of a strange current emanating from his body that made her a little dizzy. She moved away. She could scarcely attend to the map, so fascinated was she by his big, shapely brown hands, that moved so decisively.

". . . From Hat Lake you go down through a whole chain of lakes connected by a little river. The last lake is drained by the Pony River, which empties into the Rice here. I come back up the Rice, about six days' journey, and my country lies in here."

"Where's the Stanley River?" asked Ann a little breathlessly.

"You go on down the Rice, see? It flows a little west of north. The Stanley River comes down from the north in the same valley, and they collide here. That's called the Grand Forks of the Spirit. The combined river, that is the Spirit River, swings away to the east through a gap in the mountains. Right through the Rocky Mountains and away north-east across the plains. Falls into the Arctic Ocean at last. Oh, a hell of a big river, the Spirit!"

"Could a woman make a river trip?" Ann asked with her heart in her mouth.

The question caused him to close up abruptly. He arose and rubbed out the map with his feet. The look he bent on Ann said clearly: Not with me! He said indifferently: "Why not, if she had some man to take her?"

Ann's heart sank, but having opened the subject she was bound to see it through.

"My name is Ann Maury," she said.

"I know," said Chako, with that air of indifference that was so hard to bear.

"I came north to try to find my father, Joseph Maury . . . Joe Grouser they called him," she added, blushing.

Chako took the name as a matter of course. "I knew him," he said.

"Cal Nimmo thinks he's dead," Ann went on.

"Very likely," said Chako unconcernedly.

"Just the same, I must make sure," said Ann.

Chako made no comment.

"Cal Nimmo refuses to help me," Ann went on. "He says it's no trip for a woman. What's more he says . . . he says I've got to leave this place tomorrow."

Chako chuckled. "That's like him," he said. "Always bossing somebody."

"Do you think I ought to submit?" asked Ann.

"What else can you do?" said Chako brutally.

"Would *you* submit?"

"Cal knows better than to try bossing me."

He was so cool, so scornful, it was desperately hard for her to go on. She gathered up all her courage. "You say you want a job. Will you accept a job from me? Will you take me up the Stanley River?"

Chako's face never changed a muscle. "How much money have you got?"

Ann told him.

"Four hundred and fifty, eh? What do you offer me?"

"Whatever there is left above expenses."

He figured coolly: "A five or six weeks' trip in and out; might run to two months. Grub for two, ammunition, mosquito tent for you, blankets for you . . . the outfit would cost about a hundred and fifty."

Ann waited, quiet as a wild thing, holding her breath.

“All right, I’ll do it,” said Chako.

Ann’s pent-up breath slowly escaped.

He was holding out his hand, as one who offers to bind himself. Ann, not able to meet his glance, put hers within it; a firm, impersonal grasp.

Ann felt queer and shaky, but was aware of no great emotion; had she used it all up beforehand? Only somewhere deep, deep within her a thread of the sweetest gladness began to run. She tried to dam it up. She guessed that at the least display of emotion he would shy. He had a perfectly businesslike air; she must match it. But that trickle of joy spread through her being like quicksilver. She breathed lightly from a quivering breast. She kept her eyes down to hide the shine that must be in them. Ah! to have him all to herself for six weeks! To be able to feast her eyes from morning till night.

She came to herself to realize that he had asked her twice when she wanted to start.

“The steamboat leaves to-morrow,” said Ann. “Could we get away before she goes?”

“Sure!” said Chako. “The sooner the better for me. It won’t take but a day to get our outfit together.”

*Our* outfit! thought Ann. “Let us be secret,” she murmured. “Let us not meet again until we start.”

“I’m not afraid of Cal,” said Chako with a grin.

“I know,” said Ann. “But I am. I don’t want any trouble.”

“Just as you say,” he said, shrugging. “How about the money? Have you got it on you?”

Ann nodded, and drew a roll of bills from inside her waist. She was for handing it over forthwith, but Chako drew back his hand.

“Only the hundred and fifty,” he said. “The rest when I earn it.”

Ann counted out the right sum.

“You must buy your own clothes,” he said. “You couldn’t track upstream in that rig. Get knickerbockers, high moccasins, man’s hat. Get a canvas duffel bag for what extra clothes you want to bring. But keep it down. Every pound counts on a portage.”

“When will we start?” asked Ann as in a dream.

“Sun rises about three. Say two-thirty to-morrow morning. I’ll borrow a dug-out to carry us up to the portage. Wes’ Trickett can bring it back. I’ll paddle round to the Boardman River side back of the hotel. Can you get out the kitchen door?”

Ann nodded.

“All right. I’ll be there two-thirty.”

He touched the brim of his hat, and walked away along the river bank. Ann looked at his swinging back with incredulity in her eyes, doubting his existence, doubting her own. Then giving herself a little shake she turned in the other direction, towards the hotel.

All day she dwelt in that state of unreality, ecstatic unreality, as if she had eaten of some delectable drug. When she got to her room the first thing she did was to look in the mirror to see what she looked like. She saw a pale and inscrutable face without a dimple, without a sparkle to betray her, yet her breast was like an Æolian harp singing to every little wind of feeling. What a strange thing to happen to *me!* she thought.

Meanwhile her body went through its customary motions soberly. She breakfasted; she went out to buy what she needed in the stores. In one of the stores she saw the nonchalant Chako Lyllac buying groceries at another counter. For me, for *us!* she thought dizzily.

So happily was she disposed towards all the world, she could even give a smile to the gloomy Noll Voss when he attached himself to her after dinner. The result was that Noll Voss offered himself to her as a husband without passion. Ann cast a strange look of pity on him. *You!* and very firmly refused him. Noll was not much put about by it, because he had expected no better.

Later, on the platform Ann came face to face with Cal Nimmo.

Cal cocked an eye and asked with his relentless and friendly grin: “Well, sister, how about it?”

Ann did her best to look discouraged. She shrugged. “I give up! You can do what you like with me!”

“Well, that’s fine! That’s fine!” he said. “It takes a heap of moral courage to give in. Will you have supper with me here as a sort of farewell?”

But Ann knew he would never forgive her that supper later. Moreover she dreaded having to sit a meal through under that keen eye. She shook her head.

“I may live to thank you for it, as you said,” she told Cal, “but I can’t thank you yet.”

“Well, I’m sorry,” said Cal. “But that’s all right! That’s all right! See you in the morning.”

Not if I know it! thought Ann.

In her room, after supper, she completed her simple preparation; locked her “outside” clothes in her suit-case, and tied a label to it reading: “Property

of Miss Ann Maury. To be called for in August.” Finally she dressed herself in her new clothes, and glanced fearfully in the mirror.

The effect was not so bad, she thought. With her own needle she had contrived a fairly good fit for the breeches. She had refused the high moccasins because they were clumsy, and had bought instead a pair of Strathcona boots like Chako’s. The smallest pair in stock was still too big for her feet, but the laced tops set off her trim legs. She wore a pongee shirt and a brown Windsor tie: she had a bulky brown coat sweater for warmth. On her head she wore a stetson, not so broad-brimmed as Chako’s, tipped at the same angle. Not bad at all! Chako Lyllac’s little brother! she thought, dimpling and blushing to her own reflection.

She flung herself on the bed all dressed, prepared to dream the hours through, waking, but she promptly fell asleep. No danger of oversleeping though; not with *that* on her mind. She awoke with that exquisite thrill which is only to be had on the morn of one’s greatest adventure. This is the day! She sprang off the bed. It was two o’clock; twilight out of doors.

She decided to go down at once. At the back door of the hotel she would be safely hidden. And it would be so fine to see him come paddling through the dusk. She took her canvas bag under her arm, and stepped softly out of the room.

As she was about to round the corner of the hall, she heard someone coming up the front stairs, and stepped back out of sight. The steps turned to Nellie Nairns’ door. Nellie coming to bed after her day’s work! Ann peeped around the corner, and saw that it was in truth Nellie disappearing into her room.

Yielding to a sudden impulse, Ann glided along the hall, and tapped on Nellie’s door.

Nellie’s quiet, wary voice asked: “Who is it?”

“Ann.”

The door was quickly unlocked and opened. Nellie surveyed Ann’s costume, the canvas duffel bag in astonishment; pulled Ann into the room and closed the door.

“Where are you going?” she demanded.

“North,” said Ann with a smile that entreated the other woman’s understanding and sympathy.

“With whom?”

“Chako Lyllac,” murmured Ann, flushing deeply.

Nellie drew her breath sharply. Her face was like a mask. Suddenly turning her back on Ann, she went to her bureau. She half turned, and looked obliquely at Ann, a strange look. She was jaded under her rouge. There were lines about her soft and pretty mouth.

“He asked me to go first,” she said.

“I know,” said Ann. “And you wouldn’t.”

“And you?”

“I wanted to,” breathed Ann.

“Why did you come to tell me?” demanded Nellie.

“I wanted you to wish me luck.”

“*Me?*”

“Yes, you more than anybody.”

“Why?”

“Because I thought you’d understand.”

“Ah, no! no!” said Nellie with sudden bitterness. “It never happened to me! . . . And it’s too late now! I’m spoiled for it!” She laughed with peculiar bitterness. “Oh well, I’m not going to bawl over it. I’ve got twenty thousand dollars in the bank. I’ll keep my mind on that!” She suddenly came back to Ann. “You don’t want to hear my complaints anyhow. This is *your* night!” She took Ann’s hands in hers and squeezed them. “I’m the oldest,” she went on, “by rights I ought to take you in my arms, and smooth your hair back, like they do in a play, and give you good advice that would save you from a fate worse than death, eh? But no noble sentiments from me, kid. I’m shy of them. . . . Ahh! I envy you, kid, and that’s the truth of it!” She broke off, to ask quite simply and anxiously: “Do you know what he is, really?”

Ann nodded.

“A savage, a wild man!”

“I know,” said Ann, smiling. “It doesn’t make any difference. He doesn’t know what I feel. He wouldn’t care if he did know.” She briefly explained the circumstances of their trip.

“Well, if your eyes are opened there’s nothing more to be said,” said Nellie. “It may be your finish. . . .”

Ann shrugged slightly.

“You think it’s worth it!” whispered Nellie. “Ah, if I could have felt that way just once! . . . Wait a minute!”

She ran to her bureau, and from one of the drawers took a little automatic pistol of blued steel, and a box of shells. These she pressed upon

Ann.

“For the gamest kid I ever met!” she whispered.

“I knew you’d understand,” whispered Ann. “Kiss me good-bye.”

Nell began to tremble in her arms. “You really wish it?” she faltered.

“With all my heart!”

Their lips met.

Ann snatched up her bag, and fled softly down the back stairs.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ON THE CAMPBELL RIVER

THE sun was well up in the sky, and they had put Fort Edward some miles behind them. The river was high, and out in the middle the current ran in smooth undulations, miniature billows that never broke. Like all glacier fed streams, the water tended to a greyish-green, but it had come far from its source, and had received many different waters en route. The banks were almost full, which raised the heads of the paddlers well above the flat floor of the forest on either hand, and gave the tall trees the curious effect of being afloat on a raft.

They made fair progress by nosing along close to the shore on one side or the other, taking advantage of every backwater. Whenever there was a bend they kept on the inside of it, crossing over when the river swung back. But for the most part of the way, one long, straight reach succeeded another; beautiful, disappearing avenues of water dazzling in the sunshine, walled by the dark pines. Beautiful, but tedious to ascend, for the end of the avenue never seemed to draw closer, and when they finally turned a corner, it was only to open up another avenue stretching endlessly into the sunny distance.

There was an unaccustomed, an impatient, and already a weary traveller in the bow of the dug-out. During all these hours Ann had had her back turned to Chako, and she felt cheated. It was demoralizing to the nerves to be so electrically conscious of his nearness, yet never to be able to see him. To be under his eyes too, without knowing what sort of glances he bent on her. Her back became wretchedly self-conscious.

She could not turn around and look at him; the action was too marked. If he had talked, it would have given her some line on his thoughts, but he rarely spoke. Ann wondered ceaselessly what made him silent: was it his natural habit, or had something displeased him? Ah, what peace was there for one who was so at the mercy of another's humour? She thought of the days and weeks ahead with a sinking heart. Whenever she could, without appearing to force talk, she attempted to start a conversation. Chako would answer her gracelessly, and let it drop as quickly as possible.

His own conversation was restricted to the work in hand. He would say irritably: "You keep pushing her head around. You're not rowing! Put your paddle in close to the side, one hand above the other."

“But I have to lean out so far to do that,” faltered Ann. “I’m afraid of capsizing her.”

“It’s my job to balance her,” he said shortly.

Ann did her best to learn. She went stiff with the strain of trying to lean out sufficiently, yet keep her balance. A pain like a hot wire searched under her shoulder-blades.

But he was never satisfied. “If you’d turn your paddle at the end of the stroke, the way I tell you, she’d come out clean, and you wouldn’t hold back.”

Then silence for another half-hour. Ann finally fell into an apathetic state.

At last Chako said: “Time to spell. There’s a shelving place under that point ahead. We’ll go ashore there.”

Ann came to life again. She would see him!

The unpainted dug-out was silvery with age, somewhat warped in the sides, and rotten in the bottom. Care was required in handling her. Chako let her ground softly on a spot where the bank had sunk a little and the grass was in the water.

“Watch yourself getting out,” he said sharply.

Of course at that, Ann’s nerves immediately began to shake. She stood up gingerly; the boat rocked; Ann teetered wildly.

“Get out, can’t you,” Chako shouted startingly. “Or sit down!”

Ann sprang out into the shallow water as if she had been shot, and stepped ashore. She turned around, and stared at Chako in pale amazement.

Her astonished look shamed him; he dropped his angry eyes. But he was never one to confess himself in the wrong. The fact that she put him in the wrong made him angrier than ever. He cast a glance of pure hatred on her as he clambered out.

Ann went off a few paces and sat down, trying to adjust herself to the situation. Futile to become angry with him. In a contest of angry wills where would *she* come off? Neither must she allow herself to cringe to him. There lay the real danger. For deep within her she felt the dark temptation to prostrate herself. To just give up. That was what she had to fight every minute.

The sight of her sitting there, white-faced, silent, busy with her own thoughts, put Chako in an absurd, school-boy rage. He banged the grub-box on the shore, and threw things around.

“Well, have I got to do everything?” he snarled.

The thought came to Ann: After so many days of drunkenness his nerves must be in a shocking state! And she felt better towards him. She got up promptly.

“I’ll gladly help,” she said, “but you must tell me what to do.”

This did not mollify Chako. “Get the grub out, and the things, while I make the fire,” he said roughly. “Fetch water.”

So close to the settlement, having bread on hand and canned stuff, getting a meal was no great matter. When they had eaten Chako seemed to be in a better humour. He flung himself out in the grass with the air of being willing to forgive Ann, as if it had been she who lost her temper. Ann looked down at him with a glint of humour. Strange creatures, men! But ah! how strong and shapely he was, spread out in the grass. She sighed, dimly foreseeing what an uphill fight against her own heart she had before her.

But he was in a good humour. She made haste to improve the occasion. “What do you think Cal Nimmo said when he found me gone?” she asked.

“Nothing, I guess,” said Chako idly. “He’d done his duty by you. The rest was up to you.”

“Do you think he’ll come after us?” she asked with a glance down river.

“Why should he?”

“I don’t know. Everybody up here is so strange to me I can’t foresee what they will do.”

“Ahh, you think too much about people, and what they’re like and all,” said Chako.

Ann glanced at him with quick, delighted eyes. She had got something out of him at last! He had thought about her. He was aware of her existence.

“Is it possible for people to think too much?” she asked.

“Sure!” said Chako coolly. “It spoils your aim. Watch a man who *thinks* about taking aim. Misses every time. But up with your gun without thinking. Phew! And you have your buck! . . . Thinking is mostly lies anyway. Once you start thinking you can persuade yourself of anything you like. I never think!”

Ann was sitting a little above his head where he could not see her without making an effort. Her softened face brooded over him. She was utterly charmed by his bold, savage avowal. She thought: If he will only talk to me sometimes I can stand everything.

“I get your point,” she said demurely. “But don’t people who never think make mistakes sometimes too?”

“Sure!” said Chako. “What of it? I never think behind either. Just keep going on.”

“But where to?” said Ann. “How can you keep from thinking where you are bound for?”

“Oh, to the bow-wows I suppose,” he said with a flippant laugh.

Ann felt pretty flat. She tried to pick up the theme again. “Funny, our talking this way,” she said, “because men are supposed to be the thinkers and women to despise thought.”

“There you go again,” he said comfortably. “Worrying about the difference between men and women. What’s the use?”

“Well, it’s a fascinating subject, isn’t it?” said Ann.

“Not to me! I don’t understand women; no man could unless he was womanish. I just take ’em as I find them.”

“And that’s pretty bad, eh?” said Ann, smiling.

“Oh, women may be all right to women,” said Chako. “But they’re devils to men. I don’t blame ’em. Men and women are natural enemies. Soon as a woman comes around I put up my guard. . . . At that they’ve often got the best of me,” he added with unexpected honesty.

Ann felt a smile striking through and through her, a warning smile. “You see you *do* think about things, though not consciously,” she murmured.

“Oh, that’s too fine-drawn for me,” he said with a great yawn, and proceeded to go to sleep before her eyes. Ann yielded herself completely to the pleasure of watching him, knowing very well how destructive it was of her forces.

It was a charming spot, that strip of clean grass between the pine needles and the water, shielded by the pines from the growing warmth of the sun. The water slipping by just a few inches below them seemed companionable; there was a vista of a mile or more down-stream. Ann thought: There might be nobody in the world but the two of us.

With his scornful blue eyes closed and his sun-bleached lashes sweeping his cheeks, Chako’s face took on a certain softness. There was wistfulness and passion in his thin cheeks, and his beautifully modelled, fresh lips. The gazing Ann’s breast was melted entirely. In Chako asleep she fancied that she perceived the man he was intended to be. If I could only awaken him! she thought. Then with a sigh: But he’s such a determined savage!

He slept on. By and by Ann too pillowed her head on her arm, and slept in the grass beside him.

They awakened simultaneously. Chako prepared forthwith to embark. He did not appear to be much refreshed by his sleep. There was a cloud on his blond brow, and Ann trod warily.

When everything was repacked in the dug-out, he climbed over the load, and took his place in the stern.

“Push her off until her bow just touches,” he said. “Then climb in. You better rest until the next spell. I don’t want to kill you the first day. Sit down on the bottom.”

Ann climbed in and sat down facing him.

“Why don’t you turn around?” he said, staring.

“If you don’t mind I’d rather sit this way,” said Ann humbly. “We seem to go so slowly when you’re looking ahead all the time.”

Chako shrugged. “Just as you like,” he said, making it clear that *he* didn’t like it. “You get a second-hand view of everything that way.”

They proceeded, creeping along close to the bank. Ann was careful never to look directly at Chako. It would have annoyed him. He was already annoyed because she was in a position to look at him. It was not necessary for her to look at him directly. Her roving glances, which brushed over him like thistledown, nevertheless missed no detail: how he looked down his nose when he was annoyed and self-conscious; how he shielded his eyes from the glare with his thick, fine lashes; how his *pouncing* glance first travelled ahead to keep his course straight, then turned ashore to search between the tree trunks. It never rested on her.

She knew he hated to be questioned; nevertheless, questions occasionally popped out. “Why do you keep looking ashore?”

Again that cold stare as much as to say: What an idiotic question! “For game,” he said. “Rabbit, fool-hens, musk-rat.”

Presently he pointed silently into the woods with his paddle.

Ann could see nothing. “Where? Where?” she whispered.

He shrugged disgustedly. “Gone now. A mink in his summer coat.”

What a fine pose is that of the paddler, Ann thought, so erect and so supple. The play of Chako’s muscles was fascinatingly suggested. Apparently nearly all the muscles of his body shared in the act of paddling; thighs, abdomen, thorax, biceps and triceps. She was especially charmed by the way the soft hollow just inside his shoulder throbbed out under his shirt with every thrust of the paddle. What grace in the act of swinging his paddle around his head to put it in on the other side!

After their next spell ashore Ann resumed the paddle again, and they worked until near sundown. They went ashore for the last time at one of the ancient camping-places on the Campbell. These sites are always chosen for their strategic value; they could see up and down the river for a mile. The place had the effect of a house made ready to receive them: a little clearing with a fringe of trees along the edge of the bank; a shallow pit for the fire, with a bar across it supported on forked sticks; bail hooks hanging from the bar, tent pegs and dry wood for the fire.

Ann was so weary she could scarcely lift an arm, but nothing would have induced her to speak of it. She suspected that even the hardy Chako was tired to-night. Certainly he was out of sorts. Supper was eaten in a depressing silence.

Chako put up the tents. For Ann he had bought a tiny affair of pale green balloon silk. It was suspended from a rope which might be run between two trees or held up on forked sticks. In fair weather the sides would roll up. Mosquito netting hung within the silk. The whole thing was smaller than a Pullman berth. For himself Chako had an old brown "lean-to," open to the fire. A mosquito bar hung down in front.

With the twilight the awful stillness of the North drew on. Even in the riotous settlement Ann had been aware of that presence; here it was all-prevailing. Her heart seemed to grow smaller and smaller in her breast, until it was like a bird's heart, struggling to maintain life in a too-rarefied atmosphere. She slowly went cold with an inexplicable terror. She told herself that it was all foolishness, merely a sort of hysteria. Perhaps it was hysteria, but reasoning about it did her no good. A nameless terror of the blood that slowly crept up from her extremities while she sat there.

The sun had gone down while they ate, and now the sky across the river was like an amber sea in which the evening star sailed like a fairy boat, too bright for mortal eyes. Or like a glorious yellow jewel held up in the dark, carved cup of the pines. Ann could not bear to look at it; its beauty was part of the stillness and the terror. Scarcely able to move, she crept into her tent, and gave herself up to it, inert and despairing.

She thought of her own land with a pain that was almost too sharp to be borne; the unpainted schoolhouse at the turn of the red gravel highway; the friendly farmhouse with the striped roof across the way; the men ploughing in the fields; the good-humoured negroes shambling along the road— ah! a *friendly* land!

Through her tent, through the blankets that she pulled over her head, the silence still laid a hand on her like death. The silence and the solitude; they

were one. The thought of Chako lying near only caused her a fresh shiver of terror and revulsion. For he was a very symbol of this land: savage, hard and inexplicable, what had she to do with him? The spell he had laid on her was nothing; a mere trick of her imagination; a noon-day madness. Night was more real, and in the night she shivered at him.

How could she have been so mad as to have ventured on this trip into a savage land under conduct of a savage? And this was only one step into the wilderness. How could she persevere for day after day until the days mounted into weeks, always putting a greater distance between her and everything she held dear; always putting herself more and more into the power of the stony-hearted man upon whom she was dependent. Ann simply could not face the thought of the coming days and nights. She could not go on with it, that was certain. Maybe she was a coward, but it couldn't be helped. There was a limit to one's powers. . . . In the morning she'd ask him to take her back to Fort Edward. She'd pay him liberally for his trouble. Then home!

Ann was awakened by a hail from Chako outside. She answered it. Chako said:

"If we make an early start we can get a good sleep in the middle of the day. We'll need it. Got to track up the rapids to-day. Six miles."

Ann's first sensation was that of joy upon recognizing that the voice was not ill-tempered; her second, surprise at finding herself quite cheerful. She peeped out; the sun was high, the river sparkling like diamonds. The morning breeze was making a pleasant murmur in the pine-tops. How *unspoiled* the earth was!

"Ready in a jiffy!" she called out.

She took her little dressing-case and went along the bank out of sight, where she bathed and dressed and brushed her hair. How delicious the cold water! Made a new woman of her.

When she got back Chako had the coffee boiling. It could hardly be said that he radiated good cheer, but at least he was composed in his scorn. He was no longer a bear with a sore head, but just an ordinary bear. And how handsome in the morning light! Ann smiled and blushed at the night's fears, and, thankful that nobody knew about her weakness, fell to upon breakfast.

## CHAPTER IX

### BACK TO NATURE

AT noon next day Joe Mixer carried them across the portage. The old dug-out was left on the shore below Joe's store. Hearing talk of "the height of land" Ann had visualized a mountain chain to cross on this portage, but the "height" was imperceptible. Except for a hill to climb at the beginning, it was flat all the way over. The vehicle was a rough, springless wagon. A kitchen chair had been placed for Ann in the body, while Chako and Joe Mixer rode on the box, as befitted the lords of creation. A breed boy sat in the tail of the wagon with his legs dangling.

This Joe Mixer was a well-known character in the country, but not a beloved one. His sobriquet was "the butcher." It suited him. Ann was divided between disgust of his grossness and a sort of pity that was stirred by his look of injured, groping stupidity. All the way over, when the horses did not require his attention, he sat sideways, staring at Ann unabashed. Never had Ann been so frankly stared at. From her Strathcona boots to her stetson the little eyes gobbled her up, inch by inch. Ann did not mind particularly. She knew that they would see the last of him in six miles.

In the midst of all the flatness they suddenly came out on a charming lake.

"Here we are," said Chako.

"That water goes to the Arctic," said Joe to Ann with an ingratiating air. "Only sometimes in a wet season she spills over on this side, too."

"Why Hat Lake?" asked Ann.

"Along of them islands out there. Somebody calc'lated they looked like spring millinery."

They turned smartly in the grass at the lake's edge, and everybody jumped out. Chako and the breed boy lifted out the bags and bundles, while Joe Mixer stood by chewing a grass stalk, and goggling at Ann. Some sort of plot was visibly stirring in his muddy wits.

When the wagon was unloaded Chako said: "My canoe is cached down the shore a piece. I'll go bring it up."

As soon as Chako passed out of sight among the willows, Joe Mixer, with mysterious nods and winks, beckoned Ann out of hearing of the breed boy.

“Say, what you want to tie yourself up to Chako Lyllac for?” he said hoarsely. “He ain’t got nothin’. Never will have nothin’. Look at me, I got somepin, I have. I got twenty like him in debt to me on my books this minute.”

Ann looked at him as at the queerest specimen she had ever beheld in all her life. A dimple showed in either cheek. It was impossible to take alarm; he was too fatuous.

Her half smile drove him wild. “Gee! if you ain’t the slickest little feller I ever see!” he cried. “In them pants and all, and the stetson over your eye! Just suits you! I’ll let you wear ’em always. Turn around! Turn around and let me see!”

As Ann declined, he walked all around her himself, commenting upon her with the greatest frankness. Deep inside her Ann laughed. What an experience for a respectable little school-teacher!

Joe Mixer dug in his pocket, and bringing out his hand, opened it, revealing half a dozen gold pieces, that he weighed and jingled on his palm. “Look at them beauties!” he said. “For you, and more too! And anything you want out of the store.”

“I saw a lady in your store this morning,” said Ann demurely.

“Oh, that breed wench. I’ll put her to the door. She won’t bother you, honey. Say, will you come?”

“What about Chako?” said Ann.

“You just tell him you’ve changed your mind, see? He couldn’t carry you off by force, could he? If he gets ugly me and the breed yonder will fix him. I’ll keep him in talk, and the breed will steal up and pin his arms. Then I’ll crack him over the head.”

“Is there no law up here? Couldn’t you be arrested for that?” asked Ann, startled.

“Hell! They couldn’t do nothin’ to me if I was perrecting you, could they?” said Joe.

A little laugh escaped Ann.

Joe was charmed. “You’ll come, eh? You’ll come?” he stuttered. “Gee! we’ll live high over at my place. There’s plenty doin’ over there, with the rafts comin’ down the river, and the steamboat once a fortnight.”

A couple of hundred yards along the shore, Chako was seen to push out in a canoe, and turn towards them.

“Here’s Chako,” said Ann.

“I’ll give the breed a tip,” said Joe.

“No, don’t!” said Ann. “Sorry, I can’t accept your offer.”

“Aww!” said Joe, with his jaw hanging down.

“What’s more,” said Ann, “I believe I’ll tell Chako about it.”

Joe’s cheeks paled, leaving purple patches that looked as if pasted on. A frantic look came in his little eyes. “You . . . you wouldn’t do that,” he stammered.

“Yes, I’m going to tell Chako,” said Ann. “I think you need a lesson.”

Joe stared at her in his stupid terror. Suddenly he turned and scuttled for his wagon. Hoisting himself over the tail on his big stomach, he snatched up reins and whip and started belabouring his surprised horses. The outfit completed the turn on two wheels, and went back banging over the trail at a gallop. The breed boy, running like a sand-piper, caught hold and swung himself aboard.

Chako, landing from his canoe, asked in astonishment: “What the hell bit Joe Mixer? I haven’t paid him yet.”

“Then we’re in the money,” said Ann demurely. “He suddenly recollected a pressing engagement at home.”

“What was he saying to you?” Chako demanded suspiciously.

“He offered to buy me with six pieces of gold,” said Ann.

Chako had no humour. He gave a sort of grunt, and turned back to his canoe.

This was too much for Ann’s pride. She flashed an angry look after him. She thought: Even if he doesn’t care, he might show a little manly indignation.

“Doesn’t leak a drop!” said Chako, rolling the canoe from side to side.

Unfeeling brute! said Ann’s angry eyes.

Chako carefully stowed all their baggage aboard. Ann stood apart in haughty silence. She felt a little ridiculous too, because he was not paying the slightest attention to her haughtiness.

“All ready,” he called.

Ann marched to the bank.

Chako’s eyes were all for the canoe. “Isn’t she a little beauty?” he said, stroking her satiny side. “Came all the way from Peterboro in Ontario. There’s not many in the country. I’d sell my shirt sooner than part with her. Only weighs sixty pounds. I can portage her anywhere.”

That’s what possesses his heart! thought Ann bitterly. . . . Oh, well! . . . “Very pretty!” she said. Her anger was suddenly gone. She laughed a little

shakily.

“What are you laughing at?” said Chako.

“Nothing!” It was at herself that she laughed. What a fool!

The bank made a natural wharf. Ann seated herself at the bow, while Chako held the gunwale. The canoe was both steadier and more comfortable than the dug-out. Ann was gradually getting the hang of the paddle.

Chako got in, and pushed away from the bank. “Now we’re really off,” he said. “To hell with civilization!”

They headed obliquely across the lake. Ann could see no opening anywhere. Even as they approached the other shore, she could not see where they were going, but Chako drove straight into the reeds as if he knew. The water was shallow, the bottom muddy; the reeds rattled together like little skeletons. Finally the banks began to draw together, and the water to stir sluggishly. It was impossible to tell just at what point the lake became a river, but finally they found themselves in a veritable streamlet, such as waters many a meadow at home. It was not more than six feet wide, and the willows brushed their faces, as they turned the bends.

Farther along, the banks became stony, and they floated over great round stones. The water was a clear brown; the bed of the stream literally alive with fish.

“Frank Bower was the last man to go down ahead of us,” remarked Chako.

“How can you tell?” asked Ann.

“I see his tracks in the water.”

Ann, aware that she was being drawn, studied the matter. Finally she perceived red smudges on some of the largest stones they floated over. “His boat was painted red, wasn’t it?” she said.

“Getting pretty smart, aren’t you?” said Chako with a chuckle.

Clearly his spirits were rising.

The little stream received several tributaries which doubled and quadrupled its volume. The current ran now fast, now slow; carrying them bobbing down little rapids where the sunshine glittered intolerably on the broken water, and dropping them in still black pools hemmed around by tall jack-pines, gloomy as cypresses. There were broad meadows of lush blue-grass without any cattle to feed upon it; there was a hill which accompanied them the whole way; an odd-shaped hill blue and yellow in the sunny air; now on the right hand, now on the left; now before and now behind, as the incredibly crooked stream wound its way.

Chako broke into song:

“There was a youth, and a well-belovèd youth,  
And he was a Squire’s son.  
He loved the bailiff’s daughter fair  
That lived in Islington.”

He sang as humans were intended to sing, straight from the diaphragm with wide open mouth. Ann was startled. The old song had a grace one did not expect in the rude Chako. She could not see him, but she knew he was unconscious of it as a bird. The deep voice had a tender quality that shook her breast. She resented it, too. It’s not fair! she thought. It arouses feelings in others of which he is incapable.

They went ashore for the afternoon spell on a bank under birch trees and poplars. This part of the little river was all blithe and bowery; no pines. There was a fringe of the graceful, irregular trees along each bank, their branches meeting overhead. A special arbour seemed to have been put up for the river to flow through. The brown water was chequered with sunlight.

On going ashore Ann saw Chako for the first time since embarking at the lake. He was in great spirits now. There was an outrageous effrontery in his spirits. He was a little drunk again; on ozone this time. Such was his pride of being that it rendered him well-nigh intolerable to his fellow-beings. He so obviously scorned them. Ann hated him helplessly, while he dazzled her. It seemed to her that he went out of his way to wound her.

“Hey, Maury!” (he had taken to calling her Maury) “scout round and get me some dry twigs to bring up this fire. . . . Where’s the water? Don’t you know your job yet? . . . Fetch me my knife from the bottom of the canoe. Look sharp!”

At first Ann took this sort of thing in good part. But it kept getting worse. She saw finally that it was not altogether intended in fun, though he grinned when he ordered her about. It was intended to humble her. Well, she did not intend to be humbled. One had to make a stand somewhere. At his last command she sat down and looked at the view.

“I asked you to fetch me my knife!” cried Chako, angry at once.

“Fetch it yourself,” said Ann coolly.

Chako stared at her, with his broad, dark eyebrows running up. The quality of astonishment in his anger was rather comical. Do him good! thought Ann.

He rose like young Jove in his wrath, and stalking to the canoe, got his knife and carried it back with him. Ann quailed inwardly under his aspect, but sat tight. Anyhow, he had to get it for himself, she thought, but without

feeling much triumph. Chako moved around the fire wrapped in thunderclouds. How like a savage, these violent and unreasonable changes of mood!

When the food was ready, Ann helped herself in silence, and carried her portion back to her former place. Chako ate with his back turned to her. How foolish it was for two people in their situation to quarrel! But what could she do? He would misunderstand any overtures she might make. In silence the grub-box was repacked, and in silence they embarked again.

Ann was resolved to stand firm, but Chako could keep up this sort of thing better than she could. The beauty of that ineffable afternoon softened her, made her long to open her breast wide and share it. The silent figure behind put her in a strait-jacket. She could not see him, but she could *feel* him; hard, closed and angry.

There were many wild duck on the river. The mother-ducks had their lately hatched broods out. Their sufferings when the canoe surprised them was pitiful; these wildest of creatures, and unable to fly! If there was any cover the little brown mother gathered her brood around her, and sitting still with an agonized, shoe-button eye, hoped to escape observation. But if they were caught all exposed there was nothing for her to do but to flee squawking across the surface of the water, trailing an alleged broken wing to distract attention from her young. These brown puff-balls had but one trick in their little bags to play; they dived gamely, again and again, until they came up staggering and exhausted.

These and other pretty wonders Ann had to watch in silence. There was a black cloud behind her, and the air was charged with thunder. Insensibility in another caused Ann's quick nature to lash itself. She suffered. All the while she knew she had only to turn around and humble herself a little, in order to make all right again. She was sorely tempted. But she did not turn around. She told herself that she was in the right, and if she gave in, she'd have it to do all over again.

The stream slowed up and deepened. The trees retreated from the bank. For hours they wound interminably between green meadows elevated above their heads, and they could see nothing of the world. It was unspeakably tedious, for there was nothing to distinguish one bend in the river from a hundred others. On the outside of each bend there was a cut bank some eight feet high with deep water below; on the inside, the water shallowed out on a muddy beach with four-petalled yellow lilies growing in the mud.

A place where the cut bank had partly fallen finally provided them with a landing-place. A grounded tree furnished plenty of fuel. They went ashore,

and carried their things up to the top of the bank to camp for the night.

After they had eaten another silent meal, Chako went back to the bush to cut poles for the tents. The trees were about a furlong off, across the deep grass. Ann sat miserably in the grass, nursing her knees, and staring before her. The beauty of the evening only sharpened her pain. From the top of the bank one could see the blue hills which bordered the flat valley miles back. A short distance beyond where they had stopped, the river emptied into a blue lake which stretched to the north as far as Ann could see.

She was thinking wretchedly: I cannot *stand* this! And he knows it! He knows he has only to wait, and I'll give in. I have no chance against him because his heart is hard and mine is soft!

She presently heard Chako come back, and throw down the poles.

The stream flowed before her deep and slow. A murky thought invaded Ann's clear mind. If I fell in he'd have to come to my rescue. . . . And I'd find out if he's really as hard as a stone, or only pretending like me. It would make things all right again without my having to humble myself. He cannot be quite inhuman. . . .

She stood up. She took a step nearer to the edge of the bank. She affected to be looking at the view. It was a horrid drop. And she knew the water was icy. She shivered. She had no other outer clothes. It would ruin her watch. What childish folly anyway. How could she hope to arouse a man's better nature by such a trick? . . . But how would he act? Surely in a moment of stress the *real* man would come out. That's what she wanted to know. That was what she *had* to find out somehow!

She took a step nearer. The brown water swirled a little below her. It looked very deep. Oh, but it was too foolish! Too like the ordinary senseless woman! She must be straight and above-board whatever Chako was. . . . And yet! And yet! If she could only make him show his heart wouldn't it be worth it? . . .

The agonizing necessity of making a decision was taken from her. Her footing was suddenly snatched from under her, and down she went with a shriek that was drowned in a mighty splash.

When her head emerged from the water she shrieked again. She lashed out wildly with arms and legs. She went under again. The current was carrying her down. Suddenly in the midst of her confusion she saw Chako standing on the low part of the bank where the canoe was drawn up.

"Help! Help!" she cried in a very genuine panic.

Above all the noise she was making herself, she heard his hard, ringing voice: "Put your feet down! Stand up!"

In her astonishment, Ann obeyed, and found firm ground under her feet. Her shoulders rose out of the water.

“Now walk out,” said Chako.

Ann obeyed, streaming. She could see just as clearly as if she were outside her body what a ridiculous sight she was making. The consciousness of it made her hold herself very stiffly, and that in turn only made her the more ridiculous. She ploughed through the water. Chako’s face was working. Suddenly he broke into a roar of laughter that made the evening ring. That was the last straw. The tears sprang to Ann’s eyes. Tears though, could scarcely be distinguished from the rest of the water. When she got to the low bank Chako offered her a hand, but she angrily knocked it away. That made him roar afresh. Ann climbed out unaided, and walked stiffly up to the top of the bank, Chako following, weak with laughter.

When he could speak he said: “Take off everything, and throw them outside your tent. I’ll dry them by the fire. . . . Any fool ought to know better than to stand on the edge of a cut bank.”

Renewed laughter.

Ann, wrapped in a blanket inside her little tent, flung an arm over her eyes and thought in bitterness of spirit: Serve me right! Serve me right. I put myself right in his hands! How could I have been such a fool! How could I! How could I!

## CHAPTER X

### DOWN-STREAM

ANN issued out of her tent next morning braced to meet Chako's renewed derision. But his mood had changed again. Apparently all recollection of the day before had been sponged out. That was the way he was. Their quarrel and Ann's lamentable accident alike forgotten. Perhaps laughter had purged his spleen. At any rate he greeted her with careless good humour.

He was shaving. The sight gave Ann a little shock. She had seen pictures of men shaving, and had peeped into barbers' shops, but had never been actually present at the operation. But why not? she asked herself. Chako was more sensible than she, she thought, because he took everything as a matter of course.

Fully dressed except for his outer shirt, he was squatting cross-legged in the grass with his little mirror propped up on the grub-box in front of him. The white singlet clung to his swelling breast like an outer skin; his arms were faintly golden with old sunburn; the hair stood out from his head in a wild, bright tangle.

An exclamation escaped him. "Cut myself again! That damned mole! . . . Got any court-plaster, Maury?"

"Yes," said Ann. She got out the indispensable little dressing-case.

Chako squatted on his heels, and Ann knelt beside him. This brought their heads on a level. Ann's heart beat like a bird's. Chako's freshly-shaven cheek was peachy. Upon the point of his jaw there was a ruby drop that stirred a dusky emotion in Ann. She hastily dried it with a towel, put the little square of court-plaster on her tongue-tip, and applied it with a gesture that was like a blessing. She pressed it with a velvet finger-tip.

"There, I think that will stick," she said anxiously.

Chako suddenly turned his head. His eyes were dancing with the zest of earth; his lips turned up mockingly. "Kiss!" he murmured.

Ann darted her head back as if he had stung her. Chako jumped up with a gay laugh, and snatching up towel and shirt, ran down to the water's edge. A sound of splashing was heard. He came back presently with all the kinks nicely dragged out of his hair, and with his shirt on. Ann was moving blindly around the fire, still in a very tumult of emotion. Chako appeared to have forgotten the incident.

Ann gave him a wide berth. A hot little flame of resentment scorched her breast. It means nothing to him. . . . nothing! she thought.

Chako always had an eye cocked towards the sky for weather. "South wind to-day," he announced. "We'll be able to sit back, and sail up the lake. You watch the coffee-pot, Maury, while I rig a sail."

He used two of the little tent poles and one of his red blankets for the purpose. The sail made a gay splash of colour in the scene.

Presently he stuck his head up over the edge of the bank. "Hey, Maury, fetch me that coil of tracking-line, yonder."

Ann looked at him without speaking.

Chako looked away across the river; he actually blushed. "Please," he mumbled.

Ah, how Ann's breast warmed over him! The dear, the *dear*! She forgave him everything on the spot. He had learned his lesson. He *could* learn a lesson. She flew to get him the tracking-line. She could have hugged him.

When they embarked, Ann sat in the bottom of the canoe with her back against the mast, facing astern. She held the sheet. Chako perched on the stern seat, steering with a paddle. They sailed out on the lake.

"I feel great!" Chako announced.

He looked it. But a sense of well-being only made him shine outwardly, Ann thought bitterly. There was still no humanity in him. His keen gaze was never still; it embraced the sky, the shore line, the sail, but never rested on her. His unawareness of her made her feel like nothing at all in the bottom of the boat. Such self-completeness in another was maddening. Sometimes Ann felt as if he must be aware of his cruel power over her, and was deliberately exerting it, but in her heart she knew that it was his unconsciousness, his spontaneity that constituted his power.

The old songs rolled forth.

"Tom Pearse, Tom Pearse, lend me your grey mare;  
All along, down along, out along lee:  
For I want for to go to Widdicombe Fair  
With Bill Brewer, Dan Stewer, Peter Gurney, Peter Davey,  
Dan'l Whidden, Harry Hawk, Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all;  
Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all."

"Where did you learn those old songs?" asked Ann.

"When I first came North I batched with an old Sour-Dough. He used to sing 'em," said Chako. "He hadn't learned any new ones in fifty years I guess. . . . These old ones roll out better than the rag-time the girls sing in the Settlement."

“Rather!” said Ann.

“Here’s a funny one,” said Chako.

“Oh, sweet Kitty Clover she bothers me so;  
Bothers me so, bothers me so.  
Her cheeks are round and red and fat;  
Red as church cushions, oh, redder than that.  
Oh, sweet Kitty Clover she bothers me so;  
Bothers me so, bothers me so.  
She’s three feet tall and that I prize  
As just a fit height for a man of my size.  
Oh, sweet Kitty Clover she bothers me so;  
O! O! O! O! O! Oh!”

“Tell me more about the old Sour-Dough,” said Ann. “It must have been a funny combination. You were fifteen years old, weren’t you?”

“We meant nothing to each other,” Chako said coolly. “Just happened to be thrown together.”

Ann’s heart sank. Did anybody mean anything to Chako? . . . But perhaps it was just his pose to make out that he had no feelings. She tried again.

“Where did you live before you came North?”

Chako closed up instantly. “Men up here don’t talk about their beginnings,” he said.

That was the end of Ann’s attempts to question him.

The south wind held during several days. For hours at a time they sat in delicious idleness, letting it waft them. The first lake was Beaver Lake; another stretch of river followed, then a lake without any regular name, Chako said, but called by some Breeches Lake, from its shape. A favourite joke of the country was to send tenderfeet down the left leg of the breeches which ended nowhere. The last and the largest of the chain was McIlwraith Lake.

There were moments when Ann, quite without reason, became wildly happy; when she could throw back her head and shout Chako’s songs with him, satisfied merely to be alive under such a sky. But such moments were brief, for Chako would always in some unconscious way be reminding her that she meant nothing to him, and the twentieth time hurt her just as sharply as the first. But she kept her feelings to herself, of course, and on the surface they got along very well together. Chako was really a first-rate companion, if you were content to take him as he was. He was willing to meet you on

neutral ground, but he never allowed you to set foot over the threshold of his castle, and he quite frankly didn't give a damn about what was inside your castle.

While travel was so easy Chako had to find other means of working off his superabundant energy. At their spelling-places along the lakes, he would disappear, and presently Ann would see him swimming out with long overarm strokes. He would tread water, wave an arm to her and shout, then swim on almost out of sight, while Ann waited in terror for his return.

After McIlwraith Lake, the final stretch of the little river was called Pony River. It went down steeply at the end, and the constant succession of rapids was highly exhilarating. They made a morning spell beside the Pony River, in a lovely spot beside a quiet backwater, with a rapid foaming down outside like millions of gallons of root beer. Great trees arched overhead.

After they had eaten, Chako took a snooze in the grass—he could always sleep; and Ann climbed into an inviting poplar tree, that, half-uprooted from the bank, leaned out horizontally over the stony beach and the quiet water. She found a comfortable perch swinging her feet, resting her arms on another branch breast high in front, and pillowing her cheek on her arms. A sweep of loosened hair crossed her brows.

There she sat for a long time dreaming in a state of soft unhappiness, dreaming of Chako. The object of her dreams lay sleeping unromantically in the grass below her, a few feet back, but she had turned her head that she might not see him. It hurt her to look at him. How could this go on? she was asking herself, this living in such a terrible physical intimacy with a man who presented an invariably glassy surface to her. An intimacy which daily grew closer and daily softened her heart more to her partner. Not so Chako: his glassy surface was unaltered. A dozen times a day she broke her soft heart against it. She had continually to restrain herself from quarrelling with him insanely, even from striking him in her exasperation. Anything to break up his inhuman indifference. At the same time her better sense told her that if she did reveal the wild feelings that filled her, it would only make him stronger and crueller in his callousness. It could not go on! . . . But it *had* to go on! So it went endlessly back and forth in her mind.

She suddenly became aware that Chako had awakened and was looking up at her with eyes full of sleep.

“You look like a wild thing up there among the leaves,” he murmured.

There was a new quality in his voice that set Ann's heart to beating wildly. She hastily worked herself along the branch, and dropped to the stones.

Chako's sleepy eyes followed her about with a warm and dangerous look she had never seen in them before. He smiled mockingly. Ann in a panic, said sharply:

"What's the matter with you?"

"I was thinking," he drawled, "how great it would be if there were really wild girls in the woods. That would be some hunting, eh?"

"Rubbish!" said Ann, while her heart beat tumultuously.

In a moment he was wide awake, and his usual self. Almost his usual self. Occasionally his narrowed eyes shot out side glances at Ann that made her tremble. They embarked. She looked forward with dread to the next camp. If his hunting instinct was aroused . . . who would be the hunted one but she?

All during the middle part of the day the little river kept them on the *qui vive*. On every bend there was a tossing rapid and they were flung around, never knowing what they were to see below. It was madly exciting. They shouted together as they took the plunge. Sometimes the little river spread out wide and shallow, and Chako had to leap overboard, and let her down slowly over the stones. In one narrow place a tree had fallen across from bank to bank, and they just escaped crashing into it. Chako chopped a way through.

Towards the end of the afternoon the country flattened out. The river now sucked swiftly and silently around low islands covered with gigantic cottonwood trees that made a green ceiling high above. All the lower world was filled with a cool, greenish light; both scenery and lighting had a curiously theatrical effect.

They made their afternoon spell on a low, dry bank at the edge of the one of the half-submerged islands. During this stop there was bread to be baked. Ann had by now taken over the baking from Chako. Chako gathered dry wood, made her a hot fire, then sat down with his back against a log to watch.

He was thoroughly aware of Ann now. His eyes followed her every movement with a secret and intent look that made Ann feel as weak as if he were the snake and she the bird. But the suggestion of a mocking smile clung about his lips. He was aroused, but he was none the less savage. That smile embittered Ann. It seemed to say, he was ready for her now, let her come—but no hurry. Never! she vowed, while he looked at her like that. To be held so lightly hurt her worse than not to be regarded at all. It was the crowning humiliation.

Chako picked up a twig and whittled it, glancing up to woo Ann with shameless, dancing eyes and smiling lips. He was trying to force her to meet his glance, to melt into laughter. Ann felt as if her fate depended upon not meeting his eyes.

“Think yourself quite a cook, don’t you?” he drawled.

“A better cook than you, or I wouldn’t have the job,” she retorted.

“Some little cookie-boy!”

“If you’re not satisfied with my cooking . . .”

“Oh, you’re *cooking’s* good enough.”

“What’s the matter with me then?”

“Oh, to see you skipping round in your little pants, I just got to laugh!” And laugh he did.

There was a warm quality in his laughter that melted Ann like wax. Warmth and mockery! He wanted her, but he wanted her lightly. She kneaded her dough desperately. She would not let herself meet his eye, but she could see him only too well. She was tinglingly conscious of him slouching there on the small of his back, his knees up, his broad-brimmed hat pulled a little forward, the wicked, laughing eyes glancing from the shadow.

She was divided clean in half. How his deep, teasing voice seduced her breast. How she loved to have him chaff her. And his eyes; asking! asking! Careless love; was it not the most beautiful thing on earth anyway? It was nature. Chako was pure nature. Was not all the rest mere imaginings? Wasn’t she a fool to torment herself asking for more, when that was all he had to give? A niggard to ask at all what she was going to get out of it? How easy to let herself go! A lift of the eyes would settle it. No more torments, no more thinking, but happiness unspeakable!

But the other half fought hard. Sneering devil! How contemptuously sure he is of you! He only lays himself out to please because he hasn’t got you yet. Once he had you he’d treat you like dirt. Such is his savage nature. He doesn’t give a rap. Doesn’t even trouble himself to hide it. Better throw yourself in the river than give yourself in exchange for that!

Chako watched her agitated hands pounding the dough. “Bet you’d like to do that to me,” he drawled. “I can see it in your eye. Go ahead. I’ll hold my hands behind my back. Beat me up, kid. Make you feel a heap better.”

“Don’t be silly,” said Ann.

They embarked again without anything having happened, but Ann was despairing. She had resisted him for the moment. What good did it do her?

There were still days and weeks of this ahead. And each day it would become harder. Nobody has unlimited powers of resistance. What was the use? What was the use? She couldn't fight him and half of herself, too; an Ann that sulked when Chako sulked; an Ann that shrugged at the impending catastrophe with a devil-may-care grin like Chako's own.

Within a few hundred yards of their camping-place they were suddenly shot out on the bosom of a great, brawling, whity-green river, almost as wide as the Campbell, but shallow and without majesty.

"Rice River," said Chako, "and going down like a locomotive."

A violent, disorderly stream, continually eating under its banks and depositing wide bars in mid-stream, on which the torn, wrecked trees grounded, and piled high in fantastic jams. Some of the cut banks were two hundred feet high: towering slopes of sand with a fringe of jack-pines looking over far above. Harder strata stuck up through the sand in castellated masses, where swallows hollowed out their nests. A curious hissing sound filled the air.

"What is that?" asked the startled Ann.

"Nobody knows for sure," said Chako. "I take it, it's the stones rolling along the river bed."

Rapids followed each other at short intervals. Ann was alarmed by the speed at which they were carried down.

"How much of this have we got?" she asked.

"About a hundred and fifty miles."

"How in the world will we ever get back again?"

"The water will be lower then. It's done all the time, but it's no cinch. Take us a week or more, this stretch."

A wetting in a rapid obliged them to camp for the night an hour earlier than usual in order to dry out. It was a dreary spot they chose, a burned-over river bottom with jagged black sticks rising here and there, and charred trunks lying half concealed in the weeds. The high water covered the beach, and they had to pull the canoe up on top of the bank beside them.

When the supper was eaten, and the tents put up, it was still too early to go to bed. Ann got some sewing, and sat on a fallen trunk with an air of composure she was far from feeling. She was making a cotton bag to hold the beans which had burst their paper wrappings. Chako lay down on his back near her, watching her from under his hat brim. Suddenly he tossed the hat aside, and rolling over with graceful abandon, lay at her feet with his cheek pillowed on his arm, a hand behind his head.

He looked up at her with his intolerable and alluring grin of mockery. “You think I’m a pretty hard case, don’t you?”

A voice within Ann whispered: Don’t flinch! “Why yes,” she said coolly.

Chako laughed ruefully. “The hell you say!”

“Well . . . you asked me.”

“Do you know you’re damn pretty?” he said suddenly.

Ann shrugged.

“I didn’t realize it at first,” he went on. “You keep yourself so much to yourself. But in those clothes and all. . . . I’m going to call you Billy. . . . Why don’t you let yourself go a little?”

“I like that!” said Ann indignantly.

“Hey?”

“You take pretty good care never to let yourself go!”

“Oh, when we started I was sore on the world. But I’m over that now. Don’t look so sour, Billy. Be my playmate.”

“No, thanks!” said Ann.

“What’s the matter with me?”

“You’re too condescending.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Too lordly.” She mimicked a lordly manner. “You may play with me now, little girl. I am in a good humour.”

Chako shouted with laughter. “So that’s me, is it? Well, here’s you.” He gave what he considered an imitation of a little girl’s primmest manner. “Run away, boy. You’re too rough!”

In spite of herself Ann had to laugh. She quickly called it in. Laughter was so dangerous! Even that single note of laughter encouraged him to put up his hand in search of hers—daring her with his laughing eyes to refuse him. Ann delicately pricked the back of his hand with her needle. Astonished, he clapped it to his mouth.

“You little wasp! . . . I’ve a good mind to pay you out for that!”

“You’ll get worse!” warned Ann.

“The size of it!” he said, grinning. “Why, kid, I could keep you in the air with one hand, while I ate my dinner with the other.”

“Very likely,” said Ann. “What does that prove?”

“Proves you better be polite to me, little feller.”

“Oh, you’re big enough,” said Ann with a scornful glance. “But strength isn’t everything.”

“What else counts?”

“Will.”

He laughed loud. “Will power, eh? The little feller thinks he’s got will-power!” He suddenly scrambled to his knees and brought his face close to hers. It was all alight, joyous, devilish. “Want to match will-powers with me, Billy? You say you won’t, and I say you shall!”

Ann got up without haste. “You’re tiresome,” she said. “I’m going to bed.”

He followed her scowling. “Aw, can’t you take a bit of fun?”

“Oh, it isn’t that,” said Ann coolly. “The mosquitoes are coming around.”

“Then come sit behind my mosquito bar,” he said cajolingly.

“No indeed!” said Ann sharply.

He chuckled mischievously. “What’s the diff? A rag of mosquito netting! Here we are! You and I! . . .”

“Good night,” said Ann.

He swore under his breath, and kicked a stump.

Next morning Chako was still sulky. His self-love had received a wound; he regarded Ann with an injured scowl. It hardened Ann. She regretted nothing that had happened. She ignored the scowl, and succeeded in giving a good representation of cheerfulness. Which in turn increased Chako’s rancour.

The weather turned bad. All day brief cold squalls of rain swept across the river. One after another the charged, yellowish clouds stuck their heads over the hills on the left bank. Sometimes by racing down ahead, sometimes by holding back they could escape, but more often they were caught. Then they paddled doggedly through it, their shoulders hunched under the icy downpour. Between showers a hot sun made them steam.

Each time they went ashore to eat, Chako still watched her, but with an ugly gleam in his half-closed eyes to-day. Hour by hour his appetite became sharper, and he made no scruple of letting it show naked and unashamed. He intended she should see that he meant to satisfy it. This was the pure savage without the mask of mocking laughter; infinitely more dangerous. Yet Ann’s spirits steadily rose. What terrified her had been that he would cajole her

with his infernal attractiveness. When he became merely brutal she grew strong. He could never intimidate her into giving in. He should never have her against her will.

She knew that the test would come when they camped for the night, and braced herself to meet it. They found a fine camping-place on a high, dry bank under virgin pines. The canoe was pulled up on a lower level. Ann cooked the supper while Chako made all snug for the night. When they sat down opposite each other to eat, Chako's sullen eyes embraced her in an extraordinary look, cool and proprietary. In his mind he already possessed her. Her feelings were nothing to him. He had only to put out his hand, when he was ready.

Ann's extreme danger stimulated her. She ignored his look. She contrived to talk as if she had nothing on her mind but the usual details of their journey. Chako never troubled himself to answer her. But she played her part so well it intimidated him to a certain degree; it kept him quiet and sullen. Ann fought desperately against the realization that it was all for nothing. He was content to bide his own time, sitting there, wary, contemptuous, crouched to spring.

This final meal was always eaten late. The sun was down when they finished. According to their usual custom, Ann washed the dishes while Chako gathered a store of dry wood for the morning's fire. Ann put everything in the grub-box, and fastened down the cover against four-footed prowlers. Ann rose.

"Good night," she said coolly.

He faced her from the other side of the fire. "Wait a minute," he said. His voice was a little thick.

Ann would not run from him. "What do you want?" she asked.

With a spring, Chako was over the fire, a lightning-like movement. "You!" he said. Before Ann could gather her forces, he had flung his arms about her. "You pretty thing! You pretty thing!" he murmured, contemptuous even in his passion.

Only for the fraction of a second was Ann at a loss. All her faculties sprang into action. She fought him off, every fibre of her being charged with denial. Chako's strength was of small service to him, for a creature so passionately determined is simply not to be had, conscious.

Chako began to laugh. "Whoa, Emma! Whoa, Emma!" he murmured. "You little devil! . . . You hell-cat!" Delighted laughter rumbling deep in his throat.

His laughter angered Ann more than the original attack upon her; nerved her to a still greater effort. Laughter weakened Chako. She succeeded in tearing herself clear of him. She leaped down to the lower ground, where the canoe was, Chako after her. There was a paddle lying there. Ann snatched it up, and swinging it, brought down the edge on Chako's head.

He grunted, and clapped his hands to the spot. It was a light stick, and he was not much hurt, but thoroughly sobered.

"What the hell . . . ! What's the matter with you?" he growled.

"Don't you touch me, that's all," gasped Ann.

"Ahh! what's the matter with you," he repeated. "You like me."

"What makes you so sure of that?" Ann cried furiously.

"All women do."

Ann groaned in intolerable exasperation. "Well, I'm not like all women," she cried. "You've known only cheap and common women. They've made a fool of you!"

"You *do* like me," he grumbled, puzzled. "When I come close to you . . . I can feel it. Why deny it?"

"If I did feel anything for you," she cried, "I'd never give in to it! Never! Never! I'd throw myself into the river sooner!"

"Yes, you would!" he sneered.

"You put your hands on me again, and you'll see!"

He made no move. He believed her.

"You're not worth it!" Ann cried passionately. "You're empty and hard and shallow! There is nothing to you but your strength. Well, a horse is stronger!"

This got under Chako's skin. "I know what's biting you all right," he snarled. "You want a man to fall in love with you, don't you, and come crawling. Oh, I know women!"

"What sort of women?"

"Ahh, they're all the same! Not satisfied till they tame a man! I've felt it in you from the first. Well, by God! no woman's going to trim my wings! None of this love business for me!"

"But it's all right for women to love you, eh?"

"I ask for no more than I give!"

"You're incapable of loving!"

"All right! I'll take 'em and I'll leave 'em. That's all I want."

"Ah, there's the truth at last! You despise women!"

“Why shouldn’t I, when I see what they are!”

“And what are you? Selfish, stupid and unfeeling!”

“Book-words! Book-words!” said Chako furiously. “You’re no flesh and blood woman! You’ve read so many books your blood has turned to printer’s ink!”

“All right!” said Ann. “Treat me like a book after this! Books don’t trouble you much!”

“You’re damn right, they don’t! And you won’t, neither! You’ve cured me of wanting you!”

“Thank God!” said Ann scornfully.

Shouting angrily at each other, they sought their respective tents. Within the shelter of hers, the inevitable reaction set in in Ann, and the scalding tears welled up. She wrapped her head in her arms to keep any suggestion of a sob from reaching Chako’s ears. She had won, but it was a dismal victory.

## CHAPTER XI

### UP-STREAM

THE next day was a black one! If only they could have got away from each other! But there they were tied hand and foot together.

To each the sight of the other one was insupportable—but it had to be supported. Ann was presumably the better off, because at least while they were afloat, she could turn her back to Chako. On the other hand Chako was the tougher of the two.

There was an absurd side to the situation too; Ann was conscious of it while she suffered. Absurd, forced together as they were, the way each was making out that the other simply did not exist: the way Ann waited until Chako put a thing down before she would pick it up: the way Chako did everything for himself sooner than let on that there was anybody with him. Dependent upon each other as they were, they nevertheless contrived the feat of not addressing a single word to each other all day.

Always as they were hurried down the disorderly Rice River the shores were becoming higher and bolder, and now through gaps in the hills to the east they caught occasional glimpses of veritable snow-clad peaks, flung up calm and lovely against the blue. At evening of this day, rounding the shoulder of a high hill, they issued into a sort of vast amphitheatre. Ann supposed this to be the scene of the meeting of the rivers; the Grand Forks of the Spirit. The stony Chako volunteered no information. The Rocky Mountains were now fully revealed, a company of Titans seated in noble dignity. There was a great gap in the centre of the chain, where they drew back to give the great river passage.

Presently ahead Ann could see the Stanley River, which was sharply differentiated from the jade-green Rice by its brown colour. The two rivers, which were about of equal volume, rushed at each other pell-mell, and tilted for possession of the channel to the east. At the moment the swollen Rice River had the ascendancy, and the brown waters of the Stanley were sullenly backed up as far as one could see. Some skill was required from Chako in order to nose the canoe from the rushing green water into the standing brown water without a capsizing.

Where the rivers came together there was a broad bar of white sand, and in the middle of the sand Ann beheld an astonishing sight after their many lonely days; a little weather-stained A tent, with a fire before it, sending up a

thread of smoke. A man came to the water's edge to meet them. Ann's heart went out to this fellow-creature. Whoever he was, he must be more human than the stony Chako. He provided unexpected relief from an intolerable situation.

It was a very strange figure; a little, oldish man dressed in a rusty cut-away coat, of all garments! which was pinned across at the neck to hide the lack of a shirt. A cut-away coat and bare feet! His grizzled hair hung to his shoulders; his beard had perhaps never been cut, but both were scrupulously combed. He shook Ann's hand as simple and full of pleasure as a little child.

"Shoot me if it ain't a little gal!" he cried. "A little gal! Ain't seen a little white gal in years and years!" His bare toes dug themselves self-consciously into the sand.

"Hello, Tom," said Chako, sulky and off-hand.

"Interjooce me proper," said the little old man.

"Miss Maury," said Chako with a jerk of his head towards Ann. "Tom Catlett."

"But most gen'ally called Hairy Tom to distinguish from Tom Holden who traps down Fort Cheever way," said the old man. "Some calls me the Hermit of Grand Forks."

"I wanted to see you," said Chako in his lordly way. "Thought you'd be down Selwyn way."

"No," said Tom, pleased and self-important. "In fine weather I gen'ally camps right here. 'Tain't much of a camp with the sand and all. I eats sand with all my meals. But it's an elegant look-out. I can see up the Rice, and up the Stanley, and down the Spirit. Nobody gets by me. . . . How'd you get them scratches on your face, Chako?"

Chako turned a dull red. "Ahh! I ran against a jack-pine in the dark."

"Must a rubbed your face on him good," said Tom innocently. "They're all up and down like. . . . I have tea on the fire. Sit ye down! Sit ye down!"

But the evening horde of mosquitoes was gathering, and before they could take any refreshment Chako had to pitch his lean-to tent. Hairy Tom seemed to be immune to mosquitoes; he didn't bother with any netting. He went to put on his moccasins in Ann's honour, and afterwards the three of them sat in a row behind Chako's mosquito bar and ate their supper.

Ann was unspeakably thankful to have the gentle, garrulous old man for a buffer between her and Chako. How could she have got through the dreadful evening without him! Companionship of any sort was a precious boon; plenty of talk to keep the horrible stillness at bay.

Hairy Tom did most of the talking. He chattered about his life. It appeared that he was a sort of innocent mendicant who levied tribute on all travellers. A privileged character in the country, everybody contributed to his support, and took it out in playing harmless jokes on him.

Finally Chako said stiffly: "Miss Maury is looking for her father. Him that went by the name of Joe Grouser."

Hairy Tom started, and cast a commiserating side-glance at Ann. "Sho!" he murmured. "Sho!"

"You think he's dead," said Ann quietly.

"I wouldn't say it. I wouldn't say it," said Tom distressfully. "But . . ." A shake of the head completed it.

"You needn't hesitate," said Ann. "I've had it in mind from the first. But I have to go and see."

"I knew him well," said Tom. "Me and him were good friends, bein' as we were both on our own, see? Made a fellow-feeling like. Near every year I'd see him comin' out or goin' in, and we'd spell together, and sass each other. Last year, when he didn't come out, I just thought as how he'd saved enough grub to see him through the summer, and was goin' to wait until Fall and spend the winter outside, seein' as he hadn't been out for most as many years as I haven't. But I never knew he had a darter outside, he kept his affairs so private. And when the Fall come and he didn't come, then it was too late in the season for me to go look for him. Nobody has dogs in these parts. In the winter we just got to hibernate. And when this spring come, and still he didn't come, then I knew 'twas no use to go after him. A quare, randy old feller Joe Grouser was, to be sure! Me and him . . ."

Chako wearied of Hairy Tom's reminiscences. He broke in: "What I want to know is, where was his range, his hang-out."

"Somewheres up the Ouananeca River," said Tom.

"The Ouananeca!" said Chako surprised. "They say nobody's ever been up there. They say you can't get up."

"Joe Grouser found a way," said Tom. "Maybe he's the on'y one. . . . Tell you how I know it. You can bet he never told anybody where he lived, but I stumbled on it by accident. Two years ago I was campin' with some fellers coupla miles down the river, when some other fellas come along in the morning, and they ses they'd just left Joe Grouser at the Forks. Overtook him comin' down the Rice River with his outfit. Well, I wanted to see Joe. I was countin' on him for bacca. So I gets in my canoe, and comes right back, and on up the Stanley. I reckoned in my light bark canoe I'd catch him in a coupla miles, but she sprung a leak on me, and I had to go ashore and mend

her. Still that didn't take half a day to dry and all, and I made sure I'd come up with him where he spelled that night. But no, sir, I paddled all day without seein' him.

"I knew I must a passed him somewheres, so next day I come back. Never thought of the mouth of the Ouananeca at first, 'cause nobody goes in there; it's just a what's-this, a coloured sack as they say. But I went in. You can only go up the Ouananeca a coupla miles. Then you're stopped by a God-awful canyon. Well, I found Joe Grouser's skiff at the mouth of the canyon. He'd taken part of his load and gone on. Well, I thought's how he might be sore-like at my stumblin' on his retreat, so I didn't wait for him to come back. I took the bacca and left my I.O.U. and come on back. I ain't never seen him sence."

"The Ouananeca comes in about thirty or forty miles up the Stanley, doesn't it?" asked Chako.

"About that."

"If my father's skiff is still there it means he has never come out again," said Ann softly.

"It means just that, dearie," said Tom, his dim old eyes soft with feeling. He stroked her hand.

Next morning Ann faced their departure with a heavy dread at her heart. In spirit she clung to the kind old man like a child to one who would save her from unknown terrors. Tom was such a feather-brained old child himself, she was half hoping that the lure of a trip would stir him to accompany them, and all during breakfast she listened with strained ears for some suggestion of it to come from him. But it appeared he had no intention of forsaking his point of vantage right in the height of the season. There were several exciting events in prospect. He was looking for his friend Frank Bower, on his way out to Fort Edward in ten days or so. Two explorers were due down the Stanley almost any day. Jim Sholto's boy had promised to come up from Selwyn to spend a Sunday with him.

Nevertheless, while Chako was away packing the canoe, Ann said with a painful attempt at a joking manner: "Why don't you come with us, Tom?"

The old man's face closed like that of a secretive child's. He energetically shook his head. "Me and Chako wouldn't hit it off," he said. "He's too surly a lad for my likes. I like fellowship!"

Exactly!

Ann was tempted then to plead illness as an excuse to delay their journey; but while she played with the idea, her fate hurried her on. Chako called out that the canoe was ready. She went and took her place like one going to her doom.

For the first twenty miles or so the current in the Stanley was sluggish, and they progressed at a good rate. Ann was a full-fledged canoe-man by now, and paddled every trick as a matter of course. She was glad of it. The scenery along the Stanley was wild and grand in the extreme; on either hand first-class peaks rose close to the river; higher and higher peaks ever peeping over behind. The forest swept up their flanks unbroken and superb.

After their first spell they came to rapids, not dangerous, but tedious to ascend. They waded in the stream, dragging and pushing the canoe against the tearing current; lifting her over ledges of rock. Ann worked like a man, but received no word of commendation from her flinty partner.

That night stood out in Ann's recollection as the worst night of the whole trip in. Their camp was at the edge of the virgin forest; the ground was cumbered with fallen trunks, and so small was the clear space that the two little tents had to be pitched touching each other. Chako went to bed after eating, and with his amazing insensibility, instantly fell asleep. The awful stillness was abroad like a seeking creature. Ann's imagination pictured all the miles that separated her from a peopled land. She was obliged to lie there listening to Chako's deep breathing. She could have screamed at his inhumanness.

Next morning found them in the Ouananeca. It was a big stream, larger than the Pony River; it must have delivered a good half of the water that constituted the Stanley below. It was a deep, swift, narrow river, silently swirling between steep, high banks walled with pines. They could see nothing beyond the banks, except occasionally the very tip of a mountain sticking up surprisingly close. It was nip and tuck with the current. Chako, in his stubborn way, having elected to paddle up, would not give in and take to the tracking line. The two miles or so had all the effect of twenty. All the way up Ann was hearing a dull, insistent murmur that made the breast as uneasy as a native drum.

Finally they rounded a bend, and a cliff of naked, yellow rock sprang out of the world of green. It ran right across the vista; the river seemed to end there. A cliff a hundred feet high, perhaps. Ann did not need to be told that this was their present goal. That rumbling voice issued from somewhere within the cliff. Not until they got quite close could Ann see how the river snaked out sideways through a cleft in the yellow rock. She searched the shores with strained eyes.

“We never asked which side of the river,” she said breathlessly.

“The backwater works in at the left,” Chako said.

“There’s no boat there.”

“He would draw it up out of reach of high water.”

Just before they landed Ann had a peep into the narrow canyon; only a peep because of a further bend in the walls. The water came swirling out sluggishly; it had an exhausted look, covered with stale foam.

The backwater led them to a natural landing on a little green bank. Without speaking, Chako pointed to the stumps of little trees that had been chopped. His landing-place! thought Ann. She looked under the pine trees that came to the edge of the narrow bank, and saw his boat. Her breast was somewhat quieted. She knew at least that they were on his track.

They landed and went to the boat. Even Chako was a little moved by the sight of it. It had been pulled up under the shelter of the trees and turned over. It was a skiff of clumsy design, made out of rough pine lumber. For further protection pine branches had been thrown over it; all the needles had fallen off. Beside it lay the rough pine rollers upon which Joe Grouser had worked it up from the water.

Ann put her hand on the bottom. “This carried my father!” she murmured.

Chako looked away with the hardy scowl with which he always faced out any display of emotion.

“Which way do you suppose he went?” asked Ann.

“Around the canyon most likely,” said Chako gruffly. “I don’t see any way to get up the cliff, but I’ll look around. You stay here.”

“Ah, be careful!” said Ann involuntarily.

“*Ahh!*” said Chako, scowling like a bravo. He struck into the woods.

Ann pulled the canoe up higher, and carried everything ashore. In a little while Chako came back to report that there was a way to scale the cliff, and that they could get the canoe up, too, though it would take some managing. They immediately set about their preparations to continue their journey. Chako made a fire for Ann, so that she could cook a meal while he was making the packs.

“We’ll take all we can carry on our backs first,” he said. “If it’s far to carry we’ll make camp on the other side. Soon as we make sure he took to the water above we’ll come back for the canoe.”

Presently Ann noticed that one of the packs was getting to be three times the size of the other.

“You’re not giving me enough,” she said.

“I’m the best judge of that,” said Chako, instantly getting sore.

“I’m not going to let you baby me!”

“You tend to your cooking.”

Ann jumped up in a little tempest of anger, and picking up a bag of sugar from the big pack, added it to the little pack. Chako snatched it back. Ann laid hands on it again. They glared at each other.

“Let go!” said Ann.

“Let go yourself!” said Chako. “By God! you try a man’s temper!”

Suddenly he picked her up, and, carrying her back to the fire, dumped her there none too gently. Ann gave up the unequal struggle. Angry tears forced themselves to her eyes—but she called them in. It suddenly occurred to her that he was bullying her to save her strength. What an enigma he was!

They ate in a stiff silence. Afterwards, leaving everything secure against marauders, they shouldered their packs and set off. Chako’s big pack was partly supported by a canvas strap across his forehead. It secretly distressed Ann to see the proud head bowed under that weight. Her pack felt like nothing at all.

Striking back from the river, Chako led her around through the trees to a certain spot at the cliff’s foot. All along the base of the cliff there was a great slide of broken rock fallen from the top in ages past. Chako started to clamber up these rocks on all fours. Ann followed without any idea of where they were going, for there was nothing to be seen above but the smooth face of the cliff.

When they got to the top of the broken rocks an exclamation of wonder broke from Ann. There lay the way! A great perpendicular slab had cracked away from the face of the cliff, leaving a narrow fissure behind. Into this fissure entered a well-beaten path, which descended into the blackest of holes, then rose beyond by easy stages to the top of the cliff. High above, the trees looked over the edge.

Chako, seeing Ann glance curiously at the hard-beaten path, said laconically: “Bears.”

They went in. In the bottom of the hole they crossed over a pool of ageless black ice. The way up the other side was harder than it looked. At the top Ann’s burden seemed to have increased fourfold in weight. She was thankful to follow Chako’s example, and cast it off and rest. At their feet was a vast bowl of green, with the river finding its way out, and hills above hills rising steeply all around.

When she was a little rested, Ann crept forward and looked into the canyon. It was a magnificent and dreadful sight. She couldn't yet see very far into it, because of the bend in the walls. She saw the white water come tearing around this bend, sweeping high up one side with its impetus. From side to side it was flung between the smooth walls. Great billows crashed against the rock, sending up sheets of spray. One expected the rock itself to crumble under such blows. Then the water sullenly flattened down, and found its way out, heaving like a breast after a storm of passion. This was just the end. Around that bend came a hoarse roar that suggested unimaginable terrors.

Shouldering their burdens, they plodded on. Chako professed to be following a trail, but Ann could not distinguish it. At intervals though, he would point out when a fallen tree had been chopped to give passage, and Ann knew that her feet were upon the same earth that had been pressed by her father's feet before her. It was only here and there that the trail touched the edge of the canyon, and she could look into it.

One such look she never forgot. They had come out on a little plateau of rock, and threw down their packs. Ann went to the edge. She was astounded. Here she could look straight up the canyon for perhaps half a mile. The walls were not sheer here, though steep enough. It was like a steeply-inclined trough, down which that awful volume of water came leaping and crashing as upon a gigantic flight of stairs. Like stairs the huge, thick billows, regular in form and equidistant, converged from the sides to a point in the centre. The noise was not loud so much as it was earth-shaking in volume. In all her life Ann had never received such an impression of power. She and Chako gazed in silence. The sight beggared speech.

It was difficult going for the trail was of the roughest. Ann used up a good half of her strength in stepping over obstacles. They had many a stiff little hill to climb. Ann conceived a new respect for Chako's strength, seeing how easily he carried his great pack, while she sank under her little one. It seemed to her as if they were hours upon the way, though she could not see that the sun altered his position much.

Finally, after a steep climb, the trail went *down* for the first time; the trees opened up, and a lovely, placid little lake of brown water was presented to their surprised eyes.

"We appear to be here," said Chako.

He looked about him. "Just as I thought," he said. "He took to the water here. We'll have to bring over the canoe."

"All that way!" said Ann aghast.

“Matter of five miles,” said Chako coolly. “That’s nothing.”

At a first glance the little lake appeared to be landlocked, but they soon saw how the current began to creep slyly along the shore, ever gathering speed. Around at the right they felt rather than saw the hole that sucked it in. Having divested themselves of their packs, they climbed around the rocky shore to have a look.

A ridge of brown rock ran across the end of the lake like a dam. On the side on which they stood there was a break in it, not more than ten yards wide, and through this gap the whole volume of water poured smoothly without a sound. Poured down a long, steep slide smooth as oil, boiled up madly at the bottom, and swept around a bend out of sight.

“There’s all hell around that bend,” said Chako.

They returned around the shore. Chako glanced at the sun. “Not yet one o’clock,” he said. “We’ve got time to go back for the rest of the stuff if you feel equal to it.”

“Certainly,” said Ann, though her heart sank.

“Or you can wait here and I’ll make two trips,” he said with his maddeningly indifferent air.

Ann flashed a hurt and angry look at him. “I’ll help,” she said.

“Well, you needn’t get up on your ear about it,” said Chako.

Returning light was a simple affair. At the other end of the portage they ate largely, and Chako said they had time for a sleep before starting to work again. They lay down each in a blanket on the pine needles; ten feet or so separated them.

Ann flung an arm over her eyes, and watched Chako through a hole in the crook of her elbow. Sleep did not immediately visit his eyes. He lay on his back staring up at the pine boughs gravely. What would Ann not have given to know his thoughts! There had been moments to-day when he had appeared almost human, only to become sullen again directly. He suddenly turned his head and looked at Ann in an odd, intent way that startled her. He scowled, but not in anger; a hurt scowl one might say, if one could conceive of anything hurting the self-sufficient Chako. Ann had been too sorely wounded to believe right away that Chako could be human.

They slept.

Of their second trip across the portage little need be said. It was just a dogged struggle for every yard of the five miles. How they got the canoe up through the fissure in the cliff Ann could never have told, but get it up they did. Ann did not see how Chako ever could have managed it without her

help, small as that might be, but she did not expect him to acknowledge it. Up on top, Chako took it on his back, the middle thwart resting on a blanket padded across his shoulders, his hands caught under the bow thwart. He was in continual difficulties with the trees. Though they left every ounce that could be spared, Ann herself had a heavier pack the second trip, and in addition she had to carry Chako's rifle, which always accompanied him.

The sun was going down when they arrived. Ann was all in. She sat down by the lake white-faced and mute. Chako looked down at her with an odd shyness flickering in his face that made it wonderfully attractive.

"Tired, Billy-boy?" he said.

Ann looked at him in speechless astonishment; then quickly turned her head to hide the springing tears. In the whole trip it was the first, the very first, word of human sympathy she had had from him. At such a moment it was too much. The tears gushed forth; her shoulders shook.

"Oh, hell and damnation!" stormed Chako, striding down to the water in a rage.

Above the canyon the Ouananeca was a perfectly normal brown river, peaceful and charming in effect, giving no hint of the terrors below. It tended generally to the north-west, that is parallel with the mountain ranges. Close on either hand there was a mountain range, those to the east snow-capped, doubtless the main chain of the Rockies. The valley was invariably flat, and densely timbered with virgin spruce and pine. The current was moderate, but there were many little rapids; their progress was arduous and slow.

The relations between the partners slowly improved, but they were still wary with each other. They avoided frank speech. Ann's bitterness yielded slowly. She so passionately desired to believe that Chako was human and lovable, that she was afraid to let herself believe it.

Chako was envious of Joe Grouser's range. "What a fur country!" he would say a dozen times a day. "And not even any Indians to compete with him. They wouldn't come in here. Evil spirits live in the canyon, the Indians say."

"I don't wonder," said Ann.

They now had the added excitement of searching the shores for evidences of the man they were seeking. On every bend Ann held her breath a little, expecting a disclosure. But the first day passed, and the second, and the third, and they saw nothing. Neither did the character of the river change.

"We must be nearly to the North Pole," Ann said nervously.

“Not at this rate,” said Chako. “We’re not doing but twenty miles a day.”

“Could we have passed his camp, do you think?” said Ann. “He was so secretive. Perhaps he hid it back from the river.”

“Not likely,” said Chako. “A man’s natural instinct is to build on a river. Who would ever follow him up here?”

“How did he ever get a boat up here?” asked Ann.

“Built it.”

“Dug-out?”

“There are no cottonwood trees. Bark canoe. There were birches around the lake that had been peeled.”

“Nothing escapes your eyes!” said Ann.

Chako was much flattered.

“But at that,” he presently added, “I don’t see why he came so far. The fur would be about the same anywhere in this valley. He must have had a reason.”

“He was a prospector too,” said Ann.

Chako glanced at the peaks. “These don’t look like gold-bearing mountains,” he said. “Pure rock!”

Like a turtle Chako would sometimes come cautiously out of his shell, watching Ann suspiciously to make sure she took no advantage of his exposed condition. Ann, with a wild hope at her heart, became very still at such moments, afraid of the effect of each word she uttered.

Little by little she made sure from certain mute, boyish glances she intercepted, that there was a Chako who longed to open his heart to her, to give himself to her, but that the proud, savage, stubborn Chako stood watch over him like a jailer. The issue was always in doubt. Ann saw very clearly that she was likely to lose in the end. Years of indulgence had given the savage part of him an overwhelming ascendancy. And there was nothing she could do. Her instinct told her that if anything was to come of it he must work out his own salvation.

One evening they were sitting quietly on a point watching the mountains darken against the western sky. Ann silently pointed among the shadows upstream, where a wild goose was bringing her yellow brood down with the current.

“You have good eyes for a person who reads so much,” said Chako a little resentfully.

Ann smiled inwardly. “Does reading spoil the eyes?”

“Sure!” said Chako. “Everybody who reads wears glasses.”

“Not everybody,” murmured Ann.

“I don’t see what good it does you,” said Chako truculently.

“I don’t know that it does you any particular good,” said Ann, “but it’s fun.”

“Oh, reading for fun,” said Chako, “I can understand that. But heavy stuff! . . . What makes me tired is the way bookish people think themselves so much better than others.”

“Do I?” said Ann, hurt.

“Well, not so much as you did,” said Chako grudgingly.

“It’s true I used to set books too high,” said Ann. “I know now that life is more important than books.”

As soon as she took this side of the argument, Chako was bound to switch to the other. “Oh, I don’t know,” he said. “I suppose books form a person’s character.”

“So does living a natural life,” said Ann.

There was a silence, then Chako blurted out with touching boyishness: “Do you think I’ve got any character?”

How Ann’s nature poured out to him in the dusk. “Yes,” she said simply.

“Not much, I guess,” said Chako gloomily. “I’ve got good feelings,” he went on very low, “but there’s a sort of devil inside me. . . . Makes me do all kinds of crazy things. . . . Makes me say just the opposite of what I think. . . .”

It was enough. All Ann’s hurts were healed. Her spirit brooded over him passionately. My dear! My dear! I understand! Aloud she said soberly: “Oh, everybody’s got a devil to fight!”

Chako got up with a flippant, jarring laugh. “Gee! what stuff a pretty evening will make a man talk! That’s what women lay for, isn’t it?”

Ann thought: Never mind! If I am patient he will come back again.

On the afternoon of the fifth day from the canyon they rounded a bend no different from hundreds of other bends, and a little choked cry escaped from Ann. The paddle dropped from her limp hands.

“There! . . . there!” she gasped. “We have come!”

Ahead of them on the river bank, in a clearing just big enough to hold it, stood a little shack built out of the logs that had been chopped down. It was roofed with sods. At one end rose a rough chimney built out of stones from

the river bed. Alongside the shack a big bark canoe was turned over on the ground.

“Now we shall know!” murmured Ann.

Chako’s voice came unexpectedly gentle. “Not yet. You mustn’t be disappointed. He’s not there.”

“But his body?”

“Look at the door.”

Having no hardware of any sort, the builder of the cabin had contrived a swinging bar to hold the door to while he was away from home. The bar was swung into place.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE BOWL

IT was true Joe Maury was not in his cabin dead or alive. It was not merely for a day's journey he had set forth that last time, for everything had been carefully stowed in order. His hammock was gone. Yet he had expected to come back some time; most of his property was there. The interior was quite ingeniously and comfortably contrived. There was a little stone fireplace, a table and chair made out of pine poles; there was even a glazed window sash. They wondered at the trouble he must have been at to bring that all the way intact.

This was his winter shack. Traps, snowshoes, winter moccasins, and fur garments were hanging from the rafters; and in a corner was piled his winter's store of grub, all spoiled now, except tea and sugar. He must have set out from here two years before on his summer's prospecting, never to return.

Ann was ready to despair. "His bones may be lying anywhere in all this wilderness," she said. "How are we to know even where to start looking!"

Chako betrayed a dawning solicitude for Ann. To be sure these unaccustomed feelings only made him appear gruffer than ever, but Ann felt the change. "Oh, well," he said doggedly, "we've got grub enough to stay here ten days or so. We'll have a try anyway."

No use starting off at random, Chako said. They must remain where they were until they discovered some definite clue to the way he had gone. Early next morning he started off to look. He bluntly told Ann she only messed up the woods with her tracks, and bade her remain in camp. He had no success all day. For three whole days he searched in vain.

"Beats all!" he grumbled. "I can't find anything but his fur trails, which he blazed plainly enough on the trees. These just take you round in big circles. He must have lived here all of ten years, and there's not a thing to show that he ever set foot to the ground when there wasn't snow on it."

However, on the fourth day Chako returned triumphant. "I've found it!" he cried. "By Golly, a crafty old fox! If anybody did come up the river he was bound they shouldn't track him beyond this cabin. But I doped it out bit by bit. This is what he did. Started *down* the river shore with his pack on his back. Who would ever have thought of that? And walked along the stones to leave no tracks. At the first rapid half a mile down, he crossed over to the

other side; I found some stones that he'd placed in the shallow water; that gave the snap away. He came back on the other side as far as a stream that comes in on that side, and he turned up that stream, still walking over the stones, climbing the down timber. Not an axe cut to give him away. In quarter of a mile or so, thinking he was safe, he struck into the timber, and from that point on there's a trail anybody could follow. He must have gone the same way every year. Almost looks as if he had something in there worth going for, eh?"

With Chako's last words an oddly desirous look leaped up in his eyes, that caused Ann a vague disquiet.

But it was fine, after the forced inaction of the past three days, to prepare to move on again. Before they turned in that night they were all ready for a start in the morning. Enough food to carry them down to the canyon was to be left in the shack, and all the rest packed on their backs, together with absolutely necessary utensils, blankets, axe, some ammunition and Ann's little tent. Chako's tent was to be left behind. They were now fast rising above the altitude of mosquitoes.

In the morning, a few minutes in the canoe brought them to the spot that Joe Grouser had so laboriously reached on foot. They hauled the canoe up out of harm's way, adjusted their packs, and set off across the flat floor of the valley through an invariable forest of closely springing jack-pines. Their predecessor had taken much pains to chop an easy trail.

"Each year he improved it some," Chako said, pointing out the marks of the axe, some old, some new.

On the trail Chako became absolutely absorbed in his work, and Ann was no more to him than something that followed behind, and had provokingly to be waited for. But Ann, beginning to know him, was no longer resentful. His great preoccupation was with a water supply. They found a living spring at the root of a solitary spruce tree, and spelled forthwith.

Soon after the ground began to rise, and became more broken. The pines gave place to gigantic fir trees of a species strange to Chako. Hoary old monarchs they were, of an infinite majesty. ("Been here since the flood," said Chako.) Each tree took a lot of room, and there was no undergrowth in the twilight aisles. But the fallen monarchs of ages past lay sprawling up and down, and criss-cross; some making stout bridges over which the trail carried them, some crumbling to powder at a touch. Cushiony green moss masked many a treacherous hole where a trunk had rotted out of the ground. Back and forth, in and out among these obstructions the trail wound, always

climbing. The whole way was made beautiful for Ann by the fact that once on a sort of log bridge across a crevasse, Chako half turned, and extended an arm for her to steady herself on. Firm as an apple bough it was.

By and by they came to a steep plane of naked rock up which they were forced to climb on all fours. The great trees ended at the foot of it, and at the top a forest of little sticks began; the way became steeper. Now, at intervals, they caught glimpses ahead of the summit of the mountain they were upon, a huge knoll of naked rock sticking up into the ineffable blue.

Chako became uncertain about the trail. Every now and then he slipped his pack, and darted off to one side or the other to investigate, while Ann rested. "Goat tracks everywhere," he muttered.

Finally they left the trees behind them altogether, and came out under the vastest sky that Ann had ever beheld: a sky that seemed to envelop them all round about. Nothing grew on the mountain above this line but scrubby bushes in the interstices of earth, different coloured mosses, and strange, delicate flowers. A pair of black and white ptarmigan fluttered crazily ahead of them, the fool-hens of higher altitudes. A higher knoll now poked, up behind what they had at first taken for the summit.

Chako stopped altogether. "We're on the wrong track," he said, thinking aloud. "It goes straight up. Joe Grouser certainly wasn't aiming to prospect on top of the mountain. And if he was going over to the other side, he wouldn't go over the highest part. He must have turned off on one of the tracks below."

"What will we do?" asked Ann anxiously.

Chako had already slipped his pack. "I'm going up to have a look," he said. "You rest here."

"Ah, be careful!" breathed Ann involuntarily.

Chako scowled in his hardy fashion, making believe not to hear, and set off.

He went up the mountainside with great strides. He never once looked back. Ann watched him with all her heart in her eyes. How tireless he was! How graceful in his strength!

He reached the first knoll of rock, and disappeared over it. Later, Ann saw him on the second knoll, a mere atom. He stood outlined against the blue, and waved both arms over his head. Ann could just get the tiny gesture. He was like an eagle up there. Her heart swelled in her breast.

In an hour he was back at her side. "That is not the real summit that we see," he said. "There's more beyond. But it was high enough to show me. If

Joe Grouser wanted to cross this chain he'd make off around to the right. We'll go back to the first track in that direction."

They found a track that led them off around the face of the mountain across a steep slide of broken rock. It took them in and out around the sides of an awful gorge. Chako with an exclamation of triumph, pounced on a little object lodged under a stone and held it up; a sodden little mass.

"His moccasins wore out here and he changed to a fresh pair," he cried.

There in the empty upper world the little human relic seemed doubly pitious to Ann. The tears sprang to her eyes.

Beyond the gorge the track started straight up the steep face of rock. It was gruelling work on Ann, burdened as she was. Ten steps and a rest was the best she could do. Chako, obliged to wait for her continually, scowled blackly out across the valley.

At last he said gruffly: "Give me your pack."

"I won't!" said Ann hotly.

"This is no fit work for a woman."

"It is for this woman."

"Well then, drop it, and I'll come back after it."

"Go on," said Ann stubbornly. "I'll follow as quick as I can."

But he would wait for her, always scowling and looking away.

When they finally reached the top of the ridge, Ann flung herself down, too exhausted even to look.

When the pounding of her heart eased down, she sat up. The ridge was about ten yards wide, of some shaly substance, flat and bare. It was not unlike the top of a vast cinder pile. Down the middle of it ran a curiously natural looking path, worn by the grave goats in their journeys from summit to summit. Looking back the way they had come, across the valley twelve or fifteen miles away, the carved shapes of the Rockies faced them, stretching right and left as far as eye could see, glorious in the level rays of the lowering sun.

Chako had his back to this. "Hey, Billy, come here!" he cried in an excited voice.

Ann dragged herself stiffly to his side. Quite unconsciously he dropped an arm across her shoulders. He pointed with his other hand.

"Look, Kid!"

On this side there was a whole troubled sea of mountains close at hand. But Chako was pointing down. Below them lay a deep bowl in the mountains, and within it a little lake that caught at the breast in its strange

intensity of colour, that was neither blue nor green. All around it was a fringe of blackish pines, then the heights. For most of the way around sheer cliffs of grey rock backed the pines.

“See that white sand at the edge of the water yonder,” Chako said excitedly. “Looks like pay dirt to me!”

At the passion in his voice, a passion in which she had no part, Ann’s heart sank heavily.

“And look at the other side of the lake,” Chako went on, “the side opposite us. Do you see what I see?”

Ann strained her eyes. Gradually a significant little rectangle shaped itself on the shore.

“A shack!” she murmured.

“Nothing else! There’s the end of our journey!”

“Good!” said Ann. “Let’s go on.”

Chako glanced in her face. “From the look of you we ought to camp right here,” he said.

“I’m all right,” said Ann. “There’s no water here.”

“I could bring snow from the summit.”

“There’s no wood.”

“True, and there will be frost to-night. We’ll have to go down. But not all the way. We’ll camp on top of those cliffs below.”

“It’ll be easier going down,” said Ann stoutly.

“Easier on your wind, but harder on your legs,” said Chako.

They ate a little bread and went on. They did finally make the spot Chako had in view, a grove of pines on top of the cliffs, a couple of hundred feet above the lake. A little stream came down from the snow-covered heights and fell over the lip of the cliffs into the lake with a hoarse rumble that filled the whole bowl with sound. It was almost dark, and there was an insidious chill in the still air.

Ann was quite done. She could but fling herself down on the pine needles, and bury her face in her arms. Chako, in his concern, looked absolutely brutal.

“You’re a game pardner,” he growled, hating himself for saying it. “Dead game!”

Though his face, too, was streaky with fatigue, he was all activity. He chopped poles, and armfuls of pine boughs, and quickly constructed a little lean-to shelter just big enough for Ann to lie in. In front of it he made a log

fire. The heat was deflected down from the sloping roof of boughs over Ann's head, and she lay deliciously warmed. She was too weary to care whether or not she got any supper, but Chako presently brought it; hot rice and bacon and tea.

"You are too good to me!" she murmured, with the tears of pure fatigue rolling down her cheeks.

"Ahh, forget it!" said Chako roughly.

When she fell asleep he was still busy constructing a similar shelter for himself across the fire. At intervals during the night he got up and replenished the fire. Ann heard him dimly.

In the cold, winy freshness of the morning, they came down over the last broken rocks to the lake level, and breaking through the narrow belt of pines, saw the little shack before them. It looked strangely alone in that wild place. It was of similar construction to the other shack; it had a chimney but no window; the sod roof was sprouting greenly. Slipping their packs, they circled around it with fast beating hearts. The door had a bar like that other door, but it was perpendicular.

"He's inside," said Chako huskily.

A shuddering sound escaped Ann's lips.

"You wait outside," said Chako quickly.

Ann turned away to the lake shore, fighting the hysteria that gripped her. Chako put his shoulder against the little door, but it refused to yield. He picked up a great stone and heaved it; the door went in with a crash. Chako paused on the threshold. He snatched off his hat. Ann's knees weakened under her, and she sat down on the stones. Chako went in.

He presently reappeared, glanced up at the bright sky with relief, and clapped on his hat again. He came to Ann. He had something in his hand.

"He's in there," he said simply.

As Ann made a move to rise, Chako put a hand on her shoulder. "Ah, don't go," he said, strongly moved. "Let me 'tend to everything for you."

She sank back.

"No need for you to see him at all," said Chako. "Look, this will identify him to you. His ring."

Ann took it; a plain gold band. Inside were some initials and a date. A.B. to J.M.

“My mother’s initials,” murmured Ann. The tears began to fall. The horrible constriction in her breast was eased.

Chako’s face was tormented at the sight of her tears. “It’s all right!” he said harshly. “He died real comfortable, sitting there in his chair before the fire. He hadn’t been sick long, because everything is in A1 order, his hammock all fixed ready for him to turn in. He died July 23rd two years ago.”

“How do you know that?” Ann asked, surprised.

“There’s a calendar on the wall with the days marked off. I take it it was a cold night like last night, and so he fastened the door and sat there comfortably in front of a good fire, and just passed out. No man could ask for a better death. Don’t take on so!”

“I’m all right,” faltered Ann. “It’s just relief, knowing at last.”

“Look what was on the table!” Chako went on in a thrilled voice.

He had a coloured handkerchief in his hand. Opening it, a handful of shining yellow grains was revealed.

“The real stuff!” he murmured. “Must be a hundred dollars’ worth in just that little bit.”

Ann had no heart for gold.

“Take it,” said Chako; “it’s yours.”

“You keep it,” said Ann.

He thrust it in the pocket of his shirt. “It can go against what you owe me,” he said coolly.

He went on: “I’ll fix everything seemly and proper. I can’t make him a coffin of course, and the earth on these rocks is too thin to make a proper grave. I’ll tie him up in his hammock, and carry him to the top of the cliffs where he can look down the lake. We’ll heap a pile of stones over him, and put a cross on top. It’ll be a fine grave for a man. . . . You take a sleep on the pine needles while I’m fixing things. You need it.”

“Can’t I help?” said Ann.

“I’ll call you when I’m ready for you.”

The weary Ann thanked him with her eyes. She obediently went and lay down under the pines.

Some time later he called her. He had tidied himself as well as he could, and combed his bright hair. After all they had been through, the freshness of him was amazing. He had put on a great air of gravity, such as he thought suitable for the occasion. Ann, though her breast was softened and tremulous, was inclined to laugh at him. The dear, simple fellow! For

herself, she was unable to feel the usual feelings. She was just empty inside; immeasurably relieved that their journey was finished and the result known.

They went soberly up over the rocks back of the shack, up to the top of the cliffs, and through the pines. The spot Chako had chosen was immediately alongside the little stream where it plunged over into the lake. The body was already in place, and covered with stones. Chako waved his hand over the prospect; the green-blue lake like a peacock's breast, the heaven-mounting, bare heights full of just the lights and shades of beaver fur.

"He has a fine outlook," he said. "I hope I may get a grave like this. . . . It's fine to be buried alone and far off from people!"

Alone! Ann thought with a sad heart. She glanced at him through her lashes. Her thought was: I wouldn't care where my grave was if it was beside yours!

"Too bad we haven't got a prayer-book," said Chako. "We ought to have known we'd need it."

"Ah, what does he want with a prayer-book," murmured Ann, looking down at the shape vaguely outlined by the stones. "If he can see in our hearts he knows we wish him well."

"You're right, we do!" said Chako heartily. "But say a prayer anyhow," he added uneasily.

"Ah, no," said Ann. "I do not feel fit to pray for another, but only for myself!"

Even as she said it, the impulse to pray came to her, and she dropped to her knees and repeated the Lord's prayer. Chako stood with bowed, bared head.

"That's the dope!" he said quite innocently and devoutly. "By rights we ought to sing a hymn now."

"I don't know any by heart," said Ann. She was thinking that if he would sing one of his rollicking old songs with its strange undercurrent of wistfulness—so like life, so jolly, and so strangely sad—it would make a better requiem for this man than a hymn. But she was afraid the suggestion would shock Chako.

Chako picked up stones in the bed of the creek, and carried them to drop on the pile. "I only started this," he said. "I thought you'd like to help, out of respect, sort of."

"Surely," said Ann.

For a while they worked in silence; picking up the stones and dropping them; passing each other back and forth.

Ann, who deemed herself lacking in feeling, was surprised when Chako stopped short, stared at her a little wildly, and let his stones drop with a clatter. Suddenly she realized that the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

“You mustn’t! You mustn’t!” Chako said hoarsely. He indicated the cairn of stones with a passionate gesture. “*He’s* all right! No more tracking up the rapids for him; no more rain on the trail and cold grub and soaked blankets at the end of the day. His work is done. He’s gone home!”

“Ah, it isn’t that!” murmured Ann. “One wouldn’t regret a full life. But such a life! It’s so pitiful! Not to love anybody. Not to let himself be loved!”

“I wouldn’t call it a wasted life,” said Chako queerly.

She looked at him. He had forgotten himself. The absurd, boyish braggadocio had vanished. His eyes met hers squarely, and the man himself looked out. In his eyes Ann saw the deep and wistful passion that she knew belonged there. At that moment his face had an inner beauty that made his physical comeliness seem like nothing.

“What do you mean?” she stammered.

“Well . . . he got you,” said Chako.

Ann lowered her eyes. She could not bear his look. A quiet and tremulous joy stole into her breast. She thought: I was right. He *has* a soul.

No more was said. The spell passed. They started picking up stones again.

Soon they started back. Arriving at the little shack, they sat down on a broad, shelving rock at the lake’s edge, and tossed pebbles in the water. A heavy constraint sat upon them. Chako still wore his Sunday gravity.

“Joe was a good man,” he said heavily.

At his tone the shadow of a dimple appeared in Ann’s cheek. Whatever befell, Ann had to be natural. In her, laughter and tears were twins. She loved the shadow that represented father to her, but she had no illusions about him.

“How do you mean?” she asked.

“Well, he was square,” said Chako. “I never heard a man lay anything crooked or sharp or mean against him.”

“Did you know him well?” she asked.

“Nobody knew him well.”

“Did you ever have talk with him?”

“Once,” said Chako hesitatingly.

A dull red crept under his skin, and Ann’s curiosity was strongly aroused. “Tell me about it,” she said.

“It was nothing; not worth telling.”

Ann kept after him.

“You won’t like it.”

“Never mind.”

“It was four or five years ago,” said Chako. “I overtook him tracking up the Pony River with his winter’s catch. I offered to join in with him . . . but he wouldn’t.”

“What did he say?” Ann asked slyly.

Chako got red again. “He said . . . he told me . . . Oh, he declined,” he ended lamely.

Ann pictured the scene. Chako glanced at her uneasily, and saw her eyes brimming with laughter. His face cleared. They suddenly burst out laughing together, and felt enormously refreshed. But Chako was presently overtaken by remorse.

“I don’t mean him any disrespect,” he said heavily.

“Why be so solemn about it?” said Ann. “Why act as if we were at a stuffy funeral outside? Here, we ought to be natural, surely.”

“Gosh! it was a strain,” said Chako, grinning. “But I thought, being a woman, you’d expect it.”

“You’ve got a funny notion of women!” said Ann impatiently.

“What sort of notion should I have?”

“Not any sort of notion. Just treat us as human creatures like yourself.”

“Sometimes I treat you like a boy, and it makes you sore,” said Chako acutely.

Ann surrendered with a laugh. “Well, maybe it does!”

“So you see . . . !”

“Well, just act as if you liked me, and never mind my sex at all,” said Ann.

“You know I do,” said Chako, looking away.

“Most of the time you’re doing your best to hide it from me.”

“I know it,” said Chako softly. “I am a fool. Always getting in my own light.”

Ann called attention to the extraordinary colour of the water. She was obliged to change the subject. Her happy breast was lifted up so high it hurt her.

Ah! how happy she was! Chako with a great parade of unconsciousness, flung an arm around her shoulders as he had done before and drew her warmly into the hollow of his breast—that same spot that throbbed under his shirt when he paddled. Ann made believe to take no notice of the act, though this time she knew by the curious still poise of his head (she dared not look into his face) that it was *not* unconscious. They sat on, and Ann made believe to chatter on just as before, and could hardly find the breath to speak at all. And Chako, with his curiously brooding fair head, said never a word further.

Then they got hungry. Getting dinner was a sort of uproarious affair. It seemed as if the solemn occasion of the morning forced them to be uproarious in order to strike a balance. The scornful Chako, lighted up with laughter, was as attractive as Satan. How they ate!

After dinner Chako got restive. Ann was reminded that he was still the wild bird. Finally he said with a self-conscious air:

“Believe I’ll run off for a while.”

“All right,” said Ann quickly. “Where are you going?”

“Just down the shore to have a look at that sand.”

Ann experienced the same unaccountable sinking of the heart. She said nothing.

In her silence the queasy Chako found cause of offence. She could see the thought leap out of his eyes: Are you trying to tie strings on me already? He muttered sullenly: “You can see me from here.”

“Run along,” said Ann, lifting her chin. “I don’t want you hanging round here. Come back when you get hungry.”

## CHAPTER XIII

### YELLOW DUST

WHEN ANN had the mid-afternoon meal ready, she went to the water's edge and holloed for Chako. He came in excited, and for him, strangely talkative. There was an unwholesome glitter in his eye that filled Ann with a dull, grinding anxiety. He took no notice of what he ate.

"It's richer than I ever expected! I've already got a fat pinch of dust. The first gold I ever washed. Joe Grouser's outfit is there just where he dropped it; the shovel and pans and all. The pans are in bad shape but they'll last out our stay here. . . . A wonderful place! You must come down after. Only a small place; just about two claims I should say. One for you and one for me. You get the side your father's already worked. That's only fair of course. That's what you'd inherit from him."

Ann looked at him in quick astonishment and pain. Fair perhaps, but what a stab to a loving heart!

Chako never noticed her look. "A small place in extent," he went on, "but deep as the lake itself very likely. And probably richer the deeper you go. You strike water at two or three feet, but it would be simple to sink a crib, and keep her pumped out. That's for the future though. At present there's plenty on top.

"You see those mountains at that end are of a different formation from this big son-of-a-gun we climbed up. They're streaked, you see; the tops are reddish. The gold is in them. And those two streams, one on each side, wash it down to the lake. They've filled up that end of the lake with the stuff they've brought down. That's what makes the beach. You can actually see the yellow grains in the sand if you look close. Enough to set a man crazy. There must be gold washed down on the other side too. Some day I'll go look.

"We can stay here a week. I'm going to work my claim every minute of daylight. That'll give me enough to buy a bang-up outfit. I'll carry my dust right through to Vancouver so nobody will get on to it. . . . I'm coming right back this summer. I can make it before frost. That'll give me a whole month's start in the spring. I'll bring in a son-of-a-gun of an outfit. Enough to see me through to next spring a year. By that time I'll have a proper pile!"

"How about me?" murmured Ann.

His loud, confident speech was suddenly called in. He scowled at her through his lashes. It was only too clear that he suddenly found her damnably in his way. Ann lowered her eyes. She comprehended that a sort of struggle was going on in him. She would not stir to influence it. It was his struggle.

Finally he said grudgingly: "Of course you can come back with me if you want. I suppose you have a right to. But it would be hell on a woman. Eighteen months without seeing anybody. Two winters. You might get sick."

"I don't want to come back," Ann said quickly and softly.

His face cleared. "That's right!" he said with a sort of deceitful heartiness that made Ann a little sick. "It wouldn't work. You couldn't stand it. Anyhow our coming in together again would start talk. They might come nosing around. If this got out there would be hell to pay. Your Dad, he knew. . . . You just wait till I come out two years from now. I'll write to you. I'll find some way for you to work your claim."

Two years! thought Ann.

The moment he had finished eating he started back. He forgot that he had asked Ann to go with him. Ann had no desire to see those yellow sands. She hated the place without having seen it. Sand, that in a moment could destroy all that was fine in a man! She felt no resentment against Chako, but only against that which had corrupted him.

She sought to buoy up her spirits by telling herself this was but a temporary madness which had carried him off his feet. In a day or two he was bound to regain his balance. Surely it was not possible that a nature so sane and healthy should not be able to throw off this distemper. But reason as she might, her dreadful anxiety remained.

When he came back at dusk he was, if possible, more excited than before. He came in cursing the darkness that had interrupted his work. He was so full of it he had to talk, though he already looked upon Ann with suspicion. Chako was by nature a silent man, and it was painful to Ann to see him so lose himself in gusty talk.

"It's rich! rich!" he cried. "In six hours I've washed enough to pay for a summer's grub! That handful of dust I found on the table in there, I figure that was just Joe's takings the last day he worked. And I can beat that! Suppose he got in here the 15th June each year and worked till 1st September. Maybe he could stay in a little longer. But say seventy days at a hundred dollars a day, that's seven thousand for the summer!"

"Little enough for what he went through!" said Ann bitterly.

“Oh, you’re a woman,” said Chako contemptuously, “you don’t understand. A man would go through anything for a stake like that.”

“So it seems,” said Ann.

He did not hear her. “Seven thousand’s pretty damn good for seventy days’ work if you ask me,” he said loudly. “And all the rest of the year your own to bat around and spend it.”

“You said you hated cities,” murmured Ann.

“Oh, that was when I had a head on me,” he said with an empty laugh. “It’s different when you got money to spend. . . . But I’m not going to stop at a hundred a day. Why, in ten years Joe Grouser has scarcely scratched the surface with his trifling pans. I’ll bring in a saw and make a sluice. I’ll wash thousands for his hundreds!”

Suddenly Chako’s thoughts took a new turn. “By Gad! if he didn’t die until 23rd July he’d been here more than a month. There ought to be a tidy little sum in dust somewhere around the shack. Three thousand or more. All in a lump sum! By Gad . . . !”

In the quality of Ann’s silence he perceived something accusing, and pulled up. “Of course that’s yours,” he went on sullenly. He was silent for a moment, looking at Ann with eyes full of cupidity. He went on in a wheedling voice: “I suppose you’d divvy with me, wouldn’t you? I brought you here. You couldn’t have made it without me. It’s only fair. If I’d known there was anything like this I’d have stipulated it before starting.”

“You can have it all,” Ann murmured, sickened.

This angered him. “Oh, you think you’re very high and fine, don’t you?” he sneered. “Above money and all that. And I’m a low hound to mention it. You know you’re safe in offering it to me. You know I wouldn’t take it all.” He relapsed into a sullen silence.

But he could not maintain it. He soon recommenced building his glittering plans for the future. “I wonder if there’s a book that would tell you the latest wrinkles in placer mining. I wouldn’t dare ask any miner. If Joe Grouser could wash a hundred dollars a day in a pan, I ought to be able to take out thousands with a sluice and a few pounds of mercury. And of course I don’t know that his last day was a good day. Maybe some days he doubled that . . .” His thoughts flew off at another tangent. “You must be a pretty rich woman,” he said with a sharp glance at Ann.

“Do I look it?” she said with a wry smile.

“How much dust did Joe Grouser send out to you the last ten years?” Chako asked boldly.

“None,” said Ann.

“Huh! Expect me to believe that?”

Ann was silent.

“Then what did you come up here for?”

This hurt her to the quick. “Oh-h,” she breathed, “do you think it was for that I came?”

“Then what was it for?”

Ann shrugged helplessly. She said: “He said in his letters that he had found no gold. In the settlement they told me there was no gold up here.”

“Oh, Joe Grouser would be cute enough to keep it from them,” said Chako scornfully. “But he could sneak it out to you in parcels post packages.”

“Four times during the last few years he sent me fifty or a hundred dollars which he said he had left over after buying his year’s supplies. I supported myself by teaching a country school. Six hundred dollars a year they paid me. That was my riches.”

Something in her manner convinced him she was telling the truth. He stared at her across the fire. His face became livid with excitement, his voice husky. “By God! . . . If that’s true, do you realize what it means? It means that all the gold he washed here in ten or twelve years *is still here!*”

For a moment they remained staring at each other. Ann froze with horror at the insane light that blazed up in the man’s eyes.

“Chako! Chako!” she murmured imploringly, putting out a hand towards him.

He disregarded it. He was already on his feet. “Oh, God! if I had a lantern! . . . a lantern!” he cried wildly. He ran to the little shack and disappeared inside.

Ann sat where she was, bruised and apathetic. She thought: What’s the use! I can never control him now!

Hearing him come running out, she sharply turned her head. He had come for wood. He gathered up a store he had laid ready beside the fire, and ran into the shack again. Ann could not bring herself to approach that place. She watched. Presently by the light that sprang up inside, she knew he had built a fire to search by.

By and by he came out. Ann saw in a glance that he had found nothing. He had himself better in hand, but his voice was still strained with excitement.

“Of course the old fox wouldn’t leave it round in plain view,” he said. “I’ll find it to-morrow.”

Having put off his satisfaction until the morning, Chako instantly set about spreading his blankets. Ann knew that he would be asleep almost as soon as he lay down. She crept away under her tent.

She lay there too crushed to feel any active pain. But such was the weight on her breast it was hard to breathe. She was no longer tormented by maddening thoughts. She lay quiet enough. She said to herself: All that gold! It is mine, and he will never forgive me for it. It is over. He is lost. And so am I!

Sleep was out of the question for her. She rolled up one of the sides of her little tent and tied it. Sitting up with her arms clasped about her knees, she could see Chako a little way off, rolled up in his blanket a formless bundle by the fire, one shoulder sticking up. The pose suggested an utter callousness. She turned away her head. Not Chako, she thought; not the man she loved, but a wicked changeling.

She looked out over the lake. It was a moonlight night, but the moon did not rise high enough out of the south to look down into that deep bowl. The sky was a sea of grey light out of which a few pinpoint stars glimmered wanly. The moon was somewhere behind the great mountain up whose flanks they had climbed the day before; the vast, blunt summit was outlined against the pale sky, black as the shadow of doom. The peak at the other end of the lake, the gold peak, was bathed in a heavenly tender radiance. It was all too grand, too awful; what business had puny humans amid such surroundings? Down in the bottom of the bowl the lake slept in a black and awful stillness, through which the sound of falling water came like the rolling of a drum.

When she came out of her tent in the morning, Chako was already at work. He had unceremoniously pitched all of Joe Maury’s poor belongings outside the shack, and was grubbing about within. Ann set about making a fire as well as she could. Chako had never allowed her to do this before. After several attempts, she got it started, and prepared the breakfast.

When it was ready, she called Chako. He paid no attention. She sat down to eat alone.

Suddenly he came running out of the shack with his eyes blazing. There was a visible change for the worse in his face. The expression had become brutalized.

“Two hundred pounds of gold!” he cried.

To Ann it was like the cry of a madman. "Have you found it?" she asked with sinking heart.

"No," he said, "but that's the amount of it! Joe Grouser kept a tally. On the back of the door. He shaved the poles down to give himself a clean place to write on. So many ounces a day. Sometimes four, sometimes six, sometimes ten. It totals more than two hundred pounds. Now I *know* it's here!"

Ann's breast experienced a sort of jaded thrill. Two hundred pounds of gold was a lot. She had a momentary glimpse of what it would buy for one. But she could not get excited over it. She looked at Chako's changed face and hated the gold.

"You take it pretty cool," Chako said, with a hard glance of suspicion. "Maybe you already knew it was here."

Ann shrugged.

"Did you know it was here?" he demanded with an evil look.

"That's a foolish question!" Ann cried exasperated. "How could I expect to get it out of here without letting you know about it? Could I hide two hundred pounds in my clothes?"

Chako, however, was deaf to reason. He continued to glance at her darkly.

Having bolted some food, he jumped up and recommenced his search. Having exhausted the possibilities of the shack, he searched outside it, striding back and forth across the little clearing and under the trees, searching every inch of the ground for some evidence of its having been disturbed. He gave particular attention to the roots of every stump, loosening the earth around with his hunting knife, and scooping it out with his hands. To Ann, whose imagination had been so struck in the first place by his wild pride of bearing, it was inexpressibly painful to see him squatting, clawing at the earth, peering so meanly.

He was too excited, too impatient, there was no method in his search. He went here and there at random, covering the same ground over and over. Later it seemed to occur to him that he would never get anywhere this way; he went off to the diggings and presently returned with a shovel. With this he started to dig up the floor of the shack, throwing the earth outside with powerful strokes. The earth was packed very hard, and in his ill-considered impatience, he presently broke the handle of his precious implement off short. He flung it from him with bitter curses. Thereafter he had only his knife to loosen the earth with. He kept at it the greater part of the day, carefully carrying the earth outside on a square of canvas. In the afternoon

he went off to search the two paths; one climbing the broken rocks to the cliffs, the other running down the shore to the diggings.

Next morning Chako climbed to the top of the shack, and commenced jabbing his knife into the sods, going over it foot by foot. The consciousness of the futility of his occupation did not tend to make him any better tempered. From time to time he cast furious glances at Ann, daring her to ridicule him. Later he pushed all the sods off the roof, and flung down the poles. Finally he began to throw down the walls, tapping each log from end to end with the butt of his knife to make sure it was not hollow. He pushed over the chimney. By midday there was nothing left but a heap of ruins. Then, suddenly fearful that he had covered up the desired spot, he carried off all the debris to one side, and dug again.

The relentless passage of time drove him well-nigh frantic. By supertime he was almost tearful in his balked rage. His language did not spare Ann's ears. Ann did not mind that; did not mind anything in him that was rude and strong. It was cupidity and meanness that sickened her heart.

"The devil is in it!" cried Chako. "If Joe Grouser visited his cache every night to put away the day's takings, either it must have been inside his shack, or he must have made a path to it. That stands to reason. But I've levelled his shack to the ground and dug all around it. And I've searched every foot of the way alongside the only two paths there are!"

Ann said nothing. A hope was beginning to stir in her breast that he would not be able to find the gold. This was the end of the third day. In two days more they must start back or go hungry. She could not visualize the future at all. She had only a dim feeling that if she could get him away from that evil spot she might get him back again.

Chako seemed to read her thoughts. He cast a baleful look on her. "What have you got to say about it?" he snarled.

"I have nothing to say," murmured Ann.

"No, but you can look a whole lot! You've got a damned disagreeable look if you ask me!"

What could Ann do but press her lips together, though she knew it was her silences that most exasperated him.

"You're hoping I'll have to leave here without it!" Chako shouted accusingly.

The goaded Ann suddenly raised her eyes to his. "Yes, I am!" she said.

"I knew it! I knew you were against me! Sitting so quiet, and always working against me in your mind!"

“And if you want to know why,” cried Ann, raising her voice in turn, “it’s because it makes a beast of you! Worse than whisky!”

“Yah, you talk like a Sunday-School teacher!” he snarled. “You’re not human! You make me sick with your superiority.”

He walked away.

Not human! The old cry that hurt Ann worse than the commonest epithet he could have flung at her. He hated her because she could not descend to his present level.

She resolved never to let herself speak out again. It was too horrible to wrangle with him. When she did so she lost what influence she still had with him. He was a little afraid of her when she was silent. That was why he was always trying to provoke a quarrel. Hereafter whatever happened, whatever Chako might say to her, she would hold her tongue!

In the morning Chako was mum and black-browed. He wouldn’t come to eat until Ann had finished. He spoke but once, and that threateningly.

“Don’t you waste anything. We’ll need it.”

Afterwards he went off up the trail over the rocks.

When Ann had finished cleaning up she sat down on the shelving ledge at the edge of the water. She knew how bad idleness was for one in her situation, but she had exhausted all the possible small tasks around camp. She had nothing to busy her but her black thoughts. Not a ray of light ahead! To be quick-blooded and without hope is to be frantic; it is to be driven around in one’s head as in a revolving cage.

She sprang up at last. She could not stand it. Anything, anything to escape such thoughts! She must find something to do. Suppose she started looking for the gold, too. Where would one start looking? If she had been her father where would she have hidden it? Instantly the reply came: In a place so simple nobody would ever think of looking there. But that was all very well. The knotty question remained: How could he have visited his hiding-place every day without leaving a path to it?

She looked around her. The only visible path led from the spot where his door had been down to the edge of the flat rock where she had been sitting, then off to the left on its way to the diggings. The first few yards of it was more clearly marked than the rest. No doubt that was because he went down to get water off the edge of the rock, the natural place; Ann got water there herself. The rock overhung the water a little, and you could dip in easily. . . .

At this point in her reasoning Ann’s heart began to beat. *The rock overhung a little!* She went quickly down to the edge and looked over. The water was about two feet deep, clear as greenish glass, and with a shelving,

pebbly bottom. The water came up to within an inch or two of the rock, and ran back underneath. There was a space under there that she could not see into.

She looked guiltily around her. Chako was not in sight. She nervously rolled up her sleeve, and stretching herself out on the rock, thrust her arm into the icy water and reached back. Her hand met something smooth and hard; a surface of canvas. She felt about it; it revealed itself to the touch as a thick, squat bag, sitting firmly on the bottom of the lake. The top was not closed, but rolled back all around. She could put her hand right inside. She could feel the hard, smooth grains; a curious waxy feel they had. . . .

Ann rose up; squeezed the water off her arm; thoughtfully rolled down her sleeve, and buttoned the cuff. Her secret filled her with terror. What was she to do with it? She would have given anything now not to have known. Knowing forced upon her the agonizing necessity of deciding what was best to do.

Should she tell Chako, and let matters take their course? Ah! how tempting that was! To let things take their course! To drift! She was so tired of struggling. She played with the temptation for a while, but in spite of her, the firmer strain in her nature gradually crystallized.

Chako would only fling it away. She pictured all the terrible laborious years during which the gold had been stored up pinch by pinch, and it seemed wicked that it should be wasted without anybody being the better. Being the better! on the contrary there was gold enough in that bag to feed the evil in Chako till it consumed him body and soul. . . . Suppose she gave it to him freely, and he lowered his pride sufficiently to accept it. It would kill his pride—that wild pride which was his strength. And how he would hate her afterwards for having destroyed him. . . . On the other hand suppose she told him, and kept the gold for herself. In his present temper he was perfectly capable of killing her for it. Whichever way you looked at it, it was ruinous. Let it lie! Let it lie!

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE DISCOVERY

WHEN CHAKO came back to the camp-fire late that afternoon, even with his abounding health he showed traces of the fires that were ravaging him. His eyes were hollowed, and there were hard creases about his mouth. Without a look or a word in Ann's direction, he flung himself down on his back and threw an arm over his face.

Hard and savage though suffering made him appear, it *was*, nevertheless, suffering; his nostrils were pinched with pain. Ann's heart melted at the sight; he looked such a boy! Should she not tell him after all that the gold was within ten paces of him? How sweet it would be to see joy break in his haggard face! Surely joy would humanize him!

If he had looked at her that moment, it must surely all have come tumbling out, but he kept his eyes covered, and Ann's sterner self had time to rally. This is merely weakness, it said to her; you thought this all out when you were cool. You must stick to it, and not think any more. If you begin to wobble everything will be lost.

She looked at him no more, and kept on with her work.

Chako was discouraged, but not softened at all. He presently raised up to inquire harshly: "Haven't you got anything for me to eat? You've nothing else to do."

Ann's pride reared up—but she curbed it. Better to yield in little things for the sake of standing firm in the big one. "I'm getting it ready," she said quietly.

When he came to eat he said: "You've cooked too much."

"The usual amount," Ann said.

"We can't afford that now. Put part of it aside for the morning. You shouldn't need much, doing nothing all day."

Ann looked at him—and held her tongue. After all, this was merely childish. She helped him to his customary portion of rice and bacon, and took about half her share.

Chako sneered. "Doing the saintly and Christ-like now, eh?"

Ann was not yet subdued by pain. Her eyes flashed at him. By way of answer she took the rest of her portion from frying-pan and cooking-pot, and coolly ate it before him.

Chako said nothing at the moment, though his face was black with rage. When he rose he said: "If you gorge yourself now, you'll only have to go hungry later. I'm not going to leave here until I find what I'm looking for."

"You're mad!" said Ann.

"Sure," he said. "It's great to be crazy!"

"What good would it do you if you had not strength enough to carry it out?"

"Oh, finding it will give me plenty of strength," said Chako with the smile of one possessed. ". . . I'm going to take to-morrow off to hunt. There are ptarmigan on the mountain. I might get a shot at a goat."

Ann's heart went down sickeningly. All her hopes were set on the next morning but one. If their departure were delayed, where would she find the strength to go on with?

Chako went back up the rocks.

Having washed the dishes and put all in order, Ann sat down to her customary vigil on the flat rock. Though the sun had already gone down behind the mountain, it would not be dark for two hours yet. But already the deathly twilight stillness was settling on the lake. It was always still down in the bottom of that bowl, but the goodly sun had the effect of creating a pleasant bustle, and when he withdrew, like a beloved friend all too soon, that evil, freezing stillness immediately began to reach out its feelers. To Ann sitting there with her breast made tender by pain, it seemed as if the very trees turned into stone. In all created things the stubborn will to live seemed to faint at last. It was difficult to breathe such an air.

By and by Ann was greatly startled to hear a sound in the stillness; that is, a sound other than the drumming of the falls which was always there like an accompaniment to the stillness. It was the sound of dropping stones, and Chako must be making it. After a moment she succeeded in placing it. It came from the cliffs above the falls. As she listened Ann's very soul seemed to congeal with horror. The cairn they had raised together! Chako was throwing it down, stone by stone. His purpose was only too clear. In the clothes of the dreadful ruined thing that lay beneath, he hoped to find a clue to the gold.

Ann flung herself down on the rock, wreathing her arms about her head in an effort to shut out the sounds. She still heard them in her brain. It was too much to be borne. Jumping up, she paced the shore, still with her arms about her head. But whether she lay or whether she walked she could not escape the horror. How could he! How could he! How could she bear to see his hands again! Would he have the humanity to cover it up again, or must

she walk by that spot and see it? What good to turn her head away if she knew it was there! . . . Ah, how different from the Chako who had shielded her from the sight of the horror when they came! . . .

At this thought something broke inside her, and she wept. She crawled into her tent.

In the morning she was outwardly composed, but it was the last effort of self-control. Even Chako was made uneasy by her white and stony aspect. But he said nothing.

Ann finally said in a hurried, breathless voice as if the words were the last she expected to get out: "There is something I must ask you. I cannot bear not knowing."

"What's that?" asked Chako with an insolent stare.

Ann caught her breath. She pressed her hand against her lower lip to control its trembling. "Did you . . . did you cover the body up again?" she whispered.

Chako was not so completely invulnerable as he appeared. He started back as if she had struck him, and his tanned face turned yellowish. "Why . . . why, what the hell . . ." he began.

"Oh, there's no magic in it," Ann said hurriedly. "I could hear quite plainly what you were doing."

Chako looked away. "Yes, I covered him up," he muttered.

Ann turned her back on him.

She knew he had not done so. However, as soon as he had eaten he went off up the rocks with a nonchalant air that was plainly an assumption, and presently Ann could hear him piling back the stones. The tension in her breast was somewhat relieved. After all there was a spark of humanity in him, or he would not spend the moments that were so precious to him in doing this.

He went hunting. In the afternoon he returned to camp, empty-handed, discouraged, and savage as a starving dog. Ann, watching him warily, handed him his food in silence. There was one question though that she had to ask.

"There is only one day's rations left. Are we going to start back tomorrow?"

Chako was silent for a moment. His face was convulsed. "Yes," he muttered at last.

Ann was squatting on her heels across the fire from him, watching her last baking. She began to tremble all over. Clenching her hands and her

teeth, she fought it desperately, kneeling there in silence. For some seconds the result hung in the balance. Her throat was quivering hysterically, but she fought. She would have won too, had not Chako looked over at her sneeringly.

“What the hell’s the matter with you now?” he said. “You’ve got your way, haven’t you?”

That finished her. She flung herself down trying to stifle the wild sobs that tore her.

“O Christ!” said Chako. “Always bawling!” He savagely gulped his food.

Ann crept away to the water’s edge. After all it was from relief that she had broken down, and it was not long before she succeeded in controlling herself. She went back to the fire, shamed, softened, tremulous, her breast all warm. In such a mood she felt an imperative need of making friends with her companion.

“I’m sorry I was so silly,” she murmured. “I’ve been under a strain. I’ve taken a horror of this place . . . I can’t tell you. I felt that another day of it would drive me mad!”

“Pretty happy about going, aren’t you?” sneered Chako.

“Ah yes!” murmured Ann with a lifting breast.

It enraged him. He violently struck his fist on the ground. “Well, I’m not!” he cried. “It drives me wild to have to go without the stuff!” He flung down his empty plate and walked away.

Before Ann’s bread was finished baking, back he came. There was something brewing in his skull. He looked at her evilly. He sat down the better to see into her face.

“Don’t you think that gold is hidden somewhere about here?” he demanded.

Ann steeled herself for the ordeal she saw impending. “Why, I suppose so,” she said. “Since you found the tally.”

“Then how is it you’re so content to leave without it?”

“I told you the place has got on my nerves.”

“That don’t seem like much of an answer,” said Chako, boring her cruelly with his hard glance. “Not from a woman who says she’s only got six hundred a year to live on.”

“Well, it’s the truth.”

Chako grunted. He was silent for a moment, studying her. “What’s your notion of the kind of hiding-place he’d hit on?” he asked cunningly.

“I have no idea,” said Ann.

“Haven’t you been looking too, while I was away?”

“No, I left that to you.”

Chako sneered. “You must have thought about it.”

“Yes, I thought about it.”

“Well, what did you think?”

“I thought of many things,” said Ann. “Perhaps he had a hiding-place among the trees, and made a point of approaching it by a different route each time, so as not to leave a path. Perhaps he let the stuff accumulate for a week or a month before stowing it away. He may have died the day after making his last visit.”

“Not good enough,” muttered Chako. “I have looked under every tree.”

“Perhaps he had several hiding-places,” said Ann. “Or many.”

“Then he’d have to have a diagram, wouldn’t he? Or he’d forget where they were himself.”

There was another silence. These silences while he stared at her were more demoralizing to Ann than his questions.

“Are you coming back for it?” he asked suddenly.

This question threw Ann into confusion. Either answer was charged with danger. She needed time to think. She hesitated fatally. “No!” she said at last.

“Ha!” cried Chako. “That’s not human!”

“Well, you’ve accused me often enough of not being human,” retorted Ann.

“Don’t bandy words with me!” he cried roughly. “Nobody, man nor woman, would willingly turn their backs on all that gold! You’re lying!”

Ann sat still as a stone.

He leaned forward on hands and knees, sticking his face towards her across the fire. “Do you know where the gold is?”

“No,” said Ann, steadily meeting his crazed eyes.

“You lie!”

Ann held fast.

“You lie!” he repeated, beating the ground; working himself up. “I see it all now! You knew from the first that it was up here and where it was! You wouldn’t tell me before we started, because you thought I’d strike too hard a bargain! You thought as time passed you could work me the way you wanted! I know women! And when you found out I wasn’t the kind of man a

woman could work, you changed your mind. Now you want to get out as quick as possible, so you can find an easier man to your purpose!”

“This is nonsense!” murmured Ann.

He was deaf and frenzied. “Well, your tricks and your lies won’t do you any good!” he shouted. “We don’t leave this place till I get the gold!”

“Then we’ll starve.”

“No, we won’t starve either, because you’re going to tell me now!”

Ann sat silently calling on all her strength to meet the test.

“Yes, and you needn’t think you can sit there so quiet and pit your will against mine!” cried Chako. “What do I care about your will-power? What good is will-power to you, when I could break your back across my knee like a dry twig?”

“That wouldn’t do you any good,” said Ann.

“Then you *do* know! You *do* know!” he cried. “I’ll find a way to make you tell me! I won’t break your back. I’ll twist your arm between my two hands until it breaks! First one arm and then the other!”

Ann looked him in the eyes, and held out her arm.

The act took him aback for a moment. His eyes bolted. But a fresh access of rage made his face black. “By God! you can’t bluff me now!” he cried. And seized her arm.

Ann, keeping her eyes steadily fixed on his, saw that she could not stop him. She was not afraid of the pain. After the mental torture of the past few days, physical pain seemed bearable. There was even a dark sort of pleasure in the thought of being hurt by him. What she could not bear was to see Chako so debase himself. She could not bear to see the bestial look that must appear in his eyes were she forced to cry out in pain. She made her decision.

“The gold is in the water under the edge of the rock yonder,” she said. Her voice was oddly indifferent. The die was cast. What mattered anything now?

“Ha! I thought that would fetch you!” cried Chako with a roar of hateful laughter.

Ann bent a strange look on him. He would never understand! “I didn’t find it until yesterday,” she said.

He paid no attention. He was already at the edge of the rock. Flinging himself down, he reached under it. His head was turned sideways, and on his face was an intense, withdrawn look as if all the forces of his being were held in suspense. When his hand met the bag underneath, all the tense lines

broke up into a look of pure, devilish joy. Ann sat where he had left her, watching him.

All booted as he was, he forthwith leaped into the water, and reaching under the rock with both hands, dragged the bag out. While it was under water it was not hard to move, but it required all the strength of his back and arms to lift it clear. He got a knee under it, and hoisted it. As it thudded down on the rock, the old canvas split asunder, and a gorgeous yellow flood poured out on the rock.

With an inhuman cry Chako sprang out of the water, and knelt beside it. His eyes were daft with joy. He dug his fingers into the gold and let it slide through. He poured it from hand to hand. He pounced on a lump here and there, only to drop it, as a bigger lump caught his eye. Ann looked away, sickened by the sight. What hope now? she thought.

“Ah, the pretty! the pretty!” Chako was muttering, quite beside himself. “Like a woman’s hair, like sunshine, like old wine! The brightest stuff in all the world! . . . And plenty of it! plenty of it! A glut of gold! Enough to waste. . . .

“By God! when I change this I’ll make myself felt! Not Fort Edward, the lousy little settlement, but Vancouver for me, Winnipeg, New York! I’ll show those castrated Easterners how a man spends his money! I’ll *buy* their tin-horn cities! God! what a drunk I’ll go on. I’ll never stop now. I’ll die drunk!”

This was more than Ann could bear. Though her life depended on keeping silent, she had to speak.

“It happens to be mine!” she said.

Chako cast a poisonous look on her, and fell suddenly silent.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE START HOME

THE hostile travellers could not escape each other. They had to go on together in their bitter hostility; sharing their packs, dividing the work of each camping-place, eating together, and sleeping within sight of each other. They exchanged no speech of any sort except what could not be avoided. They did not quarrel any more; their hostility was too deep. Twice during the first night Ann, in her bed off to one side, awoke to see Chako sitting up by the fire with his eyes fixed on her sombrely; not as a man looks at a woman, but as he looks at his enemy. Ann thought: He hates me so much it wakes him out of his sleep! Such looks did not grieve her any more. She had got beyond that, too. In every nerve she was braced to fight the danger that threatened her.

Now that Chako had the gold in his possession, his frenzy had subsided. To one of his simple nature possession was the main thing. He never let it out of his sight; he slept with an arm thrown over it. His violence gave place to a hard, secret watchfulness; during every waking moment Ann was conscious of being watched. The unnatural situation was cruelly hard on one of her quick nature. Though she knew herself to be in the right, hour by hour she could feel her strength and courage abrading by contact with Chako's flinty surface.

That same night they made all their preparations to start back. They had nothing out of which to make bags for the gold except Ann's little tent. Ann, seeing Chako's covetous eyes upon it, made haste to offer it to him before he should take it anyway. After all, the mosquitoes were over for the season, and the tent afforded her no other protection. Ann had come down to basic things. She really preferred to sleep in the open, where she could better see what Chako was about. Chako cut squares out of the light, strong material in which he tied up portions of the gold, and two larger bags to contain the smaller ones.

By daybreak they were on the trail. Having eaten all their food, they had little to carry out of the valley, save their blankets and the gold. But that was load enough. Two laborious trips were required in order to get it all up to the top of the ridge.

From that point Chako insisted on pushing on with their entire load at once. The gold was divided roughly into four parts, of which Ann took one and Chako the other three. It was a crushing weight even for one of his

physique, nevertheless he shouldered it doggedly. Ann's burden was almost as heavy for her, but she started down the other side of the mountain with a thankful heart. Whatever might be before her could not be worse than what she had suffered in that hole in the earth. And now they were headed for a peopled and friendly land.

Chako, bowed under that killing weight, went sideways down the steep track, balancing himself with one hand against the stones behind him. The expression of his face was agonized; every few steps he was compelled to rest; but he never staggered or fell. Down through the forest of little sticks they went, and into the big timber, where Chako led the way steady-footed across the great fallen logs, and around the treacherous holes. There was something magnificent in his determination.

The distance was perhaps eight miles in a straight line. They were eighteen hours on the way. When they arrived at the hut by the river Chako was completely done. He could only lie inert on the floor. He refused food. Even so his thought was all of the gold. He got what Ann had carried, and putting it with his, kept it all beside him.

The next day Chako was unable to travel, and so after all, his feat of endurance gained them nothing in time.

He sat on the river bank in the sun recuperating his strength. He had now put all the little bags of gold into the stout canvas bag in which he had formerly kept his spare clothes. He had this bag beside him, and he amused himself taking out the small bags, counting them, weighing them on his hand, opening one at a time, spreading out the contents on the ground, and lovingly ruffling the grains with his palm. Then he'd tie up the square of silk with the greatest care, put it away, and take another.

To Ann, watching him from a little distance with dark eyes, it was a dreadful sight. To see him there in his youth and strength so *besotted*! It was old men who went crazy about gold. He was so infatuated he was beyond shame; he didn't care that she was watching him. Seeing him fondle the gold, Ann conceived a breathless hatred of the stuff. It was that which had taken him from her; which had destroyed his manhood.

Yet she could not drag her eyes away. Even now she was unable to despise him. He was still beautiful in her sight, and unspeakably dear to her heart. To-day he had knocked off work; relaxed and softened by fatigue, he looked boyish again; he was smiling. But all his smiles and soft looks were directed towards the gold—those soft looks which had been hers for a few moments. He was smiling at the gold as if he shared a secret with it. She

could not bear it. It was foul and unnatural that gold should so bewitch a young man. She abruptly got up, and walked away along the river bank.

Walking up and down out of his sight, she tormented herself. How insane it was to be jealous of a *thing*! She must get the better of it. Ah, but how unspeakably humiliating it was to be cast aside for a thing, a bag of earthy stuff! She, Ann, was the fit one for Chako; her heart told her so. She could have helped him find himself. She knew she was not the sort of woman that got her hooks into a man—to use Chako’s own phrase. She could have loved him, and exacted no price. She would have had him love her freely or not at all. And now the gold had him fast; had him by his basest feelings.

Chako called her and she went drearily back. “What is it?” she asked.

“Nothing, only I was lonesome,” he said with a grin.

Here was a change of mood! Ann glanced at him astonished, and sat down without a word.

Chako talked carelessly about this and that. He put away the little bags, and twisting a line about the neck of the big bag, tied it elaborately. He fell silent, and pulling out his pipe, filled it reflectively. Chako did not often condescend to think, and when he did the process was visible. Ann wondered apprehensively what was coming. The slightest alteration in his temper concerned her so vitally! She caught him glancing at her with a wary, speculative eye.

She went and got some mending to help keep her in countenance. Time passed. It was a peaceful scene, but Ann’s breast was filled with a great disquiet. Finally meal time approached, and she started clumsily to make a fire.

Chako immediately hobbled over to her. “That’s my job,” he said.

Ann looked at him startled. Days had passed since he had last shown any disposition to lighten her tasks. He was grinning at her now in a friendly fashion, but his eyes did not share in it; they were still sizing her up coolly. Ann was not reassured. She drew back, and let him make the fire.

“This poplar’s no good to start a fire with,” he said, tossing it away. “You want dry pine. In this kind of country there’s always plenty of tinder handy. See those little spines that stick out of the pine trunks.”

He gathered a handful of the twigs as he spoke. Ann watched him in a scared way. It was very uncharacteristic of Chako to make talk in this pleasant manner. After the last few days it was astounding. Ann could not imagine what was brewing. A nature so wild and unreasoning as Chako’s gave you no line to go on.

“Different kinds of wood are like different natures of men,” he went on, kneeling to his task. “Poplar burns slow and sulky with a spicy smell and plenty of smoke. Damn little good except to keep off mosquitoes. Pine burns quick and hot; burns down to a fine ash. Hard wood, only there isn’t any in this country, hard wood catches slow, and burns steady and clear. A hard wood log will burn up by itself, while pine needs two or three sticks for company.”

When the fire was well started, Ann came forward to prepare the meal.

“Go ’way and sit down,” said Chako. “I bet you’re just as tired as me, anyway. I’ll be cook to-day.”

There was a silky tone in his voice that Ann had never heard before. Whatever his faults, Chako had always been open. He was not open now. His eyes were veiled and watchful. A sort of despair filled Ann. What does he want of me? she thought.

Chako had suddenly discovered a great store of conversation. “I see you’ve got beans in soak. We’ll let ’em cook all afternoon and to-night they’ll be prime. Nothing like beans to stick to the ribs. But travelling like us, you don’t have time to cook them right. . . . Once when I was on the Spirit River below the canyon, I met an old Sour-dough floating downstream on a little raft. A wee raft, made of four dead logs lashed together, and him sitting in the middle of it on his bag of flour, looking at the scenery while the eddies waltzed him slowly round. Well, at his feet on the raft he’d made a little platform of flat stones with a thick layer of dried mud on top, and on the mud he’d made a little fire. There he had his pot with the beans dancing in it. That’s the only case of a man cooking beans while he travelled that I ever heard of.”

When the invariable bacon and rice were ready, Chako filled Ann’s plate hospitably, and throughout the meal attended to her wants. How happy it would have made her could she have been deceived! But his method was too crude. It insulted her intelligence. When they had finished eating, Chako sent her from the fire. She resumed her mending of the old silk shirt that had suffered on the strenuous trip over the mountains.

When Chako had cleaned up after a man’s fashion, he came and flung himself down beside her, supporting his head on one hand, and smiling up at her. It was the old smile of charming mockery, but with a difference. It had an ulterior purpose now: his cold eyes betrayed it. Nevertheless Ann trembled with happiness at his mere nearness. His careless attitudes were so full of grace; the smile, though it might be false, was irresistible! Ann’s

tempter whispered: What difference does it make what he is; good or bad he is your fate!

“’Member the last time I stretched out beside you?” Chako said lazily. “You were sewing then, too. You stuck me with your needle when I got fresh.”

Ann could not call up a smile at the recollection.

Chako raised himself higher. The arm that supported him was warm against Ann’s back. He rubbed his cheek against her shoulder. Ann, dizzy from her racing blood, thought with a sort of despair: He knows by instinct that he can do what he likes with me! What’s the use of fighting him? She sewed on with nervous quickness.

“How fast your fingers fly!” Chako softly drawled. “Looks so comical to see my little man sewing for dear life! I won’t know you when you put on skirts again. I’ll be sorry. You’re such a cocky little chap in your breeches and boots!”

Ann gave no sign.

He was piqued by his failure to draw her. “Haven’t you got a word to throw me?” he grumbled.

“What is there to say?” murmured Ann very low.

“Just like a woman!” he said sorely. “Bound to hold things against a man until Kingdom come. Got to store up every little thing until it spoils! . . . Can’t you let what’s past be past? Can’t we make a fresh start?”

“We could if you were sorry for what is past,” murmured Ann.

“Ahh! I suppose you want me to crawl and eat dirt!”

“I don’t care whether you *tell* me you’re sorry or not. I just want you to *be* sorry.”

“I am sorry,” said Chako readily.

Ann smiled bitterly to herself. When Chako was really sorry how differently from this he acted! His hang-dog look confessed it, but the rack wouldn’t drag any admission from him.

“You’ll see whether I’m sorry or not,” he went on. “I wouldn’t be talking to you this way if I wasn’t sorry, would I? I want to get things settled up.”

Ann looked at him sharply: “What do you mean?”

“Well, we got to think about the future, haven’t we? We got to talk things over.”

“I couldn’t talk about it,” Ann said swiftly. “You can have whatever you want.”

He scowled. “Ahh! I wasn’t talking about the stuff.”

“What did you mean then?” she demanded.

Chako darted a hard look at her. His deep voice purred. “Well, when you and I get out to Fort Edward, we’re going to get spliced, aren’t we? Married?”

Ann stared at him in horror. So *that* was it!

Under that wide-eyed stare, Chako’s bold glance trailed off across the river. There was a hardy swagger in his manner. His arm crept around Ann. That was what he trusted to!

Ann shook it off with a violent shudder. She scrambled to her feet, and turning, stared at him, still unable to speak.

“It’s all right, isn’t it?” said Chako, scowling.

“No! No! No!” she whispered brokenly. “You don’t want *me!*”

She ran away out of sight along the river bank. Chako made no attempt to follow.

Well out of sight of their camp, she dropped down on the edge of the bank, and letting her feet hang over, stared and stared at the flowing brown water without ever seeing it. Within her the old, mad whirligig seized her in its grip; she was flung back and forth like the water of the Ouananeca River between the canyon walls.

I am a fool! A woman as far gone as I am can’t make conditions. I should take him and be thankful! . . .

He wants the gold, not you. . . .

I’ll take him anyhow. I’ll make him want me afterwards. . . .

He wants the gold. . . .

I don’t care! I’ll marry him and make a stand against his evil nature. I’ll save him from himself. . . .

Folly! Folly! To accept so contemptuous an offer would destroy your pride. He would despise you for marrying him, and rightly so. You could do nothing with him. It would mean a lifelong wretchedness. . . .

What of it? It’s my fate. Useless to struggle against it. I can’t change him. He’s too strong for me. If I lose him what sort of a life would I have? The worst he could do to me wouldn’t be so bad as that! . . .

No! No! A lifetime of wretchedness. And your pride would be gone. You wouldn’t even have pride to help you bear your life. . . .

So it went. There is no end to such a discussion.

When Ann returned to their camp, Chako lay sleeping in the exact spot where she had left him. This was another knife-thrust in her breast. It was so little to him that her heart was breaking! He was so sure he'd get what he wanted, he could sleep while he waited for it!

Ann felt that she had come to the end of her string. For the moment there was no more fight in her. She, too, lay down on the pine needles a dozen feet or so from Chako, and gave herself up to the pleasure of looking at him. At least while he was asleep she didn't have to fight him, she told herself.

His hat had rolled off, and his bright hair was as touselled as a school-boy's. There was no evil in his sleeping face; it was as calm as a boy's, the corners of the lips a little turned up ready to smile. But his bare, tanned throat was not like a boy's; there was a man's strength and beauty in the turn of it, which bewitched the gazer. She gazed without thinking how the sight undermined all her forces.

She gave herself up to delicious, weakening make-believe. Suppose he were as good as he seemed at this moment. Suppose he loved her truly. Suppose their hearts were open to each other, she could wake him now with a kiss. They could be everything to each other; angels and devils too, for that matter. What a golden journey would then lie before them! If only he were kind!

While she lay dreaming, Chako opened his eyes. He smiled at her. "Hello, kid!" he murmured.

Ann smiled back—how could she help it? Her whole heart went with her smile.

In a flash Chako had rolled over, and was scrambling towards her on hands and knees. As Ann rose, he flung an arm around her. The watchful light was still in his eyes, but now there was a film over Ann's sight that prevented her from seeing it.

"It's all right, kid, isn't it?" he asked softly. "Say you will!"

Ann's arms stole around his neck. "I love you so! I love you so!" she murmured. "Ah, be good to me, for I cannot help myself. I love you so!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE PROPOSED BARGAIN

As long as they stayed in Joe Maury's winter camp, Ann occupied the shack at night, and Chako slept outside. There was nothing in the way of a bed or a hammock for her, but the earth floor was no harder than the earth outside, on which she had slept for many a night now, and it was a comfort to sleep within walls, rude as they were. They shut out the presences of a vast stillness.

She awakened with a painful foreboding on her breast. Her love was not destined to be a happy one. Half the night she had by turn been railing at her own weakness in giving in to Chako, and trying to find justification for it. She told herself he must be good at heart, for she had seen it once, and that it was only his stubbornness that forced him to appear worse than he was. But she did not really believe this; better sense told her that the most one could say for Chako was that the evil and the good were about equal in his nature and one had as good a chance as the other of prevailing in the end. This being so, had she not when she consented to marry him, given the evil side of him an ascendancy which the good would never be able to recover? For it was certainly the worst in Chako which had asked her to marry him; it was cupidity and cunning and hypocrisy. That was the side she had thrown in her lot with!

Such were the dreadful thoughts that lay with Ann on her hard bed. But being human and young, she could not altogether give up hope. Surely things could not be as bad as all that. It was hope which enabled her to sleep at last.

Now, in the morning, it seemed to her as if everything depended on the way in which he would first look at her. His first glance must be unconscious; in it he was bound to reveal the true state of his feelings; in it she would read her fate. She dwelt on this thought for so long that when she was finally ready to go out, she could not bring her trembling hand to open the door. Suppose he looked at her with dislike or contempt! She paced the little shack all but wringing her hands. But the door must be opened at last. Finally with her heart in her mouth she stepped out.

Chako was kneeling beside the fire with his back to her. He did not look around, though he must have heard the door open. Ann was obliged to speak.

“Good morning.”

He flung a careless glance over his shoulder. “Morning.”

This hurt but it was not conclusive, for it was Chako’s ordinary manner. She wanted to find out for sure. She went up to him slowly, dreadfully conscious that there was something cringing in her manner, and dropped to her knees beside him. He was placing sticks on the fire with the intense concentration he devoted to every task, however small.

“Chako,” she whispered.

“I’ve got a good fire for you,” he said, without turning his head. “You get the breakfast while I roll up the beds and pack everything.”

“Chako,” she whispered, “have you forgotten last night?”

He looked at her in simple surprise. “Why no,” he said. “We’re engaged, aren’t we? Everything’s all right. . . . You don’t want to back out, do you?”

“No,” she murmured.

Taking her answer for granted, he was already on his feet, and away towards the canoe. Ann lowered her head to hide the hot tears that dropped on the ground—tears of bitterest mortification. You let yourself in for this! she told herself.

The worst of it was, Chako was in an entirely good humour. Surliness would have been easier for her to forgive. His head was full of nothing in the world but the details of their forthcoming trip.

“What bothers me,” he said, surveying their baggage, “is that we’ve got just a little too much for two trips around the canyon, and not enough for three.”

You are a fool! Ann said to herself, and tried to meet him on his own matter-of-fact level. “You must not over-exert yourself again,” she said.

“Oh, the portage round the canyon’s on an easy grade,” said Chako confidently. “Besides, it’s not so far.”

After a hasty breakfast, he loaded the canoe. The bag of gold was his main concern, of course. As the landing in front of their camp was shelving, he was obliged to wade into the water in order to place the bag in the centre of the canoe. It was no child’s play to shoulder that weight, and lower it into the frail craft without dropping it through the bottom. A great woof of relief escaped Chako when he accomplished it.

“Thank God! I won’t have to move him again till we unload at the canyon,” he said.

He settled the bag into place with affectionate hands. “Fat little beggar!” he said. “Do you know, sometimes I can’t believe he’s real! I wake up in the

morning and think it's all a dream, until I see it there beside me, and get my hands on it!" He stroked the canvas sides. "I believe a man could tell what was inside this just by the feel!" he said dreamily. "There's magic in it!"

Hot little flames sprang in Ann's breast, and crept up till they scorched her throat and the base of her tongue. She turned away sick with hatred of the thing that stole his kind looks and caresses from her.

They pushed off, Ann with a long look at the little shack where she had lain happy for three nights and wretched for two. They left it as they had found it, with the bar in place. With its window, its door and its chimney, it looked out on the river as with a grotesque, lop-sided face, one ear pricked. They passed around a bend, and left it for ever in its strange isolation.

They went along with the current at a good rate, but Chako's impatience would not be satisfied. As in most streams of this sort, each rapid in its path formed a sort of dam, and backed up the water behind it. Consequently their swift, brief descents alternated with long reaches of sluggish water, at which Chako continually grumbled. He busied himself with calculations of the distance they had to cover.

"I want to get to the canyon to-morrow night," he said, "so we can sleep on this side, and give a whole day to carrying our stuff across. Otherwise we'd have to sleep on one side while the gold was on the other."

"What harm could come to it?" asked Ann between stiff and bitter lips. Chako could not see her face.

"Why none, I suppose," he said with a deprecating laugh, "but I couldn't sleep easy unless I had it beside me."

The river never changed in character. It flowed smoothly between its low banks, which were covered with millions of invariable pine trees; the pines covered the whole valley as thick as hair. No part of the valley had ever been burned over; before themselves so far as was known, there had never been but one creature there who used fire. The water was falling, and the strip of mud left bare under the banks was mantling itself with tender green grass. Chako measured their progress by their camping-places on the way up.

They went ashore for their first spell at one of these former camping-places. When they landed, Ann's eyes were free again to fly to Chako's face. She struggled in vain against the attraction. Hour by hour she had been aware of a progressive demoralization in herself, but she could not help it. Her will was like water. She was conscious only of a great ache.

When they had finished eating, and sat a while to rest as was customary, she could stand it no longer. Were they not "engaged" as Chako said; had she not some rights? She frankly moved close to Chako's side. He was

smoking. Slipping her hand under his arm, she dropped her cheek on his shoulder.

Chako wriggled impatiently. "Aw . . . don't," he muttered.

Ann quickly dropped his arm. "Why?" she asked in a scarcely audible voice.

"I don't feel like it."

"Yesterday . . ."

"That was different. Yesterday I was laying off and resting. Didn't have anything on my mind. To-day we're travelling."

Ann's pride suddenly failed her altogether. Clinging to Chako, she lifted her face to him, exposing all her misery. "Chako . . . Chako," she stammered, "you must not treat me so! You must not shut yourself away from me or it will kill me!"

Chako's face turned black. "I won't be made to do a thing if I don't feel like it!" he said. "It only makes me stubborn! Cut it out!"

He shook her off, and got up and walked away.

Ann lay on the ground with her face covered, wondering why she did not die.

Presently she heard him coming back, and sprang up mad with eagerness. Her pride was in ruins. His face was an extraordinary study; exasperation, stubbornness and cunning struggled there.

"Ahh," he muttered as if he hated himself for saying it, "I shouldn't have spoken to you the way I did. . . . I'm sorry, Kid."

He dropped beside her. Ann silently flung her arms around him, and hid her face in his breast. Chako said no more, but held her, and clumsily patted her shoulder. She dared not look up. She knew what was in his face. She clung to him, because she could not help herself, but she knew she had not won anything. However, she had a few moments of exhausted peace.

Chako said, "Come on, let's go now."

As soon as they were afloat Ann's torments recommenced. She thought: He didn't want to come back to me. He only forced himself to, because he was afraid of driving me too far. And that would interfere with his plans.

Hour after hour, as they paddled, she was forced to dwell with such thoughts. But in the very depths of her humiliation she found a slender foothold for her pride, a beginning-place. Whatever might be in store for her, that particular kind of scene should not be repeated. She had learned a lesson. She knew for a certainty that she would die before ever she asked Chako for kindness.

In mid-afternoon they spelled again. Chako regarded Ann uneasily. She kept her eyes to herself, and set about the cooking. As they had cut short their usual rest after the last spell, they were both tired, and after eating they prepared to make up the lost rest before going on the water again.

Ann threw herself down on the opposite side of the fire from Chako, and managed for the most part not to look at him. She could not but be aware though, that he was in, for him, an unusually thoughtful frame of mind. It was evident too, that she was the subject of his thoughts, for he kept glancing at her covertly. Chako was but a clumsy plotter. These looks filled Ann with disquiet. What was he up to now? The mere fact that he did not go to sleep was significant.

After a while he got into the canoe, and began rummaging through their slender belongings.

“What are you looking for?” Ann asked.

“Nothing,” he said evasively.

He untied the bag of gold, and took out several of the smaller bags. Ann could not bear to see him at this game again. She got up and went away out of sight.

When she returned Chako had put away the gold and tied up the bag. He was stretched out on the ground on his stomach, with a little square of the pale green silk spread out on a paddle-blade before him, and he was writing on it with the stub of a pencil. Ann was astonished. *Writing!* What reason could he have for writing in their situation? To whom but herself could he be writing? Why should he write to her? Ann’s sore and jealous heart burned up with curiosity, but she would not ask.

Chako, seeing her eyes upon him, folded up the piece of silk and slipped it in his shirt pocket with a highly self-conscious air.

After their final meal at sundown, there was always a period of relaxation by the fire. It is the best moment of the day when there is amity in camp. On this night Chako sat with his back against a tree, smoking, while Ann, across the fire, nursed her knees, and kept her head down in attitude as still as the evening. She had weakened again. Slow drops of pain were being forced from her heart.

Surely now with their day’s work behind them, now in the still and lonely evening under the red sky, he must soften a little towards her, he must speak! She would not be guilty of the final weakness; she clutched the rags of her pride desperately around her; *she* would not speak. But what if he presently got up with an indifferent yawn and turned away to his blankets, how could she bear it?

But he did speak. He said in a rough, cajoling tone: "Come over here, Kid."

She got up and went slowly, intolerably shamed, her head hanging. He did not want her, and she knew it. He was just cajoling her. His look was not open.

He patted the ground beside him, and she dropped down. He flung an arm around her. "That's better, isn't it?" he said. "That's comfy."

Ann could scarcely draw breath, such was the pain. She put her hand up and clung like a drowning woman to the hand that came around her shoulder. Surely he must feel through the nerves of her hand what she suffered, and relent. Apparently he did feel it, for he uneasily pulled his hand from under hers. He made believe this was to give him freedom to pat Ann's shoulder. How she hated that patting; a hypocritical gesture!

Chako said with a consciously reasonable air, not unmixed with jocosity: "We got to take some thought about our future, Kid. This getting married is no joke. I've seen marriages. Lord! the two of them pulling in different directions like half-broke dogs in sledge harness. We don't want to be like that, do we?"

"No," whispered Ann.

"I reckon there's got to be a head to every house," he went on. "I aim to be the head of my house. I couldn't stand for anything else. Are you willing?"

"Yes."

"That's fine! Now this business of the . . . you know . . . the stuff we got. (Chako was as shy as a lover of naming his treasure.) That's bound to make trouble between us unless we settle it beforehand. Isn't that right?"

"I suppose so."

"So I made out a little paper fixing it all up between us. At least it isn't a paper, for there wasn't any in the outfit, but it's the same thing."

This was the writing!

Taking his arm from around her, Chako produced the piece of silk from his pocket, and, spreading it open, held it up for Ann to read.

"This is for you to sign," he said.

Ann read: "I hereby give to my husband, George E. Lyllac, all the gold we found on the property of my father, Joseph Maury."

Within her Ann heard wild, cruel laughter and a deriding voice: Of course! Of course! Just what was to be expected! You fool, not to have guessed it!

Chako sprang up, leaving Ann sitting a little crumpled. Full of confidence, he got a paddle from the canoe, laid it across her knees, and smoothed the piece of silk upon it.

“Sign there,” he said, pointing.

Ann took the stubby pencil he offered her, and put her hand to the place. Chako’s sparkling eyes were fixed on her hand. But it did not write. It rested motionless for so long that he looked sharply in her face. Ann’s face was stupid with internal conflict.

“What’s the matter?” demanded Chako.

Ann dropped the pencil. “I cannot!” she whispered. “Not that. . . .”

Chako was instantly enraged. “Why not?”

“A sordid bargain,” she whispered.

“Sure it’s a bargain!” he cried. “I put in the word husband to bind myself. If I don’t marry you it doesn’t hold.”

“Oh, I understand that.”

“Then sign!” he said, offering the pencil again.

With a nervous gesture Ann pushed the paddle away. Chako retrieved the fluttering piece of silk. Ann got to her feet and essayed to walk away with firmness, but her legs gave way under her and down she went without a sound. She lay still with her head between her arms. She had not fainted. No such mercy was vouchsafed her. She was fully conscious of her pain. No cries, no tears came to ease her breast.

Chako, a little alarmed by her stillness, cried harshly: “What’s the matter with you? This is only play-acting! Can’t you act like a reasonable woman?”

She did not answer him, and he bent down to turn her over.

“Don’t touch me!” Ann whispered sharply. “I’ll be all right in a moment.”

Chako cried in his rage: “What do you think I am? Do you think I’m going to tie myself up to a woman who holds the purse, and makes me jump through hoops to get a dollar? Not on your life! I’m not getting married for nothing! Marriage is a sacrifice to a man like me. If I’ve got to shut myself up in a house I’m going to be the boss of that house. No woman is going to tell me how much I can spend for my own good!”

“Oh, don’t. . . .” murmured Ann. “I know all this.”

“Then sign!” he shouted.

“I’d sooner die!”

Chako abandoned himself to rage. “Oh, I know the kind of woman you are!” he shouted. “I’ve seen it from the first! It’s rule or ruin with you! You want a man well-broke, don’t you? A kitchen-man! A lackey! You want to keep your hands on your money, and your foot on my neck! Well, not for me! Not for me! *No, thanks!*”

There was much more of this. Under the storm of Chako’s rage Ann came out of her daze. She finally sat up, oddly composed. Her glance was far away. She had recovered her human dignity. The storm continued to beat about her ears, but it seemed remote. She knew so well the sort of thing Chako would say, she didn’t have to listen. Besides, it didn’t matter. She thought: It’s all over. You’ve been through hell and somehow climbed out the other side. Nothing can touch you now!

She got up and went for her blanket roll. She walked steadily now. Her self-possession infuriated Chako. He planted himself in her path.

“Do you think I’ll marry you now?” he shouted.

“No,” said Ann.

She walked around him, and laid her blankets down a little way off. Chako stared after her, speechless with rage.

Ann, lying wrapped in her blankets, gazing up at the stars, felt a sort of weary peace after her stormy days. She had lost him for good now. She had no illusions about that. But the thing was *decided*. No more reason to torment herself. She stared wide-eyed and unafraid down the grey and ashy vista of the future. All right; she still had her little spring of comfort. In the final trial she had somehow found the strength to stand fast. She had been true to herself. Thus she had escaped the very worst thing in life.

She slept.

## CHAPTER XVII

### FACE TO FACE

**I**N the morning it was clear that Chako had not slept much. He had had rage for his bed-fellow, and she had left the marks of her claws. Ann saw his face as it would appear when Time had permanently smudged its youthful brilliancy, the eyes a little sunken, and ugly lines between nose and mouth. His eyes had the same look of balked fury that they had shown while he was engaged on his fruitless hunt for the gold; with this difference, that now he had an object to vent his fury on, and that was Ann.

Ann had expected nothing different. In order to keep the peace as far as possible, she remained away from the fire until he had cooked and eaten his breakfast. Then she ate what was left. She did not require much. They did not speak.

Another man would have taken pains to veil the baleful fires in his eyes; not so Chako. His rage and hatred blazed out nakedly. His eyes followed Ann wherever she moved as if they would destroy her with their glances. It was difficult for her to maintain her self-possession under such espionage. In spite of herself the poison of his glance infected her. She was dismayed by the mere existence of such virulence.

In making their preparations for departure, they moved in circles, in order to give each other a wide berth. Once they were afloat, Ann breathed more freely, though she was very conscious of that glance still fixed on her back.

That was a strange paddle in silence down the river. In the rapids Ann was obliged to watch close and strive her hardest, for Chako would not now tell her what to do. More than once they were in difficulties in the rapids through a lack of team work. Chako remained mum throughout. His rage was too deep to find any vent in abuse. In the sluggish reaches they drove their paddles hard into the sullenly resisting water. Both were possessed by a fever to get on.

Upon this morning the beauty of the charming river vistas, the beaming sky, the noble trees had no message for Ann. She felt numb inside; neither glad nor sorry; neither interested nor bored; not exactly dead, nor altogether alive. The way did not seem long; one reach after another, it was all one. Sometime soon she knew with a little feeling of dread, she would have to take up the painful business of feeling again.

When they landed for their first spell the situation was unchanged.

“I’ll cook,” said Ann.

Chako shrugged. “Cook enough to last the rest of the day,” he said harshly. “I don’t mean to spell again until we get to the canyon.”

During the tedious business of baking the biscuit, he took himself off out of sight.

When they had eaten, Chako remained sitting glumly. He had no appetite for his pipe to-day. Ann cleaned up. Glancing at him covertly, the realization suddenly came to her that a man might make himself hard and brutal, yet suffer the torments of the damned, too; that in fact such men *were* the damned. Behind Chako’s cruel, savage mask she perceived an unspeakable wretchedness, and her heart melted. She began to feel again, but the warm tide had a healing effect.

She loved him. Useless to deny it to herself. She must love him till she died. Whether he were bad or good had nothing to do with it. It was himself she loved; not his qualities. If he were resolved on being wrong and wicked he needed love so much the more. She could never expect anything from him; no matter; she must love him just the same. How she could love him if he would only let her! But it must be upon the terms of self-respect. There could be no weakening there now.

Chako’s eyes were bloodshot; his lips compressed into a harsh and bitter mould of pain. Because she loved him Ann was endowed with a certain second sight where he was concerned. She saw that he was writhing in a perfect hell of rage. That it was a hell of his own creation made it none the less painful. What a lot of pain for a smallish bag of gold! Surely if he possessed it he would realize of what little worth it was. It was visibly destroying him to be deprived of it, so it could do him no worse harm to let him have it.

“Chako,” she said quietly.

His eyes bolted. He snarled at her.

“Have you got that thing you wanted me to sign?”

“No. What of it?” he muttered, sharply arrested.

“Well, you can make out another, I suppose,” said Ann. “If you’ll change it a little, I’ll sign it.”

Chako bent an extraordinary look of incredulity and suspicion on her. After a moment he muttered: “I don’t know that I want you to sign it now.”

“But if it were changed a little,” said Ann. “Leave out the words ‘her husband.’”

“What are you getting at?” he demanded.

“I’m willing you should have the gold,” said Ann. “But I don’t want to marry you.”

Chako sprang up. His face was convulsed, his voice breaking with rage. “What do you think I am!” he cried. “Do you think I’d take it from you? Do you think I’d take it from you as a gift when it’s mine by right? You think you’re putting it all over me, don’t you? Makes you feel fine, doesn’t it, to give it away so grandly! You’re always trying to make out that I’m a sort of low hound, a worm scarcely worth your while to step on! Well, I’m sick of it! You know damned well you’re safe in offering it to me! You make me mad! You make me mad! Don’t speak to me any more!”

He plunged blindly away among the trees. Ann was left sitting there aghast and white-faced; stunned by the unexpected outburst. Who could have foreseen this!

But she reflected, and dimly she began to understand. A strange joy stirred in her—in her, who had put joy aside for ever. Her intuition told her that it was something noble in Chako that found her offer so intolerable. A mean nature would have snatched at it. It was his better self, aware of having treated her badly, that was driven mad by her generosity. The voice of intuition whispered to her that a hatred so violent and uncalled-for was akin to love. Perhaps after all he loved her in his own fashion; she was comforted. She did not deceive herself; she saw clearly that the stubborn Chako would bring down ruin on both their heads sooner than confess himself to her. But she thought with a grave smile, she could go to destruction with him willingly enough if she knew he loved her.

Chako was a long while gone. When he came back Ann saw that he had recovered a sort of composure. His face was no less hard and cruel, but his eyes were quiet, almost sleepy-looking. They shot out glances at her sideways. It was a new look; a wicked look. His lips, so tightly compressed before, were now full and red, and slightly parted in a sensual smile.

Ann instantly thought: He has made up his mind to kill me.

A great thrill shook her that was not fear. She was not afraid. She exulted in it. It is not so hard to die, she thought: I shall not shame myself in dying. She looked around at river, trees and sky with a sharp pang for the beauty of the world, but it was not fear.

Chako said: “Shall we go? We’ve got a long way to paddle.” The purring note had returned to his deep voice; a sinister fun seemed to play about his lips.

At this camping-place the low bank was cut-away sharply, and the canoe floated in sufficient water alongside, tied to a tree. In such a place they could embark without pushing off. Chako got in first.

“Hop in,” he said, holding to the bank. He was still smiling, and his sleepy eyes were deadly.

Ann’s heart beat madly. Chako’s look at her was much the same as if he had been looking forward to embracing her; a rapt look. That was what set her heart off. But just a little different. Ann saw his rifle lying on the baggage immediately in front of him, and hesitated. She could die, but she desired to face her death. If he was going to shoot her she must be looking at him; that would be her all-sufficient revenge, that last look.

“I’m not going to paddle,” she said with a firmness that surprised herself. “I will sit in the bottom.”

Chako’s devilish assurance was upset. He scowled. “We’ve only done one trick.”

“I don’t care,” said Ann. “I’m tired. It’s down-stream work.” She got in facing him.

“Well, turn around the other way,” he snarled.

“I prefer to sit this way,” said Ann, proudly meeting his glance.

Chako’s eyes trailed away across the river. With a vicious shove against the bank, he started the canoe moving.

In his rage, Chako no longer reminded Ann of the lover, and a healthy instinct of self-preservation asserted itself in her. His cruel lust to kill her had precious little to do with love; it was a mere sickness of the fancy to regard it so. There was that obese little bag of gold squatting in the canoe between them. *That* was what he was killing for. Things had better be faced. He wouldn’t let her give it to him, but he could kill her to get possession of it. Such were men!

Her swift thoughts raced, and doubled back, and started off again. She would have little enough time for thinking! . . . It was not so simple as all that! One must try to be fair even to one’s murderer. He *did* love her with the better part of him, and the gold with the baser part. And the pull of the gold was stronger; he had given himself to the gold. Therefore, the mere existence of Ann had become a reproach to him. He was going to kill her, not because the gold was hers, but because he could not give himself wholly to it while Ann lived.

Her rival! Ann thought, with the hint of a twisted smile in the direction of the thick bag squatting there toadlike and obscene, half-covered with their spare clothes. She, Ann, might break her heart to win him, and it did

nothing, it just existed. Yet it had taken him from her. Its earthy glitter was more potent than her eyes—the windows of the soul, they called them. What a mockery! How loathsome that a bag of yellow sand should be endowed with such a power! The sight of it suddenly afflicted her with a nausea. She looked wildly up at the sky, the trees for health. . . . Strange how, at such a moment, each separate tree out of all those thousands impressed its beauty on her; and the little, light shining clouds in the zenith; different from any clouds she had ever seen in her life before, and touchingly beautiful.

She glanced at Chako again. He was looking over her head at his course down-stream. A slight change of expression when Ann looked at him showed that he was aware of her look, but his glance never deviated. His eyes were narrowed and hard as a wolf's. In his hate and hardness he was still splendid to look at. Yet beauty was truth, and truth beauty! How strange that a man should be so bent on killing that which loved him best. Some other poet had remarked on that. . . . Would she ever open another book of poetry? Ah, how careless of beauty she had been! If she could only seize it all in one moment before she died!

But such thoughts were slightly morbid. Better for her to be thinking how she could save herself. Surely there must be a right thing for her to say which would turn him from his purpose. If she could but find it! Surely if she showed him how well she understood him and sympathized with him even in his murderous promptings, he could not kill her. . . . But at that thought she instantly smiled in self-scorn. How could she begin to explain that she understood him to one who did not understand himself. In his eyes it would be an added offence. At the first word he would snatch up the gun in a fury and blow the top of her head off, grateful for the excuse to do so.

Any word she uttered would be likely to anger him. If she could avoid angering him, he would hardly shoot her while they sat there face to face. In that case she was safe until nightfall—unless he changed his mind and went ashore again. At nightfall! then would come her difficult time! And even supposing she succeeded in staying awake this night, there would be tomorrow night, and every night until they got out to an inhabited land. . . .

At the thought of the friendly land; of home and smiling neighbours and children, a breathless pain stabbed Ann's breast; a horrible, insidious weakness pulled her down; she ground her teeth; hard sobs caught her by the throat. She sat there desperately struggling with herself, well aware that the first sob, the first tear would mean her instant death. When she finally got the better of it a long sigh escaped her; she slipped down a little faint with weariness.

Ann had her blanket roll behind her back. She slipped down a little, and resting her head against it, flung an arm over her eyes. From under her arm she watched Chako. He only looked at her once, his eyes darting little snakes-tongues of hatred. As if he suspected she might be watching him, he quickly shifted his glance and it did not return.

Useless to look at him. There was no chance of his relenting. His implacable face bruised her. It was weakening to look at him. She covered her eyes in earnest, and her thoughts flew on.

A long time passed.

Suddenly Ann realized that Chako had stopped paddling. She sat bolt upright. Her body went cold. He was in the act of picking up his gun. His face was white, the forehead furrowed with intensity; his eyes fixed on her and deadly. As soon as she moved, his glance flew away, but she had seen it. He threw the rifle to his shoulder and pulled the trigger. The sound of the shot crashed between trees and trees.

“A moose,” he said. “I missed him.”

But there was no sound of any animal pounding away.

Ann said quickly, turning to peer among the trees in the direction he had aimed: “Fresh meat would be welcome.” She dared not look at Chako. She thought: If he suspects that I have guessed his intention it is all up with me!

A dreadful silence fell between them. Ann with held breath listened for the click of the reloading. She dared not turn back right away. To have looked at him would have revealed her fatal knowledge. She had to say something that would put him off that. She murmured carelessly:

“How long is it going to take us to get out?”

Chako did not immediately answer, and she could then look at him in a natural way. He was taking up the paddle again. The blood had rushed to his pale face, giving it a swollen look. His eyes were terrible with rage and pain and frustration. Aware of Ann’s eyes on him, he muttered in a thick, slurred voice:

“Oh, twelve or fourteen days.”

The danger was past for the moment. Ann relaxed and began to shake. She clenched her teeth, and concealed her hands under her. She smiled a little. She repeated rhymes of her childhood over and over to herself, in a desperate effort to control that treacherous weakness of the flesh. Gradually the shaking passed.

So time went on. Ann could not be sure that she had persuaded Chako of her ignorance, but she felt that a single additional word would bring down

the catastrophe. She sat there quietly facing the frenzied man with the loaded express rifle at his knee. Not so hard to nerve oneself up to face a brief, dreadful moment, but this had to go on for hour after hour. What gave her the strength was the certain knowledge that if she weakened by ever so little, if she wept or pleaded it would drive the man completely beside himself. It would supply just the fillip he needed to enable him to snatch up the gun and fire at her point blank. The only moments she could relax were when they went down a rapid. Then Chako's attention was fully occupied.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE CANYON

THEY did not go ashore again. The hours passed. Finally the sun went down, but Chako still paddled doggedly on.

From feeling too much Ann ceased to feel anything. She was solely concerned now with saving herself. Her brain was busy.

What will I do when we go ashore? . . . I've got to have sleep. I might steal away from Chako's camp and hide, and get some sleep. But then he'd know I suspected him. Anyhow, how could I sleep with the chance of his coming on me at any moment? . . . No, he's got to sleep too. The safest thing would be to lie down just as usual where I can watch him. I won't sleep until he sleeps. And I'll trust my instinct to wake me when he wakes. . . . I might have a chance to throw his gun in the water while he sleeps. . . . But he could kill me just as well with his hands.

Darkness was gathering when the shores of the little river suddenly fell back, and they found themselves out on a dusky-blue sheet of water, reflecting the dying light of the sky. Ann recognized with a little thrill that they had come to the lake at the head of the canyon. There was no other such place. Indeed she could presently hear the roaring of the waters in the gorge below, though at first only as a murmur.

All the southerly side of the lake was bounded by low cliffs, pale in the dying light. On the other side the trees came down to the water's edge. The landing-place was down at the end of this tree-lined shore where broken rocks ran out in a point. Around that point was the awful chute down which the waters poured into the gorge.

Chako let the canoe ground lightly on the shingle, and laid down his paddle. Ann had to get out first. In getting out she had to turn around, and present her back to Chako. She did not hesitate. Whatever comes must come, she told herself. Nevertheless, it was with a sort of surprise that she found herself alive and on firm ground once more. She turned and lifted the canoe a little higher according to their custom.

Chako climbed out over the baggage. He left his gun behind him. Seeing this, Ann's knees began to wobble under her. She could stand the strain, but to have it suddenly relieved unnerved her. She crept away a pace or two, and dropped on the ground fighting to avert a collapse.

The thought came to her: After paddling all day, and me sitting idle, he will have a seeming right to demand that I get the supper. She desperately put her limp limbs in motion again. Blindly seeking from tree to tree, she gathered a thick handful of the little dry pines as he had once showed her.

By the time he had carried the bedding and the food ashore, she had a fire started. He carried his gun ashore, and stood it against a tree near where he had thrown his bed-roll. Ann was always electrically conscious of the position of that gun. He left the bag of gold where it was in the canoe. He was frankly too weary to shoulder it. He opened his bedding, and flung himself down upon it. The gun was within reach of his hand.

Chako had paddled about sixteen hours this day, and upon insufficient food. Fatigue was a grand corrective of the unholy passions that filled him. His look at Ann was almost indifferent now. Ann, glancing at him while she washed the rice and sliced the bacon, thought: He'll have to sleep to-night; I'll get some rest. To the next day she gave no thought. All her energies were concentrated on living from moment to moment.

He came to the fire when she called him. He sat upon his side, she on hers. They passed things back and forth with an appearance of amity, though few words were spoken. It seemed as if Chako would never have done eating. Ann thought bitterly: It will renew his strength and his rage.

"Cook some more," he said harshly. "There's plenty cached at the other side of the canyon."

Ann wondered if he meant there would be but one to eat it.

When he was finished, Ann set about washing the plates and the frying pan. Since he had left his gun over by the tree, she felt in no immediate danger. Heavy with food, Chako half reclined on the same spot, supporting himself on his elbow, and glancing at Ann from time to time from under lowered lids.

What was he thinking of? She gave it up with a shrug. Only one thing was clear; he had not relented towards her. At the moment he was sluggish from eating, but his purpose had not changed.

After all was in order he still made no move to seek his blankets. So as not to give any appearance of avoiding him, Ann returned to her former place by the fire. About half a dozen feet separated them. Chako sat up, refilled his pipe, lighted it, and drew on it with evident satisfaction. Ann glanced at him with a sad wonder. How he could enjoy his food and his tobacco!

For a while they sat in silence. The fire died down. The air trembled under the hoarse rumble of the torrent below, muffled by the intervening

walls of rock. From where they sat under the pines, the lake was like a blued-steel corselet reflecting the clear night sky. Over the pale cliffs on the other side the sky was brightening.

As they sat in silence Ann's exquisitely sharpened intuition became aware of a something that was drawing her and Chako together—a something, madly sweet, which did not, however, lessen her danger a whit, but increased it.

Chako suddenly took his pipe out of his mouth, and pointing with the stem across the lake, said: "Moon's coming up."

It did not surprise Ann that his deep voice had resumed its purring note, like a lion's; she expected it. Her heart galloped off.

"Up North the moon's a crazy wench," Chako went on. "You'll see tonight, she'll just circle over the cliffs a little way, and go down almost in the place where she came up."

A savage, amorous purr like a lion's. Nothing changed; nothing softened towards Ann. She thought breathlessly: He wants me before he kills me. I cannot. That would certainly seal my fate. . . . But if I refuse him it will rouse him to a fury, too. . . . But I will refuse him.

"How white your arm is in the shadow," murmured Chako.

Ann nervously rolled down her sleeve and buttoned it.

A chuckle sounded in his throat. "Mustn't I ever remember you're a woman?"

"Did you forget it?" Ann whispered.

The implication was lost on him. "And a beauty," he added. "Your throat is like snow!"

Ann's hand darted to pull her collar to, but she held it sternly. She thought: He's putting me on the defensive. I must not be put on the defensive.

"I forgot too long that you were a woman," Chako murmured, leaning towards her. "Wasted time!"

He scarcely troubled to hide the sneer in his voice; a warm sneer. Something in his insolent love-making made Ann's very blood abject; caused her to dissolve in weakness. If he touched her, how could she resist him? . . . But what a shameful surrender that would be! She would deserve no better fate than to be killed by him carelessly.

"Look at me," murmured Chako.

She did the only thing she could think of; arose and coolly moved the embers of the fire apart with the toe of her boot. "It was agreed that that sort

of talk was to be cut out,” she said. “I’m going to turn in.”

Turning her back to him, she proceeded to spread out her bed, trembling in every nerve, listening in sick suspense to hear what he would do. He made no move at all, and she was obliged to look at him. It was too dark for her to read his expression. He finally got up, grunting with stiffness. He seemed to hesitate a moment, then turned to his own bed.

Ann thought bitterly: He did not want me very much!

Chako prepared his bed with a certain ostentatious air that was not lost on Ann. If he desired to suggest to her how keen he was for his bed, it must mean that he had no intention of sleeping if he could avoid it. Having been to the lake to wash and drink, he lay down with his back to her. Ann was in a fever of anxiety because she could not see what had become of the gun. Apparently he had slipped it under the edge of his bed.

They lay in their blankets, feet to the lake, with a distance of about twenty feet separating them. The moon came up over the cliffs and flooded their little camping-place with her level rays. Ann could see better now. Sleep was far from her eyes. By and by Chako rolled over, and his face became visible to her as a pale, oval patch. His eyes were but two pools of shadow in it, and she could not tell if they were open or shut. Presumably they were open though, and straining to discover if *her* eyes were open. Should she let him know that she was awake? . . . Not unless he made some further move.

So she watched him, and with a dull pain tried to figure out in her mind what it was that made men so passionately bent on destruction. She could understand how anybody, man or woman, could get started wrong, but what was it in human nature that forced a man once started wrong, so blindly and insanely to hold to his course. Why was it, when he was wrong, that honesty and love maddened him instead of curing him? It was too difficult. She had to give it up.

After a long while—she could not have told how long—she saw Chako with infinite slow caution, raise himself on his elbow. Her heart rose in her throat.

“What’s the matter?” she asked quietly.

He caught his breath sharply, and dropped back. “Thought I heard something,” he muttered.

Nothing more was said. Ann feared that Chako must now know that she was aware of his murderous intentions. Henceforth it must be a duel between them to see who could stay awake the longer. To-night the advantage was with Ann, because Chako was dog-weary. The minutes

dragged by leadenly. Ann was conscious of a weak fatigue that threatened tears. She had no desire for sleep, her eyes were propped open; but she knew she must sleep. She concentrated all her faculties upon listening for Chako's breathing. It was still enough except for the rumble of the torrent. She imagined at last that she heard Chako's breathing settle deep and slow. Even so he might be feigning.

Ann in her turn arose in her bed, but in a different manner from Chako; she sat bolt upright.

There was no answering move, no sound from Chako. Still, he might be leading her on. She threw the blankets off her and stood up. Still no move from him. With a thickly beating heart she took a few steps towards him. Her feet were bare.

He was certainly asleep. She could now see his face pretty clearly in the moonlight. Not only were the eyes closed, but the lines were all softened; he could hardly feign that. There is not much difference in men asleep—or dead. Ann saw only the weary youth and nothing of the hellish spirit that animated him waking. An intolerable longing made her breast tight. If she could but have him so!

She turned back to her own bed prepared to sleep now. She intended to trust to her instincts to wake her when he awoke. At any rate she had to have sleep.

She was arrested by the picture framed in the opening of the trees as you looked out. With the moon in her eyes the lake no longer appeared steely and glimmering, but had become vague and grey-dark. There were shadowy lines across it, that denoted the gradually quickening current. One could hear the water sucking around the stones alongshore, as it was drawn off towards that inferno around the point. Below Ann in the immediate foreground lay the canoe full of moonlight, and presenting all its shadows towards her. In the middle of it rose the pury bag of gold, tied tightly about its middle, with the top half flopping over.

That was the focus of the whole scene; that was what arrested Ann's eyes, and drove the thought of sleep out of her head. The source of all her agony! There it squatted insensate while it destroyed them! There was something unspeakably loathsome in its aspect, the lank end lolling over against the fat stomach. The sight of it suddenly enraged and sickened Ann. A flame was lighted in her vitals that maddened her with pain. She ceased to be a reasonable creature. The beastly thing! The beastly thing! Her fingers curved like claws with the desire to rend it.

And there it lay for the moment unprotected. What a chance!—if only Chako did not waken. A vivid picture of the storm of waters around the point sprang before Ann's eyes. She had only to launch it for it to be lost beyond power of recovery. True, the canoe was their means of salvation too. And Chako would certainly kill her if she lost him his gold. What matter? What matter? How gladly she would die if she first destroyed *that*!

She glanced fearfully over her shoulder. Chako slept like a dead man. She stepped down softly in her bare feet. The canoe was drawn up on the shingle for half its length. She pitted her strength against its weight. Under ordinary circumstances she could never have stirred it, but nerved with a passion as she was, she succeeded in moving it an inch, and rested.

She could not *shove* it out for fear of waking Chako. She had to lift the end an inch at a time. But with every inch she moved it, a little more of the weight was taken up by the water under the stern. It was a slow job. Her back cracked under the strain. If only Chako did not wake! Midway in her labours she perceived the two paddles lying in the bottom. Obeying a subconscious prompting she reached in for them, and laid them down on the shore.

Finally the canoe floated. Ann thrilled with a terrible satisfaction. But it was not yet out of Chako's reach. She crept slowly into the icy water pushing it, careful to make no splashing. The pebbly bottom dropped away quite steeply; ankle-deep, knee-deep, thigh-deep, waist-deep. Finally, gathering up all her strength, she shoved the light craft out on the current, and a wild, triumphant cry broke from her.

Chako awoke all of a piece, and instantly came leaping down with a roar of rage. He plunged into the water. Ann fled aside from him. He disregarded her. He forged through the impeding water with arms outstretched. Flinging himself in bodily he swam. In a score of powerful strokes he reached the canoe, caught hold of the gunwale, and with the trick of a practised canoeist, swung himself aboard.

He searched frantically in the bottom for a paddle. Seeing that there was none, another dreadful cry of rage escaped him. Half beside himself, he squatted in the bottom of the canoe and paddled with his hands. The canoe answered sluggishly to the impulse, but the current had her now. She was carried down, slowly at first, gaining a little with every yard.

Ann's heart failed her. She caught up one of the paddles on the shore, and flung it towards him with all her might. It whirled around, and flapped in the water far short of him. It was useless to him. The canoe was fairly in

the grip of the current now, moving relentlessly towards the hoarse bellow of that inferno around the corner.

Ann kept pace with it, scrambling over the rocks along the shore, tearing at her hair, and screaming witlessly: "Come back! Come back! Come back!"

Chako soon saw that his efforts were useless. He stood up in the canoe in an attitude of tragic despair, an arm over his head. Then he dived in. It appeared as if he had waited too long. Canoe and man were now entering into the funnel which gathered all the water of the lake to a point, preparatory to discharging it down that fearful chute. Chako could not possibly win back to the shore he had left. His only hope lay in a great rock lower down whose base was washed by the deep current. But all the surface of that rock was as smooth as if it had been sculptured.

Ann saw the rock. With a superhuman effort she reached it in time, and flinging herself down upon it, dug in her toes, and reached down. She caught Chako's arms as his finger-nails scratched the smooth surface. Chako wound his arms about her arms and pulled himself out. At the moment Ann was no more to him than something to pull himself out by. The instant he gained a foothold he dropped her, and set off crouching, running, scrambling up over the broken rocks to the top of the canyon wall. Ann followed.

Below them the canoe was now fairly launched on that strange, smooth slide of water. It glided down in the moonlight with elegant grace, its fat little passenger squatting amidships like a baby, holding on tightly, one would swear. In the grand boil-up at the foot of the slide the canoe appeared to leap bodily in the air, its dark shape silhouetted against the white water. Then apparently, it was overwhelmed. But it immediately appeared below, still dancing madly and lightly amidst the flung-up waters. It passed out of sight around the bend in the walls.

Chako, Ann trailing after, gained the top of the low cliff, where the way was comparatively smooth and clear. The two of them ran across the rock floor, cutting off the first bend, and came to the lip of the canyon farther along. The waters were in full turmoil here, and the roar of it rose up with stunning force. The moon did not shine into this hole, but Ann dimly apprehended the gigantic billows, undulating in a strange, savage regularity, ripped and laced with white. Again, for an instant, she saw the dark, slender shape of the canoe leaping over the billows, like a horse over successive barriers. It seemed to stand fairly on end, half its length out of water. Then it passed out of sight around the next bend.

Chako had run on, and she started to follow. But her unnatural strength failed her at last. She fell headlong, and lay unable to get up.

By and by she heard Chako coming slowly back, and she instinctively scrambled to her feet, unmindful of the pains that racked her body. She saw him approaching in the moonlight, his arms hanging, his head sunk and thrust forward. All little feelings passed away from her. She thought that her hour had come, and braced herself to meet it.

She was squarely in his path. She looked at him, and spread her arms wide, and said: "Now kill me!"

Like lightning Chako's clenched hands went over his head. He showed his gritting teeth, and she could hear the suck of his breath between them. She kept her eyes fixed on his. The blow never descended. His arms dropped again, and with a groan he started running away from her, running back towards their camp.

Ann remained standing in the same spot all wrought up and exalted. She supposed he had gone to get his gun. It was only two hundred yards or so back to their camp. But the moments passed and she did not hear him coming back. The exaltation of her spirit slowly and sickeningly failed her; her broken body reasserted its claim; she sank down on the rocky floor again, trembling, her breast bursting with pent-up sobs. Once the first sob escaped her, every vestige of self-control failed her. She lay shaken and praying that he might come quickly and end it.

Gradually the conviction was forced on her that he was not coming back. She was then too much exhausted to care whether he did or not. She was incapable of going to look for him. She lay inert where she was. The passage of the hours signified nothing to her. Her teeth chattered, but what was cold? If she had any conscious impulse it was to drag herself to the lip of the canyon and drop over; but she lacked the energy of mind to carry it into effect.

## CHAPTER XIX

### PICKING UP THE PIECES

IT was a cloudy dawn. In the first dreadful half-hour of day, when the world is like a grey ghost of itself, Ann dragged herself to her feet, and started stumbling back towards the camp. Body and soul she felt completely numb; a woman as good as dead, reluctantly forced on by a pair of alien legs. From the canyon rose the crashing of the waters undiminished; in fair weather and foul until the earth itself perished, that futile uproar was bound to go on. There seemed to be a mirthful undercurrent in its bellowing that caused Ann to shudder.

She picked her way down over the broken rocks. Her bare feet were bruised and cut, but that was the least of her troubles. As she approached the trees she saw that Chako was not there; his bed and his gun were gone. Instantly a wild terror attacked her that showed she was not dead yet; there were still new torments to be undergone. To be abandoned there in the empty land! Her heart stood still at the prospect. She ran wildly this way and that among the trees, crying for him, well-knowing how useless it was. He had gone and taken his things; his bed, his gun, his axe. Only her bed and her boots were lying there, and some utensils by the fire.

In her panic she overlooked what must otherwise instantly have caught her attention; a scrap of rag pinned to the tree above her bed by a knife. In a few moments she had experienced a whole lifetime of agony before she saw it. She flew to it. On it was scribbled a message of three words:

“Cross the portage.”

Ann quieted down. Evidently he was waiting for her on the other side. She immediately set about preparing to follow.

There was bread left from the night before. She forced herself to eat some of it, though it choked her. With pain and difficulty she succeeded in pulling on her boots. She rolled her bed into as compact a bundle as she was able, and slung it across her back. Frying-pan and cooking-pot she carried in her hand.

She set forth. She would scarcely have been able to follow that dim trail unaided, but as soon as she started she discovered that Chako, preceding her, had blazed a tree with his axe every ten feet or so. She was enormously comforted by this; he was certainly waiting for her, she thought, and for a mile or so she scarcely felt the pain in her feet.

But the portage was five miles long and very rough. To the broken Ann each mile seemed twice as long as the mile before it. The remembered landmarks appeared more and more slowly. She had no food except a little more of the stale bread which she could not force down without water, and she had forgotten to bring water. The last mile of all was simply interminable. It seemed to Ann that she must have used the whole day in her passage, yet when she got to the cliff that marked the other side, the sun was still low in the sky. She had not been above two hours on the way.

She went down through that curious fissure in the rock with a cold hand on her breast, thinking of the bears that frequented the place. From the foot of the cliff it was only fifty yards or so to the embarking place on the river. She covered it with her heart in her mouth. She was not at all sure now that she would find Chako waiting. She burst through the last trees with eyes straining. A glance showed her he was not there, that there was nothing of his there. She sank down covering her head with her arms to shut out the sight of that emptiness that must be faced alone.

Chako was gone, but there were fresh evidences of his handiwork here. Floating in the backwater, fastened by a line to a tree, was a little raft made of four logs lashed to two cross pieces, with a floor of poles on top. On it was placed the grub-box that they had cached in this place, and alongside the grub-box lay a paddle. Ann, searching among these things, found another scrap of rag under the paddle, with a similar laconic message scribbled on it.

“Float down to Hairy Tom’s camp.”

Ann could not weep. The source of tears was quite dried up. She sat down on the shore with a stony air. How characteristic of Chako was that cruel, brief message! So he *had* abandoned her! True, he had taken what measures he could to ensure her safety, but he had abandoned her. She tried to be fair. What else could she expect of him, having destroyed what was dearest to him in the world? He had in his own eyes every excuse for abandoning her. Ann in her lowest depths never regretted what she had done to the gold. A certain feeling of righteousness upheld her. Ah! but the grinding ache in her breast!

It occurred to her that Chako could not long have finished making that raft. Having prepared everything for her departure it was possible he might be keeping himself out of sight somewhere near. She threw back her head and called.

“Chako! . . . Chako! . . . Chako!”

Her voice was mockingly tossed back to her from the yellow cliffs.

Perhaps if she waited there all day he would come back, expecting to find her gone. Not likely, though. He had not left anything to come after. And if she waited, and he did not come, she would be forced to spend the night completely cut off from her kind. At that thought the nameless terror gripped Ann's breast. She had her own courage, but it was not that sort of courage. At the mere thought of the creeping silence of twilight she began to shake.

She knew she was something less than fifty miles above the Grand Forks where Hairy Tom, the queer solitary, had pitched his tent. There was a swift current the whole way; it was scarcely more than eight o'clock now, and if she started at once she was bound to arrive before dark. There were rapids in the Stanley River, but deep rapids; so long as she kept in the centre of the stream no harm could come to her, beyond a wetting. The logs of her little raft were cunningly and stoutly lashed with a thin strong tracking-line.

If she wished to arrive before dark she must start at once. It was agonizing to have to leave that spot, believing Chako to be near, yet her fears drove her—her fears and perhaps her common sense. She could not help her blind, instinctive yearning for Chako, but common sense told her she must tear him out of her breast, and the sooner the better for her peace of mind. She put a foot on the raft, and drew it back again. She walked up and down the shore on the rack of indecision. Common sense told her that the wild Chako, having taken to flight, would never allow himself to be caught—there were a hundred good reasons why she should go; but it was none the less hard.

Her attention was caught by a little green object lazily circling in an eddy of the backwater. With amazement she recognized it as a splintered fragment of the gunwale of Chako's canoe. The ends of the wood were ground into fibres. It was significant of what had happened in the canyon. By what irony of fate had it been cast up almost at her feet! Chako had probably seen it. How it would enrage him!

Finally, with a groan, Ann untied the rope, threw her bed on the raft, and stepped after it. Refusing to think any longer, she caught up the paddle, and desperately drove her unwieldy craft out into the current. Once the current gripped it, the die was cast. On a raft one could not go back up-stream.

The sun was low when she came in sight of the wide expanse of sand that marked the meeting of the rivers. Hairy Tom's brown tent was pitched in the middle of it, and the old man himself was visible, a tiny black figure in front of it. He must have seen Ann as soon as she saw him, for he stood

there motionless all the time she was drawing near, his face turned towards her.

The Rice River had now fallen, while the Stanley almost filled its banks; consequently the Stanley held possession of the channel, and Ann, borne on its triumphant flood, was in danger of being carried right by the sandbank where she wished to land. Hairy Tom stood at the water's edge shouting instructions to her that she could not hear. He started to launch his canoe in order to come to her assistance, but Ann finally succeeded in driving her stubborn craft from the flowing water into the standing water, almost rolling under in the impact. A few minutes later she grounded on the sand.

The old man was unchanged, with his neatly combed locks hanging to his shoulders; his rusty cut-away coat pinned across at the neck. He was delighted to see her, but his eyes were big with astonishment.

"Where's Chako?" he demanded.

"Back there," said Ann.

Ann had foreseen questions, of course. What had happened she regarded as nobody's business but hers and Chako's; still she knew something must be told to forestall the marvellous and lying stories that would otherwise be set in circulation. She had resolved to tell as little as possible.

"Is he dead?" asked Hairy Tom solicitously.

"No," said Ann. "We had a bad time. We lost our canoe in the canyon."

"But why did he let you come down alone?"

"It was my own wish," said Ann evasively. "No doubt he will follow."

"You quarrelled?" said Hairy Tom.

Ann was silent. Useless to deny that.

The old man looked upon her silence as a sufficient answer. "Sho!" he said regretfully. "Chako is a skittish colt! . . . But I didn't think he'd quarrel with you. . . . Has he got grub?"

"He cannot have much," said Ann.

"But he has his gun, his axe, his bed?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then he'll be all right," said Hairy Tom confidently. "You couldn't down Chako in this country. He's as clever as a fox."

How this comforted Ann! She hid her face from the old man lest he should see too much.

"Where did you leave him?" asked Hairy Tom.

"At the mouth of the Ouananeca canyon."

“Well, if he don’t come down within a day or two I’ll paddle up and have a look,” said Hairy Tom. “He’d have a time to quarrel with me,” he added with a chuckle. “I’m the amiablest man north of fifty-three.”

Ann’s heart was very soft and warm towards him.

“But here we stand talking!” cried Hairy Tom. “And I’ll bet you’re clean tuckered out! You look it. Sit ye down! Sit ye down! I’ll have some grub directly. I was just about to get my supper when I see you come floatin’ down river like a little water spider.”

Ann sat down at the door of the tent, while the old man busied himself making a fire.

“You come just right,” he said. “I have a nice fish that I took on a night line this morning. All day I kep’ it fresh in the cold water.”

All during the preparation of the meal, and during the meal, he maintained the flow of his friendly chatter. It was exactly what the numbed Ann needed. Human speech. Friendly, thoughtless small talk; she had forgotten how sweet it was to the ear. Chako had had so little to say, and what he said was so charged with significance for her. But with the old man she could relax. While he talked the tears rolled down Ann’s cheek. He made believe not to notice them; he had his delicacy.

“I tell you it give me a turn when I see you comin’ down the river all alone! First-off I couldn’t see the raft at all, but just little you sitting on the water, like! Such a little thing all alone on the river! A woman, too! In all my years up North I never seen the like. It give me a turn!”

He wanted to know all about his friend Joe Grouser, and Ann told him, suppressing, however, all mention of the gold.

“So, Joe’s gone!” he said. “Well, well! It was a good end now. It makes an old man thoughtful. I was a lot older than Joe. My end will not be long put off!”

By and by Ann asked him anxiously how she could get on from there.

“Oh, there’s always some way,” said Hairy Tom cheerfully. “If need be I could paddle you down to the Rocky Mountain portage, put you across and build you a raft on the other side. Then you could float down to one of the posts in Athabasca. . . . But I reckon you’d rather go out to Fort Edward where you started from.”

Ann nodded.

“Well, as it happens, Frank Bower will be coming up from the portage any day now. Bower is the feller that come down the Rice River just a day or so ahead of you. He had a scow-load of supplies for the surveying party in

the canyon down there. Soon as he delivered it he was going back light in a canoe. I looked for him before this, but of course, his season's work being done, he's nachelly takin' things easy."

"Do you think he'll have room for me?" asked Ann.

"Sure. He's got a twenty foot dug-out, and only a breed boy to help him paddle. A good tripper, Bower is too; one of the best. You'll be safe with him. A good-hearted man too; not like Chako."

In spite of herself Ann could not let this pass. "Chako's all right," she said involuntarily. "It was my fault that we quarrelled."

He looked at her queerly. "Chako quarrels with everybody," he said.

"I don't care!" said Ann. "I have no complaint against him."

The old man looked away, and hummed a few bars between his teeth. He did not mean to be rude; it was merely that he required a moment or two to adjust himself to this situation.

He was soon launched in his stride again. It appeared that this Bower was quite a hero of his. He had tales of Bower's prowess in the big rapids of the Spirit, and in the deep snows.

"He's a humorous feller, too," Hairy Tom went on. "Me and him has always got to have our joke. He said when he come up this time he was goin' to kidnap me, and carry me outside and get my hair cut!" To the simple old man this was the richest joke in the world. He laughed until the tears stood in his eyes.

Like all men who live much alone Hairy Tom was a philosopher in his innocent style. "I ain't been out in twenty-five years," he said. "They tell me there's great changes, what with the automobiles, the flying-machines and all. Gosh! they say you can shoot messages through the air now without any wires. I like to hear the fellows talk. I don't believe the half of it. But I ain't curious to see these things. No, I'm too old for changes. What I like about this country is, it never changes. This is my life. I always used to plan to go out at last when I got ready to die, but Law! I guess dyin's much the same one place as another. Seems like it wouldn't be stickin' by the land if I carried my old bones outside. So I'll die on the ground I've slep' on nigh fifty years."

Hairy Tom insisted on Ann's taking his tent, while he slept under his canoe. She lay comforted by the sense of his nearness. The queer old fellow was both kindred and kind. She breathed a little prayer of thankfulness for such a friend. All the tears Ann had not been able to shed before flowed now. Her heart was desolated. But the hard, desperate numbness was gone.

Her heart might be broken, but it was a human heartbreak; at least she felt herself human again, and in a world of her own kind.

On the second morning following, Ann was baking bread in front of the tent when she was thrilled by an excited cry from Hairy Tom who had gone down the shore to visit his night lines. Her eyes flew up the Stanley River where her heart was, but there was nothing to be seen there. Coming up the Spirit River though, was a little object creeping along shore which presently resolved itself into a dug-out, with two men paddling it. A long-legged dog accompanied them, walking gravely along the shore.

“Frank Bower!” cried Hairy Tom.

Their progress was very slow against the current, and Ann had plenty of time to size up the outfit. She could see little of the man in the stern, however, because he was masked by the bow paddler, obviously a breed. They paused opposite, to allow the dog to jump aboard, then came paddling over to the sandbank. In no little trepidation Ann awaited the stepping ashore of the man upon whom her present fate depended.

He proved to be a stalwart, up-standing Irishman about forty years old, with red hair curling close to his head, and eyes as blue as the June sky. The first glance of those Irish eyes inspired Ann with confidence. She was in luck again. A few words sufficed to explain her plight to Bower. His eyes warmed with compassion. He instantly adopted a solicitous and protective attitude, which under other circumstances Ann might have resented, but in her present forlorn state it comforted her.

Bower did not have to be asked to take her to Fort Edward. He took it for granted she was to go with him. He even proposed to drown the unfortunate, harmless mongrel, that Ann might not be discommoded by the dog's presence in the dug-out, but Ann quickly vetoed that. When she tried to suggest paying him for the trip, the man was deeply hurt and angry; she had much ado to smooth him down. Ann had not been long enough in the North to become accustomed to the effect that the sight of her wrought in the breast of a lonely man. Old Tom, primming up his lips, and making queer old-man faces, saw what was going to happen.

They ate a meal on the shore. Bower strongly commended Ann's baking, which, to tell the truth, was not up to her standard. His eyes brooded on her continually. Pain is apt to make one selfish; and Ann having made up her mind that she could trust Bower, gave little thought to him. Hairy Tom was frankly impatient with her, or with Bower, or with both of them. At any rate he was not getting the pleasure out of Bower's visit that he had looked forward to.

Immediately after they had finished, Bower said he must push on in order to make a certain camping-spot that night. Old Tom was as disappointed as a child. He considered this a mere excuse of Bower's to get Ann to himself. He pished and pshawed and shrugged, as much as to say he washed his hands of them both.

Bower would not hear of Ann's wielding a paddle. He constructed a nest of blankets for her amidships, facing him. He handed her in like a princess. How different from her other travelling companion! Ann thought of this, but her heart did not soften towards Bower as much as it ought. With good-byes back and forth and many last messages, they pushed off. Hairy Tom accompanied them, walking along the edge of the sand, until he was stopped by a little tributary which came in on that side. They left him standing there, rather a piteous figure with his grey hair blowing and a slightly resentful expression on his face, like a child who has been left out of it.

"Are you quite comfortable?" asked Bower anxiously.

"Oh, yes," said Ann. "I'm not accustomed to this. I feel that I ought to be doing my part."

"With two men aboard to paddle for you!" said Bower, a little shocked.

"I'm afraid you have old-fashioned ideas about women," said Ann, smiling.

"Well, I think you're an old-fashioned sort of girl," said Bower acutely.

Ann shrugged.

"I can't abide new women or new ideas about women!" said Bower warmly. "The old ideas of working for them and fighting for them are good enough for me!"

Ann ought to have thanked God for sending such a one in her extremity, but instead she found herself resenting every stroke of the paddles that drove her a little farther from the place where she had left her heart.

That slab-sided little steamboat, the *Tewkesbury L. Swett* with her crooked smoke-stack and her wheezing engine, was being borne down on the current of the Campbell River at what seemed a surprising speed for one of her crazy build. But it was the river that was doing the work. As Cap'n Wes' Trickett was fond of saying, she had to hump herself to keep ahead of it.

Out on the deck for'ard of the shed, Frank Bower and Ann, the only two passengers, were sitting on camp-stools. Ann had the capstan at her back. Twelve days' tripping together had considerably relaxed their attitude

towards each other. There was now a comfortable suggestion of custom and confidence in it. They were able to be silent together without constraint. Bower had lost a good deal of his old-fashioned gallantry, but had gained something truer and deeper. The soul of the man looked out of his eyes when they rested on Ann. Ann's face was pale and downcast.

Bower broke a long silence to say: "We'll be at Fort Edward in about an hour. I suppose you won't be sorry."

"Nor glad either," said Ann.

"The steamboat will lie there over night," Bower went on. "To-morrow she goes down to Ching's Landing to connect with the stage." He hesitated with a painful air; finally blurting out: "Will you be going down on her?"

"I don't know!" said Ann in a tormented voice. "I suppose I ought!"

He looked at her solicitously, but was unable to find the right words to speak. There was a long silence.

At length he said in a low, moved voice: "This has been a wonderful trip to me, this last twelve days. I can scarcely believe that such luck fell to me! To be able to look at you all day long, and talk to you. You cannot know what it means to a man who never before had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with a lady."

"I am not a lady," said Ann with a crooked smile.

"You are what I call a lady," he said gravely. "Paddling up-stream never seemed such light work before, nor the little lakes so pretty. You pointed out new beauties to me that I had never seen, often as I have gone that way. The only thing that troubled my happiness was that you were not at ease in your mind. I wish I could have changed that!"

Another silence.

He went on softly: "It has changed everything in my life. I see the meaning of things that I used to mock at."

"Ah, don't . . . !" murmured Ann.

"Let me talk," he said with a grin. "All my life I've been bottled up, sort of. It'll do me good . . . I haven't any false hopes."

She made no further effort to restrain him.

"I suppose this is what they call love," he said with a confused air. "I never expected to speak that word. I never expected it to come to me—and so I made out to mock it. That was one of the things I mocked at. So I can't speak the language now. . . . But it's true . . . I love you!"

"Oh," murmured Ann, "I have suffered too much myself to wish to make others suffer. If only this need not have happened!"

“Bless your heart!” he said with his grin. “It isn’t going to do me any harm! It’ll make a man of me if anything will. . . .” His courage failed him in the act of vaunting it. His head went down. After a while he said timidly and longingly: “Of course you couldn’t marry a man like me. . . .”

“No,” murmured Ann.

He took her up quickly. “Of course not! It’s not to be expected! . . . But you see I had to ask you before you went away. I was so scared to ask you, if I had not asked you it would have made me out a coward to myself.”

“If I only could!” said Ann.

“That’s all right. That’s all right,” he said much flustered, “I understood all along I wasn’t good enough.”

“Far too good,” said Ann. “When I think of your kindness and gentleness to me day after day it is almost more than I can bear, to have to hurt you now!”

“But you mustn’t think of it that way. You must think of the benefit you conferred on me.” While his tongue spoke what he considered the proper thing, his confused and longing eyes pleaded in a language of their own. Finally he blurted out in honest tones of pain:

“You say you can’t marry me. Well . . . why can’t you?”

“I do not love you.”

“I know. But even so . . .” He struggled with what he thought ought not to be spoken, but it *would* have way. “Oh, I know I ought not to ask you. But I can’t help myself. It means such a hell of a lot to me!”

“You can ask me anything you want,” said Ann simply.

Bower looked straight ahead of him with a red and tormented face. His tongue stumbled on. “Well . . . the most natural explanation of what happened up there is . . . is that Chako took advantage of you . . . that he mistreated you. . . . My God! that wouldn’t be your fault! . . . Is *that* why you won’t marry me?”

“No,” said Ann. “There is no truth in that.”

Bower let his head fall. “Oh,” he said in a flat tone, “I didn’t want to insult you. . . .”

“I am not insulted,” said Ann quickly.

“I almost wish it was true,” he murmured. “Don’t misunderstand me. You see, that would be something that I could make up to you, rude as I am. I wanted you to know that it wouldn’t make any difference in my feelings for you if it was true—though I’d kill him for it. . . .”

“It is not true!” said Ann. “Look at me. You must believe that.”

He refused to look at her. “Oh, I believe you,” he muttered with hanging head. “Then I guess the reason you won’t marry me is because you have a fancy for . . . for . . . well, for somebody else.”

“Yes,” said Ann.

“I’ll say no more,” said Bower. “You know you can always count on me.”

## CHAPTER XX

### BACK IN FORT EDWARD

THE arrival of the steamboat from up river was not a matter of great moment in the settlement, and only half a dozen or so of the inveterate loafers were attracted to the bank to see her make fast. These few received a shock when they saw Ann step ashore under conduct of Frank Bower. Their faces confessed it. Nobody needed to be told that there was a story behind this. It promised a sensation greater than any which had transpired at Fort Edward that season. As soon as Ann and Bower set off along the road, the onlookers scattered to spread the news. The school-teacher was back, and not with Chako Lyllac but with Frank Bower!

The settlement was unchanged. Two or three more of the appallingly ugly yellow pine shacks had been run up, that was all. The mud, the stumps, the old log buildings, and the new ones of sawn lumber were just the same. It sickened Ann a little with the painful old feelings it stirred up; out of that shack Chako had run with blazing, laughing eyes in pursuit of the little squeaking man in the store suit; in this store while Chako bought groceries at one counter, she bought clothes at another, thrilling with a marvellous secret. Years seemed to have passed over her head since she had left Fort Edward; a green girl then, a woman now with life behind her.

On the platform in front of Maroney's the usual little crowd was loitering. One and all they turned and stared at Ann as at a phenomenon from the skies.

"Damned rubber-necks!" muttered Bower.

Cal Nimmo was not among them. Inside the hotel they ran into Noll Voss. His jaw dropped. He stared at Ann with a sickly hatred, and sidled out of the door. Maroney, with the hair up-standing in the middle of his head, and his greasy smile, appeared from somewhere; and stepping behind the rough desk, shoved the dog's-eared register towards them.

"One room or two?" he asked slyly.

Bower's face turned crimson. "Two rooms, damn you!" he muttered. "And if I hear another word of that sort . . ."

"Well, no offence," said Maroney impudently. He felt safe in his own house.

Ann was not at all sensitive to these evidences of her changed status in the settlement. What did it matter?

Maroney showed her upstairs to the room she had had before. She greatly desired to know if Nellie Nairns were still in the house, but did not like to ask him for fear of provoking an impudent answer. After he had put her in her room, he presently returned, and shoved her old suit-case inside the door. Ann opened it with a queer sort of sensation that she would find her old self inside. But it was only the husk of her old self, the woman's dress. What was the use of changing? She would not get that old self back again!

She sat down by the window where she had looked out so often and listened. At present all her faculties were turned inward. Some time before morning she had to come to a decision. Within her, common sense was vocal.

You *must* go to-morrow. The incident is closed. Why prolong the agony? The only thing for you to do is to go to work and forget. . . . You staked everything on Chako. Well, you lost! Face it! Face it! Don't be a bad loser. To hang around where you're not wanted would only open the way for unbearable humiliations. . . .

So much for common sense. On the other hand her instincts were not articulate but they exerted a terrible pull. All the good reasons in the world made no difference. Feeling that pull, Ann cried in pain:

"I *can't* leave here! I can't! I can't!"

By and by Maroney banged rudely on her door, and called out that Cal Nimmo wanted to see her downstairs.

Ann thought: Even if I should stay, I can't stay in this house. This man is bent on making it impossible for me.

She went downstairs with mixed feelings; she liked Cal Nimmo, his tough-mindedness, his candour; she desired him for a friend. But she had defied him in going North, and now she expected to have to face his anger, or what would be worse: I told you so! In the decision that had to be made Cal would certainly be on the side of reason and against desire.

He was waiting for her at the foot of the stairs. To her secret relief he was not angry, but greeted her with just the old, hard, sceptical, kindly grin.

"Howdy! Howdy!" he cried, offering her an enormous paw.

Ann understood with gratitude that by this public recognition, he was definitely putting his influence at her service.

When he got a good look at Ann, his face changed a little. He pulled his nose and scowled. One would almost have said that compassion appeared in that grim and battered phiz.

“Where the hell can we go for a bit of a talk?” he grumbled. “I swear you’ve got them all jumping with excitement like beans in a pot!”

“Let’s go into the dance-hall and sit at a table by ourselves,” suggested Ann.

“All right,” said Cal with a broader grin. “Can’t hurt you now that you’ve lost your reputation.”

Ann laughed a note. There was something so sane about Cal. He had a way of making things seem not so desperate.

The dance-hall was fairly well filled, but the atmosphere was stodgy. The men and the girls sat around in listless attitudes. All the zip had departed.

Ann said at once: “Nellie Nairns has gone.”

Cal nodded. “Yes, Nell cut about all the hay there was in Fort Edward, and went in search of fresh pastures.”

They sat at a table a little apart from other people, and looked at each other afresh. “I’m glad you’re willing to be friends,” said Ann with a wry smile. “I hardly expected it.”

Cal wagged his raised hand as much as to say: No use bringing up the past!

A silence fell between them.

“Well, why don’t you question me?” Ann asked at last.

“I’ve already learned from Bower what you told him,” said Cal coolly. “I don’t reckon you’d tell me any more.”

Ann let it go at that. Another silence.

Cal asked with his admirable directness: “Why don’t you marry some other man? Naming no names.”

Ann had the comfortable feeling that she could be absolutely honest with this man, even though he might be opposed to her. “That’s one way out,” she said as coolly as himself. “But I think I’d rather teach school.”

“No doubt you’re right,” said Cal. “I only mentioned it because it’s what most women would do under the circumstances. . . .” He added significantly: “The steamboat goes down river to-morrow. . . .”

Ann interrupted him. “Oh, don’t let’s get started on that again,” she said. “I know all you can say. I know I ought to go. The question is, can I bring myself to it!”

“Well,” said Cal dryly, “if I think you ought to go, and you think you ought to go, it might be the part of true friendship to make you go.”

Ann shook her head impatiently. "What would prevent me from coming right back on her? . . . No, if any good is to come of it, I must persuade myself to go."

"That's pretty fine-drawn for me," said Cal scornfully. "Look here, let me give you a few plain-spoken reasons. Nellie Nairns is gone, and the fellows here are bored. When a gang of men gets in that condition anything devilish can happen. As long as they believed you were a respectable woman, you were pretty safe from them, but they're only ordinary men; they have their own explanation as to why you went North with Chako Lyllac and came back with Frank Bower, and there's no budging them from it. According to their notions you're fair game now. I put it blunt. The only way you could keep the gang off would be by accepting one of them as a protector."

Ann shuddered. "If I only knew that Chako was safe!" she murmured.

"Fudge!" said Cal with brutal friendliness. "That's only an excuse. If you knew he was safe you'd be more unwilling than ever to go."

Ann hung her head.

"I assure you Chako's perfectly safe," said Cal calmly. "If I didn't think so, I wouldn't be sitting quietly in camp. Nothing could kill Chako short of an avalanche. And he isn't in the mountains."

Ann's eyes shone on Cal.

It made him uneasy. He raised his voice a little. "Let me put it to you even more plain. You might think from the way Maroney received you that I had given him a tip not to take you in, as I once threatened to do. That is not so. I never spoke to him about you. It is something quite different that is biting Maroney. Why does he act as if his house was too good for you, you may ask, and him keeping these girls here, who are certainly not lilies. Do you know why?"

Ann shook her head.

"Well, I'll tell you. Maroney collects a percentage of these girls' earnings. He is naturally sore . . . I see I don't have to go on."

Ann's head was low. "Oh, I must go!" she groaned. "Don't say any more to me now. Let me fight it out."

The hard-headed old Mayor of Fort Edward was guilty of a shameful softness. "Sure, sure," he murmured, and touched Ann's hand, then looked around in alarm, to see if anybody had noticed it. He raised his voice. "Lord! This joint is like a Quaker meeting. Let's get out."

They left.

In the morning Ann resumed her woman's dress, and packed her suit-case. She breakfasted in the hotel without speaking to anybody, and afterwards paid her bill to the sneering Maroney. The steamboat was announced to leave "some time or other in the forenoon," and she made up her mind she might as well wait on board as anywhere else. She could screen herself from observation within the deck-house. She set out.

Cal Nimmo was out on the platform. He came towards her with hand outstretched for the suit-case. Ann drew it back.

"Please do not come with me," she murmured. "I know you are my friend. I shall not forget you. But . . . but I would rather be alone."

"That's all right," said Cal quickly. He was not grinning. He lowered his voice. "I wish you luck, my girl," he said deeply. "If it's any consolation to you, I think you are a corker! Chako Lyllac is a fool!"

They shook hands. Ann hurried on alone.

She presently perceived that she was overtaking a group of men bound in the same direction, and moderated her pace. A second glance showed her that Frank Bower was among them, and her heart sank. Frank had bought himself a new store suit which clung queerly to the bulges of his stalwart frame, and he was carrying a new imitation-leather suit-case. The spirit was steadfast but the flesh was weak. He simply could not resist the opportunity of being with her day by day during the long journey outside.

Ann stopped and stared sightlessly in a store window. The crafty instinctive part of us is always on the watch to take an unfair advantage. The instinctive part of Ann used poor Bower's going as an excuse to start a new fight, all dead beat as she was from fighting all night. Because she didn't want to go anyway, the fact that Bower was going rendered the trip well-nigh insupportable to her. How could she endure it, she asked herself; Bower so gentle, so chivalrous, glowing with such a deep and repressed passion; in a word all that she longed for in another man. She told herself she could not bear to hurt him day by day, but it was perhaps nearer the truth that she herself could not bear the implied contrast between Bower and Chako. Cal Nimmo's suggestion recurred to her, too. Suppose in a moment of weakness she took what she could get. Would she not regret it all the rest of her life?

As Ann stood there in inner confusion, her attention was caught by a woman who entered the store, a buxom, pleasant-faced young woman Ann had not seen before. Young wife was written large upon her. Ann recollected that there was a settlement of married people a little way up the Campbell

River that she had never visited. The woman's look of happiness and serenity made her a little sick with envy. *She* has no troubles, Ann thought.

Without thinking what she was doing, Ann followed the woman into the store. Ann bought some handkerchiefs she did not want, while she watched the other covertly. The young wife was well acquainted with everybody in the store; she looked so jolly and kind! When she went out Ann hurried after her, wholly in the grip of her instincts now. She overtook the woman.

"Excuse me," she stammered, "I . . . I suppose you live here."

"Why yes," said the woman, smiling. "Up the river a little piece. Who are you?" Her face suddenly changed. "Why you must be . . ."

"Ann Maury," whispered Ann.

A curious mixture of feelings was to be seen in the woman's face; a strong curiosity, a formal disapproval and a very informal sympathy. It was this last sparkle in her eyes that gave Ann courage to go on.

"I'm afraid you've been hearing stories about me," she faltered.

The woman laughed in an embarrassed way. "Well, they have been talking," she said. "But I don't believe all I hear."

"Do I look like a bad one to you?" asked Ann.

"No," said the other promptly. "That's what I can't understand. . . . What did you speak to me for?"

"I don't dare tell you now," murmured Ann.

"Oh, go on!" said the woman. "There's nothing stand-offish about me."

"Well, I was on my way to take the steamboat," said Ann, "because I can't stay at the hotel. The men there . . ."

"I get you," said the woman dryly.

"I don't want to go out on this trip," Ann went on, "because . . . because . . ." She snatched at the first lie that presented itself. "Because I'm expecting an important letter in the next mail. And then I saw you, and you looked so nice I couldn't help speaking to you. . . . I thought perhaps you would take me in for two weeks. Of course I would pay you the same as I paid at Maroney's."

The woman looked Ann up and down, and bit her lip reflectively. "I don't know," she said. "We live pretty rough up here."

"Ah, what is that," said Ann, "I've been sleeping on the ground for the past six weeks."

"Yes, I know," said the woman dryly. . . . "We have a spare loft in our shack, but you'd have to go up and down on a ladder."

"I wouldn't mind that," said Ann eagerly.

"I wouldn't mind having you," said the woman; "you don't look as if you'd bite me. And it would be company. But I'm thinking my husband would cut up rough. . . . He's a moral man," she added with an engaging grin.

"Perhaps if he could see me," ventured Ann.

"He has seen you."

"Couldn't we go talk to him?"

"That wouldn't do any good. He'd feel obliged to take a moral stand if you put it to him." The woman considered awhile. "Come on!" she said at last. "I'll take a chance. He won't be home till night, and the boat'll be gone then. I can talk him round."

Ann's strained white face softened and beamed. All her unregenerate instincts rejoiced because she had after all won out against common sense.

They proceeded to get acquainted as they walked on. It appeared that Ann's friend's name was Mrs. Cranmer. Her husband was Ed Cranmer, one of the proprietors of the store they had just left. She had a baby. Mrs. Cranmer insisted upon carrying Ann's suit-case part way, and Ann took her bundles.

Their path led them within a hundred feet of the spot where the steamboat was tied to the bank. Only her pilot-house and her crooked stack showed above. She was getting steam up; light wood smoke was floating from the stack. The usual little crowd of men was standing about and sitting on the lumber. When Frank Bower saw Ann passing by, the other woman carrying her suit-case, his honest face took on a comical expression of surprise and chagrin. Ann saw at once that he would never leave that day.

The Cranmer dwelling faced the river. It was of somewhat greater pretensions than its neighbours, having a porch in front and a dormer window in the roof. The Cranmers called it a bungalow. Like all the other shacks it was built of rough-dressed pine, guiltless of paint. Inside, partitions of the same rough boards divided the rooms. The furniture was of the scantiest description. Nevertheless, it was a woman's house; Ann was sensible of the new atmosphere as soon as she entered the door.

The rosy eight-months-old baby blinded Ann to everything else. At the sight of him bouncing and crowing in the breed girl's arms, imperatively holding out his little arms for a white woman to take him, Ann melted like wax before the fire.

"Ah, let me hold him!" she murmured; and took the soft wriggling little body in her arms, and walked up and down with the tears falling fast. The

baby knew he had found a friend, and clung to her with a will. That the women might not see her tears, Ann went out on the porch, where she sat rocking and crooning and weeping, easing her hungry heart.

From that moment Mrs. Cranmer was Ann's friend, and ally. They spent a comfortable day together. Ann told her new friend a little more than she had told Bower, but not much more. Mrs. Cranmer guessed more than Ann told her, and Ann did not mind having her know. Just before midday they heard the piping whistle that announced the departure of the steamboat.

"Well, that's settled," said Mrs. Cranmer with a laugh.

Ed Cranmer came home to his supper with a sour face. Ed was a typical grocer's clerk, who only looked himself behind an apron. He already knew of Ann's meeting with his wife. Ann took herself out of the way while husband and wife had it out together. When she returned Ed's manner towards her was still grudging, but it seemed to be taken for granted that Ann was to stay. During the meal Ed retailed the day's gossip for his wife's benefit. The only item that interested Ann was that Frank Bower, after carrying his grip down to the steamboat, had carried it back to Maroney's again.

On the following afternoon the two women were seated in rocking-chairs on the little porch. Mrs. Cranmer was sewing, and Ann held the blessed baby. That baby was Ann's consolation and joy. The little form seemed to armour her breast against pain. When she held it she knew peace again.

The Cranmer bungalow was built about fifty feet back from the edge of the bank. A swath had been cut through the trees in front, and through this opening they looked out across the murky green flood, but could not see up nor down the river. There came a moment when conversation failed the two women. Ann was rocking slowly, thinking about nothing in particular, quietly recuperating her depleted forces. Suddenly, close to the shore, a light bark canoe shot into view, Chako Lyllac paddling it.

Ann's heart stood still. Her peace and her new-found strength were shattered. The old pain came winging back. She had forgotten it for the time being, and it dismayed her. It snatched her breath and sapped her courage. It seemed as if it must be more than her tired heart could endure. This was what she had been secretly waiting for, but she felt only terror. How could she go through it all again! What would she not have given at that moment to be safely bound out on the stage!

Chako's head was up, his smooth cheeks glowing, his whole figure instinct with well-being. Unaware of being observed he showed them in the first moment the quick open look of a natural creature, missing nothing and giving nothing away. Then he turned his head and saw Ann, and instantly drew the hard mask over his face. He looked away with the defiant, hang-dog air she knew so well. He was carried out of their sight.

Mrs. Cranmer, without saying anything, glanced slyly and compassionately at Ann. Ann got up, and handing the baby to his mother, passed into the house, and climbed the ladder to her loft.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE LAST CHAPTER

WHEN ANN heard Ed come home to his supper, she was forced to go downstairs again. She dreaded having to face his sharp, mean glance, but she had to know what was going on in the settlement. And then after all, Ed would not speak of it before her, though he was clearly bursting with it. The meal was a torture to Ann.

Afterwards the three of them sat out on the porch in a constrained silence. Ann knew very well that Ed wanted to talk to his wife, but she would not leave them. To be sure she could get it all out of Mrs. Cranmer the next day, but she did not see how she could get through the night without knowing. Yet her tongue was frozen in her throat. She could not ask a question.

While Ann sat there so composedly, she was inwardly torn by devils.

What would Chako do? Fly away back again most likely, now that he knew she was still there. What could she do? Sit still until she learned that he had gone? Just sit still and do nothing? She would go mad! . . . But what *could* she do! It would be suicidal to go to the settlement after him. At the first suggestion of pursuit he would surely fly, if he had not already flown. Yet he would never of his own will come to her either. . . .

While Ann was being harried by such thoughts, the form of Chako rose over the edge of the bank in front of her. For one dreadful moment Ann thought she had gone mad in truth. Like lightning she glanced at her two companions. But they saw him too. A wild hope leaped up in her. He had come! She searched his face with her very soul. His day-time freshness was somewhat rubbed. He had probably been drinking in the settlement; that was to be expected. He wore the same defiant hang-dog look. That told Ann nothing, for she knew he used that look to cover all sorts of feelings. He had come! Inside her a warning voice whispered: Don't count on it! But she disregarded it. He had come! He had come! Holding her breath, she waited for his first words.

He touched his hat brim. "Evening, Ed. . . . Mrs. Cranmer. Want to speak to Miss Maury a minute. Matter of business."

Hearing those resonant tones, a little gruff with self-consciousness, Ann well-nigh swooned with delight. She accompanied Chako back to the edge

of the bank, walking like a woman in a dream. They stood there for a moment, Chako, at a loss for words, scowling like a pirate.

“Well . . . haven’t you something to say to me?” he mumbled at last.

She looked at him blankly. “What should I say?” she whispered.

“Well, you owe me some money, don’t you?” he said with a hardy air.

“Oh,” said Ann, with a silly-sounding laugh. “Of course! I quite forgot. I’m so sorry. . . .” Her tongue gabbled while her senses were reeling. So it was the money he had come for! Of course! What a fool she had been! “It’s in the house,” she stammered. “If . . . if you’ll wait just a moment I’ll get it.”

She ran to the house. A strange need of haste drove her. Ed and his wife stared at her. Ann scrambled up the ladder, got the money, and came flying down again and out to Chako.

She thrust the roll of bills into his hands. “Here,” she said. Inwardly she added: “Go! Go! I can’t bear any more!”

But Chako had to count the roll. Ann waited with averted head, holding herself tight.

“There’s too much here,” Chako said sullenly.

“Three hundred was the amount agreed on,” murmured Ann. Her lips were stiff with repugnance, forced to speak about money.

“But I didn’t bring you all the way out.”

“There is the canoe. . . .”

“Ahh! you can’t pay for that!” he said harshly. “That’s not the point. You’ve got to have money enough to get home on. What you paid Bower to bring you out has got to be taken out of this. How much did you pay Bower?”

“Nothing,” said Ann.

“What!” cried Chako.

“He wouldn’t take anything.”

Chako’s face turned black. “Oh, he wouldn’t, wouldn’t he? He was a nice, kind fellow, eh? Different from me, I suppose! He’d do everything you wanted him to! He’d let you walk all over him . . . !”

“Oh, go!” murmured Ann, sick at heart. “You’ve got what you came for.”

“Not till I get to the bottom of this!” Chako said, low and furiously. “Maybe you paid him some other way. . . .”

Ann started back for the house.

“By God! *I’ll* pay him then!” Chako said after her, and leaped down the bank to his canoe.

Ann went back with a dazed air; passed the staring Cranmers without speaking, and climbed to her little loft again. She stood under the peak of the low roof. At first she was simply dazed and sickened by his brutality. Then the feeling stirred within her that after all there was something worse than a man’s brutality; that was his disregard. A crazy little thought of joy lifted up its head. Chako *jealous!*

She seized it and strangled it. Strangled it and stamped on the corpse. He was only drunk; ready to quarrel with anybody about nothing. There was not a spark of feeling for *her* in his breast. To allow herself to suppose that there was, was simply to prepare for another shock such as she had had that night, and another would certainly finish her.

As Ann and the Cranmers were sitting down to breakfast next morning, the open doorway of the bungalow was darkened by the tall figure of Cal Nimmo. Ann’s heart leaped into her throat. She instantly understood that this visit had a portent for her.

“Morning, folks,” said Cal affably. “Got grub enough for another?”

Cal was decidedly a person to be propitiated in Fort Edward, and Ed Cranmer and his wife jumped up with smiles to draw up a chair, to set a plate, etc. Mrs. Cranmer helped him largely. Cal disposed of it handily, declined a second helping, sat back and filled his pipe. Meanwhile Ann played with her untouched breakfast in a state of suspended animation.

Cal got his pipe going well. “I really came to see Miss Maury,” he said. “But I want you folks to hear what I’ve got to say. There’s been so much damn nonsense passed around it’s time a little truth was put in circulation.”

Ann’s heart beat intolerably. She pushed her plate away.

“Now don’t get excited, sister,” said Cal. “There’s no call for it. Let me tell my story and you’ll see.”

“Go on!” said Ed impatiently.

Cal’s eyes twinkled derisively upon him. “Oh, it don’t invalidate your overdue accounts, Ed. . . . Last night Chako Lyllac was seen to set off up the river in his canoe, and as he was back in half an hour or so it was supposed that he had been here.”

“He was here,” said Ed.

“Ah! . . . Well, he’d been drinking some before he came, and he drank some more when he came back, progressing from bar to bar with that long-

legged stride of his like a lone moose, speaking to nobody. He came into Bagger's place, and I was there. And a lot of other fellows buttressing the drink counter. Frank Bower was there. . . .”

Ann half rose from her chair and dropped back again.

“Easy, my girl!” said Cal. “There was no murder done. . . . You all know what a peaceable fellow Big Frank is. Why, I can scarcely ever recollect when he got into a fight. He'll do anything to avoid a fight, and he's respected just the same, because all men know his pluck and endurance on the trail.

“Chako marches up to him and says: ‘I been lookin’ for you.’

“Frank says: ‘Well, I ain't been keepin’ out of your way.’

“Chako ups and throws a little wad of bills in Frank's face. ‘There's your pay!’ he shouts. Nobody knew what he was referrin’ to. Nobody knows yet. ‘And now you're paid I'm goin’ to smash your face open,’ Chako says.

“Some of us grabbed hold of Chako at that. When Chako gets drunk and raging he's like a mad buffalo. Nothing can withstand him. And we thought Frank Bower was too good a man to make meat for Chako. Near twenty years older than Chako, anyhow. But Frank he says, cool as you please: ‘Take your hands off me, men. This cub needs a lickin’ and he's goin’ to get it at last!’ ”

A groan was forced from Ann.

Cal flashed on her: “Well, *didn't* he need a lickin’?”

Ann hung her head.

“Go on! Go on!” Ed Cranmer said, beside himself.

“That's what you miss, stayin’ home nights, Ed,” drawled Cal.

However, Ann's imploring eyes caused him to bestir himself with his tale. “None of us thought Frank Bower had a show. We'd never seen Chako licked in a stand-up fight; and few of us had ever so much as seen Frank Bower put up his fists. But while Chako was still givin’ him the rough edge of his tongue, Frank stepped up and stopped his mouth with a punch that astonished the young feller. Then they went to it. That scrap will be talked about in Fort Edward for years to come.”

“How did it end?” murmured Ann, clasping her hands.

But Cal refused to be cheated out of his whole tale. “Chako was at a disadvantage,” he went on. “He was too mad. Always before this he went into a scrap with a don't-give-a-damn look that had his man half licked before they begun. But now he was mad; so mad he couldn't see good. Bower was mad, too, but it was a different kind of mad. Bower had the look

of a holy priest celebrating mass. Bim! every punch he sent home was for the glory of God! Get the point? What chance had Chako against religion. Not that it was a one-sided scrap at that. Chako got in many a one of his well-known pile-driver hits, but Frank only smiled at 'em. I tell you we men got the surprise of our lives when we saw Chako measuring his long length on the floor. . . .”

“Was that the end?” cried Ann.

“No, the beginning,” said Cal dryly. “Chako was game, of course, game to the marrow. A man shows his true mettle in a losing fight, and I was proud of the boy. Chako came back again and again. When he could no longer see to place his own blows, he still stood up without flinching, and took Bower’s.”

“I can’t stand any more!” cried Ann. “How did it end?”

“It ended when I ended it,” said Cal simply. “Chako would never have cried quits while there was still a beat in his heart. He was so far gone though, that he was damned glad when I stopped it. He was licked all right. Another fellow and me took him home to my place, and there he is still.”

Ann involuntarily rose from her chair.

“Where you goin’?” drawled Cal.

“I must . . . I must . . .” she stammered.

“I wouldn’t,” said Cal dryly. “Chako’s beauty is not permanently spoiled, but this morning he is not pretty to look at.”

“What do I care for that!” cried Ann.

Cal dropped the facetious air. “Sit down, my girl,” he said firmly.

Ann obeyed.

“Do you want to spoil his cure?” Cal went on. “I feel towards Chako as I would towards my own son if I had one, and I tell you this is all for the good of his soul. Leave him to his meditations for a while. *Sympathy!* My God! it would be all to do over again! I tell you the lad is lucky, being in the wrong, to get so thoroughly licked. It will give him a properer notion of life. No man is a complete man until he has been well-licked once.”

Ann said no more.

“You don’t ask me anything about Bower?” said Cal slyly.

Ann looked her question.

“After I put Chako to bed I come back to Bagger’s,” said Cal. “Me and Bower went away by ourselves and had a talk. There’s a man!”

“What did he tell you?” asked Ed Cranmer eagerly.

“Well, you see, Ed, it was to me he told it,” drawled Cal. “In confidence-like. I may say this, though. Bower knew exactly what he was doing.”

“How do you mean?”

“He set out to knock the devil out of Chako, knowing that Chako’s gain would be his loss.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“There’s one as understands,” said Cal. “That’s all Bower cared about.”

“Where’s Bower now?”

“I lent him a dug-out that was left with me by a fellow that went out for the summer. Bower’s gone back up river in her. Must have passed here about midnight.”

Cal got up to go. Ann understood from his glance that he had one word for her in private, and she went with him out on the porch. Cal took her hand.

“Listen, sister,” he said, “you ought to know by this time that I’m your friend. Before this you’ve always done the exact opposite of what I told you. Well, I say nothing about that now. But listen to me! If you don’t stick close to this shack for the next couple of days, I swear I’ll wash my hands of you for good!”

“I promise,” murmured Ann.

When Ed had gone to the store Mrs. Cranmer suggested that she and Ann go in together to buy supplies. There seemed to be no harm in this, nevertheless Ann determined to hold to the letter of her promise, and she declined. Mrs. Cranmer was not too ill-pleased perhaps. The good woman was clearly burning with curiosity to learn the inwardness of the affair that Cal had so tantalizingly suppressed. She set off alone.

She returned in an hour or so with an appeased air. She looked at Ann with a new eye, a romantic eye. To her Ann had become the heroine of a thrilling drama. She let it appear that she was quite willing to tell all she had heard, but Ann would not question her, and Mrs. Cranmer was chary about volunteering the information. To Ann it did not seem worth while to question her, because she was very sure Mrs. Cranmer had not learned the one thing that concerned her, and that was, the true state of Chako’s mind that day.

All day Ann was pursued by the devils of restlessness. She could neither sit still, nor put her hand to any work. In and out of the house she went; to and from the edge of the bank; up and down the trail. It was only the baby

that kept her from flying off the handle altogether. To hold the baby in her arms gave her strength and sanity.

When night came, and they all went to bed, it was worse. Ann, in her loft, felt as if the low roof was suffocating her. For hours she tossed on her cot, and sleep retreated farther and farther from her eyes. Finally she rose, and kneeling at the window rested her arms on the sill. The sky was crowded with stars; the river a grey blur, subtle with emotion. The night soothed her; she was no longer afraid of it; it began to tempt her curiously. After a while she dressed, and letting herself softly down the ladder, went outside.

The ugly scars of the clearing did not show under the stars. The fragrance of the pines was a balm to the spirit. With her face up to the stars Ann went slowly out to the edge of the bank. When she stopped there, and looked down, she was amazed to see a canoe drawn up on the mud below; a light, flat bark canoe. Her heart set up a crazy beating. Around Fort Edward she had seen but one canoe of that sort; Chako's. Turning, she sought for him wildly and silently in the little clearing. She dared not speak his name for fear of those in the house.

She came upon him lying face downward, his head wrapped in his arms. She fluttered down beside him like a bird.

"Chako!" she whispered.

"Go away!" he murmured harshly.

She sat beside him with her hands in her lap, praying for guidance.

"Chako, look at me," she whispered at length.

"I daren't," he groaned. "I'm ashamed."

Ann's breast was softly irradiated with joy. Her instinct bade her be silent.

"Go away!" Chako said again. "I don't want you to pity me."

"I don't pity you," she said simply.

"Why didn't you go with Bower?" he said harshly.

"I never thought of such a thing."

"Do you know what happened last night?"

"Yes."

"Don't you despise me for it?"

"No."

There was a silence. Chako did not turn, nor raise his head, but Ann presently became aware that his hand was dumbly seeking hers. He found it

and caught it up against his cheek. The simple, contrite act wiped out all Ann's pain, all her resentment. Nothing needed to be said. Her breast hovered over him like a mother bird.

"I've been crazy all day thinking you'd gone with Bower," he murmured. "They told me he'd gone. I made sure you were with him. I was afraid to ask. When night came I couldn't stand it any longer. I paddled up here. You hadn't gone to bed. So I knew you hadn't gone. . . . Then I couldn't go back again. I wanted you so! I wanted you so! . . . And I knew it was too late!"

"Not too late!" whispered Ann.

"I couldn't face you in the daylight," he faltered. "You don't know me. You don't know what passed through my mind up there."

"Yes, I know that too."

"I was crazy. I don't know what got into me. The worse I acted, the finer you showed up, and that drove me savage and devilish. And all the time I wanted you so! I wanted to be decent. . . . Well, I see the truth now clear enough. You are the only one that could save me from the devil that is in me. You saved me once already when you sent the gold into the canyon. And robbed yourself doing it. I know now how I need you! And I've lost my chance. Without you I'm a goner!"

Ann slipped down beside him; flung an arm over his shoulders and rubbed her cheek in his hair.

"You mustn't!" he said sharply. "It drives me crazy! I don't deserve it!"

"What's deserving got to do with it?" whispered Ann. "I love you. I love the bad in you and the good . . ."

He sprang up. "Oh, Ann!" he murmured brokenly. "I can't say it . . . but I'll show you! By God! if I live I'll show you!"

Ann's head went home at last.

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.

[The end of *The Wild Bird* by Hulbert Footner]