

THE QUEST OF ALISTAIR

BY

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Gift to a Good

GIFT

O Reader, pent in city street,
Ride with me now, your cares beguile
Out on the range where winds blow sweet.

Leave pavements hard that tire your feet,
Roam uplands rolling mile on mile,
O Reader pent in city street!

Leave winter cold or summer heat—
Forget the daily round awhile,
Out on the range where winds blow sweet.

'Tis yours to hear the rapid beat
Of hoofs, to feel the campfire's wile,
O Reader pent in city street!

The wide wastes call, the stars entreat—
So, rise and ride, true Western style,
O Reader pent in city street,
Out on the range where winds blow sweet.

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CHAPTER I

ON a fine windy morning late in April, a young man of twenty-one climbed the stairs from the Waverley Station, and turned down Princes Street towards the Scott Monument, glancing about him keenly and sniffing the air with evident enjoyment after the closeness of the railway carriage from which he had lately emerged. The gardens to the left of him glistened in their Spring verdure. Even the solemn statues that stood sentinel along their borders seemed to have taken on an unwonted air of animation borrowed from the quick passage of the fleecy clouds across the sky and the quivering tremulous ecstasies of the trees and shrubs as they bent before the vigorous gusts of the East wind, salty with the tang of the North Sea. The throng of foot passengers, too, always an interesting one on this most romantic of thoroughfares, seemed in accord with the rompish mood of Nature. Girls with faces flushed and smiling struggled to hold their headgear, and elderly ladies, as they mounted to the tops of tramcars, fought bravely to subdue the transports of tempestuous skirts that spread themselves flamboyantly as if possessed. Even brown-kneed kilties from the Castle barracks realised that there might be times when the prosaic trousers had their points of excellence over the more picturesque national costume.

The young man smiled as he noted at a windy corner an elderly gentleman of corpulent habit trotting clumsily but

gately after his top-hat which was careering sportively across the street, pausing now and then in its course as if loath to discourage its pursuer by outdistancing him too greatly. Again his face lit up with amusement as he threw a penny to a street urchin who, noting his indulgent eye, had thought it worth his while to cut a few Catherine Wheels in front of him, thereby disclosing serious deficiencies in his nether garments which had not been evident so long as he remained right side up.

"Funny little beggar," the young man muttered to himself as the boy, touching a grimy hand to his cap, flitted off in the direction of the nearest pastrycook's. "How fine to be so happy-go-lucky. It's evident the problems of life don't worry him much," he said; and he sighed in spite of the exhilaration of the east wind.

Along near the National Gallery the young man turned up a side street for one block and then entered another narrow one at right angles, which was composed of such sombre but respectable looking dwelling houses of two or three stories as are so plentifully to be found in the Scottish Capital. The contrast between the life and colour of the shops, with their crowds of passers-by, and the silence and deserted appearance of this side-eddy was a marked one; but the young man did not appear to notice it. He strode along with the assured step of one who knows where he is going and stopped at a house not very far down, on the door of which was a brass plate containing the inscription:

DURIE AND MONCUR
SOLICITORS

Ringing the bell, the young man was ushered upstairs by a trim maid in white cap and apron, where an elderly gentleman sat before a table that was literally covered with papers apparently in the wildest confusion. He rose with an unmistakable air of pleasure to welcome his visitor and shook him warmly by the hand.

"Alistair, my lad, I'm glad to see you, indeed. And

what has blown you up here at this time of the year? You can't be taking your holidays yet surely?" he said as his visitor seated himself comfortably in an armchair opposite him with the air of one who felt much at home. "Have you arrived from London this morning?"

"No," the young man replied, "I came down to Greycrags yesterday on receipt of a telegram from my father. He had had a letter that worried him and he wanted to talk it over with me, so I came down at once. I must go up again to-night though, as I have a case to plead to-morrow."

"Ah, the briefs are beginning to come in, are they? You'll make your mark among those London barristers. They'll find that chin of yours is not to be lightly regarded."

The young man smiled and his smile was a very winning one. In repose his profile was clearcut and handsome, the chin square and prominent but the mouth small and sensitive; the nose fine and Grecian but slightly crooked, a defect which was only noticeable from the front view but was more evident when he smiled, and seemed to impart an individuality to a face that without it might have seemed somewhat too coldly regular. Blue eyes and a fine, high forehead surmounted by auburn hair of a wavy texture, made up a countenance that was striking and attractive to a degree. His figure, slightly above the medium height, slim of waist and wide of shoulder, looked slimmer and more delicate than it really was.

The trend of the conversation seemed not to his liking and he hastened to change it.

"Yes," he said, "chin is all very well but it isn't everything. One needs a 'dome' as a Yankee friend of mine expresses it; and I confess I am faced with a problem now that is too much for me, so I have come to you to solve it."

"Humph," grunted the elder man with a shrug: "more likely you might say you are faced with a problem you think you have solved and you want me to agree with you that you have solved it correctly. I know the breed of you young men all right. One doesn't pass the two and a half score

milestone for nothing. However, I'll listen at any rate," and he leaned back in his chair and inserted his thumbs in the armpits of his vest, spreading the fingers receptively.

"You remember that investment that Father made in British Columbia"—the young man began with something of a deprecatory air.

"That was the eight per cent mortgage on a cattle ranch, I suppose. Yes, believe me it's not one that I am likely to forget. I strongly advised your father at the time to have nothing to do with it. It was for six thousand pounds, was it not?"

"A little more than that, thirty thousand dollars."

"I wanted your father to pay off the mortgage on Greycrags. Instead he thought it was best to let it remain and invest the money at eight per cent when he was only paying three. I suppose it has turned out badly, has it?"

The old man's airy attitude of expectation had changed to one of keen concern and he now leaned forward with lowering brows surveying his visitor with close attention, his small, grey eyes peering out fiercely from under the shaggy eyebrows.

"I'm rather afraid that it has," admitted the young man sadly, as he took a letter from his pocket and unfolding it, handed it to the solicitor. "Perhaps if you will read that it will give you some idea of how matters stand."

The letter was typewritten and the old man, having adjusted his glasses with some little parade, took it up and read as follows:

543 Granville Street,
Vancouver, B. C.,
15th March, 19—

John Kilgour, Esq.,
Greycrags Farm,
Selkirk, Scotland.

Dear Sir:—

We duly received yours of the 5th ult., and regret very much that we have been unable to forward you

anything on account of the De Roche mortgage as we had fully hoped by this time to have remitted you for the arrears in full as well as at least half of the principal of the chattel mortgage.

You will recall that in the summer of last year on account of the severe cold of the winter preceding and the lack of fodder having greatly reduced Mr. De Roche's stock of cattle, he approached us with a certain proposition. This was that we not only allow the interest accrued to remain unpaid but that we lend him another ten thousand dollars to be applied in the purchase of new stock and that we take as security for this as well as the unpaid interest, a chattel mortgage over the whole of his live stock. As Mr. De Roche's covenant was good and the value of the stock was several times that of the money required, we recommended the loan to you on the understanding and with the full belief that it would be paid off this spring from the proceeds of the beef cattle that would be ready for sale. Mr. De Roche is an excellent stockman with a tried reputation and it seemed reasonably certain that he would be well able to do this as he promised. The additional loan was accordingly made.

Unfortunately Mr. De Roche was stricken with a paralytic shock last autumn and was laid aside from the possibility of any more active participation in the management of the ranch which was then left to a young son and his cousin. The former appears to be somewhat wild, and he and the cousin together seem to have made a mess of it. At any rate, when spring came, not only had they let a considerable number of the stock die, but those animals that had come through the winter all right, were so poor that it was impossible to fatten them so as to make them fit to be sold for beef. They had therefore to be turned out on the range and will not be available for sale until the late fall, probably about October. Neither the interest nor the principal of the chattel mortgage has been paid, nor have we been able to collect anything on account of the interest on the old mortgage.

The writer, being alarmed over the situation, has just returned from a trip to the De Roche ranch. He thought it advisable to find out at first hand just what the conditions

were as it proved impossible to get any satisfaction from correspondence. De Roche appeared to be anxious to do what was right and was much distressed over his inability to pay the interest; but he seemed to be relying entirely upon his nephew or manager as he really is now. When the writer threatened to distrain on the stock for the chattel mortgage, he said it would ruin him and make it impossible for him to be able to meet his liabilities on the other mortgage, as without the stock his ranch would not pay at all. There was a good deal of truth in this contention and there is no doubt that if there is a good price for beef cattle in the Fall, De Roche should then be in a good position to pay up all his interest at least. The cousin was very rich in promises but the writer was not at all favourably impressed by him. He said that they had required all the funds that had been taken in to pay the men and other current expenses and that they would have nothing to pay to us for several months. It appears too, that they had secured a considerable advance from the bank at last harvest season which had never been paid back.

If De Roche, himself, had been running the ranch we should have been willing perhaps to wait to give him time to realise to advantage on his cattle, but he is confined to his chair and is unable to take any direction of things. With the present management, which is apparently shiftless and irresponsible, the situation is far from satisfactory. The stock might be sold off in spite of your chattel mortgage and we might not be any the wiser for months after the event. We were, however loath to distrain without your definite instructions and we are writing you now to ask you to cable what you wish us to do in the matter. If De Roche would have let us put our own manager in to run the place till the chattel mortgage and arrears of interest were paid off, we should have been quite satisfied but he absolutely refused to do this. An alternative to this would be to send a competent man up there to look after your interests, if De Roche would consent to have him on the place, as I dare say he would. This would mean additional expense, and it might be hard to get hold of the right man.

We would ask you therefore to kindly cable at once whether you wish to take immediate proceedings against De

Roche to realise on the stock or what alternative action you would suggest.

Yours truly,
BANCROFT AND ATHERTON.

The frown on the old lawyer's face deepened as he read the letter carefully through; and he glanced back with some care over its contents before he finally laid it down with a slight shrug. Then he glanced up again at the young man who sat watching him with an expression that betrayed some anxiety.

"This chattel mortgage is something new to me. Your father never told me anything about it," he said at last. "I was, indeed, completely unaware that he had any such sum as ten thousand dollars available for such a wildcat investment as this appears to have been. I know that it has been hard enough for me to scrape up enough money to pay the interest on the bond on Greycrags which, by the way, falls due this next month. How we are to meet it, I'm sure I don't know," he added in an aggrieved parenthesis.

"As a matter of fact," the young man admitted hesitatingly, "that ten thousand was my money. It was the legacy which I got from my mother's estate. This seemed a good enough investment—at least, father thought it was and I was willing to abide by his judgment. I was only getting two per cent in the bank and eight seemed so much better."

Mr. Durie spread out his hands, palms outward, with a gesture of despair and groaned audibly.

"Fools and their money!" he exclaimed. "Eight seemed so much better," he repeated sarcastically. "Yes, if you get it but it might as well be a hundred if you don't. And to think how I've schemed and slaved to get your father's affairs into better shape and lain awake wondering how we were to be able to meet this wretched bond when it comes due! I advised him against this British Columbia loan when he made it."

"Still you know the investment may come out all right. The way I size it up is this," argued the younger man. "The

ultimate security for the first mortgage on the land is probably safe enough; but if it is necessary to take out foreclosure to collect on it, that means a long-drawn-out business. With the bond on Greycrags soon to mature, we can't afford to wait indefinitely. But the chattel mortgage on which my money is invested is not so secure, as cattle may die if they are not attended to, or, if the people were dishonest, they might be sold without reference to my claim, and my security would be gone. At the same time if we instruct these agents, Bancroft and Atherton, to distrain on the stock, while we would probably realise that money, still we might be making it hard for De Roche to be able to pay up on the big mortgage, as he himself claims.

"Now, I have thought the matter over and talked about it with him and we have come to the conclusion—at least I have—and he has given his consent, that the only thing to do is for me to go out myself and stay there with De Roche, all summer if necessary, until the cattle are sold and he pays up. The agents suggest sending someone up, but they might find it hard to get a reliable man; and I feel that there is too much at stake for us to take the risk of entrusting the business to a stranger."

"What, go off like a madman and leave your profession just when the ball is at your feet—you cannot mean it surely," Mr. Durie burst in, his whiskers and eyebrows seeming to quiver in the heat of his anger and disgust.

"It does seem a pity, doesn't it; but it's not on account of the money alone," the young man pleaded, "although that's important enough. As a matter of fact, I have had some doubts lately as to whether, after all, the law was my proper vocation. While I enjoy the mental exhilaration of getting up the cases and pitting my wits against the other fellows still, at the bottom, there is a certain sordidness underlying it all that one can't get away from. If one is to succeed, one has to truckle; one can't always be on the side of justice. A fellow has some ideals when he leaves college—or he should have—and if he sees that in his chosen profession he must make up his mind to say 'good-bye' to them it is a rather

tough prospect. Then, again, when there is a morning like this and I have to settle down to musty lawbooks or to listen to dreary, sordid squabbles in gloomy courtrooms, I feel that I am losing the best of life. I get the wanderlust, in fact. I suppose you think I talk like a silly schoolboy," he broke off apologetically, "but I am quite in earnest all the same."

Mr. Durie got up and walked over to the window and gazed out of it fixedly, one hand in his trouser pocket fumbling with a bunch of keys. He stood there a short space and gave vent to a subdued sigh before speaking.

"I suppose I ought to scold you mightily," he said at last, "I'm sure I should—and yet I don't know. When I was a young fellow like you, I, too, had a notion I would like to see the world but my father had this business before me and I was brought up with the knowledge that I must take his place. He was getting old and was anxious to have my help as soon as I was qualified and, of course, I was considered lucky to have such a secure thing to step into, a practice all made for me—and I thought so too indeed. So I came in here thinking that when I had saved some money I would be able then to travel and gratify my desire to see the world. I made the money all right but somehow it seemed that I could never get away. Responsibilities multiplied as the business grew; and now here I am, fifty last February and I've never really been out of the British Isles, with the exception perhaps of a hurried run over to Paris for a day or two.

"I ought to scold you, my boy," he repeated, "and yet I don't know. After all, it's a thankless business this worrying over other people's affairs. You get absorbed in it and your youth is gone before you know it. At least, that was the way with me. By the time I was in a position to take my fling, the edge of the desire had been dulled and I was too snugly settled in my groove. And here I am as you see. However, that's beside the question," he broke off briskly, coming back and resuming his seat, "and you've

made up your mind anyway, haven't you?" he questioned with a smile.

"Yes, I think I have," said Alistair; "six months should see the business through as far as the investment is concerned. After that, if I feel like it, I can take up the bar again without a great deal of harm having been done. I shall be only twenty-three then; and the experience abroad will not be wasted."

"Well, I hope your quest may prove successful, my boy. It is rather a queer one, you know, and hardly as romantic as if you were going gold-digging or in search of hidden treasure; but it may turn out adventurous enough. If you can pull your father's chestnut out of the fire and your own too it may be worth while," Mr. Durie replied glancing at his watch; "but you had better lunch with me at the Club and we shall talk it over further. I have an appointment now with an old lady client—whose will I am drawing the fifth time, by the way—and I must not keep her waiting."

CHAPTER II

HERE comes Olney with the mail at last and Ted isn't with him. I do wish he would be a little more regular about coming to meals. He is getting quite thin."

The speaker was a young girl just on the threshold of womanhood. About the middle height, she looked taller than she was because of the slim lines of her figure and the erectness of her pose as she gazed intently down along the narrow road that skirted the lake, lying smooth and mirrorlike against its wooded background, which reflected faithfully the many-shaded colouring of the hills above. A horseman had just made his appearance around the corner where the road disappeared and was approaching at a sharp gallop.

"What nonsense you do talk about your brother, Lorraine," said her companion querulously, a man of about fifty, who looked older than he was by reason of sickness and who sat in a wheeled chair on the verandah beside her. "You know very well how many things he has to attend to. A cattleman must eat when he can and not when he will."

"Yes, Father, I know," said the girl with a faint sigh; "but Ted isn't very strong and he doesn't have to ride the range the way you did. He's oftener at Tim White's than he should be. He thinks it is manly to drink with the other men but I know it isn't good for him."

"I do wish that you wouldn't be such a tale-bearer on your brother," the sick man replied with some irritation. "I'm sure Olney is always saying what a fine boy he is—that he is his right hand in managing the place. Now that I have been stricken down, it is a mercy we had your cousin Olney to step into my place though he has been unlucky with the stock this winter."

"Yes, indeed, Father," said the girl heartily enough, "but all the same he is inclined to spoil Ted just as you are. I don't like tale-bearing as you call it," she went on earnestly, "but I can't bear to see Ted getting into such ways—there, I am worrying you, dear, when I shouldn't, and I'm sorry," she broke off coming over to pat the pillows and fondle the thin, white hand that rested on the arm of the chair. The lines that had been wrinkling the forehead of the invalid smoothed themselves gradually out as the fair cheek with its clear, transparent hue and suggestion of lurking freckles was laid against his, and the golden auburn hair brushed lightly against the grizzled temples. There was a strong likeness between the two faces thus brought together, the same pink transparency of skin, the same patrician delicacy of feature as shown in the fine chiselling of the nose and mouth and the smallness of the ear and the graceful arch of the eyebrow. In the man's face, however, there were discernible the marks of the stroke that had in a moment cut him off from his active career and had not only robbed him of his physical strength but had clouded the brightness of a mind that had before been remarkable for its keenness and sound judgment.

"Oh, there he is now," she broke in as another horseman appeared riding very swiftly and rapidly overtaking the first so that they turned in together at the gateway, which was about a hundred yards from the house, and came down the avenue of cottonwoods at a brisk trot, passing round to the stables at the rear. In a few minutes they returned on foot by the front door, having come through the house. The elder of the two threw himself into a cane rocker beside the invalid, but his smile was for the girl as he opened the white canvas mailbag and began to take out a number of letters and newspapers. He was in appearance about thirty-five, tall, and very powerfully built; and the careless freedom of his dress with shirt open at the throat, no vest, and trousers secured by a belt about the waist served to accentuate the suggestion of great muscular vigour. A slight tendency towards heaviness was apparent in a round-

ness of the shoulders and the amplitude of the waistline as compared with the chest, while the head large and well-shaped was in keeping with the torso. The features were regular, the nose slightly aquiline, the mouth large and loose-lipped, half concealed by a heavy brown moustache, and the eyes of a light blue with long lashes like a girl's. A ruddy complexion improved the general effect which was distinctly pleasing except for a certain heaviness when the face was in repose.

"Just one for you this time, Miss Lorraine," he said tossing a letter into her lap, "and only one for me. It's from these mortgage sharks, too," he added, the smile changing into a scowl as he slit the envelope with his knife and unfolded the letter before him. "I wonder what they have to say now."

The girl who had begun to open her own letter looked up with concern and her glance passed quickly from the younger man to her father. As she noted the shade of anxiety that had crossed his face, her hand stole out and clasped his tenderly. The two kept their eyes fixed on the reader's face, the old man, with head down, looking up under contracted brows, the girl with parted lips and bated breath. On the verandah rail, her brother flicked idly with his gauntlet at the rowel of his spur.

"Listen to this," Olney Layburn cried with a laugh that had little of mirth; and he began to read from the letter: "Being alarmed by the unsatisfactory condition of the loan, Mr. Kilgour has come out from Scotland himself to look into the matter and will be with you in the course of a few days. It is imperative for him that the chattel mortgage should be paid in full this Fall and the interest paid up to date. The proper course would be to sell the stock at once, under the powers contained in the former and start foreclosure upon the land as well; but Mr. Kilgour is loath to take any harsh measures if it can be avoided and he has this alternative to propose which we think is a very fair and reasonable one. He will stay with you on the ranch all summer and must have full cognizance of all receipts

and expenditures. He may also wish to have some voice in the policy of the working of the place. Should Mr. De Roche or yourself object to this arrangement, which we trust, however, will not be the case, then there would be no other course but to take immediate proceedings. As Mr. Kilgour will arrive very soon after this letter, it will be quite satisfactory for you to deal directly with him. Yours truly, Bancroft and Atherton."

When the reader had concluded there was a brief silence which was broken by the youth, Ted.

"The miserable swine!" he burst out. "What do they mean, I would like to know! This haw-haw Englishman thinks he has come out to be a boss and a spy over us, does he? Ha, ha, ha! I don't think," and he laughed out loud with all a boy's impetuosity. "As for me I call it rich. I bet he wears an eyeglass and talks with a lisp. Bah Jove, ma deah sistah," he mimicked, erecting an invisible monocle and screwing up his eye in the approved fashion of the Englishman on the stage, "I weally think that we shall have some doocid fun with this fellow, don'-cher know, eh what? I weally envy him the charming time that he is going to have."

The girl's eyes sought those of the invalid to see the effect that the reading of the letter had had on him.

It was quite evident that he had realised its import also and his distress of mind was clearly shown in the drawn look on his features, and even in his attitude of strained attention which, since the conclusion of the reading, he had not relaxed.

"It's the first time that Dick De Roche ever defaulted on a debt yet," he groaned, "and I'm fair ashamed of it. They're getting nervous about it, Olney, it seems, and you can't blame them; but we must sell enough stock to give it to them at once, eh?"

"Don't you worry about it, Father dear," the girl said coming quickly to his side and laying her cheek against his. "It'll be all paid up almost right away, won't it, Olney?"

And we'll send the man away with his tail between his legs just like Yarrow when the bull took after him to-day."

"Sure, we'll have it all paid up in no time almost," said Olney in answer to her appeal, but his voice may have lacked something of the full heartiness of conviction. "Look's like we would have to," he went on; "but if this tenderfoot thinks he's going to take a hand in running the place, he's off his bearings, that's all. I ain't going to take orders from the like of him, and the sooner he goes back where he came from the better. I guess he'll have had enough of it by the time he's been here a week."

CHAPTER III

THE train on which Alistair Kilgour left Vancouver a few days after the events chronicled in the last chapter was timed to arrive at Garston about seven in the evening of the same day, but unfortunately, on account of a rock-slide near Agassiz it was made six hours late. There was a semi-weekly stage that he could catch next morning, Bancroft had assured him, and this would take him to the Duck Lake post office within a mile of the De Roche place. The conductor had assured him that there was a fair hotel at Garston and he would have no trouble in getting comfortable sleeping quarters there. It was true, he had added, that the landlord was deaf and it might be hard to wake him up at that hour of the night—but that, in any case, the door was always open and all he had to do was to go upstairs and take the first empty bedroom he came to. Not many guests stayed there anyway and these were only men of a free-and-easy life so that he could just make himself at home.

It had been a warm ride but nevertheless Alistair had enjoyed it to the full. The wildness of the scenery in the Fraser Canyon and along the Thompson, the sense of limitless spaces so scantily peopled and the impression of a Nature grander and more awe-inspiring than he had ever realised before his trip across the Continent, all combined to arouse emotions that were novel and delicious. Here, at last he felt, he had escaped from the trammels of an age-long civilisation and was at the opening of a new life that would be full of untried experience, of fresh sensations, dear to the heart of adventurous youth.

The train pulled up at Garston with much grinding of brakes and deep groans of protest at the wasted time, nor

was there a moment of delay after Alistair had stepped down and his trunk had been thrown out of the baggage car before it was on its way again. He was the only passenger to alight and a man, who was evidently the station-agent, pointed out the hotel to him, a two-story building that stood nearby.

It had a wide verandah extending all along the front, carried up to the second story. Alistair mounted the steps and opened the front door which was closed but not locked. The entrance hall was dark in contrast with the bright moonlight outside and he struck a match as he stepped in, closing the door after him. Its feeble ray revealed a small counter on the right on which was a large book, evidently the register, while on the left was the stairway. After he had knocked as loudly as he dared on the counter, until it seemed that everybody in the house must have heard him, without any apparent result, he concluded that the best thing that he could do was to accept the conductor's advice and take the first room that he should find unoccupied. So, with some slight trepidation, he tiptoed up the stairs as quietly as he could by the light of a second match, the uncarpeted treads creaking a loud complaint as he went.

"You'll always be able to sympathise with the feelings of a burglar after this, my boy," he said to himself with an inward chuckle as by the light of another match, he was able to make out the outline of a narrow corridor with doors on either side. The first had the number 7 upon it. He listened for a moment at the keyhole for the sound of breathing or a snore, but hearing nothing, he gently opened the door and stepped inside. The sudden draught of air, however, extinguished his match and there was a moment of suspense while he lit another one and held it high, so as to shed the light around him. It was a small room and it only took him a moment to see that the bed was occupied so he backed out precipitately, closing the door after him with some noise in his hurry. Reassured by the silence that still reigned, he lit another match and tried No. 9, which was the next in order. Here, the bed was also occupied

and evidently by a lighter sleeper for as soon as the illumination fell upon him, there was a rustle of bedclothes and a deep voice growled, "What the devil's the matter?"

With a muttered apology, Alistair again escaped. By this time, his desperation was lending him courage as he felt that he must find some haven of refuge. He could not remain in the passageway all night; and the sooner he got in somewhere the better. Once in bed, he would be safe from suspicion, but as long as he was wandering about through the house the position would be a decidedly awkward one, should he be challenged by any of the inmates.

However, he had no sooner stepped into No. 11 and lit a match as before when there came a loud feminine shriek, or rather a succession of them. Alistair had put the possibility of a female occupant of the room out of his head on account of what the man at the station had told him, when he had suggested it, so he was considerably startled as might be supposed. In his hasty flight, however, his nerve did not desert him and he was able to sum up the situation and to decide the best procedure to follow. The house could not fail to be roused after such an outcry and to return down the stairs would almost surely lead to his betrayal. However innocent his motives might be, it was bound to be an awkward matter to explain them at that time of night and, perhaps, under the indictment of an angry female.

Quickly he tried the next room and fortune favoured him, for he found it empty. He stood and listened with beating heart inside while he heard several doors open and men's voices in discussion.

"What in tarnation's the matter, Bill?" said one. "There was a galoot came into my room and lit a match."

"Hanged if I know, Jake; sounds like some female bein' murdered, ain't it?"

"Does kinder appear that way, Bill. Why don't yer rush in to the rescue, you that's such a lady's man."

"Nothin' doin', old scout, not for little Willie," was the sardonic reply; "I've got to have fuller instructions than

that afore I rush in on any female in her bowd-war if she is gettin' killed. None o' your jackpots for me."

Then a different voice broke in, a man's voice again but a timorous one, the tones piping and nervous.

"Oh, there must have been someone murdered," it cried. "Which room did the screams come from?"

The answer came from the screamer herself in a voice that was evidently still tremulous and quavery with fright.

"Oh, there was a burglar came into my room, Mr. Jenks," it said breathlessly. "He was just going to take my watch off the dressing table when I screamed. You might see if you can catch him. He ran out the door whenever I cried for help. I got a terrible fright."

Alistair's feelings were a curious mingling of mirth and perturbation, as he listened to the colloquy which was all distinctly audible, the partitions in the building being only made of wood, and not plastered, so that the sound easily passed through them. If they should come into the room after him, he felt that he would have an awkward time making an explanation, especially in view of the fact that he was an utter stranger in the country. Fortunately the blind was up and, by the moonlight that streamed into the room, he was able to make out the furniture. So as silently as possible, he pulled down the clothes and jumped into the bed pulling them up to his chin again. However, in his haste to get under cover, he shook it so violently that the tall head-board gave a loud rattle; and this, with the creaking of the springs, evidently was plainly heard by the party in the hall.

"He's there in 13," said the same piping man's voice. "I distinctly heard him just now."

"Why don't you go in an' see then?" said the gruff bass of the first one; and the door was flung open and the party burst into the room. Two of them had candles and to Alistair, peeping out from under his half-closed eyelids, they presented a striking appearance, the three figures silhouetted in the candle light as they stood, the two first inside the doorway and the third discreetly in the back-

ground. The head of a fourth could be distinguished peering over the shoulders of the third. The two that were leading were clad merely in their shirts, the scanty tails of which left a goodly length of unprotected shank that gleamed weirdly in the flickering beams of the candles; but a long nightrobe discreetly veiled the figure in the rear.

The two in front paused irresolutely as their blinking eyes took in the fact that the only occupant of the room was in bed.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Alistair, the words dying away in a yawn. "The house isn't on fire, is it?" and another yawn followed even more sleep-laden than the first.

"There was a burglar in the next room that scared the lady purty bad and we thought he come in here," stammered the nearest to the bed, an old man six feet tall with formidable bristling whiskers and a Yankee drawl. "Ye hain't seen him, have ye?"

"No, my friend," Alistair replied gravely, appreciating the fun of the situation in spite of its seriousness. "Do you not think that he might be out on the verandah though. That would be the easiest way of escape, I would think."

"Danged if the chap bean't right, Jake," said the other, a stoutly-built man over middle age. "We are wastin' time here;" and he strode quickly to the door that opened out to the upper balcony followed by the others and the whole party were soon outside. They were not long in trooping back, however, when they found that the burglar was nowhere to be seen; and closing the door after them, they departed, and Alistair was left in peace.

Before long, quietness reigned again throughout the building and he was able to get up and light the candle and undress; and, thoroughly tired out with the long, hot journey in the train, he was soon asleep.

CHAPTER IV

ALISTAIR was awakened next morning about seven o'clock by the bright sun that streamed in at his window, and with the pure, stimulating air of the Dry Belt, his blood was stirred to an unwonted exhilaration. In spite of the shortness of his rest, he sprang from the bed with eagerness to enter upon the adventures of the day.

It was true that he felt some diffidence about making his appearance after the incident of the night, but he sallied downstairs with as easy an air as he could muster. To his relief there was no one in the hall except an old man who was brushing off the counter with a feather duster and he took him for the hotelkeeper himself. He was short and very broad with a face that was like that of Santa Claus in the pictures, cheeks and nose a bright pink, and hair and whiskers of the whitest and silkiest possible.

"Good-morning," said Alistair to him politely in as gracious a tone as possible; "you'll be wondering how I got here, I suppose. I came in on the train during the night; and as there was no one around I just helped myself to a room. I was told that that was the proper thing to do."

The old man was evidently deaf for he took a speaking-trumpet out of his pocket, put the one end to his ear and solemnly extended the other to Alistair, who was somewhat disconcerted to find that all his suave speech had been wasted.

"I came in on the train during the night," he repeated, shouting loudly into the tube.

"Eh, what's that?" the old man queried evidently puzzled; "you've come here lookin' for a fight?"

"No, no, my friend, not at all," Alistair laughed. "Through the night, on the train, you understand. She was six hours late you know."

"Sitting up late? She wasn't sitting up at all," the old man exclaimed irascibly. "She was in bed and asleep too. Raised Cain with me this mornin', she did, for not havin' no lock in them doors. 'Taint my fault, is it? I didn't build this here hotel, did I? If the gent went into your room by mistake, ma'am, ses I, didn't he go out jist as quick whin he found out ye were there; an' what was the use of hollerin' so about it, wak'nin up the whole house."

Alistair gasped in astonishment to find that the old man seemed to know all about his nocturnal misadventure and his face must have expressed his surprise for the latter went on as if in reply to his mute query.

"Oh, yes, I knows all how it happened; an' I told the young woman so wen she come down this mornin' purty nigh in highstrikes about it. 'Might a' been murdered,' she ses, ses she. 'Not on your life, ma'am,' ses I. 'The gent just came in late and helped himself to a room; an' e's up there now nixt door to ye sleepin' the sleep o' the innocent as quiet as a babby. If ye've a mind to, ma'am, ye can go up an' ave a look at 'im yerself.' But ye'll be a-wantin' your breakfast, no doubt," he broke off, pointing at the door to the left; "an' ye'll find it in there."

"I want to go up on the stage. Can you tell me when it leaves?" Alistair shouted into his ear, relieved to find that his landlord, at least, was not likely to ascribe sinister motives to his intrusion into the lady's room.

"Oh, ay, the stage," the old man replied, when Alistair had repeated, "the stage'll be here in about a half an hour an' I'll tell Jimmy ye're goin' so there won't be any chance of 'im missin' ye. You just go in an' 'ave yer breakfast for ye'll need it all I guess before ye git to where ye're goin'."

So, without further parley, Alistair nothing loath entered the dining-room. It was a plain, uncarpeted room with half a dozen tables. A girl was seated at one of the nearest ones and two men in shirt-sleeves and overalls at the one farthest away. A Chinaman was moving about waiting on the guests and when he saw Alistair, he hastily beckoned him to a

chair at the same table at which the girl was sitting but at the other end. Alistair would fain have sat at any other, but he had not the courage to refuse the chair offered him. So he accepted it in silence inwardly cursing the man's officiousness. There were just two tables that had linen tablecloths and these were for strangers and guests belonging to the upper ten, so to speak, of the district. Alistair wore a white collar and there was no chance that Sing who had the good of the house at heart, would allow him to slip past to the other tables that could only boast of a covering of the less luxurious but more permanent white oilcloth that could be rubbed spotless with a damp cloth after each meal. To dine on linen with the aristocrats cost fifty cents whereas to do so on oilcloth, or below the salt with the common folk, only thirty-five.

However, Alistair was as yet altogether oblivious of such class distinctions existing even in this Wild West to which he had come; and had small appreciation of the social advantage of his position. He felt sure that here facing him was the complaining female whose rest he had disturbed and the realization gave him some embarrassment.

The Chinaman came to his rescue by handing him a plate of fruit and asking him if he would have porridge. After peeling half of an apple and biting a bit out of it, he mustered up courage to take a furtive glance at his vis-a-vis. She was young and decidedly pretty, he noted, and she did not look like a country girl, he thought, her dress was too stylish in its cut.

To his great relief, a newcomer entered the room and came and took his place at the table between him and the young woman. He was a short, plump little man with a clean-shaven chin and side-whiskers streaked with grey. His small eyes, deep-set in his fat, pasty-complexioned face, glanced about him with a certain nervous alertness that impressed Alistair curiously.

"So you are up early, Miss Pelton," he said smiling to the girl as he took his seat. "I should have thought that after your midnight alarm, ha, ha, ha, you would have

taken a longer spell in bed. Good-morning, sir," he concluded with a nod to Alistair who acknowledged it civilly. The voice was high-pitched and piping and the latter at once recognised it for one of those that he had heard in the hall upstairs a few hours before.

"I have to catch the stage, you see, Mr. Jenks, which like time and tide waits for no man. Monday morning I have to be at work again and I don't want to have to walk to Duck Lake."

"What a happy lot of youngsters they must be, ha, ha, ha, to have you as their tutelary goddess," and he grinned fatuously at her.

"Oh, I get along very well with them I assure you, Mr. Jenks, except when I have to punish them, and I daresay they don't like me over much then."

"I hope that you don't feel any the worse of your fright of last night,—I'm sure you don't look it. It was a pity we weren't able to catch the fellow. He got away with your watch, didn't he?"

"Oh, no, indeed; I found it under my pillow after all. I thought that I had left it on the table in front of the bed and when I put out my hand and found that it was not there, I thought, of course, that the man had stolen it. Old Humpty says that it was a man who came in off the train and was looking for an empty room; and he must have gone into my room by mistake. A pretty serious mistake!" she exclaimed indignantly; "but old Humpty seemed to take it quite as a matter of course. In fact, he seemed quite annoyed that I had made such a fuss about it. But, of course, he should have locks on the rooms—next time I'll put the dresser up against the door and anybody that comes in late will find that he is 'up against it.'"

"I regret that I was the unfortunate cause of your alarm last night," Alistair broke in, finding that he could not keep silence any longer, "and I must apologize most humbly. I was told by the conductor on the train that it was the proper thing to do if one arrived at this hotel in the middle of the night just to take possession of the first empty room

one could find without troubling the landlord. He said nobody would object; and if I found a room occupied, just to pass on to the next. I asked him what if there were any lady guests and he said that there never were any. So you see I followed what I thought was the custom of the house. I am very sorry, I am sure, but if it is any consolation to you I think that I was just about as frightened as you were."

"Oh, don't apologise," the girl answered laughing but with some embarrassment, a warm blush suffusing her cheeks. "I guess that I was silly to make such a fuss about it; but you see I'm from Vancouver and I've only been up here about four months. I haven't got used to the ways yet."

"He, he, he," laughed the man whom she had called Mr. Jenks turning to Alistair, "these city school-ma'ams! I know them. They come, they see, they conquer like Cæsar. I just give Miss Pelton a year before she marries some young rancher and settles down in this country. He, he, he, one after the other, the procession of the school-ma'ams, I call it. Are you going up on the stage, too?"

"Yes," replied Alistair somewhat distantly. This chap has gone far enough, he told himself. Let him mind his own business.

"Perhaps you are going to Duck Lake where Miss Pelton is bound for?" Jenks persisted. "It'd be rather nice to have company, wouldn't it, he, he, he?"

"No, I'm going to the De Roche ranch," Alistair returned emphatically, spurning the suggestion with some annoyance.

"He he, he, that's just by Duck Lake," chortled the tormentor gleefully.

"I think it must be time for the stage to leave," said Miss Pelton rising abruptly.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Alistair had paid his bill and, carrying his portmanteaus, had passed outside to where the stage was waiting, his preconceived notions of what that was likely to be received a rude shock. It was only a spring wagon with one wide seat and two ordinary-looking nags; while the stage driver instead of the bearded and bewhiskered type described so picturesquely in the novels of Bret Harte was only just a stripling of a lad with the down on his cheek, and clad in a pair of faded blue overalls and a yellow shirt. He was busy now finding a place for Miss Pelton's suitcase amongst the miscellaneous assortment of articles in the wagon, which besides the mailbags included a heating stove and a large parrot cage. Miss Pelton, who was already perched on the middle of the seat, was chaffing him in a sprightly way, and the lad seemed to be holding his own with her, while at the same time disposing his load to the best advantage with deft hands that never seemed to make a false move. He nodded to Alistair and took his bags from him, placing them safely in the wagon, as the latter climbed up to the vacant seat beside Miss Pelton. In another minute they were off at a slow lumbering trot. The team slowed up, however, as they crossed the railroad track; and the road began to climb around the edge of a big bluff and along the canyon by the side of the clear mountain stream that at times bordered close upon the driveway, and at times gurgled along in a deep ravine from fifty to a hundred feet below. The rippling waters sparkled brightly where the morning sun in places pierced through the canopy made by the bullpines and the cottonwood trees; and the horses, walking briskly, snorted in apparent appreciation of the fresh breeze that was aromatic of the scents of

summer. The clinking of the tracechains formed an accompaniment to the singing of the birds overhead.

The road kept on climbing, ever twisting and turning, as the slope was far too steep to permit of a direct ascent. The grade had been cut out in many places having a bank towering high on the one side and a precipitous declivity on the other with nothing at all in the way of a fence for a protection to the driver. Alistair wondered how anyone who was not acquainted with the road could possibly negotiate these turns and twists with safety in the dark. His sense of the picturesque was charmed by the changing vistas of green fields traversed by curious snake-fences and dotted here and there with the rude log house and barn of the hardy homesteader. On each gatepost was the invariable box for the mail at which Jimmy, the driver, would pull up his team and deposit a little sack with letters or any package that he might have brought from the store, for the stage laid itself out to carry everything for a fee. The loneliness and ugliness of these little farms was only redeemed by the romantic scenery amid which they lay, so different from that of the settlers' shanties on the flat and uninspiring wastes of the prairies that Alistair had marked from the car windows on his trip across.

Alistair's attention was called away from his enjoyment of the scenery by the sound of a familiar name in the conversation between Jimmy and the school ma'am, to which up to this time he had paid scant attention. It was the former who was speaking.

"Yes," he was saying; "Mr. De Roche had another shock and the Doctor says he's pretty bad. He can't speak a word either. Poor Miss Lorraine is terrible cut up and Ted he went down to White's and got on a terrible drunk over it. Too bad that kid can't behave himself. Just when he's needed, has to go an' play the fool. 'Taint right, is it?"

"No, it isn't right, Jimmy," Miss Pelton replied. "Ted has been badly spoiled, I'm afraid; and I don't think that Olney Layburn has done him any good either. By all I

hear, Olney encourages him in his drinking habits though he wouldn't like Lorraine to know it."

"No, I guess not," Jimmy replied with some emphasis as he flicked at the off horse with his whip. "Olney is mighty sweet on Lorraine and he knows how much she thinks of Ted. If she thought that he was leadin' Ted wrong it'd be the mitten for him or I'm a nigger."

There the conversation was broken off by their arrival at a little house by the side of the road where an old man stood waiting to get his mail and some groceries that had come out to him with Jimmy. It took a minute or two until he was attended to, and when the stage drove on the conversation took another channel, rather to Alistair's disappointment as he was interested in any details that he might learn of the De Roche household.

They had been trotting along past green meadows between the low pine-covered hills that rose on either hand but now the road all at once came out on the margin of a lake, the blue waters of which sparkled gaily in the sunshine. Ducks and other waterfowl could be seen swimming on its surface, or flying with rapid wing from place to place, and an occasional muskrat swimming out in a half circle from the bank below.

"I suppose that you'll be the head of the family, Jimmy," Miss Pelton remarked sympathetically, to the driver, "since your father was killed. Anyway, it's fine for you to think what a comfort you are to your mother now. What could she do without you?"

"Jim's father was killed in a runaway with the stage just about three months ago and he has been driving it himself ever since," she remarked aside to Alistair. "He has two little brothers and a sister and he is the breadwinner for them all and he just turned seventeen. They make up exactly one-fifth of my pupils and they are about the smartest I have too."

The conversation was interrupted as they rounded a lofty bluff along the lakeside by the sudden appearance of a drove

of pigs driven by a man on horseback and a couple of bare-footed boys; and as the road was very narrow and there was no protecting fence along the precipitous edge, it was necessary to pull the team in as close to the bank as possible while the porkers with many a suspicious grunt galloped past the wagon almost in single file, so narrow was the space available.

"Nice looking lot of hogs, Monte," Jimmy called out to the man on horseback as he passed with the air of a connoisseur. "Should average a couple of hundred apiece, eh?"

"About that, I guess, Jimmy," the man replied with a smile. "I'll trade you jobs if you like. Drivin' hawgs ain't just much in my line, it ain't."

"No, thank you," Jimmy called after him. "I ain't stuck on the job either. I guess that Monte just naturally hates hogs. He's a cowpuncher an' nuthin' else an' it just makes him mad to have to attend to the grunTERS. 'Cows or nuthing for him,' he says. He came up here from Montana where they do have cowpunchers—the real thing, with six-shooters—that ride into town every payday an' shoot up the sheriff, you know, just like in that picture in White's store. That's the life, you bet. If I were foot-loose I'd go down to Texas or Arizona myself where there's some real fun goin' on, I would."

"For shame, Jimmy," said Miss Pelton smiling. "One would think to hear you talk that you wanted to be a regular 'Texas bad man.'"

"I gather then that this is a reasonably law-abiding community," said Alistair in his most deliberate manner; "which I am quite relieved to hear, you know. For a peaceful sort of party like myself, it would be very unpleasant to have persons of that kind around."

Jimmy stifled the guffaw that rose to his lips to a sort of half-audible snort and did not deign to make any reply. A moment or so later, they had mounted the crest of a long hill and the road turned down again to a fair-sized two-story wooden building with two doors which looked out on the lake. Above one doorway was the inscription, "Store

and Post Office," and above the other the word "Hotel." A wooden platform, with steps three or four feet high leading to the ground, extended along the wide front, and on this three or four men were lounging among the fruit boxes, grain sacks and other articles that lay here and there.

The group upon the platform nodded to the stage-driver and touched their hats to Miss Pelton; and Alistair was aware of their curious scrutiny directed towards himself. He was the last to climb out of the wagon and followed Jimmy into the store to settle with him for his fare. He arranged with him to bring his baggage along later to the De Roche ranch which the latter assured him was but a short mile farther on. The house being close to the road and the lake front, he could not miss it. Then, pleased to escape from the curious eyes of the loungers in the store he slipped outside and strode off down the road glad to stretch his legs after sitting still so long in the stage.

About ten minutes' smart walking brought him to a neat gate, painted white, from which a short avenue of cottonwoods led up to a house of some pretensions. It was of two stories with a wide verandah all round approached from the front by a flight of steps. Luxuriant creepers climbed up and encircled the wide verandah posts and the front door stood invitingly open.

Alistair walked up the avenue and mounted the steps, looking around him with interest and knocked at the open door. No one, however, came to answer, and he was about to knock again when his eye was taken by a figure on horseback that had stopped and dismounted at the gate through which he had just entered. It led the horse through and began to walk up the avenue towards him and as it came nearer he saw that it was a young girl in khaki riding habit, cut with the divided skirt so as to permit of riding astride. The horse was a fine animal, coal black and about fifteen hands high; and as it followed her, with the reins looped over the horn of the saddle so as to hold fairly tight on the formidable looking curb bit in its mouth and make

it arch its neck in a shapely bow, it cocked the eye nearest her in the knowing way of a horse that is fond of a little fun as much as to say, "You think that I'm going to do all you say, but just you wait a bit."

His mistress was evidently aware that it required watching; for in spite of her assured and jaunty step, from time to time, she turned to coax it on and adjust her pace in order not to let it increase the distance too much between them, pausing occasionally to encourage it with a gentle tap across the shoulders from her riding-switch. As they came to the place in the drive where a road branched off to one side leading to the barn, it made a quick turn along this and had not its mistress been watching closely, it would have got away before she could stop it. With a quick bound, however, she managed to head it off and snatch the bridle.

"Shame on you, Pronto!" she exclaimed, "shame on you, sir, for a wicked, wicked horse. After all the pains I have taken with you to think that I have to watch you just as closely as if you were a shaggy-coated, half-tamed, unmannerly little bronco instead of—instead of," and she tapped the animal lightly across the nose at each pause for emphasis, "instead of a blue-blooded, five-gaited High School Saddle Horse all the way from 'Ole Kentucky,' sir. Aren't you 'shamed of yourself? Oh, it's all very well to bow and scrape, sir," she went on as the horse began pawing the ground vigorously; "but if you want to keep up your country's reputation for gallantry, you'll better not try to run away from your mistress in that fashion again. Shake with me now and say you're sorry and won't let it happen again ever;" and she held out her hand. The horse with his nose tucked in and his one eye thrust forth, roguishly regarded her for a moment or two, his two ears cocking back and forward curiously betraying his indecision. Then all at once, he swung round his quarters slightly and lifted up the right hoof very high toward his mistress. Then as she leant towards him to take hold of it, he reached out with the velvet muzzle and playfully pretended to nip her slender shoulder with its thin khaki covering.

"Ah, you old humbug," she said to him affectionately, dropping his fetlock and pressing a kiss on the velvet nose; "you think you know how to get around me, don't you, with your little ways, but some day, sir—some day—if you don't reform you are liable to get a licking."

Alistair who had stepped forward on first sighting her to await her approach, had stood watching the little tableau, charmed with the pleasing vision of the slender, graceful figure of the girl, who could not have been over twenty, and the handsome animal, so high-mettled and yet so gentle. He made such a contrast in his glossy coal-black coat with the girl's Titian red hair under the broad-brimmed felt hat and her clear waxlike skin with its faint suggestion of lurking freckles. It was pretty to watch the play of expression that flitted over her delicately-chiselled features, passing from mock severity to one of tenderness that bore testimony to the good understanding between the two. Partly screened as he was by the climbers on the porch and absorbed in her attention to her mount, she had not noticed Alistair until all at once, she glanced up to meet his eyes looking down upon her.

Her confusion was as instantaneous as it was complete, and she flushed right up to the tips of her small ears with resentment as she encountered Alistair's dark eyes looking down on her, the appreciative glance of which she misread for one of derision and amusement. He, himself, when he saw the girl's start of surprise and the hot wave that spread over her face, at once tried to cover the awkwardness of the situation by making known his business without delay.

"I have a letter of introduction here for Mr. De Roche of Inshallah. Perhaps you can tell me if I have come to the right place," and he came down the steps to stand beside her.

She looked at him questioningly for a moment, her eye taking in the details of his appearance, the clean-cut face, the trim and athletic figure in its neat tweed coat and smart riding breeches with leggings showing a brilliancy of polish not usual in these Western regions; and as the realisation

came to her that this must be the visitor whose advent the Vancouver agents had written about, the rich tide in her cheeks ebbed as quickly as it had risen, leaving them paler than it had found them.

“Yes, this is where Mr. De Roche stays,” she said at last and her voice betrayed a slight tremor, “but he is ill. Perhaps you would give me the letter? I am Miss De Roche.”

He handed it to her and after taking it she pulled the reins over her horse's head and tied him to a ring that stuck out from the planking of the verandah. Then with an inclination of the head she invited Alistair to follow her as she mounted the steps and opened the screen-door ushering him through a wide hall to the room at the right.

CHAPTER VI

ALISTAIR took the chair to which Miss De Roche motioned him with a sinking sensation inside of him. She herself did not sit, but moving over towards the window, opened the letter and read it slowly, her brows contracting slightly and her lips tightly pressed together. Then she came back again and stood before him.

"It is most unfortunate," she began, and while her voice had a faint tremor, its accents were cold and contemptuous, "that my father should have been taken so much worse that it will be impossible for us to—entertain you—as Mr. Bancroft requests in this letter. It appears that that is the suggestion, is it not?—that you should come and stay here with us."

"I believe that is the proposition," Alistair replied stiffening under the stimulus of her hostility. "I regret very much, I assure you, the necessity; but the condition of the mortgage has become so serious and my family has so much at stake in the matter that I think the request is a reasonable one. Of course, I am prepared to pay whatever is proper in the way of charges for my lodging and would make myself as little of a nuisance as possible."

"I dare say," and she laughed scornfully; "and yet you want to take a hand in running the ranch—to tell us when we do wrong, I suppose. Might I ask what qualifications you may have, sir, to presume to interfere, what experience you have had of the cattle business?" and she looked him up and down eyeing disdainfully his trim get-up in his English riding clothes.

"That is quite beside the question, Miss De Roche," said Alistair, admiring the girl's spirit and astuteness in spite of his rising choler. "The point is that if the ranch is being

properly run it ought to be paying at least the interest on the mortgage, which it is not. What I wish to feel sure of, to speak plainly, is that my father and myself are getting fair play in the matter and that the revenue of the place is not being diverted into other channels."

She bit her lip with vexation and paused for a moment, evidently at a loss for an answer. Then with feminine ingenuity she chose another tack.

"Well, of course, had my father not been taken worse, we might have managed to put up with it," she said; "but now the thing is impossible as my aunt and myself have all we can do to nurse him, without having a stranger in the house."

As Alistair was hesitating how to reply to this, he was grateful for the diversion caused by the entrance of an elderly lady, with grey hair and features with so marked a resemblance to the younger woman that it was plain that there was a close relationship.

"This is my aunt, Miss Paget," said the girl. "Mr.— I forget what you said your name was." Then without waiting for a reply. "This is the gentleman, you know, that Mr. Bancroft wrote about whose father has the mortgage on the ranch."

"Oh, indeed," Miss Paget replied with a peculiar intonation, the expression on her face changing from uncertainty to one that was slightly hostile; and she bowed distantly and looked from Alistair back to the girl as if seeking a lead for what she was to say. Nor did Miss De Roche fail to answer her appeal.

"I have been telling him that on account of father's illness it will, of course, now be impossible for us to have him here as Mr. Bancroft proposed. I am sure had Mr. Kilgour known he would never have come to vex us at such a time," and there was a tremor in her voice and a suggestion of mistiness in her eyes that made Alistair feel somewhat uncomfortable.

"Oh, but I shall not give you any trouble. I can eat with the men if you like," he said ingratiatingly, smiling on the

elder woman who was looking at him with eyes of uneasiness. "I have been accustomed to roughing it and can put up with anything."

"My niece is quite right," said Miss Paget decisively. "It would be impossible. Our time is taken up with nursing my brother-in-law—he is asleep now and I just took the opportunity to slip downstairs for a moment. We cannot afford to have a nurse, so we take turns at attending upon him and the strain is very great. At such a time to have a stranger in the house would be really too trying."

"It is not as if there was any need for you to be here," the girl took up the argument. "I am sure that we are as anxious to pay you what is due as you are to get it; and it is only a question of a little time now until we can get the cattle fattened and pay up the interest at least. Mr. Bancroft knows, I am sure, that my father was always one to pay his debts and he must have been aware that such a thing as you propose would be most distasteful—most painful to us," and there was a catch in her voice that made Alistair fear that the tears were not very far away.

He was about to reply and declare that he was ready to give up the project when heavy steps were heard on the verandah outside and in the hall. In a few moments, two men entered the room, Olney Layburn and Ted De Roche, the son of the house. Both had just been out on the range and they still wore their spurs, which tinkled as they walked. They halted in surprise when they saw the visitor, who had risen to his feet.

"This is Mr. Kilgour that Mr. Bancroft wrote about, Mr. Layburn, my cousin and my brother," said Miss De Roche by the way of introduction.

Layburn scowled and growled out an ungracious, "Pleased to meet you," looking anything but pleased. He passed over to take a chair by the window, while Ted De Roche, without any acknowledgment of the stranger, took up a position at the side of the fireplace, leaning his arm on the broad mantel-shelf. The former appeared constrained and uncomfortable and sat bolt upright facing the

visitor with a curious tense expression, his rigid attitude emphasising the rugged strength of his figure, the ample lines of which were plainly indicated under the light shirt which he wore. His jacket he had carried in his hand and he now held it across his knee.

He had been taken somewhat by surprise and it was not his wont to be surly. Had he had time to consider he would have greeted this young Britisher with more suavity and the result of the meeting might have been different. The contrast between the two men was very striking as they sat opposite each other. Alistair, who had sat down again, leaning back easily in his big armchair, with clean-cut features, and figure slender and willowy still bearing something of the delicacy of youth; and Layburn, older and bigger of frame, masterful and aggressive, typically western.

There was a pause which to all in the room was electric. Alistair was grateful for the interruption and the new elements that had entered into the situation. Now that this brawny cowboy sat opposite him, his intrusion did not seem the monstrous thing that it had a moment or two before, in the face of the girl's pleading.

"He wants to come and stay with us here, and help us to run the ranch till we pay up what is owing," she said with a note of appeal.

"Oh, he does, does he. Well, he can't, that's all," he sneered. "What do you know about a cattle ranch, I wonder?" he questioned looking at Alistair. "Bancroft has an impudence to suggest such a thing but he can't run a bluff like that on me. I suppose he thinks because we're up here away from the lawyers that we don't know anything. Well, he needn't think that I'm a greenhorn to be taken in with the like of that."

"You needn't blame Bancroft, at all," said Alistair. "I'm quite prepared to take all responsibility for the proposal on my own shoulders. If Miss De Roche consents, I have no intention of making a nuisance of myself, and as to helping to run the ranch, I confess I know nothing about it although I suppose I could learn."

"Well, anyhow, you won't have the chance—at least, not while I'm running it, you won't," Layburn burst in angrily nodding his head vehemently as he spoke. "I hold Mr. De Roche's power of attorney and I guess I'm in charge here; and I wouldn't stand for what you want, not for one minute. I guess Miss De Roche and Ted here will back me up in it," and he turned towards the two as he spoke.

"Sure we will," the youth replied emphatically; and though the girl did not reply, her expression and attitude showed her approval. The elder lady was plucking nervously at the tassels of a cushion on the lounge on which she sat and kept her eyes on the carpet.

Alistair glanced from one to the other and paused a space before he replied. Now that the male element had entered in he was feeling a certain joy of the combat and his customary skill of debate did not desert him. It was a difficult situation to handle.

"You know," he said, "you people are mistaking the position entirely, as I see it. You are treating me as a spy and an enemy when you ought to be welcoming me. Here have I come out these six thousand miles just to avoid the necessity of Bancroft and Atherton taking the proceedings that your default in the payment of the mortgage renders advisable. The easiest course for me to have followed was to have told them to go ahead and to have stayed quietly at home. On the contrary, however, I lay aside my profession for the time and come out here to try to get this matter properly adjusted. I do not wish to cause you any hardship; but at the same time, my people need this money to liquidate a debt that they owe. Expediency would urge me to realise on any security now, or as soon as the law will allow me; but if you are willing to be reasonable and consent to the arrangement that I have proposed—and a very moderate one I consider it—I am willing to give you longer time yet."

Layburn rose to his feet.

"You'll better get out of here," he said rudely. "We're not going to put up with this kind of talk any longer."

Mortgage sharks don't find it very healthy for themselves out here in the West, I'm going to tell you; and if you're a wise man you'll go back where you came from."

He stood glowering down upon his visitor as if he would have liked then and there to lay violent hands on him.

Alistair had coolly drawn his notebook from his pocket and was turning its leaves apparently oblivious to the threatening attitude of Layburn. Evidently finding what he wanted, he looked up at last with apparent composure at the latter. Miss Paget had slipped noiselessly from the room too distressed by the discussion to remain and the girl sat with lips parted and face pale, her eyes riveted as in a kind of fascination on the two men. Her brother also had straightened himself from the mantel and was watching the pair with a nervous grin.

"The chattel mortgage which I hold on Mr. De Roche's stock," Alistair said in the same even, deliberate tones, "fell due on the thirty-first of March. It is now the seventeenth of May and neither principal nor interest has been paid. The mortgage, I understand, covered all the live stock on the place, horses and cattle, so many of each; and at present market prices there is no doubt that it will realise much more than the amount of the loan. As you appear to be absolutely unwilling to fall in with my suggestion, I shall at once distrain under its provisions and have the stock sold by the sheriff. I shall also begin foreclosure proceedings on the ranch itself, and, I suppose, within nine months or a year should be able to realise on my investment. As my solicitors will be quite able to attend to these matters I can at once return where I came from"—and here the flicker of a smile appeared for a moment on the young man's features but as quickly vanished again—"as you have just so kindly suggested. I have no desire to remain in an unhealthy neighbourhood when there is no object to be attained by it," and he rose lightly to his feet. "I regret, Miss De Roche," he said turning to the girl with a slight inclination, "to have troubled you with this interview, especially as it appears that you or your brother have no control

over your father's business and therefore have no say. I hope, however, that Mr. Layburn will be more successful with it in the future than he has been in the past. I shall stay to-night at the hotel—I see they have accommodation for travellers—and should Mr. Layburn see fit to reconsider his decision before morning, he shall find me there. I shall instruct my solicitors without delay, however.”

“Go, and the quicker the better,” said Layburn with an oath, stalking to the door and throwing it open with a bang. Alistair walked out with his head in the air but with a creepy sensation that ran along his spine when he turned his back upon the furious cattleman whom he had thus bearded.

CHAPTER VII

SOMEWHAT ruffled in his feelings, Alistair trudged back to the store and found it empty of customers this time, but the proprietor himself was bustling about with a surly air. At Alistair's request he procured a telegraph blank and agreed to send the message which Alistair wrote on it. As to dinner or a lodging for the night, however, he refused to provide either.

"Poor sort of a hostelry you keep," said Alistair nettled at the man's manner which seemed to him hostile, "that you can't give a chap a bed or a bite;" and he turned his back and sauntered out the way he had come without another word. He was sure that there was something studied in the man's hostility. It was not mere boorishness or incivility and he guessed that he must have heard something as to the mission on which he had come. Gossip travels fast in the country where everybody seeks to mind his neighbours' business, he reflected.

Outside he met a small boy of about twelve hurrying briskly towards the store.

"Do you know where the stage driver lives, my son?"

The urchin turned a chubby, freckled face towards him and grinned.

"Guess I do," he said. "He lives where I do; he's my brother," he added with a touch of pride.

"Well, I hope it's not a secret," said Alistair with a smile, "'cause you see I'd like to know. In fact, I want to go there and the sooner the better."

"Sure, I'll show you; but Jim ain't home now. He's gone over to Jasper Holt's with the team to get some hay; and I've got to hurry after him once I've took back this here bacon an' help him load up. See that gate down there at

the foot of the hill?" he asked pointing with his hand. "You just turn in there an' then follow your nose. We'll be back after an hour or so."

"Is there anybody home now?" Alistair asked.

"Only Mother an' the kids, I guess. Better wait till we come an' you can ride on top of the hay."

"No, thank you," said Alistair. "I think that I shall go along and not wait for you;" and he turned away to go down the hill.

Climbing the gate to avoid having to open it as it was a heavy one and clumsily hung, he followed a slightly winding road marked out by two wheel tracks that led through the bush for about half a mile until it stopped abruptly before a rough stable with a hayloft above built of logs loosely framed together. It had a lean-to for a wagonshed in which stood a vehicle which Alistair readily recognised as the stage that had brought him out that morning. About thirty yards beyond the stable and surrounded by a rough picket fence, stood a log house with a wide verandah all along the front of it, and a chimney at one end, out of which a thin column of smoke was slowly wreathing upwards. Two dogs, an Airedale and a hound, rushed out with a vociferous barking and appeared as if they would have eaten him up, while behind ran a girl and a boy calling to them loudly in shrill treble tones.

Alistair being used to dogs, however, kept a bold front and the fury of the onset soon resolved itself into low growlings as they swung round and came in to sniff at his heels. The youngsters seeing a stranger, had come to a halt; and the little girl with her apron to her chin and the boy with his arms akimbo stood shyly waiting his approach.

"Oh, you would like to eat me up, would you? but you are not so sure that you are able," said Alistair. "Your dogs sing very sweetly together, little girl," he remarked referring to the curious blending of the hound's high whining falsetto with the Airedale's deep bass.

"Tony always growls at strangers and so does Shep,"

the little boy answered, "but you needn't be afeared. They won't bite you when we're here, will they, Liz?" and he turned to the girl to confirm his statement.

"Well, it's a relief to know that," said Alistair, "but it must be hard on people when you're not here."

"They only bite tramps," said the little girl with an air of superior wisdom," and that was only once when a man tried to take away Jim's saddle from the barn. I bet he was scared."

"And how do you know that I'm not a tramp?" asked Alistair.

"'Cos you're too well dressed," was the reply. "Tramps are always ragged and they don't walk straight like you."

"Eliza-ah, Sa-am, Eliza-ah, Sa-am," a shrill voice came from the front where a portly female figure stood enframed in the doorway of the little house, "come and fetch them clothes in off the grass this minute. See what a sight o' rain is comin' up. Hurry now."

The warning seemed not uncalled for as a huge, black cloud had rolled over from the west and the first big drops, precursors of the storm, were already falling. The children hurried off to answer their mother's S.O.S. call for the family wash which lay spread out over the grass in front. The worthy lady had rushed out herself bearing a basket and it was surprising to see how soon, with the help of the children, she had all the various articles of lingerie gathered up and safely bestowed on the porch. Only then did she have time to take stock of the stranger who had moved under shelter and stood awaiting her leisure, while the rain began to come down in torrents.

"You were just in time, weren't you," he said easily with a smile as at last she turned to scan him, her eye running over deliberately every detail of his person, the small shoes, the natty leggings and bulging breeches of the latest London cut.

"The rain sure did come down quick," she replied. "I never see the like before an' them boys out after a load of hay. But come right inside," she broke off suddenly;

and pulling open the screen door, she ushered him into a fair-sized room with a big rustic table in the middle, the legs of which were composed of lengths of log sawed off at right angles. The walls were lined with natural cedar tongue and groove and were adorned with several lithographs and calendars.

Alistair sat down on the rocker which was offered him while his hostess stood waiting by the table curious to know his business.

"You are Mrs. Appleby, the stage driver's mother, are you not?" Alistair asked by way of introduction. "I came up with your son this morning," he went on after she had nodded assent, "and I want to go down again with him to-morrow. I have come to see if you could put me up for the night with you as it appears they do not have room for me at the hotel or the store or whatever they call it."

"Jim told me there were a gentleman come up with him. He did say as how you had gone down to the De Roches, but you'll be very welcome here," she said hospitably. "You can have Jim's bed and I'll make a shake-down for him. He's used to rough lying when he's been workin' out and sleepin' in the bunk-houses. I suppose you had your dinner at De Roches."

"Well no," said Alistair. "I tried to get some down at the hotel but it was past the dinner hour and they wouldn't give me any. I'm hungry, too, as a matter of fact," and he laughed. "This high, thin atmosphere of yours seems to be good for the appetite."

"Oh well, I'll get you something at once," she said hospitably. "Will a bit of bacon and fried eggs be all right and a cup of tea?"

"Splendid," said Alistair. "Couldn't be better."

She bustled off to the room in the rear and he leaned back in his chair and with a sigh of relief and anticipation settled down to wait. The rain was pouring down outside and made a loud noise on the porch-roof while a vivid flash of lightning was followed by a heavy peal of thunder and the little girl began to cry.

"God's angry and she's afraid," her brother explained to Alistair. "I ain't afraid. I'm glad I didn't go with Jim and Herb though. Jim White's cow was killed by lightning last year."

Alistair took the little girl on his knee and pacified her tears. By the time the eggs and bacon arrived he had made friends with both her and her brother. As he ate, they prattled away gaily, the boy on one side of him and the girl on the other. However, at the sound of a great stamping of feet and boyish voices at the back of the house they rushed off. Herb was to bring some candy from the store, they explained. They left the door between the two rooms half open and Alistair could hear quite plainly what was being said.

"Say, Mother, what d'ye think," he heard clearly after a few words about the hay and the errands they had done. "You know that English swell that came up with me in the morning. That was the chap that has the mortgage on the De Roche place an' he's come all the way out here to take it from them because it hain't been paid. Tim White told me all about it. I'd never have brought him up if I'd known. I'd have——" and the voice ceased suddenly. Alistair heard the mother whispering and then the boy's voice whispering in reply. He could guess what they were saying. She was telling him that he was inside. There was an argument going on between the three for he could tell the other boy was there too. It was plain that the mother was objecting to the boy's contentions and though he did not wish to listen he could not help hearing such snatches as "I'll soon tell him, he can't stay here," "I don't care if it does storm," and so forth.

At last, Jim the stage driver came in, with his smaller brother close behind him and the mien of both was anything but friendly, for their faces were overcast with a sullen air and their slender figures stiff and awkward with the embarrassment of their hostility. The little brother and sister would have followed them into the room but were sternly forbidden.

Alistair felt keenly the unpleasantness of the position and he sympathised with the feelings of the youngsters in their enmity inspired by the thought that he had come out to persecute their friends. However, he would make the best of it and he did not wait for the others to speak.

"Here I am again, you see," he said nodding pleasantly to Jim over his plate of bacon and eggs, now well depleted. "You didn't expect to see me so soon, did you?"

Jim's face flushed painfully as he replied: "You'll have to get out, you know," and he appeared to have difficulty in framing his words. "I know what you've come for an' we can't have you stay in our house. You'll have to go. Mother didn't know or she never would have agreed to let you stop here."

"What have I come for, then, my boy, seeing you know so much about my business?" Alistair asked feeling somewhat at a loss himself.

"You've come to put the sheriff in at Inshallah," the boy replied hotly. "That's what you've come for; an' you'll find it ain't such an easy thing as you think by the time you're through either. But anyway, you can't stay with us, that's sure enough, so the sooner you get out the better," and his lip quivered with anger while his voice which was at the changing period varied curiously between a high treble and a man's bass.

"You surely wouldn't put me out in the midst of a storm like this, would you?" Alistair asked glancing out through the window where the rain could be seen coming down in sheets while a furious wind drove it loudly in upon the porch and against the windows. "I haven't even my overcoat with me. I left it down at the store with my traps."

"'Taint far to the store an' you ain't either sugar or salt," was the sarcastic answer, showing that the speaker was nothing moved by Alistair's plaintive plea. "'Sides I can lend you my slicker an' that'll keep you dry. You can leave it at the store. 'Tain't any worse for you walkin' down there than 'twas for us comin' up on the top o' that load o' hay; no not as bad I guess." Sure enough the boys

were both wet through though they seemed to reck little of it.

"Well, then," said Alistair, foiled in this defence, "your mother arranged that I could stay here all night and it is with her I'm dealing. If she insists on me going I suppose I'll have to; but I won't go unless." He leaned back in his chair with an air of determination and picking up his knife and fork began to eat. "This bacon's getting cold and if you'll excuse me, I'll finish it."

"Oh, but you'll have to go, you know," said the smaller boy, Herb, speaking for the first time and eager to reinforce his brother. "I guess it's our house ain't it?"

"Mother's too soft-hearted," Jim replied. "She'd never put anyone away, but it ain't her you've got to deal with, so you'd better go quiet. D'ye think that we are goin' to have the De Roches think we're puttin' you up when we know what mischief you're up to. No. I guess not;" and Jim approached a step nearer with a truculent look in his eye. "Go bring his hat, Herb."

It was an awkward moment; but Alistair went on eating his lunch. He had no mind to be ejected in this ignominious fashion if it could be avoided, and a personal struggle with the two youngsters was anything but desirable.

"I quite enter into your feelings, boys," he began again upon another tack. "As friends of the De Roches you feel that you cannot harbour their enemies and you think that I am one. However, you won't do them any good by throwing me out in the rain. Mind I'm perfectly ready to go if your mother says the word; but I am her guest and only from her will I take my dismissal."

"Get around the other side of him, Herb. Don't be afraid, he's only a city dude. These chaps ain't strong at all; they're all soft like butter," and the stage driver slipped off his wet jumper and threw it into a corner of the room and moved a step still nearer.

"Now, remember, Jim," Alistair warned, "if either of you lay a hand on me it's assault and battery punishable by fine or imprisonment. You'd better consider well whether

you have the right to take chances on that for your mother's sake if not for your own."

"I don't care," said Jim defiantly. "You ain't goin' to sit there and dare us after we've told you to go," and he seized hold of Alistair's shoulder with a grip that was no tender one when Mrs. Appleby rushed into the room. She had been listening to all that had been said.

"Let the gentleman stay, Jim, do you hear," she said angrily. "I ain't goin' to have no rough houses nor no damage suits neither, I am a-telling you. 'Taint goin' to do the De Roches any good an' if you get into gaol over it, what am I goin' to do. You know I hain't got no money to pay fines. Go right this minute and put off them wet clothes and the gentleman can stay till to-morrow if he wants to."

"I assure you I'll go at once if you say so, Mrs. Appleby," said Alistair. "I was really only trying to scare the boys when I talked of that. I would never have put it into practice even if they had thrown me out."

The two still glared daggers at Alistair but Mrs. Appleby was firm.

"Go on now and do what you're told; and be quick about it," she said imperatively, and there was that in her eye that demanded obedience.

The two went off sullenly, Jim slamming the door behind him with a loud bang.

"Jim's a pretty good boy," she remarked, "but he ain't got all the sense in the world in his head yet. I wouldn't put a dog out in a day like this; an' I guess I wouldn't you, sir, even if you have come here on a bad errand, which, of course, ain't yet been proved to me."

CHAPTER VIII

THERE'S the devil to pay now, Olney," said Ted when the latter had stalked back into the room and thrown himself down in a chair looking discomposed and crest-fallen, in spite of the high tone he had taken with the departed visitor.

"Devil's the right word for him, Ted, damn him," he answered. "How we're to pay him, I don't know, though I know how I'd like to pay him, the way we used to do horse-thieves down in Arizona with a rope and a cotton-wood tree."

"What will happen if we don't?" said Lorraine. "Can he sell off the stock as he says?"

"I guess he can at sheriff's sale until he gets enough to realise what's due. There's not much market for either cattle or horses now either with beef going down an' not touched bottom yet. It'd be simply ruinous to sell 'em now."

"We're sure done for if we lose the stock," said Ted gloomily. "The place wouldn't pay taxes without it. If you knew he could sell us up, you might have talked a bit sweeter to him," he went on flaring up at the older man with a boy's petulance. "A nice mess you've made of it, eh, Sis?" and he looked to Lorraine.

"I'm afraid that we were all equally in fault, Ted," she replied. "Olney did his best, no doubt, but if I had realised how serious it was I might have done differently. There's Mr. Thibault coming in, we'll ask his advice what to do. One can always trust to his judgment."

"Aye, for Lesesne's side of the bargain; but not for anybody else. Trust him for that. Don't listen to him," said Layburn with a sneer.

"Father always trusted him and I don't believe he ever

advised him wrong. He may be sharp at a bargain but I don't believe he ever took the better of his friends," the girl said quietly, as she rose and went out to the porch to welcome the newcomer. In a moment or two she returned with him, the rest meanwhile sitting moodily silent.

He was a man a little over the medium height but powerfully built. His hair had been black but was now plentifully filled with grey as was the moustache and goatee that adorned his upper lip and chin. He wore no coat and his vest, which had once been black but was now a bottle green, was unbuttoned except for the lowest button. His pants were of the same hue and were tucked into heavy boots that came halfway up to the knee.

"Thought I would stop for dinner with you folks," he said after he had greeted everyone. "I'm on my way to Rummel's to see about a cook. Men all say they can't stand the Chinaman's grub and I've got to try a change. Can't afford to run the risk o' losin' them. How are the crops comin', Olney? You're not lookin' very chipper, none o' you ain't," he continued looking shrewdly from one to the other.

"'Tain't my fault," Layburn growled rather sulkily, crossing one leg over the other and beginning to play with the rowel of his spur.

"We're in a peck of trouble, Mr. Thibault," Lorraine broke in. "Mr. Kilgour who holds the mortgage on the ranch has been here—he's come all the way from England, it seems—and he wanted to stay here at the house and show us how to run the place. Said he needed to see that he was given fair play and that the revenues were not being diverted and all that. Of course, we wouldn't stand for it and Olney sent him away."

"Yes, with a flea in his ear," Ted burst in. "Infernal cheek, I call it, to suggest such a thing! I guess he was feeling mighty hot to be sent to the right-about that way."

"Yes, but he says that he will take proceedings at once on the chattel mortgage," Lorraine went on anxiously; "and I think that maybe we made a mistake in not being

a little more civil with him. What do you think, Mr. Thibault?"

"Is the mortgage due?" the latter asked with a look of concern.

"Yes, it's away overdue, interest and principal. We expected to pay it off with the spring beef but we aren't going to have nearly enough and the stock are in such poor shape that we don't know if we will be able to sell them. The interest on the big mortgage on the ranch hasn't been paid either."

"Same man holds both, doesn't he? What have you been doing with all the money? Surely you should have been able to pay the interest. Beef's been low to be sure and crops bad, but even then——" and Thibault gave a slight shrug to his shoulders and raised his eyebrows significantly as he glanced over at Layburn as if looking to him for an explanation.

The latter shifted uneasily in his chair and a flush appeared on his face.

"There's been so many other things to meet," he said; "and then we lost a lot of the young stock with blackleg."

"Well, there ain't much excuse for that these days; inoculation's cheap and easy," said Thibault. "I know if I had a mortgage on my place an' a chattel mortgage on top o' that, I wouldn't be takin' any chances on blackleg."

"Olney did the best he could," said Lorraine quickly; "it's too bad though if the stock's got to be sold for the chattel mortgage. Nice thing to have a sheriff's sale at Inshallah. Dad would die of shame if he was to know of it," and she turned away to hide the mist of tears that flooded into her eyes.

"Nobody'll buy store cattle just now either, for anything like a fair price with beef goin' down every day," said Layburn. "Some big dealer like you, Mr. Thibault, will bid them in for a song an' make a pile on 'em by Fall," he added a trifle insolently.

"If I'd been you I'd have tried not to rile the man that had the mortgage," said Thibault, ignoring the covert sneer

in the other's tone. "No use stirring up trouble if you don't have to. You couldn't blame the man being worried over his money and it might not a' done you any harm to ha' had him on the ranch with you a while. You'd ha' had a good chance to get acquainted with him—an' it never hurts to listen to advice."

"Then you think that we should have fallen in with his demand and let him come here to lord it over us?" said Lorraine tossing her head and flushing rosily.

"Better that than have the sheriff here while your father lies upstairs helpless," he replied gravely with another shrug of his shoulders and a faint deprecatory wave of both hands palm downwards. "If he gets well we must be able to show him that whatever happened we did the best we could; and if it requires that we eat humble pie for a while, why then——" and he raised his eyebrows significantly.

"Not on your life!" said Ted loudly with a mirthless laugh. "Let him sell the cattle and horses if he likes. We've still got the ranch anyway."

"You won't have it long when there's a big mortgage and you have no stock to make it pay," suggested Thibault.

"I'll see if I can't raise the money to meet the chattel mortgage at the Kamloops bank. They ought to advance it, considering all the business they've had from us."

"Father could always get what he wanted when he was well," said Lorraine. "They surely should help us now. Couldn't you and Ted go over to-morrow and see?" she said to Layburn.

"I guess we could. That manager though is no good. I can't stand him, he's so high and mighty you would think he owned the whole bank himself."

"Has this man, what's his name, gone back yet?" asked Thibault.

"No, he's gone back to the hotel; but he's going down on the stage to-morrow, I guess. He's to give his lawyers their instructions," said Lorraine. "I wonder how long it takes," she continued anxiously.

"Well," said Thibault, "I've got to be on my way for

it's a long ride over there; but my advice to you is this. See him before he goes and try to get him to forego proceedings and stay on at the ranch here till you can pay him the money or satisfy him that he's going to be paid. To my mind that's the quickest and easiest way out of a bad business." And he rose to take his leave.

CHAPTER IX

AT seven o'clock the same evening the storm abated just as quickly as it had arisen and a watery moon gleamed out fitfully over the lake through fleecy clouds that raced across the sky before a strong wind that seemed to veer around capriciously from almost every point of the compass. A cheery light beamed from the windows of the Duck Lake Hotel and soon after the rain had ceased horsemen singly and in twos and threes wended their way along the lake front and tied up their cayuses by the hitching posts or left them untied with the reins down to await the wills of their lords and masters.

To-night the little group that congregated in front of the bar had matter of more than usual interest to chat about for the news of the telegram that the stranger from across the seas had sent had leaked out. Two of the men, Dick Evie and Paul Lorringer, were employed at Inshallah and the news for them might portend the loss of their jobs. In the conversation that ensued the dominant note was indignation against the stranger.

Monte, the cowboy from Arizona who had been pointed out by the stage driver to Alistair on his drive up as "a real bad man" from the real cowboy country, was especially emphatic in his remarks. He was in the midst of a long rambling harangue when the door opened and young Ted De Roche stalked into the room. His mien was a slightly conscious one as he strolled up to the bar and nodded a greeting to those about and called for a glass of whisky. Monte paused a second or so in his speech and then went on again. One elbow was on the counter and one foot on the footrail that extended along the front of the little gutter which served as a drain and a cuspidor as well as a receptacle for stubs of cigars and other castaways. His head

was bent forward for emphasis and one hand with two fingers extended was laid on the sleeve of his nearest listener.

"D'ye know how we'd ha' treated a tenderfoot like this here chap down on Circle 'K,'" he was saying. "Strung 'im up! Naw," and he shook his head in disgust. "Nothin' o' the kind! They'd have simply scared 'im out o' the country. No, these chaps didn't stand for no nonsense. Well, I guess not. How did they treat Marmadook—that wasn't his real name but that was what we called him. Wy, wot they did was just this—when e' began shootin' off his lip,—for he was a powerful onpleasant sort of coon, 'e was—they jist rounded him up, so to speak, an' set him on old Joe Bates' pinto pony bareback, face to the tail. Joe Steves and Baldy, that was foreman on the QP outfit, each put an end of their lasso round his middle and another chap ridin' ahead leadin' the pinto and these two one on each side they rode him out o' camp and right through town yellin' an' ky-yin' like a pack o' coyotes worrying a sick sheep. I laughed fit to kill myself to see how the poor galoot hung on to the pinto's back for dear life though it weren't too easy at the rate that we made the brute travel. Ah, we don't have no fun like these days round this here bloomin' country." and Monte sighed heavily before burying his lips for consolation in the glass of beer that now stood before him on the counter.

"That's what you ought to do with this chap that's got the mortgage on Inshallah, Ted," said Andy Wilmot, a homesteader who bore no good will to the De Roche family. The feeling arose out of an unpleasantness that had developed over an Inshallah calf which had strayed into the Wilmot corral under circumstances that pointed to the probability that its wandering had resulted from external rather than from internal promptings.

The boy had just poured a glass of whisky down his throat and he turned a flushed and angry face towards the speaker.

"You mind your own business, Andy," he said; "I'd like to know what you know about him anyway."

"I know what they're sayin', that's all," answered Andy with a sneer, "that he's goin' to sell you folks up by the sheriff just as soon as he can get him out here. You Inshallah chaps won't have so much ridin' then, I guess, nor the range won't be so crowded either, I'm thinkin'."

"Don't you fool yourself, my boy," said Ted; "it's not your fault if it is crowded anyway. There'd be lots of less calves on it if you had your way."

There was a loud laugh at this sally and Andy hastened to drown his confusion in a glass of beer.

"Where did the chap go?" asked Monte of Tim White who was serving bar. "I'm surprised he isn't round ornamentin' them chairs o' yours, Tim. They tell me he was got up like a regular stage dude, whiskers an' eyeglass an' all. We uns might a' had a little fun with 'im."

"He'd a-been here if I'd ha' kept him," said Tim, "but I was so mad when I knew what he was up to that I sent 'm off with a flea in 'is ear an' I guess he went up to Jimmy Appleby's to see if they could put 'im up. Jimmy was down past here for a load of hay and I told 'im about 'im an' I guess he wouldn't get no too warm a welcome from Jimmy. Jimmy's a game little cuss an' he knows how to stand by his friends."

"They must have kept him anyway, he havn't come back at all and it ain't loikely he would have climbed the mountains," broke in Dennis, a little stunted Irishman, the general factotum of the place who had drawn near and was engaged in adjusting one of the hanging lamps which needed attention.

"You've had enough, Teddy, my boy, I'm thinkin'," said Dick Evie pushing back a glass of whisky that Tim White had just poured out for him. "Give your stomach a rest, man. You can't stand to take all that liquor. Let's go over and play a game of cards."

The boy had already had three glasses and the effects of it were showing in his face. For a moment he was inclined

to allow himself to be dissuaded by Dick, but the jeering voice of the homesteader broke in. The latter was still smarting from Ted's thrust about the calf and he was glad to get even by seeing the boy make a fool of himself.

"That's right, Ted," he sneered. "Liquor isn't good for little boys. Mama'll spank 'im if he goes home drunk."

"Give it to me," he said with an oath, pushing Dick's friendly hand aside and reaching for the glass. "You mind your own business, I guess I can hold as much liquor as any of you," and he drank it down.

"Come over and play a game of cards, Ted," said Dick, anxious to get him away from the bar, taking hold of him by the arm in a friendly way.

"Not with you anyway," said Ted throwing him off roughly. "What business have you to boss me, I'd like to know, eh? I'd rather talk to Monte, here. Monte's a man, he is—and Jack Beckles."

"Come down to my shack, Kid," said Monte. "Jack and I are goin' down for a game at cards," and he took hold of Ted's other arm. The youth smiled fatuously.

"I don't care if I do, Monte," he said. "I'm sick o' this bunch here. They make my head ache, they do;" and he suffered himself to be led outside. Here all three mounted their horses and rode off down the road to the little shack where Monte lived alone, for he called no man master. He was always willing to hire himself out for a day or two of riding to any cattleman who needed an extra hand to break a few colts at so much a head, but he never could be got to take a regular job. Sometimes he was very flush and at other times he lived on his credit at Tim White's, where he could always run up a bill for groceries and tobacco, for he was sure to pay in time and his credit was good.

When they had dismounted and entered by the little door which was always left unlocked and Jack had lighted the candle which stood on the rough board table, they did not play cards. Ted's troubles had so magnified themselves with the fumes of the whisky that he could think and talk of nothing else; and his companions were ready to listen

and sympathise. The boy was flattered by their apparent deference and in his fuddled state, he could not see that they were just playing with him.

"Olney and my sister, they think that they are running the whole show," he said turning over his grievances, "but if they'd have let me run the ranch, we'd never have been in this fix. I'd have taken that ninny to-day by the throat and made him promise to give us time if it hadn't been for them," he continued waxing boastful. "Y' know you've got to handle people firmly—f-f-f-firmly," he repeated with a grotesque attempt at dignity, "an' then they ain't so likely to sting you—it's just like the n-n-n-nettle—hic——"

"That's right, Ted, they don't treat you right at home, that's sure. You're the son o' the house an' not that son-of-a-gun, Olney Layburn. What right has he to lord it over you? Shouldn't you be the boss instead of him? Now if you had had the dealing with this swankin' Britisher, you'd ha' scared him so as 'e wouldn't have given no trouble. Rode 'im out o' town like we did the chap down in Arizona."

"Sh-sure I would," assented Ted leaning back in his seat and nodding with portentous solemnity. "I'd have sc-scared the life out of him. He would have been glad—glad to make terms with me."

Monte winked at Jack Beckles and the latter thrust his tongue in his cheek and grinned back. They sat facing each other at either end of the table while Ted sat between them, his face between his hands gazing moodily before him. Jack leaned across and laying his hand on Ted's shoulder.

"Say, Ted, he's over at Jimmy's now!" he hissed in a dramatic whisper.

"By gosh, Jack!" said Monte, "that's right. Might not be too late yet, eh?"

"An' Jimmy an' his mother ain't to home for I met them in the buggy driving down to Hislop's," continued Jack. "It appears his wife's sick and they sent up for her to go down. It'll be the best part o' two hours till Jimmy gets

back so there'll be nobody there but the kids and the coast'd be clear."

"That so, Jack?" said Ted gazing stupidly into the other's eyes. "Let's go down and scare the life out of the beggar. Will you two back me up?"

"Sure we will," replied Monte.

"You bet we will," was Jack's quick response.

"Shake hands on it," and he held out his hand to the boy who shook it with a tipsy man's fervour. "I guess that we'd better put somethin' over our faces so as he can't tell who we are. It'll be a great lark but there's no use of lettin' people know who did it. They'll be able to guess all right, but guessin' is a different thing from knowin'. I've got the very thing for the purpose."

He went over and opened a square wooden box that stood in one corner of the room and after turning over its contents two or three times he produced three black masks, one of which he handed to Monte and one he fitted upon Ted while he put the other in his pocket.

"There now," he said to the latter, "your own mother wouldn't know you if she saw you."

The boy looked somewhat sobered as he saw Monte's sinister appearance with the black mask upon his face and he glanced from him to Jack Beckles a trifle nervously.

"I just want to scare him a bit you know," he said; "but don't want to do anything that's likely to get me into the coop."

"Of course not, man," said Monte reassuringly getting up and clapping him on his back. "It's only a little lark but it may teach the young fellow not to get too fresh around these parts. He'll be none the worse of a lesson and we're the boys that can teach him, ain't we?"

"Yes, we're the boys that can teach him, you bet," Ted replied recovering his courage and straightening up and thrusting out his chest. "He'll know that he can't bully me for nothing; an' Lorraine'll find out who is the boss round our place, Olney or me, eh?"

"You bet, she will," Jack replied heartily as he lifted up the candle to show them to the door before blowing it out. "Lorraine'll get a lesson too all right," and he winked at Monte who grinned back as he stepped behind Ted to let him go out first. "You bet your sweet life!"

CHAPTER X

ALISTAIR sat in the rocker in the dim light of a small lamp which stood on the table while the small boy Herb sat on a low stool opposite him whittling out with a jack knife a wooden latch for a gate that he was going to put up on the morrow. Mrs. Appleby and Jimmy had gone off as soon as supper was over as the former, who had been a nurse before her marriage, had been sent for to attend a woman who had been taken suddenly sick on a farm some miles away.

Herb had done all the chores himself and had then come in and put the two younger children to bed in the adjoining room, a proceeding which had been accompanied by cheery sounds of laughter bearing witness to the good-will that prevailed there among the three. However, now that the two children were settled for the night there was silence and Alistair had found all his efforts to draw Herb into conversation utterly unavailing. It was clear that he had been sent to Coventry and while the fact occasioned him some amusement, the feeling was mingled with chagrin as well. After the rain had ceased he had gone outside for a short stroll along the path through the trees and the strangeness of his environment, its wildness and its loneliness, the tempestuousness of the wind whistling eerily through the tall pines, had made him feel the first touch of homesickness he had experienced since leaving Scotland.

It was too wet underfoot to stay out long and he had come in with his feet soaking, and in his somewhat depressed state of mind the hostility of the small boy's attitude did not tend to make him feel any the more cheerful. He was disgusted with the results of the day's doings and felt that he had made a mess of his mission when perhaps if he

had been a little more tactful he might have achieved a different result. He blamed himself for not having brought Atherton with him to break the ice with the De Roche family. The broker had offered to come but Alistair in the pride of his youthful confidence had told him that there was no need and that he felt sure that he would be able to get along all right with the De Roches and persuade them to fall in with his plans.

It appeared plain to him in the light of his experience that he had far underestimated the difficulty of what he had undertaken and he began to appreciate the ungrateful nature of the task. He had perhaps expected some coldness towards him from the De Roches but he had not contemplated the prospect that the whole community would look askance at him as well.

The silence was becoming oppressive. He felt a certain embarrassment even under the disapproving gaze of this small boy with the bare legs as after a while he laid down his whittling and sat motionless, staring with evident disfavour at the stranger from across the seas.

At last, Alistair could stand it no longer. He had already tried hard to break down the boy's reserve but had finally desisted before a succession of monosyllables. He would try again. He would consider this boy as a hostile witness whom it was necessary to propitiate, he said to himself; and the very effort would while away the evening's tedium. He had had experience of boys and he knew boy nature and it could not be so very different in these Western wilds from what it was at home.

"Do you ever get lonely out here?" he began.

"No," replied Herb with a decided note of sullenness in his tone.

"I suppose you go to school, do you?"

"Yes."

"The young lady that came up with us in the stage to-day would be your teacher, I suppose."

"Yes."

"How is she, a pretty good teacher?"

"I dunno."

"Is she good-natured? We always had men for teachers where I went to school so I don't know very much about lady-teachers, you see."

No answer.

"Her name is Miss Pelton, isn't it? Quite a high-sounding name."

"Yes."

"How many scholars are there attending the school?"

"I dunno."

"What part of your lessons do you like best. I suppose now that you have several subjects to study, a big, intelligent boy like you. Tell me something about what you have at school. You see I've never been out in the West before and I am interested in finding out about how you do things here," and Alistair smiled his most winning smile but there was no answering gleam in response. Herb remained as stolid as a stone image.

"Oh, we learn lots o' things," was his reply at last.

"Such as, for instance——" prompted Alistair.

"Oh, readin' an' writin', I guess," was the sullen response.

Alistair paused to count casualties as it were. He felt that on the head of school he was not making much progress so it was plain he must try another tack. Possibly Herb was not fond of school and the subject had no allurements for him. He should have known better than to raise it. A boy on a farm was almost sure to be interested in animals.

"That is a fine team your brother has to draw the stage."

There was no reply to this.

"Are you fond of horses? I suppose you will be a fine rider, able to sit a bucking horse and throw the lasso and all that?"

"I dunno."

"I have a fine horse at home with which I sometimes ride to the hounds and he can jump over a five-barred gate just like a bird. But I suppose he wouldn't be of much use to ride on these ranges of yours. He would be breaking a leg

the first thing. I daresay you ride all over these steep hills with your cattle horses."

A grunt was all the answer that this called forth. Evidently horses were not going to prove a common ground of interest.

"You know your trains out in this country seem very strange when one rides in them for the first time; they are so big and heavy compared with our small light coaches, and your engines look so grand and imposing with their big cowcatchers in front and the bells make such a noise through the night at the crossings. It was funny the day I left Montreal. The bell started to ring just before the train began to move and there was an Irishman sitting next to me who thought that it was a firebell. 'Let's go out and see where the fire is,' he cried to me in great excitement. 'Mebbe it's the blissid station goin' up in smoke.'"

Alistair simulated the brogue of the excited Irishman with much animation but not the faintest glimmer of a smile lightened the boy's face. What was he to talk about that would charm him out of his sullenness. His whole attitude expressed juvenile boredom and disgust.

"I come from the city of Edinburgh," Alistair began, trying another tack. "I suppose you've heard about Edinburgh, the city you know that has the old castle perched upon a lofty rock overlooking its principal street. It's a grand old town and has such an interesting history."

Alistair thought that he could just detect the faintest flicker of attention in the little face before him although the eyes were still downcast and the features expressionless.

"There are Highland regiments in the castle and every day they drill in the barrack yard and often march down into the city with the band of pipers at their head and all the little boys run after them enjoying the sight.

"Yes," went on Alistair, "I could tell you some fine stories of the old castle, things that happened hundreds of years ago, if I thought you would like to hear them," and he waited for a reply but none was forthcoming, although just

for a flickering instant the eyes were turned toward him and then just as quickly turned away again.

“I sometimes tell them to a little cousin of mine who is just about your age—but the poor youngster is a cripple and has to lie on a couch most of the time—so I have to try and cheer him up when the pain of his poor little leg has been especially bad. The one that is his favourite of them all is called ‘The Black Dinner,’ and is about a boy earl who was killed with his younger brother in the castle by a very terrible and cruel treachery. I sometimes tell my little cousin—Fred is his name—that he ought to have something more cheerful, but he says he likes the sad stories and so I have to tell it to him.”

Herb’s eyes were now turned towards Alistair and there was something in them that encouraged him to go on, although the boy did not speak.

“It was when the king of Scotland, too, was only a boy—he was just ten years old when this happened—and his kingdom was in a very wild and lawless state. The family that had given the greatest trouble to the realm was that of the great earls of Douglas, and the Earl at this time was only a boy of sixteen. The two regents, Sir William Crichton and Sir Alexander Livingstone whose duty it was to govern for the boy king till he came of age, were very jealous of this family of the Douglas and although the head of it was then so young, they feared that before long he would be making trouble for the king and for themselves. So they thought that it would be a good thing to get the young earl and his brother put out of the way and they invited them to visit them at the Castle, flattering them by saying that they wanted their help in ‘advising for the good of the realm.’ Friends warned the youth that he was taking a risk in trusting to the friendship of these enemies of his house but he refused to consider any possibility of treachery. Then they pleaded with him that at least he would leave his younger brother at home and not place all the hope of his house in the king’s power. But the boy would not be guided by their advice and refused to believe

that danger was possible where he was invited on a friendly visit, so one fine day he and his brother David with a few gallant followers rode up the driveway to the castle never to come down again.

"At first, they were received with the greatest kindness by the two regents; and the young king and the three boys played happily together before they went into the great banqueting hall to the sumptuous feast that had been arranged. The laugh and jest went round and everybody appeared to be merry. There was no sign of anything but the greatest friendliness when suddenly Crichton arose to his feet and began to upbraid the boy earl for the wrongdoings of his house. At the same time, a black bull's head, which in Scotland is the symbol of death, was carried by a servant down the long hall and laid on the table right in front of the boy-earl.

"In an instant, he knew what it meant and sprang to his feet. In spite of his struggles, however, he and his brother were quickly overpowered and bound and dragged away. The little king, sitting at the head of the table, was horrified. He cried and pleaded with the regents that they would have mercy, but it was no use.

"'Either you or they must die,' said Crichton, 'for the kingdom of Scotland cannot hold both a Stuart and a Douglas.'"

"And were the two boys both killed?" Herb asked breathlessly, his sullenness forgotten in the interest of the story.

"Yes," said Alistair delighted to see that he had broken the ice. "They were put through the form of a trial at which the child-king was forced to preside and were condemned. Then they were taken out into the courtyard and beheaded. It was a disgraceful act and the foul treachery of it cannot be excused."

"The poor little king must have felt bad about it," said Herb, his eyes shining. "Gee, that boy-earl must ha' felt mighty scared when they carried in the black bull's-head,"

and he gave a slight shudder and glanced over his shoulder a little fearfully.

Then he jumped to his feet with a sharp exclamation of fright and his face turned white in the lamplight.

"I thought I saw a man's head lookin' in the window," he said in answer to Alistair's look of astonishment.

Alistair jumped quickly to his feet to follow the boy's frightened gaze and as he did so, the door was thrust violently open and three masked men strode into the room.

CHAPTER XI

HANDS up," said the foremost of the masked intruders as he levelled a revolver at Alistair. The other made a grab at Herb, who had attempted to dive to the door at the back. He was not quick enough, however, for he was clutched in a grasp of iron and dragged squirming and fighting back to the middle of the room where he was fain to be still under the compelling grip of his captor.

Alistair demurred for a moment but at a threatening motion of the pistol, he reluctantly raised his hands above his head. For a moment, he felt sick with the terror and suddenness of the danger, while his heart seemed to stop beating and there was a horrible sensation at the back of his throat. He was relieved when after a terrible moment or two of silence the man spoke, his words coming out in a gruff, throaty way as if he was trying to disguise his voice as much as possible.

"You've got to come with us, partner," he was saying, "an' the quieter you come, the better off you'll be. This ain't a very healthy locality for you we're thinkin' an' we're goin' to see you out of it, see? Better not tempt this gun o' mine to go off which it might do accidentally, y' know, so keep these hands up."

"Oh, you ain't goin' to hurt him, are you?" said Herb, bursting into tears, forgetting himself in Alistair's danger as the stranger wagged his revolver significantly. The action appeared all the more sinister on account of the terrifying effect of the black mask with its eyeholes disclosing a pair of fierce eyes that glared ominously upon the threatened man.

"Shut up, sonny," said the other man: "you needn't get scared. We ain't goin' to hurt you, nor him either if he behaves himself, only to teach 'im a lesson that's all."

"Tie the kid up an' let's be goin'," said the other. The second man acting on the suggestion, drew a strong cord from his pocket and after tying the boy's hands behind his back, he forced him into a chair. With the rest of the cord he bound him to it firmly with several turns first around his body then, to make additionally secure, he took a turn round his ankles and also made them fast. "Youngsters like you are mighty wiggly," he said, "and I ain't goin' to take no chances. It won't be long before your brother'll be back and turn you loose," he muttered. "Now then for the next."

With another piece of cord the two men then tied Alistair's hands in front of him. Forcing him to do their bidding under the menace of the pistol, they hustled him roughly before them and conducted him outside. Before doing so, however, the bigger of the two men forced a piece of cloth into his mouth so as to gag him effectually; and then they did the same to the boy, fearing that if they did not, he would awaken his little brother and sister to come to his assistance. Outside the door, one of the men put his hand into Alistair's coat and took his pocket-book. A little distance from the house, they came upon another masked man sitting on horseback and holding three horses, on one of which Alistair was forced to mount. The operation was a slightly difficult one on account of his hands being tied. Both men then mounted and one of them leading Alistair's horse by the bridle, they set off at a slow trot, two by two, Alistair being in the rearmost couple. The two in front conversed in a low tone but too low for Alistair to hear above the noise of the wind in the trees.

The moon had gone behind a bank of dark clouds. The night was now rather dark, and it had stopped raining. The road was rough and muddy and the horses stumbled frequently as they trotted along. For a time, Alistair, who had never ridden a horse with his hands tied before, had to watch closely to avoid losing his seat. Never having ridden anything but an English saddle he felt very strange sitting in the stock saddle with which his horse was equipped, with its high pommel and wide wooden stirrups.

After a little they came out of the wood into the main road and then the going was much easier and smoother so that he was able to let his thoughts turn to his position and to speculate as to what was to be the outcome.

He had gathered from the few words his captors had let fall that he was in the hands of a sort of moonlighting committee who were making it their business to scare him out of the country on account of the errand on which he had come; and he was at a loss to know whether or not he was likely to meet with further violence from them. Would they take him a certain distance and then turn him loose, or would they punish him still more?

He was puzzled, too, by the fact that the man had robbed him of his pocket-book; and he wondered if perhaps the real motive was plain robbery after all.

They had turned to the left when they emerged from the side road and were now proceeding at a slow half canter back along the road over which he had come by the stage. On their right, the lake, lashed out of its usual calm by the gale, chafed loudly against its banks. Once quite near them, a great tree fell with a loud crashing sound like a great clap of thunder.

Soon they had passed by the lake and were into the midst of heavy woods where the road was much worse. Here the horses could only proceed at a walk, their feet sinking away down into the spongy mud and coming up again with a sound like the popping of corks. Up and down hill the road went and for the young man with his hands tied and with no chance to save himself if his horse should fall, the experience was anything but pleasant. The animal he rode, too, seemed to be an inveterate stumbler, and many a time did the man beside him swear at it. Alistair was unable to beg them to untie his hands as he would have done had he not been gagged, and he felt his helplessness very keenly.

Only once did they meet anyone. This was at the top of a long hill when all at once, the two men in front pulled up quickly and another figure on horseback appeared out of

the darkness. "Hallo, who's this?" it cried: but the others spurred quickly past, the man beside Alistair cutting his horse swiftly on the flank with his quirt.

"That was Charlie, eh, boys?" one of the men said and the man behind assented.

"I guess so," he said. "We don't have nothin' to say to him to-night, do we?" and he laughed. "Let's get a move on," and the pace was greatly increased.

At the faster gait Alistair's horse stumbled more than ever but the man beside him seemed to have no mercy. He lashed it from behind with his quirt, the poor brute lunging each time in a way that made it very trying for the rider. At last, in descending a steep hill, it stumbled over something on the road and went down on its knees. Alistair was thrown over its head and landed on his face and shoulder in the soft mud of the road.

For a moment he lay half-stunned, but he was in no hurry to move even if he had felt able. One of the men was quickly down on his knees beside him and lighted a match to see how far he might be injured.

"Oh, he ain't much hurt, I guess," he said to the other. "It'll do him good I'm thinkin'."

The third man, who throughout the ride had never spoken a word, had dismounted, too, and was looking down with some concern at the prostrate figure. He was slighter in build though just as tall as the other two.

"He isn't killed, is he?" he asked anxiously. "I wish we had let him alone," he said; and to Alistair's ears the accents sounded familiar. Where had he heard the voice before? His mind was in a whirl and he could not think very clearly; but he waited to hear what else might be said. He was in hopes that they might now turn him free; and he was not disappointed.

"I guess we've done enough now; I hope we haven't done too much. You don't think he's hurt badly, do you?" the same voice asked again. "I'll get some water out of a ditch here and that'll fetch him to."

The next thing Alistair knew he was being soused in the

face with a hatful of water; and he decided he had better come to if he did not want to be drenched. He groaned and sat up feeling very sick and faint. Then he felt his gag being removed and a flask of whisky was placed to his lips. When he had taken a mouthful he felt better and was able to rise to his feet. Then the cord binding his wrists was cut.

"Now buck up, my boy," said the man. "We'll let you go now. You're only four miles from the Garston Hotel so you can hoof it down there as fast as you like. But I wouldn't come back to these parts again. They ain't healthy for the likes o' you especially when ye come round to do dirty work. The boys don't stand for no nonsense round them parts so if I was you, I'd be off on the first train. We didn't mean to have you throwed, but I guess you ain't hurt much after all. Count yourself might lucky we didn't string you up to a cottonwood tree, what has happened to many a man that made himself unpopular in a cattle country."

Without another word, he put the reins up over his horse's head and quickly mounted. Then the three, wheeling their horses, rode off at a smart canter in the direction that they had come. Alistair was left alone listening to the sound of the receding hoofbeats which was soon lost in the insistent chorus of the frogs that were making the night vocal all around him.

What were his feelings as, bruised and stiff from his fall, his cheek and temple smarting excruciatingly and covered with mud which was plastered all over him, his wrists still sore from the chafing of his late bonds and his mouth and tongue numb and aching from the pressure of the gag, he limped slowly down the hill? Not very pleasant to be sure, notwithstanding the relief that he felt to be out of the hands of his tormentors. Mingled with this there was the keen sense of personal humiliation from the treatment he had undergone as well as the bitter acknowledgment of defeat in his mission. He was but twenty-two,

and youth, which has yet to taste the buffetings of life's hurley-burley, is apt to take its first ones hardly.

One consolation he had now that after this experience, he would not have the same compunction about setting the machinery of the law in motion to realise on the mortgages. The other side had first declared war and on their head be it if the consequences were not to their liking. If the cowboy toughs of the neighbourhood egged on, no doubt, by their employers, thought that by this act of intimidation they could frighten him away from the district, they had appraised him wrongly. They had thrown down the glove and he would not hesitate to pick it up.

It was a long, weary, four miles, but he covered it and the lights of the railway station at last appeared in sight. Fortunately, there was no one around but the old deaf landlord when he entered the hotel door.

CHAPTER XII

THE morning after Alistair's adventure, Lorraine arose with a deep sense of heaviness at her heart and went downstairs to get breakfast with Olney and Ted who were to make an early start to Kamloops. She had spent a wakeful night her mind filled with anxious thoughts and evil forebodings. What with her father's critical state and this new calamity of the seizure of their stock impending, the future looked very dark indeed. Again and again, she recalled Thibault's advice that they should still make it up with the young Britisher and let him stay at the ranch.

Until the last few months, life for her had been very sunny and she had never known anything of its cloudy side. In the community in which she lived, her family enjoyed considerable social prestige not only for the extent of its holdings in land and cattle but because of her father's personality and leadership in local undertakings. At boarding-school in Victoria, other girls had envied her for her beautiful country home and for her horsemanship and cleverness in everything pertaining to country life. She was sought after and deferred to by the young men at all the dances and parties that took place in the district.

It was small wonder then that a spirit so untried should prove rebellious under Fortune's frown; and the attitude of Lorraine under this latest impending stroke of the rod was rather defiant than conciliatory. That such a crushing humiliation as was threatened should come upon her family seemed at the best an unwarrantable mistake on the part of Providence, and she was strongly inclined to voice the spoilt child's formula of "I don't care," and tell Fate to do its worst. Had she only had herself to consider, it would have been different; but she thought of her father, lying upstairs helpless, and she felt that, for his sake, at least,

it was necessary to temporise with and propitiate the enemy if it was possible to do so at all. So at the breakfast table she opened up at once on the subject.

"I've been thinking it over all night," the girl began impulsively and with just a trace of diffidence, "and I think that we were wrong in not agreeing to let Mr. Kilgour come here as he wanted to. I think Mr. Thibault was right and that we ought to try to find him this morning and persuade him to come back. It will break Father's heart if he gets better and finds out that the stock has been sold out by the sheriff."

"Yes, I think that is true," Miss Paget assented. "After all the young man is not an ogre—indeed, to tell the truth, I was rather favourably impressed with him. It won't do us any harm to have him around for a little."

"I think that he is insufferable," Lorraine put in quickly with a flush, "but I am willing to put up with him for Father's sake. I should just hate to be in his power though. Of course, we are that now, I suppose, as far as our property is concerned but that is all, thank goodness. We can send him to the right-about if he gets too uppish and unbearable or as soon as we get the mortgage paid."

"Auntie thinks that he must be all right because he is good-looking," said Olney with a smile, "but I am afraid that it's too late to invite him back here," and his face relapsed into its former state of sulky gloom.

"How?" asked Lorraine quickly. "Has he gone away already? The stage doesn't go until noon."

Olney looked at her queerly before answering. Then he laughed a trifle grimly.

"Oh, he didn't need any stage. Some of the boys took him away at the end of a rope; at least so they were saying round the corral this morning."

"You don't mean they hanged him?" cried Lorraine anxiously turning pale.

"Why not?" said Olney in his ill-humour not averse to keeping her in suspense. "Oh, we're a wild lot at Duck Lake, we are. Why shouldn't we hang a chap like that

who comes poking his nose where he's not wanted? It'd be all he deserves, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, you're joking, Olney, please say you're joking. They never went and did that, did they?" and she looked from him to Ted, her eyes wide with dismay.

"Ask Ted, then," said Olney.

The latter with a muttered imprecation rose hurriedly from the table and pushed his plate back.

"No, of course, they didn't," he said. "What's the good of scaring her that way. Some people never have sense enough to keep their mouths shut," and he walked from the room after casting a glare of anger on his cousin.

"No, they didn't hang him, true enough," Olney hastened to say; "but I guess that they pretty nigh scared him to death and then broke his head for him. Served him jolly well right too. I guess he'll not come back again in a hurry although he'll send somebody else to do his dirty work. We shall be hearing from him soon enough, I reckon; and the quicker Ted and I get to Kamloops and try to raise that money, the better if we don't want everything sold over our heads."

"Tell me just what happened, Olney?" said Lorraine.

"Well, it seems he was staying with Jimmy intending to go down with him to-day, and last night when Jimmy and his mother were away—she was called to Sam Hartney's wife who's down with pneumonia—three masked men went to the place and held up his lordship at the point of a gun. They tied little Herb to a chair and then took the chap away. Charlie Bertolani met four men riding down towards Garston about ten o'clock and although he hollered to them they would not answer. Anyway, Kilgour arrived on foot at Humpty's about midnight with his face all cut and bleeding and just about all in. The station agent was telephoning the store about some feed and he told Tim White. Of course, Kilgour will blame it on us so the fat's in the fire now. But I've got to get away. We should have been on the road an hour ago."

He rose hastily and strode from the room while Miss

Paget and Lorraine sat looking at each other in dismay.

"The fools! They must have been mad," said Lorraine. "Who could have done it?"

"I would not have believed it of any of our men," said Miss Paget. "Whoever did it must have been drunk. It is certainly a great pity. He is sure to think that we had some part in putting the men up to it. But there, do not worry, my dear," she said, taking pity on Lorraine's face of despair. "It will all come right and, no doubt, the boys will be able to arrange for the money we need in Kamloops. Go up now and see how your father is getting along."

Lorraine had been very busy all forenoon and well into the afternoon. About four o'clock, however, Miss Paget insisted that she should go for a ride so she saddled Pronto and set out for Mrs. Appleby's. She found the good lady in a great state of excitement and indignation. To come home about midnight—for the doctor had brought a professional nurse out with him from town and she had not therefore been required to stay—and find her boy gagged and bound to a chair and her guest spirited away by force was a shock that even to her bluff and vigorous good nature, was a severe one. She considered the hospitality of her house had been outraged and she did not spare to give full vent to her opinions of those who were responsible for it. Fortunately, although badly frightened, Herb was no worse for the affair. Indeed, he was inclined to be proud of himself and went joyfully forth to school prepared to pose as the hero of a very terrible affair.

Mrs. Appleby said she had her suspicions as to who were the men who had taken part in it; but she refused to name any names. She made it quite clear, however, that she would never suspect that the De Roches themselves would lend their countenance to it. The young man, she admitted, had impressed her rather favourably in spite of her prejudice against him on account of his mission. She told Lorraine how the boys had nearly tried to put him

off the premises and how she had interfered when a hand to hand struggle seemed to be imminent.

After she had partaken of a cup of tea and some scones and honey, Lorraine started on her homeward way considerably cheered and refreshed. It appeared that no serious harm had come to Mr. Kilgour according to the news that had come over the telephone from Garston. In spite of all the evil consequences which the occurrence might have in urging him to extremities in reference to the mortgage, she felt a sneaking satisfaction in the thought that he had been so quickly and ignominiously punished for his insolence.

She was riding along slowly at a walk with the reins loose and her horse's head hanging down. All at once, at a turn in the leafy lane she came full upon the subject of her thoughts mounted on a big sorrel horse which was moving at a swift trot. The rider reined up quickly to avoid a collision and the big horse under the sudden pressure of the curb turned himself broadside on in the pathway for a moment blocking it completely.

Alistair gravely lifted his hat and having got his horse back into proper alignment was about to pass on. He was somewhat perturbed at this sudden encounter and his impulse was to get away as soon as possible from its embarrassment. His head and the side of his face had been dressed by a surgeon in Kamloops and while the pain was now much alleviated, he was somewhat sensitive to the appearance which he presented with his decoration of sticking plaster and lint. Moreover, his self-love was smarting far more than his broken head from the humiliation he had undergone and he had come back determined to wreak punishment on the offenders. In this way, he hoped to restore, in part, at least, his good opinion of himself.

After the first gasp of astonishment at seeing him again, Lorraine's embarrassment, which was almost as great as Alistair's, instead of keeping her silent, prompted her to speak.

"So you have come back again after all," she said, and was disgusted with herself as soon as the words were out of her

mouth. She felt that she must have a few words with him at least and this might clear the atmosphere and help to put things upon a better footing; but as she thought of the foolishness of such a remark under the circumstances, she blushed painfully. As she looked at his bandaged head and noted the stern pallor of his face and its weary, drawn look, it struck her what he must think of such a question coming from herself.

"Yes, I'm back, you see, in spite of your friends. As the poet says: 'My head is bloody but unbowed.' The next time that they honour me with their attentions, I hope that I shall be more ready for them than I was last night."

He was smiling but it was a smile of bitterness rather than of mirth.

"I suppose you mean the men who—who held you up," said Lorraine, anger coming to the rescue of her pride which might have capitulated under the pressure of her self-reproach. "You have no right to call them my friends, sir, and you have no right to connect us with them at all. We would never have countenanced such a thing. We are not to be held responsible for the wild acts of any drunken cowboys that are out for a lark or for the mad things they may do."

"Oh, but I think you are to be held responsible, when these same drunken cowboys' acts carry out the very threats that your cousin hinted at when he ordered me out of your house yesterday afternoon." Alistair's momentary embarrassment had left him. Lorraine's eyes fell before his stern gaze and she began to play nervously with the end of her horse's mane where it met the pommel of the saddle. "It is always a dangerous thing to threaten, you might tell your cousin when you see him. Many a man has been hanged because he did so, who might never have been convicted without it."

"My cousin was not the only one who threatened, Mr. Kilgour," retorted Lorraine, wincing under the sting of his sarcasm. "You may recall that you took the last word—"

usually a woman's privilege—so they say, at least—by threatening to make it as unpleasant as you could for us.”

“Then, by all means, let the privilege be yours this time, Miss De Roche,” said Alistair quickly, lifting his hat. Then as his horse swung round to the pressure of his heel, in another instant he had passed and was riding slowly down through the trees leaving the girl dumfounded and furious.

She watched him until he disappeared, and then, turning Pronto's head homeward, she humped herself forward on the saddle and burst into tears.

After leaving Miss De Roche so cavalierly, Alistair rode on somewhat ruffled in temper although he felt that in the brief passage of arms he had not come off second best.

“Little spitfire!” he said to himself. “In the old country she would be still in the nursery almost and yet she had the impudence to fly at me like a wildcat, when I taxed her people with egging these men on to the business of last night. She may be a little tamer yet though before I am through with her.”

He had had a hard day and was far from amiable. In the morning he had arisen early, being unable to sleep from the pain of his bruises, and caught the train and gone to Kamloops which was about nine miles from Garston. Here he had had his wounds properly dressed and then called upon a firm of solicitors which Bancroft and Atherton had recommended to him in their wire, which he had been able to get from the office there. With them he discussed the whole status of his investment. Finally, he had instructed them to commence distress proceedings on the chattel mortgage in the course of a day or two if they did not hear from him to the contrary. While he had at first been of a mind to take immediate proceedings, on calmer reflection he determined that he would go back to the district again for a short time before definitely deciding.

He was somewhat doubtful as to his reception from Mrs. Appleby, but he felt that if she would take him in again, it would be better than looking out for other quarters.

He found the good lady alone, Herb being at school and Jimmy being down at Garston with the stage.

"Well, well, Mr. Kilgour!" she exclaimed, "But you're the very last man in the world that I would have expected to see after the treatment you've had—an' the scoundrels, that they are, they should be strung up for it. As I said to Jimmy this mornin' there's always two sides to a question after all, an' if Mr. Kilgour has money out on Inshallah and can't get it in, he's not to be blamed if he comes lookin' after it. 'Give a dog a bad name,' says I, 'an' that's what they've done with him, an' I ain't goin' to believe that he'd treat the De Roches bad till I see it. I take every one as I find them,' ses I, an' that's a good gospel to follow, I'm thinkin'. As for that Olney Layburn, I don't think that he's done much good at Inshallah since the old man took sick; an' I'm thinkin' that if I was Mr. Kilgour and had money out, I would be watchin' 'im pretty close, I would. He wants to marry Miss Lorraine, an' then if Ted goes to the bad, as it looks mighty likely—and believe me, Olney don't hinder him none neither—then he'll have the ranch to himself when old De Roche is done with it an' that won't be long now by the looks of things. But that poor head of yours does look bad. Ain't there nothin' I could do for it?"

"Nothing at all, thank you," said Alistair, "I had it dressed in Kamloops and it's feeling all right again, almost. But how is Herb, Mrs. Appleby, my partner in misfortune? I hope that he was none the worse of the fright which he must have got."

Mrs. Appleby's face crinkled up with merriment.

"Worse, bless you, not a bit of it. He's as proud as Punch over his part in it, though he was awful mad about you. He's bringin' the teacher home with him to supper to-night though, an' I guess it's time that I was gettin' the batter ready for the pancakes that I promised to have. He says Miss Pelton's awful fond of them; but I expects that it's one word for her and two for himself."

"I want to know if I can board with you for a short time, Mrs. Appleby?" said Alistair when she paused and

he saw a chance to break in. "I don't know how long it may be. Perhaps for a day or two and perhaps it may be longer."

The good woman readily consented on terms that seemed most moderate, and then they talked of general matters until Herb's appearance from the stable, where he had been attending to Alistair's horse. The boy was elated, at the same time rather awed, by the occasion of having his teacher as his guest. His shyness was a certain protection, for which Alistair was thankful, to keep him from bursting into the subject of the holdup with too much enthusiasm for detail. He answered quite simply when he was asked how he felt after it; and was perforce satisfied merely to look his sympathy for Alistair's bandaged head, which, however, he regarded with much interest and some awe. He was wishing that he might have had some visible injury as a result of his connection with the affair.

Mrs. Appleby soon had the tea and the pancakes on the table, together with some cold tongue and honey, and they all sat down to the meal. With the merry chat that went around and the friendly atmosphere, Alistair was soon rid of the depression of the afternoon and the pain of his bruises was forgotten.

He was interested in the girl's frank talk about herself and her experiences in her profession. She represented a type that was altogether different from anyone that he had ever met in the old land.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I don't really need to earn my living by teaching school—Father is quite well off; but he thinks that every girl should have a profession to fall back upon so that if the time ever comes that she should actually need it, then she would not be stranded. It's good experience, too, I suppose, to get out away from one's family where one has to rely upon oneself.

"I suppose you have to board with one of the farmers?" said Alistair.

"Yes, one is usually regarded as a perquisite of the Secretary of the school trustees, or if he is a bachelor and

disqualified, of one of the Board. Sometimes it works out very well but at other times it doesn't. I. is all well enough if he is the right kind of a man—then one may be said to be under a benevolent despotism; but if he isn't it becomes tyranny of the worst kind. I have tried both so I know," said Miss Pelton, smiling so as to show an engaging dimple in each cheek while she spread some honey on her pancakes.

"And which form of government are you living under now? if I may make so bold," asked Alistair with a quizzical air to match her mood.

"Oh, the benevolent despotism to be sure," she replied.

"She lives with the Thibaults," put in Mrs. Appleby; "and they just think the world of her. Their children all died so they're kind of lonely and I guess they're mighty thankful to have Miss Pelton with them to keep them company."

"To use your Western way of talk, the Board of Trustees 'boss' the teacher and the teacher 'bosses' the scholars. I wonder if that's a benevolent despotism too," said Alistair. "What about it, Herb?" he asked.

Herb looked at his teacher and hesitated for a moment.

"I don't know what that is," he said, blushing; "but I guess when she gets out the strap, we all sit up pretty straight."

Here it was Miss Pelton's turn to blush, which she did very prettily and the conversation turned into other channels.

After supper, all except Mrs. Appleby, who was expecting Jimmy home from Garston at any moment and wished to have some pancakes ready baked for him, went out to the corral. Here the lone "bossy" of the Appleby family was in waiting. It appeared that Herb had promised to teach Miss Pelton how to milk. The man who looked after Mr. Thibault's cows took such a serious view of his responsibilities that the girl had never felt the necessary courage to suggest that she would like to try her 'prentice hand on them; but she was really anxious to learn the art before she returned to town in the summer holidays. But now the presence of this young and stylish stranger, even although temporarily

slightly damaged, had made her anxious to defer her first lesson until a more fitting opportunity. Herb, however, was so full of the desire to exhibit his own superior knowledge to one who was able to speak to him with authority anent the mysteries of long division and the eccentricities of the English Grammar, that "the cat was out of the bag" before she was able even to formulate any plan by which to keep it there.

Alistair, noting the boy's look of disappointment when Miss Pelton suggested a postponement, at once applauded the idea. He said he, too, was anxious to learn and was quite ready to take his first lesson if Herb would guarantee that the cow was a quiet one and would deal mildly with a tenderfoot like himself, who hardly knew one end of a cow from the other.

So they all sallied out gleefully. "Bossy," a fine black and white Holstein, regarded them thoughtfully as they approached, her large eye taking in with a somewhat sardonic expression—at least so it seemed to Alistair—the large milk pail which Miss Pelton carried.

"She looks very fierce, doesn't she?" said Miss Pelton, as under Herb's direction, holding the pail delicately in the one hand, she took the little one-legged milking stool in the other. Then placing it upon the ground, she sat down at about eighteen inches' distance from Bossy's bulging sides and reached out timidly towards the swelling udder.

"Oh, you're much too far away," cried Herb impatiently. "You must come close up to her, you know. Maybe you'd better let me start her first and it will be easier for you"; and he took the stool from Miss Pelton who was all too willing to give it up. Then he sat down almost underneath the animal, and dug his little head into its side, and in a moment the milk was flowing in streams to the accompaniment of that delightful, rhythmic music that it makes upon the bottom of the pail. A dreamy look of contentment settled over the cow as she quietly chewed her cud and resigned herself to her reflections.

"There, now," said Herb after he had milked for a minute

or two: "you see how easy it is, and Bossy, she's as quiet as a lamb. You just have to start squeezing with the first finger first and follow on with others and the milk comes as easy as anything. Of course, you can't expect to do it as quick as me at first; but you soon get speedy when you've practised a bit. Just to milk, why it's as easy as rolling off a log."

"It certainly looks easy enough," assented Miss Pelton as she took the stool from the boy's hand and proceeded to settle herself cautiously upon it. Just at this moment, Bossy made a furious lurch of her head to brush away a fly that had settled on her side. The girl thinking that it was aimed at her and that the cow was resenting the change of milkers dodged quickly; and losing her balance, would have fallen but that Alistair was quick enough to catch her. As soon as she was on her feet again, she disengaged herself quickly from his hold, blushing confusedly, and again set herself resolutely on the stool.

"How silly of me," she said; "I thought she was going to butt me with her horns."

"Lucky you didn't have hold of the pail," said Herb. "Now try again and don't be afraid to get up close to her. She won't hurt you nowadays."

This time she made a bold effort. Taking the pail in her lap, under Herb's instructions she got hold of a teat with one hand and began to squeeze. At first the milk would not come at all. Then after several vain efforts she succeeded in forcing out a few scanty drops that trickled out over her fingers.

"It reminds me of Byron," said Alistair who was standing, looking on in amusement:

"And from her side the last drops ebbing flow
. fall heavy one by one.

Like the first of a thunder shower.'

"In this case though, unfortunately, it's 'the first drops' instead of 'the last' that you've been able to bring forth."

"It's easy enough for you to make fun of me," she said, pursing up her mouth in desperation. Then by chang-

ing her method, all at once she managed to squirt a fairly liberal stream which bespattered her shoe and stocking. At the same time the cow, which had been manifesting various signs of impatience, suddenly lifted up its right foot and brought it down inside the bucket knocking it out of Miss Pelton's hand. At the same time it brought its tail with a vicious swish around the girl's neck and ears. This was too much for her endurance, and she jumped to her feet smarting with the pain of the castigation.

"That's enough for me, thank you," she said angrily. "You can let Mr. Kilgour do the rest, seeing he can be so witty about it. I'll look on. I don't think that your cow is used to having ladies milk her, Herb"; and she took her little handkerchief and wiped the offending fluid off her shoe.

"Oh, she often does that to me," said Herb, "I mean, swishes her tail that way. She's getting tired now, so I guess I'd better finish her myself. She doesn't mean no harm"; and he sat down on the stool while the others stood watching him, as he milked the cow dry.

When he had finished they all went into the house again. The stage stood horseless in front of the barn as they walked past, showing that Jimmy had returned; and outside the fence there was a spring wagon with a team of horses tied up. When they went inside they found Mr. Thibault chatting with Mrs. Appleby. At least, she was chatting away in her usual voluble strain and he was quietly listening with a twinkle in his eye.

"I hear that you've been learning to milk," said Mr. Thibault to Miss Pelton after greetings had passed and he had been introduced to Alistair. "I suppose that you know all about it now?"

"No, indeed," she answered. "I think that I like cows best at a distance."

"There's a telegram at the hotel for you, Mr. Kilgour," said Jimmy. "Tim White was asking if you was still at Garston and I told him you left on this morning's train. He guessed it was a cable from the old country. I didn't expect

that you were coming back here, though, and I told him that you had likely gone down to Vancouver."

"Is that so?" said Alistair, a sudden tightening at his heart. A cable from home was not likely to contain anything but bad news for him. "I think, if you will excuse me, I shall go down and get it now. It is not far to walk," and he rose to his feet.

"You can drive with us," said Mr. Thibault. "We are just going anyway and we pass the hotel."

"And Jimmy'll go along with you to be company on the road back," said Mrs. Appleby. "It'll be dark by that time anyway, and you might mebbe get out of your way. 'Tain't so easy to keep on the trail at night when you're not used to it. Herb and I will do the rest of the chores."

CHAPTER XIII

THERE was the usual group of men gathered around the bar at Tim White's. It had been payday that day at Kendall's which was the next largest place to Inshallah in the district; and four or five of the men had come in to cash their cheques and spend a goodly part of the money, for to them wages were something to be dissipated over the bar almost as soon as earned. Dick Evie and Paul Lorringer and Ivan the Russian and Oscar the Swede were there from Inshallah. Monte and Jack Beckles were busy at cards at a small table opposite. An observer might have noticed that while attending to his game the former kept a watchful eye on the group at the counter.

It was not only the fact that it was Kendall's payday that made business good. The news had spread that there had been a mysterious stranger visiting Inshallah who had departed as quickly as he had come and whose advent boded some crisis in the affairs of the ranch. These it had been whispered around had been none too prosperous of late.

"Well, I saw old Humpty down at Garston," Steve Brebner, the foreman at Kendall's was saying, "an' he told me that this chap Kilgour came in all ready to drop he was that weak and his head an' face was bleedin' like a steer. He jist said to Humpty that he had had a fall; but seein' he had no horse with him, Humpty thought it were a bit queer that he should a hurt himself so bad an' him only walkin'. However, Humpty ain't no hand to be inquisitive. He kind o' shut me up when I began to enquire more special into the affair."

"I guess he won't trouble them parts again for some time, eh, Steve?" said Tim White as he poured him out a glass of beer. "He lit out first train next mornin', didn't he? I guess he felt that this neighbourhood was none too

healthy for his constitution," and he grinned around with an unpleasant leer at the admiring circle.

"Well, he was gone when I got up anyway," said Steve, who had spent the night at the Garston hotel. "S'pose we've got to thank them Inshallah boys for that, eh, Dick?" he said with a knowing wink to Evie. "I guess that they rode him out on a rail and left him somewhere on the road to Garston after they had had their fun. That right, Dick?"

"Not on your life, Steve, my boy," said Evie good-naturedly throwing one muscular, bechapped leg over a card table. "We're too law-abidin' round our outfit for that kind of a frame-up. We got nothin' particular 'gainst the fellow even if he did lend the boss his money so long's he don't cut up nasty about it."

"Well, if he distrains on your cattle, I guess you'll think that's kind of nasty, won't you?" said Andy Wilmot breaking into the discussion.

"Well, I allow that would be kind o' nasty, Andy," Evie answered lazily chewing a straw with apparent gusto, "but it ain't quite come to that yet, has it?"

"Well, we all know what he wired to them agents o' his," was the reply. "I guess he'll be too scared to come back himself now but he'll send the sheriff, I'm thinkin'. He'll be mad enough to do that though he'll be careful to keep his own skin at a safe distance. I must say that if I was to put the sheriff in on Inshallah, I wouldn't feel these parts none too healthy to be wanderin' about in, not with the likes of you an' Lorringer around, Dick. An' I ain't goin' to blame no kindergarten kid like this here young Englishman for fightin' shy."

At this moment amid the murmur of assent which followed this speech, Kilgour himself walked quickly through the swing door closely followed by Jimmy Appleby. There was no evidence of timidity in the young man's mien as he strode rapidly through the room. Thrusting through the crowd of loungers about the bar, he stopped in front of Tim White, who in astonishment at the sight of him had paused in the midst of pouring a bottle of beer.

"I believe you have a telegram for me," he said, his anxiety causing him to speak with some peremptoriness.

"Who the hell are you anyhow?" Tim snapped back annoyed by the stranger's brusqueness and not unwilling to show off before the crowd.

"It's Mr. Kilgour, Tim," said Jimmy who had come up behind. "I told him you had a wire for him."

"He can't have it now anyway," said Tim, rudely. "It's after hours and he'll have to wait till mornin'."

Alistair had had experience of the man's rudeness before and he was in no mood to be trifled with. He coolly seized the bottle of beer out of the hotelkeeper's hand and began to pour it for him.

"Here, I'll do this for you while you go and get it," he said, as if it were a matter of course, concentrating his attention entirely upon the operation. Tim was so astonished to be ordered about in this way that his underjaw dropped and he gasped in amazement.

"Well, I'm blessed," he ejaculated, completely at a loss what to make of the situation. He felt like hitting the stranger a blow on the face but there was something masterful about him in spite of his slim youthfulness that made him pause, something in the quiet indifference of his pose and in the firm cut of his jaw. The moment's irresolution persuaded him to a pacific policy, so he went into the store adjoining and returned in a moment or so with the Manila envelope bearing Alistair's message. The latter took it and at once retired to a vacant table to read it. His fingers trembled as he tore the covering apart and opened up the flimsy sheet of paper. This was what was on it:

"Bondholder started action Greycrags yesterday urgent realise De Roche mortgage immediately.

"Kilgour."

Alistair's sensation was one of intense relief as he read the message for he had feared it might contain news of sickness or death at home. That the bondholder had started action on the farm was bad enough, but still all might yet

be well if he was able to call in the money from the mortgage on the De Roche place.

The room had fallen into comparative silence on Alistair's entry; and after the buzz of conversation that had preceded it, the contrast was a marked one. All eyes were on him as he read his telegram; and the word was quickly whispered around that this was the stranger who had the mortgage on Inshallah who had been run out the night before. That he should have the hardihood to come back seemed an extraordinary thing and his coolness and evident unconcern added much to the piquancy of the situation. The bandage on his head bore undoubted testimony to the injuries he had received whether they were the result of violence or not.

"Ye ain't keepin' bad company, Jim, are ye?" cried Paul Lorringer to the boy as the latter stood watching Alistair a little timidly, not wishing to intrude upon him while he was reading his message.

"Guess I am when I'm standin' beside the likes o' you," he snapped out moving off to the other side of the room.

"Jimmy likes to keep in with the swells," said Dick Evie. "He ain't got no use for plain farm hands like you and me now."

"I wonder what my lord's got in his telegram," said Andy Wilmot after the general laugh that had followed Dick's sally had subsided. "He don't look none too sweet over it, does he?"

"Guess they've wired him they can't get no forced sale on them cattle after all," said Dick. "Let's see if we can't have some fun out o' the chap"; and he strolled over to where Alistair was sitting. The young man's eyes were still looking into vacancy for his mind was far away with his father at home. He was thinking how much this thing would distress him.

"Had an accident, sir?" asked Dick with mock solicitude.

"I beg your pardon?" said Alistair suddenly brought back to earth and his surroundings again. "Did you speak?"

Dick repeated his question amid a subdued titter that

arose from those around who had heard him and suspected what he was about.

Alistair looked at him a moment and he read the ridicule in the man's face and felt as in a flash the amused and unfriendly eyes that were upon him. Glancing around the circle, he noted Jimmy's face hot and troubled watching him with the rest.

"Yes," he said in measured tones. "You're likely to have one, too, if you don't mind your own business."

There was a general laugh at Dick's expense which made him colour red with anger, and the smile of amusement had changed to an ominous frown.

"Oh, I am, am I?" he said with a sneer. He moved a step closer to Alistair thrusting his chin out and canting his head to one side with a threatening air. His bulk loomed high over the table where the latter sat. "Well, not by a miserable, whey-faced whipper-snapper like you, I guess. If you'll just stand up, we'll see who's most in danger of an accident, you or me"; and he hunched his shoulders slightly as if to show his readiness for an immediate fight.

Alistair bitterly condemned himself for his lack of self-control that had led him into such an untimely scrape. To become involved in a fist-fight with this bully of a cowboy was the last thing that he would welcome even had he no special mission on his mind and were he in the best of condition for such a struggle. He was no coward; but he realised that physically after his injuries of the night before and the exhaustion following the long arduous day, there was but one possible outcome. It meant a licking for him. He was not one to sit down under an affront or a challenge, yet he owed it to his father to keep himself in good trim for the duty at hand which was far more important than the castigation of this cowboy even if that had been possible to accomplish in his present condition.

It was hard to sit still, so hard that he clenched his hands under the table until his nails bit into the flesh. He felt that a hundred eyes were upon him which he was afraid to look up and face. It was a bitter ordeal for one who was unused

to humiliation; and he felt the blood rush up into his face while the silence of the room seemed interminable, crushing him with its impending menace of the world's contempt.

There was, however, a diversion from where he would have least expected it. Jimmy perhaps of all those present did not enjoy the situation and pitied the young man, although even yet he was doubtful of his good intentions.

"He was right enough, Dick Evie," he said wrathfully, his voice that was at the breaking stage between a boy's and a man's, changing curiously in the stress of his passion. "If you would mind your own business it would be a good thing for everybody and if you want to fight you'd better pick out a man of your own size that ain't sick already, you great big slob you!" He strode up to the big man as if he would have tackled him himself right then and there.

The latter swung round and he might have struck the boy the next moment had not another hand been laid upon his shoulder, a heavy and a strong one too, with a powerful grasp which could not easily be shaken off.

"Steady, steady, man," said its owner in a broad Scotch accent. "Ye wadna be fechtin' wi' a bairn wi' the beard no yet stiffened on his face an' wha's no sae far frae the richts o' the case as ye might imagine in yer calmer moments. You come wi' me an' hae a drink before ye dae somethin' that ye'll be sorry for."

He was a man of somewhat over middle height but with a slight stoop. He had just entered as the little contretemps had arisen and had stood to witness it. Dick Evie looked somewhat abashed when he saw who it was; and the truculent air wilted away in a moment.

"I wasn't goin' to hurt the kid, Andrew," he said apologetically; "but he'd no right to sass me the way he did all the same. He has little need, I'm thinkin', to be takin' up with a chap as had better have stayed where he came from an' where he was better appreciated. However, that's his lookout."

Dick then suffered himself to be led by the new comer

to the bar where a drink was soon forthcoming which helped to soothe his ruffled spirits.

Alistair and Jimmy meanwhile seized the opportunity to slip out and were soon upon the road home.

They walked for some time in silence under the bright stars which studded a clear sky. To Alistair they looked singularly beautiful and restful after the heat and stress of the scene they had just left.

"Jimmy," he said, at last, turning to the boy. "You're a plucky lad and you did me a good turn to-night that I shall not forget."

"'T weren't nothin' at all," said Jimmy a trifle huskily for he was moved.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Lorraine had arrived home after her vexing interview with Mr. Kilgour, she found that Olney and Ted had returned from Kamloops but that the news they brought was far from cheering. The bank manager had treated their proposals for a loan with anything but enthusiasm. Indeed, at the end he had flatly refused to consider it at all. There was a balance due of the funds that had been advanced last harvest which he would like to see settled, he said. They had then applied at the other two banks and in each case, the managers there had returned the same negative answer.

Meeting with no success in raising a loan, they next interviewed the manager of Herries and Laing, the big meat packers, to find out whether he would consider buying their cattle or a sufficient part of them to pay off the chattel mortgage. However, he told them that he had more stock on hand than he wanted and offered a figure so ridiculously low that it was not worth while discussing. The market was glutted, and the prospects for Fall prices were very poor. His firm could not afford to take any chances at the present time. Moreover, he advised them that he did not think they would be likely to find any local purchasers as he mentioned another rancher who had a large bunch of good store cattle to sell and had been unable to do so. He advised them if at all possible to keep their stock until prices improved.

It was rather a gloomy meal at the supper table where they recounted their experience although Lorraine did her best to put a bright face on things.

"We should have fallen in with Mr. Kilgour's suggestion," she said.

"Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Ted, fiercely. "Have

that stuck-up English prig here prying around and sticking his nose into everything and lording it over us all just because we owe him some money? Not if I know it"; and in his excitement he knocked over the water jug. He had been drinking in Kamloops, it was evident, and his face was flushed and twitching and his hands unsteady. The girl's heart sank as she looked at him and she reflected that here was far greater cause to them for sorrow than the loss of the stock could possibly be.

"I think that Lorraine is quite right," said Miss Paget as she mopped up the deluge with her napkin. "The only thing to do is to eat humble pie and try to pacify him so that he will not proceed to extremities. We must tell him to come here at once and we shall make him welcome."

"Welcome! Aunt Jane," cried out Ted with a laugh of derision. "Welcome as rain in harvest, I guess!"

"He'd never make it up with us now," said Olney sullenly, "after us showing him the door. Anyway I'd never ask him. I'd die first. Let him take the cattle and sell them for what they'll bring. I don't care."

"As it happens, you see they're not your cattle, Olney," said his aunt severely. "You've got to act to the best advantage for your uncle when he's sick whether it suits in with your dignity or not. The thing for you to do is to go and see the man at once at Appleby's—Lorraine says he is back there though how he had the nerve to return after the way he was treated astonishes me—and make the best terms with him you can. Do anything almost rather than have the cattle sold; because you know as well as I do that if that happens, we are as good as ruined."

"I tell you I won't and that's an end of it," he declared angrily. "Ted has a more amiable temper than I have. Let him have a try at patching up a peace."

"Not I," said Ted hastily, "he can have the cattle first. I thought we had got rid of him for good; but now he's back again I don't want him any nearer. It wouldn't be any use anyway to try after the handling that he's had. I guess he's pretty sore both outside and in by this time."

There was silence for a moment while Miss Paget's eyes sought Lorraine's and there was a mute interchange of messages. Both knew that it was useless to plead further. All at once, Lorraine made a sudden resolve born of the pain that she saw in her aunt's face.

"Then I shall go," she said, "the first thing to-morrow morning because there is no time to lose. If he will not listen to me there will be no great harm done; and to humble oneself is, no doubt, fine discipline especially for a temper like mine."

She smiled a little ruefully as she thought of her chastening of the afternoon.

"Then you'll be a fool and have your pains for nothing," said Ted, "but if he does come here by any chance, don't expect me to be civil to him, that's all."

"There's little danger of us expecting you to be civil to anybody I'm afraid, Ted, in your present frame of mind," his aunt put in with a touch of sarcasm.

"Well, you can do as you like about it," said Olney rising and pushing in his chair while Ted followed his example giving his a vicious fling to mark his resentment of his aunt's remark.

"You're a brave girl," said Miss Paget rising herself and coming round behind Lorraine when the others had left the room and patting her gently on the head in a rather self-conscious way for she was anything but demonstrative by nature. "And I think you will be successful in spite of what they say, for after all I think that young man has a nice face."

"Oh, Auntie! How can you say such a thing," she exclaimed with vehemence; "I think he had such a domineering sort of look. He is simply horrid with that sarcastic smile of his. Oh, you should have heard him this afternoon!"

"That may be," replied Miss Paget with serene confidence; "but I feel I am not mistaken. However, I know better than try to overcome your prejudices."

CHAPTER XV

LORRAINE arose early next morning her thoughts full of her mission. She had lain awake long but fallen asleep at last and in the moment of awakening, before she could remember what it was, she was aware of a something disagreeable impending. When her mind recalled in a flash her undertaking of the night before, she could have wished she was still asleep. However, she was not a shirker and taking a hasty breakfast, she went out and saddled Pronto and set off to the Applebys.

The morning was a fine one and as she rode along the margin of the lake and marked the freshness of everything, her spirits rose somewhat. With the buoyancy of youth, by the time she arrived at her destination she had begun to feel almost confident that she could wheedle this young man whom she disliked so much into doing what she desired.

She found Mrs. Appleby out among her chickens and was told that Mr. Kilgour had gone for a stroll saying he intended to climb the bluff that lay to the north, and have a look at the country. Without stopping to converse long with the good woman, she turned Pronto's head along the trail that led for a short way through the brush and then turned almost perpendicularly upwards on the face of the bluff. There was only the one trail so that she knew there was small chance of her missing Mr. Kilgour unless he was not content with simply ascending to the summit of the bluff but should explore farther along on the slopes or should seek to climb to the greater height behind.

She soon reached the bottom and here she flung herself quickly out of the saddle and throwing the lines over the horn, she started up the narrow trail which led almost perpendicularly up the steep face of the hill. To any one unaccustomed to the wonderful climbing abilities of the

rangebred horse it would have seemed impossible for Pronto to follow her, so narrow was the path and so precipitous the ascent, but both the horse and his mistress took it as a matter of course. Just like a dog, he followed her, soberly and demurely taking every foothold with precision—at times making catlike springs with his hindquarters where some particularly difficult bit had to be surmounted. The girl was able to aid herself now and again by catching hold of a small tree trunk or branch and occasionally she would pause for a few moments, breathing space for herself and the horse and then go on again. The very last stage before reaching the summit was the steepest part, and as the trail here was covered with a loose rubble of earth and stones it made a slippery footing for the horse. So it was that he began to step very quickly to avoid slipping back again and Lorraine had to scramble fast to keep out of the way of his forefeet. She managed to keep ahead of him, however, and having reached the summit, panting and utterly exhausted for the moment, she flung herself down on the grass with a sigh of relief. The horse, equally winded, stood with legs spread apart and head down and puffed like a steam-engine, the sweat dripping down the point of his nose and from his chest and showing in foamy streaks all over his flanks and shoulders.

"I had my money on you," said a voice almost directly above her, coming in the most startling fashion as it seemed out of the air. By a quick involuntary movement of her hand, she drew the loose skirt of her khaki riding suit over a slender limb incased in canvas leggings that had been carelessly exposed in the abandon of her collapse as she looked up in surprise to see where the mysterious voice came from. But it was not such a mystery after all, for, in a low fork of the tree under which she was reclining and just a few feet from the ground, sat Mr. Kilgour, the man she had set out to find.

"I—I—beg your pardon," said Lorraine somewhat haughtily in the embarrassment of her surprise to find the object of her search so close to her. This embarrassment

was increased perhaps by the fact that there was a faint smile of amusement on the young man's face; but it was not unfriendly.

"No, it is for me to beg yours," he replied quickly, anxious to avoid giving offence; and jumping from his perch in the tree he sat down beside her on the turf. "It looked as if you were trying a race with your horse up the hill and I was only saying that I was betting—in my mind of course—that you would win."

"Oh, is that it," and she laughed. "Yes, it is quite a climb, isn't it? and one has to move quickly to keep out of Pronto's way once he gets started. He doesn't always realise how big and heavy his feet are as I have found out to my pain more than once. They are small for a horse but they come down very sharp and sore on such toes as mine," and she glanced down at her foot that was small and dainty enough in spite of the shapely but serviceable shoe which covered it. "But what have you done with your horse?" she asked looking sideways at him now that she was beginning to recover her self-possession. He was not so pale this morning, though the bandage was still evident on the side of his head; but the depression and weariness that had so marked his mien of yesterday had disappeared and his expression was cheerful and his eye friendly.

"I left him in the stable," he replied. "I came out only for a stroll. I've just hired him for a season, and how do I know that he wouldn't break his neck, or mine, if I brought him up Alpine precipices like this? I prefer to do my mountain-climbing on foot, thank you. And this view was certainly well worth climbing for."

"Yes, isn't it grand?" she assented, her face lighting up with enthusiasm as, following his admiring gaze, she looked abroad over the wide prospect which lay panoramically before them. Under the mild light of morning, it all looked very beautiful and full of peace. For a time, Lorraine had almost forgotten the unpleasant nature of her errand as she drank in its charm with eyes aglow and colour mantling in her cheeks.

"I love to come here—it does me good," she went on, "and look down over the valley and see, like a god, all that is going on below—sometimes the cowboys driving in the cattle or Jimmy Appleby passing with the stage or some motor party going through. The road that seems to stop so abruptly reminds me of the one that Stevenson described in 'Will o' the Mill' where so many people went by. Will wondered where they all went to and what happened to them for they hardly ever came back. I look away there to the South and see the hills getting bluer and bluer in the distance"—she waved her hand to the right of them—"and I imagine that I don't know myself what there is down there or where the road can lead to. Don't you like to let your fancy run riot that way sometimes?"

"Yes," he replied, "there was a low hill above our place where as a boy I loved to go and lie on the grass in the summertime. I used to watch the people passing along the road to Selkirk and speculate on who they were and where they were going and weave daydreams of my own. It was a highway rich in associations, too. Oh, it's a romantic country there—even to ride into the old town of Selkirk on a summer morning—up the hill, for it stood upon an eminence from the direction in which we always entered it—with its red sandstone houses it used to look to my boyish eyes like some romantic Italian city. Yes, I suppose my imagination did run riot in those days,——" and his enthusiasm suddenly died down as he concluded, the animation fading out of his face.

"You will be surprised to hear," she began, looking down into her lap, her fingers plucking apart, petal by petal, a yellow dandelion that she had picked from the turf beside her, "that I really came up here after you as I wanted specially to see you—Mrs. Appleby told me which way you had gone. I—we—we have been considering the proposal that you made us the other day and we—that is, I——" and she floundered rather piteously feeling all the time, though she still kept her glance down, that he was looking at her with those eyes which she knew could look so coldly and

sternly, "I mean," she went on at last desperately when the silence became unbearable, "that it wasn't so unreasonable after all and that we should not have been so—so—so rude and so—so mean about it to you; and I just wanted to ask you to forget that and come to us now and we shall try to make you as comfortable as we can till we can pay you the money."

She took courage to glance up for one brief second at his face. Its expression was not reassuring, for the light had died out of it and he was looking at her coldly, almost suspiciously, she felt.

"I am afraid that the time for that has passed. More than one thing has happened since then to alter the situation. I think that it would have been more fitting that your cousin or your brother should have come to me if there were any proposals to make. I was given to understand that Mr. Layburn held your father's power of attorney and that he had complete charge over everything. In any case in a matter of this kind I should prefer to deal with him. As I said, I am afraid that it is a little late for any compromise now."

He felt some compunction about speaking so severely but he had a suspicion that perhaps the man was trying to work him through the girl. He had heard things in Kamloops that made him suspect that enough stock should have been sold off Inshallah in the last year to have more than taken care of the mortgage interest and the expenses of the ranch.

"My cousin is so headstrong and—and so obstinate"—she paused for a moment as if at a loss—"and I am afraid that he hardly realises how much depends upon your giving us more time. It is my father, I am thinking of most," she went on with difficulty; "and I am thinking of what it will mean to him if he gets better and finds out that there has been a sheriff's sale on the place. It would about break his heart, I know, so I thought that it was for me to see you and try to get you to give us another chance—for his

sake. My brother does not help me much and I cannot count on him," she added pathetically.

"I am very sorry for your distress," he said looking away and his profile showed no indication of softening; "but I have had news myself from home yesterday and it makes it the more imperative that this mortgage must be realised as soon as possible. It might have been better for your father as well as for us if we had forced this thing to an issue as soon as the money became due. Sometimes, in such cases as these, an easy clemency is the worst kindness."

"I suppose that you really want to get even with us for the way these men treated you the other night—for I dare say that you still hold us responsible for the outrage, most unjustly so too," she protested, adroitly taking up another angle of the subject on which she hoped to find him more vulnerable.

"I think that we already discussed that somewhat yesterday," he returned; "and there is not much to be gained by opening it up again. I tell you though—I am willing to do this; you can talk it over with your cousin when you go back. I shall call over at your place this afternoon when you can let me know your decision. I am willing to stop proceedings in the meantime, on condition that you turn all the stock over to me to dispose of as occasion serves, up to the extent of the amount of the chattel mortgage, and for ten thousand more to be applied on the principal of the mortgage on the ranch itself. Layburn can still run the place but it will be under my supervision and according to my wishes. I am afraid that you will have to make me your guest in the meantime. If this arrangement is agreeable to you—there is no reason I think why we cannot clean up the business within six months or so in an amicable and friendly fashion. Believe me," and he smiled, rising to his feet as if to suggest an end to the interview, "I have no wish to be otherwise. As my head bears witness"—he could not resist the taunt—"the unfriendliness has been on your side."

She also rose with an air of quiet dignity and going over

to Pronto, she took hold of his bridle and pulled his head up from the grass which he had begun to crop lightly.

"Very well then," she said without glancing at him again, "if that is your ultimatum we shall look for you this afternoon and shall let you know if we can accept it."

Now that he had set his terms she was not going to cringe before him any longer.

"Will you permit me to lead your horse down the path for you?" he offered rather taken aback, it must be confessed, by her terminating the discussion so suddenly.

"Oh no, thank you, I shall ride down," she returned quickly; and, putting her hand to the stirrup, she vaulted lightly into the saddle. Wheeling the horse round she had turned him down the bluff before Alistair had time even to protest. His heart was in his mouth as to him the act looked like suicide; but with considerable noise of snapping of twigs and rolling of stones the animal slid down almost on its haunches, and he and his rider were soon out of sight.

CHAPTER XVI

ALISTAIR kept his appointment on the afternoon following his meeting with Lorraine on the hill ; and after a lengthy conference, at which Layburn and Ted as well as the girl herself were present, an amicable understanding and *modus vivendi* were arrived at. It had appeared when Layburn had sufficiently got over his sulkiness to talk reasonably, that there were really no funds available for running the place through the summer and the men's wages were already considerably in arrears. Probably it was this fact as much as the threat of a sheriff's sale hanging over their heads that made him at all amenable to reason.

So the next day had seen the two, Layburn and Alistair, repairing together to Kamloops where the lawyers, Somerville and Slack, were consulted. An agreement was drawn up turning over all the stock to Alistair, enough of it to be sold at his discretion to pay off the chattel mortgage and ten thousand as well on the principal of the other mortgage on the ranch itself. On the strength of this arrangement and Alistair's own personal guarantee, he was able to negotiate a sufficient line of credit with the bank which the De Roches had always dealt with, to carry them through the expenses of the summer. He was to sign all cheques and receive all moneys coming in from sales of stock, so that he would be in control of the financial end of it. While Layburn was still to have the management, Alistair was to act in an advisory capacity. It was an arrangement that left loopholes for trouble but it seemed to be the best that could be made in the circumstances.

The day after it was signed, Alistair took up his quarters at Inshallah after saying good-bye rather regretfully to the Appleby family, who were as sorry to see him go as he was to leave them.

Lorraine it was who came to the door in answer to the bell and she ushered him into the front parlour with something of restraint in her manner.

"I wanted to have a few words with you," she said, her face showing a faint tinge of colour above its usual waxen-like transparency as, having motioned him to a chair, she sat down opposite him, her long lashes lowered. "My father is able to come down stairs now and we have given him to understand that you are here as a guest merely—you want to see a little of Western ranch life. He has forgotten all about the letter the agents wrote before your arrival. The doctor says that it is absolutely necessary that he should be kept free from mental worry or excitement of any kind—otherwise he is likely to have a relapse which would probably prove fatal. I thought it would be better if I explained to you"—she hesitated evidently somewhat at a loss to go on while her fingers played nervously with the tassel of a cushion beside her on the settee—"then you would not mind playing up to the part—just as if you were not self-invited you know—in view of the circumstances."

"I quite understand, Miss De Roche," Alistair returned, smiling a trifle sarcastically. "For your father's sake we are to appear as friends when he is present; at other times we are just to act naturally. Is that it?"

"I suppose so," she assented but with a slightly embarrassed air, looking up at him. "And now dinner is ready," she broke off, and ushered him into the dining-room where her father was already seated bolstered up with cushions in an armchair. Miss Paget was there, too, and shook hands civilly enough with the guest.

Alistair looked with interest at the invalid, who held out a thin hand to greet him and noted the marked resemblance to his daughter in the straight clear-cut features, the delicately-chiselled nose, sensitive chin and fine arch of the eyebrows. The mobile mouth was slightly drawn up at one side bearing witness to the recent stroke from which he had suffered, though the weakness was more noticeable when he spoke.

"I am very glad to welcome you, sir, to my house, though sorry to be in such poor shape to entertain you," he said cordially. "But Lorraine here and Ted will have to make up for me." The latter had now entered and were waiting for the visitor to take his seat at Miss Paget's right hand where she had placed him. "Olney will too, of course—that is my nephew—but he does not have much time. There's always a lot to do on a cattle ranch."

"Yes, I should think there would be," said Alistair.

"Too much to do to have to be bothered with triflers around," muttered Ted. "What are you kicking me under the table for?" he asked of Lorraine raising his voice. The girl was frowning at him warningly; but maliciously, he pretended to be ignorant of her meaning. It was evident that he had had more liquor than was good for him.

"Yes, it's a mighty poor place for people that poke their heads in where they are not wanted," he went on speaking louder and with a note of defiance. "We haven't the time or the inclination for them;" and he stared insolently at Alistair.

The latter had noted the distress in the girl's face and her look of mute entreaty to him; and he grew hot with anger at the youth, though he saw what had caused him to forget his manners. In his half-intoxicated condition it was hard to tell how far he might go.

"So you warn them out of the country, do you?" he said, turning his gaze fixedly on the boy; and for a brief space the two looked into each other's eyes, the younger trying to remain steadfast. The shaft sent at random had struck home and Ted in spite of himself felt the blood surging over his face and brow and his eyes fell before the stern compulsion of the other's look.

"Ted, you talk too much," said Mr. De Roche reprovingly. "You must not mind him, Mr. Kilgour. When you get to be my age you'll think the intolerance of a boy is to be looked upon with a certain degree of forbearance."

"No doubt, that is true, Mr. De Roche," returned Alistair responding easily to the charm of the elder man's smile.

"After all neither Mr. Ted nor I have come to the stage yet where we can look at things with a philosophical eye. We have all our buffets coming to us."

"Boys and young men are just like colts. Some are 'broke' easy with scarce a bit of trouble. Others take it hard and after it is over, they sulk and fret, won't eat or drink and get so poor and weak that you'd almost expect them to die. Take it from me, Ted, either for man or colt it's never any use to sulk."

"Sometimes the best horse is the hardest to break too, isn't it?" put in Lorraine, relieved to have the conversation opening into more impersonal channels.

The subject was changed and the meal passed off pleasantly, even Ted's sulkiness succumbing before the end of it to his interest in the conversation.

De Roche was a man of considerable intelligence, who had traveled a good deal and read well, if not widely. It was plain that he enjoyed Alistair's company, but the effort of talking was too much for him, it was apparent, and he soon lapsed into comparative silence.

"Where is Olney?" he asked Lorraine with a touch of irritation.

"I don't know, Father," the girl answered, her face falling. She knew why Olney had not appeared. He had taken his supper with the men rather than "put his legs under the table with the interloper," as he expressed it. "He's going out on the lease to-morrow to cut out the strays, and he's been delayed, I guess. I'm going with him, if you don't mind."

"Well, then, that's just the thing. Certainly I don't mind. It'll do you good, after so much sick nursing, and bring the colour back to your cheeks, eh? You can take Mr. Kilgour along with you."

"Oh, it would be too long and rough a ride for Mr. Kilgour," said Lorraine quickly.

"Not a bit of it," her father replied. "He's no milksop, I'm sure. Hasn't he ridden to hounds? The ride will

harden him up, even if he is a little stiff after it. You and Olney can show him what a fine range we have around here. You can make a regular picnic of it."

Much against Lorraine's will the matter was settled in this way.

CHAPTER XVII

SOON after dawn the little party rode out of the ranch gate and along the lake-front to the east. The sky behind them above the hill was suffused with a rich saffron glow, while beneath, soft, white streamers of morning mist still hung on the pine-covered slopes, making their dark-green deeper by contrast. Not a breath disturbed the lake's unrippled surface and there was a stillness everywhere save for the cheery chirping of a few early birds on the fences.

Alistair rode in front with Olney and Lorraine while Ted and Monte followed. Lorraine was in good spirits and chatted away gaily with Olney on her left hand but had never a word for Alistair on her right.

He was mounted on a big raw-boned bay long-coupled and with a large head and powerful shoulders. Hammer-head, it was appropriately named. It had little spring to its paces and seemed to respond very clumsily to the rein. This clumsiness was due, had he known, it, to his unfamiliarity with the Western manner of guiding a horse by the pressure of the reins on the neck instead of pulling on the bit.

At the head of the lake was a grove of cottonwoods growing very large and luxuriantly in a piece of low-lying swampy land; and they turned into this through a rude gate composed of bars which Monte took down, all but the two lowest ones over which each of the party jumped in turn. After riding quietly along through the trees for about ten minutes they came out on a wide sweep of pasture with a herd of cattle grazing; and Ted and Monte rode off to one side and Layburn to the other, so as to round them up.

"We are going to drive them out on to the range now," said Olney addressing Alistair for the first time since they had started. "This bunch came through the winter very

badly and we have been feeding them hay up till now to get them in a little better condition. Now the grass is getting good on the ranges, it is time they were out."

The three horsemen following their diverging paths and still proceeding at a walking pace had passed out to the rear of the cattle and were now bringing them slowly up. Occasionally one of them would have to put his horse to the gallop to catch some refractory steer that would suddenly attempt to break away; but on the whole the animals seemed to come willingly enough. It was a pleasing picture to watch them spread out through the wide field with the three riders behind turning their horses hither and thither skilfully so as to bring the herd together in a more compact formation.

The girl and Alistair had drawn their horses to one side so as to allow the cattle to pass into the willow brush where they quickly disappeared, the riders following them with shouts. Now was the difficult part as there was so much opportunity in the semi-gloom of the thicket for animals to stray out on the sides and escape; and Lorraine plunged in after the rest, fearlessly riding where at times she had to crouch to her horse's neck to avoid being swept off his back by the low limbs of the trees.

Alistair followed more deliberately and did his best; but unaccustomed as he was, he found some difficulty at places in penetrating himself through the thick brush without attempting to drive the cattle through it.

It was easy once they had got clear of the willow brush under the cottonwoods and before long they had passed out through the gate and across the road into the field on the other side. It was necessary to traverse this to reach the cañon that led up to the range in Monk's Meadows. A rude trail led up the hillside but it was impossible to keep the beasts from spreading out over this on either side; and the riders had to scramble through the brush after them. The cows with very young calves gave the most trouble and the latter were now getting very hot and tired for by this time the sun was growing strong. The dust, too, had

risen in clouds behind the shuffling hoofs and the horses were sweating heavily.

Alistair was filled with admiration for the skill of the men in driving the cattle up over steep banks and declivities or charging through dense brush with forearm raised across their eyes to protect them from the sharp-pointed branches. It was a hot and exhausting operation; and he was heartily glad when about noon they had got the herd well up the hill into a wide cañon that extended for about half a mile and Layburn suggested a halt for something to eat.

"They'll find their way over now," he said; "it isn't any use us drivin' them any farther. They're all tired enough and a little rest won't hurt them or us either, I'm thinking," and dismounting he pulled off his sombrero and mopped his wet forehead.

The others dismounted also after loosening the cinches, threw the lines down on the ground and let their horses graze on the meagre grass that grew under the trees.

Miss De Roche took off a small package that was tied at the rear of her saddle and, undoing the string, disclosed two smaller ones within, one of which she handed to Alistair.

"There's a surprise packet for you," she remarked with a smile. "Enough to keep you from perishing until we get back again. Our picnics are not at all elaborate affairs, you see, as we find it best to travel light."

The others each carried their own lunches with them and they ate for the most part in silence, speaking when they did in short, laconic remarks that had no general interest. There was evident constraint and Alistair, feeling himself to be the cause of it, did not attempt to open up a conversation. He was nervous under the sinister glances of the man, Monte, who sat with his back against a tree opposite him. Ted had ignored him completely while Layburn, when he did speak, seemed to confine his remarks principally to the girl.

Alistair was pleased enough when it was decided to move

on again. They mounted the horses after giving them a drink at a brooklet nearby and rode on in single file along the narrow path through the trees. About half an hour of riding brought them out on a fine expanse of meadow, the Monk's Meadows, that was their objective. Here Layburn suggested that Alistair should go with Ted and Monte in one direction catching up any strays they might come across on their way. After driving these out at the hole in the fence where they had got through, they would mend it and then ride back again to meet him and Lorraine when they would all ride home together. Alistair fancied he could detect a slight awkwardness in the man's manner as he made the suggestion and he intercepted a glance of understanding that passed between Ted and Monte.

"Hadn't Mr. Kilgour better come with us, Olney?" the girl asked. "He wants to learn as much as he can and you are best able to tell him."

"Oh, Ted can tell him as well as I can," was the reply; "and it'll be easier going that way. It isn't so hilly and, I guess, Mr. Kilgour will have had quite enough, as it is, when he gets home since he hasn't been riding much. No, you and I'll go by ourselves."

She was opening her mouth to speak again; but he frowned at her. Then silently she turned her horse around and she and Layburn rode off together to the right.

There was then nothing for Alistair to do but to accompany Ted and Monte who at once reined off to the left. They had not proceeded far before, as they reached the crest of one of the slight eminences that lay in their way—for the range here was undulating like the ocean in a heavy swell—Monte's dogs started a coyote not far off and immediately gave chase. With a shout their master was after them and Ted and Alistair followed as fast as the horses could go. It was a furious run while it lasted and, to Alistair, a most exhilarating one.

Soon the coyote got into a sort of dry ditch that ran around the foot of the low bluff and here the dogs finally pulled him down and were worrying him fiercely when

Monte and the others came up. He was off his horse in a moment and put an end to the animal's misery with two or three blows on the head from the loaded end of his quirt. The dogs whined as he drove them off with a cut or two from the other end of it.

Alistair looked down with interest on this little outcast of the hills of whose depredations he had heard. It did not look nearly so formidable a creature as he had supposed from the deadly reputation that it bore. It was a little larger than the foxes that he had been accustomed to hunt at home but not nearly so handsome; the fur was of a dull, mottled grey, shaggy and unhealthy looking; the nose not so pointed and the head altogether heavier with more of the wolf in it.

"This one's hide ain't worth much," Monte said. "He's got the mange too bad. There's three dollars of a bounty though an' I've got to take his scalp off to get it too."

Suiting the action to the word, he pulled out a big clasp-knife from his pocket and, opening it, he severed the animal's scalp from its body. Then he tied it on to the back of his saddle.

Another half hour of riding brought them to the fence they were to mend and there was some swearing from Monte when he saw the serious extent of the breach. It was a plain, log fence, the logs being held in place partly by their own weight and partly by ingeniously nicked crosspieces on which they rested and which kept them from rolling off. Alistair watched with interest for some time the skilful way in which Ted and Monte built them up. At first he tried to assist with the lifting of the heavier logs until it was made very plain to him that his assistance was not wanted. Monte had unbent for a moment in the excitement of his capture of the coyote, but it was evident that the lapse had been only momentary; and Ted made no secret of the fact that his hostile feelings had not altered, although for politic reasons it might be necessary to hold them under control. At the same time there was a something furtive in his manner that puzzled Alistair. Sometimes he seemed to be depressed; and again he was mildly hilarious with his com-

panion, laughing loudly over little jokes that he would make as they proceeded with their work.

The afternoon passed away slowly but not all unpleasantly for Alistair. It was well on to five o'clock before the fence menders had finished their work and as yet there was no sign of the others rejoining them.

"Guess we'd better be goin' back. I'll bet Olney and Lorraine must have got sidetracked somewhere an' we needn't wait for them. Likely they may be home by this time," said Ted when he and Monte after getting on their horses had come over to where Alistair was sitting. The latter had already tightened his cinch on seeing them making ready; and he mounted at once and the three rode off together.

"We're going home by a different way," Ted continued, "so as to show you as much of the country as we can."

There was a sneer in his tone that Alistair did not like and, glancing sideways, he caught a look of understanding that passed between him and the cowboy.

"Sure, Ted," said Monte; "the gentleman's wanting experience and it's up to you to see that he gets a chance. We didn't come the purtiest way, not near, when we come out this mornin'. We might mebbe just have to ride the least bit harder on the road back, but the horses are fresh enough an' they always go good goin' home."

There was certainly no doubt about them having to ride harder. The way was more hilly, leading across deep ravines where it was necessary to keep to a narrow trail and ride in single file, continually watching not to strike one's head on the branches of the trees or have one's eyes put out by projecting snags. Alistair rode behind and the others set a swift pace considering the nature of the track. Hammerhead followed as well as he could, although held back somewhat by Alistair at times where the brush overhead was so thick that one, inexperienced as he was, found it difficult to avoid being swept from his saddle or badly torn. Wherever the going was clear above, he permitted the horse to take his own way. It was wonderful to see the

surefootedness of the animal going down steep declivities that seemed more fit for a goat to negotiate than a horse with a man on its back. It was enough to make anyone nervous who was not used to it and Alistair was half amused, half annoyed as he realised now the meaning of Ted's look of conspiracy. They had thought to give him a bad half hour if even at the expense of their own comfort. Well, he would grit his teeth and take his medicine. To be sure, the danger was slight so long as his horse kept its footing.

Nor could he complain that the scenery of their ride was not finer than that of the route they had come by in the morning, but the swiftness of their pace and the difficulties of the path gave him small chance to enjoy it.

At last they had emerged from the timber and had got among a series of grassy mounds on the sidehill. As they were climbing one of these—Alistair slightly in the rear, for he had striven hard to keep up, not wishing to be left behind to find his way home alone—all at once he felt his saddle slipping back on to the loins of his horse. Feeling that it might turn with him any moment, he threw himself off and set to work to tighten it. The task was a little difficult owing to the steepness of the ground he was standing on and the horse's impatience to follow the others. When he mounted again and crested the summit of the little eminence, as he had feared, he found that his companions had passed out of sight. There were other mounds to the right and to the left of him; but which way they had turned, it was impossible to tell. Owing to the waning light and the hardness of the turf, he could not track the horses' hoofs. They must be riding down one of the hills, but which was it? The only thing he could do was to choose one and ascend as quickly as he could in the hope that he would find them in view when he got to the top.

This he did; but only to find that he must have chosen unfortunately, for there was no one in sight. However, he was not at all alarmed as he felt that he had a fair idea of the general direction of Inshallah house and that he was

not very far away from it. He felt reasonably sure that the horse would take him home if left to itself. Indeed it seemed to have no doubt as to its way as it kept moving steadily along. With its ears pricked forward it looked anxiously for some signs of the others. Soon, a horseman appeared in the distance and the animal whinnied with pleasure. Alistair felt relieved, thinking that it was one of his companions that had turned to find him; but to his disappointment, it proved to be a stranger, a tall, lean rancher on a small bay pony, who drew rein as he met them.

"Am I in the right direction for the De Roche place?" said Alistair.

"You're in the right direction, I guess," said the stranger after scanning him curiously for a moment, "but you've got a goodish bit to travel yet."

"Is that so? How far would it be?" asked Alistair anxiously. "I have got separated from my friends and I don't know the country at all."

"Oh, about four or five miles, mebbe; but it's rather a tough trail if you don't know it. You're Mr. Kilgour, are n't you? I saw you at White's the other night with Jimmy Appleby. You'd better come along home with me. I'm pretty near there now; and though it's a poor place, I can give you a bed all right and a bit o' supper."

Andy Wilmot, for this was he, was nothing loath to have a chance to find out all about this young Britisher who had come to take some of the pride out of these De Roches. As for Alistair he accepted the invitation with alacrity and, turning his horse's head, he rode along in silence behind his new host.

CHAPTER XVIII

NO, you folks haven't had a square deal from Layburn," said Andy Wilmot. "There weren't no reason even though things have been kind o' bad for the last two years why Inshallah shouldn't have paid well enough so as to give you folks your interest."

Alistair and he had just partaken of a supper of tea and fried eggs. Now they were sitting on the rough porch outside the homesteader's log shanty. The young man had not been able to conceal altogether his annoyance at the cavalier treatment he had received in the afternoon; and Andy's sympathy was not ungrateful to him. Furthermore, he felt that he might gain information that would be of use.

"Do you think that he has been deliberately dishonest in the business, then?" he asked, turning round to face the speaker, who was half-sitting half-reclining on a canvas hammock.

"I hain't got any doubt about it," was the reply. "I've had my eye on Olney Layburn ever since he done me a dirty trick over two years ago, an' if he ain't been just bleedin' that Inshallah outfit an' old De Roche, I'll eat my quirt, that's all."

"The man surely wouldn't cheat his own uncle," said Alistair.

"Wouldn't he though? Why, Olney Layburn would cheat the mother that bore him just as quick as I would fool the tax assessor when he comes round to value my place. Why is it that De Roche has so few calves in the last two years, tell me that? I'll bet they didn't have no sixty per cent o' what they used to have—that is, that they didn't brand no sixty per cent, I mean. The other forty per cent, Mr. Olney has been saltin' away for his own self. He's keepin' them over at that half section of old Bill Riley's that died

this two years back of pneumonia. He's got Pete Smail, a half-breed, workin' it for him; an' he's got far more young cattle runnin' about them hills with his brand on them than he ever bought or his cows ever calved."

"You mean that he took the De Roche calves for himself and put his own brand on them? Surely that would be impossible?"

"Impossible nothin', when there's nobody around lookin' after things! Why is it, will you tell me, that Layburn, ever since old De Roche has been sick hasn't had a real cowboy workin' at Inshallah at all, 'cept Dick Evie? and Dick knows enough to keep his eyes shut. He got rid of Syd Maddox who was as good a man as ever put a leg over a horse and the best roper round this district. Syd was too honest, that was what was the matter. Now these men they have, are all just ord'nary farm hands—can't ride for nuts. What did he have to go an' hire Monte for to-day instead o' takin' one of his own men. There ain't one of them can ride; an' if they did he wouldn't want to take them in case they might catch on to what he was up to."

"But there's young Ted De Roche, surely he would suspect what was going on. He is not exactly a fool, I take it."

"No, but Layburn has him pretty much under his thumb; an' he gets him soused every now an' again. No, Ted ain't very hard to fool. His sister should ha' been the boy an' she might ha' sized up how things was goin'. Of course, she ain't much out on the range an' she wouldn't notice what the like of a real rider would."

"Has Layburn been selling the stock that you say he has stolen?"

"Not yet, he hasn't. They're all young critters one an' two-year-olds. I bet he's talked to you a lot about the big losses he's had from blackleg. Well, you take it from me he didn't lose half—no, nor a quarter of the critturs that he said he did from blackleg—it was another kind of blackleg got them an' that was Olney Layburn. They're over in Blake's Meadows now with his brand on them as healthy as they ever were; an' one of these fine days they'll be goin'

down to Calgary as Layburn's beef or he'll have a fat cheque in his pocket."

"Well, he hasn't acted with me as if everything was square and aboveboard," said Alistair; "or he would have been a little more civil. I came to him with a business proposition and I should have been met in a businesslike way. Instead I find myself held up and robbed and an attempt made to drive me out of the country. I can't help thinking that the De Roches were the instigators of that outrage though, no doubt, they took good care not to let their hand be seen."

"Did they, though? Well, I am not so sure about it. Maybe I'm wise about that, too. As it happened, I know who was mixed up in that job—that is, I know who were the men that did the trick itself. Ted De Roche was one of them.

"Well, it happened that I noticed the three of them turn off the main road up to Appleby's that night—I had left Tim White's an' I had seen Ted go out with Monte and Jack Beckles an' I kind of thought that I recognised the horses. 'These beggars are up to somethin', I says to myself; 'and I think I'll just see what it is.' So I went over into the brush an' tied up my horse; an' I followed them on foot as fast as I could. When I saw them go into Appleby's house, I went up on to the porch and peeked in the window and watched the whole business. I even saw Monte pick your pocketbook out of your jacket."

"But didn't it occur to you to attempt a rescue?" asked Alistair, somewhat nettled.

"Waall, to be sure it might have occurred to me," said his host with just a shade of embarrassment. "You see that Monte's known to be a pretty sure shot with his gun. Now it hardly appeared to be worth while to take a risk of interferin' in a little party of that kind for a perfect stranger. The joke was on you; an' I didn't see no real strong reason why Andy Wilmot should take the chance of a bit o' lead in his innards to help a tenderfoot out of trouble. To tell the truth, it seemed rather a good lark to me at the time. Besides, I didn't happen to have a gun

with me. I thought it a leetle bit thick, you know, that Monte should have swiped your pocketbook—I did think that was playin' the game a leetle too strong."

"It makes the matter a felony for which Master Ted and his friends would have to serve time if you were to tell what you now say in the witness-box," said Alistair with a touch of sternness. "Would you be willing to testify if required?"

Andy took the stump, which was all that remained of his cigar, out of his mouth and laying it on the verandah floor carefully stamped it out before replying.

"Well, pardner, that depends," he said with a note of reserve. "It's right enough that I have a grouch against the Inshallah folk; but I don't know quite as it's as bad as that—not against Ted at least. If it were Layburn now—that would be a different story; but Layburn wasn't there."

"Don't you think that he was in all probability behind the escapade?" asked Alistair.

"He might have been and then again he mightn't," was the guarded reply. "I'm sure of this much, that it was the others, Monte and Jack, that put Ted up to it. He was too drunk to know what he was doin'; an' I'll bet it worries him quite a lot now. Ted ain't cut out for a real bad actor. He's just naturally weak; he ain't vicious at all. Now that Layburn, he's a mean cuss; an' like as not he put Monte up to it but had sense enough to keep out himself. If ye got real plumb up against it with him now an' ye needed my help, I'm not sayin' that I wouldn't be givin' it to you."

"You're canny enough to have been a Scotsman, Mr. Wilmot," said Alistair smiling.

His host was about to reply when his attention was taken by a figure on horseback that suddenly appeared before them in the dim light. He stood up and peered at it curiously.

"Why, it's Miss De Roche!" he said in surprise.

"Is Mr. Kilgour here?" asked a voice that was rather breathless, which Alistair quickly recognised as hers.

"Oh, I am so glad," she said with a sigh of relief as he

stood up and she recognised him. "I was afraid that you might be lost and Father is waiting up for you. He couldn't understand why you didn't arrive with the others. Would you mind coming home at once?"

There was nothing else to be done but to accompany the girl without delay; for her distress was manifest. Wilmot asked her to stay and have something to eat, but it was evident that she was impatient to be gone. So poor Hammerhead was unceremoniously hurried out of the stable and saddled as quickly as possible. Then, with a hurried good-night to the homesteader, the couple were soon riding at a smart walk down the trail towards Inshallah.

CHAPTER XIX

“WHY didn’t you let Mr. Kilgour come with us?” asked Lorraine with a tone of annoyance as soon as she and Olney were out of earshot of the others. “It was most unwise to say the least.”

“I had my reasons right enough, Lorraine, and I’ll tell you what they were just as soon as we get our work done. Let’s get busy with that first and then we’ll have time to talk; and I have a whole lot to say.”

He had put spurs to his horse and was going at a gallop which her own horse quickly emulated; and the girl was forced to let the matter drop for the time. Nor did they slacken pace appreciably for over an hour or so except occasionally where they came up with scattered groups of cattle when they stopped sometimes to make sure of the brands. They came across no strays from other herds, however. At last, when they had compassed a wide half circle and had climbed to the top of a high bluff enjoying a fine prospect of the surrounding range, Layburn proposed that they should dismount and sit down under the shade of a bullpine that stood sentinel at the top. They threw down the horses’ lines for them to graze. The girl was the first to take her seat on a smooth rock and Layburn took his place beside her so close that at first she made a slight movement as if she would draw herself away but so faint and so quickly arrested that he did not notice it. There was perhaps a suspicion of embarrassment in his mien—if embarrassment were possible to Olney Layburn. Perhaps this had communicated itself to her for she was plainly a little perturbed as was evidenced by a faint flush that mantled on her cheek.

“Now, let’s talk,” he said, “and maybe you’ll understand why I didn’t want to have the Britisher along. Let him

have a chance to get better acquainted with Ted and Monte, especially Monte. They don't either of them have any special love for him, do they; an' I guess they won't make the afternoon any too pleasant for his lordship."

"And that's the very reason why you should have kept him with us when you know how much depends on keeping him in good-humour," Lorraine protested. "We can't afford to follow our own feelings in the matter."

"Let's talk about something pleasant," said Olney. "Lorraine, how long is it now that we have known each other?"

"I guess it must be about two years since you came up from Montana, Olney. You ought to know well enough without asking me, don't you think?"

"Just a slip of a kid you were then and a bit of a tom-boy too; and when I used to tease you about it you used to try to get even with me by mimicking my Yankee accent. There is quite a change in you since then."

"I had to grow up some time, I suppose," said Lorraine, a little nonplussed by a something unusual in his tone.

"Yet, when I came here to see you all for the first time, I never intended to stay more than a month at most, Lorraine. There was a good job waiting for me down in Montana as soon as I would go back; and what do you suppose made me stay?"

"I suppose you liked the country and—and us so much that you could not make up your mind to leave it again," said Lorraine with a slight laugh. "There are plenty of people come up here to the Dry Belt and never want to go away again; some of them, to be sure, are asthmatics and lungers and they simply daren't."

He frowned slightly at her flippancy and then put his right hand over her left as it lay in her lap, clasping it firmly.

"You know very well, dear, what it was that kept me. It wasn't the country and it wasn't the climate but it was you—I simply couldn't bear to leave you. I hadn't been here a week before I said to myself, this little girl is just

the wife for me; and I vowed that I would wait for you. Now the time has surely come—the time when you need me—and I cannot wait any longer.”

The girl shrank a little at his touch and would have drawn her hand away but he held it too tightly.

“Things cannot remain as they were, Lorraine,” he went on, “I must have your answer now. I love you and I cannot wait. If you are to give me the go-by, then it’s time that I was gettin’ back to Arizona where there is more money to be picked up than there ever will be here. An’ if I should, what will your father do? This beggarly Britisher will have you sold up, lock, stock and barrel, before you know where you are. An’ then there’s Ted.”

The girl had hidden her face in her hands, as at last he suffered her to pull her left from under his. There was a hard light in his eyes and a cruel twist to his mouth as he looked down upon the fair, bowed head on the slender column of her neck gleaming white in contrast to the tan of the little hands that half the time wore no gloves. “What’s to become of Ted if I should go away, I wonder. He’s bad enough to hold now.”

“Oh, I know—I know——” she cried, “I cannot sleep at nights for thinking of him,—but I cannot do what you want me to now. It isn’t fair to ask me, Olney. Give me time till I get used to the thought of it; and maybe after a while and things are all straightened out and the mortgage paid and Father better again, then we can talk about it. I couldn’t think of such things just now when everything is going so badly. It wouldn’t be right,” and she turned to face him again, the tones of pleading in her voice giving way somewhat to a new note of firmness and decision.

“Things will go worse then, Lorraine,” he said sternly; “and yours will be the blame. Love like mine—for I love you, little girl”—and his voice was thick with the excess of his emotions—“I love you with a love so strong that you dare not trifle with it. I’m not one of your sighing, mealy-mouthed sort of lovers—nothin’ of that sort for mine. I had a little mare once that I thought the world of—she was

a thoroughbred and as nervous an' highstrung as they make them, so rattleheaded that when you took her out after cattle she got so plumb crazy that you couldn't do nothin' with her; but to ride on the road you couldn't have a kinder or better little mount. She'd carry you along all day and be as easy and chirpy on the last mile as she would on the first.

"Well, I vowed I'd break her to go out after stock an' I did; but it was her neck I broke before I was through. Now I'm warning you fair so you won't make no mistakes."

The girl, white with anger, rose to her feet, as he did also; and for a moment she stood facing him, her lips quivering as she tried to speak.

"No, don't you say a word until I am done," he went on, looking down on her darkly. "We'll let this matter drop until the dance, the night of the Rexham Fair, and then everybody'll have to be told that we're to be married. I daresay that I brought this a bit sudden on you an' it's only right that you should get a chance to get used to the idea; so I'll ask you again just before that an' don't you say no then."

She had never looked more alluring to him than now as she gazed up at him. Her tongue was speechless but her eyes were eloquent of her anger and her face quivering with the play of conflicting emotions.

"Don't be angry with me, Lorraine, dear, if my wooing is a bit rough. Anyway, I mean it when I say I love you," and his tone was again soft and coaxing. "I've kissed you before in a cousinly way, but I'll kiss you now right—so you'll know I mean what I say"—and in a moment he had seized her in his arms and had kissed her not once but several times in a mad ecstasy of passion. Realising, after her first impulse to resist, her utter helplessness she lay still in his arms until he released her.

She stood before him white to the lips and a slight shudder passed over her slender figure.

"If you are quite finished with me now I think that we shall go home," she said with a curious expressionless pre-

cision of utterance. And without another word they both turned to seek their horses that had been cropping the grass quietly within a short distance. She mounted unaided and rode on slowly homewards while he stood watching her for a moment, slightly at a loss to know what were her feelings. Then he jumped on his horse and followed.

CHAPTER XX

LORRAINE had arrived home with Layburn to find that Ted and Monte were there before them sitting rather moodily in the harness room, and without Mr. Kilgour. Ted explained with a slight embarrassment that the latter had dropped behind and they had lost him. They had not troubled to go back after him. Layburn had then remarked sulkily that it would be a good thing if he did get lost and break his neck over some cliff and then they would be rid of him for good; but Ted with his eyes on his sister's face saw that she did not by any means share in this sentiment. Ted was fond of his sister and the sight of the distress that was written all over it gave him a pang, even although he had troubles of his own that were lying heavy on his spirits. Ever since the night of the holdup, Monte had assumed somewhat of a domineering attitude towards him. In spite of Ted's efforts to assert his independence, he was made to understand somehow that after that escapade the law had a claim on him; and that his co-partnership with Monte and Jack Beckles involved a certain intimacy and dependence which was very galling.

Lorraine was in dismay because she felt that she had done wrong in allowing Mr. Kilgour to be sent off separately from Layburn and herself. It galled her to think that they had again placed themselves in the wrong by this piece of unnecessary rudeness. What concerned her even more, however, was the thought of her father's annoyance and anxiety if he should find out what had happened. This fear was quickly justified, too, by the appearance of Miss Paget to beg them to come in without delay as Captain Trelawny was with Mr. De Roche and the latter was very anxious for the Captain to meet his guest, whom he regarded as an acquisition to the district. To Lorraine's dismay

while she was talking to her aunt, she found that Ted and Monte had slipped away and mounting their horses, which they had not unsaddled, had ridden off. She had intended to ask them to go back and meet Mr. Kilgour. Layburn also had disappeared or she would have asked him. She then decided that she would go herself. Her aunt must try to keep her father pacified until she came back. She had saddled her horse again and ridden off swiftly. Seeing no signs of the missing one, she had gone straight to Andy Wilmot's and had found him there as we have seen.

As she and Alistair rode down the rough trail from Andy's house together, her mind was in a chaos of conflicting emotions. Her cousin's blunt and precipitate proposal of marriage, proffered in such a way as to outrage her self-respect, and his covert threat in case she should not accept it, lay like a load on her heart. Then Ted's sneaking off with Monte had borne in upon her the power which the man and his companions were fastening upon him. Her feelings towards Alistair, it must be confessed, were anything but kindly; and although she realised that he was not directly responsible for the day's mishaps still she felt unreasonably angry with him. The poor girl had been in the saddle all day; and it was hardly to be wondered at if fatigue and anxiety together had combined to ruffle her temper.

Alistair's own frame of mind as he followed her, keeping Hammerhead's nose on the tail of Pronto, was not by any means good-humoured. He was annoyed, first of all at the interruption to a conversation that had such a vital bearing on the problem which had brought him out to Canada and his relations to the De Roches. Besides this disappointment, he was tired and stiff after the long day's ride; and to have to mount and go another ten miles or so in the dark, at the curt bidding of one whose desertion earlier in the day had been so discourteous, was rather trying to his temper.

When the trail became wide enough for two to ride abreast, Lorraine pulled her horse to the right and checked him for a moment so as to allow Alistair to come up along-

side. For some time they rode in silence. Lorraine had made up her mind that he must be the first to speak. Minute after minute passed and still he kept silent, continuing at her side like some phantom figure, sombre and indistinct in the gloom, although so close that at any time she might have put out her hand and touched him. There was something weird and uncanny in the sensation, something awesome and menacing that at last in the tense and harrassed state of her nerves proved too strong for resolution so that she felt that she must either speak or scream.

"I suppose you are feeling very sore with me—and with us all," she began, trying to control her tone although in spite of herself her voice betrayed a tremor.

"Our feelings often run away with our judgment," he replied evasively after a second of hesitation, resisting with difficulty the temptation to accept the opening she had given him; "they are best, at times, left unspoken."

Mingled with his resentment there was a touch of pity born of the revelations that had just come to him which conquered the desire to upbraid her. She deserved to be well punished for her behaviour of the afternoon but he decided to defer it to a more suitable season. Besides he was conscious of a fear that the pent-up emotions which he sensed under the low tones of her voice might burst forth at any time; and he shrank from the possibility of provoking the storm.

"See how brightly the stars shine above us," he went on, gazing up at the dark-blue, brightly-studded canopy. "One cannot look long at them without realising how foolish it is to let oneself fret over petty matters. They help to lift one far above such trifles."

At this moment Hammerhead stumbled over a stone in the path and nearly fell, so that Alistair, taken unawares, narrowly escaped being thrown. A smothered "damn" slipped from his lips in the annoyance which the incident produced; and with both bit and heel he admonished Hammerhead, though, in truth, the poor animal was but little to blame.

The explosion that he had feared took place; but it was one of mirth rather than of temper; for Lorraine could not resist a ripple of laughter.

"See how easy it is to bring one back to earth again," she said, enjoying his discomfiture. To see the philosopher put to the test of his own theories is ever a joy to those who have to listen to his lectures."

"Yes, the tempter is always ready to trip one up," said Alistair, himself inwardly amused; "hence the necessity to exorcise him in Latin. The priests were accustomed to use it to frighten the devil and his ministers."

"Latin?" she echoed, with a quaint inflection of disbelief. "If that's Latin, they use it plentifully in the bunkhouse, I am told."

"The root is Latin," he explained; "and if one uses the English form the spell is just as potent."

They now emerged on the main road. Lorraine, remembering the need of haste, started her horse at a lope and the conversation dropped. Nor did they draw bridle till they turned up the driveway at Inshallah. One of the men took their horses when they reached the stable.

They entered the house by the front door and hastened to join the company in the parlour.

The rest of the evening was rather a trial to Alistair. Miss Pelton and the Thibaults were there as well as Captain Trelawny. However, he made himself so agreeable that before they made their adieus both the Thibaults and the Captain invited him to come and see them.

CHAPTER XXI

LORRAINE had spent an almost sleepless night following her cousin's declaration which had come to her as a bolt out of the blue. She liked him well enough as her cousin and they had never had any serious disagreements; but, as a lover, she had never thought of him at all. Indeed, her heart had never been seriously touched by any man and her life thus far had been so full of other things, love from any standpoint had hardly yet engaged her thoughts.

Her cousin had given her until the Rexham Fair to make up her mind and this was still about a month distant. Something might happen before then, although she could not see what it was likely to be. In the meantime, she reflected before going down to breakfast, the best and easiest way would be to treat Olney on the old footing as nearly as possible.

So at the breakfast table she astonished them all by her apparent high spirits and joked with her aunt and rallied her cousin and Ted in the most sprightly way possible. With Alistair, while she remained more on her dignity, still she unbent as she had not done previously and drew him into the conversation so as to make him feel almost as if he were a real guest rather than an enforced one.

Olney was evidently relieved to find that she had apparently forgiven him and he responded to her mood gratefully. He felt that he had gone rather far and had shown his hand in a way that was almost unnecessary.

Miss Paget, sitting behind the coffee-pot, was puzzled to know what to make of Lorraine's sudden change from depression to gaiety. Her sympathetic ear, however, was quick to catch a note of strain and artificiality in the girl's mirth, and Alistair, too, felt that there was something forced about it, although he was grateful for the new friendliness

towards himself. Ted was too much wrapped up in his own depression to take much notice. His evening spent with Monte and Jack Beckles had not been a pleasant one, indeed, quite the reverse although he had stayed late and drank more than was good for him. His face told the tale and it was one that Lorraine was quick to read although nothing in her manner or expression betrayed how it saddened her.

After breakfast, the day like most other days passed heavily for Alistair. He had not been encouraged to take any active part in the work of the place, pleased as he would have been to have done so; but he tried to learn all he could. Layburn while outwardly civil, thwarted him in every way possible.

That evening after dinner he played checkers with Mr. De Roche and listened to his reminiscences of old times on the ranges. Ted and Layburn were out; and Lorraine was busy with some sewing. When Alistair and Mr. De Roche had finished their game, the latter called on the girl to sing to them. She had a sweet and well-trained contralto and accompanied herself with taste and effect; and Alistair had learned to look forward to her singing in the evenings. She knew that her father liked to hear her and she never spared herself in this, knowing that it gave him pleasure. Tonight she sang Kingsley's "Three Fishers" and Tennyson's "Home They Brought Her Warrior Dead." Her voice which was full of temperament gave fine expression to the two songs and her mood seemed in sympathy with the sadness of their themes. Alistair was struck by the dramatic power with which she rendered them; and as her clear, sweet tones rang out, vibrant with tenderness and emotion, he guessed that the depression that he had marked at the breakfast table was still upon her.

Mr. De Roche, too, seemed to feel the pensiveness of her mood and asked for something more lively, so rallying herself with an effort, she gave them, "When the Boys at Bully Ranch Gave a Party," a humorous cowboy song of which her father was very fond. The words were rough but they

had a freedom of swing. The air was a merry and haunting one and the girl sang it with sprightliness and abandon.

Soon after Mr. De Roche went upstairs to bed on his daughter's arm and Alistair slipped outside through the French window on to the verandah. Here he sat down in one of the armchairs, glad of the pure night air after the warm room. He had not been there many minutes when Lorraine rushed out past him and threw herself face downwards in the hammock, her whole frame convulsed in a passion of sobbing. In the shadow of the creepers where he was, it was evident that she had not seen him and fancied herself alone.

He sat still for a short space not knowing in his embarrassment what to do, looking down on the slender, quivering form that lay before him. He would gladly have slipped quietly away, but escape was blocked in both directions. The heavy climbing plants made it impossible to jump over the balustrade and the hammock itself, with its occupant, lay directly across between him and the French window whence he had emerged.

Perhaps it was that the girl was so close to him and looked so girlish and slender crouched up in the hammock, her neck and arms gleaming white in the moonlight that filtered in through the trellised leaves; perhaps it was because of the more intimate knowledge which he had of her circumstances and of the hard fight that she was making; perhaps the slight homesickness which he had himself experienced made him more sympathetic; or perhaps the season and the environment of pale moonbeams and the scent of roses and honeysuckle had something to do with it, but this somewhat cynical and sophisticated youth felt for a moment an irresistible impulse to take her in his arms and comfort her.

"Miss De Roche, what is the matter? Can I help you in any way?" he stammered out, sadly at a loss and feeling very forcibly the inadequacy of words in such a crisis.

The sobbing ceased as if by magic and she was on her

feet in a moment gazing at him with startled and indignant gaze.

"You! you!" she exclaimed when she had found her voice. "Must you spy on me, too?"

"Neither the moon nor I can help ourselves, if you run right into our line of vision, can we?" Alistair replied with a smile trying to take the edge off the situation. "I'm sure we neither of us want to play the part of a Peeping Tom. You know who he was, don't you?"

"I'm afraid I don't," she replied frostily.

"It's in Tennyson's 'Godiva.' He was mean enough to spy upon a lady and he lost his eyesight as a punishment."

"And you dare to go scot-free?" she asked, rallying a little, her anger passing as she saw its unreasonableness.

"Methinks I am punished enough already in your displeasure. Besides one may not lose his eyesight but one may lose something else, almost as serious, that is your good opinion."

"How could you lose what—?" and she stopped, a pause that was eloquent.

"What I never had, you would say," he filled in with a slight laugh but wincing all the same for he was young and thin-skinned, albeit a barrister. "Ah, well, one can still hope for the unattained when one is not sure it is unattainable. But would you not tell me the cause of your distress. Give a poor soul a chance to come back, won't you? Perhaps I might be able to help."

She shook her head, sadly, moved by his earnestness and feeling almost a liking for him. Something in the witching charm of the night had softened her attitude of resentment towards him, something perhaps of that freemasonry of youth, the potency of which all of us have experienced. There was a stirring of something within her, an emotion that was strangely sweet which she was unable to analyse. Words would not come to answer him; and an ungovernable impulse, a new shyness seized hold of her so that she turned and fled into the house.

"I dare say the poor girl hardly knew what she was say-

ing after all," he said to himself as lighting a cigarette, he walked down the steps to the avenue and along the drive towards the road, feeling that a walk under the moon would help to soothe his ruffled feelings. "I think that I shall go down as far as Tim White's and see if I can't find a glass of something fit to drink before I turn in."

CHAPTER XXII

THE lights of the hotel had a cheery glow, as Alistair drew near. He entered the bar-room and found the usual group leaning up against the polished counter. They were drinking and laughing away in the same boisterous fashion. At two or three of the small tables others were playing cards and in the adjoining room through the open archway he could see several men playing pool. When his eyes got used to the bright light, among the group at the bar he recognised several who were known to him. Ted, for one, was there and seemed to be the centre of the talk and chaffing. At his elbow were Monte and Jack Beckles and Andy Wilmot, his host of the night before. As Alistair walked up to the bar to order the drink that would establish his right to be of the company—he saw that more than one had been drinking quite freely.

Poor Ted, as usual, was the worst. It was evident that those around him were just playing with the boy, applauding his half-drunken boastings and extravagances and by their approval urging him on to more while winking to each other behind his back. Olney Layburn was playing at one of the card tables and Alistair in passing caught his glance as he looked up from his game. The cattleman raised his eyebrows with a slight smile that was at once derisive and contemptuous and then turned his eyes back to his game. At the same time, Alistair could feel that they were still furtively keeping watch upon him, and the sensation was not a pleasant one; for he felt that there was an enemy that was not to be despised. Ted's boyish resentment he did not fear, but this man's hostility was something that must be reckoned with.

Dennis was attending to the bar and he was not long in taking Alistair's order for a whisky neat. He glanced

with some interest at the newcomer as did those in the group who were drinking, all except Ted, who was too much interested in laying down the law to his little coterie. Ted had arrived earlier in the evening in the depths of depression; but had soon been cheered, under the ministrations of Dennis and the good-humoured rallyings of the satellites that circled around him. He had passed through the stage of exhilaration, in which he had invited all of them to drink at his expense. Now, his money gone and the fumes of the fiery fluid that passed for whisky in Tim White's establishment having quite obfuscated his faculties, he was ready to quarrel with anyone on the first provocation.

It was at this psychological moment that Alistair with Quixotic rashness attempted to get the boy to go home with him. It said the more for his resolution that the job was one for which he had little stomach. Prudence counselled him that it was no affair of his. The boy had been uniformly rude to him; and to expect him to be docile now was to stroke a tiger and expect not to be clawed.

Had there been none but Ted and himself and the bar-keeper present, the matter would have been comparatively easy; but he was keenly conscious of the onlookers and felt himself in an atmosphere of hostility. He had not forgotten the incident in that very room a few nights before and how he had had to keep quiet under insult. For a youth of spirit to eat dirt, once in a way, may be possible but he cannot be expected to acquire the taste for it. He might have listened to the arguments that Prudence put up to him while he was sipping away at the glass of very bad whisky which he felt it was policy to drain to the bottom, had it not been for a stubborn conscience that would have none of expediency.

When he had finished he took out of his pocket his silver cigarette case, a prize he had won in a golfing tournament and quietly abstracted a cigarette.

Ted, by this time, had noticed that the attention of those around him to his vapourings had been drawn away somehow. Looking about for the cause, he was soon aware of

this bête noire of the family standing within a few feet of him. He eyed him moodily for a space, his eyes falling from Alistair's face to the little silver case and the shadow of contempt deepened the darkness of his scowl.

"L-l-look at our little London dandy. Isn't he cute though with his teeny, shiny, cheroot box?" he said loud enough for all to hear.

There was a slight titter from two or three in the background; but Alistair took no notice. It needed more than this to make him show resentment to a drunken man. However, he presented the despised trinket and asked the lad to help himself.

"Have a smoke, Ted, and come home with me," he said in a friendly tone and with his most winning smile. "It's beastly hot in here anyway."

"Don't want your smokes," said Ted, thrusting the cigarette case away, none too gently, with the back of his hand. "Better go home yourself f'r you—you ain't wanted here, y'know."

But Alistair was not to be dissuaded by one such rebuff.

"Come on, now, there's a good fellow," he said coaxingly, "your sister will be looking for you. I guess she's a bit worried about you"; and he moved a step closer and took the boy gently by the arm.

The effect on the latter was as if electrical.

"Damn you," he cried, "leave my sister's name alone."

In a sudden fury of passion he turned round and gripping the handle of his quirt which hung suspended from his right wrist by its leather loop, he swung the long lash viciously at Alistair's face.

Fortunately for the latter he was partially on his guard. He raised his arm quickly enough to catch the main force of the blow on his wrist although the thin end of the lash curling viciously took him around the neck cutting him painfully enough, though not severely, on the cheek. It knocked over as well a couple of the beer glasses and a bottle off the counter which fell with a loud noise on the floor. Maddened by the stinging smart of the blow, Alistair

wrenched the whip from the hands of its owner, seized him by the collar and, tripping him up, stretched him on the floor. Then, without releasing his hold, he cut him three times across the shoulders, his victim writhing helplessly beneath him. After the third blow, Alistair, noting the look of torture on the youth's face desisted, seized by a quick revulsion of feeling and shame for his own passion. Releasing him, he leaned his back against the bar, for the room was now in an uproar, and turned to face what was before him. Jack Beckles had made a move at the first, when he had seized Ted, to stop him; but Andy Wilmot had caught him by the arm telling him it served the lad right. He was not sorry to see a De Roche getting his deserts, and for the moment he had saved Alistair from interruption. The respite, however, was only temporary; for Olney Layburn had risen and came quickly forward among the first from the tables. He was only prevented from rushing at Alistair by the menace of the loaded end of the quirt which the latter held upraised in his right hand, threatening to brain anyone that laid hands on him. Too well Olney knew the weight of that quirt for he had carried it himself; and it was easy to see that the young Britisher would not hesitate to use it. He looked dangerous even to Layburn who had seen many a fight. His shoulders squared and his eyes flashing and the chin which the old lawyer had remarked upon as indicative of the fighter, all spoke of a spirit that would not readily accept defeat.

"I don't want to kill anyone," he said quietly; "but you'd better keep your distance. Ted got what he had deserved though I'm sorry I licked him so hard," he said quickly, his voice a trifle unsteady with excitement and his recent exertion.

"Lay down that quirt if you're not afraid and I'll lick you, you bully," shouted Olney fiercely, "unless to fight with kids is all you've got stomach for—an' to do that you've got to wait till they're drunk."

"I'll lay it down with pleasure, my friend, if those here will guarantee I won't have to fight more than one at a

time," said Alistair glancing around for a moment at the circle of faces about him. "From the experience I've gained, I'd rather not take anything for granted, I'm sorry to say."

He still held the quirt in readiness for any attack that might be made on him. He was disgusted that he should have got into this imbroglio; but he must get out as best he could and there appeared no way but by fighting.

Fortunately, he was not a stranger to the noble art, but had boxed under good masters in London. Though probably not nearly as strong as Layburn, his reach was long; and what he lacked in weight he might partly make up for by superior agility. Still, the man was a nasty customer to tackle; and the meeting was an ordeal that Alistair would gladly have avoided had it been possible.

"You'll do well if you lick Olney alone; one'll be enough," said Dick Evie.

There was a general laughter and chorus of assent largely ironical in tone for it was evident the crowd had little faith in the stranger's power to stand up against Layburn, of whose capabilities they were well aware.

"We'll see you get fair play," said one, and "It will be fair play for him to lick you, I'm thinkin'," said another who was addicted to puns, and "You'll get all that's comin' to you, don't forget it, fair play and all," said yet another.

It was plain that the feeling was not friendly to him but he felt that he would have to take a chance. He could not stand out against them all, anyway, and to delay was only to anger them. So he threw the quirt on the floor and took off his jacket amid a faint murmur of satisfaction. Such a fight, it was felt, would be a sensation such as did not often come to Duck Lake. It seemed that the slim, young Britisher, with his delicate-looking physique and boyish face, would have no chance with the powerful rancher whose uncommon strength and prowess with his fists was known to all. To see the former well thrashed and made to feel that he was "no great shakes" in this Western country after all would be, to many, a pleasure. Some there were, however, who felt pity for him and would have been glad to see

him escape from the predicament in which his rashness had placed him. One of these was Andy Wilmot, who helped him off with his vest and whispered encouragingly into his ear.

"Whatever you do, take it coolly, my boy; and don't let him get too close to you. Keep movin' on those spindly legs of yours and keep out of his way; for if he lands you with one of his right-hand swipes, it'll be all day with you."

It was pleasant to Alistair to hear one friendly voice. He had no mind if he could help it to take the punishment which a stiffly contested fight with fisticuffs would probably mean to both victor and vanquished. He knew a good deal about boxing and he had also worked hard with an expert in London to perfect himself in the ju-jitsu system of self-defence. He resolved to use the latter now to have himself if possible from another mauling; for his head was only healing up from his last experience of the kind. Besides he had made himself unpopular enough with the De Roche family by licking Ted without battering his cousin any more than was necessary. It was a case he felt, where discretion was the better part of valour. He had tried out the ju-jitsu several times in tight places before—once in a crowded third-class railway carriage where a giant coal miner, slightly drunk, had tried to run amuck, and again with an Apache when walking through the Montmartre in Paris when seeing the sights without a guide. He believed that it would not fail him now.

Layburn, too, had stripped to his shirt and stood ready waiting in the midst of the space that had been cleared in a moment by willing hands. He wore a confident air; and he rolled up his sleeves disclosing a pair of formidable, hairy arms on which the muscles stood out in gnarled knots that bore witness to the power that lay in them. Alistair's arms with their smooth, white skin seemed weak and girlish in comparison.

The two men stood facing each other for a moment, the older cool and smiling, the younger palpably nervous and ill at ease. Of those who looked on, many could not help a

qualm of pity for the latter. The outcome seemed a foregone conclusion.

Then they closed. Alistair was determined to follow the advice that he had just received and from the first held himself strictly on the defensive, parrying or evading his enemy's blows which seemed to be forcing him all around the ring. He got home once on the face and twice on the body before Alistair saw the opening that he was waiting for. As Layburn seemed to feel that the victory was already his, however, the chance soon came. Turning aside a terrible blow of Layburn's left hand aimed at his head, Alistair quickly seized his wrist palm upwards. Then diving his head under his enemy's armpit and bringing the arm across his own shoulder and his foot up behind Layburn's left, he held him powerless. With his right arm he had seized the other's right behind his back, holding it prisoner also. His own shoulder, acting as a fulcrum, gave him a powerful leverage over the cattleman's left arm. Thus he was able with a slight pressure to strain it severely, so that after the first faint attempt to struggle free, Layburn made no further resistance. Thus, to the onlookers, there was seen this strange sight of their champion boxer and strong man held helpless in the grip of one, who, beside him, looked a mere boy almost, so slight and delicate was he compared with the heavy, muscular body of his opponent. To them it appeared as if Layburn must be shamming and that at any moment he would break away and crush the Britisher; but the expectation was disappointed. Nor did they realise that it was a trick that enabled Alistair to control him thus, as a man might hold a child rigid and powerless. To Layburn the thing was just as great a puzzle but he had no doubt as to his own helplessness. Already the pressure that Alistair had brought upon his left arm had for the moment given him excruciating pain and he dared not resist for fear of its repetition. By the leverage which Alistair held upon it over his own shoulder, he could easily have strained it severely.

"Gosh, Olney must have had a shock," said an old rancher,

breaking the awed silence that had fallen upon the crowd at this curious collapse of the neighbourhood's champion.

"What the deuce is the matter with him?" asked another. "He ain't licked, is he?" and there was a general chorus of remarks and suggestions.

"Brace up, Olney, old boy," and "knock the spots out of him," and similar encouraging adjurations were of no avail.

It was easy to see from the expression of the cattleman that his captive position was no feigned one, for, on his face, humiliation, fury and bewilderment, all three seemed to be struggling for the mastery.

Alistair led him about a dozen paces down the room and then turning him round brought him back again.

"Queer kind of fightin' if ye ask me," said Dan Herder, shepherd for the Kendall Ranch. "Looks as if they were out to take an' evenin' walk together."

"Bedad but they look mighty lovin' all at wance," said Dennis, "walkin' arm an' arm just like two school kids a-goin' sweetheartin'. They didn't look like that two minutes ago, did they now, tell me that, will ye?"

Under the hubbub Alistair was talking quietly into his prisoner's ear.

"I shall let you free now if you promise not to make me any further trouble and to go and sit down or leave the room. I do not wish to humiliate you unless you make it necessary. Will you promise?"

"I guess I've got to," muttered Layburn between his teeth; and with the words, Alistair let him go. He slunk off towards the bar, looking at no one. As he was making for the door, his eyes fell on a butchering knife that George Cooper, a homesteader, who had but lately settled in the district, had borrowed from the cook to slaughter a hog on the morrow. Beside himself with rage, and careless for the moment of consequences, seizing this in his right hand he had turned on his heel in an instant and rushed back on his late foe who had already turned his back on him. Some one, however, called "Look out!" and Alistair wheeled just in time to see the danger. As Layburn rushed upon him

with knife raised to strike, he struck his hand aside with his left. Then, bringing this against Layburn's chin so as to throw back his head, at the same time catching hold of his left knee, he threw him back with great force. As he fell, his body swung round, his head struck on the edge of one of the card tables, and, when he reached the ground, he was senseless.

There was a general rush to lift him up and a rough-and-ready system of first aid was employed; but it was soon evident that the blow was a serious one. The injured man lay in a sort of coma from which it seemed impossible to arouse him. Some one remembered that Dr. Priest from Kamloops had been called out to a case only six miles away and Tim White at once telephoned to see if he could come down. He would leave immediately, the reply came.

Doctor Priest in about ten minutes arrived with his motor. He shook his head gravely when he examined the patient and pronounced it a case of concussion, how serious he could not tell. It would be necessary to take him to the Kamloops hospital at once. Ready hands soon lifted him into the motor after a sort of bed had been made of several rugs to make the trip as easy as possible.

Alistair had worked with the rest for Layburn's restoration, and was glad when the doctor came and Dick Evie volunteered to go into town with him and look after the injured man. Alistair's position was by no means a pleasant one although he felt that he was not much to blame for what had happened. He was pleased to see, too, that with the exception of the Inshallah men themselves, none of the others seemed to hold him accountable for it, at least they did not show themselves unfriendly. That Layburn might die, was a possibility that he did not like to think of.

Then there was the immediate situation to be faced. Ted had disappeared before the fight with Layburn had begun and was perhaps home by this time; or he might not have gone home at all. Lorraine would, no doubt, be on the watch for her brother's return.

To go back and face her knowing that he had thrashed her brother and perhaps killed her cousin and betrothed—for he strongly suspected that the two were engaged—this was an ordeal for which he hardly felt himself brave enough. And yet, what else could he do?

As he stood outside the hotel again in the cool, night air, he had a strong inclination to go to the Appleby's and ask hospitality from them—but to go there would look as if he was ashamed of what he had done and he was not. No, he decided he must face the music; but the thought of Miss De Roche's face with its sorrowful expression as he had seen it a short time before—the thought of meeting her after what had happened was more terrible to him than had been the ordeal of fighting Layburn.

One of the horses tied to the hitching-post nickered to him as he walked past; and he noticed, as he stopped in his abstraction to pat its nose, that it was Layburn's big sorrel. The beast was thinking of stable and supper and hoping for its master's coming.

"I'm afraid he won't be able to ride home to-night, old boy," he said. "Maybe I'd better take you myself in case the men don't think of it."

Loosing the animal, he mounted and rode off towards Inshallah slowly because he would fain defer the interview that lay before him.

CHAPTER XXIII

AFTER Alistair's departure, Lorraine sat down on the verandah chair and abandoned herself to her reflections, none too pleasant as they were. The feeling of humiliation at being surprised in tears by her enemy was somewhat swamped in the greater trouble that lay in her anxiety about Ted. However, she was not long left quiet for her aunt came to call her to go upstairs to read aloud to her father. This had become a nightly custom, of late, as he found it difficult to get to sleep; and the reading for an hour or so seemed to have a quieting effect on his brain, which was inclined to be too active for repose.

The book that Lorraine had been reading was the "Pickwick Papers," her father having a great fondness for Dickens, and she found it very difficult to-night to keep her mind on the thrilling equestrian adventures of the three members of the Pickwick Club which was the part of the narrative which fell to be read. More than once her father rallied her on her listlessness; and each time she parried his question and spurred herself to a new animation of tone and a new simulation of interest while always her mind was racked with uneasy speculations about Ted. At last, he became too drowsy to listen any longer and she gladly seized the opportunity to slip away.

As she reached the foot of the stairs, her heart gave a sudden bound of pleasure and relief as she saw her brother's figure in the outer doorway coming in. Not often, of late, had he come home so early when he had gone down to the hotel in an evening.

"Oh, Ted, I'm so glad that you have come home," she exclaimed, hurrying towards him; but, even under the dim light of the hall lamp, she was quick to recognise in his appearance that something was wrong. He did not stagger

or appear to be drunk as had so often been the case of late; but there was a strained and haggard look on his face which was deathly pale. The deep lines of pain were altogether out of place on his boyish features and the dark shadows under the eyes were accentuated by the downward rays of the lamp under which he stood; to the girl, already apprehensive, he looked ghastly, so much does fear colour our vision.

"Don't come near me," he said hoarsely as without looking at her, he sat down stiffly and with a stifled groan of pain on the oaken settee that stood under the wide hat-rack. "I've got to go away from here, right away, too."

"Why, what's wrong, Ted?" she cried, putting a hand tenderly on his shoulder. "Why must you go away? What have you done?"

"Oh, let me alone, can't you," he replied fretfully shaking off her caress. "I've got to go, I tell you and that's all. What's the use of talking?"

"Tell me, Ted dear," she persisted. "You can surely tell me, can't you?"

"I'm disgraced, forever," he said in tragic tones, "and it won't do any good talking about it, I tell you. You don't understand how I feel."

"No, but if you'll only tell me, Ted. You'll feel better after telling someone anyway. It can't be so very bad and it won't do any harm to tell me. It's only Lorraine, you know;" and she put her hand on his shoulder.

He shrank from it with a faint exclamation of pain.

"Well, if you must know," he said, "that devil, Kilgour, thrashed me with my own quirt in front of the whole crowd at Tim White's; and—and—oh, hell!" he groaned and covered his face with his hands. "I let him do it, too."

"No!" she cried. "Thrashed you, the mean bully! How dared he? Oh, the mean hound! He's a man and you're only a boy, Ted, anyway you shouldn't take it so badly. You're not disgraced and you don't have to go away. Besides, Olney will pay him well for it. Was Olney there? What did he do?" she questioned rapidly.

"I was too sick ashamed to wait and see—I—I—oh damn!" and he began to sob with vexation, his slender frame quivering with the violence of his emotions. "I hope Olney kills him!" he burst out petulantly when the paroxysm had somewhat expended itself.

Lorraine did not outwardly echo his wish but in her heart she realised a certain satisfaction when she thought of the punishment she felt certain Mr. Kilgour would receive at the hands of her cousin. Of course, she did not want him killed; but she did hope, at least, he would get a double portion of what he had administered to poor Ted. As she looked at the boy, so crushed and broken-spirited, her anger flamed hot against this man who had brought so much trouble and humiliation upon them. With it, however, there was a terrible fear that there was more calamity yet to come from him and that this was perhaps only the beginning. If Olney should in his anger go so far as to kill the Britisher, or even to injure him severely, what terrible consequences might this not bring upon them.

However, now was not the time to dwell on such speculation when her brother's suffering and mental distress appealed to the motherly sympathy so strong in every true woman's heart. She was soon upon her knees pulling off the boy's shoes, which he suffered her to do with but the mildest protest. Then she got him persuaded to go upstairs to bed and, while he undressed, she went to make him a cup of tea with which to try to soothe the throbbing headache that was the result of the whisky he had drunk, combined with the nervous strain of the past hour. He sat up in bed to drink it, and as he did so Lorraine gave an exclamation of horror as she noticed one or two spots of crimson showing through the thin, cotton nightshirt where it fitted close upon his shoulders.

"Why, your back's bleeding, Ted, let me get some water and bathe it, then I'll put some salve on it."

But this was too much for Ted's manhood to put up with. He thrust back her hand upsetting the teacup which it held and spilling the tea over the side of the bed.

"Now, see here," he said fiercely, his voice hoarse with anger and shame; "if you don't go away and leave me in peace, I'll get right up and I'll saddle my horse and go away. I won't come back in a hurry either. I've no business to stay here anyway after what's happened, only I've let you persuade me, partly because I'm so darned sick and sore; but I'm telling you straight, if you're going to plague me to death this way, I'll dress myself and go away yet. If I do, it'll be your fault.

"I'm sorry, sis, to talk so rough to you," he added in compunction, his tone changing almost to a sob; "but you see how it is, don't you? For mercy's sake, go away and leave me in peace and quiet. I'm all right, at least I will be in the morning." He lay down and pulled the bedclothes over the incriminating shoulders.

Lorraine hesitated for a moment and then after quickly stooping to leave a kiss on his upturned ear, she picked up the fallen dishes and blowing out the candle sped noiselessly out of the room.

CHAPTER XXIV

LORRAINE sought the door of her aunt's room to which she had retired just a short time before, but there was no streak of light coming through underneath it nor was there any sound within. It was apparent that its occupant was already in bed. Much as she felt the need to talk over this new mishap, she was too considerate to think for a moment of awakening her aunt out of her first sleep just to burden her with more trouble. So she went into her own room and, without lighting her lamp, sat down in a low rocker by the window through which the moonlight was streaming brightly, chequering the interior with strange shadows. Here she gave herself up to her thoughts.

She had not sat long, however, before she heard the hoofbeats of a horse coming up the driveway. Looking down she saw, as she supposed, Olney on the familiar sorrel. He passed along below her; and though she cried out to him, he gave no sign that he heard, but went on to the stables. She was too anxious to wait for news until he should come in, so without hesitating a moment, she slipped downstairs and followed him out to the barn. Two kittens that took their rest on the verandah followed her delightedly with tails upraised; but, in her haste and anxiety, she gave them no heed.

The barn door was open and she passed inside and went over to the stall which she knew was Dandy's. Although the place was in darkness save for the moonlight that came in through the door and windows, she knew it so well that she had no difficulty in finding her way. Feed had already been filled into the manger for she could hear the munching of the horse. Its rider was evidently still struggling to buckle on the halter, finding difficulty in doing so because of the

animal's unwillingness to submit his nose to it, judging by one or two sharp objurgations that showed some irritation on his part. Lorraine stood waiting breathless while he unloosened the cinch. After throwing it and the stirrup over the top of the saddle, he swung it quickly off the horse's back and hung it on the peg at the foot of the stall. Somehow, now that she was here she felt strangely tongue-tied.

"It's me, Olney. Ted came home and he told me what happened," she said as he turned round towards her, the words coming with a rush all at once. "What did you do to Mr. Kilgour? Oh, Olney, I've been so worried that I almost wanted to come down to the hotel."

The figure before her was strangely silent and a quiver of fear came over her as somehow she began to feel that this was not Olney. Not that there was light enough to see, for all she could make out was a vague outline; but, if it had been Olney, she felt he would have spoken at once.

Alistair on his part, was rendered dumb for the moment by the suddenness of her appearance and by the realisation that she took him for her cousin who, by this time, must be well on the way to Kamloops hospital. It was one thing to break the news to her in the house with perhaps her aunt at her side; but to blurt it out here in the dark, when she was taking him for the injured man seemed well-nigh too much for his fortitude. However, on the ride home, pondering over what was the most expedient way to deal with the problem, he had decided that he must carry matters off with a high hand.

"It's not Olney, I'm sorry," he said at last, "though I have brought back his horse."

"Oh," she gasped, "and why, may I ask, did he not come home with it himself?"

Her voice was hard and cutting, although a tremor in it betrayed her agitation.

"Perhaps, if you would just wait until we get inside till I explain to you——," he began, but she cut him off peremptorily.

"No, tell me now. Tell me at once."

"He—he met with an accident and they have taken him to the hospital at Kamloops. We got the doctor at once and he took him away in his motor. The foreman went with him—but I trust it is not really serious, although he had a bad fall. The doctor says there is a slight concussion of the brain. Let us go into the house and I shall tell you all how it—how it happened."

He spoke in an apologetic tone and with evident hesitation in spite of all the bolstering resolutions he had formed when coming down the road. The girl was quick to notice his embarrassment.

"I believe you were responsible for it," she burst out with passion, in a torrent of words though her tones were low and there were tears in them. "But you never could have done it by fair means. First, my brother, then him. Oh, how I hate and despise you, you cad and bully! But don't think that you will ever come into our house again—that is, when we are there. You will be lucky to escape with your life when the men get to know of it."

"Some of the men were there when it happened and if there had been foul play on my part, I daresay I would not be here now. It was your cousin's own fault and he—he only got what was coming to him, to speak in your Western manner. I am very sorry it happened so, Miss De Roche, but I assure you, you are blaming me quite unjustly."

"Yes, and you'll be telling me that it was Ted's fault, too. A mere boy and yet you lashed him till the blood came, coward and brute that you are—for I saw it with my own eyes—you that pretend to be a gentleman—who were a guest in our house and you treated him so. Oh, I cannot tell you how I despise you and hope to see you well punished for it."

Alistair quailed under the lash of her words, for he could not altogether gainsay them. He could not but admit that from her standpoint, she was not to be blamed for her attitude, but when he answered her it was with a new note of domination and almost of menace that made the cold chills run up and down her spine.

"Now, now, Miss De Roche, we shall drop all these

heroics if you please. They are entirely unnecessary and they do not help out the situation at all. It is bad enough for all of us without making it any worse by childish nonsense of that sort. If you want to know, Ted struck me first with his whip; and the hiding he got for it should do him good if you don't spoil all the effect by sympathising with him."

He did not tell her that it was to his efforts to bring Ted home and get him away from the drink, to which he owed the whole misadventure, or her attitude might have been changed at once.

"You say that you won't let me come into the house again. Supposing I don't come, will you tell me how you are going to pay the men when the haying comes on very soon, for I can tell you the bank won't advance a cent without my name on the notes. They don't appear to have much confidence in Mr. Layburn's financing and neither do I, I must say from past experience. If you want to save this ranch for your father, you and Ted, let me tell you, will have to buckle to and help me—not put hindrances in my way. I am working in this to save my own investment and yours at the same time. The sooner you and your people appreciate that the better. Furthermore, I may tell you this. While I held my hand before from foreclosure and distraint proceedings at your request and against the interests of my own family which have been jeopardised accordingly, I shall not do it again if you force the alternative. I shall hate to proceed for your father's sake. He is the only one of you that has treated me decently—he and Miss Paget, who has not acted as if I were an ogre. I think I have said enough now," he concluded, picking up the lantern, his tone softening; "and we shall go inside or you will get chilled. In the morning we can hold a council of war—that is, if you are willing to be reasonable and after I have taken Master Ted in hand—and see what is best to be done."

She shuddered slightly and, as he lifted the lantern high for her to see, she moved off obediently before him. In this

way, in silence, they proceeded to the house, the kittens accompanying them with playful little scampers occasionally sidestepping so as to rub themselves against her ankles.

As they entered the hall, she turned to him.

"Do you not think that I should go to my cousin to-night?" she faltered.

He shook his head.

"It would be of no use," he said gently; "they wouldn't let you see him anyway. It will be time enough to think of that after we have telephoned in the morning. We must not unnecessarily alarm your father."

"Do you think Olney is in danger?"

"I really do not know. The doctor would not say much; but I should think that with a sound constitution like his that he should be all right. I suppose your aunt has gone to bed. If so, I would not tell her to-night."

She lighted a candle that stood on the hall table and went silently upstairs. As Alistair followed her slight form with his eyes, a lump rose in his throat and he felt that Fate had, indeed, dealt unkindly with him to cast him for such an ungrateful rôle. Hereafter, when he went to the play, he vowed that he would always have some sympathy for the villain in the piece.

CHAPTER XXV

NEXT morning Alistair was up betimes and rode down to the hotel to telephone to the hospital as he had been unable to get a connection from the ranch telephone. Layburn, he was told by the hospital doctor who answered the call, had recovered consciousness and was out of danger. He was resting easily and it was only a matter of a week or so until he would be on his feet again. Greatly relieved, Alistair hurried back to the ranch with the good news. He met Miss Paget on the verandah and told her and she hurried upstairs to tell Lorraine. A few minutes later he went in to breakfast in answer to the gong and found both of them there awaiting his coming to sit down. Lorraine gave him a constrained "good-morning" without looking at him. He was unable to determine by her manner just what was her attitude towards him after the events of the night before. There was a general constraint on all three, nor was this eased any by the fact that a dark-blue weal showed on Alistair's right cheek, extending all the way from his eyebrow to the tip of his ear, where Ted's quirt had struck him.

Lorraine had slept little and was looking pale. She had told her aunt all that had happened as far as she knew it and what Mr. Kilgour had said to her at the stable. The girl was annoyed that her aunt, while greatly distressed, would not join with her in her unqualified condemnation of Mr. Kilgour. She was relieved to learn that Olney was not seriously hurt as she had feared; but the fact did not greatly lessen her resentment against the cause of his injuries. The knowledge that he had received them in his defence of Ted had filled her heart with a new tenderness for him, and she reproached herself for having received his suit so coldly. Olney, strong and well, even though slighted

in love, was not an object for pity; but Olney, sick and in the hospital, was all at once surrounded with a certain glamour that made her think of him with kindness and a measure of gratitude.

There was a savoury breakfast of porridge followed by fried eggs and bacon, but Lorraine only took a few hurried mouthfuls. Then she went out to the kitchen and returned with a tray daintily spread and provisioned with a supply hot from the fire. She poured out a cup of coffee and had lifted the tray to carry it out; but Alistair jumping up from his seat, barred her way.

"Is that for Ted?" he asked.

She looked at him coldly for a moment with evident surprise.

"Yes, it's for Ted if you wish to know;" and there was resentment in her tone.

"Please allow me to take it up to him," he said, looking into the eyes that met his so defiantly. There was an imperative note in his voice that belied the suavity of the words.

"No, not at all," she said. "I think that Ted has had enough of you for a time."

"You have scarcely begun your breakfast. I really must insist;" and he took hold of the tray with both hands, still looking gravely into her eyes.

All her spirit rebelled within her but somehow, she seemed forced to drop her gaze beneath his. The words that she wanted to pour forth on him, that would wither him with their fire somehow would not come and she stood before him tongue-tied. Perhaps it was the enormity of his barefaced assurance that seemed for the moment to paralyse her will. While all her inclination was to combat him, she somehow weakly dropped her hands from the tray. With a suave "Thank you" he marched off with it out of the room leaving her standing dumbfounded at her own apparent impotence and raging with a sense of frustration and defeat. To be ordered about in her own house and before her own aunt,

who might, she thought, have come to her rescue was only of a piece with the humiliations she had already endured.

Meanwhile, Alistair carefully bore his burden upstairs and knocked softly and briefly at Ted's door. Then without waiting for an answer, he stepped quietly inside.

It was a fair-sized apartment in the front of the house with one window that looked out on the lake. The walls were well adorned with numerous pictures mostly from English illustrated annuals, some framed and some unframed. The bed was over at one side and its occupant lay with his face to the wall. He was evidently awake for he spoke without turning round and in no very gracious tones.

"What do you want? I wish you'd go away and leave me in peace."

He had heard the rattle of the dishes on the tray and thought it was his sister.

"I've brought you some breakfast, young man," Alistair said quietly.

There was a lightning-like disturbance of the bedclothes and a vigorous twisting of the young limbs beneath them. Their owner had raised himself, so that he could set his startled eyes on this intruder who had been the object of his unspoken maledictions through the hours of the night—those weary hours in which he had tossed and fretted under the smart of his burning shoulders.

"You!" he cried with an oath, when in amazement he saw his enemy before him. "Get out of here, or I'll get up and kill you."

At the same time he gave a groan of helplessness and pain. Had he had a pistol beneath his pillow he felt he would have shot his tormentor. As it was, he was lacking in courage to get up and fight him. If he had even been dressed, he felt he could have done it and defied the consequences; but it is astonishing how greatly a man is handicapped without his clothes. So, he could only glare in impotent rage, with his enemy smiling down upon him, as it seemed, in derision.

"Now, don't bear malice, Ted, my boy," said Alistair, setting down the tray on the dressing table. "I'm sorry I lost my temper last night and hit you so hard; but I don't think I was altogether to blame, now, was I, when you walloped me first? See the mark you made;" and he put his finger to his cheek. "That quirt of yours knows how to bite; and it hurt me so much at the time that I just had to let you have it. Let's shake hands and be friends."

"Not on your life!" Ted cried fiercely. "Get out of here and leave me in peace in case I mark you up again and worse, too. Oh, you make me sick."

"You make me sick, too," said Alistair, "making a hog of yourself there in the hotel. When a fellow like me wants to do you a good turn and get you out of there before you become so drunk you can't stand, you go and hit him with your quirt—hit him across the face, too—and then because in his surprise, he hits you back you have to sulk about it. I really believe at heart, Ted, you're a better sport than you want to make out. What about it, eh?"

The youth turned down his eyes in shame and a flood of crimson spread over his face, which had before been white with anger and vexation. He felt the truth of the arraignment; and much as he wanted to fling it back in the teeth of his accuser, he was too honest to do so. Had it been uttered in tones of harshness and severity he might have done so; but Alistair had spoken reproachfully and sadly with not a trace of anger apparent.

Besides, the wakeful hours of the night with their pain and weariness had worked a salutary discipline; and conscience, which ever speaks its loudest when other folks are abed and there is none to interrupt, had pointed out his sins and follies with unsparing frankness. The paths of wickedness which he had been treading had after all proved far from alluring. The old days of light-hearted boyhood had passed away and in their place had come only heaviness and satiety and a feeling of dispeace within. At first, he had thought that it was manly to be bad and with youthful bravado had laughed to scorn his sister's warnings. His

cousin's had usually been given in such a way that they had only spurred him on upon the course that he had begun. It was the escapade in which, with Monte and Jack Beckles, he had held up Mr. Kilgour that had first made him realise the dangerous road on which he was travelling. It was when his accomplices had imparted to him, after it was all over and he was quite sober, the serious consequences of their deed provided they were ever found out and caught. He had learned then the unpleasantness of partnership with others on whose discretion and good will might depend his very freedom. Then he understood that the deed, which in his half-fuddled state he had regarded as a rather clever but harmless prank, might mean a gaol sentence if he were convicted. It was with the greatest horror he had found out from Monte that the latter had picked their victim's pocket and gloated over the fact. Since then, Ted had discovered—now that he had lost it—how precious a thing is a mind from care and conscience free. So it was with a mien both chastened and softened that at last he made answer.

"I'm sick of myself, too. I—I guess I deserve all I got." Then a sudden flicker of interest lighted up the dejection on his face as he asked, his eagerness but thinly disguised. "But say—after I left, did Olney go for you—I felt sure he would—but he doesn't seem to have left any marks," and he lifted his head a little to scan Alistair's face more carefully.

"It was about that that I really came up to talk to you," said Alistair, moving over to sit down on the side of the bed and forgetting all about the food that was rapidly cooling on the dressing table. "Yes, Olney went for me all right; but it didn't just turn out as he expected. You see, maybe he rather underestimated the extent of the contract he had tackled. Anyway, I got a hold on him which he couldn't get away from; and he had to give in that he was beaten. Then when my back was turned, he made for me again with a knife. He would have stabbed me, had I not managed to throw him down. I hate to tell you, Ted, for I know how badly you'll feel over it. His head

struck the table and it knocked him unconscious, so they had to take him to the hospital. He'll be there for a week or two till it mends. We were afraid it might be serious but the doctor says not."

Ted did not speak for a few moments but lay with his eyes cast down and his fingers picking nervously at the coverlet. When he did, at last, his voice was hoarse and he seemed to form his words with difficulty. His mind could scarcely credit what he heard; but somehow in his heart he was convinced that Alistair spoke the truth. A new flood of humiliation was borne in upon him. It was bad enough to think of the mean figure he himself had cut although then the liquor he had taken was some excuse; but that Olney should have been bested, and that, too, while he was attempting foul play, perhaps—it was a terrible blow.

"You seem to call our bluff every time, don't you?" and there was the bitterness of defeat in his tone. "You hold all the cards and we don't have a look-in."

Poker terms were somewhat strange to Alistair but he readily gathered the drift of Ted's meaning.

"Maybe it looks like it, Ted. As a matter of fact, I don't know but what you may hold the joker in this game; and unless we play as partners, I'm in danger of losing my stakes. Indeed, both of us are if we don't play together; and that's what I'm coming to."

"You needn't think you can turn me against Olney an' the rest of them," said Ted quickly, a gleam of suspicion in his eyes.

"Not at all, but I want to help you all and, by helping you, to help myself at the same time; and I'll tell you how. If you have another bad season this year you are almost bound to go under; but if the stock and crops are handled rightly and you get anything like fair prices in the Fall, we should be able to pull things out of the hole. Now you can't do it without me for you can't get the money from the bank to finance you. I can't do it without you for I don't know how to run the place alone; and I couldn't get the men to do the work right. They'll work for you while they

wouldn't for me. Now, here's Olney laid up for a couple of weeks at least and the hay harvest ready to begin very soon. The men are sulky and ready to quit—I suppose they are wild at me for handling you and Olney the way I did, although they should know that I couldn't help it. If you come out and show that there's no ill-will and that everything is all right between us there will be no difficulty. We shall be able to keep the work going. If you don't—why we go under together, that's all."

"You can count me in," said Ted, huskily.

There was a sharp rap at the door which opened to admit Lorraine. Unable to bear the suspense down in the dining-room and consumed with anxiety as to the results of the interview in Ted's room after sitting still as long as she could, she had slipped upstairs. Then, alas, that one should have to confess it—only on the ground of sisterly love and devotion can a defence be offered—she listened at the keyhole. Not being able to hear what was being said, however—for Alistair, in spite of his earnestness, spoke quietly—she finally determined to burst in upon their tête-à-tête, auguring from what she heard there had been no renewal of the quarrel of last night.

Her eyes swept over the two figures on the bed searching the faces keenly for indications as to the *status quo*. She was relieved evidently by what she saw and she glanced hastily from them to the tray upon the dressing table, its contents untouched. Then as quickly she looked back again, her gaze resting accusingly on Alistair.

The latter had followed her glance and now conscience-stricken had risen to his feet, his face rosy with confusion; for he was still young enough to blush on occasion.

"Oh, I say, I'm really sorry, Miss De Roche, I quite forgot about the tray; and I'm afraid, Ted, it'll all be cold."

The glimmer of a smile appeared for a moment on the girl's face, a smile of amusement and malicious enjoyment of his distress.

"And after all my trouble to fix up something tasty and tempting," she said reproachfully, going over to the dress-

ing table. "Cold as a stone! I'll take it down and have it warmed in a jiffy."

"That's a good sort, Sis," said Ted; "but don't bring it up again for I'll come downstairs and eat it. I'll be dressed in two minutes, for Mr. Kilgour and I must be out and get the men to work."

Lorraine with the tray in her hands paused at the doorway to stare at him in amazement; and then, with one quick, fleeting glance at Alistair, was it of hate or admiration, or both, she hurried from the room.

"What will happen next!" she exclaimed to herself in wonder and astonishment.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE men had fed their teams as usual ; but after breakfast, instead of going out to the fields to work they hung around in one corner of the corral and discussed the situation. Only two of them, Dan Anderson and Jimmy Palliser had been present with Dick Evie, the foreman to witness the affair at the hotel in which Ted De Roche and the boss, Olney Layburn had come to grief at the hands of this upstart stranger.

They had had nothing personally to complain of Alistair's treatment of them since he had been domiciled at the ranch, for he had been careful not to interfere at all between them and Layburn. Still they regarded him somewhat askance ; and out of loyalty to the De Roches, he was made to feel that they tolerated him, but that was all.

As Ted and Alistair passed out through the rear of the house, where Sing, the Chinaman was busy making his preparations for the men's lunch, and out into the corral, they were met almost at the door by a stout figure in the usual blue overalls and carrying an axe. The man looked familiar to Alistair, yet it was not until he had started speaking with a broad Scotch accent that he was able to recognise him as Andy Blair, whose welcome interference at the hotel the night of the altercation with Dick Evie, had quickly quelled the latter's rising truculence.

"Ted, man," he was saying, "what is the matter with all you folk here at Inshallah. Not a man out irrigatin' as I can see ; an a' yer' watter rinnin' awa' as fast as it likes doon the ditches tae Jenkinson's. I'm thinkin' yer hay'll be dry enough by hairst time without wastin' it that way. It's easy enough lettin' the water gang but ye'll not get it tae rin back again in a hurry."

He spoke with a fervour of indignation ; and as Ted hung

his head and hesitated to speak, he went on with a renewed access of wrath.

"Oh, I ken fine aboot yer ploys o' last night, you an' yer fine cousin brawlin' an' bickering wi' this billy here. I'm thinkin' he served ye gey richt, baith the twa' o' ye; an' I hope it'll learn ye a guid lesson. For shame, lad, wi' your father lyin' sick an' like to lose his gear juist for lack o' guidance. And mind, I'm tellin' ye, if he had been to the fore, this lad here would never have had tae come a' this road seekin' his money. I'm no blamin' ye, mind," he said turning to Alistair, "though I dinna just like your errand; but it was time somebody was beginnin' tae look after the way things was goin'."

Neither of his listeners seemed to find words to answer him and he went on after a few moments' pause.

"Of course, it's no, so tae speak, my business, an' I'm likely tae get little thanks for stickin' my nose in whaur I'm no concerned. I jist thought that mebbe it was only neighbourly to look in and see if there was naebody aroond man enough tae take hold and keep the place frae rack an' ruin. I'll be stepping noo but I wish ye baith luck."

With a curt nod to both, he turned away down towards the gate. "We'll be the talk of the whole place," said Ted, "if we don't get the men to work right away; an' I guess these ditches are just playing mischief with everything. I know I deserve all I get. I've been a fool—an awful fool; and it'll be my fault if we do lose everything." The boy's voice faltered. "Say, let's stop a minute. I just can't go an' face these fellows just yet—I just can't;" and he turned round, his face twitching with nervousness so that Alistair could not help pitying his distress.

He put his hand on the boy's shoulder in a kindly way.

"Brace up, Ted, let's get it over with," he said. "Remember, I'm backing you and we'll pull through together. They've seen us; and they'll think we're afraid if we don't face up to them. We've got to see it through together."

Ted's face lightened just a shade. He turned again and

the two walked smartly up to where the men were grouped together, sitting on a number of big logs that had been brought in the winter before, to make firewood for the house. Most of them had their eyes turned down and the remains of a grin on their faces; but Bob Ainsley and Paul Lorringer in the foreground, looked up with glances that betrayed curiosity mingled with hostility. These two, especially had always treated Alistair with an averted air when he spoke or nodded to them in his goings to and fro about the ranch. Their faces now wore the same unfriendly, sullen look with which he was familiar. It was a surprise to all to see Ted walking amicably with his adversary of the previous night; and they awaited in silent expectancy the solution of the riddle.

"What's the matter, boys?" asked Ted, cheerily plucking up heart: "why aren't you all out at your jobs? Andrew tells me the ditches are playing the mischief with the grain and there's all kinds of trouble. Surely everything doesn't have to stop just because Olney and I aren't around. You know what's happened to him and—and well, you might know there was some excuse for me not being too early around this morning."

It was a bitter pill for Ted to swallow to refer to his own humiliation; but the boy did it manfully so that Alistair, looking on, was moved to admiration. He was aware that it was by Ted that the battle must be fought mainly, not by him. The less he himself said, the better.

There was a faint murmur of laughter not ill-humoured; and Bob Ainsley took it upon himself to answer for the others. There was no smile upon his grizzled face, but rather a grimmer setting of the jaw that boded trouble.

"I guess we want our time, that's what's the matter, kid; and the bloomin' ditches can go to blazes. What I'd like to know is who's goin' to give us our cheques now the boss is laid up. One thing sure, we ain't goin' to work for that ugly son of a gun there that's got you all feedin' out of his hand. You may lie down an' let him lick you; but we don't intend to. The sooner you get out your cheque book

and give us what you owe us the better. We can't fool round here all day. There's lots of other jobs waitin' for us."

"Ay, that's right," chimed in Lorringer: "there's been too damned many bosses about this place to suit me. I'm sick of it, I am; the last cheque I got wasn't no good at the bank when I took it in an' I'd like to make mighty sure this one be good."

"You know very well we fixed it up, Paul, long ago," said Ted hotly; "and you'll all get your money quick enough if you have to go. I don't see though what you want to leave for. There aren't so very many jobs mebbe as you think; and they're not as pleasant as the one you have here with plenty of good grub all the time. 'Sides I count it pretty mean if you go off an' leave me in the lurch just when I need you most. It isn't a fair deal, is it?"

"Fair deal be hanged," retorted Bob Ainsley with a snort of derision. "You can give us our time any day you feel like it; and I don't see why we shouldn't ask for it when we want. We ain't goin' to work for any blasted English toff that thinks he can come out here an' run things to suit himself. Let him find some one else to work the ranch; if he's to run it, I'm through."

There was a murmur of assent to this.

"Ted's going to run it now," Alistair hastened to put in; but it was evident that this explanation was not convincing.

"Why then, Mr. Kilgour, he sign all the cheques?" put in Oscar, the Swede, who had not yet spoken.

"I only signed them with Mr. Layburn. I have been helping to finance the crop and that is why. You surely wouldn't object to that, would you?"

"We know all about that, don't we," sneered Ainsley. "Do you think that Olney didn't let on what game you were playin'. If we did right we'd duck you in the creek, that's what we'd do instead o' sittin' talkin' here, boys, eh?"

He stood up as he spoke and looked around from one to the other suggestively; but though one or two looked as

if they might be willing to back him up, there was no general response. It was felt that there had been enough of that sort of thing. Remembering how Layburn and Ted had fared the night before, most of the men thought that it would be unwise to have any more disturbances. The law had a long arm and they felt that it would be rather a serious matter to lay hands on the young stranger especially when he was under the protection of Ted. The lad's influence went a long way. At least, he was for the present the "Boss"; and whatever was the reason, it was evident that he was on friendly terms with the other.

Alistair watched the men anxiously, afraid to speak in case he might say the wrong thing and make matters worse. Conscious, as he was, of the awkwardness of the situation for himself personally, he was really most concerned about the question of the men sticking to their work. This he felt was the vital matter as regarded the welfare of the ranch and his father's and his own investment. He felt fairly secure in the belief that the men would not dare attack him thus in broad daylight and with Ted there. They didn't appear to be made of the same fire-eating stuff as Bob Ainsley, who might have done so had he felt sure of the men's backing.

"Shut up, Bob," said Ted. "You know you're talking a lot of rot that you'll be sorry for. Now are you all going to stand by me; or are you going to let me down just for a bit of spite? If my dad were up and about, I bet you wouldn't desert him, would you now? If I have to go and tell him that you've all left, he'll have another stroke."

The appeal had its effect, for most of these men had worked for Mr. De Roche in the past.

"We'll work for you if you'll put Mr. Kilgour off the place; but we won't while he's around, that's a cinch," said Ainsley. "He's a regular Jonah, he is; and the sooner he's gone the better."

"He's putting up the money for your wages, I tell you," said Ted; "or at least we couldn't get it without him. If you

like to work for nothing, it would be all right for me to send him away."

It was evident that this proposition, however, found small favour and there was silence for a moment or two. Then Ivan, the Russian, who had sat whittling a piece of wood with his jackknife stood up and stretched himself lazily. Until now he had looked on with a grin and listened to what each had to say with evident impatience.

"I think we damnt fools every one," he declared. "I think we better get back to work. I myself go irrigate right now. No more time talk;" and without looking at anyone he walked over and picked up his shovel from where it stood against the barn. Throwing it upon his shoulder, he then strode off in the direction of the main ditch where he had been irrigating in the field for a week past.

"I tank so too, I go feenish my tracking," said Oscar, the Swede, getting up also and going off towards the barn where his team were still standing in the stall.

"I guess we'll all stand by ye, kid," said Paul Lorringer looking at Ainsley, however, to seek his assent. The latter shook his head.

"Nix for me," he said. "Not on your life. I'll go pack my duds; and then I'll be round for my cheque, Mister Ted;" and he, too, strode off.

"All right, boys," said Ted to the others, ignoring Ainsley's defection. "I thought that you wouldn't turn me down. Now, I hope you'll get right at it for there's no time to waste."

"Well done, Ted, my boy," said Alistair as they were left alone; alone, that is, except for a stranger who had ridden into the corral and trotted quickly across to them, reining up his horse.

For a moment he scrutinised Alistair from the crown of his hat to the neatly fitting leggings of pigskin. Then he quickly dismounted by his side and took a paper from his breast pocket.

"You are Mr. Alistair Kilgour," he said.

"That's my name."

"Then, sir, I arrest you on a warrant signed by two justices of the peace for this district on a charge of assault."

Recovering first from the shock of Alistair's arrest, Ted was the first to speak.

"Oh, you're off your base entirely, man," he said. "You've just as much reason to arrest me as Mr. Kilgour."

"Let me see the warrant," said Alistair, pulling himself together. "I would like to know on whose complaint it was sworn out."

"Dick Evie was the man, I believe, though I don't know him. I was stopping at the hotel last night and waiting for breakfast when your justice of the peace here,—Weiss, I believe, is his name—yes, O. Weiss, there it is at the bottom—called me over—he had heard that I was an officer of provincial police—and asked me to serve it. That's all I know about it but it's perfectly regular and all I have to do is to execute it. Sorry, sir, but that's my business, you see; and if the complaint is not founded, no doubt, you'll be quickly released. If you'll agree to go quiet, I'll not trouble you with any bracelets. Mr. Weiss said that I was to treat you as politely as possible and Bill Dutton isn't the man to go out of his way to be nasty."

Alistair looked at the document that deprived him of his liberty. Although slightly different from the form to which he was accustomed and though the warrant was in a crabbed and far from elegant hand writing, still it appeared to be in order and he had not the slightest intention of resisting.

He asked for leave to go to the house and get his coat and some cigarettes before accompanying the policeman. They would go down to the hotel where they would have lunch, the latter said, before the trial which was to be held in the hall beside the schoolhouse, in the afternoon. Weiss, the J. P. had told him that this would be the arrangement if he was able to get his man.

"It appeared the old man thought it was rather an important case," Dutton volunteered, "as he said that you was

some kind of a big bug in the old country where you came from, an attorney or barrister or somethin'."

Alistair smiled and said nothing. He offered his captor a cigarette which he accepted with alacrity and they walked all three down towards the house. As they did so one of the men called over to Ted from the barn for some directions as regards the work he was to begin upon. The lad paused in hesitancy.

"Don't bother coming with me now, Ted," said Alistair; "but you may have to come down later on and help to keep me out of gaol. You'd better stay with the men. They're in none too good a temper; and if they hear what is going on down in the village it may require somebody at their backs to keep them at work.

"Well, send word if you need me," said Ted, realising the truth of what he said; and he hurried off to see what was wanted of him.

Dutton tied up his horse outside; and they passed through the kitchen and upstairs into Alistair's room where the latter put on his coat and replenished his cigarette case. Going down the stairs and outside again they saw no one except the Chinaman. They walked away together, Dutton's horse following him like a well-trained dog.

For Alistair the walk to the store was an experience that was full of unpleasantness. The consciousness that he was no longer a free man was bitter and while outwardly calm, the turmoil within his breast was considerable. He was beginning to have misgivings as to whether perhaps his acquittal was as certain as at first he had supposed and he began to feel that he was very much alone.

CHAPTER XXVII

UNUSUAL excitement was manifest outside the village hall, an unpretentious frame, barnlike building which was the scene of most of the local festivities and many of its more solemn functions as well. The only relief to its baldness was the little projecting portico in front and the steps leading up to this which formed a lounging-place for those who preferred to remain outside and scan all who went in.

To-day there was the usual knot of half-grown lads and young men. Among the loungers a buzz of low talk went on for the trial of Mr. Kilgour, which was to be held, was one that aroused the keenest interest in the community.

Inside also there was a murmur of conversation. The occupants of the room—and there might have been about thirty—sat for the most part on the forms that lined three sides of the place. There were women as well as men.

Over on one side and near the small stage at the back, two men sat at a small table. These were the Justices. One was large and stout with a reddish-brown beard, broad aquiline nose and full lips. His was an aggressive, an overbearing face and bore the impression of self-satisfaction all over it. Here was a man one might well say who would readily ride roughshod over all rights but his own. His name was Otto Weiss, and, as the name would imply, he was a German. He had come over in his early twenties and had become naturalised soon after. Now as one of the old settlers and a large landowner, he had been made a justice of the peace. In spite of his arrogance, however, he was not unpopular as he was a good man to work for and paid and fed his hands well.

Weiss was talking very earnestly to the other J. P., a small man with a black moustache, sallow complexion, sunk-

en eyes and high projecting cheekbones. He sat humped up in his chair and listened meekly to the stream of his colleague's talk. Only now and then he put in a word or two where there was a pause that permitted it. His name was Alec Dingwall and he hailed from Nova Scotia. He also was a prosperous man; and his farm was one of the best stocked in the district. He was taciturn by nature but was recognised as a very successful dealer.

Alistair sat with the policeman, Dutton on the form that stood facing the table at which sat the Justices. The policeman had acted so far with uniform good-nature and courtesy. The morning hours the two had whiled away over a cribbage board, the officer teaching his prisoner the rules and intricacies of the game.

"Mighty cheek all these people have coming here just out of curiosity. Why don't they stay at home and mind their own business? Look at that woman over there with the kid—it makes me sick, it does."

"I suppose they've got to make the best of the amusement that comes to them," said Alistair smiling; "and while I can't say that it is altogether pleasant for me, I suppose I ought to be pleased to be giving someone enjoyment. It has been quite the other way, of late, I must confess; and it has got a bit on my nerves. I hate to be unpleasant to people but sometimes you have to whether you like it or not;" and he sighed.

His mind had recalled the picture of Lorraine stretched sobbing in the hammock on the verandah with the moonlight falling upon her. Then, too, it reverted to the scene the same evening in the stable after he had thrashed her brother and sent her cousin and supposed fiancé to the hospital. What a miserable swashbuckler she must have thought him and no wonder that she hated him for it. What girl of any spirit could have forgiven him? He grew hot too as he thought how he had overborne her in the matter of the tray. It had been almost a coward's or at least a bully's trick. He might have got at Ted later surely, he reflected.

It was more refreshing for him to think of Miss Pelton

with whom his relations so far had been more than pleasant. He wondered what she would think when she learned of his predicament.

His musings, however, were of short duration for he was soon made aware that the court was about to open by Mr. Weiss rapping heavily on the table for order. At the same time he was surprised to notice a man, whose face was familiar to him talking to the two Justices. Soon he saw him rise from his chair beside them and walk over to take a seat at the side of the room. He was puzzled for a moment or two to recall where he had seen him before. Then all at once it came to him that this was Mr. Jenks, the man he had met at the hotel at Garston who had giggled so offensively. He was dressed now in rough farmer's clothes and that was perhaps why Alistair had failed at once to recognise him.

Mr. Weiss' repeated rappings had by this time had the effect of separating somewhat the chatting groups that were around the room. All had taken seats and were waiting expectantly. There was a great scraping of chair-legs on the wood floor and a hitching of forms; but soon comparative silence reigned. Mr. Weiss began the proceedings.

"Alistair Kilgour, will you stand up while I read the charge that has been laid against you."

Alistair stood up. The constable was already on his feet beside him. He was aware of a peculiar sensation, not of fear exactly, nor of anger nor humiliation, but a sort of composite emotion which it would have been very hard for him to analyse. He was conscious, too, of all these curious eyes boring into his back.

"Sir, I see you are charged here with assault and battery on one Olney Layburn by which the same was seriously injured and now lies in a critical condition in hospital. Do you plead 'guilty' or 'not guilty' to the charge?"

"I would like to have this case held over until my lawyer arrives to defend me. I have telephoned to Kamloops for him and I am expecting him to arrive at any minute. I

would therefore crave your indulgence until then. I am a stranger here and I do not think that it is fair to expect me to defend my own case, especially where the charge is as serious as the one that has been trumped up against me here."

"This is rather a strange request. This court's time is valuable, young man, and I must say it is most unusual for prisoners such as you to ask for a delay of that kind. What do you think, Mr. Dingwall?"

"If the lawyer is likely to arrive within a half hour or so, Mr. Weiss," said Dingwall, "I hardly see that we could well refuse to wait that time if the gentleman is sure that he will come."

"That's all very well," said Weiss impatiently; "but I see no reason why you should not plead and let us go on with the evidence for the prosecution. By the time you have put in your defence, if you have any, your lawyer should be here. We are busy men and we cannot stay all afternoon. It is just such brawls as this is that keep the country back. Isn't that so, Dingwall? Don't you think that we might as well proceed," and he leaned over close and whispered something into the other man's ear. The latter seemed to demur at first. Then as the other persisted, he shrugged his shoulders and apparently acquiesced.

"Mr. Dingwall and I have decided that the case must proceed at once." Weiss announced pompously.

"I object to it proceeding until I am represented by counsel," declared Alistair firmly.

There was a subdued murmur from the spectators in the hall.

"I wouldn't rile him if I were you," Dutton whispered in his ear.

"Don't you be impertinent to the court," said Weiss angrily, "or it will be the worse for you. You have no business to speak at all in the matter. We'll hear the first witness for the prosecution. Dick Evie? Is Dick Evie here?"

An odd sensation of oppression seized hold of Alistair, a tightening about the chest and anger surged up into his heart. He felt like doing something desperate to this pompous autocrat; but prudence whispered in his ear, so that with an effort he controlled himself.

"Well, if you proceed, please have the clerk or who ever keeps a report of the proceedings take note that I have entered protest."

"Dick Evie."

"Yes, sir."

Dick had stepped up to the front and stood near the table looking very red and embarrassed. It was evident that courts were not in his line.

Perhaps had he thought beforehand of the prominence into which his action in swearing out the warrant was going to bring him, he would have refused to have anything to do with it. What to do with his hands seemed to be one embarrassment. However, the worst was that he had been surprised by the Justices' sudden call with a quid of tobacco in his mouth and had not had the presence of mind to withdraw it before coming forward. He was somewhat in awe as to whether the bench might not commit him for contempt or at least publicly reprove him. Still he decided to put a bold face on the matter. It was not at all his way to be diffident; but here he was out of his proper element and his usual assurance had deserted him.

"You are Dick Evie, the complainant in the charge against this man, Kilgour?" Mr. Weiss questioned eyeing him sternly.

"I—I guess so," stammered Dick and added: "You ought to know me by this time. I've worked for you before this."

The words slipped out in his nervousness and as soon as he had spoken, he was aware that they were not calculated to impress the justice favourably. Weiss looked at him coldly for a moment, too surprised to speak.

"You had better be careful, sir," he said with a judicial

air. "Remember where you are and that anything that you say may be marked down against you."

Weiss had heard of a phrase somewhat similar being employed towards criminals just after their arrest and it seemed to fit in here very well. There was no doubt that the witness, at least, was impressed, for he turned very red and nearly swallowed his quid. He was more confused still when Dutton administered the oath to him; but he repeated the words after him in a mumbling tone scarcely audible.

Mr. Weiss, pleased to have properly humbled him, evidently thought that he was frightened badly enough for he smiled with an attempt at geniality.

"Speak up, now, Evie, and don't be afraid. Remember you are not the accused and you must speak perfectly freely. We are here to get the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth;" he added pompously looking to Mr. Dingwell for his assent.

"You sure do have a lot to say, Weiss," replied that gentleman without enthusiasm turning his head away. "I guess the less the witness says, the less of lies we'll have. That's my way of thinkin' on it. However, get 'im to go ahead and let's get through: for the sooner I'm on the road, the better."

"Well, I was in Tim White's saloon last night," the witness continued, "and saw the fight that took place between Mr. Kilgour here and Olney Layburn. After it was over—and it weren't really much of a fight after all—more like a little wrestlin' match—this here Kilgour suddenly seizes hold of Olney below his knee and clippin' him under the chin before he could save 'imself, he knocked him clean over backwards. Olney, he hit the table with his head an' had to be taken to the hospital an' it's a wonder he's not dead now. I ain't one as objects to a fair fight; but I'm not goin' to stand by an' see my boss next to killed by a sneak trick like that, so I swore out this charge I did."

Alistair listened amazed to this perversion of fact; and he looked around among the faces behind him which were all

strained with eagerness to hear what was going on. He felt that surely there would be denial from some one who had seen the occurrence and could not remain silent; but strange to say there was not one there save perhaps Monte with his dark, saturnine face, that he could remember as having been at the hotel the night before. There was a brief silence.

"I suppose in the absence of counsel, I have the right to cross-examine this witness?" he said quickly.

"I guess so," said Weiss. "Only be as short as possible."

"Tell me this then," said Alistair addressing Evie. "What was Layburn doing when I knocked him down as you say I did? and I did, I'm not denying it——"

"He wasn't doin' nothin'," said Evie. "He was just walkin' across the room past you. It was after you had left loose of him."

"What did he have in his hand?"

"He didn't have nothin' in his hand, leastways not as I seen."

"Didn't he have a butcher knife in his hand?"

"No."

"You're on your oath, remember. You didn't see a knife in his hand and that he was running at me to stick me with it?"

"No."

The witness's lips were white and he swallowed hard as if something in his throat troubled him but he stuck to his tale.

"That is all I wish to ask him just now," said Alistair; and the witness on a word from Weiss went over and sat down on the bench at the side with a sigh of relief.

"Monte Peresso is the next witness. Is he here?"

"You bet he's here," said Monte coming forward with a swagger, his spurs rattling bravely as he stalked with heavy tread on the wooden floor. He took the oath with an ease and familiarity that betokened that he was probably more familiar with the observances of courts than the first witness.

"Did you hear what the first witness said?" Mr. Weiss asked him.

"Oh, I heard him all right, though he sure didn't speak none too loud."

"Do you corroborate this story?"

The witness seemed puzzled. The word was new to him. However, he was not of a nature to keep silent.

"I certainly do not. Why the story's as true as gospel."

"That's what I mean," said Mr. Weiss. "I mean do you back it up."

"Most certain, I do. Didn't I see the whole thing with my own eyes just as he did?"

"Tell us exactly what you saw then."

"Didn't I see Mr. Kilgour there trip the poor chap when he wasn't looking and bash him on the bean. Olney he was just walkin' along quiet past Mr. Kilgour and not even lookin' at him when he knocks 'im over jist as Dick was tellin' you and breaks his head for him. Meanest bit o' dirty work I've ever seen an' I've been among some mighty mean cusses."

"Let me examine the witness, please," said Alistair.

"Go ahead."

"Tell me this, my man," said Alistair in his most judicial manner; "and remember that you are on your oath and that perjury is a serious crime. Do you say that I took this man Layburn treacherously unawares—that is, when he was completely off his guard—and I tripped him and knocked him down so that he injured himself seriously in the fall? Is that right?"

"You can bet that's right. That's just what I'm sayin' and don't forgit it, young man."

"You will not admit that what I did, I did in self-defence when Layburn was rushing at me with a knife."

"No, then, I will not."

"Now, be careful, my man, and speak the truth to this question. Do you say that this man was not even looking at me, did not even see me at all when I did this to him?"

"Yes, I say it and I'll swear to it," said Monte with emphatic intonation.

"You say that his back was turned to me. It must have been if he did not see me?" pressed Alistair leaning forward in his earnestness and glowering at the witness. The sharp-cut contour of his face showed more marked as he gloomed upon the cowboy whose whole attitude was expressive of defiance and hate.

"As sure as death, it was; and you took him cowardly from behind."

Alistair turned to the bench.

"One of these men must be lying. The first witness says that Layburn was walking past me and I hit him under the chin and tripped him up by catching his leg under the knee. The other says I slipped up behind him when his back was turned to me and knocked him over."

"No, then, but I didn't," said Monte quickly, seeing that he had let himself fall into a trap. "I didn't mean that at all. The chap took me up wrong."

"I don't believe that either of these men is telling the truth," said Dingwall with an expression of weariness.

"Suppose, Weiss, that we have Mr. Kilgour tell us what happened and give us a little enlightenment. As it is, we're quite in the dark."

"Well, I'm sure I've no objection. Fire away, Mr. Kilgour. Give us your side of the story."

"The facts of the case are merely these," went on Alistair thus encouraged. "Layburn and I had a bit of a fight in which I had the better of him. I got a hold on him that he couldn't break away from. It's a little trick I know of—nothing wonderful at all. I let him loose on his promising to keep quiet. As I was walking away, he picked up a knife and made for me. Somebody warned me he was coming and I turned in time to save myself. To do so, I caught him under the chin with one hand and under the knee with the other and threw him over backwards. I was sorry it turned out so seriously; but it wasn't my fault. What I did, I had to do in self-defence. Any

credible witness that saw the occurrence will bear me out. There is nothing more about it. I ask for a dismissal as I am sure you must see that if any charge should be brought, it should be against the injured man. I think that Layburn would not have done it had he not been in a passion. I am not bearing any malice against him; but it is probably better for him not to have this matter go any further. I demand a dismissal of the case."

"Not so fast, young man, not quite so fast," said Weiss evidently not pleased at the turn affairs were taking. Such presumption on the part of the prisoners who usually came before him was altogether outside of his experience.

"This matter must be probed out and we can't dismiss it just as easily as you seem to think. A respected neighbour has been pretty nigh killed and you appear to be to blame for it. Indeed, you admit having done the mischief though you may claim that you had to do it. These other men say no, that you did it by foul play and we've got to make sure. The——"

Here he was interrupted by Dingwall.

"Tut, tut, Weiss, I really think that this has gone far enough. After all, the whole thing was in a fight and it would appear as if Layburn got his medicine. He should keep out of such fights. This young man has a good enough reputation I presume, and I don't see why we can't just dismiss the case. You know that, ten chances to one, the man, Monte is lying. He's a good enough cowboy—we all know that and you needn't glare at me so, Monte—you know I am no bluffer if you are."

"I don't know that the young man does bear a good reputation," said Weiss. "From what Mr. Jenks over there has told me since I came into the hall, there are some other very suspicious circumstances connected with his first appearance in the district—very suspicious circumstances," he repeated shaking his head with gravity.

"Aye, is that so? and what kind of circumstances may I ask?"

“Circumstances connected with a mighty queer robbery in the hotel at Garston, I understand from Mr. Jenks.”

“Then if it’s to have a bearing on the case before us, let him come up here and be sworn. I don’t want any hearsay.”

“I’m sure I have no objection to being sworn, Mr. Dingwall,” said Jenks in his squeaky voice that Alistair readily recognised. Coming forward, he took the oath with a certain unction as if he enjoyed it, rolling the words on his tongue with all a parson’s solemnity.

“It was over a month ago,” he began, fixing his eyes on Mr. Weiss, “that I was stopping overnight at the Garston Hotel. Well, about one or two in the morning—I couldn’t be sure which—we were all awakened out of our beds by a woman’s shrieks. We all jumps up, of course, and gets out into the hall—an’ mighty cold and shivery it was, I can tell you at that time of the night. Old Dan Billings was there and Seth Avery and one or two others: and sure enough we all thought a murder at least was being committed.

“‘Help, help!’ was the words. ‘There’s a burglar in my room and he’s gone an’ he’s taken my watch!’

“Well, we all ran out through a chap’s room that was in bed; but we couldn’t see anyone. In the morning it turned out that it had been this chap, Kilgour here. Of course, he claimed that he had come in late off the train, he, he, he; and had started out to find a room that wasn’t filled. Anyway it did look mighty fishy it did.”

There was a general subdued hum of interested comment throughout the hall.

“What has that to do with this, I’d like to know,” said Dingwall bluntly to Jenks. “Was it proved that the man stole anything or are you just supposing?”

“Oh, no, it wasn’t proved at all, he, he, he” said Jenks giggling a trifle nervously this time; “but all I say is that the matter looked somewhat fishy, eh?”

At this moment there was a diversion for someone had entered the hall. There was a slight stir at the rear as he

pushed his way through the people and walked rapidly up to where Alistair was standing.

"How do you do, Mr. Kilgour," he said holding out his hand. "I am sorry that I am so late but I have done my best. There is, of course, some mistake in this matter," he said when he had shaken hands. Then, turning round, he bowed to the two Justices. He was a tall man, rather spare but well-built, with face, clean shaven and striking of feature. There was something impressive and commanding about him that seemed to make Weiss shrink a little and lose some of his pomposity.

"You are the lawyer he was expecting, I suppose?" he said. "We had to begin without you: but we have only just begun. With Mr. Dingwall's permission, I think we might stop for five minutes to give you and him a chance to talk it over. What do you think, Mr. Dingwall."

"Oh, I'm agreed," replied Dingwall.

"Come over into the corner here where we can talk," said Mr. Somerville to Alistair; and the latter followed him.

As rapidly as he could, he gave Mr. Somerville the details of what had happened. The lawyer heard him quietly until he had finished and then put one or two questions as to points on which he was not quite clear. They then returned and told the justices that they were ready to proceed.

"My client has told me what has taken place; and he had done just what I should have done myself, that is, applied for a dismissal of the case. The charge is absolutely false and unfounded as we can very easily prove by witnesses that we can call and whom we have had no opportunity to summon. Any conviction that might be made we should certainly appeal, and it would be speedily quashed before the higher court. I am sure, however, that Justices of your experience would never proceed with a case trumped up on such trivial ground as this undoubtedly has. My client has been the victim of a conspiracy ever since his arrival here. Those who have had part in it had better beware. It would be an insult, gentlemen, to your

intelligence for me to address you any further in his behalf when your duty lies so clearly before you—simply prodding a dead horse. So I shall only repeat my client's request already put forward that you dismiss the case."

He sat down and the two Justices drew their chairs a little closer together—or rather Mr. Weiss drew his closer to Mr. Dingwall and made show of conferring with him. As, however, Mr. Dingwall had already made up his mind and was anxious to be off home, there was little real conference about it. So Mr. Weiss stood up.

"We find that this here case has not been sufficiently made good against the accused—and there is too much doubt as to whether it was an assault or just a plain fight. So we dismiss the case. I would also like to say that we hope there will be no more of such cases brought before us without proper cause. Our time is too valuable to be wasted in this way."

Mr. Somerville turned to Alistair with a smile and the latter thanked him for coming so promptly.

"I need hardly have come after all," he said, "as I expect that you could have handled the thing all right yourself. Still you never know. At any rate I am pleased it has turned out so satisfactorily."

CHAPTER XXVIII

AFTER Ted saw Mr. Kilgour go off with the constable, it was with somewhat mixed feelings that he went about the moment's pressing duty of seeing that the men all got to work again at their various tasks with as little loss of time as possible. In spite of considerable soreness of body from the cuts of the quirt, he was conscious of a certain lightness of spirit as if he had been carrying a burden and it had been taken off his shoulder. A crisis had arisen which called for him to act and thanks to the prompting of the man whom he had treated as his enemy, he had stepped into the breach and so far had acquitted himself not unworthily. He was at the age when a lad's personality struggles to find self-expression and for want of proper standards and wise guidance, his had broken out in the wrong direction. As we have seen he had soon discovered the dangers of the path on which he had started and the difficulties of turning back on it. Now with his Cousin Olney out of the way, for a time, at least, and this new ally to help him, he felt that he would have a real chance to begin again.

Mingled with the relief for his own spiritual betterment, however, there was the sense of concern for Mr. Kilgour in his unpleasant predicament of which he knew himself to be the cause. He felt some anxiety as to the outcome although it seemed certain that he must be set free as soon as the J. P.'s had an opportunity to hear the facts—that is, if these were as Mr. Kilgour had told him; and as has been said, he had little doubt as to that.

It took him all forenoon to get everything going smoothly again and the men each doing his work to the best advantage. When he returned to the house at lunchtime, he

learnt that the Justices were to hold court at the hall at two o'clock.

In response to a request from a neighbour sent by telephone, Lorraine had ridden off after breakfast to take some medicine to an old lady ten miles away, who had been sick. She was not likely to be back till late in the afternoon. Ted was just starting off to go down to the hall when a man arrived from Kamloops who had come to see some young pedigreed boars that Olney had advertised for sale. He was delayed for a time with him, so that it was almost two when finally he approached the door of the place. Monte was standing at the steps and came to meet him.

"Where you goin', kid?" he asked in his gruff, hectoring way.

"Goin' to the trial, I guess, where everybody else is, I suppose," said Ted not liking his manner.

"Better not, kid; better turn back. You ain't wanted in there."

"Turn back nothin'," retorted Ted with asperity; "what'd I do that for?"

"They'll call you as a witness if you go an' I guess you don't want that, eh," said Monte leered unpleasantly. "The chap gave ye some weltin', didn't he though? and I'd like to see him 'put over the way' for a month or two to cool his uppishness. There's nothin' like a bit o' hard labour on the dope they feed ye there to take the starch out. I've tried it myself so I know, ye see."

"Well, if you want to see him get that I don't, in spite of what he did to me. I guess it was comin' to me for what I did to him. That's what I've come down for, to see that he doesn't get it."

"Oh, ye have, have ye?" said Monte with sinister intonation. "Well, still I would say ye'd better go back again. Listen to me, kid;" and he came unpleasantly close to the youth clutching him by the shoulder and speaking into his ear with a great affectation of secrecy:

"I'm tellin' ye and don't you forget it that it'll be the best thing that can happen both for you and for me if they

'put him over' for this; for we're in a hole both of us—a bad one. I can't tell you any more now; but you come to my cabin to-night round eight o'clock and you'll know then. I've got to get back inside for I'm needed there. You get home to the ranch. Don't forget to-night now; I'll count on you, so don't disappoint me, see?"

Ted would fain have detained him to hear more; but he rushed away with a look that was sinister and at the same time cautioned secrecy. The boy stood for a moment or two undecided in the middle of the road, dismayed and dumfounded by Monte's words. Then sick with fear, he turned back towards the ranch. It might be that he was abandoning Mr. Kilgour when he had promised to stand by him, still, if what Monte said was true it could hardly be expected that Ted should keep to his compact of the morning at his own imminent peril.

The remainder of the afternoon passed wretchedly while he worked hard irrigating, not coming home till supper-time, when he found the news of Mr. Kilgour's acquittal awaiting him. The latter had sent a message with one of the men to say that he was going to the Appleby's for supper.

Towards eight o'clock Ted saddled his horse, Dandy and rode off to Monte's. As he came past the house, Lorraine was on the verandah and called to him.

"You're not going to the hotel, Ted, are you?" she asked with a note of entreaty which wrung the boy's heart with remorse and despair. If she knew where he was going and for what reason, she would have far more cause for distress than if he had been going to Tim White's, he thought bitterly.

"No, I'm not going to the hotel, Sis; don't worry," he called back in as cheerful a tone as he could muster; and fearful that she might question him further, with a wave of his hand to Lorraine he put Dandy to a lope with a touch of his knee and was off down the driveway.

It was a fine evening, with a fresh and squally wind coming from the south driving a flock of fluffy white clouds

like sheep before it, and making a noise like the sea in the leaves of the cottonwoods as the boy rode along, his lithe body swaying gently with the rocking-horse-like gait of his beast. There was a freshness in the air which bore with it faint odours brought from distant spaces, faint and evanescent but delightfully suggestive and stimulating to young blood. On the lake countless little whitecaps scurried across the usually placid surface. The world to Ted had never looked fairer and home had never seemed dearer to him. Yet he had spoilt it all for himself, he reflected gloomily.

On arriving at the shack he tied Dandy to a tree. He went in to find Monte alone and just finishing his supper of tinned salmon and bread and butter washed down with coffee taken black. The bad man did not look so fierce thus relaxed before his frugal board as he munched away vigorously with occasional deep draughts from a large moustache-cup which, although minus its handle, still bore evidence in its rich gilding and ingenious shape of a pristine splendour.

"Glad you've come early before the other chaps get here," he said, as Ted threw himself down on the bed. "I wanted to talk to you quiet-like."

"Who's coming?" asked Ted quickly.

"Don't be afeared; it's only Jack Beckles and another chap like him that I guess you've seen before. That bloomin' galoot got off after all, this afternoon, I suppose you know."

"Yes, I heard all right. He was too strong for you even if you fellows did tell lies about the affair. I see now why you didn't want me there."

Ted spoke boldly but his heart was trembling at his temerity for he was afraid of the man's anger. The other looked at him for a moment under lowered brows.

"Oh, you do, do you?" he said at last with a sinister sneer. "Maybe you think you know, but I bet you don't know all; and when you do, you'll not talk so pert about it or I miss my guess. Maybe you don't know that he's

on to us for that little job the night we ran him out and frisked his wad; and he's just waitin' to pounce on us and put us all over the road. Five years'd be the very least for any of us, even you, young as you are, for the like of that."

He had pushed back the dishes from before him on the table and was leaning on it with arms folded, glowering darkly at the pale face of the boy, who had now risen up on the side of the bed and sat staring back in a sort of hypnotised stupefaction. After some seconds of silence, Ted found speech though his lips were dry and his voice husky and strained in the stress of his fear.

"I didn't 'frisk his wad' as you call it. I would sooner have died than touched a nickel from him and I never got a cent of it."

"Doesn't matter, kiddo; you knew about it and that's all that's necessary. Who'd believe that you didn't have your share; you knew about it and that's enough to make you sweat like the rest of us."

"I didn't know till after; I could swear that I didn't."

"Much good swearing would do; you might swear till you were black in the face and small notice the judge would take of that, or the jury either. Why, you were the ringleader in the job; poor Jack and I were only the tools, see!" and Monte leaned back and grinned gargoylike.

Ted groaned and buried his face in his hands, his shoulders hunched like those of an old man.

CHAPTER XXIX

I DON'T believe, Lorraine, that you are glad to see me home again at all," said Olney.

It was the morning after he had arrived back from the hospital looking pale and weak from his injury. Lorraine had walked out in the pasture field behind the barn to look at the colts; and Olney, whom she had not expected to see up so early, had followed her. She had dreaded this moment when he would have the opportunity to speak to her alone and had calculated to defer it as long as possible; but when he had a purpose in mind it was difficult to thwart him.

"Nonsense, Olney; why will you say such unkind things to me whenever you come back; and on this beautiful morning, too. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I am not unkind, Lorraine—at least, not any more than I have good reason to be when I return and find this Kilgour still here on better terms than ever with you all after he has nearly killed me."

"You know very well why he is here, Olney, and you know that I am not friendly with him at all. But I have to be civil. We can't help it that we have to put up with him. I don't like it any more than you do."

"Don't tell me that. Anyway it looks mighty queer to me. Ted's just as bad as you are or worse. I believe the chap has hypnotised you all. You'll be sorry one of these days, you'll see."

"But that wasn't what I wanted to speak to you about, Lorraine, dear, and you mustn't mind if I am cross. That knock on the head that I got would make anyone feel a bit sore. I've been thinking a lot since I have been in the hospital, Lorraine; there was nothing else to do but think all day and it was mighty lonesome, you may believe, for

a chap like me that never was laid up hardly in his life before."

"I know, Olney, it must have been and I was thinking of you."

"Were you really, Lorraine? I am glad of that for it was you who were in my thoughts all the time and I was wondering what you would say to me. You remember what I asked of you the day we were out on the range?"

It was not likely that she had forgotten—it had been a load on her mind ever since. The anger that she had felt against him, however, was strangely qualified by his weakness and she found that her feeling was now one of pity and of regret that she should have to wound him.

"I told you, Lorraine," he went on, "that I must have an answer by the time of the Fair and that I would give you until then to think it over. What do you say? I love you now more than ever and I cannot do without you, dear."

"I gave you my answer then, Olney; and I'm sorry—I'm sorry that I cannot change it. I just like you as my cousin, Olney; and you are very dear to me that way—but—but that is all."

"But why? then why if you feel that way—if you love me——?"

He paused at a loss for words and it was strange to her to see him at a loss.

"But I don't love you—I couldn't love you in that way."

All at once his face became dark with passion; and when he spoke his voice was hoarse and the words came jerkily.

"It's that Britisher, I believe, blast him; you're in love with him. We are none of us good enough here for you now. But I'll pay him out and I'll pay you out too; and I'll get even on Ted. You've both of you turned your backs on me. You think he's rich and young and stylish with his baggy pants and his high-flown airs; but you'll see yet where you come off at with him. He doesn't care a rap for you—he——"

"You need not say any more, Olney," she interrupted, her head raised high and her face pale, "for I shall not listen to you. Your knock on the head must have made you mad to say such things."

"Oh, it must have made me mad, must it," he sneered. "Well, we'll see. If I am mad, you and Ted had better look out for me; for I am not going to be treated so after the way I have slaved here for your father and you when I might have been elsewhere, making good money for myself."

"I must go in now, Olney," she said. "You needn't come with me for you have told me enough."

She turned quickly away and walked back towards the house leaving him standing looking after her. When she came to the corral her thoughts were distracted by a somewhat animated scene.

The place was in a hubbub very different from its usual peacefulness. Ted, Alistair and Paul Palliser, the chore boy, and Sing were all racing around in the hitherto vain endeavour to chase a large boar into a pen where a still larger one was being fattened for the butcher. The bigger one had been cribbed off at one end of the pen by a large board put across and wedged tightly in place and the door thrown open to let the smaller one in. The latter, however, had shown decided objections to the loss of his freedom. He had broken out of the field where he was kept and wandered into the corral where he had been making a nuisance of himself. Now all the available strength of man and boy power had been mustered to put him where he would be out of mischief for the time being. As he weighed about four hundred pounds and was astonishingly nimble and fleet for his size, the problem of his capture was proving a difficult one.

"Come on and give us a hand, Lorraine," called out Ted as he saw his sister approaching. "This old grunter is about as stubborn a case as I ever saw. We are just rounding him up for another try."

She took hold of the stick which he handed her. Little Paul Palliser and Sing, the Chinaman, were now driving

the immense animal up again towards the door of the pen with lusty whacks of their sticks. Three times already they had had it with its nose looking in where they wanted it to go; and three times, at the very moment when they thought they had achieved success, it had turned and with a rush and an indignant snort had pierced through their line. Its weight and tusks were such that no one dared to put himself right in the beast's way.

Lorraine was glad of the distraction from her thoughts and readily lined up with the others; and whether it was because of her reinforcement or that the boar had made up his mind that he might as well give in, this time he allowed himself to be driven inside. The door was at once closed behind him.

The larger animal, meanwhile, when it saw this stranger intruding into its quarters seemed to bristle with rage and quickly broke down the barrier that had been set up to keep it in one part of the pen. It looked for a moment as if there would be a battle royal, for the beast, which must have weighed about five or six hundred pounds, rushed upon the newcomer with its tusks bared as if it would have torn it to pieces. The latter was greatly frightened and squealed loudly with terror; but he had the courage and sense to keep his face to his enemy. The bigger beast stopped short apparently too prudent to risk battle while the other showed fight; and there the two stood, muzzle to muzzle, their tusks bared, their jowls frothy with foam, and their malignant little eyes full of hate. The smaller beast was squealing as loudly as he could and made no secret of his fear while the larger was roaring with rage but in a deeper key, so that the noise of the duet was appalling. Then the smaller would make a rush to the other end of the pen followed by the bigger one, still too prudent to risk the issue; and there they would stand for a time making pandemonium, with their cries.

Ted and Sing and the boy had all moved away having no further interest in the matter now that they had accomplished what was needed, and Lorraine found herself stand-

ing alone with Alistair. He, like herself, had been in a manner fascinated by the sight of the animals and their fury. There was something revolting and horrible in the intensity of their rage, so brutal and bestial.

"Aren't they awful?" she said with a shudder as her eyes met his. "Just because the big one had a hundred pounds more of brawn and fat, he is scaring the other nearly to death; and yet after all he is afraid to jump on him, for he knows that even if he won, he wouldn't get off scot-free."

"It is the way of the world I am afraid," Alistair replied.

"That is true," she said sadly. "I believe that some men are just as cruel as those brutes;" and she shuddered again.

Alistair, glancing at her face, saw that it was clouded with deep depression, it might be fear, and he wondered. The boars had suddenly ceased their wild clamour though they still glared at each other watchfully.

"You should not think of such problems though. Surely you have not yet had them thrust upon your notice, sheltered as you have been."

"Have I not?" and she laughed a low laugh that had no mirth in it. "I am not so sure of that."

Her mind was upon what Layburn had just said to her; while Alistair thought that perhaps she was thinking of himself and the mortgage and how he had forced himself upon them.

"Perhaps you consider me in that category?"

"No," she disclaimed quickly; "not at present at least. I had someone else in mind. Not but what, perhaps, I have at other times thought of you somewhat in that way; perhaps I was wrong in that. I—I have not had much experience of life yet; and perhaps—perhaps I am not now so sure of my judgment as I was."

She was speaking in an intimate way, half to herself and half to him and her thoughts were busy. She was contrasting the two men, Layburn whom until lately she had liked and admired, and this stranger, whom she had

despised and hated. Was Mr. Kilgour as bad as she had thought? She had begun to doubt it and to think that she had been mistaken regarding him. She felt that he had qualities that made him in a manner akin to her; and she was conscious of his sympathy now when she was troubled over Olney's threats and she needed sympathy. Her aunt was right, she reflected; he had a nice face and his eyes were kindly.

Alistair knew that she was in trouble of some kind and he felt a longing to comfort her; but it was absurd for him to think of such a thing, he told himself. Was he not irrevocably in disgrace with her? He imagined that her depression had something to do with Layburn's return; and he had guessed that the two were engaged. It was probably a lover's quarrel and he himself the cause of it. Layburn was jealous, no doubt. Well, there was no need for that.

"I am afraid that your cousin is annoyed that you are still harbouring me in spite of my quarrel with him and its consequences. Would it help matters if I went away for a week or two? I hate to be the cause of any serious breach between you if it can be avoided."

She looked at him for a moment or two without reply moved by his consideration for her. She had not expected it from him. When she did speak it was without hesitation.

"No," and she raised her head with spirit, "though I thank you sincerely for the offer. He shall not dictate to me. He has no right. It was good of you to make the suggestion, and I do appreciate it, indeed. At the same time—" and she smiled at him, her lips twitching with a touch of mischief—"at the same time, if you had made it a fortnight ago, I should, I am afraid, have accepted it with alacrity."

With a faint salutation she turned and walked towards the house leaving him to his thoughts.

CHAPTER XXX

THE great day of the Rexham Fair came at last and the weather was bright and balmy. Great preparations had been taking place all over the district within a radius of twenty miles or so, and at many a lone homestead and ranch, horses and cows and pigs found themselves for days or even weeks the object of most unusual attentions, groomings and cleansings often of the most bothersome and unwelcome kind.

Soon after sunrise, numerous little cavalcades had already started out; for some had to come many miles, and certain animals to be exhibited could not proceed any faster than a walk. To the people living around Duck Lake, however, such an early start was not necessary for it was only about six miles to the Fair Grounds; but all the same, at every ranch house and stableyard there was plenty of bustle and stir. Inshallah was no exception to the general rule and Alistair found himself affected by the holiday atmosphere prevailing. Actually at the breakfast table he found himself drawn into the discussion as to the merits of some of the animals showing in the various events; for, even in spite of the short time he had been in the district, he had already got to know something about the best mounts and their riders. He was looking forward to the day with much interest, not only for the novelty of the celebration but because he already knew so many that were taking part.

Even the auspiciousness of the occasion, however, had not altogether dispelled the restraint that had become habitual to the company around the table; and it was plain enough to Alistair that neither Lorraine nor Ted was going forth with a mind that was free from care. Olney Layburn had not put in an appearance at all but had

taken his breakfast with the men; and Lorraine, after remarking on his absence to her aunt, had relapsed for the moment into a fit of abstraction in which it was plain that her thoughts were by no means pleasant. Soon, however, she rallied her spirits and began to discuss with Ted the best tactics by which to make Pronto win the mile race. For Ted was to be the jockey and the making of his outfit of blue and silver had occupied the girl's spare hours for several evenings. In spite of the fact that he had been looking forward to this race for some time, however, the boy appeared depressed; and he replied to Alistair's good-natured jokes and teasing, at times with a kind of nervous hilarity and again with a forced smile and a constrained manner, which soon caused the latter to desist and turn his remarks to Lorraine.

Here, he had little better success. The girl was sick at heart for fear that Ted would be led away by the hotel crowd with which he had become hail-fellow-well-met, and begin drinking again. Her cousin's threat was still ringing in her ears; and she knew that this was the day of all days in which Ted stood in worst danger of being led back into his folly. From past experience of the Fair she was well aware of the drinking and fighting that went on amongst the rough element. So she feared that it would be extremely likely in the excitement of the various events and the general hilarity that prevailed, for all Ted's good resolutions, to which he had stood stoutly ever since the night of his thrashing from Mr. Kilgour, to suffer disaster.

"Promise me, Ted, that you won't drink to-day whatever happens, whether you win the race or lose," his sister pleaded anxiously. "I know how hard it is to refuse people when they only want to be kind but if you promise me, it will be ever so much easier. All that bad crowd will be there and they will like nothing better than to get you back amongst them."

"Of course, Sis, I won't take anything; you needn't be afraid. I hate the stuff anyway," said Ted in as matter-of-fact a tone as he could muster. He was thinking that

Lorraine might have known better than to ask him before the others, especially Alistair.

"I'll have money up on you, you know, Ted," Alistair said jokingly, appreciating the lad's embarrassment and wishing to relieve it; "and I'll expect you to do the very best you can for me. I know Pronto's a good horse and I know he's to be backed by a good jockey."

"What about betting on Miss Pelton's driving horse?" retorted Ted with a grin. "You'd better put your money on him instead."

Miss Pelton was to drive Tuto, the Thibaults' fine roadster in the Driving Horse Class, and had arranged to take Alistair to the Fair with her. He had been over more than once to lunch or dinner at the Thibaults and had become quite intimate with them and their boarder.

"Oh, that's hardly a sporting event, my boy. If Miss Pelton were entered for the races, I certainly would have a bet on her, but she isn't you see. I do hope she wins though. I hear that Monte is to enter the bending race. What would you advise as to my taking a bet on him?"

"I don't know; it might be all right," said Ted uncomfortably; but all the light had died out of his face which flushed red with embarrassment. The mention of Monte had brought up his suspicions; and Alistair's jocular attempt only terrified the boy with the thought that the other was playing on his fears before it was his pleasure to let the blow fall.

Alistair on his part was quite at a loss to know what caused the sudden change and hastened to turn his attention to Lorraine. However, she had noticed Ted's embarrassment, too, and, although unconscious, like Alistair, as to the reason for it, he found it reflected to some extent on her face as well.

"I think that you would stand a good chance to bet on Monte, Mr. Kilgour," said Miss Paget coming to the rescue; "for desperado or no, he is the real thing in the cowboy. I've seen him with the lasso; and if he can ride as well as he can rope, he will be able to give a

good account of himself with the men around here. These Montana riders are hard to beat."

"It is too bad that you can't come along with us," Alistair returned; "but I suppose it is impossible for you to get away on account of Mr. De Roche."

"Yes, but I shall hear all about it from you when you come back," was the reply. "I shall get all the pleasure in that way without any of the dust and fatigue of which there is always a good deal."

For all she spoke so cheerfully, the good lady would have dearly liked to have been there.

The breakfast was soon over, for there was no time to linger. Alistair went out with Ted to see him saddle Pronto and put the finishing touches. It was a holiday for the men and they had already mostly all disappeared from the corral and the bunkhouse. Even little Paul Palliser had long since finished his chores and had vanished.

Lorraine was to ride Ted's horse while Ted was to ride Pronto. Olney was to make his own arrangements as he had refused to allow himself to be counted in on their plans.

He was hitching up the driving mare, Winnie, to the buggy as Ted and Alistair came across the corral; and he looked up from the strap he was buckling with a smile that was somewhat mocking.

"Still in leading strings, I see, Ted my boy, eh? See that you don't have a relapse before the wings begin to sprout. They mostly do, but, I guess, you'll be the exception."

"Don't be afraid, Olney; we can't all be as good as you," Ted retorted, flushing painfully, however. "You aren't going to ride to-day?"

"No, I'm not, and maybe it'd be better for you, kid, if you weren't either. Take care you don't come a cropper with your fine new friends, that's all: the old ones aren't so stylish, maybe, but they're likely to wear better."

"You think I'll come a cropper in the race, do you?" the boy asked quickly with white lips. Such a contingency

had no fears for him; but he dreaded that the words contained a more sinister prophecy, nor did Olney's reply reassure him.

"Oh, I meant a worse kind of cropper than that," said Olney, smiling darkly again as he flicked the reins on Winnie's back and drove off, leaving his words to rankle.

"Olney is sore," was all Ted remarked to Alistair, trying to carry the situation off lightly though his heart was heavy. Monte had warned him of the danger that lay in his intercourse with Kilgour, and now here was Olney doing it, too.

As for Alistair he was at a loss what to say. It was plain enough that he was the object of Olney's innuendoes.

"Yes, I suppose that it isn't to be wondered at that he doesn't like me very much," he said at last rather lamely. "Don't let him make you ashamed of keeping away from the toughs though, Ted."

"Not much," said Ted; but his tone lacked heartiness. "There's Miss Pelton come for you," he added, glad of anything that would terminate the interview.

"Well, I'll see you later," said Alistair moving off.

"So long," returned Ted with a wave of the hand.

Miss Pelton had pulled up her horse and buggy at the front door and Lorraine had come out and was standing talking with her. She went back into the house, however, on Alistair's approach.

Miss Pelton smiled brightly at him.

"Are you all ready," she said, pulling on one rein of the big bay so as to crank the wheel and make it easy for Alistair to climb in. "I think I'll let you drive him and keep myself fresh; for he is keen as mustard this morning and wants to fly. My arms are tired already holding him in."

She was looking very charming and fresh and blushed even rosier than she had been before under the intentness of Alistair's gaze. Perhaps, he suffered it to rest a little longer than common politeness would have allowed, before taking his seat beside her and the reins from her hands.

"Lorraine does not look very gay this morning," said Miss Pelton when they had got outside the gate and were trotting slowly along the lakeside. "What have you been doing to her?"

"I, oh, nothing worse than usual. My presence is a continual damper, no doubt, a sort of skeleton at the feast. We are rather a glum trio, at present—the girl, Layburn and myself—and poor Miss Paget has a sorry time with us all, I fear. But let us talk of something cheerful, yourself, for instance. What are the chances of your winning the prize with Tuto?"

They chatted pleasantly all the way and the time did not seem long before they found themselves drawing close to the Fair Grounds. Many were the vehicles and rigs of all kinds to be seen on the road. Everyone seemed exuberantly happy, if dusty, and salutations greeted Miss Pelton from all directions, while many a sly glance was directed at Alistair and many a side remark was made as to the teacher's beau. The girl's colour heightened as they drew in at the gateway to the Fair Grounds and they had to run the gantlet of many curious eyes while the horse was pulled up and Alistair paid the entry money to the gatekeeper. He himself was not unmoved and hardly knew whether he felt pleased or annoyed at the significance that was being placed on the fact of their being in company.

CHAPTER XXXI

THOUGH it was still comparatively early and not a third of the people had arrived, yet the scene was already an animated one. The grounds were almost ideal for the purpose of a Fair. Sheltered in the lee of a grassy mound or hillock about three hundred feet high, they stretched out in a wide park-like plain that commanded a fine view of distant hill-tops beyond the intervening stretches of pasture and grain fields dotted with cottonwood and bullpines. Underneath the hillock, a long one-story wooden erection provided housing for the cattle and another beyond it was the dancing hall also used for a lunch-room. In front of this on the other side of the half-mile track, was the judges' stand where from the little booth below, a man was giving out programmes.

Among the people scattered about the grounds, Indians were as much in evidence as white people for this was their great day. Both men and women showed their racial fondness for colour and went about resplendent in blues and purples and crimsons and greens. In the men, this was largely confined to the silk cowboy handkerchief about their necks; but with the women it applied to the whole costume, which was often gaudy in the extreme, the bright-hued garments contrasting oddly with the dull copper of their hands and faces.

It was now about ten o'clock and the judges were already on the ground. Apparently the draught horses were being inspected, and there were a number of fine-looking animals with their manes and tails gaily decorated with coloured ribbon being led around in a circle by proud but anxious owners. The two judges stood in the centre scrutinising each of them carefully. Then in turn the animals were lined up and inspected again both from front and from

rear and from the side, until finally the decision was arrived at and the blue and red and yellow flags were handed out to the winners. It was on the whole not a very lively business and there were but few spectators taking any interest.

Lorraine and Ted had joined Miss Pelton and Alistair and stood beside the buggy watching the proceedings. They were both on foot having stabled their horses in a shed where by special favour a place had been reserved for them.

Lorraine was wearing a neat grey riding suit with a skirt divided but which could be fastened in front when she was not in the saddle. This was its first appearance and she and Ted made a pleasing couple to look at.

The next class was the ladies' saddle horses for which there were eight entries and this was more interesting. Both the mounts and their riders were of widely different appearance, the former ranging from the big, upstanding hunter down to the rough but hardy native type, short and stout-legged but nimble and quick; the latter varied just as greatly from Mrs. Kendall, a dignified horsewoman in correct riding habit and stiff black hat, riding side-saddle to girls in their teens riding astride in stocksaddles with short dresses, their black-stockinged legs pressing tightly into the sides of their mounts, but thoroughly well-pleased with themselves and enjoying the importance and the dignity of their position as exhibitors.

First of all they kept to a walk and then the judge commanded "T-r-r-rot," with military ferocity. Immediately the whole circle started, many of the smaller horses in their excitement breaking into the more natural lope and being with difficulty pulled out of it again into the more sober trot. When the command "canter-r-r" came, more than one straw hat or sunbonnet was blown from the wearer's head to the back of her neck where it hung ungracefully held by its elastic band; but the riders did not seem to mind at all and galloped on quite unconcerned, bent on showing their mounts to the best advantage. Here, it was clearly a

case where not millinery but horseflesh was to count; and the keen-visioned judges had no eyes for anything else. It was amusing to watch the different attitudes in the saddle and the different idiosyncrasies of pose. Some bent well forward while others leaned back easily and there was great passing and repassing. One little girl, she with the black-stockinged legs, was always getting in the way of the other riders. Her mount was slower than any on the field and there were many black looks as horses were pulled hastily up in their stride and narrowly escaped collision on account of her awkwardness. Great was her disappointment when finally the prizes were given, the first to Mrs. Kendall, the tall middle-aged lady on the big hunter and the second to a fiery little bay ridden by a small woman in a khaki suit of divided skirts. She saw that her horse had been completely passed by, had not even been put in the centre to be unsaddled and inspected with the others. Then, with downcast face, she came out to join a small group looking on, evidently her father and mother and little brother, struggling homesteaders it was easy to see from their appearance, even in their holiday attire, which was pathetically plain and poor.

"Ain't you goin' to get a prize, Liz?" asked the small boy anxiously.

"I guess not, Ronnie," said the little girl smiling bravely to hide her disappointment. "Flossie ain't stylish enough to show against all them fine, big horses."

"I guess we'll have to put her back to the plough, Liz," said the father with kindly pleasantry, patting the plump black-stockinged leg affectionately, while the mother, a slight, fragile woman with pleasant but tired-looking face, stood looking on saying nothing but with a wistful look in her eyes.

"I know that little girl," said Miss Pelton, as the group moved off a short distance; "she used to come to the school; but the mother was taken sick and they had to take her away, to help at home. They live back in the hills somewhere."

"I never saw them before. They can't have been very long in the district. Go over and speak to her, Amy, why don't you? Tell her what a fine horse she has and that she ought to have got a prize," said Lorraine, who had plainly been moved by the little scene. Alistair, watching her face soften to pity, was struck with the sweetness of its expression. "She would think so much of a word or two from you. Little girls nearly always adore their teacher—at least, so often they do, especially in the country where she is apt to be a sort of goddess to the little kiddies that have never seen much."

Miss Pelton looked at her a trifle coldly. She was very well satisfied there sitting in the buggy with Alistair standing by her and she thought that perhaps Lorraine was trying to get a chance herself for a little tête-à-tête.

"Oh, I think you overrate the kiddies' admiration for us," she said. "Besides she was only there for a week or two and I don't know the parents at all. I hardly think it is necessary. There are quite a number besides her who have been disappointed. I may be needing consolation myself in a little while," and she changed the subject.

A moment later, Mrs. Kendall, the lady who had won the first prize came over with her husband and a friend to speak to Miss Pelton and Lorraine and receive their congratulations. After being introduced to them, Alistair, to whom had come a sudden whim born of Miss De Roche's suggestion, managed to slip away and walked over to one of the stewards, a little smart-looking young Englishman.

"There's a little girl over there, who is very disappointed at not getting a prize," said Alistair smiling apologetically; "and I wondered if you would mind giving her this five-dollar bill and telling her that it is a special prize awarded to her horse—you might call it a third prize, if you liked, seeing that there were only two given. Of course, don't by any chance tell her where it came from."

The man took the bill and smiled back at him.

"Sure, I'll be delighted to do that. I noticed the little girl; but you know that she had no chance at all with that

poor little runt of hers. I'll make her believe it is a pure reward of merit. Trust me;" and he hastened off.

As Alistair hurried to rejoin the group around Miss Pelton he saw that Lorraine had left it and gone over herself to speak to the little girl. She was now patting her pony's nose and making friends with the parents. No one save Miss Pelton had noticed his short absence and he was able to slip into his place in the group without remark. In a few minutes Lorraine returned evidently highly elated.

"What do you think, Amy," she said, her eyes eloquent with pleasure. "Mr. Ducie came over as I was talking to the people and said that it had been decided to award the little girl's horse a special prize of five dollars on account of its fine conformation. You should have just seen her face when he said that. It was a picture, so full of pride; and the old people were just about as pleased. I think that it was very good of the judges. I suppose five dollars will be almost a fortune for her to spend."

"Don't you think though that it is bolstering up inferiority to give a prize where it is not deserved?" asked Alistair quizzically, afraid that by any chance the act might be ascribed to him. "It is evident that the pony was the worst-bred animal in the whole class!"

Lorraine looked at him but remained silent; and when he saw the hurt expression in her eyes, he was sorry he had said it. Somehow, although she had often been rude to him and had for the most part treated him with scant courtesy, he did not like to have her think that his words could possibly be serious.

"She is only a little girl and if she is made happy I'm sure the giving her a prize is not going to affect the quality of horseflesh very seriously in the next generation," said Mrs. Kendall severely looking at Alistair with a withering smile. "I am sure I should have been glad to have given her my prize."

"I'll bet that Mr. Kilgour was only pulling your leg," said Ted feeling sorry for Alistair in being so sat upon. Mrs. Kendall was a large imposing sort of woman with

dark, heavy eyebrows that met in the centre. She had an air of finality in what she said that, as a rule, left no appeal. They had a very large ranch and were people of consequence in the district.

"Not at all," returned Alistair refusing to be thus defended and taking up the cudgels with Mrs. Kendall. "Charity is one thing and reward of merit is another. It might be all right for you to give the little girl the money you got for your prize; but for the authorities to award it and stamp it with their certificate as it were, seems to me a piece of foolish sentimentality and indicates poor judgment on their part. However, there was certainly no doubt about the merit in the case of your horse, Mrs. Kendall," he said, breaking away from a continuance of the controversy. "He is a very fine animal, indeed, and you must be proud of him."

The conversation passed again into commonplaces, but Alistair surprised Lorraine looking at him curiously. He wondered as to what she was thinking. Had he known it the girl was trying to determine in her own mind whether he had been speaking in jest or in earnest. In spite of her dislike of him, in spite of the masterfulness of his manner towards her and their frequent passages at arms, she acknowledged to herself that at times she felt a something in him that attracted her in spite of herself. The sensation had a mingling in it of piquancy as well as of uneasiness.

It was soon time for Miss Pelton to take her place in competition for the "Lady's Single Driver." Tuto arched his neck proudly as he was driven into the ring and the Inshallah party were delighted when Miss Pelton was given the blue ribbon.

By this time, Mr. and Mrs. Thibault had come over from the pavilion where they had gone first to deposit the eatables which the latter had contributed as her quota to the refreshment committee. They were just in time to receive, along with Miss Pelton, the general congratulations on Tuto's winning the prize. Mr. Trelawny had also put in an appearance as the Thibaults had invited him

to join them at their picnic lunch. The whole party, with Miss Pelton and Alistair leading in the buggy, now made their way over past the pavilion and the ice-cream and lemonade booths around which there were great crowds of Indians and children, to the lee of the hill. Here among some small brush there were good places to tie the horses and to light a fire and boil water for the tea. There were several other parties scattered about that had already begun their cooking operations; but there was still room enough for comfort.

Ted helped Alistair to unhitch Tuto while Mr. Trelawny busied himself with the girls and Mrs. Thibault in lighting a fire and unpacking the luncheon from the democrat. There was soon a fine spread of good things laid out and when the tea had been made they all sat down on the grass or on convenient stumps. Mrs. Thibault had invited the Applebys, who had unhitched their wagon near by, to join them; and there was Mrs. Appleby, resplendent in a purple bonnet, looking rather hot and tired but her face beaming with happiness. Sam and Eliza were there too with faces dirty and sticky on account of some popcorn candy which they had been eating, and Herb, looking bashful in the presence of so many grown-ups.

The people were now beginning to come in crowds for it was the races in the afternoon that attracted the town-folk; and the road coming in from Kamloops was now dotted with autos.

"It's going to be a splendid day and the biggest crowd I've ever seen here," said Mr. Trelawny. "You'll have quite a triumph, Ted, you and Lorraine, if you win the one-mile."

"I doubt there isn't much chance," said Ted; "but we'll do our best, Pronto and I. Lorraine will get twenty plunks, won't she? She ought to give me a new hat on the strength of it out of the prize money, don't you think so?"

"You win the race and then it'll be time enough to figure out what Lorraine ought to give you," said that young lady.

"Carry my colours to victory first. One would think that it was the spoils rather than the glory you were after."

"Oh, no, it's the glory that Ted's after," said Mrs. Thibault as she busied herself in cutting up a large lemon pie; "but, no doubt, he thinks that he would like to get some of the spoils, too, and I don't blame him."

"Where is your cousin, Olney, to-day, Lorraine?" Mrs. Thibault asked. "I haven't seen him around at all. He used to be so jolly on occasions like this that I quite miss him."

"I don't know where he is but I think that he is here somewhere," said Lorraine, slightly embarrassed at the question. "He came by himself in the buggy and I suppose that he must be taking lunch inside with some of his friends."

"I see he's one of the judges of the racing," said Mr. Trelawny. "It's one-thirty now, and I notice that they are lining up for the parade of horses. It is pretty near time we were clearing away and getting ready; for I don't want to miss any of it. Will you take me, two to one against Pronto, Miss Lorraine?"

"You surely wouldn't expect me to bet against my own horse, would you?"

"Well, it might help you to bear up, if Pronto is defeated, you know. It would be a sort of consolation prize; and if you won you would never grudge paying your bet to me."

"Ladies don't pay their bets anyway, as a rule," said Miss Pelton; "so it would be a pretty safe thing, Lorraine. You're losing a golden opportunity. He'd never take it from you if he won and if you won he would pay you."

"Oh, but I would pay sure enough if I lost. I don't believe in betting at all if you can't take your medicine if you lose. I'm afraid that we shall have to go to the pavilion now, Amy and I, for we promised to help with the dish-washing for an hour or so. The Ladies' Auxiliary have the catering affair in hand to raise some money to try to pay off a part of the Fair Association debt and we have to do our little share, haven't we, Amy?"

"I suppose we must then," said Miss Pelton but with evident reluctance. "Imagine what it must be like in that stuffy place washing dishes on a day like this. We'll have your sympathy at least, Mr. Kilgour, won't we?"

"Indeed you will," was the ready reply.

"You might be around about half-past two and let us go up on the hill behind where we can see the whole field stretched out below us," she said to Alistair. "Will you come up too, Lorraine?"

"No indeed," said Lorraine quickly; "at least not until Ted's race is over; for I want to be as close as I can and see how he gets off and how they finish. There is so much in a good start, Ted, isn't there? And sometimes some of them are not very fair about it."

It was not so much to watch the interests of her pony that Lorraine was anxious about if the truth were told but to keep an eye on Ted himself. Olney Layburn's half-veiled threat was never out of her mind, and she would gladly have taken her horse out of the race if she could have got her brother away out of the danger of a return to his old habits.

She was thankful when the meal was over and she could escape with Miss Pelton in the direction of the pavilion to assist in the dish-washing bee that had already started inside.

CHAPTER XXXII

IT is delightful up here," said Alistair; "the whole Fair spread out at one's feet. It is an ideal place from which to view the races away from all the dust and the crowd and the unpleasantness."

The hour of dish washing promised by Miss Pelton to the Ladies' Auxiliary having been duly performed, she and Alistair had climbed up the steep bluff at the back of the pavilion almost to the top and had seated themselves on a convenient rock whence they could view to advantage the whole Fair Grounds below as well as the magnificent vista beyond them.

"Yes," replied Miss Pelton enthusiastically. "Distant enough to lend the enchantment and near enough for one to see all one wants to see."

"Can you pick out any of your friends amongst the crowd?"

"Yes, a great many of them, though one has to peer somewhat closely to distinguish them. I imagine that it is easier for them down there to recognise us here than for us, them. Perhaps it would have been better had we chosen a less conspicuous place. We might have gone a little higher up so as to be over the brow and they wouldn't see us then."

"Does it matter?"

"It may not for you, but the school teacher is a public character and is always under surveillance. A girl has to be so careful. You see, Mr. Jenks' evidence at the court the other day made a lot of silly talk."

Miss Pelton stopped suddenly as if she had repented what she had said and began tracing patterns with the point of her parasol on the grass in front of her while her cheeks glowed with the clear pink to which they were

susceptible. So Alistair glancing sideways had a revelation that she was deeply moved apart from her tone and the words themselves. He felt somewhat of a thrill himself and it was a new experience to him. He had never been on such confidential terms with a girl before and the situation held an element of piquancy as well as a soupçon of panic. The meaning of the disclosure that had slipped from her flashed through his mind in a moment and filled it with astonishment. He had never dreamed that the evidence that Jenks had given before the justices would have been connected up with Miss Pelton or could have been used to cause her any annoyance.

"Surely there was nothing in that which would cause people to talk, and anyway why should they connect you with it?" he hastened to ask.

"Oh, well, they found out that I was the girl and they have made up all sorts of stories about it—the women-folk, that is, for some of them don't like me. But it doesn't signify at all and I didn't mean to mention it—I'm sorry. It doesn't matter anyway. Why should I mind what they say so long as it isn't true. This will be my last term here for Father says I must stop teaching and go 'back to my proper sphere' as he says. He never was in favour of me doing any actual teaching, anyway, although he thought that it was a good thing to take out my certificate. The trustees want me to stay so that it isn't that I haven't made good."

"I am very sorry," said Alistair; "I seem to make trouble with everyone? I'll be extremely careful the next time I have occasion to stay in a hotel. As you say, though, there is no use minding the silly gossip that goes around and a day like this is too perfect to spoil by talking about it."

"They are getting ready for Ted's race at last," Miss Pelton burst out excitedly, "and there's Ted on Pronto riding across from near the pens there. I do hope the boy wins, both for his own sake and Lorraine's. She is just wrapped up in that horse and I don't wonder at it. I suppose that she could get big money for him."

"Yes, he's a fine animal and he is fast. One would hardly realise it until one has seen him going. Ted rides well, too, although I suppose he has not had much experience as a jockey and that counts in a race like this."

The riders had all now gathered in front of the judges' stand and there was a great deal of wheeling and turning amongst them as the excited animals were jockeyed about, throwing up clouds of dust that mounted into the stand and covered the populace around. There were ten entries, six of them horses owned and ridden by Indians. Kendall had put in a beautiful thoroughbred roan called "Strawberry" from its colour; and his foreman, a little man named Wilkes, who had ridden on the turf in the old country and was a crack jockey, was riding it for him. In racing experience there was no doubt that he was ahead of all the other riders, Indians and white men. Strawberry and a bay horse called Bellman owned and ridden by a half-breed Pete Smail, were the chief favourites, Pete was in a kind of partnership with Layburn in a quarter-section of land at Blake's Meadows, a fine piece of open range about seven miles away. Pete stayed on the place and Layburn was a kind of sleeping partner although he went over there once a week or so. The two men had now a good bunch of cattle. They had begun with only a few beasts; but since they had started in soon after Layburn's arrival in the district they had never sold any and their stock had increased rapidly.

Pete had a passion for racing and this horse was as the apple of his eye. He had been bragging all day about how he was going to win. The horse was certainly a beautiful animal and his coat shone like a piece of polished red granite.

The Indians nearly all backed Bellman; and with the whites, although most favoured Strawberry there was a considerable following that backed Pronto. His conformation however, was considered by those who were thought the most knowing to be rather too stocky for a race-horse. Not many had seen him running, however, and those who had

had been surprised at the way he stretched himself out when on the go. There was no suggestion of stockiness then, they declared.

Pronto was behaving well although the temptation to cut up amongst this seething crowd of straining, pawing horses was considerable. However, he seemed to know the importance of the occasion and the necessity to save his strength for the struggle before him. Ted sat on his back, slim and elegant in his natty costume and the two made a pleasing picture, the smooth-cheeked lad with his fresh complexion contrasting strangely with his swarthy Indian competitors, heavy and stolid of feature. He was nervous, for it was his first race, but, at least, he was resolved to do his best.

Wilkes beside him seemed cool and composed and his mount too, under his steady hand seemed to have no energy to waste on fruitless jibbing and straining. Strawberry was a good-dispositioned horse while Bellman was moody and had an uncertain temper which made his running less reliable. The latter to-day, however, seemed to be well in control.

Twice the gun fired and the horses were off to a false start and had to be recalled, but the third time they got away well in a fairly compact bunch. Gradually these, however, spread out into a line that grew steadily longer as the better horses pulled away in front and the intervals between the animals became greater. Pronto with his blue and silver rider had kept third place almost from the start. Strawberry was in the lead and Bellman close behind him. Wilkes was riding in red and white and the half-breed's colours were yellow and green. The two men thought now that they had the race between themselves, for Ted was fully ten lengths behind, and already they had covered the second furlong. Both horses were doing their best and they had not, since soon after the start, changed their relative distances much.

When they came to the far side of the circle, the furlong post, Bellman was still about two lengths behind Straw-

berry and Ted on Pronto was still about ten lengths behind Bellman, Ted was beginning to feel that as far as he was concerned the race would be lost. Pronto was going well and steadily but he did not gain at all; and he seemed to be doing his best. Ted felt sorry for Lorraine but it could not be helped. At the same time it was gloriously exciting with the air rushing past furiously.

Near the judges stand, Lorraine, standing on a chair that had been lent her, followed the race with anxious eyes and saw with disappointment that Pronto was not making up on the others. Still she did not despair and she felt that the last part of his race might be the best part for he had great wind and staying power.

The crowd around her was electric with excitement and many were the shouts of encouragement and exclamations causing a veritable babel of voices that increased as the race drew on. They were nearing the six furlong post now and suddenly Pronto had caught up within four lengths of Bellman and Strawberry, which were now neck and neck. Pete Smail's heart jumped when he saw the roan alongside of him and his eyes caught for a flash those of Wilkes and sensed their triumph. Pete's Indian blood boiled and a rage, intensified perhaps by the thought of the ancient enmities of his Indian forefathers and their wrongs, made him forget his customary prudence in the mad resolve that this man should not beat him. He forgot the fierce temper of his horse and its tendency to sulk at punishment. He raised his whip and brought it down with a vicious lash. Wilkes watching him brought his down simultaneously on Strawberry for he would not run the chance of dropping behind again. Strawberry needed plenty of the whip at the finish to get the best out of him, his rider knew and he did not spare it. Both horses answered bravely to the stimulus, Bellman swerving a little in resentment but though sulky still going well.

Ted behind had seen the uplifted arms and followed suit with Pronto with a light cut that would serve, he knew, to make the horse do his best. It was now or never.

They were past the six furlong post and on the home stretch. Around the stand the crowd had gone crazy and were yelling with open mouths and waving their hats, Indians and white men cheering and calling to their champions. Away behind in the race six of the "also rans" were still coming on, but the others had ridden off the track seeming anxious to hide themselves and their tardy steeds from further notice.

The pace was furious and Ted was gaining. The cut of the whip seemed to have called out tremendous reserves of energy in Pronto. He was on the outside and he gradually crept up to within three lengths, then two lengths of the others who were galloping so close that there was not twelve inches space between stirrup and stirrup of their jockeys. Strawberry's nose was on a level with Bellman's shoulder. Pete was still lashing the latter cruelly and perhaps his policy of punishment had been the right one to follow for the horse was going nobly. Suddenly it found that Pronto had come up beside it and was running neck and neck just as the judges' stand was only a few score feet away. Furious with pain and mad with temper this new annoyance was too much for it to bear, and, wild to vent on something the fury it had been nursing, it bit out at Pronto's neck savagely. The only result was to increase the speed of the latter for this was too great for Bellman to get a hold or do much damage. The effort, however, proved Bellman's undoing for the lurch he made and the impact of his mouth on Pronto's neck was enough to destroy his balance and interfere in his stride, and with one or two frantic attempts to recover himself he fell with a tremendous crash right in front of the judge's stand. Then he only came in third for Pronto had swept on ahead and crossed the line with Strawberry a neck and shoulder behind him. Pete was thrown like a stone from a catapult straight ahead, missing Pronto's heels, as it seemed, by a miracle. He lay crumpled up in a sorry heap right in the centre of the track and was nearly trampled by one or two

of the other horses as they swept past opening out to right and left to avoid his prostrate figure.

The yells and cheers from the crowd had hushed in a moment to a great gasp of dismay and there was a rush, as is the way with crowds, to get close to the injured man who lay still where he had fallen. A doctor was at hand in a moment and a light motor delivery wagon was pressed into service to bear Pete away. Strangely enough the injured man's horse had picked himself up practically unhurt and was already being rubbed down by two solicitous attendants.

It was a sad ending to a splendidly contested race and Lorraine, with the rest, had been horror struck at the accident. Much of the pleasure of having Pronto win was destroyed for her.

Meanwhile Miss Pelton and Alistair had been watching with bated breath from their elevated station whence with admirable clearness they were able to see the whole affair. Their disappointment in the beginning to see Pronto keeping only third place, changed to keen excitement when they saw him after the half of the course had been run, creeping up closer on the two ahead.

"Good boy, Ted," cried Alistair at the finish when he saw that Pronto was abreast of the others. A moment later he had seen the accident and he stopped suddenly in his cheering.

"What a pity!" he said to his companion who, like himself, was shocked at the sight and together they hurried down the slope. Miss Pelton fain would have remained to continue the conversation which had just been promising to become interesting when this tiresome race had come in to interrupt it. Probably now she would not have another chance for a tête-à-tête until the drive home after the dance, to which she was looking forward.

They thrust and jostled their way through the crowd to where Ted and Pronto were together beyond the judges' stand, surrounded by a knot of friends and admirers; for

many were there, who wanted to get a closer look at the horse that had won the race.

Pronto, with a blanket thrown over his loins, submitted with indifference to the caresses offered him. The red, still showing in his nostrils, and his panting sides, bore witness to the strenuous race he had run. On his neck there was a slight abrasion where Bellman's teeth had left their mark.

Ted and Lorraine were standing by his head. The boy's eyes sparkled with elation as one or another would pat him on the back or speak a word or two of hearty congratulations. Lorraine looked proud also, proud both of her brother and her horse. Boy and girl made rather a striking picture as they stood together with their similarity of feature, both faces flushed in their excitement, the clear complexion which was a family feature, in Ted's case shining out even under the coating of the dust of the race which he had not had a chance to wash away. Pronto was slyly nuzzling Lorraine's little gloved hand for another lump of sugar.

Lorraine, forgetting for the moment the cloud that had been thrown over her horse's victory, was enjoying her little triumph to the full. To Alistair, whose congratulations she acknowledged with a graciousness unusual towards him, she showed herself in a more attractive light than ever before and he was struck by the poise and quietness of her manner to the people of all grades that spoke to her. Standing in the background, he was able to note how her greetings were just as friendly and genuine in the case of humble ranch hands she knew as with such people as the Kendalls who were among the social leaders of the community. Whatever were the girl's faults of temper or caprice, there was surely no snobbery in her disposition.

Mr. Kendall, who was judging along with Olney, had come over himself for a minute or two, and had brought with him two strangers. One was Mr. Stubbs, a stockdealer from Calgary who had been in the vicinity for a week buying horses to take home with him. He had already bought all he required and had two cars of horses ready to go on

the night freight train but had been glad of the chance to attend the Fair. The other was a Mr. Lancaster from Edmonton who had come to buy store cattle to stock a ranch he had purchased. With them was a Mr. Du Bois who was the brand inspector from Kamloops. He had ridden up with the dealer after inspecting the brands of the horses that the latter was shipping out.

It was most flattering to Ted to find himself referred to by these big men who asked him many questions about Pronto and commended highly the way he had ridden him, telling him that he was a born jockey. It was plain that Stubbs was much impressed by the horse and in a jocular way he asked what he could be purchased for; but Ted had evaded the question. Lorraine had been called away to be introduced to some friends of Mr. Kendall's who were sitting in their automobile nearby, so she did not hear the conversation. Such a thing as Lorraine selling Pronto was not to be thought of and Ted was too well aware of her feelings to suggest it to her. However, he did not say it was his sister's horse and the two hovered around the subject Ted willing enough to know what the dealer would offer for him and the other sparring with him in the way that dealers have all the world over.

So when Stubbs suggested that the best of the races was over and that Ted might ride quietly down with him and Du Bois to Garston, the boy flattered by the invitation, at once accepted. He knew that his sister would not want him to go but she was not there to object.

Alistair, however, stopped him a moment to ask where he was off to.

"I'm just going down to Garston with these chaps for an hour or so," said Ted. "Tell Lorraine I'll be back in plenty of time for the dance. She's going over to Kendall's but I don't want to go there. The races are pretty well through now and I'm tired of staying around here."

He was off without allowing Alistair a chance for expostulation.

When Lorraine returned after her short absence, to her

consternation both horse and boy had disappeared. She turned to Alistair and Miss Pelton in dismay for an explanation; and although she tried to hide her feelings, it was plain that she was distressed.

"He might have told me first," was all she said; but she looked reproachfully at Alistair, evidently thinking that he might have stopped Ted or given her some warning that he was going away.

Herb had been standing in the background keeping an eye on his friends although too bashful to stay very close to them and Alistair strolled quietly over to him.

"I want you to do something for me, Herb," he said. "Ted has gone down to Garston with those two men that were here. I hope that the boy will be all right but one never knows when there's whisky around and bad companions. Now I can't very well run after him but there is no reason, Herb, why I shouldn't send you down for twenty-five cents' worth of shoe laces—I'm giving you a dollar and you can buy yourself some candy after getting them. The rest of the dollar will give you entrance to the hotel where you can go and get some soda water; spend it all on soda water if you like so long as it's necessary to keep drinking it in order to give you an excuse to hang around. If Master Ted gets to drinking, I want you to let me know and I'll come down and fetch him myself. I don't want to go unless I have to; but I can't have that boy started on the road to ruin again. You'll find me either at the Kendalls'—they've asked us there to tea till it's time for the dance—or at the dance. You have my horse with you, haven't you? and you can ride him."

"Sure," said Herb nodding, delighted with his mission and he scampered off after secreting the money carefully in his handkerchief and stuffing it into his trousers pocket.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE Kendalls had invited the Inshallah party, Miss Pelton and Mr. Lancaster to their place nearby for dinner after the races.

They went there in the Kendalls' seven-passenger Cadillac and the dinner passed off very pleasantly, the host and hostess setting everyone at their ease. After dinner they sat out for a while on the wide verandah in front of the house and then drove down again in the motor to the hall, in the delightful cool of the evening.

The Fair Grounds were almost deserted for the crowd had nearly all gone home so that except around the hall itself the place looked quiet and peaceful. However, there was plenty of bustle of motors and buggies and wagons, vehicles of every description arriving.

Inside, the place had been made to look quite different from the appearance that it had presented during the day when it had been full of long tables and forms on which sat those who had depended on the Ladies' Auxiliary to allay their appetites. An orchestra of two fiddles and a piano was already tuning up at one end; and the floor had been plentifully waxed and was smooth and slippery. A number of couples were already up waiting for the music to start and in a moment they were all whirling around the room to the strains of a waltz.

Alistair had engaged Miss Pelton for the first dance and as soon as she emerged from the space that had been partitioned off for a dressing-room at one end of the place, they started off. He was not anxious to dance at all but felt that the girl would expect it. However, once they had started his indifference passed away. His partner was a

good dancer and his first nervousness as to his own performance soon vanished when he found that they kept excellent step and time together.

The first dance was the best for after that the floor soon became so crowded that it was difficult to navigate without bumping into someone or being bumped; and as the night went on, the behaviour of some of the men began to get rather hilarious and objectionable. Some of these had been drinking too much and were inclined to take liberties, not only with their own partners and immediate friends but with the people they did not know at all. Their idiosyncrasies were not much noticed until it came to the Lancers. In one set there was nearly a fight because one of the dancers, in turning his lady partners at the corners, would hardly let them go and wanted to embrace them with a thoroughness not at all called for by the ordinary exigencies of the dance. This almost led to a fight between the offender and the young men attending on the ladies who were the object of the inebriated one's attentions and the masters of ceremonies had to intervene. During the altercation, by common consent the dancing was halted. The matter was patched up and the music went on again; but at the end of the set, Miss Pelton who had been dancing it with Mr. Kendall came to Alistair to tell him that she would like to go home. Lorraine, who was with her, would have preferred to go too; but Ted who was her escort had not yet turned up and the girl was greatly worried about it. She had been much sought after by the young men and had never sat out a dance though her cousin Olney had not come near her all night. He had danced with Miss Pelton but had studiously kept away from Lorraine. She felt somewhat lonely and was a little disturbed when she knew that Alistair and Miss Pelton were going home. She would fain have gone too had it not been for her anxiety about Ted. She feared that the boy must have been drinking again or he would not have stayed away like this for it was now nearly nine o'clock.

Alistair divined what was troubling her and he might have offered to ride down to Garston to find Ted and

bring him back, only he had asked Lorraine to dance and she had refused him. This rebuff he had expected but had thought that it was a matter of courtesy to make the offer seeing that he was in a measure her guest.

Lorraine went with Miss Pelton to the dressing-room to ask her to stay for a while longer but Amy would not hear of it. She had counted too much upon this drive home with Mr. Kilgour to take chances of spoiling it by waiting too late. The evening was passing away and she wanted to make the most of it. There were few opportunities in such a room and such a crowd.

Alistair had gone to the door to wait there for Miss Pelton away from the rout of dancers when there crossed through the knot of loungers around it, a small boy very breathless. It was Herb and it was easy to see by the anxious, searching look in his eyes that he had news. They lighted up with relief when he saw Alistair. Quickly the latter drew the boy outside again into the cool night air.

"What's the news, Herb?"

"Oh, Mr. Kilgour, Ted's awful drunk again and he's gone away and sold Pronto to that man from Calgary. I couldn't get near him when I went down first—they were in one of the private rooms by themselves so I just hung around and waited as you said. I knew they must be drinkin' 'cos old Humpty would take 'em in booze every now and again; but I hoped as how mebbe Ted wouldn't be taking any. Then after a while they had some dinner taken in to them and still I waited outside and I could hear them laughin' an' havin' a good time an' I could hear Ted and he was laughin' louder than any of them but I thought that mebbe if he was comin' out I could get him to come home with me. I thought as mebbe I should have come and told you before but I thought I ought to wait and I kept on drinkin' them soda waters and eatin' crackers—for I got old Humpty to give me some, I was so hungry."

"Poor boy,—I should think you would be hungry. Well, what happened then?"

"Oh, pretty soon they came out, and it was then that I knew. They went right to the barn and took poor Pronto out and the brand inspector he examined the brand by the lantern. 'Yes, it's the Inshallah brand all right,' he said, and he made a note of it. 'I'll let you off the five cents you owe me on that one.' Then they led him over to the station and down to where the cattle corral is and Mr. Stubbs—that's the Calgary man—his cars of horses was lying there for they were just loaded up this afternoon. Ted saw me and, though he was pretty bad, he wasn't so drunk that he didn't notice me an' he says, 'What you doin' here, Herb, out so late? Your mother'll spank you when you get home.'

"'What you doing with Pronto,' I says?

"'Never you mind,' said he. 'You better go on home.'

"And then the men started to open up the car door—the station-agent was there an' another man that was to look after the horses on the trip—for Stubbs was to leave on the nine o'clock train. I heard him say so—and they put poor Pronto into the corral and led him up the chute, though they had to club him to it for he didn't want to go at all. Mr. Du Bois, the brand inspector, was there, too, and he helped them.

"Ted got awful mad when he saw them start beating Pronto to make him climb up, but Stubbs, he says, 'What you grouchin' about? He ain't your horse any more that you should worry.'

"'I wish I hadn't sold him to you,' says Ted kind o' sobered. 'He ain't got no right to sell him,' says I to Stubbs; 'he belongs to Miss Lorraine.'

"'He belongs to me now,' said Stubbs, 'and I've paid more than the beast is worth but I'm not grumblin'. You better run home, sonny,' he says to me grinnin', 'or I'll put you in with this here horse and send you to Calgary and sell you there for a little donkey and how'd you like that?' an' he laughed. When he said he had paid his money for him then I's kind o' scared to say any more and I thought I'd better let you know as soon as possible."

"You did quite right, Herb; but tell me this, you're sure this man Stubbs was going out on to-night's train."

"Well, he said so. I heard him tell the brand inspector that he was to stop off at Revelstoke."

"He'll be gone now then unless the train is late. When are the cars with the horses to go? Did you hear when the freight was due?"

"No, I didn't think to ask that?"

"You did well, anyway, to find out so much."

Just then Miss Pelton came out with Lorraine who accompanied her to the door to have a look outside for Ted; and when the latter saw Herb and glanced from his face to Alistair she knew something was wrong. That of the boy was most tell-tale—consternation was written over it for he was fond of Lorraine and he knew what Pronto was to her.

"What is the matter? Where is Ted?"

She spoke quickly and her tones were tense with anxiety for she had been on the strain all evening. Alistair hastened to relieve her mind.

"Nothing so very serious, Miss De Roche," he said; "but it is bad enough. Your brother's been drinking again down at Garston and Herb says that he has sold Pronto to that buyer from Calgary. I'm afraid it is true enough, for the boy says he saw the horse loaded on the car to be shipped out on the first freight."

"Surely Ted would never do that, oh surely, he could never do that?" said Lorraine. "Sell my horse, Pronto; he would never do it unless he were simply crazy with drink." And she looked to Miss Pelton for confirmation.

"Why, it wouldn't be legal, would it?" said the latter almost as much aghast as Lorraine. "How could he sell what wasn't his own?"

"A man will do anything when the drink has hold of him, I'm afraid," said Alistair sadly. "Of course, Ted would never have thought of such a thing if he had been in his right senses; but probably they plied him with the liquor till they could do what they liked with him. The

thing to do now is to stop the mischief and if possible get the horse back; although, from what Herb tells me, that will be difficult if this man Stubbs got off at nine o'clock for Revelstoke as Herb said he intended. If the horse is loaded in the car nobody can get him out but Stubbs himself."

Lorraine stood silent for a moment wondering what would be the best course for her to follow. Olney would have been the one for her naturally to turn to but she hated to appeal to him now. Mr. Thibault had gone home hours ago, dances not being in his line, Captain Trelawny also. Mr. Kendall would have gladly helped her but her pride revolted at the idea of spreading Ted's folly abroad. It seemed so heartless and dishonourable, her cup of humiliation was full. Ted knew what Pronto was to her and that he should have done it even when in drink seemed incredible. She would appeal to Olney in the crisis after all, she decided.

"Excuse me, please, and I shall go and tell my cousin," she said; and went back into the hall. A dance had just come to a close and she had no difficulty in finding Olney who was standing chatting merrily in the midst of a group of girls. He frowned slightly when she broke in upon them but readily turned aside with her when he saw she had something special to say to him.

He whistled when she had told him her news; but his manner was not consolatory. She was watching him closely and she thought that he did not seem to be particularly sorry.

"That's what comes of your being so thick with the Britisher, you and Ted," he said with an air of triumph as of one who says "I told you so." "He has had a hand in this, no doubt. I've noticed the hold he's been getting over Ted and I warned you of it; and now the kid's gone and made a fool of himself, you needn't blame me. I believe you're getting sweet on that chap yourself or you wouldn't have turned me down in the way you did."

"What am I to do about Pronto, Olney, to get him back?" she asked him, the tears in her eyes.

"There isn't anything to do. If Ted has sold him, he's sold him, that's all and there's nothing much that you can do about it unless you can persuade the man to give him back to you; and that isn't likely."

"That's what I want to do now, Olney; he's down at Garston, at least he is there if he hasn't gone away yet and the sooner we get down there the better. Won't you come and help me to get Pronto back from him."

"Not I, I'm having a good time here and why should I put myself out for you when you won't do anything for me? If you'll give me what I want, why I'll go with you but not unless, see."

"All right then," she said and turned away sadly to re-join the other two. "Olney won't come," she said in answer to their look of enquiry. The others asked no questions. It was a case where the less said, the better; but they looked their sympathy. "I'll go and get my things and go myself," she added and darted off again to the dressing-room.

"Poor Lorraine, I'm sorry for her with her ne'er-do-well brother. What a thing for him to do, to sell Pronto. I suppose that Lorraine will never see him again for the man will never give him up even if he hasn't left Garston by this time. Would she have a claim on the horse legally? You are a lawyer and ought to know."

"Yes, she could claim him; but if she did so it might be at the expense of a gaol sentence to her brother and she could not run the risk of that. It would have to be a matter of arrangement with the man and if he were disposed to be nasty it would be very awkward to deal with it. Layburn should have gone with her if he had been a man at all; but I am afraid that he is not much of a man."

"I daresay Mr. Kendall will go and help her and if not there are others here that would only be too glad of the chance to do a good turn to Lorraine. No doubt, she will ask someone."

Miss Pelton was vexed that this thing should have happened as it had. Not only was it going to spoil the evening for Lorraine but it might for herself also; for it was evident that Mr. Kilgour was more concerned than there was any need for, considering how Lorraine had treated him. She was not altogether surprised when after apparent hesitation he spoke with some diffidence.

"I was thinking that it would only be the right thing for me to go, seeing I am living in their house; and perhaps you would not mind waiting here until we come back. We can get one of these autos to take us down and we would not be long."

"But you forget that I am all ready to go now, and the people are beginning to get so rough that I could not possibly remain here."

She spoke coldly and Alistair, who had expected her to assent as a matter of course, was disappointed.

"You would have the Kendalls to look after you and if they wanted to go before I got back, you could go home with them and I would come for you there," he suggested though with some confusion.

She shook her head, however. It did not suit her plans that he and Lorraine should be thrown together in this affair.

"Of course, if she gets Mr. Kendall to go with her or anyone else, I would not think of it; but here she comes now and we shall know," he said reassuringly.

Lorraine came alone; and it was soon evident that she had no intention of taking Mr. Kendall or anyone else with her. The quieter the whole matter was kept, the better, she said; and she had sufficient confidence in herself to feel that if she once got hold of the man, Stubbs, who had bought her horse, she could soon persuade him to give it back to her. However, if he had already gone, this was a contingency that she had not brought herself to face, and it would be time enough to consider it when the need arose.

Miss Pelton expostulated with her but in vain.

"I shall go with you then," said Alistair quietly; "for I

am sure that under the circumstances Miss Pelton will excuse me for an hour or two—it is now ten minutes past nine—and if we can hire an auto, as I expect we can, it will not take us very long.

“Oh, but you must not leave Amy,” said Lorraine quickly although her eyes lighted up and she smiled gratefully at his offer, the good faith of which she could hardly doubt, in spite of Olney’s recent aspersion.

“I do not think that there is any need for you to go, Mr. Kilgour,” Miss Pelton said, “when there are others here that would be glad of the chance if Lorraine would not be so foolish. I do not see why she should be so unreasonable. It almost amounts to selfishness if she is going to take you away from me just when it is time that I was going home.”

“I wouldn’t think of such a thing, Amy, as you know very well,” said Lorraine with a touch of indignation. “It is kind of Mr. Kilgour to offer but there is absolutely no need.”

“That is all very well,” said Alistair, “but I cannot let you go alone for perhaps I know better than either of you of the difficulties you may meet. But we are wasting too much time. You will allow me an hour and a half, Miss Pelton, and I promise to be back by then; and you can remain with the Kendalls until I come.”

He spoke with an easy assurance and a smile as if there could be no doubt of her willing assent. She was annoyed at his persistence and angry that he should take so much for granted and the heat of her displeasure carried her farther than her reason approved; but the words were spoken and her repentance was unavailing to undo them.

“That will be quite all right, Mr. Kilgour,” she replied with the smile of the lips which the expression belies; “but you need not trouble to hurry back as I shall make other arrangements for getting home. There are those who will be pleased to go with me and I shall not have to wait. It would be a pity to trouble you so much and you do not know how long Lorraine may need you. Good-night, Lor-

raine, and I do hope you get along all right and get Pronto back. It is chilly out here and I had better go in; and it is time you were away."

With a nod that took in both she left them and Lorraine turned to Alistair in distress.

"There, now, she is angry with you and all because of me," she said with sympathy; but he would not listen further.

"Never mind," he said; "she was unreasonable. Let us see if we can get a car to take us down. Herb, you had better follow us on down on my horse for we might need you. I hope your mother won't worry, that's all."

They found a motor outside, the driver of which was having a nap in his car while waiting for the dance to come to an end; and they awoke him and were soon speeding down the road to Garston.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CAN I see Mr. Stubbs? Is he gone yet?" Alistair asked of old Humpty whom he and Lorraine found washing glasses behind the bar—for the girl had followed him in as soon as she saw that it was empty of customers.

"No, ye can't get no grub; not at this time of night leastways," said Humpty looking curiously from one to the other. "The dining-room closes at seven-thirty."

"Mr. Stubbs—is he gone? The horse buyer that was here from Calgary," repeated Alistair bellowing in his ear so that the old man winced and recoiled slightly from the volume of sound.

"Oh, ay, Mr. Stubbs; oh, of course. A little chap with whiskers; oh, yes, I know the man you mean. Yes, he went away not half an hour ago on the nine-seven."

"That's too bad!" exclaimed Alistair looking at Lorraine. "And Mr. Ted De Roche, where did he go?" he bellowed again.

"Softly, softly, my hearin's a little better to-night and you don't just need to speak quite so hearty. Mr. Ted De Roche, why he hain't gone anywhere. He's asleep on the lounge in the parlour. I wish he would go away for he ain't just an ornament to a house that tries to keep respectable."

"Let's go and see him," said Alistair; and the two hurried into the common room of the place which was fortunately empty save for the recumbent figure of Ted on the lounge by the window. It was but dimly lighted by a small lamp on the table. Alistair stood leaning on the mantel-piece leaving the girl to go over to her brother alone for he wished to spare her feelings as much as possible. Ted was not asleep, however, for as Lorraine spoke to him he rose

to a sitting posture with an involuntary groan. Liquor acted very quickly upon him and it did not take much to make him completely drunk.

"Hello, S-sis, wh-wh-wh-at you doin' here at this time of night? Thought thash you would be at the dance havin' a g-g-good time," and he tried to straighten up and look dignified. The attempt, however, only made him hiccup and sag over on one side so that he nearly lost his balance and lay down again.

Lorraine quickly seated herself beside him and put her arm around his shoulder to steady him.

"Oh, Ted, how could you sell Pronto? Did you really do it?"

He looked at her vacantly for a minute.

"Guess I did, Sis—that man Stubbs fine chap and no end rich. Gave me hive fundred dollars and you shall have it all, Sis; yes, every last dollar," he added again, "hive—I mean five hundred dollars spot cash an' it's all—right here;" and he slapped the breast of his coat.

"Oh, Ted, how could you sell my horse; you're drunk and you promised that you wouldn't touch anything to-day; what made you do it?"

"Sorry, Sis; but I—I'm not drunk—not d-d-drunk at all. Very far from it, in fact—oh but my head's damned sore all the same. The money's all for you, Sis and you—you'll need it all. That sneak, Kilgour, he's goin' to sell us all up—sell us up; and worse than all, Sis, he's tryin'—tryin' to get me in gaol, Monte knows—Monte told me an'—an' I've been sick with worry ever since," and he began to whine. "Monte told me right this afternoon that Kilgour had got another clue and he'd land me—an' Monte's goin' to split—he's up to some mischief all the time. But I've got to keep in with him or Kilgour'll get me, he says."

"But you haven't done anything wrong, have you, Ted? You can't have done anything wrong. Mr. Kilgour is here now, you know."

Ted looked up and saw Alistair for the first time. The sight seemed to sharpen his faculties.

"No, no, Sis, of course, I haven't done anything wrong; but all the same he's a sneak, he is—h-h-he's trying to get me in wrong; but—but that's all right; he'll be b-b-better look out for me, thash all, f-f-for me and Monte."

Alistair came forward.

"You're talking nonsense, Ted, and you know it," he said good-humouredly. "But tell us about the horse, poor Pronto."

"Pronto, why Stubbs has got him, of c-c-course—got him loaded in the car now with the rest—and I've got Stubbs' money. 'F you like I'll show it to you;" and he put his hand into the breast pocket of his coat and drew out a thick roll of bills. He fingered them over with the clumsiness of a drunken man, starting in to count them but always getting mixed after he had turned over three or four.

"You'd better get them away from him," Alistair whispered to Lorraine, "or someone may rob him."

"Let me count them, Ted. I'll keep them for you until your head's better," she said. She quietly took them out of his hand and he offered no resistance although he seemed a little nonplussed all the same.

"Has Stubbs gone to Calgary, Ted?" asked Alistair.

"Revelstoke, I tell you. He'll be there for a day or two," he said. "Then he's going on to Calgary. Pronto's in the car with the other horses."

"When do they go out?"

"Oh, how my head aches!" the boy groaned. "I do wish you'd go away and leave me alone; I'm so dead t-t-t-tired."

"But when do they go out, Ted? When does the freight train come past?"

"Oh don't bother me; how should I know;" and he settled down on the lounge again.

"We'd better leave him and find out about that freight and if there's anything we can do further," said Alistair to Lorraine; "although I'm afraid with the man gone there's nothing much. We might wire to Stubbs though or

something. Dickson, the station-agent may be able to give us some advice."

Lorraine rose and gently pushed her brother down on the lounge stroking for a moment his hot head with her fingers. Then she turned to follow Alistair. Her heart was sick with a new fear, for Ted's words had again filled her with distrust of him and she felt as if she were moving in the midst of pitfalls; but she must make every effort now to recover Pronto. Ted, poor boy, would wait. There would be time enough later for her to think about him.

They walked over to the little station building that was just across the road from the hotel and found Dickson busy working with his freight-bills in the office. He looked up surprised when he saw Lorraine, a grizzled old Irishman who had known her from childhood.

"Miss De Roche; it's late for you to be down here. I thought that you would have been at the dance after the show. So your horse won the race and then you sold him, eh?"

"That's just what I came to see you about, Mr. Dickson, and I thought perhaps you could help me," she began and told him all the trouble in which she found herself. He opened his eyes wide and pursed up his lips in dismay.

"Sure but that's bad business, miss—a bad business. What to do about it, I'm sure I don't know," and he looked at Alistair in bewilderment.

"You've got to open up the car and take Pronto out, that's all," said Lorraine triumphantly as if there was nothing that could be simpler.

"Oh, for the love of Mike, but I couldn't do that now, Miss De Roche. I'd be finding myself in the cooler or losing my job at the least. According to what you tell me, this man Stubbs paid Ted for the horse, did he not now?"

"Yes, but Ted had no right to sell him; he was drunk when he did it and this man made him so."

"Then ye'd be gettin' Ted into trouble, miss, wouldn't ye? There's the divil of it."

"I'm afraid he is quite right, Miss De Roche," said

Alistair. "It wouldn't be safe to take that course, either for Mr. Dickson here or for Ted. You could write to Mr. Stubbs—no doubt, someone here would know his address—or if not here, at Kamloops and the letter would be there as soon as he would. You could explain the whole matter and if Stubbs is any good at all, he'll let you have the horse back on the return of the money."

"No, no, he would keep the horse or sell him?" she said impatiently, and the glance that she turned on him was not without suspicion. "I would never take chances on that. I'll go with the horses myself rather. I can ride in the caboose. I'm not afraid. Ted went to Vancouver once with a carload of cattle and he said it was fun. When does the freight train go, Mr. Dickson?" she asked.

"She'll be here in about fifteen minutes," he answered; "but it's jokin' that ye are, of course. You would never think of such a thing."

"I am quite in earnest, Mr. Dickson. Mr. Stubbs has gone to Revelstoke. He was to stop off on his way home and I could catch him there; and if I once get him face to face, I think that I can persuade him to give me back the horse."

"I'm thinkin' that with these eyes of yours, miss, ye could persuade him to give you the teeth out of his head," said the gallant Irishman, his brogue becoming richer as his interest grew stronger, "but all the same don't be asking me for to countenance it. It wouldn't be the thing at all for you to be ridin' in a dirty caboose with the rough min that you're liable to find in them places. You'd be frightened for your life, you would and wishin' you was back home again. But excuse me now, Miss, for I have to go and get some boxes ready in the shed to go on this train and there's jist about time for me to do it and that's all;" and he hurried away leaving the two alone.

"You cannot possibly do such a thing, Miss De Roche," said Alistair. "It would be madness; but there is nothing to hinder me going if I can get the conductor—to let me

ride on the train. I could see Stubbs at Revelstoke. It is no affair for a girl to undertake."

She looked at him with a mingling of gratitude and doubt, gratitude, for his words sounded so fair and she felt so helpless and alone; doubt, because from the first she had thought of him as her enemy and now after Ted's ominous words of but a few minutes before she had more reason than ever to consider him such. Olney had warned her, too, against him; and how could she entrust Pronto's fate to him. There were moments when she could not help liking him; and she felt that she had to be on her guard or he might break down her defences of distrust and then, after having won her confidence, take advantage of it. This might be a cunning scheme of that kind. If she had felt sure that he would bring back her horse, she would have accepted the offer for Pronto's sake even although it would have laid her under an obligation to him; but she was by no means sure.

"Your proposal is very generous if it is sincere, Mr. Kilgour," she said quietly; "but I could not accept it for a moment. You forget what Ted said a short time ago and while it may not be true—I hope it is not—I—I—hate to say such a thing but you should realise—you should understand——" Here she stopped in confusion utterly unable to frame what she wanted to say.

Alistair looked down upon her from his superior height with a smile that held a touch of bitterness. In the gloom of the dingy office she appeared so young and fragile, such a mere child almost. Her face was troubled, its natural transparency of skin intensified by the dim light and the shadows cast by her hair. The little brown riding cap surmounting it, in the hurry of her departure and their swift journey down from Rexham, had acquired a certain rakish tilt not unbecoming. It was impossible to be very angry with her.

"You want to say that after what Ted told you, you cannot trust me to go for you," he said.

His pride would not allow him to defend himself. Had

he been willing to do so and to reason with her, she would have been more inclined to believe in him; but that he made no protestations seemed to her evidence in favour of his guilt.

"Well, I—I—suppose—something like that——" she replied and though the admission came hesitatingly, her intonation was definite enough. "But I believe there comes the train," she broke off, glad of an excuse to change the subject, as they heard the whistle blow and the rumble growing gradually louder together with the quick, gasping puff of the freight engine.

Alistair opened the door for her and they went out, to be met by Herb who had been looking for them anxiously. It appeared that he had been doing detective work to some purpose for he had interviewed the man who was to travel with the horses to Calgary. He had come over with him from the hotel and Herb had been pumping him all the way. Mr. Stubbs was to stop off at Revelstoke, the man had said. Herb pointed him out standing nearby, a shapeless figure in the gloom of the night.

Conversation, however, was completely cut off as the train drew near and thundered in with a great flashing of sparks from the wheels as the brakes began to grind. It seemed a great length as car after car passed them and they held their hands to their faces to protect their eyes from the flying dust and the cinders while the ground seemed to shake under their feet with the weight of the ponderous wheels. At last after the engine had passed the station, with many mighty groanings the whole train came to a standstill.

From the caboose at the end they saw someone jump off and come towards them. He was carrying a lantern and humming to himself as he went. The man who was to go with the horses went to meet him and they exchanged a few words. Then the former walked on towards the rear end of the train while the latter continued his approach. He gazed at them curiously and would have gone on but Lorraine went over and spoke to him.

"Are you the conductor?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am, I guess you've hit it right."

"Would you let me ride in the caboose as far as Revelstoke if I gave you a ten-dollar bill?" she asked rather faintly, somewhat abashed at her own temerity.

"Jee-rusalem!" he exclaimed lifting the lantern higher so that he might see her face. "What's all this? Let us have it again if you please."

She repeated her question louder this time though still with a tremor in her voice.

"This is a rum go an' no mistake. Ain't the bloomin' passenger good enough for you, miss? 'Taint an hour since she went past; but mebbe you lost her. Was that it?"

"Ye-es I lost her—that is, I lost the man that went on her and—and—and I've got to catch him at Revelstoke, you see."

"Take my advice, miss an' if he's run away from you, let 'im go. He's not worth following or my name ain't Dan Tattersall."

"No, no, it isn't that," said Lorraine impatiently; "don't you understand? I have to catch him on a—on—a business matter; he's got my horse, you see. Oh, I can't very well explain, but I must get to Revelstoke with this train—I really must;" and there were tears in her tones which evidently had their effect on the conductor for he changed his manner.

"I'm very sorry, miss, very sorry, indeed; but we ain't allowed to carry passengers, especially lady passengers—hain't got the accommodation so to speak. Why, in that there dirty caboose of mine it'd be out of the question. Never heard such a thing—might get me into no end of trouble—lose my job and all the rest of it, you know. We won't be in Revelstoke for eight or ten hours and that's only if we have good luck. You take the passenger in the mornin' and you'll be there pretty near as soon and with a heap more comfort. It'd be an easy way for me to earn a ten-spot besides the pleasant company I'd have by the way; but I'm advisin' ye for the best for yourself, miss.

'T ain't no joke though, for me to refuse such a good-lookin' girl even if I did run the risk of bein' fired. I guess I could take a chance on that for once. But I'll have to get along now an' tend to business. We have to pick up a couple of cars of horses here and some other stuff. If you're of the same mind when I come back, we'll talk about it again. I'm not makin' any promises though."

He walked off down the platform, the lantern making quaint shadows as he went; and Lorraine turned with triumph to Alistair, forgetting for the moment the tension of the last words that she had spoken to him.

"He'll consent, you'll see," she announced almost gleefully. "You see how he wavered between two opinions."

"It is sheer madness," said Alistair sharply, his tones perhaps rendered the more incisive by the sting of her recently expressed distrust. "Stark staring insanity. His advice for you to take the morning train, if you must go yourself, was sound, and that is what you should do. You will be there very nearly as soon, maybe sooner; for although I don't know much about your freight trains, I imagine that they are very uncertain in their time."

"They can't surely lose much time between here and Revelstoke. Why, it isn't a great deal over a hundred miles; you could do it in a motor car in a few hours if you had a road and surely you can in a train."

Her tones had stiffened to match his; for her forgetfulness had been but momentary and again she was wondering if there could be any hidden motive behind his words. It seemed such a simple thing to her just to jump on the train and be there in the morning; to bring this man Stubbs to hear reason and return triumphantly bringing Pronto with her.

"Yes, but a few hours seem a long time if it is night and you have to sit up in a cold, draughty car when you're accustomed to be asleep in a comfortable bed. Your cousin, Olney, would never hear of such a thing and your aunt would be shocked at the idea."

"My cousin, Olney, wasn't willing to put himself out enough to come down with me or it would not have been necessary for me to go at all. As it is, I am going. I dare not wait over for the passenger train for I might be too late. I shall stay with my horse until I get him out."

"Indeed, you must not think of it, Miss De Roche. I insist that you give up this madness. It is really not right for you to go. You may get into all sorts of trouble. What will they think at home? They will be worried out of their senses; and your father—what will he say?"

"You will tell him that I have stayed over at the Kendalls—he will think it quite natural. It is a white lie but we must take some chances for Pronto's sake. The recording angel will not be very severe on that one, I feel sure. I shall be back before anyone knows I am away."

"Herb must tell him then. Of course, I shall have to go with you."

"Indeed, you shall not! There is no need and I do not want you."

"You cannot possibly go alone and unprotected. It would not be safe at all—there are dangers that might not occur to you," he hectored. "It is not what you want that matters. It is what is fitting and necessary."

"You must kindly allow me to be the judge of what is fitting and necessary. If I am to believe my brother's words,—yes, and I am sorry to say my own experience must bear them out—the danger is more likely to lie in your presence than in your absence on the trip." His domineering tones made her wish to punish his impertinence and the impulse drove her to speak more severely than she otherwise would. Repenting a little she veered around trying to school her voice to an easier strain. "I am sure that conductor is a kindly, honest sort of person and I shall be all right with him."

"Oh, very well then, Miss De Roche, perhaps you may yet think better of it; but I need trouble you no further.

I must apologise for my presumption;" and bowing, he turned upon his heel, and walked away, leaving the girl standing a desolate figure to ponder unavailingly as to his meaning. But he did not go far, for Herb had been standing off a little ways to allow them to talk privately, and Alistair stopped to speak to him.

"What became of the man who is to go with the horses, Herb?"

"I think he went and climbed into the caboose, Mr. Kilgour," and the boy stood to attention in his most military manner. He was aware that strange things were in progress and his senses were alert that he might be ready for whatever would be required of him.

"Now listen to me, Herb, carefully, for you mustn't make any mistake. Miss De Roche has decided that she must go on this train to-night to Revelstoke in order to try to get back her horse from the man who has bought him. It is rank folly; but she says she is going to do it and I believe that she will. Now I can't let her go alone for several reasons; and I shall have to try and arrange with this man who is with the horses to let me take his place. If I can, you'll not see me any more to-night; for I'll stay right on the caboose. Now you must keep Miss Lorraine company until she leaves. If she asks where I have gone, tell her you saw me walk away, which will be true enough. Go at once to the dance and tell Mr. Layburn that his cousin has gone to Revelstoke to try and get back Pronto. You can say that she and I parted, not friends because I didn't want her to go. Don't, whatever you do, tell any of them that she went on the freight train. That's the deadest kind of a dead secret, Herb, you're to remember. You don't know where I am and you won't, for I don't know where I'll be myself. You can say that I am to be away for a few days on business. Now do you understand?"

"Sure."

"That's all then. You've done good work to-night and I'm grateful. So long, just now."

“So long,” said Herb proudly as Alistair shook hands. His heart swelled with pleasure as he watched his friend disappear in the blackness of the night. If he could only have gone too, his cup of contentment would have been full.

CHAPTER XXXV

ASSISTED by the conductor, who had yielded to her pleading, moved thereto more by what he had learned from Dickson, the station-agent, than by that and the ten-dollar bill that he was not above taking, Lorraine climbed lightly up the steps of the dark caboose; but it was with a sinking somewhere inside of her that she waved good-bye to the small figure of Herb standing below her as the train moved slowly away. Then when he was no more to be seen she turned inside and found herself in the dimly-lighted interior. The windows were high up so that one could not look out of them and there were lockers running along the sides. These were not upholstered; but at the far end there was one leather cushion and on this lay the figure of a man which she could just dimly make out. A coat that was thrown over him hid his face and body completely but the boots sticking out from under assisted her to determine the nature of the object that it concealed. At the near end the conductor was busy replenishing a coal stove; opposite this was a sink with two or three dirty dishes still lying; and the conductor at once began to wash these in a little tin basin and as he wiped them laid them carefully in a little locker set into the bulkhead. He then got out a bundle of papers from the breast pocket of his coat and sitting down remained absorbed in these while the girl was left to her thoughts. He was a wholesome looking man with red cheeks and a brown moustache and rather inclined to stoutness and she was somewhat reassured as she watched him; for he looked as if he could be trusted.

However, in the course of half an hour or so, he got up and went out; and she was left alone except for the silent, recumbent figure on the locker. It was then that

Mr. Kilgour's warning counsels pressed themselves with renewed force upon her mind and she began to think that perhaps they had not been so groundless and unreasonable as she had fancied.

The few hours that must elapse before they could reach Revelstoke which had seemed so short to her when standing on the security of the platform, she realised now might be like an eternity if the nervousness that she was beginning to feel should continue and increase. She wondered if the conductor would be long away and where he had gone to. Then she went out to the door of the car to see if he was standing on the steps perhaps; but he was not there. It was so dark and eerie outside that she hurried back in again possessed with the fear that in her absence the figure on the bench might rise up and come out to her.

Her thoughts went back to the bright scene of pleasure that she had left at the dance and then to her home. She reflected that just about this time her aunt would be going to bed after tucking up her father for the night. Herb, the brave little chap, would be off homewards in the dark.

Then she thought of Ted and of what he had said as to Mr. Kilgour's sinister designs; and she recalled many little evidences of the boy's distress which had been incomprehensible at the moment but which in the light of his disclosure seemed clear enough to her now. She had thought at times that he was needlessly rude to Mr. Kilgour on occasions when it had seemed even to her, prejudiced as she felt herself to be, that there was no justification for it. True she had taken a certain malicious enjoyment out of such little ebullitions and she had never reproved Ted for them; but she had thought them unfair.

What if Ted were mistaken though? She could hardly square his suspicion with the impression she had formed of Mr. Kilgour. She had thought the young man hard and grasping but he had never appeared to her to be treacherous or underhand. She could conceive of nothing baser than for him to have lived in their house and eaten

at their table and to have sought to win the boy's friendship only to bring him to ruin. It had been plain enough of late too that he had done all he could to please and propitiate. At times, it seemed as if Ted really had been won over; and then there had come a reaction and he had been as cold and stiff as he dared without giving Mr. Kilgour an excuse for open resentment.

If Ted was wrong in his suspicions, if there was really nothing in the accusation he had made a short hour ago in the hotel parlour, when drink had taken possession of him, Mr. Kilgour would have just grounds for resentment, indeed.

As the train clattered on, the car often swaying uncomfortably and the various tin dishes and other articles rattling against the wall inside and still the conductor remained away, her fears increased. Above the other noises every now and again would sound the shrill, eerie blasts of the engine whistle to warn the public as the train swept over some level crossing. Startling and uncanny like the shrieks of some monster, they helped to make her feel more keenly the loneliness of her position.

Again and again she glanced round at the sleeping figure near her. Was it really sleeping? This she was unable to determine. She had a horrible feeling that it might be watching her all the time. She felt sure that it had changed its position; that it was peeping at her under the coat. She scolded herself for her silly fears assuring herself that they were groundless and that the poor man there was as harmless as herself. She ceased looking round at him lest if he was looking at her and had sinister designs, he might think that she was frightened. She had really only been alone with him a short time but it seemed like hours.

All at once she heard a rustle and the scraping of the boots on the locker and she was aware that he had thrown off the coat and was sitting up. She was afraid to look around. A sudden nervous terror seized her. There was a prickly sensation in her tongue. She could almost have

shrieked. It was a clear case of unreasoning panic born of suspense and apprehension.

"Well, well; we are fellow travellers, I see," a voice said at last after the seconds of silence had seemed minutes. "So you disregarded my advice after all."

She turned round with a gasp of relief.

"Oh, it's you?" she exclaimed as, her eyes confirming what her ears had reported, she recognised Mr. Kilgour with his hair very ruffled; for he had thrown off the sombrero hat which had covered his face and was now dangling it on his knee.

"You," she repeated in a kind of stupefaction of surprise.

"Even so," he replied calmly still looking at his hat, his grammar breaking down in the emergency. "Who else did you expect?"

Then as her blood began to flow more normally and her nerve to return, resentment revived as fear was dispelled.

"Oh, you frightened me so!" and she shuddered. "How dared you?" she demanded indignantly.

"How dared I what?"

"How dared you follow me in this way?"

"Follow you! Why, you followed me! I was hoping to have a comfortable snooze and wake up in Revelstoke and now you with your interference have spoilt it all. When I am wakened out of my beauty sleep it breaks my rest for the night." Raising his hands above his head he yawned insolently, she thought.

Even in the dim light of the caboose, her eyes flashed fire. To be nearly frightened to death and then to have one's just remonstrances made fun of to have the offender pretend to be the injured party, it was too much. She rose to her feet and faced him, her slight figure drawn up to its full height tensely dramatic in its pose and her little chin thrust forward. So Cleopatra might have looked when she ordered some offending slave to be taken to instant execution. Anger had completely triumphed over her fears and the depression of a moment ago was forgotten.

“You insufferable cad! to take advantage of a girl’s helplessness when you know that there is no one around who can punish you. You big bully that you are. You think that I am helpless and that therefore you can do what you like. But do not be too sure. I am not so defenceless as you think: and I shall get the conductor to put you off the train as soon as he comes back, which may be any time now. Oh, how I hate you, how I hate the sight of you!”

She stormed above him like a queen of tragedy while he cringed before her on the locker. He had turned his head to look up at her, but when she had burst forth, he buried his face in his hands as if crushed by her anger. When she had finished, he lifted it again, still keeping his hands before it; but the fingers had spread apart to allow the eyes to peep through in mockery. For by the time her violence had expended itself and her speech had ended—she realised that he was laughing at her still. She had only laid herself more open to his ridicule—oh, it was bitter! She could have struck him in her rage but all she could do was to burst into tears. Sinking back upon the seat, she too put her face in her hands and sobbed. In her display, there was no pretence. Alistair abandoned further dissimulation and sat upright again. As he marked the quivering of her delicate, shapely shoulders and the droop of the head upon the white neck, his heart smote him for a brute, and he was filled with a queer inclination to comfort her. However, he forced himself to resist it. So long as she was in no actual fear, a little teasing that would humiliate her pride would be a salutary corrective.

“I think that it was Socrates—was it not—who consoled himself with the reflection under slightly different circumstances that ‘after thunder there usually comes the rain?’” —he remarked quietly almost as if to himself when the violence of her weeping had subsided. “Yes, poor man, they say that Xantippe was a great trial to him but that he considered her shrewishness as a discipline which was salutary. We are not all as philosophical about such things

as he was, however. For myself, I must confess, feminine nagging annoys me. Tears, I do not mind so much, so cry away. It will relieve your mind and do you good."

He was wiser now than earlier in the evening. He guessed that to tell her to weep would have the effect of stopping her; and, in spite of his assumed callousness, he felt that he would be glad to have her stop.

"It is so much more sensible in a woman to weep than to faint," he continued in the same monologue; and he fancied now that she was peeping at him through her fingers though he could not be sure. "Not that you are yet a woman—you are merely a child and a rather naughty one at that though the feminine traits come out in the child as in the adult. Now supposing that you had decided to faint—instead of merely to shed tears, it would have been an unpleasant necessity for me to pour water on you to make you come to; and how distasteful that would have been to both of us. 'Twould have been for me to play Xantippe."

She jumped from her seat and stamped her foot on the hard floor of the car. It was a very tiny foot and miserably ineffective for the purpose.

"Will you cease talking or must I put my hands to my ears?" she pleaded in desperation.

"Do you think that you are sufficiently punished?" he asked in a different tone, looking up at her now.

"What do you mean?"

"This firework business, you know—it's quite un-called-for at a time like this when we have serious business before us, so serious that we shall need all our wits to bring it through successfully. If we are to fritter away our energies at the start we may as well give up now. You are angry with me for coming after you told me not to. Do you know that the man whose place I bribed him to let me take had a bottle of whisky in his pocket and was already well on in liquor when I found him here? He wouldn't have been a very pleasant fellow-passenger to have on board in such times as this when the conductor is

away attending to his business. You would be in a nice condition to deal with Stubbs in the morning, wouldn't you if you spent the night in fear of annoyance from him? I know that you didn't mean all you said—you're a little over-wrought, that is all——"

His voice was kindly now and she looked at him for a moment unable to speak. The turmoil of her thoughts had had a chance to settle and her mind was calmer; and she realised what his presence had saved her from. Remembering the fear that had possessed her, the terror of those moments of suspense, she was grateful.

"What shall I say?" she asked dropping her head in contrition and ashamed to look him in the eyes. She resented the domination that he exercised over her but mingled with this feeling was a curious resignation to it, an odd sense of satisfaction in her abasement. "I should have been thanking you instead of—instead of insulting you."

"Don't say anything; it isn't necessary. Suppose we go upstairs into the lookout gallery and have a peep at the moon. She's due to be up by this time and I daresay the view will be worth looking at."

"The lookout gallery, what is that?" she asked in wonder and glad of the change in the subject which he had offered her.

"Don't you know the little lookout place on the top of the caboose from which the trainman can sit and look all over his train. A regular observation car in miniature, it is. I've never been up in one; but I noticed them when I was coming West. I envied the freight conductor his luxurious view-place and I often thought I would like to ride in it. I didn't expect so soon to have a chance. Come along."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THEY went out to the rear and climbed up the little stair at the side that led to the gallery above. There were two single seats, one behind the other, on each side of the stairway and Lorraine sat down in the front one while Alistair sat in the one behind. They were now passing along the shores of Sicamous Lake. The moon had just arisen above the hill-tops and its clear luminous disc was brightly reflected in the water and cast a silvery sheen over its smooth surface while the dark outlines of the shores and along the skyline showed a rich blue that was almost black. Coming from the gloom of the interior of the caboose to this scene of beauty so mystical and calm, the girl drew a deep breath of wonder and for a time both were silent. From their lofty seat they looked down upon the tops of the long line of cars that flitted away in front of them now almost straight and again curving to conform with the track as it followed the shore. At the head, the engine puffed and gasped and wheezed like a conscious thing, at times seeming to complain vigorously over the weight that it had to draw. Around them the whole earth seemed to be asleep and there was no sign of living creature or habitation of man save for the ghostly procession of which they formed a part, ghostly in all except the noise made by the bustling, fussy locomotive at its head. They were all alone together whirling along through a sleeping world lying bathed in silvery moonlight and to the girl there came a sense of tranquillity. The heat and strife of the scene that she had just passed through seemed almost unreal to her, as if it had been a dream; and the hate and suspicion with which she had regarded her companion, these too seemed extravagant and uncalled-for. She

found it difficult to persuade herself that she could have entertained such feelings with regard to Mr. Kilgour.

"Ah, but this is a glorious change," she said sniffing the freshness of the evening breeze with its faint perfume. "That stuffy car gave me the blues;" and she shuddered.

He began to talk lightly to reassure her and distract her mind from her trouble. Something in the night's magic had entered into his brain too, something perhaps in his nearness to her of which he was pleasantly conscious; and he felt all at once the impulse to be sentimental.

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!" he quoted and then went on to parody—

'Here will we sit, and let the sounds of the engine's
puffing

Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night

Become the touches of sweet harmony.

..... Look how the floor of heaven

Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.'

It's wonderful how he could just hit everything off so that one cannot change or better it."

"Yes, and the thought at the end of the passage is just the universal one that is apt to come to us—isn't it—on looking on a scene as perfect as this? We contrast the peace and serenity of the stars with our own fevered lives and we wonder why all our fret and worry. To be quite concrete," and smiling she turned for a moment's glance to glean courage for her daring, "to be quite concrete and personal, we quarrel in the caboose and miss the harmony of the spheres that is going on above, outside and

'While this muddy vesture of decay—

Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.'"

She was not averse to showing that she could quote Shakespeare as well as he.

"Hardly quarrel," said Alistair doubtfully, and in spite of her abject surrender he could not resist the impulse to

brow-beat the vanquished. His triumph was sweet and the schoolmaster in him was strong. "Is 'quarrel' quite the word? Might you not say 'scold and are scolded?'" He found a certain piquancy and thrill in her indignation and he wanted to see what she would say.

"Now you are ungenerous," she reproached. "I wanted you to share the blame and you won't. As we say in the West, you prefer 'to rub it in.'"

"It was mean," he admitted in quick contrition. "Only the worst kind of a bounder would have done it—like hitting a man when he's down."

"I had forgotten about Xantippe but you thrust her back upon me," she continued pressing her advantage; and her voice had the plaintive note of a little child whose trust has been outraged. Her face was turned away gazing out upon the lake so that he only had her little ear to look at and that seemed to have a severe expression.

"Oh, now!" he exclaimed distressfully. Even in the moonlight he could feel the hot waves flooding to his forehead. Up here in the serenity of the night it seemed an awful thing to have said. "I had forgotten about her too. I must apologise for that, I really must with the most abject grovelling. It was an unpardonable thing to say. I have no manners, none at all."

"Oh, well," she consoled. "No doubt, Socrates had none either. He was an old bear, I daresay and kept the dinner waiting while he was pondering how clever he was. Don't you think that maybe Xantippe had a good deal to put up with and the deluge that he got was just what he deserved?"

"No doubt he was a solemn old fossil," he said, cheerfully sacrificing his convictions to appease her wrath. "Xantippe was an angel of light and sweetness but he couldn't appreciate her because of his egotism and conceit. Another case of Jane Welsh and Carlyle.

"Seriously though," he went on dropping all trace of levity and assuming a tone of intimacy that the girl did not find offensive. "Hasn't there been a great deal of unnecessary misunderstanding between us. I have been so

willing to be friendly with you people if you had only met me even a quarter way. Now, here's Ted. I have tried all I could to make Ted like me. I know the fight that he has been making to keep straight; and there were times I did think that I was gaining ground with him. Now here he comes out with this silly story of me trying to get him into trouble. It's all an absolute figment of his fancy, you know; and yet—and yet——” he hesitated.

“And yet silly, prejudiced people like myself are apt to take it for true, you would say,” she prompted.

“Well, perhaps something like that,” he replied, “though I must try not to be too personal. We must at least bury the hatchet for the trip and reserve all our fighting energies for our battle with Stubbs who for the time must take my place as the villain of the piece.”

“Then you are to play the hero-errant, I suppose,” she mocked; “I congratulate you on the change for the better in your rôle. It must be somewhat bewildering though, the suddenness of it, I should think.”

“Bewildering!” he exclaimed; “it makes me positively dizzy, but believe me, I consider that the honour has been thrust upon me. I hope that the station master has sense enough to keep ‘a still tongue in his head’ as we say in Scotland. It will be just as well for the Duck Lake community not to be informed of your little trip to Revelstoke—at least, of the method of it.”

“I do not worry about them,” she replied; “but one thing that I am troubled about is that I should have been the means of making Amy annoyed with you for coming with me. She likes you, at least, if other people are unkind.”

“I was sorry about it too but I think that she was unreasonable, though we were looking forward to the drive back in the moonlight. As it turned out, it was a good thing perhaps that she gave me my congé for the evening or I should have been on the horns of a dilemma with her expecting me back. However, we needn't worry about that. I hope that your fiancé, your cousin, Olney will not be

annoyed. However, it was his own fault for not coming along."

"My fiancé! Oh, Olney is not my fiancé. What made you think that?"

"I beg your pardon. I thought that it was an understood thing. One often takes things for granted without adequate reason."

They were both silent for a time, but their thoughts were busy for their minds had some readjusting to do in their mutual estimates. Lorraine had thought that he and her friend, Miss Pelton, were likely to make a match of it; but his manner in regard to the little disagreement between them was hardly in accord with such an idea, or at least it would appear from it that his affections were not as yet very deeply engaged. He did not strike her as being one who would be readily susceptible to female blandishments and she reflected that her friend had acted unwisely in treating him so cavalierly that night, that is, if she was beginning to be fond of him as had appeared to Lorraine to be the case.

Alistair could not help comparing the two girls in his mind and he was forced to admit to himself that he could not conceive of this one acting so childishly and selfishly as Miss Pelton had done when a friend was in trouble. However quick-tempered and vixenish she might be, he judged that she would be sincere in her friendships, judged it from her devotion to her father and her brother if by nothing else.

The mystic splendours of the night were conducive to dreams and neither felt much inclined to talk. They experienced a pleasant sense of serenity, of contentment with the situation which speech might dispel. It was the calm after the storm with the girl at least; for in the past hour or two her emotions had run the gamut of fear and despair and the reaction had brought with it a pleasing sense of relaxation.

The scenery before them was changing its aspects not so swiftly but subtly with the effect at times like that

one has seen at a dissolving diorama where one picture fades away leaving another in its place. The moon passing through the clouds that lay in her path made of the sky a fantastic sea in which floated mysterious islands that glowed and became transfigured by her silver splendours, with here and there the very faintest possible shore-lights made by pallid stars that hardly dared to twinkle in the fulness of her beams.

Then they left the lake behind them and could look back at it over the shoulder of a wooded hill along the side of which they passed; and now they were gliding through wooded parklands of dark pines, the forms of which stood out strangely dark and unyielding in the soft light, then again into barren range where cattle lay asleep or moved around like ghostly figures. Here and there was an occasional farmhouse or rough log cabin or a giant haystack lifting its massive bulk like some mammoth of prehistoric times.

At a little wayside station, their reveries were interrupted by the appearance of the conductor who climbed up beside them as they pulled into it.

"It's against the rules for either of you to ride up here, you know," he said gruffly, addressing himself to both of them. "Clean against Company regulations and I can't have it. You'll have to get down. We're taking on a 'pusher' here."

"Oh, don't put us down, Mr. Conductor, not for a while at least," said the girl impulsively. "It's so stuffy inside and it is such a lovely night. You couldn't have it in your heart to send us down yet."

The man looked at Alistair doubtfully—suspiciously. "Seems to me, you ain't the chap that I saw at Garston who was to go with them horses. He had a beard, that fellow, and looked a bit thicker than you are. There's somethin' kind o' funny here, I'm afraid. I think anyway that you'll better ride down below and the young lady can stay up if she wants."

Alistair guessed what was passing in his mind. The

honest fellow was trying to look after the girl and he did not like the looks of things. It were best, however, to try to disabuse him of his suspicions.

"As it happens, I know this young lady and her people very well and that is why we are sitting together. You need have no misgivings as to my annoying her in any way. Here is my card;" and Alistair, taking out his pocket-book, abstracted his calling card and presented it with due solemnity to the conductor.

"Alas, no, comrade," he said, "cut out the grandstand play and keep your pasteboard in your pocket. This ain't no passenger an' we don't take no tickets on this train, anyway you can't buy one to ride in this observation car, see. I ain't goin' to have no sparking here so you'll better just climb down, an' don't waste no time about it."

"Indeed, the gentleman is a friend of mine," Lorraine broke in, "and please don't send him down, Mr. Conductor."

"If he's a friend of yours, miss, it makes no difference; an' if I had known that there were friends of yours aboard you wouldn't have been ridin' on this train to Revelstoke. You didn't tell me nothin' about him when you asked me, did you?"

"I assure you, conductor——" Alistair protested annoyed that the man should be putting a false construction on his presence there and eager to disabuse his mind of its mistake; but the other broke in upon him with an air of sternness that would brook no parley.

"Now, young fellow, just you cut off the hot air will you an' git down below; or you'll maybe find that I'm a bit hasty at times an' might just accidentally put you down in a way that wouldn't be just comfortable, see!" and he leaned over in a threatening manner that warned Alistair that he was liable to be as good as his word.

It was an embarrassing and humiliating position. The man was, no doubt, from his own standpoint perfectly right and he was master of the situation. As far as he was concerned, it was quite irregular both as regards his assumed guardianship of Lorraine and as to his presence on

the train at all. He had no qualms of doubt as to the actual propriety of his course in coming with the girl; but to justify it to a scandal-loving Mrs. Grundy, who for the present was represented by this well-meaning conductor, was a different thing altogether. Lorraine had turned her face towards the engine completely subdued by the innuendo of the man's speech to her.

When Alistair had gone below, which he did without speaking to her, for he could think of nothing suitable to say, the conductor took the seat opposite.

"We take on a 'pusher' here, miss," he said; "see her coming up behind there. This Notch Hill we're comin' to is a mighty steep pull and we have to get help to get up. She rises about five hundred feet in ten miles and that's some climb, that is, believe me."

She looked behind where he pointed and saw a big engine coming up behind. Their train had come to a standstill and one of the brakemen was walking alone behind ready to adjust the coupling, which was soon done, the big engine putting its head in behind their train as a circus elephant is trained to push the big caravans in time of need. Then away the train started again up the steep incline that was before them, both engines puffing away stertorously with the strain. Up and up they went, by-and-bye looking down over magical vistas of mountain and lake glowing in azure and silver under the moonbeams; but although the scenery was just as splendid, the charm of the night was broken and Lorraine was glad in a short while to tell the conductor that she was tired and would go below. He followed her down the ladder and inside.

Mr. Kilgour was sitting on the bench and smiled to her as she entered.

"Tired?" he questioned, rising to allow her to pass him.

"A little," she answered smiling back at him.

"You had better lie down," he said, still standing in the middle of the aisle, so that the conductor, following in her rear, was unable to pass, and stood looking a little nonplussed.

She lay down obediently on the leather cushion.

"You need not be afraid to go to sleep," he said; "for I shall be awake here all night and shall call you at Revelstoke. You will guarantee that she will be safe from annoyance, won't you, conductor?" he asked of that worthy with great suavity, overlooking the little unpleasantness that had passed. His manner had the easy condescension of one who has the right to command but prefers to request a favour. The man resented the other's taking the upper hand in this way but Alistair's smile was so winning and confident and his manner so easy that he found himself unable to gainsay him especially with the girl there to hear. So he merely answered, "By all means," although in a tone of gruffness that betrayed his annoyance, and taking off the lid of his little stove began to put coal into it with a great deal of unnecessary clatter.

Alistair, meanwhile, went over and sat at the other end of the car and, folding his arms, settled down for his long vigil surrendering himself to musings, a curious mingling of the varied events of the day. Strange to say, perhaps, he found them sweet, and in spite of fatigue and discomfort, for his seat was hard and the car where he sat was chilly and draughty, he was conscious of a certain elation, a certain thrill that was difficult to account for or to analyse. Nor had the long weary hours of the night in which he did not even trust himself to doze, nor the stiffness of his limbs, nor the raw humours of the morning air, filled with coal dust and smelling of oils and grease, entirely dispelled the feeling when the train, slowly and with innumerable joltings and groanings, drew into Revelstoke as the first beams of dawn were streaking the sky and tipping with grey the lofty hills that encircled the little town.

CHAPTER XXXVII

IT was not a very jaunty couple that alighted from the caboose and picked their way in the morning half-light over the network of rails towards the nearest street end. Lorraine, however, was the fresher of the two for she had slept the latter part of the night although her slumber had been troubled by unpleasant dreams. Her bones ached from the hardness of her couch with its stiff leather cushion.

"Do I look as disreputable as I feel?" she said smiling at Alistair but somewhat ruefully. "It is a weird time of day to arrive. Why couldn't we have had the moonlight still? It casts such a glamour over the ugliness and hides all the deficiencies. Last night I felt like Joan of Arc and could have faced armies with a good courage; this morning I feel as shifty and shamefaced as a tramp but with a conscience——" she paused for words proportionate to her resentment against its activity—"a regular busybody of a conscience that's impossible to live with and I believe I would flee before a rabbit if it shook its ears at me."

"You look all right anyway," said Alistair approvingly as he scanned her trim figure in the neat, grey tailor-made skirt and jacket. "Quite proper and respectable. I wish I could say the same about myself," and he rubbed an unshaven chin that had lost its smoothness. "I am the tramp of the party; but I shall feel better when the barbers are open. It is an awkward time though for us to be landed here. We can hardly make our appearance at the hotel at this hour." He pulled out his watch. "It is now half past five and I found out from the conductor that there is a train from the East comes in at seven. I think we had better be there when she arrives; and you can board the hotel bus and go down in state that way while I shall come along humbly on foot."

"Why can't you come in the bus too?" she asked. "I do not want to disown you even if you do look rather—what shall I say—tough?"

"'Tough' is the word," he replied; "but all the same I think that I shall walk. The 'convenances' to use the French word must be respected at all costs. Mrs. Grundy, you know"—he added seeing she looked slightly puzzled; "the good lady is everywhere, and wherever we may be we cannot ignore her."

"Oh, I see," she said hastily, blushing rosy even in spite of the raw morning air and casting her eyes downward in confusion.

During the night watches she had, indeed, had time to reflect on the impropriety of her conduct as it would be viewed by her neighbours and friends at Duck Lake should they ever hear about it; but it had not occurred to her as necessary to consider with any particular anxiety the people of Revelstoke who were strangers to her.

Alistair noticed her confusion and was wroth with himself for being the cause of it. He hastened to divert her mind in a different direction.

"The first thing to do is to get some breakfast and I see a restaurant there in the very first corner. 'Good Eats,' it says, which is hardly classic English; but one is not in a mood to be fastidious about names just now. What do you say?"

"I am not very hungry," she said; "but it will help to pass the time and perhaps they will be able to let us have a wash. That would be refreshing."

It lay at the end of a long street of one and two-story buildings which looked very deserted with only here and there an odd pedestrian hurrying along. Passing within they sat down at one of the tables that were ranged on each side of the dingy room, except in the front where, on the left, a Chinaman stood behind a short counter on which was a cash register and a showcase containing cigars and cigarettes. Two customers in trainmen's uniform were

having breakfast and they were relieved to find the place so quiet.

"I'm afraid that it is hopeless to think of a wash here," said Alistair, looking at the dirty tablecloths and fly-blown bill of fare. "You could never take chances on the towels. What are you going to have?"

"Bacon and eggs look the safest," she replied after scanning the menu; "boiled eggs would be better if one could count upon them being fresh."

"Bacon and eggs then be it," said Alistair; and he gave the order to a girl who had appeared from the back regions. She was a fresh-looking, apple-cheeked lass a year or two younger than Lorraine and she was plainly much interested in these two customers who had come in so early in the morning and who were so different from the ordinary run of those who attended the little café. Clearly she scented a romance, a runaway match at the very least, for it was plain even to her inexperienced eyes that here were no ordinary married folks who had been some time settled down. As she set knives and forks before them, she took time to glance at Lorraine's hands and noted with interest that they were ringless except for a bright ruby on the middle finger of the right hand which was no place for an engagement ring and it was clearly not a wedding ring.

"Would you like to go behind and 'ave a wash, miss," she said in a soft Yorkshire accent, her face mantling into a dimpled smile. "We've got lots of 'ot water, we 'ave and you'll be welcome."

"Yes, I should like to wash the soot out of my eyes," said Lorraine; and she followed the little waitress out into the kitchen behind. A Chinaman was busy before a huge range on which several frying-pans were sizzling and the smell that came from them was appetising enough. He paid no attention to Lorraine and her conductress, and the girl, taking a tin basin from a bench, washed it carefully under a tap and then poured into it some hot water which she took from a big boiler at the side of the range.

She stood admiring Lorraine as the latter took off her cap shaking down her fair, ruddy hair and tucked up her sleeves showing a pair of white arms very different from her own that were reddened by hard work and dishwater.

"Gee, but you are a good looker!" she exclaimed. "I'll bet you've run away with the young gent. Say, I'll bet that he's a toff, too, 'e is. Right from the oold country too, ain't he? I've bin out joost two years but I knows my way around now, I do. Oh, I ain't as green as you might think just to look at me. A lass learns a lot around a joint like this."

"You ain't got no weddin' ring yet," she rattled on as Lorraine, not liking the drift of her remarks, began to dry her face and hands as quickly as she could in order to put an end to the involuntary tête-à-tête as soon as possible. "They wouldn't catch me goin' off without one; no matter 'ow 'andsome and rich they might be. Oh, no, I know too much for that even if I am just a young 'un.

"Say, miss, now I didn't mean for to offend you nohow—my, she's gone——" she ejaculated as Lorraine, the tell-tale blood flushing up into her cheeks, betraying her agitation, after hastily putting her hair to rights before the cracked and distorted little mirror hanging on the wall, and pinning on her hat, had dashed rapidly through the swing door back to the restaurant.

As she approached him, Alistair saw that something was the matter and he had a shrewd guess as to what it might be.

"I must leave this place at once," she said; "and I shall go to the hotel. Do not ask me why. That girl—that girl——" and she stopped, unable to give expression to what had taken place and ashamed to have him know. She was trembling all over as she stood beside the table and Alistair was at the extremity of his wits to know what to do or say to calm her agitation. He was not going to have her run out into the street in such a condition and without having had anything to eat if he could help it.

If the situation was embarrassing it was not to be helped by getting hysterical about it.

"Never mind the girl," he said. "She's only a waitress, a servant, and does not matter. You ought to know better than to take any notice of what she says."

"She has insulted me—dreadfully—you cannot imagine how——"

"It does not matter at all, child; sit down and eat your breakfast. You have ordered it now and you must eat it. We shall discuss as we eat. With the Anglo-Saxon, meals are a sacred ceremony. Everyone is a sacrament and must be rigidly observed even though the heavens fall."

"Do not talk nonsense, please, for this is a serious matter. And do not call me child, either."

"I beg your pardon, Miss De Roche; but sit down or you will draw everybody's attention to us. These men behind are just beginning to wonder what is the matter."

She sat down at his bidding and then the girl appeared with a trayful of dishes containing their breakfast which with a conscious mien she placed before them.

"This habit of eating meals," Alistair went on talking nonsense to help Lorraine to recover herself, "is clearly what differentiates man from the brutes. Without forks and finger-bowls, what is he but an animal?"

She raised her eyes to meet his and under his quizzical smile her own face cleared and she began to get back her poise. What a goose she had been so to lose control of herself. He would think her a silly schoolgirl. It was necessary to vindicate herself. "Don't you think it is perhaps these things that prove him still an animal——" she said picking up his cue and conscious of the girl slyly watching her, "all the refinement invented to prolong the pleasures of eating which after all surely belong to the mere animal passions. The godlike qualities of man should enable him to be above such indulgence and he should be content to live on rice or some simple food that would keep the fires of life going just as well and leave his mind clear for high thinking. Your ancestors used to do it by

all reports," she twitted mischievously, although a little surprised at her own daring, "when they lived on nothing but oatmeal brose; but now, alas, they have come down in the scale, at least if you are a fair sample."

"Not at all," he countered as he helped her to some bacon and eggs. "You are quite mistaken there; that is a barbarous Western notion which is excusable enough, I suppose, to people who have never had a chance to study the art of the epicure, for it is an art. What is it that Stevenson says about the fine perceptions required to appreciate the taste of an olive?—I have forgotten but it is very pat to support my argument."

"Trust a Scot to be able to quote another Scot at all times and seasons to support him in a heresy. However, if all your argument is designed merely as an excuse for a good appetite, I shall forgive you. I wish that the cook here was a better professor of his art; this mess is so very greasy. The coffee is good though."

"I'm sorry that you don't appear to be eating anything," he said solicitously. "You will want all your strength and you might as well try to take a good breakfast."

She had recovered her composure again and they finished their meal quietly, neither saying much. After they had prolonged their sitting as long as they felt they dared, they went out and walked around the street until it was within half an hour of train time when they went back to the railway station.

The Eastern train came in at last and Lorraine got into the hotel bus and was soon signing her name in the register at the hotel office. The second name above hers was "T. Stubbs, Calgary," and the sight gave her a thrill of satisfaction.

It was an hour and a half later when they got to speech with the great man. Meanwhile Lorraine had had a rest in her room and Alistair, after bribing a bell-boy to keep him informed of Stubbs' movements, had hunted up the hotel barber and persuaded him to give him a shave. They had thought it best to let the cattle dealer have his

breakfast in peace before tackling him, thinking that he would thus be in a better frame of mind.

The dining-room door opened out to the hall way opposite the lounge room and an hour or so later Mr. Stubbs fell an easy prey to his pursuers, who had posted themselves in a couple of big easy chairs from whence they had been able to command a good view of all who issued from the dining-room. He had a toothpick in his hand and stared insolently at them when Alistair asked for the favour of a few words. He was a short man but stout and broad with a strong, protruding chin clean shaven, and full, sensual lips surmounted by a bristling, yellow moustache. His nose and ears were large and the whole effect was rather masterful and dominating.

"You want to speak to me, eh? Why, it seems that I have seen you before, haven't I?" and he looked questioningly from one to the other under bushy, yellow eyebrows that imparted an air of fierceness to his glance. "Well, let us go and sit down in the corner here?" and he led them over where there was a more private place behind a large pillar. Motioning the girl to be seated on a large settee, he sat down beside her while Alistair took an easy chair opposite.

"I know now where I saw you," he said, chewing his toothpick; "it was at the Rexham races yesterday afternoon. Some people, miss, once you see them, you don't forget them in a hurry;" and he grinned with appreciation of his own gallantry. "Now then, if you will tell me what I can do for you?" and he turned again to Alistair who had been waiting his chance.

Lorraine had arranged with the latter that he should speak first and explain the situation and then if necessary she would follow up his appeal.

Very quietly and deliberately Alistair explained the whole matter; and how they hoped that he would take back his money and let them have Pronto since the horse had not been Ted's to sell. The boy would never have done such a thing had he not been under the influence of drink at

the time. He was not a bad boy, but weak, Alistair assured him, and no one would be sorrier than he when he came back to his senses and found what he had done. The horse had been a gift from Lorraine's father and she was greatly attached to it and it would be a shame for her to lose it in this way.

Stubbs heard him to the end without interrupting, gazing steadily at him under the thick eyelashes and twirling the wooden toothpick between his heavy lips in a most distracting fashion.

"So that's the proposition is it?" he said laughing sardonically, "that's what you've followed me all this distance to tell me: a pretty wild goose chase it seems to me. You must think that Tom Stubbs is a soft mark that he's going to swallow a tale like that and just on your say-so let you have back the beast that he's paid his good money for. No, no, the horse suits me and I'm going to keep him. I paid all he's worth but when I want a thing, price doesn't matter so much. See!"

"What Mr. Kilgour says is quite true," protested Lorraine, indignation mastering her timidity. "He is my horse and Ted had no right to sell him to you. All we want is that you should take back your money and let me have Pronto back. You have plenty of horses and it shouldn't make much difference to you. If you had a pet horse, you wouldn't like to lose him, would you?"

"What I would like or would not like is not the question, miss," he replied. "If your brother had not the right to sell the beast then if you want to take him away on that ground, I must look to him; and let me tell you, it's a serious business to sell what doesn't belong to you. So you can take that line if you like. It's all right if you don't mind what happens to Ted. All I know is that he's got my five hundred dollars and I've got the horse; and I'll keep the horse or know the reason why."

He laughed again, a dry laugh that had no real mirth in it, a laugh that held a menace and fell on the ears of Lorraine hard and pitiless. Her heart sank and she turned

away her head to hide her discomposure. She had been foolish to come and Mr. Kilgour's advice had been good advice. Her mind felt numbed by her anxiety and for the moment she was reviewing the past twelve hours and had forgotten the present. It came back, however, and she realised that Mr. Kilgour was speaking. He was offering Stubbs, the hateful, a cigar and was laughing with him instead of being angry. He had lit a match and was lighting his cigar for him and was now with great deliberation cutting the end of his own.

"You are perfectly within your rights, Mr. Stubbs," he said when all the business of getting lighted up was finished with. "Miss De Roche knows that very well; and it is the last thing in her mind that she has any right to ask you for your horse back again. The horse is most certainly yours by right of possession which, as we lawyers say—I'm one of that much maligned class, Mr. Stubbs, though you might not think it to look at me—is nine points of the law. The tenth is with you also; and it lies in the fact that if the young lady should claim that the sale her brother made is null and void because he had actually no title to sell, she incriminates him, which, as a good sister, she could never do. That's the position exactly, isn't it?"

"Exactly," replied Mr. Stubbs nodding his head vigorously. "In other words I hold cards and spades and big and little casino and you folks haven't got a look-in."

"That's just about the way of it," said Alistair; "and the sooner Miss De Roche and I get on our way back home, the better. I told her, you know that it was no use her coming but she would come. Rode in that dirty, draughty caboose all night—pretty plucky thing for a girl to do but foolish all the same. Said she wouldn't leave the horse. I told her it was nonsense but it didn't make any difference. She felt sure that you would be generous in the matter in spite of the fact that you had all the rights on your side."

Mr. Stubbs puffed away at his cigar, big strong puffs at regular intervals that threw out heavy clouds of smoke.

Sometimes it would form in rings and he would watch them curl and then dissolve enjoying his own dexterity.

"You told her right; it was nonsense and she would have done well to take your advice. A silly piece of nonsense it was. I knew where I could place the horse to good advantage when I bought it and nobody could expect me to give it back. Not but what I would like to have done the young lady a favour; but business is business, and I don't let sentiment enter in at all. It's all very well to play the good fellow but it doesn't get you anywhere; and Tom Stubbs wasn't born yesterday."

"Yes," said Alistair, "I suppose you stand to make quite a bit of money by selling the horse again; and it's hardly to be expected that you should lose a good thing for the matter of sentiment and a lady's bright eyes."

"I stand to make five hundred dollars, that's all. There's another young lady that wants a horse and she told me what she wanted; and in that little black of yours I've got it. Her father'll pay me the thousand as quick as winkin' for with him money ain't no object at all. Now if I were to give this young lady back her horse, I'd have to disappoint the other one; so you see there ain't no object. I'll deal with you if you like for a thousand—that's five hundred dollars on my bargain, but you can't have him for a cent less. I'm not in business for my health you see."

"Oh that is impossible, Mr. Stubbs," Lorraine broke in almost in tears, and her eyes, veiled in a mist were shiny and beautiful—at least Alistair thought so and wondered how the man held out so long. "Just for once in a way couldn't you look at it from another standpoint than a business one? Be a good sport, as my brother Ted says, couldn't you, just for once?" she pleaded.

Stubbs trimmed the ashes from the end of his cigar and crossed one knee over the other putting his back against the end of the settee so as to face the girl. His shaggy countenance seemed to be somewhat less aggressive. Her eyes were still holding him and as she leaned forward towards him in her eagerness he seemed to fall some-

what under the spell of them; and he began to thaw out from his attitude of hostility. From the stern and severe, he changed to the jocose.

"You're a very taking young lady and I'd like to be a good sport as you say, if I could afford it, miss; but in this case to follow my feelings would be too expensive. If I had been ten years younger, I suppose likely I wouldn't ha' been able to refuse those bright eyes of yours but I ain't so sentimental at this time o' day. Now, the like of this young man here—I don't know if he is your fie-an-cay or not—but if I were him, I wouldn't be five minutes in forking out the cash an' gettin' back the horse for ye. I would consider it cheap at the price now for a young lady like you. I'll tell you what I'll do though—to show that I ain't such a bad sport after all and just because you're such a good-looking young lady. I'll do this with you, young fellow; I'll throw you for the horse an if I win you pay me a thousand dollars. If I lose you can take him for nothing and the young lady can keep the five hundred dollars I paid for him. Seems to me, miss, that's a pretty fair sporting proposition and you asked me to be a good sport.

"Wait a minute though," he continued as Alistair was about to speak. "You'll have to assure me that you have the money all right. I ain't goin' to bet with you without I know that if I win you can come through with the cash. Will you take me up now?"

"Done with you," said Alistair quickly; "and I'll put up my cheque on the bank at Kamloops and you'll find the money's there all right, that is if you win."

"Oh, I can't let you do this, Mr. Kilgour. It's too much of a risk and I can't pay you back—not just now at least. You mustn't do it," said Lorraine quickly. She was manifestly distressed.

"Nonsense," he returned; "it's a fair chance and I'm willing to take it. I'll have the horse for security, you know," he said jokingly, at the same time anxious to lift from her any sense of obligation. It was a quixotic thing

that he was doing for he could ill afford to lose the money at this time.

"Shall I write you out a cheque now?" said Alistair.

"No, I'll take your word," said Stubbs; "that's good enough for me. I've seen your breed of Englishman before; and though you're easy to beat on a deal and as a rule, almighty stuck on yourselves, you're game and you don't go back on your word. Here, boy," and he beckoned to a bell-boy that stood over by the office counter. "Go to the bar, will you, and bring us the dice.

"Yes," he went on, "you're a queer lot, you English yet you have your good points; you play fair an' sometimes you get badly let in. I've known some of you that I could have stolen their eye-teeth while they were talkin' to me. But I wouldn't do it with them kind; it would be like stealing candy from a kid. No, no, if a man thinks he's as smart as I am then it's nip and tuck between us and no quarter and I'll never squeal if I come off with the short end.

"But if he puts himself in my hands, so to speak, and trusts to me then I wouldn't for anything put one over on him. No, no, that ain't Tom Stubbs."

The boy arrived with the dice and the cattleman handed them to Lorraine drawing a little table that stood by towards her.

"Now then, miss, you must make the throw for your side; and see if you can make it a lucky one for the young chap here. It's a big stake you're playin' for, mind. What'll we make it on, the first throw or the best out of three?" and he looked to Lorraine.

"Let it rest on the first throw," she replied, "if it must be. The shorter the suspense, the better."

Her fingers trembled with excitement. Would she have the luck?

"Shall I throw first?" she asked.

Stubbs nodded.

She rattled the box and threw. The dice fell out, a six and a four.

"Good throw for you!" said Stubbs. "Now we'll see what luck I have."

He got a two and a three.

"Bravo, Miss Lorraine," said Alistair delighted. "You've won.

"Congratulations!" and he held out his hand to her. She let him grasp it, smiling at him through eyes that were still misty. It was the first time that he had ever shaken hands with her—it was a little hand and he did not hasten to drop it.

"Will you shake with me too," said Stubbs smiling; "now that you've got the horse and my five hundred bucks, you ought to be willing to do that."

"Of course, I will, and gladly," she replied heartily, "and I thank you ever so much. I'll say you're a good sport, but I won't keep your five hundred. You must take it back. I hope some day you'll come and make acquaintance with my father at Inshallah."

"I'll be delighted, miss, the first time I am back in your country; but when I do, you'll not leave your horse around loose for I swear I am liable to steal him next time. I won't take back the money either, not if you begged me on your knees.

"As for you, my lad, I've only this to say, that you're a good sport. I just wish that I was as young as you and I'd have given another five hundred to take your place on the return trip;" and he winked portentously at Lorraine who blushed furiously and turned down her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE west-bound train left Revelstoke at half past five and it was boarded by Lorraine and Alistair. The day for both had passed quickly, Lorraine after making her excuses to Mr. Stubbs had retired to her room where she slept until lunch time leaving the two men together. The cattleman had evidently taken a fancy to Alistair and talked away interestingly about his business and the experiences he had met with at various times in travelling about the country.

Cattle were going up he declared and now was the time to buy. He had been looking at the Stetson cattle about twenty miles from Garston. Alistair knew the Stetson place by reputation. The old man, who had been one of the pioneers, had just died leaving a wife but no children behind him. The executor wanted to sell the cattle to clear up the debts of the estate and was offering them very cheap, thirty-five dollars a head, about four hundred, taking them right through. Stubbs said that he would have jumped at the offer but he had bought so much already that he had hardly enough funds left and did not want to strain himself. He could easily get the necessary amount from his bank but he preferred not to. If Alistair had the money, he offered to go in halves with him and share the profit. He would arrange for the sale of them and Alistair could look after the shipping. Allardyce, Stetson's executor was to deliver them at the cars at Garston any time required up to the 1st of September, so that there would be no expense and it would be easy to sell them at a good profit long before that. There was no risk, Stubbs declared.

Alistair told him he was sorry but that he had not the money or he might have taken up the offer. His own was all tied up in the Inshallah place; and when he would get

it out, he said he did not know. The De Roches had about three hundred head but so far they seemed not to have found them very profitable.

"Well, you should be able to get back some of your funds this Fall for they'll make a good thing out of them, take it from me. Beef is about six cents now—if you can sell it at all—but you mark my words it'll be nine or ten before the end of August. You say you've no money, but I'm thinking you can get it if you want it—you Britishers always have rich relations—and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll leave the matter open for a week and if you change your mind wire me to Calgary. 'Stubbs, cattledealer' will find me. The money would be wanted within a fortnight. It'd take about seven thousand dollars. If I hear from you, I'll wire Allardyce. He gave two weeks' option and there's ten days still to go. Think it over."

At leaving, Stubbs had repeated the offer and the two parted with mutual regret.

Lorraine had had lunch sent to her room and feeling rested after sleep, she and Alistair had gone for a stroll around.

It was a relief to both of them, however, when they found themselves in the train for each had felt something of an awkwardness and constraint. He had suggested to the girl that perhaps it would be better for him to return by the next train so that they should not travel together in case of any of the Duck Lake people being on board and making unpleasant comments; but she had objected to this.

"I have done nothing to be ashamed of and neither have you," she said; "although I did rate you so hard at first," she added with a smile; "and I think that there is no reason that we should act as if we had done wrong. At the same time, I won't want to make any unnecessary talk, of course."

"Perhaps, if I go on to Kamloops and you get off at Garston that will be all the precaution that would be necessary. I could stay at the hotel there and turn up at In-

shallah next day. You will have to stay all night at Garston though, won't you?"

"Yes, but I shall be all right with old Humpty. He will look after me and Jimmie goes up with the stage about noon. He will take me home."

So it was arranged, and with that off their minds they both felt relieved. Alistair, to tell the truth, was beginning to feel differently towards the girl—the last twenty-four hours had shown her to him in a different light. He could not help admiring her pluck and cheerfulness under trying circumstances and he found an ease and restfulness in her presence that was grateful.

The success of their mutual undertaking and the relief to have it so happily consummated had brought to both of them a feeling of elation. As they sat down together in the dining car, the contrast between their situation of the night before in the smelly caboose and this luxurious travelling palace of sumptuousness with its brilliant lighting and snowy-covered tables gleaming with cut-glass and silver and the large windows on either side through which could be seen the most beautiful panorama all kindled into wondrous tints of rose and gold by the beams from a brilliant sunset, was delightful. A spirit of sheer gaiety had fallen on both of them, partly due to the reaction and relief and partly to the perfection of the environment; for what can equal in its sense of luxury the delight of eating a well-served dinner in a Pullman while the finest scenery in the world is passing by in panoramic splendour.

The people about them seemed blithe and free from care, fashionably dressed and chatting with each other happily; and the waiter who served them was all smiles, scenting in this youthful pair, a honeymoon couple good for a generous tip. Lorraine had suggested that they get as fine a dinner as they could and pay for it out of the five hundred dollars taken from Ted, the bulk of which was still remaining; and Alistair falling in with her whim consented. She was in a playful mood and it was pleasant to lean back and watch her as with eyes sparkling and heightened colour

she smiled at him, a smile that held a hint of roguery and at the same time betrayed a tremor of maidenly bashfulness.

He declared that if she was bound to pay for the meal then she must be consistent and do the ordering of it; and it was pretty to see her pursing up her lips over the mysteries of the menu card while the waiter hovered about hiding his grins behind his napkin and assisting with the advice which Alistair smilingly refused to supply. At last, it was completed and with a sigh of relief she handed the waiter the order-slip and leaned back in her chair.

"You might have helped me," she complained; "when you saw how green I was. I was at the man's mercy and I hardly know what he will bring us. It serves you right if you can't eat it when it comes."

"No danger! You showed admirable selection. An epicure could not have done any better;" and his eyes twinkled as an odd thought struck him. She caught the fleeting gleam.

"Now, what are you thinking of?" she asked. "What are you smiling at?"

He had an attractive smile, she was remarking, singularly attractive.

He hesitated a moment under the gaze of a compelling pair of blue eyes and when he spoke there was a catch in his breath as of one greatly daring and fearful of his temerity.

"I was thinking of the inconsistency of woman and how you have heaped coals of fire upon my head. I begin by forcing myself upon your hospitality to your great annoyance—and now you retaliate by forcing your hospitality on me. Is it right to overwhelm me with such a weight of obligation?"

The blue eyes were hidden under a fringe of long lashes while she turned their glance sidewise through the window and her profile had a wistful cast. She was thinking of her first few minutes alone in the caboose last night—alone with the recumbent figure on the locker and the pain and terror of them. She was thinking of what the night might

have been had she had to lie awake even for part of it in fear like that; and she was grateful to him. Her eyes still turned away.

"Since you forced yourself into my service as knight-errant the least that I can do is to give you a meal. You have been so good through it all—so kind and considerate and so—so forbearing after the way I have treated you—and I am afraid that you may have come at some sacrifice—more sacrifice than the mere discomfort of the trip and the having to put up with my tantrums—my Xantippean—I think that is the word——" and for a moment he had a glimpse of the blue eyes again—"my Xantippean tantrums. I am afraid that Amy—I am afraid that Miss Pelton will be annoyed; but surely she will have forgiven it by this time. It was natural enough, was it not that she should be a little put out and you must not think the worse of her for it. We girls have such terrible tempers, you know—we are so touchy, aren't we?"

He was pleased that she should make excuses for her friend and was touched by her evident solicitude for the outcome; but he was far from feeling concerned about the school-teacher's forgiveness for his desertion of her on the night of the dance.

"At one time you are all sparks and fireworks," he agreed smiling; "and then again in a moment almost, you become dates and honey. No wonder a mere man is apt to be at a loss."

The waiter now appeared with a trayful of eatables and the subject had perforce to be dropped. It was a bountiful repast that she had ordered of which the pièce de resistance was roast turkey and they both did justice to it. The talk was on a less personal strain, of her school life in Victoria, of his experience in London of which he was able to tell much that was interesting to her, of books, about which she showed a cultured and discerning taste and an acquaintance not wide but eclectic.

Dinner over and the waiter tipped to his ample satisfaction, they passed out into the observation car in which there

were only three or four passengers seated and on out to the platform at the end. Here there was only one occupant, an elderly gentleman sitting huddled at the side, his coat collar turned up evidently to protect his throat from the chill night air, and apparently asleep. They sat down on the other side.

"This is the most peaceful and secluded spot on the whole train," Alistair remarked as he settled himself comfortably in his chair and pulled his cigarette case from his pocket. "If there is anybody that knows us on board they are not going to come out here, so you may feel perfectly safe. I am glad now that I didn't wait for the next train, for there was no need for the precaution; and I wouldn't have missed this for anything. How do you think it compares with the caboose?"

"I don't believe the view is as good," she replied. "We have to look back all the time, while last night we could look before as well as behind. Still I wouldn't care to be back in the caboose all the same. That was a very peremptory conductor and as for the passenger—well, he was worse than peremptory; but the less said about him——"

She paused and he could tell that she was smiling.

"The less said about him the better," he concluded for her.

"He is quite able to speak for himself," she amended, "if he wants to; but he is modest—at times, that is. I wonder what Ted is doing," she said becoming serious in a moment. "My conscience still pricks me for leaving him. I do hope that he went home and kept away from Monte and the rest of that bad crowd. I thought he was going to reform completely. I would hate to have all the neighbours know what he did about Pronto; but if Amy and Dickson, the station-master, keep quiet it may be all right."

He was silent, for he could not reassure her. He was aware how news flies around in a country place.

"The best way is to defy gossip and to rise superior to it," he said for want of something better. "We ought to be more afraid of our own self-judgment than that of the world."

"So you say, but I notice that you are very careful about Mrs. Grundy," she twitted.

"Ah, Mrs. Grundy is a different matter altogether, Mrs. Grundy is a female and is not to be flouted with impunity. Hence my care to seek out the most secluded corner on the train. Here, at least, no officious friend is likely to find us out and plague us with embarrassing questions."

"Don't be too sure of that, young man," said a deep bass voice coming from the figure in the corner which had straightened itself up and was now looking towards them disclosing to Alistair's astonished eyes a pair of bushy eyebrows and grey whiskers that bristled familiarly under the moon's revealing beams. "I don't want to be officious but I thought it was best to let you know that I am here."

"Why,—why it's Mr. Durie," gasped Alistair, jumping up and grasping the owner of the voice by the hand. "I never expected to see you here."

"No, evidently not," the old lawyer replied with an intonation of dryness that was not lost on his listeners; "and be assured that I wouldn't have interrupted you, only that I couldn't sit still and listen any longer. I didn't expect to see you here either."

"But let me introduce my friend. This is Miss De Roche; Mr. Durie, an old friend of mine from Edinburgh, who was the last man I expected to find out here."

The lawyer rose to his feet and bowed; the girl, rising also, acknowledged his salute with a faint inclination of her head. Then she turned to Alistair.

"The night air is chilly," she said, "I think I shall go inside and leave you and your friend alone as you will have much to talk about," and she left them.

CHAPTER XXXIX

IT was not much more than an hour after Lorraine and Alistair had left the dance at Rexham when Layburn himself slipped unobtrusively out of the hall to the shed behind where his horse was awaiting his master's pleasure. Quickly harnessing it to the buggy he drove out into the road and took the direction of the hotel at Garston.

He, too, like Lorraine, had had a summons from the scene of gaiety not half an hour before by the mouth of a half-grown Indian boy, but it was not with the intention of obeying it that he had stolen away now. It was from Pete, his half-breed partner, who had been hurt in the race that afternoon and now lay with his back broken at the house of a relative about half a mile from Garston. Pete, so the messenger had said, was in a bad way and greatly troubled in mind, and in the midst of his moaning he had called repeatedly for Layburn.

But Olney, after careful cogitation, had decided not to answer the call. Pete had been a useful man and had always dealt on the straight, but it looked to Layburn as if perhaps his time of usefulness was past. The accident of that afternoon, the way things were shaping, might prove a very fortunate affair from the viewpoint of the latter. On the other hand, it might prove the reverse; for if Pete thought that he was about to die, he might in a fit of deathbed repentance divulge certain matters concerning the dealings of the partnership which would prove disastrous.

Layburn was much discouraged, of late, with the way fate was treating him. For a long time he had been having everything his own way and he was the more inclined to be peevish over the obstacles to his plans that had in the last month or so presented themselves.

It had started, of course, with the appearance of this young Britisher on the scene. No longer, as of old, could he consider himself boss on the ranch with this fellow slouching around like a sleuth and watching everything that went on. Then Lorraine had thrown him over and had shown him that his suit was hopeless, the suit by which he had hoped eventually to have Inshallah for his own when old De Roche should shuffle off. His defeat in the struggle with Kilgour had not improved his prestige in the district and some, who before had never dared to show their real feelings towards him, were now giving him the cold shoulder.

He was curious as to what Lorraine had done about the loss of her horse and when he came down to the station he sought out Dickson in his office and interrogated him. The station agent, however, beyond admitting that the horse had been shipped out with the rest of the dealer's purchases and that Miss De Roche and Mr. Kilgour had been in to see him about it, was careful not to divulge anything further. His manner made it so plain that he was on his guard that Olney was all the more curious to learn more.

Seeking the hotel, he was not able to get anything out of old Humpty, but he found the man who was to have gone to Calgary with the horses. After treating him to a couple of drinks at the bar, it was not long before he learned that a man and a girl—who could be none other than Lorraine and Kilgour—had boarded the freight and were now on their way east. Quickly shaking off the source of his information, who would gladly have made a night of it with him, he left him in the bar and went in to the parlour to be alone and think over the situation.

Here the lamp was burning low, but by its faint light he made out the outlines of a figure on the lounge. He went over to it and lighted a match which quickly disclosed the features of Ted sound asleep, his right arm thrown up over his head with all the abandon of the drunken man.

A smile, crafty and sinister, gleamed for a moment on Layburn's face as he looked down on that of the boy flushed and tear-soiled, a smile that betrayed satisfaction.

"The little fool!" he muttered contemptuously as he turned away. His mind was made up in a flash. He would pull his stakes and away. The game here was well-nigh up and miraculously the road had been cleared for him. De Roche was a helpless invalid, Lorraine and Kilgour off together on a wild-goose chase and Ted drunk and sick with remorse, no doubt, for selling the horse and therefore too crushed, even if he did get sober, to offer any opposition. Pete, his partner, helpless on his back and likely to die, was not liable within the next twenty-four hours to cause any trouble.

And twenty-four hours would do it. Only to-day at the Fair, Lancaster, who had come out from Edmonton to buy store cattle to stock his new ranch, had offered him forty dollars a head straight through for the Inshallah cattle. He would be glad to take his own and Pete's as well—Pete's no longer, indeed, for Layburn had no intention of accounting to the half-breed for his share of the cattle. Pete with his back broken was down and out. He was only an Indian anyway and there was no use to take account of him.

But could he get the cattle, his own and the Inshallah bunch all in and down to Garston by to-morrow night? Time was valuable, for Kilgour and Lorraine might come back any time. He felt sure, however, that they could not get back within forty-eight hours. He could hire at least half the men who were there at the dance to help him. There was another dance to-morrow night in the Garston school-house, and so long as they were back to that they would not mind riding all day, especially if he promised them double wages. Nor would they ever question his right to sell the Inshallah cattle.

Lancaster was at the Stewart Hotel in Kamloops by now. He could telephone to him there and arrange for him to be at Garston the following night with the Brand Inspector at five o'clock. He must bring his money with him in bills. There would not be time to cash a cheque, for he would have to be across the line into the States by another twenty-four hours. Once there, he knew of places where he would be

safe. He would hire a chauffeur from Kamloops that he knew of by repute who would ask no questions as long as his pay was liberal. He would take Monte with him. Monte knew too much and was too dangerous to leave behind, but he would be content with a modest share of the booty.

Now he would be able to show Kilgour who was the best man. The Britisher would find he had only the naked ranch for his security and he would be stuck on the notes that he had signed at the bank as well. And as for Lorraine, it would serve her right to have her pride ground in the dust. She would find that there were worse things that might happen to her than the loss of her riding pony.

Olney was a man not wont to give outward expression to his feelings, but he rubbed his hands together in satisfaction as he went away to telephone to Kamloops.

CHAPTER XL

ON Lorraine leaving Mr. Durie and Alistair alone at the end of the car, the two men were silent for a few moments, each feeling somewhat at a loss for words. The elder had heard all that had been said and the tenor of it had perplexed him not a little. To find his friend apparently travelling with a young woman on intimate terms was something of a shock to him and the reference to gossip and Mrs. Grundy had not been reassuring. He was loath to put the worst construction on what he had seen and heard, but certainly, on first appearances, it looked bad. He had so pleasantly anticipated this first meeting with the boy and the surprise that he would give him, that to have it happen in such a fashion was a keen disappointment.

Alistair on his side was considerably nonplussed also. He had been enjoying so much his tête-à-tête with Lorraine that its sudden and somewhat unpleasant termination in this way came to him as a caprice of fortune that he could ill take philosophically. He was wondering, too, how much of the conversation the lawyer had heard and what construction he might have put upon it; and while on the whole he felt that his conscience was clear, still, his association with Miss De Roche on a trip of this kind was certainly an awkward thing to explain. An older man might have been able to carry it off with more aplomb, but Alistair, in spite of his sophistication in the shady precincts of London law courts, was yet only in his early twenties and had still at times something of a boy's engaging bashfulness.

"Is the young lady travelling with you?" asked Mr. Durie, who was the first to find his tongue, trying but with poor success to make his voice sound unconcerned. It was useless, he thought, to ignore her presence. He might as well know the worst or the best as soon as possible and

clear the way for discussion of the matters that had brought him out here.

"Yes," replied Alistair with some hesitation, "in a way, we are together. It is something of a long story, though. I suppose that you probably heard something of our conversation."

"I did, I must confess, and I apologise. At first, I did not know it was you, but the voice sounded familiar and very soon I felt sure that it was. Perhaps I did not make my presence known soon enough, but really, my boy, I had no intention of eaves-dropping. I must say, though, that I am sorry if there should be anything that the boy I knew as Alistair Kilgour would have to say that he would be ashamed for me to hear—for I think of you as a boy still, even although you are now pretty much of a man."

"I should, indeed, be sorry too, sir; and really you do me wrong if you think there is in this case, though as I said before it is a long story and takes a little explaining."

He sensed the concern in the other's tones and he had too much real regard for his friendship to let him rest under his misapprehension a moment longer than was necessary. So he told him the whole story, explaining at length his relations with the De Roches from the start, much of which, of course, the lawyer already knew from his letters, in which he had told him the difficulties he had to contend with, not only from the De Roche household, but from the people of the district as well.

Mr. Durie, while still somewhat scandalised, was much relieved by his explanation and admitted that perhaps the young man if he acted rashly had not done amiss in helping the girl, especially as it had turned out.

"All the same, it's a most extraordinary story—a most extraordinary story," he repeated with emphasis. "And you say that this is the girl who has been so mean to you all along and has done everything to make it uncomfortable. Ah, my boy," and he shook his head. "I'm afraid that there's only one explanation. She must be wonderfully good-looking and you must be deeply in love. But I suppose

almost anything is to be expected in this extraordinary country. However, I cannot complain. I came out here—apart from your father's express request and my wish to help you and him out of a hole—I came out looking for thrills. At my time of life one would hardly expect them—but I am certainly getting more than I bargained for. This is the worst yet. I could tell you of several interesting occurrences on the way out——”

“But tell me first why you came, sir, will you, please, for I am on tenterhooks to know what could tear you away from Auld Reekie. I quite believe that it must have been for my sake and my father's, for I know of your kindness in the past. But I should like to learn the immediate causes that moved you to take such a step—and apart from your desire to get thrills, of course,” he added roguishly.

“None of your impertinence, young sir; but give me a cigarette and I'll tell you all about it.

“In the first place, your poor father was getting properly worried. This foreclosure action was weighing on his spirits and affecting his health. He had never experienced anything of the kind before and he was quite unable to take it calmly, although I assured him that we should certainly be able to make it all right before there was any danger of loss of the property. Then he was afraid that something might happen to you or that you would not know what was best to be done in forcing a settlement out here; and he thought, in short, that if I came out two heads would be better than one and that between us we might get the things adjusted in some way. He still thinks of you as a boy, you see, and can hardly realise that it is possible you should be able to take care of yourself.”

“Dear old Dad,” said Alistair. “I can quite realise it and you were too good-natured to refuse when he suggested that you should come.”

“As a matter of fact, my dear boy, I jumped at the chance. To take such a holiday as a matter of actual duty was a real godsend. Here I was able to tell everybody that I had to

go to Canada on clients' business, when all the time I knew that I was humbugging them and myself as well.

"As a matter of fact, it's made a new man of me and I feel ten years younger already. These Rockies, why I never saw anything like them. They make one's blood thrill to look at them! And the mountain air and the colouring and the sunsets; why man, I could almost write poetry. At times I feel positively dithyrambic, by Jove, I do!"

"I know," said Alistair, "I've got it too, bad; and to make a clean breast of it, I don't want to go back. You can keep your law, but no more of it for me. I'm done with it, if I can make a living for myself out here in the open.

"And there are big chances too. This very day I met a cattleman who showed me how in three months' time with seven thousand dollars I could make my fifty per cent; and I believe he was right."

"Ah, speculation!" exclaimed the lawyer with a sneer. It was as if he had said "rattlesnakes" or something else as deadly.

"Speculation, if you like; but speculation where you could hardly lose," said Alistair, warming. "Buying cattle at their present low figure couldn't have much of the element of risk in it, could it? especially when one would be buying cheap from a man who wanted to sell even if he had to do it at a loss."

"There's something in that, I suppose," Mr. Durie admitted. "Tell me more of the details. I was talking to a farmer on the prairies, and he also was telling me he thought that cattle were due for a rise. I haven't kept my ears shut at all on this trip across I can tell you."

Alistair explained Stubbs' offer in detail and the lawyer was deeply interested.

"I've taken a flier before this in the Argentine," he remarked, thoughtfully puffing at his cigarette, "and I did well, to, out of it. Of course, it's very sinful and I shouldn't, I suppose; but I have gathered together quite a bit of gear and I've no one of my own to spend it," he added sadly. "So I might as well have a little fun if I want to—at

least that's my feeling. It puts a zest into life sometimes to take a chance, and mine has been on the whole humdrum enough. I've steered clear of the biggest lottery, so I may be excused if I have a shot at some of the lesser ones, I suppose."

"You mean marriage?" queried Alistair. "The ladies would say you were ungallant."

"Ah, but I don't say such things before the ladies. However, to keep to the subject, if you think that this man, Stubbs is all right you can wire him that you accept his offer and I can have the money here by cable in a couple of days or so. I'll give you half the profits over four per cent on my money. How'll that suit you?"

"It's far too generous," said Alistair. "You don't need to give me any of the profits. You are taking all the risk and for all I know there may be considerable."

"Well, I made that much on the Argentine business and if I lose on this I'll just be square of the game. Righteous people will have a chance to say it serves me right. Now, let us go in to the young lady, for I am dying to see what she is like after what you have told me. She may be thinking all sorts of things about us, and it is time that I made amends for any unkind thoughts that I may have had of her."

They went inside and found Lorraine sitting rather desolate in the far corner of the car reading a magazine. She received them with an air of hauteur which, however, soon melted under the geniality of the lawyer. Old man of the world as he was, he could be very agreeable when he laid himself out for it.

At Sicamous, he sent Alistair out to despatch the telegram to Stubbs, and in spite of the young man's warning that he had better be cautious, he insisted on its being done, saying he felt sure that it was a good thing.

While he was away he had a chance for a talk with Lorraine alone; and when she found out that he had come to join Mr. Kilgour, she invited him to visit them at Inshallah and take up his quarters there. The lawyer accepted with

alacrity, but said that he would travel to Kamloops with his friend and come out with him the next day. He was aware of the arrangement they had made and thought it was a wise one.

It was half past ten when the train arrived, and their farewell was of the briefest and most perfunctory. Alistair followed Lorraine out on the platform at the end of the car and saw her descend and walk quietly off towards the hotel. Two men boarded the train. They were Lancaster, the dealer whom he had seen at the Fair with Stubbs, and Du Bois, the Brand Inspector.

The conductor had just lifted his lantern as a signal to the engineer to start when a small flying figure appeared suddenly from the other direction. It was Herb.

"Mr. Kilgour! Mr. Kilgour!" he cried as he recognised Alistair's head leaning out. "Quick, come down, come down: something terrible has happened. Layburn's sold all the Inshallah cattle."

In his eagerness and in order to keep the conductor from jumping up and thus blocking the one possible exit for Alistair, who was behind, he caught hold of the man's coat sleeve. Railway dignitaries, however, are not accustomed to be treated in such free-and-easy fashion, especially when on duty, and the conductor, indignant at this lèse-majesté, with one vigorous thrust of the arm flung the boy to the ground. The second's delay, however, was sufficient and Alistair, grasping in a flash the meaning of his words, jumped lightly down. Without stopping to remonstrate with the conductor, he picked Herb up but little the worse and waited for him to recover his breath. Meanwhile the long train moved slowly out bearing Mr. Durie, all unconscious as yet of his companion's desertion.

It was not long, in spite of the boy's excitement and the incoherence at times of his tale, before Alistair had learned all he had to tell him.

The night before, after the parting with Alistair, he had gone straight to the dance hall to find Layburn. As he took the old road, however, he missed meeting him on the way

down to Garston as he would otherwise have done. Not finding him, he waited about on the chance that he might come back, as one or two of the men said that they were expecting he would. In about an hour or so, he was rewarded by his appearance and at once delivered his message.

Layburn, however, as we know, had already found out what Herb had to tell him as well as the part that the boy had been told not to disclose, and he was too intent on the immediate business he had before him to pay much attention.

Herb then went home and narrowly escaped a thrashing from his mother for having stayed so late. Next morning he went to school but was on tenterhooks all day. In the afternoon, as soon as he was released, he rushed off home to saddle Alistair's horse and ride down to meet the train.

On the way, he overtook Layburn and his riders with the cattle. To his sharp boyish wits, it seemed strange that as soon as Alistair and Lorraine were out of the way, the stock should be rounded up and taken off the range at this season of the year. It could be for nothing else but to sell them, he reasoned and he determined to see all that could be seen of what went on. He followed them all the way and was nearby when Layburn shook hands with the cattle dealer and the Brand Inspector. The cattle were coralled and counted with the greatest haste. The time before dusk was short enough. There were about four hundred, all told, and mixed in with the Inshallah cattle were others that bore Layburn's own brand.

Herb had seen Ted come out from the hotel and Layburn had taken him inside and talked to him. After that Ted had stood still and watched the proceedings. When these were over, the riders had all gone off to the dance at the school house. The Brand Inspector and Mr. Lancaster, the dealer, had gone into the hotel with Layburn and Ted. The two former had just boarded the train that Alistair had left.

"You're a smart boy, Herb; and I am greatly indebted to you," said Alistair. "That Layburn is evidently a worse rogue than I had thought. He has, no doubt, sold the cattle

and got the money for them. What we must do first then is to get it back from him."

"Gee, I had 'most forgotten about Rout," said Herb. "Come here, Rout," and the figure of an Indian boy, a lad of eighteen or thereabouts, appeared suddenly from out the darkness where he had been standing close by while they were talking. "Rout is Pete's brother. Pete, you know, is Layburn's partner up at the old Riley place. He was the Indian that got hurt yesterday in the race and he's awful bad too. Rout was lookin' after the place when Pete was away, and when he saw Layburn's men roundin' up his brother's cattle he sure knew that there was somethin' wrong. Gussed that Layburn was up to some dirty trick when Pete was sick. So he come down an' told Pete an' Pete was awful mad. Said he'd make it hot for Layburn an' he sent Rout here to tell you how they'd been stealin' Inshallah calves these last two years."

"Is that so?" said Alistair to the boy.

"That shore is right," said the lad, nodding his head. "They useter brand the Inshallah calves with their brand and no one was the wiser. When I told Pete how Layburn was double-crossing him—sellin' the calves an' all—he said he'd squeal if he went to gaol for it. He allowed though now that his back is broke they wouldn't trouble him, an' he thought that mebbe you or Mr. De Roche if you got the cattle money back from Layburn would give him a little bit."

"An' would he swear to this? Take his oath before a magistrate, you know?"

"Sure, he would, you bet. He'd do anything to get even with Layburn; 'n' Monte too. Monte hain't played the game neither. Wish't I had my knife in him."

Alistair pondered for a moment. Here was confirmation of what Wilmot had told him that night at his shack. It was evident that Layburn was thoroughly unscrupulous and that even his own accomplices could not trust him. To brave him and Monte together would be a risky thing, but he could not see anything else for it. It would never do to allow them

to go off with the money for the cattle. If he were to wait until he could swear out a warrant and bring the police, the birds might well be flown.

He wondered what kind of a meeting Lorraine and Layburn were having together. The girl, of course, would not know what had happened and it was not likely that Layburn would tell her. Her presence could hardly fail to be embarrassing, he reflected. How would Layburn receive her?

His decision was soon taken.

"Herb," he said, "we'll go over to the hotel and I'll see if I can't bring these cattle rustlers to book. If you are not afraid I would like you to be on hand outside, but you must not come in. I might want you later to go on an errand."

"Let me come, too," said the Indian lad.

"You can wait outside with Herb if you want to," said Alistair.

CHAPTER XLI

AFTER alighting from the train, Lorraine walked rapidly over to the hotel without once turning her head to look back. The moon had not yet arisen and, coming out of the brightly lighted car, the night seemed even darker than it was. There was a light in the window of the hotel parlour as well as in the transom above the door. Mrs. Humpty herself often sat in the parlour with her sewing and it was with the full expectation of finding her there that the girl passed through the hall, which was empty, and, opening the door, stepped boldly into the room.

It was in semi-darkness, the only light being a candle, and it was not until Layburn spoke that she recognised the two men sitting on opposite sides of the centre table. The other was Monte. They had been shaking dice to while away the time.

"So it's you back already, miss, is it?" Layburn said with a sneer, looking up, but not rising from his chair. He had had a long day in the saddle, and now, with the money for the cattle in his pocket, he had been relaxing for a space while waiting for the motor from Kamloops which was to take him and Monte across the boundary. His plans so far had all gone well and Lancaster, the dealer, had just left them to take the train for Kamloops. He was to be back again on the morning train to attend to the shipping of the cattle, which were now in the railway corrals. The riders had all gone to the dance at the schoolhouse half a mile away and Mrs. Humpty as well, so that there was no one in the hotel except Humpty, who had gone upstairs to bed.

To Layburn, therefore, when all had been turning out so satisfactorily, the appearance of Lorraine at such an inopportune moment when he thought Alistair and she safely on the road to Calgary would have been disturbing had his

mood been less elevated—had he felt less cocksure of his success. He had been indulging in two or three drinks, which had somewhat dulled the acuteness of his perceptions.

If he did not rise to his feet, however, Monte was on his in an instant and quickly pulling back his own chair he offered it to Lorraine, at the same time adroitly placing himself between her and the door.

She took it almost mechanically in her surprise and annoyance. Layburn was about the last one that she wanted to see at this time. She had not before realised how strong had become her dislike to this cousin of hers, a dislike recently born but which had grown with a swiftness that astonished her. For the moment she could not find words to answer him.

“And what has become of the squire that went with you?” Layburn continued, concealing the anxiety with which he asked the question. “Did he come back too?”

“If you are referring to Mr. Kilgour, he has gone on to Kamloops to-night.”

“Oh, has he? That is too bad, Monte and I are heart-broken, aren’t we, Monte?”

Lorraine burned with resentment at his tone, but she hardly knew how to give voice to it.

As for Layburn, he was bound he would punish her. She had spurned him and now he would pay her back. Something told him that she had changed her attitude to Kilgour and it was through him that he could make her feel.

“I suppose he has gone to buy a wedding ring for Amy Pelton. You know that they are engaged, don’t you? She told me last night.”

He was lying to her and enjoying it. He felt that she winced at the news.

“No, I—she had not told me, but I am not surprised. They—they seemed to get on well together. I am glad for Amy.”

“Oh, you’re glad, are you? I thought that you had no use for him. It strikes me you’ve changed your tune pretty quick. I suppose he made love to you too, but he hadn’t

much regard for your character, my lady, had he? Why, the whole place is talking about the way you and he ran off together. Why——”

“I won't stay and listen to you, Olney,” she said with a catch in her voice, rising quickly to escape. On a faint sign from him, however, Monte had put his back against the door, a grin contorting his gargoyle-like features as he gazed down at her, shaking his head slightly.

Pausing a moment in amazement, she then tried to push him aside but he gripped her tightly by the arm and forced her back. Realising the futility of her effort she desisted. Then she turned to Layburn, her head erect and her whole mien tense with indignation. As yet she was too angry to be afraid.

“What does this mean, Olney? Will you stand by and let Monte treat me this way?”

He smiled at her unpleasantly, almost a leer. The fumes of Humpty's whisky taken on an empty stomach—for he had scarcely had a bite to eat all day—were having their effect, and prudence and decency were alike forgotten.

“Sit down again, Lorraine, sit down and let me explain. Let me explain just f'r one minute, will you. You see, it's this way. Monte and I, we have decided that we are not exactly meeting with the appreciation that we deserve up here—in fact, that you haven't been treating us right—and that we want to get back to the country we belong to, where we will be treated right. Yes, for we're not going back empty-handed. Jus' let me—le' me show you,” and he pulled from his breast pocket a large wallet and opened it to show a thick wad of bills. “See these, all 'hundreds'; and more than these we have too. This is the money that your pretty little Britisher came out to get, but you see we've got in ahead of him, Monte and I. You an' him came back a little too early, though, and I'm afraid, my dear, it is going to cause you a leetle—just a leetle inconvenience for we shall have to take you with us, just for part of the way. It wouldn't do to leave you behind for you might split on us. The car will be here any time now.”

Lorraine's eyes were wide with consternation and, at first, speech failed her.

"But, Olney," at last she burst out, "what do you mean? You aren't in earnest, surely. You wouldn't treat your own cousin this way?"

"To tell the truth, my dear, I'm not your cousin at all. I just took his name when I came up here. He died down in Montana and he told me all about his relatives up here and I thought it would be a cute trick to come up and pass myself off for him. It wouldn't do him any harm and think of the benefit I was doing to you all. I've got no kick about the way your dad treated me, but I don't like the way that you an' Ted have acted; do you, Monte?"

"Oh, I wish Ted was here. He wouldn't let you treat me this way."

She was half sobbing now.

He laughed.

"Ted, why Ted is here. He's there on the lounge behind you, drunk as a lord and dead to the world. Oh, he is a gay boy, Ted, believe me, now that my restraining influence has been taken away."

She gave a cry of dismay and rushed over to the sofa where, indeed, Ted was lying sound asleep. She shook him by the arm, shook him roughly, but she could not arouse him. The last drink that he had taken had been drugged, but she was not to know that. In desperation she ran to Olney and seized him by the arm.

"What have you done to him? Oh, what have you done to him?"

"Done to him, nothing at all. He's done it to himself, hasn't he? I can't keep him from making a hog of himself, can I? But you needn't take on so," he said in a milder tone, relenting a little. "We are to take him with us—a matter of expediency—so that it will be perfectly proper. You couldn't have a better chaperone than your own brother, could you? Now if that shark Kilgour had been as careful of your reputation, there wouldn't be any reason for talk, would there? We won't take you with us all the

way either, will we, Monte? but we'll drop you and him somewhere where it's quiet an' lonely, where you'll have a nice long walk back. Meanwhile we'll tell Humpty that we've all gone down to Penticton together to buy a new bunch of cattle with the money we got for our own. That'll put everybody off the scent, won't it? and by the time that you two get home to tell your tale, Monte and I will be—well, somewhere away from all the little unpleasantnesses we have in this miserable country."

The meaning of his words was dawning upon her and for the first time she began to realise the position.

"Have you really sold our cattle to get that money?" she gasped.

"Aye, verily, it is even so, miss," he replied, mocking her.

"Then Mr. Kilgour will catch you and get it back. He will never give up."

Her words had the ring of conviction even if her heart sank with doubt. She felt sure at least that he would try.

Layburn laughed sardonically, although there was just a trace of uneasiness in his eyes.

"You forget that he has gone to Kamloops and he will know nothing about it till long after we are beyond his reach. You needn't look to him for help, that's a cinch."

There was a sudden crash as the door against which Monte was still standing was thrust violently open, throwing him forward into the room, and Alistair appeared, his hand holding a revolver, the muzzle of which wavered threateningly between Layburn and Monte.

CHAPTER XLII

I'VE got you both covered. Put up your hands," said Alistair. Layburn laughed harshly but he lifted up his hands above the table where he was still sitting. Monte had quickly recovered his balance and would have sprung at the newcomer, but he recoiled before the threatening muzzle so close to him, and he, too, put up his hands.

"Go and call Humpty," commanded Alistair in a quick aside to Lorraine, who had risen to her feet. He was anxious to get her out of the room. The girl, after a momentary hesitation, obeyed.

"So you're here," Layburn began with a sneer, "and what's the trouble. What sort of Wild West stuff is this. Turned highwayman, have you, for a change? What'll it be next, I wonder."

"It won't be cattle-thief, anyway," said Alistair. "What do you mean by selling the Inshallah cattle? I'll trouble you to hand over the money you got for them. It's Mr. De Roche's money and not yours, so I'll take charge of it, please. Outside the door I heard what you said, so you needn't take the trouble to deny it. Besides, I know all about you and Pete stealing the Inshallah calves. Pretty serious business, that, I call it. You can put down your right hand and take out that money and lay it on the table. Better do as I say exactly now, for if you make any mistakes I shall just have to shoot you, for I can't afford to take chances."

Layburn's face seemed to twitch nervously, or was it the flickering light of the candle upon the table making the shadows play over it? Cautiously he lowered his right hand and drew out his pocket-book from his breast pocket.

"Mebbe you'd like me to open it and show you that the money's there," he volunteered and, opening its folds, he

showed the thick wad of bills. Then, as he closed the wallet, with a sudden sweep of his arm he knocked over the candle and made a swift dive for Alistair's knees. He had stooped low but not so quickly but that the pistol rang out and a bullet struck him in the arm that had made the demonstration. His spring fell short of its object and he sank to the floor. Monte meanwhile had grappled with Alistair and had both arms around him in a viselike grip, and the two, tripping over a chair, had fallen back against the door where they swayed and wrestled grimly. The room was dark, for the candle had gone out. Monte, by a trick of which he was master, had forced the pistol from Alistair's hands so that it fell to the floor. In their fall they lay each on his side, facing one another so that at first neither had the advantage; but the cowboy had muscles of steel and was easily the stronger. Again and again, he sought to get his clutch on Alistair's throat, but the latter was able to hold him off; yet gradually he felt that his strength was giving out. Herb and the Indian boy outside were trying to open the door, but could not budge it for the bodies of the two struggling men, who fought in grim silence save for occasional gasping breaths that told of the deadliness of their fight. Meanwhile, Layburn had rallied somewhat from the faintness caused by his wound and had managed to rise to his feet, cursing loudly from the pain.

"Stay with him, Monte," he cried hoarsely, "an' I'll kill that devil as s-s-soon as I can light this damned match. 'Tain't so easy when a fellow's winged an' this arm hurts me like hell."

At last he managed to light a match and he stooped for the pistol.

"I'll bat him on the head with this an' he'll not trouble us any more, I guess," he muttered; but his match went out. As he fumbled for another one, the window of the room was thrown up and two figures jumped in. Just then Layburn struck his second match, but it was his undoing. The two, Herb and Rout, had gone round to the window and

now swooped down upon him. In a moment they had him on his back on the floor.

"See to the Boss," said the Indian, "I hold him now myself."

Herb, nothing loath, obeyed and turned to help Alistair, but in the dark it was difficult for him to distinguish between the two men struggling on the floor. He had caught a momentary glimpse of them from the light of Layburn's match and now he had to feel his way. His hands encountered a pair of shoulders, and following these they came on a head and face on which latter the beard and moustache left no doubt as to its owner.

Monte swore deeply as the hands closed upon his throat. Alistair, feeling his enemy's clutch weakening and that reinforcements were at hand, made a desperate effort to throw it off. The attempt succeeded, for Monte with his wind already half gone began to suffocate. In another moment Alistair had risen to his knees and had the cowboy on his back at his mercy.

As soon as he had raised himself, the door which had been for some time exerting a painful pressure against his back of which he was but dimly aware, opened with great suddenness and old Humpty entered with a candle in one hand and a cudgel in the other, followed closely by Lorraine.

"Geehosaphat!" exclaimed the old man, as he surveyed the scene that met his eyes. "Holy Moses, but this 'ere is some shindy, I do think."

Layburn lay on his back with the Indian boy sitting on his chest, with hate and triumph in his eyes and his open clasp-knife in his right hand ready for use. The man's arm was bleeding from a flesh wound and blood was spattered plentifully on the floor around him. A few feet away Alistair was kneeling over Monte with Herb beside him. His face was the first thing Lorraine saw as she entered behind Humpty. He was panting heavily and his cheek was badly cut where in his fall he had struck the corner of a chair. However, he was able to smile faintly into her eyes—apologetically, indeed, for he was conscious of the odd figure

which he must make. He felt rather ashamed to have been so nearly bested by Monte and Layburn—so nearly that had it not been for the timely reinforcements they would have overcome him completely.

As for Lorraine, who had been terrified lest he were killed or fatally wounded, her eyes looked into his, lustrous with tears unshed, and he read in them a message to which his own heart responded with a leap. In these brief minutes of stress they had just passed through they had come closer, perhaps, than a month of intimacy might have brought them. For a moment, forgetful of the bizarre group around them, and the strangeness of the whole situation, they looked into each other's eyes and soul spoke to soul of a love that must have been nascent but until now had not revealed itself to either of them. But to Lorraine it was a brief ecstasy, for in a flash came back to her what Layburn had so lately told her, that this man was engaged to Amy. Her face, which had been pale, flushed to a rosy red at the awful thought that she had betrayed her secret, that she had given her love unasked. Overcome by the agitation caused by her fears and the consequent revulsion of feeling when she found them ill-grounded, she hid her hot cheeks in her hands.

Fortunately an interruption occurred that gave her a chance to compose herself and drew all eyes away from her. A man stood in the doorway looking down wonderingly upon them. Alistair leaned over for his pistol that lay on the floor where it had fallen, and then arose quickly from Monte's prostrate body, motioning Herb back also. He did not think that there was anything further to fear from that worthy in the meantime. Then he picked up Layburn's wallet from the table where it still lay and put it in his pocket.

"Been a little argument, looks like," the stranger said with a note of sarcasm, his eye roving quizzically from one member of the group to another. He wore a big over-coat and chauffeur's gloves. "I was ordered to be here at ten to take a party south Penticton way. A chap called Layburn; must be one of you, I take it."

"That is the gentleman there on his back on the floor, but I don't know whether he will need you now or not," Alistair replied dryly, seating himself nonchalantly on the edge of the table. He was not indifferent to Lorraine's breakdown; but she would soon recover her composure and in the meantime there was yet much to be settled. "It will depend entirely on our pleasure whether he will be able to go with you."

Layburn glanced at him and then at the Indian looking down at him with eyes of hate.

"Call your dog off, will you," he said hoarsely, "and let me sit up so I can talk to you?"

The words were like to have been his last. Rout, wild at the insult, lifted his knife to strike him and would have driven it home in his body had not Humpty brought his cudgel smartly across the boy's wrist and sent the weapon spinning across the room. He had seen the thing coming almost before it happened else Layburn had paid dearly for the insult. The boy, furious at being thwarted, jumped at the old man like a cat. The other was ready for him, however. Exhibiting a strength and nimbleness hardly to be expected from his appearance, he gripped his assailant by the shoulder and tossed him after his knife, so that he fell with a crash in the corner.

Layburn, meanwhile, realising his narrow escape, scrambled with difficulty to his feet and was fain to sit down. He was faint from his wounded arm and the by no means gentle treatment that Rout had accorded him.

"Looks like it ain't very healthy for me round these parts the way things been going this last ten minutes. That damned Indian pretty near made me pass in my checks this time sure."

"Served you jolly well right for sassin' him so," said Humpty. "An Indian houghtn't to be called a dog any more than a white man, I says. They've their feelin's, 'aven't they, like other folks? Mebbe I made a mistake for interferin' with 'im, but I wouldn't like to see 'im goin' to

the gallus even if his haction was to our hinterest. That's the way I feel about it."

The boy had picked himself up. The fall had apparently brought him to his senses and his frenzy had passed. His features, turned towards the light, showed now the characteristic impassivity of his race.

"Thanks, Humpty," said Layburn with a grin, a wry one, however, for he felt that the cards were against him, and the pain of his wound was severe. "You're candid enough, anyway; you always were."

"What are we to do with this cousin of yours, Miss De Roche?" said Alistair at last. "Shall we prosecute him for cattle stealing or shall we let him go if he leaves the money behind?" and he began to count the bills that were in the wallet. "The amount seems to be about right, on a rough calculation, I should say," as he concluded after he had counted them over.

"He says that he is not my cousin and I am glad—glad—that that is so. I think, though, that we should let him go. It may be weak to do so—maybe exposing other people to the danger of his villainies—but I cannot help it. I have to think of my father—it might kill him to know the truth of this—and if you think that it is all right, I would rather let him go. Maybe he will repent and turn over a new leaf. I am sure I hope so."

"And Monte, what about him? Is he to be allowed to go free also?"

"Yes, Monte too."

"Damn your infernal cheek!" said Layburn, turning to Alistair. "You needn't think that I am going to be blackmailed out of the country. You can't prove that I was going to steal the money I sold the cattle for. That was all a cock-and-bull story I told Lorraine a little while ago. I was just playing a joke on her."

"Oh, you were, were you? And what about your knowledge that the cattle were covered by my chattel mortgage and also the agreement that you and I both signed with the bank when they made us the advances that they did. That

alone, my friend, will be quite sufficient to make things very unpleasant for you should you elect to remain in the country. What about your avowal that you impersonated another man? We can easily find out, now we are warned, if that was only a joke. Then there is the little matter of Pete, your partner's confession implicating you in a wholesale robbery of Inshallah calves. Are you anxious to stay and face that charge also?"

"I guess you got me euchred. What do you say, Monte? Shall we get out now while the going's good or had we better stay an' face the music?"

"I guess we better git, Olney. I—guess so," said Monte after a moment of hesitation. "What about funds though? I hain't hardly got a bean and it's a cinch we can't git out of the country without something to go with."

Layburn looked first at Alistair, then at Lorraine. There was silence for a few seconds.

"I guess they won't see us stuck for enough to take us away," he said.

Alistair looked at Lorraine.

"There's that five hundred we got from Stubbs," she said. "Suppose we give them each a hundred dollars out of that—on condition that they go out of here to-night with this man?"

She handed him two hundred-dollar bills.

"I must go and look to my brother now," she said, and she rose and went over to the lounge where Ted was still lying fast asleep.

CHAPTER XLIII

BEFORE letting Layburn and Monte go, Alistair made the former sign a paper which he had drawn. This was to obviate the possibility of any legal complications in regard to the cattle, either with Layburn or anyone else. When this was done and he had seen the last of the two he drew a deep sigh of relief.

He persuaded Lorraine to let Humpty show her to her room on promising himself to put Ted to bed as soon as he came back from the schoolhouse. It was necessary to go there to tell Evie not to go back to Inshallah but to come down to the hotel with four or five men to be on hand to drive the cattle back on the range in the morning. He hoped that he could get Lancaster, the dealer, to take back his money for the cattle when he explained the circumstances to him.

When he got back to the hotel again, this mission having been duly accomplished, the place was all quiet. He carried Ted upstairs to the room Humpty had assigned to him still fast asleep, and after undressing him and putting him to bed, he lay down himself. Sleep, however, was long in coming and then it was fitful and troubled.

He was up early in the morning, and by half past seven was able to get Lancaster on the telephone at the Stewart Hotel in Kamloops. On learning the circumstances the dealer consented to take back his money, although it was plain that he was much annoyed. He stipulated, however, that Alistair would bring it to him at Kamloops on the morning train which was due at Garston about eight. Alistair asked him to advise Mr. Durie of his safety and the reason for his desertion of last night. There was just time to give the men their directions what to do with the cattle and to leave a message for Lorraine as to where he was

going. She was not yet up, but Ted was. He was feeling very seedy and half sick from the effects of the liquor and the drug that Layburn had given him. His physical discomfort, however, was more bearable than his mental reproach. Alistair took pity on him and suggested that he accompany him to Kamloops. This, he felt, would not only be a distraction for the boy, but it would be a relief to Lorraine to have the responsibility of him off her mind for the present. She would be able to get home with Jimmy Appleby on the stage that left at midday. Herb had already ridden off rather unwillingly to school but full of a thrilling pride at the part he had been able to play in the drama of the preceding night. Rout, too, had departed well pleased with a message to his brother that he would not be prosecuted for his complicity with Layburn and that it was likely some small part at least would be given him of the money received from the sale of the cattle from the Riley place.

Once on the train, Alistair tried to rally Ted out of his dejection, which seemed to him to be too acute in a healthy boy and his contrition too abject for the fault he had committed, especially since its consequences had been averted. He feared that there might be something else that he was hiding that troubled his conscience.

"Don't be afraid to tell me, Ted," he said. "You must think of me as a friend who wants to help you, you know."

"It was I with Monte and Jack Beckles that held you up that night at the Appleby's," the boy burst out at last falteringly and with eyes averted. "I was drunk at the time—else I never would have done it: but I guess they saw how it was with me—and I was sore—and——"

He stopped, unable to go any further.

"I have known all that for some time, Ted. Andy Wilmot told me; but I guessed how it had come about. You're just a bit of a kid after all and haven't got much sense. All you needed was a licking and you got it, you know, so we're quits on that score, I hope—unless, of course—unless you still bear me a grudge, which I hope isn't so."

"No, but you've been too good to me. I don't deserve it after the way I've treated you."

His voice faltered but his face had cleared.

At Kamloops they took the hotel bus for the Stewart and Mr. Lancaster was awaiting them in the smoking room. He was very indignant at Layburn.

"If it had not been that De Roche is an old friend of mine, I would not have let the matter pass so easily," he said. "I think that I might have put up a pretty stiff fight for the cattle. After all, Layburn was the manager and I bought them in good faith. I'm losing a good sum by the deal not going through."

They found Mr. Durie in the dining-room at breakfast in high good-humour. He had just enjoyed the unusual thrill of seeing a half-column interview of himself in the morning paper. The enterprising reporter who had button-holed him in the hall the night before and with whom he had hardly exchanged half a dozen sentences, had evidently made the most of these, embellishing and interpolating whatever he felt was necessary to make good copy. Mr. Durie was described as a capitalist from Edinburgh, representing large interests, who had come out to make extensive land purchases in the district. The worthy solicitor, unfamiliar with transatlantic press methods of exaggeration, had gasped, forgetting altogether his ham and eggs rapidly growing cold as he read and reread the astonishing paragraph. "Extraordinary!" he had muttered. "Did ever anyone hear the like of it? I never said anything of the kind. What a tissue of exaggeration!"

All the same his face still bore a certain pleased expression. He shook hands genially with Ted and then proceeded to overwhelm Alistair with a flood of raillery over his sudden disappearance of the evening before which the latter bore as good-humouredly as he could.

When he had finished his breakfast, leaving Ted at the hotel, he and Alistair called at the latter's bank and arranged with the manager to draw through his correspondent

in Edinburgh on Mr. Durie's bank there for the funds required to be remitted to Mr. Stubbs at Calgary. Then Alistair wired Stubbs to draw on him at Kamloops for whatever was the exact sum required for his share of the cattle to be purchased.

When they got back to the hotel, Ted was waiting them with the news that he had found a friend who was motoring through to Austin and as he would pass Inshallah on the way he had offered them a ride in his car. Alistair could not accept, himself, as he had still considerable business to do, but he persuaded Mr. Durie to go with Ted. He himself would come out next morning with the motor stage.

He was busy all afternoon. Now that Layburn was away the whole management of the ranch would be upon his shoulders and there were a number of people to be seen. He got back to the hotel for dinner about six and, in the dining-room, the waitress showed him to a seat at a table where sat a young lady. It was not until he had almost seated himself that he found it was Miss Pelton. She seemed as much surprised as he was, but greeted him cordially.

"A regular knight-errant you seem to have been since I saw you last. And I was so mean about your going with Lorraine that I have wanted to ask your forgiveness ever since. Do you know that I went down to Garston that night to do so and drove Tuto in the dark all by myself because I could not bear to think that I had treated you so meanly. When I got down there, the train had just pulled out and I could have cried, almost."

Her tone was plaintive and her eyes pleaded forgiveness; but she was watching him curiously. For a moment he was at a loss what to say.

"Then, of course, you knew that I had accompanied Miss De Roche to Revelstoke to get the horse back. I could hardly allow her to go alone, could I? I was hoping, however, that the community would not find out, as you know

how such things are liable to be talked about. However, I suppose they were bound to know."

"Oh, it was all over the place next day—not by my telling, of course. I kept strictly mum; but you can't keep these things from getting out in a district like ours. The most romantic tales were told about you and Lorraine; and that you had eloped was the very least of them. Of course, I knew that it was all stuff and nonsense; but it is no use to contradict in a case of that kind as you only add fuel to the fire."

To change the subject, he asked her how she had managed to get away from school. It appeared that she had got another girl who was visiting at Duck Lake to substitute for her with the Board's permission. However, she was going back to Garston on the train that night and had her horse and buggy at the hotel there, with which she would drive up in the morning. She hoped Tuto would not be too frisky; of late, he had been sometimes almost more than she could manage, she said.

"I am staying here all night," said Alistair in reply to her question, "and shall go out on the motor stage to-morrow morning, so I should be at Duck Lake before you probably."

"I shall soon be going to Vancouver." There was a note of regret in her voice. "Do you ever go down to the Coast?"

"I went through to Vancouver when I first came out, but I shall likely not have time to go again before I return home. I shall probably be in a great hurry when I do leave; and I shall take the quickest possible way. However, it may be a considerable time yet ere I can leave Inshallah."

"Will the De Roches manage to pay up all right? It is perhaps an impertinent question. You see—you see, they are such close friends that I sometimes feel anxious and when—when I got away I should feel easier for Lorraine if I knew that they were going to come out all right financially."

She was blushing a little—and it became her. There were no flaws in her complexion and the gown that she wore—it

was a rich blue—set off her white neck and shapely arms to advantage. She was finding him cold, however; and she seemed to make little headway. She had the sense of fighting a losing battle. There were serious things in his mind—as she guessed—that preoccupied it to her disadvantage.

A few days before, Alistair would have answered her question about the De Roche finances with candour; but now all he said was he thought that they would come out all right and that she must not fear for them. When they parted at the end of the meal, he did not offer to see her off at the station, although she told him that the train left at nine-thirty.

He was reading a magazine in the lounge room about three hours later when the hotel clerk told him he was wanted on the long distance telephone. It was the station agent at Garston to tell him that Miss De Roche's horse had arrived on the evening freight consigned to him and would he come over and take delivery of it. He looked at his watch and saw that there was just time to catch the train. If he went on it he could ride up on Pronto in the morning. It would be a pleasant surprise for Lorraine.

He paid his bill and ran all the way, reaching the station just as the train was slowly pulling out. As he walked into the day-coach and sat down panting for breath a soft voice sounded in his ear.

"So I'm going to have your company, after all? How glad I am that you have changed your plans. I was just feeling so lonely."

He turned and it was Miss Pelton.

Strange to say, only a short time after he had left the hotel, the clerk had another telephone call for Mr. Kilgour.

"He has just checked out to go on the 9.30 east-bound."

"Oh," said the voice with an inflection of disappointment, "I wanted him to get something for me. Oh, by the way, is Miss Pelton there, then?"

"Miss Pelton, too, went out on the 9.30."

"Gee! what d'ye think of that, Lorraine, he's after her already," the voice came over the wires more faintly. "I'll

bet he was fooling us about that business he said he had to wait over for." Then the voice spoke directly into the 'phone. "Yes, that is all right then, I'm sorry to have troubled you."

CHAPTER XLIV

ALISTAIR had forgotten all about the fact of Miss Pelton's going to Garston on this train and his feelings were almost akin to dismay when he found himself sitting beside her. He experienced a certain embarrassment in explaining the reason for his change of plans. Her manner was playful and bantering, but he found it difficult to keep the conversation from verging on the sentimental.

"The Garston Hotel has interesting associations for us both, has it not?" she said. "I did not imagine that night when you gave me such a scare that we were going to know each other so well."

"No, indeed, nor I neither; nor that the acquaintance should be so pleasant."

"Let us say friendship, surely," she said with heightened colour.

"By all means; it was, of course, the word that I should have used."

Alistair was glad when, at last, the train drew in at Garston and they went over to the hotel together, he carrying Miss Pelton's suitcase. Humpty met them in the hall and he looked at them rather curiously, but made no remark.

"Good-night, then," said Miss Pelton at the foot of the stairs as she turned to follow Humpty—who had taken the suitcase from Alistair—to her room, "or au revoir, shall it be? as I hope to see you in the morning."

The glance that she gave him had something in it, whether of reproach or entreaty or both he could not determine; but for the moment it troubled him vaguely.

The next morning his pleasant anticipations of riding Pronto up to Inshallah were doomed to disappointment. Tuto was feeling very fresh and Miss Pelton was afraid to

drive him home alone. Alistair acceded to her request that he should accompany her with as good a grace as he could muster; and he made arrangements to have Pronto ridden up later in the day by a cowboy.

He had not forgotten the look that Miss Pelton had given him on parting the night before. But the glamour that her personality had held for him when last he was driving with her had somehow been dispelled. He had grown to like and admire the girl. The feeling might very well have grown stronger, but for the little rift brought about by Ted having sold Pronto and the dilemma that it had presented him to choose between offending her and obeying the beck of common courtesy and duty that would constrain him to help any girl he knew placed as Lorraine had been. There had been evidenced a total lack of understanding between her spirit and his—a something alien that must act as a barrier; and from that time he had ceased to have her in his thoughts. He liked the girl, but that was as far as it could ever go.

And what were his feelings toward Lorraine? With her, indeed, it had been a battle from the beginning; from the beginning he had found hers a personality that he had to reckon with. Though he had looked upon her as a child almost, little more than an unformed schoolgirl, he had found it impossible to be indifferent to her opinion. She piqued his interest even when he found her most vexatious.

The events of the last few days had changed everything between them; and he had hardly yet become adjusted to the difference, nor was he sure whether or not in the struggle of their personalities the result had been a victory for him. He found himself dwelling with pleasure on the remembrance of characteristic poses of her head, of certain tones and inflections of her voice, and again on the indefinable charm and winsomeness of her smile.

So ran his thoughts as he and Miss Pelton travelled along beside the creek, for the most part ascending, although here and there the road would take a slight descent. It was only owing to Tuto's ardour and Miss Pelton's determination to

curb it that he was left to them so long; but soon they had come to the steep part where the horse was glad to proceed more sedately and his driver had a chance to relax her grasp on the lines and to withdraw part of her attention from the driving.

"You are very silent," she said at last. "I wish that I had the 'open sesame' to your mind; there must be all sorts of treasures there, but it is plain that you are miserly and will not share them."

"Alas, the floor of the treasure house is bare," he averred, mendaciously enough, "but who is to be blamed though he have the riches of Sindbad for hiding them from one who would enter forcibly and drag them out for the vulgar gaze. I have been admiring your good horsemanship. Tuto is no easy handful when he is fresh, is he?"

"No, indeed; and he usually seems as fresh at the end of the trip as he does at the beginning. Were it not for my pridefulness I should give you the reins."

"And I should decline the honour; besides, you would never trust me."

"I would trust you with more than that," she said softly, and her eyelashes swept her cheek.

It was a daring remark, she was well aware; but she felt that it was necessary once and for all that she should know how she stood with this man. She was determined to find out whether he was still interested in her. If not, then she need not trouble herself further with him. Vacation being close at hand it would soon be time for her to return home. Her own heart was not yet involved sufficiently to make the parting a serious one, though she owned readily enough to herself that she liked him better than any man who had yet come within her circle as a possible parti. His position and prospects, too, as far as she could judge, while perhaps not brilliant, were eminently satisfactory and such as her parents would well approve.

Alistair was quick to gauge the drift of her remark and he determined that the sooner he dispelled any wrong idea she might have as to his intentions, the better it would be.

“Ah, you might trust me with the reins wisely enough, I dare say: but not with anything more important. I’m an irresponsible chap and any more worthy honours I should the more strongly decline.”

He spoke with a tone of lightness; but for her the words had no ambiguity. She saw how it was and, while her pride suffered, her heart was still whole. Now that she had ventured on the thin ice, how to get safely off, that was the difficulty.

“I have too high an opinion of you to believe that you will decline the trust that I would leave with you—for I am going away back to town shortly. I am troubled for Lorraine. I know that she has perhaps not been as courteous as she might have been; but the circumstances, you must admit, have been trying. Last week when we were driving to the Fair, you spoke, I thought somewhat unkindly of her. No doubt you had some cause; but I am hoping that you may have changed your attitude towards her since you have had such a romantic adventure together. If so, it is all right and my words are not needed; but if there is still any coolness between you two, I would like to ask you to try to banish it—to help her as much as you can. I know her cousin has been forcing his attentions upon her and that, together with her father’s sickness and their financial troubles—to say nothing of Ted’s dissipation—has been a heavy load for her to carry. I thought perhaps that you would not mind me speaking to you in this way—for we have been friends, haven’t we?”

“Indeed we have; and I hope that we shall long continue so. And I shall accept the trust and consider it an honour that you should impose it. I am glad that you have asked me, although my attitude has changed towards Lorraine—towards Miss De Roche in the last few days. I realise now the—the unworthiness of my former one—the childishness of it. I should have had more sense—more generosity; but one learns as one grows older.”

He was delighted to find that he had been mistaken in his interpretation of her first remark while he chuckled in-

wardly at the snub to his own conceit. He felt warmer towards her because of her championship of Lorraine while he was amused to think how unnecessary it was.

"Nuff said," Miss Pelton replied briskly, changing the subject.

All the way to Inshallah the conversation did not flag but there was no recurrence to the sentimental; and their farewell at the gate—for she refused to go in—was of the friendliest, and free from apparent embarrassment.

CHAPTER XLV

LORRAINE was on the verandah arranging some flowers, she had just picked, in vases, when, looking up from her task, she saw the buggy with Miss Pelton and Alistair come swiftly along the road and draw up at the gate. Ted had told her the night before of what he had learned over the telephone from the hotel clerk as to Alistair's sudden change of plans, and his own conclusion that he had gone to Garston in pursuit of Miss Pelton. This only bore out what Olney had told Lorraine as to their being engaged.

Ever since, Lorraine had been conscious of a sense of depression. Her thoughts had been concerned not a little with Mr. Kilgour since her return home, and she was ashamed of herself for having harboured such musings. She tried to feel glad for both their sakes that the two had come together again. She felt that she ought to be because she had known herself the original cause of their temporary estrangement, and her over-sensitive conscience had a slight feeling of guilt as regards the past week and its events. Not that she felt that she was responsible for what had happened or that she had made any advances to Mr. Kilgour. The very change in her attitude towards him, however, the intimacy of their associations and a sweetness she had found in it that she dare not deny to herself, as well as his altered manner towards her, all made her conscious of a sense of disloyalty to her friend.

So she sat still, bending her head over the flowers, her fingers doing their work skilfully even if her thoughts were not governing them. It was so that Alistair found her as, with a light and eager foot, he mounted the steps and stood looking down upon her.

She looked up and smiled at him, noting on his face a

certain look of brightness and hope that she had not seen there before, not even after they had won Pronto from Mr. Stubbs or when they had supped together coming on the train back from Revelstoke. He had been bright and jolly enough then; but this was a new expression with something of triumph in it as well as something of new hope or joy.

She put the flowers that lay in her lap on the settee beside her and rose to her feet. His eyes were scanning her face eagerly and noted its wistful cast, and in spite of all his ardour, his tongue hesitated. Lorraine, true daughter of Eve, spoke first.

"I am glad to see you back and to be able to thank you for all you did for me and for us all."

"Oh, but that was nothing, nothing at all. Let us forget about it; but I have some other good news to tell you."

It had happened as she had thought then and he was going to tell her. He expected her to be glad, as she ought to be for Amy's sake and his, for were they not both her friends. She felt terrified that she might betray to him that she was not as glad as he expected; that her congratulations might seem cold and perfunctory in spite of herself from her very nervousness. He had paused, and in her panic the silence seemed pregnant and ominous. If she did not speak he would think her cold and might guess at what her own heart had not yet dared to admit to her. She would lose his good opinion which she felt she had won, and this would be grievous to her. So with a precipitancy born of her panic she hastened to fill the void at the first opportunity, to forestall if she might such an unwelcome contingency.

"I think I can guess what is your good news; and I congratulate you most heartily and wish you both every joy. I am so fond of Amy—she is such a lovely girl—and I know that you will make her happy. I have cause to know how kind and—and how noble you are; and I was afraid—I was afraid that what—you had done for me—might make a barrier between you, and that it would be my fault."

She held out the little hand to him that he had clasped

only once before, and he took it with some embarrassment, keeping hold of it, however, as something that might steady him in his astonishment. When his thoughts were full of his own love for her so recently born but already waxing so great in his consciousness that everything else in his life seemed to be dwarfed into nothingness, to have her burst upon him with congratulations on his presumed engagement to a girl for whom he did not care was a blow that was bewildering, to say the least.

"B-b-b-but you are quite mistaken—the good news is for you and not for me. I am not engaged to Miss Pelton nor am I likely to be. There is nothing between us at all and never was. I don't know how you could ever think such a thing."

"But Olney said so—and why did you follow her down to Garston last night, then?" she faltered, to justify herself.

She had dropped her eyes before his gaze; for she found that she could not meet it. Her heart was beating fast and she would have drawn her hand away but for the fact that he was still holding it tightly and she could not.

"Follow Miss Pelton!" he exclaimed, "when I was dying to get back to you. How could you possibly imagine such a thing?"

"To me?"

Her voice was faint, just the merest whisper; and one brief second he had a glimpse of her eyes, suffused and misty like the sea is sometimes when the fog curtain lifts, but eloquent of something that he was quick to read. He had meant to say more, but speech was too slow when thought could fly from eye to eye and pass through clasped hands like an electric current. Why wait to lay siege to the city when its defences lie open already to the invader?

He was still holding her hand and he must either drop it and draw back or press on to a closer and more intimate contact. Her eyes had told him that he had her heart; when he looked down at the lissom gracefulness of her girlish figure so appealing in its youthful delicacy of outline and the face that had once seemed so scornful now suffused

with a tell-tale flush and glowing with the tender light of love, what could he do but take her in his arms and put the seal of his confession on her lips.

"And you really love me after all?" she said, at last daring to look at him with eyes that were lustrous.

The face that she had known so hard and grim, which she had scorned and hated and longed at times to humble, was now looking down upon her in fondness.

"I really love you, Lorraine; I have loved you a long time and did not know it, dear. I love the sound of your voice and the curve of your eyelashes and the adorable way that your hair curls in clinging tendrils round your little ear. I love you when you are angry and when you are sad and when you are merry; but most of all when you are as you are now and I feel that you are my very own. When I hold you in my arms this way and I think—when I hope, at least—that you don't want to get away. And you don't, dear, do you?"

"I know that it isn't any use, you hold me so tight, sir."

"Call me Alistair," he commanded masterfully. "Sir me no sirs, Madam Mischievous, nor jest about matters that are sacred or I shall hold you tighter; and tell me this, when did you first learn to love me?"

She hesitated; and, looking up at him, her lips took on a touch of roguery.

"May it please my lord——"

"I said 'Alistair,'" he interrupted, frowning.

"May it please my lord, Alistair then," she repeated to his prompting, "it was——" she hesitated with the mischievousness of a child that means to be naughty but falters for fear of the consequences—"it was when you called me Xantippe."

"Do not jest with me," he pleaded.

"And laughed alike at my anger and my tears, sir—I mean, Alistair," she was hurrying now to appease, for she feared she had hurt him—"and when that night I looked through my fingers at you and saw how handsome you looked and yet how stern—oh, how stern and dominating

with your head thrown back and your chin thrust out—I just knew that you had beaten me and I liked you the better for it. Then when I gave in to you and—and—and you were so kind and gentle to me, I think it was then, sir—I think that it was then, Alistair, my dear, that I first knew that I loved you and—and—and I hope that now you are satisfied.”

Falling back upon the lip-language which is so potent for love making, he kissed her again for answer.

Just at this moment footsteps were heard on the verandah steps, the footsteps of Miss Paget and Mr. Durie, who had returned from a walk as far as the store. They were almost as much taken aback as the two wooers by the sight that met them and they halted half-way up the steps, arrested by astonishment. The former had hurriedly separated and were standing side by side blushing and altogether out of countenance. Alistair, however, although his face had flushed, was not so discomposed. With head thrown back, he faced the newcomers assured and elated.

“Lorraine has just promised to be my wife,” he said.

Mr. Durie was the first to answer him.

“Bless my soul! so you are back again, Alistair, my boy, and that is what you are up to. You certainly have lost no time, it would appear. Well, well, I am sure I must congratulate you and extend the best of good wishes to you, my dear young lady. I have known the young man since he was in knickers and I can say I believe he will make you happy.”

He held out his hand to Lorraine, whose face was rosy with smiles and blushes, and then to Alistair, who clasped it warmly—so warmly, indeed, in the nervousness induced by the occasion that the lawyer was forced to cry for mercy from the vigour of the grasp. Meanwhile Miss Paget had run to Lorraine and kissed her.

“My dear, I am glad but I am not surprised,” said this wise woman who had, in truth, foreseen the event. “I am glad to welcome you into the family and I am sure that my brother-in-law will do the same,” she said to Alistair.

"What news do you think I got at the store?" asked Mr. Durie, flourishing a telegram at Alistair. "A message from Stubbs saying that he has sold the cattle already at three thousand dollars' profit to us; and the half of it is yours, my boy, so that should pay for the honeymoon, eh? It is most astonishing; but it seems cattle are going up with leaps and bounds. It would really seem as if I am born lucky. There was that Argentine business which I told you of, you remember. And while I think of it, boy, just to relieve your mind at this happy—this most felicitous occasion"—and he bowed ceremoniously to Lorraine—"I may say that I have been talking over with Miss Paget here the matter of this mortgage which has been worrying you all—I have, of course, explained to her how it is imperative that your father should have this money in order to meet the mortgage on his own place which is being foreclosed—and I have decided after seeing what a splendid security is offered in this ranch to purchase the existing mortgage from your father—at its face value, of course, so that his money may be returned to him. This will be mutually beneficial, I hope, as I shall be getting an excellent investment at a rate of interest—eight per cent—such as I have never enjoyed before, and your father will be able to pay off the bond on Greycrags. Eight per cent seems usurious to me but then, of course, if it is the custom of the country, no one will be likely to call me a Shylock. What do you think of that proposal?"

"It seems a very desirable and satisfactory one from my standpoint, sir," said Alistair, "and a very generous one on yours."

"Generous, fiddlesticks; nothing of the kind; grasping if you like, but not generous."

Suddenly Alistair remembered the news, the telling of which he had been so full of on his arrival.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you what was my good news, Lorraine, that Pronto is on his way up from the station. I should have ridden him myself only Miss Pelton made me drive up with her."

"Oh, I am so glad," said Lorraine, her eyes misty.

"You will be interested to learn, Alistair," said Mr. Durie, "that Miss Paget has volunteered to teach me to ride; and I have promised not to go home until I have mastered it."

"I sincerely hope then, sir, that for our benefit, at least, you will be a long time in learning."

Mr. Durie looked at him quizzically for a moment and then glanced shyly at Miss Paget.

"It would please me mightily, my boy, if I thought that my teacher might have the same wish."

Miss Paget blushed and looked down, and now it was her turn to change the subject; but her air did not convey that she was offended, indeed she seemed pleased.

"Mr. Durie," she said, "it seems to me that we have interrupted these young people at a very inopportune moment and the sooner we leave them to finish their business the better. Suppose we go and break the news to my brother-in-law, and they can follow us in ten minutes or so, as soon as they are ready," and the two went into the house.

When they had gone Lorraine was seized with a sudden access of shyness.

"I had forgotten my flowers, I must finish them before dinner."

"Let us sit down and finish them, together, Lorraine," Alistair replied. "From now on, dearest, in joy and in sadness, in sickness or pain, it shall be we two together always, all the way."