

THE SILENT CALL

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THE SILENT CALL

BY

EDWIN MILTON ROYLE

AUTHOR OF "THE SQUAW-MAN," "THE STRUGGLE EVERLASTING,"
"FRIENDS," ETC.

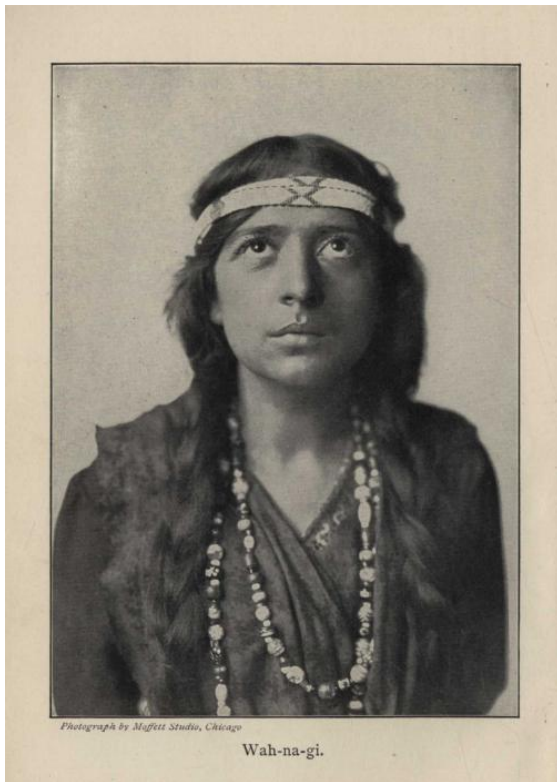
THE SILENT CALL

EDWIN
MILTON
ROYLE

Author of

THE
SQUAW
MAN





Wah-na-gi.

ILLUSTRATED

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To
MY FATHER AND MOTHER
WHOSE YOUNG HEARTS HAVE PRESERVED THE IDEALS OF
OLD-FASHIONED ROMANCE THROUGH FIFTY-THREE YEARS OF
WEDDED LIFE, THIS STORY IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED BY
THE AUTHOR
April 12th, 1910

THE SILENT CALL

CHAPTER I

Not even snow is as white as these great masses of congealed foam floating in a deep blue sky, six thousand feet above the sea, and yet somewhere out of this deep

cool infinity flamed a sun that searched the mesa until it blistered and cracked. The alkali plain quivered and burst into spirals of heat that were visible to the eye. A cloud of dust hung like white smoke above the fiery trail over which a band of Indian police was slowly and painfully crawling. This dust is very penetrating and very irritating. The reins hung limp on the ponies' necks and their heads swung low as though they looked for a place to sink down.

As far as the eye could see you would have known that they were Indians. The uniform furnished them by the government is a dark purplish blue with a red piping down the trousers. It's a plain affair, but each Indian wears it with a difference and adds a decorative touch that is his own, and that is always pictorial and Indian. One had encircled his broad-brimmed black hat with a wide purple ribbon, lapped by a narrow pink ribbon. A yellow neckerchief rested on his green silk shirt, and about his waist was a sash braided of many colored worsteds, and, strange to say, the result was pleasing if rather brilliant. Another had a pink feather apparently plucked from the tail of the domestic duster tied loosely to his hat, which lent to the changing airs a graceful note of color. Some wore cowboy boots, yellow and elaborately stitched in fancy designs; others adhered to the ever beautiful moccasins. Most of them wore brown or drab cowboy hats, but made them their own by beautifully beaded hat-bands. Here and there gleamed gauntlets heavy with a stiff beaded deer which seemed trying to jump away from the cuffs, but couldn't because it was so obviously and eternally stiff and beaded. Some had beaded sleeve bands and all sported guns hung in holsters elaborately outlined in brass. No one wore a coat except a tall elderly man with glasses who, in spite of the torture, felt that his out-of-date captain's uniform enhanced his straight unbending dignity.

The police had no prisoner in charge, nor even an air of expectancy, or remote or possible interest. Horse and man were as near sleep as it was possible to be in the quivering heat. The pack animals were loaded with surveyors' instruments, and there was evidently nothing more warlike or strenuous on foot than to creep across the table-land and reach the Agency. To the close observer even at a distance there was a difference in the figures as they straggled through the sage-brush. The man who rode behind was well set up and sat his horse like a cavalryman. He wore khaki that fitted well his close-knit and athletic figure, and he carried the suggestion of authority. He was the chief of Indian police. "Calthorpe," as he called himself, hadn't explained himself and nothing had as yet explained him. He had been from the first a mild mystery to his neighbors, in a country where neighbors were few and far between, and as he had a gift for silence, and it did not appear to be any one's business in particular to unravel him, a task which might, too, involve risk as well as trouble, he had remained a mystery. Oscar Wilde once expressed great astonishment at finding a miner in

Leadville reading Darwin's "Origin of Species," but in this Western country one ought to be surprised at nothing.

On closer observation, there was a certain resemblance between the leader and his men. He might have been one of them with his swarthy skin and coarse black hair, but that a startling pair of frank blue eyes flashed out from their dark surroundings. They were friendly eyes set in a strong, immobile face. He glanced at his companions, at the burning plateau, then at his companions again.

"And they expect the hunter and warrior to turn farmer in a country like this," he thought. A horned toad startled by the intrusion darted across the trail from the shelter of one sage-brush to another—"In a country that raises sage-brush, horned toads, and hell," and he laughed softly to himself. "The Indian only gets the land the white man wouldn't have." Then his eyes fell on the pack mules, and again the blue eyes gleamed with amusement. "And sometimes valuable minerals are found on land the white man refused, and then he wants even the God-forsaken remnant he promised by solemn treaty never to take from the red man and his children's children." "God-forsaken" was a stock phrase for that country and Calthorpe reflected, "And it *is* the last word in desolation, the last word, but *I* like it. Yes, I like it." And he was amused with himself.

He didn't understand it or try to, but something in him responded to the crimson and yellow glory of the cactus flower, the purple of the thistle, the dull red of the "Indian's paintbrush," or, as the mountain children call them, "bloody noses." He knew a secret joy when the pale greens of the sage-brush and greasewood, and the live shimmer of the scrub oak were relieved by the larkspur, wild roses, the white columbine and sago lillies, and the flashing black and white of the magpie's wing, and somehow he knew that these things were more appealing because set in wide spaces and in silence and desolation.

By chance or telepathy something like this was passing through the mind of another, a man in middle life who sat in front of a tent pitched on the bank of a clear mountain stream that separated the Agency from the rest of the Reservation. He was a big framed man, stoop shouldered, with the face of a scholar and a saint. His clothes hung loosely on him, and he sat as though it would be an exertion for him to rise. Near by was the blasted trunk of a hollow tree. It had been fired by the cigarette of some careless smoker, and it was afire within and smouldering. A look at the man's pensive eyes showed that he too was afire within and smouldering.

"Fine boy, strange boy," he mused. Then he caught the vibration of the thought of the young chief of police who was riding toward him on the dusty trail.

"Some sins," he thought, "are magnificent. Milton's villain is superb, but"—and his eyes rested on the rather pretty cottage of the agent nestling in a grove of

trees below—"small sins are really inexcusable." Rather an unusual reflection for a clergyman, who ought surely to be irreconcilable to sin in any form. But then he *was* unusual, the Rev. Dr. John McCloud. "We send these wild children to our great cities, and show them how hopeless it would be to resist our countless millions, but we never show them righteousness. We only make the Indian hopeless. And who of the countless millions knows or cares what happens to this bewildered anachronism, this forlorn child of a day that is gone? With really generous and noble purposes we hand him over to the spoiler, and so a great people becomes *particeps criminis* in petty larcenies and other pitiful and ignoble wrongs. I wish I could awaken our people to their privileges, their divine opportunities—not so much for the sake of the Indian, but for our own sakes." And he coughed and sank deeper into his camp chair. "Why should a great, mighty, enlightened people stoop to crush such obviously harmless and helpless ones? Is it because they have no votes, no lobby in Washington, are unorganized, obscure, and ignorant?" And his eyes drooped to the book open on his lap and rested on these figures: "7,000,000 families on a medium wage of \$436 a year, and 5,000,000 farmers with an average income of \$350 a year. Which means that 60,000,000 people must think before buying a penny newspaper, that they must save and plan for months to get a yearly holiday, that sickness means debt or charity, that things that make for comfort or beauty in a home are out of the question."

"Yes, yes," he reflected, "that is it. Why should we trouble to save the Indian? We are not even troubled to save our own. At least the Red Man has the fresh air, the light, the sun," and his mind wandered back to the crowded cities, with their gaunt men, slatternly women, and pallid children.

Between this middle-aged man sitting under the flap of his tent and the young man riding across the desert there had been from the first, quick, instantaneous sympathy and understanding. And now the thought of each jumped from the general to the particular.

"She's a fine woman," clicked the instrument in the elder man's head. "It's very tragic, her situation. I wonder if the boy realizes its full significance? I wonder if he knows his own peril?"

"She's a fine woman," was the response in the younger man's consciousness. "I must speak to the agent about her. I've given her such protection as I could, but he *is* the man; it is *his* duty. Duty isn't Ladd's strong point, but perhaps I can ram it gently down his throat. If he doesn't do it, it will lead to trouble," and he looked grim and his teeth set.

He reined in his horse for a moment to take in the beauties of the view. His men had already descended from the mesa into the huge basin that opened out suddenly at their feet, disclosing a dreary waste that was beautiful and absolute, for not a dwarfed tree or a sage-brush or a twig lived there. The wind and rain

had cut and carved the hills and mounds into strange and sometimes grotesque shapes, and merged and blended the colored sands, so that they presented versions of the spectrum, sand rainbows, giving brilliancy and color to this dead desolation.

The Bad Lands were buttressed by a ring of sandstone battlements, twisted, tortured, pock-marked, broken away here and there in huge masses, weird and fantastic. Time had painted them the Indian colors—a dull red at the top blending into a faded yellow, then half-way to the valley the dirty drab of earth, looking as if it had been polished with sandpaper, escarped to the plain. He had crossed this trail many times, but never failed to pause on this brink to wonder and admire. It was lucky for the chief of police that just at that moment he raised his hat to wipe his dripping brow, for the report of a rifle rang out, and reverberated again and again among the hills, pockets, and gullies of the Bad Lands. Instantly every policeman sat erect, unslung his rifle from the pommel of his saddle, but with unanimity that told of unusual discipline, they turned and waited for their commander's orders. The latter made a gesture which in the sign language meant "Wait." The men deployed and waited, their eyes sweeping the broken ground before them. Calthorpe looked at his hat, and laughed as he replaced it on his head.

"By Jove," he muttered; "he picked his place. What a mark I was on this sky-line! Don't know how he could have missed me!"

When he had rejoined his men in the valley below, he called to his interpreter:

"Chavanaugh, I think these boys savey my English pretty well by now, but you make sure; explain it again to them when I am not by. You savey Wah-na-gi?"

Chavanaugh signified that he did.

"Well, I want some of my men always near her, pretty close by. Good woman, Wah-na-gi. Pretty bad men all time round loose. No father, no mother, Wah-na-gi! No harm come to Wah-na-gi, savey? Bad come to Wah-na-gi? Well, you kill 'em, kill 'em; anybody; me too! I do wrong, *me* too. You savey me?"

Chavanaugh paused for a long while, then wiped his brow with painful deliberation, and they rode on.

CHAPTER II

With a whoop and on the run, they dashed into the water, throwing the spray high into the air, and the weary animals buried their noses in the stream and drank so greedily that the water ran out of their nostrils, the men leaning over and drinking out of their hands, and throwing it over their heads and faces.

"Hello, Calthorpe," joyously called McCloud from the bank above. "You're late."

Calthorpe made no reply, but having allowed his horse another gulp, with quirt and spur drove him through the stream to the further bank.

"Hold my horse, will you?" throwing him the reins. "And don't let him get back into the stream."

"What in the world are you doing?"

But to this the young man did not trouble to reply, but tore his clothes off as if they burnt him.

"See here, you can't bathe here at this ford; some of the women might come this way."

"Well, you stand there and shoo them away."

The other smiled good-humoredly as Calthorpe lurched down the bank above the ford and slid into the water with complete abandon.

"Oh, Lord," he sighed, "how heavenly."

Standing Bear "river," except in the spring, was a "crik." The young man lay where he fell, on a beautiful clean pebbly bed, with just enough water to cover him, eyes closed, blissfully inert.

"Bless the chap who invented water," he murmured feebly. "Parson, my throat's lined with alkali dust; say a few words for me to fit the occasion, won't you?"

A beautiful smile lit up the pallid face of the preacher as he said simply: "Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who preserveth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercy."

"That's it. That's me. Thanks!—I could drink it dry, *this*; but I mustn't." Then he managed energy enough to spurt a mouthful into the air. "If I put this into my boiler I'd explode. I'm taking it in through the skin. See the steam? Now if I had a 'horse's neck' with cracked ice—oh, a yard long, and a soup plate full of Maillard's ice cream and the Savoy Hotel orchestra to play to me, and I could eat and drink and sleep at the same time—but it's pretty good as it is."

"We've been expecting you for the last two or three days." McCloud had descended to the brink of the stream and was sitting under a willow with a towel in his hand. "Mr. Ladd's been getting nervous about you."

At the mention of the agent's name the lids of the young man's eyes dropped half over his eyes in a peculiar way.

"Yes? What's up?"

"A powwow over the asphalt lands! all the interests are to be represented. You're just in time. The agent has been very anxious to see you before it took place."

The young man sat up with a sudden accession of life. "Yes, I ought to see the agent before that. All right, I'm alive again, and as good as new," and he shook himself and clambered out on the bank, catching the towel McCloud tossed to him.

"Thanks. This is luxury. One dries by evaporation in this climate."

"Mr. Ladd seems to think your report of the highest importance in the settlement of this dispute."

"Well, what I don't know now about the asphalt lands isn't worth knowing. If information is what is wanted, I'm dripping with it. There!" as he threw the towel aside, "I'm not clothed, but I'm in my right mind, and I am a human being once more." Offering his brawny hand to the older man—"How is the good doctor, eh?"

"Oh, not complaining, my boy; not complaining."

The other was quick to detect the subtle shade of over-emphasis, and immediately met it with a jocularly and buoyancy that did not altogether conceal its anxiety.

"By Jove! Why, you're getting fat. I'll wager you're gaining every day!" And then realizing that his tone had not carried complete conviction with it, he hurriedly began to throw his dusty clothes on.

"No, my dear fellow," said the clergyman with a plaintive smile and sinking into the camp chair before his tent. "No, I'm losing, gradually, but steadily losing every day."

"Nonsense," laughed the other with a determination not to be impressed. "Nonsense. Look at *me*. Almost forgotten I ever had a cough. When you've been here as long as I have—"

"You came in time. I'm afraid I came a little late—just a little late." And the smouldering eyes dreamed off to the snow-capped mountains in the distance.

"Better grub, that's all you need, John."

Calthorpe was not a demonstrative man and McCloud realized the affection that the use of his first name implied.

"You're coming to live with *me*. I'll make a new man of you."

"You?" interjected the other with some surprise. "You and Big Bill haven't enough room for yourselves, much less for—"

"No, not at this exact moment, but, as you public speakers would say, we are on the verge of momentous changes, fellow citizens. Say nothing, look wise, and wait for the dinner-bell. And when my ship comes in, why you sit at the captain's table—savey? Ladd doesn't cater to you."

A shade of annoyance crossed the brow of the elder man.

"The agent has been exceedingly kind to me since I've been here."

"I know," protested Calthorpe. "You brought letters of introduction from the Secretary of War, and—"

"Who was one of my former parishioners, that's all."

"That's all," mocked the impertinent youngster, "and other people of influence, social and political, and you have been ostensibly the agent's honored guest, but Ladd likes you, John; yes, he likes you, just about as much as a burglar likes dodging a search-light. The fact of the matter is that you're an infernal nuisance around here, and when I get ready I'll have no difficulty in kidnapping you and having you all to myself." And the blue eyes laughed impudently into the obvious disapproval of the grave eyes opposite.

"You ought not to make me listen to reflections on my host. By the way, he has asked me to preside at the conference this afternoon."

"Really?" said the other seriously. "What have *you* to do with it?"

"That is just it. Presumably a disinterested party may help along."

"I'm rather sorry."

"Why?"

"Well, they're a rough lot, quick, passionate, not too scrupulous—"

"Why, this is a peace affair, isn't it?"

"Yes," dryly; "so make every son-of-a-gun disarm before he becomes a part of it."

With this the young man, now dressed, flung into his saddle with an alert grace that spoke favorably of the regeneration of his bath.

Perhaps the most significant thing about this interview was that neither had spoken of what was uppermost in the mind of each—Wah-na-gi!

"Hello!" exclaimed the chief of police as he settled in his saddle; "here come McShay and his pals. Howdy, boys," he shouted down to the three men who had halted their horses in mid-stream. "By the way, McShay, I've just had a chat with our chairman. Perhaps you'd like a word with him before we confer this afternoon."

"Sure," called back a thick-set man with a meaty face; "sure, only ain't got nuthin' to say nobody couldn't hear."

"Well, so long, see you later," and Calthorpe whirled his pinto and shot off to the agency. Pinto is the local word for piebald. There is taste in horse-flesh just as much as in neckties or hose, and evidently the owner's taste was a little loud. At all events, he shared the Indian prejudice in favor of the calico horse. The Indians regard the pinto as "good medicine," good luck.

"Glad to see you, Mr. McShay," said the preacher heartily as the burly figure of McShay disengaged itself from his saddle in a lumbering way. In the saddle

McShay was at home, but for purposes of embarking or disembarking, his weight was badly distributed.

"You know Orson Lee and 'Silent' Smith, don't you?" said the Irishman.

"If we had a church over our way these two scoundrels would be deacons or whatever you call the fellers that's on the inside of the inside ring, you can bet on that. They're two of our most influential citizens. Couldn't pass your wickiup without sayin' hello."

The preacher greeted the two awkward cattlemen and made them feel at ease at once.

"I hope you won't ever pass by my tent. I should feel hurt if you did. I'm rather lonesome at times and it's a great pleasure to see friends. Sit down, won't you?"

He got another camp stool for McShay, and Lee and Smith sat on a decaying log near by. McShay had already noted that the gaunt figure was a bit gaunter, so he said with pleased surprise,

"Why, you're lookin' well, Parson—you're lookin' fine."

Like most active men forced by ill-health to think too often of themselves, McCloud disliked any allusion to his condition or appearance, but he replied gently and without irritation,

"Thank you, Mr. McShay, I've nothing to complain of."

"That's good," said the other heartily. "Have a torch? You needn't hesitate. I smoke 'em myself," he added with a laugh, as he offered the preacher a cigar. "Wouldn't throw 'em away on them longhorns," with a jerk of his head toward Smith and Lee. "They just 's leave smoke alfalfa."

"No, Mr. McShay, thank you. I used to smoke a little, very mild cigars, but had to give up even that dissipation."

"Honest?" said the other, with an awkward smile, almost incredulous. McShay was built after the bulldog style of architecture, and with a physical equipment and adjustment that left such things as ill-health in the category of objective phenomena, but he had a sort of respect for it, as for a form of culture he didn't and couldn't possess. He had always been a smoker since he could remember. The only objection he had to sleep was that no one had yet discovered a method of smoking during sleep. He had sometimes felt that even this difficulty might be overcome if he had time to "go after it." McShay was a man who was in the habit of getting things he "went after." The fact that he couldn't at all measure the dimensions of the preacher's sacrifice gave him a painful impression, and he shot a covert but searching look at the other, and then he said with uneasy gentleness:

"We sure got a superior brand of climate out here, parson, but you mustn't git discouraged if the improvement don't come by special delivery. Takes a little coaxin' sometimes, you know."

"Oh, I'm sure I am as well here as I should be anywhere, Mr. McShay."

"Sure," and the cattleman was strangely conscious of a peculiar feeling in his throat, and he coughed, spat, sat down, and became unduly busy with his cigar.

"You know," he said, changing the subject, "it's some spunky of you to pre-
side at these festivities to-day, Parson. Ladd says you're goin' to take the chair."

"Why, you don't imagine there will be any trouble, do you?" said McCloud lightly.

"No, don't know as there will. You bein' in the saddle will have a steadyin' and refinin' infloence, because you're respected round here, parson, and that's sayin' a good deal for a preacher. Most of the salvation experts we've been used to has inspired practical jokes."

"I'm glad the presumption is in my favor," said the preacher, greatly amused, "but I didn't suppose any of my neighbors even knew that I was here."

"Oh, it gits around, Doc; amazin' how it gits around. Don't know as we're much smarter'n ordinary folks—maybe we are, but any way we're on. We got you tagged. We're not only onto your present game, but we know your record. We got it pretty straight that you had to let go your holt in Minneapolis just when the cards was a comin' fine, just when you was the acknowledged pulpit champion of the Middle West, with standin' room only at every performance. Say, it must have been tough, just when you had the Old Boy licked, just needin' an easy little punch to put him out; say, it must have been tough to have to throw up the sponge and crawl under the ropes."

The preacher smiled. "It was a bit tough, Mr. McShay."

Then, realizing that he might have called up painful memories, McShay hastened to add:

"But you're all right, Parson; you're grit clean through. Don't suppose you could throw a lariat or pull a gun—parsons ain't supposed to be up in the useful things, are they?—but we like you. We like you, and the feller as don't has got to explain it to us or put us out of business. Personally, we ain't no better'n we ought to be, don't profess no religion. We're on the make; we're in the little game of grab along with all the rest of 'em, but we know the spiritual goods when we see 'em, and you can touch us for anything we've got—in the pocket, on the cards, or in the fryin' pan, and at any spot in the road. Now, I can't make it stronger than that, can I? I guess I've about expressed the prevailing sentiment," and he turned to his two companions for the approval of which he felt serenely certain, as befits an admitted leader.

Neither Lee nor Smith had spoken up to this time, and even now neither felt called upon to pass upon the subject of the great man's remarks. That was obviously superfluous.

"Say, Silent," said Lee to that sphinx, with open admiration, "ain't he a wonder? Ain't Mike got a cinch on the language? Why, when he wants a word all he's got to do is to whistle to it, and it'll come up and eat out of his hand. He's got the English language broke to single or double harness—in fact, he kin make it do tricks like a circus hoss. Say, Parson, Mike's a orator."

"Oh, git out," protested McShay, obviously pleased. "You're locoed."

"He sure is all right," insisted Lee.

"I'm sure of that," said the clergyman heartily, glad that the centre of interest had been shifted to the other.

"Oh, shucks," laughed McShay, with good-humored toleration. "When it comes to savin' the nation or plantin' a prominent citizen, I kin sprinkle a little language over the occasion, but I ain't a braggin' about it, Orson, before a feller as is a artist. I have the savin' grace to know where I come in, and it's at the back door, son. I daresay, Parson, you've heard that I keep a saloon over at 'Calamity'?"

"Yes, I've heard so," said the other simply, without a trace of pharisaism even in the tone of his voice.

"Well, any time you want to keep your hand in at the preachin' game, come right along, and I'll personally guarantee the character of the proceedings. They tell me that as a preacher you're a stampede."

The big eyes in the pallid face glowed for a moment, then they suffused with melancholy. There was a sensible pause before he said:

"Thank you, Mr. McShay; thank you. Perhaps I'll take advantage of your offer some Sunday, but at present I've had to give up preaching: it seems to exhaust my vitality." He paused for a second and then added with a shy little smile, as if he were confessing to a fault: "I like to preach, too, and, as you say, it's been 'tough' to be compelled to give it up, but, after all," suddenly alarmed at the thought that he was bidding for sympathy, "living is more important than preaching, isn't it?"

McShay filled in the pause, that threatened to be too obvious, by jerking out his Waterbury.

"Hello, gitting on to the time! Guess we'll be moseying along. Well, Parson, I've expressed myself pretty free, ain't I? And in something of a complimentary vein, not with a view to inflooincin' your attitude in this approachin' conference. Mind you, I ain't above doin' it if I could. I don't do it 'cause I know it wouldn't go, that's all," and he laughed generously as he hoisted himself into the saddle. McShay was a man with few illusions. He fancied he was pretty familiar with the ordinary phases of human nature, and his code of morality was a working code; it would bear comparison, he felt sure, with that of the average citizen, and it wasn't so high as to be inconvenient. He had never felt called upon to experiment with a code obviously theoretical. He wouldn't hesitate at cards or in a

trade to cheat one who was engaged in trying to cheat him. In fact he looked upon it as a joyous and holy duty to skin the skinner. He was not inexperienced in the ways of the world. He knew more of Doctor McCloud than that worthy man dreamed of, for when a very young man he had been a policeman in St. Paul and during the uncomfortable times following a reform upheaval had felt obliged to leave that saintly city. Indeed, he had brought about the upheaval by his own obstinacy, for there are degrees of graft, and the young Irish-American wouldn't violate his own wholly illogical standards of what was fair or decent any more than he would accept the standards of the too-good. He had come into his own in the cattle country, opened a saloon, became a political leader, a boss, and a cattle king. He had prospered. He was loved by his friends and feared by his enemies, and he was fond of both. And when the cowboys on one of their summer round-ups found something that looked like coal or jet, and which, unlike coal or jet would light like a candle, they took it at once to McShay, who promptly, without knowing whether it had value or not, located claims for everybody and everybody's relatives and claimed everything in sight. "To those that have shall be given," he explained irreverently, and indeed that version of the text was his point of view. And when further investigation showed that the discovery was an important one and that a considerable part of the mine or the vein or series of pockets was on the Red Butte Ranch, he promptly sent Andy Openheim and Charley Short, very quietly, to London to buy the ranch or that portion of it containing minerals from the Earl of Kerhill. It was pretty well known that the ranch had not been a profitable venture to the Earl, in the days when he had been a cowboy, and it was thought that his old herders, "Andy" and "Shorty," could buy it for a song. They had returned with a deed, but by this time these two amiable citizens had caught the prevailing spirit of enterprise and announced that they had indeed secured the prize, but that they had bought the ranch for *themselves*, a sample of commercial wakefulness which was denounced as several kinds of treachery, and came near to leading to the death of some eminent citizens. However, as by that time the secret was out and the lust of gain had spread from the range to the settlements and from there to the cities and the State, and indeed to the busy halls of Congress, and every one pretty much was evolving a plan to get in on the good thing, it was thought best to buy out the holders of the deed, even at the advance in price which they impudently demanded. McShay paid the price for himself and his cowboy associates, but at the conclusion of the purchase he strongly advised Shorty and Andy to leave the country, which they lost no time in doing. The fate of these two worthies will always be a stock warning to the rising generation in Calamity. Before they reached the Canadian border they had quarrelled, and when the smoke had cleared away Shorty was alive and had the money. There was profound regret at first that either should have survived,

but this sorrow was mitigated later by the report that Shorty had lost every cent at a single sitting in a three-card monte game up in the North-west. Then only was the moral tone of Coyote County felt to be in the way of rehabilitation, and confidence was restored in the dispensations of Providence. It was even darkly hinted that McShay had sent out some skilful short-card men on their trail, and to that extent had assisted Providence to make plain that "transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness."

Whether this was true or not, McShay never contradicted it, and it added not a little to his prestige with his constituents. As McShay turned to speak to the preacher, his more active companions, Orson Lee and "Silent" Smith, had already mounted and turned their mustangs toward the agency. As he glanced toward their retreating figures, McShay said with a twinkle in his eye:

"Say, Parson, you'll like 'Silent.' He ain't much on gab, but say, he kin shoot like hell, and if the argyment is agoin' against you, 'Silent' is good company; he sure is good company."

CHAPTER III

After a ride through the Bad Lands, Standing Bear Agency was a gracious sight. One could see from afar the white flag-pole which marked the centre of its activities. Close by nestled the agent's cosey little cottage which peeped out from the shade of maple and cottonwood trees, backed by its well-kept barns and corals. Opposite it sprawled the Indian-trader's store, a log-cabin affair, the relic of other days, by comparison a really beautiful bit of architecture in the surrounding ugliness. These two aristocratic buildings stood a bit apart, and had a small sense of aloofness. Between ran what had once been a trail, then a road, and now was trying to be a street; a street that had moved boldly out toward the prairie, taken one frightened look, and then shrunk back cowed, and had refused to be teased or coaxed further. It quit almost before it began and was hideous with sheet-iron and clapboard monstrosities, which here and there bulged into a pretentious bow-window, as irritating as the challenge of a flagrant hat on a particularly ugly woman. These buildings huddled together as if they felt the enveloping loneliness. Back of them was a tin-can desolation. Further along was the blacksmith shop, and near the "bench" which rose on the other side of the "crik" was the saw-mill, and off to one side the slaughter-house and its corrals.

The valley was sprinkled with the huts, tepees, rude houses of the Indian farmers and the agency employees, which followed the course of the Standing Bear and the crude irrigating ditches. Beyond all, across the mesa, rose majestic peaks covered with perpetual snows. But for these noble heights, Nature hereabouts might have been accused of an undignified proceeding, but the Moquitch Mountains spoke eternally and serenely of God.

In front of the trader's store was a platform littered with merchandise, buckets, rope, tubs, etc., things that slopped over from the crowded shelves within. Even on bargain-counter days, if such evidences of a high civilization ever reached this emporium, business was desultory, but the trader made up in percentage of profit what he lacked in volume of trade. It was late in the afternoon, business apparently at a standstill, "nuthin' doin'." Cadger, the proprietor, was leaning casually out of the window, and, though neither looked at the other, was talking to the agent who stood on the platform just outside. The merchant must have had another name, but no one had ever heard him called anything but Cadger. His father and mother—it was difficult to believe that he had ever had a father and mother, and inconceivable that he had ever been a child, much less a baby—if, I say, he ever had parents, they probably called him something endearing or at least human, but in a country where almost no one escaped a nickname, he remained just Cadger. In appearance he suggested negation, the excluded middle. He seemed to have been plucked too soon and faded early. He had a half-hearted nose, a discouraged chin, and his faded little eyes blinked weakly. There is such a thing as carrying insignificance to excess. In personality he was so unobtrusive as to appear not to be around, unless one stepped on him. It is said, however, that any one so careless remembered it, if he lived to remember anything; for, strange to say, Cadger was supposed to be a man-killer. He wasn't at all the usual bad man type, looking for an audience and a chance to show off. He was a plain business man, and all he had ever asked, like other business men, was just "to be let alone." There was a vague rumor that he had once been in business in the Black Hills, where he had gone into competition with the express companies in the carrying of gold, and after a more or less successful career had found it safer to retire to the slower and less exciting pursuits of a post-trader's store. At all events, he was a quiet, modest man that no one cared to investigate or annoy, and no one had successfully questioned his commercial methods. He took no pains to remedy his natural deficiencies, for he had found it useful to look like a fool.

"I think we can do business with Calthorpe," said the agent, looking off into space.

"Can't make him out," said Cadger in a tone as vacant as his face. Then after quite a pause which he filled with smoke from a filthy pipe. "Suppose you

know all about him, but you ain't never give it away to me."

The agent swung a contemptuous look in the direction of the other.

"He's out here, isn't he? Along with the rest of us. No one knows the exact particulars about you before you came here."

The other overlooked the obvious inference and did not trouble to reply in kind, but murmured gently, "Takin' chances."

"Big Bill applied for the job for him," continued the agent. "All Bill knows about him, or all he'll tell, is that he brought a letter of introduction to him from his old boss, the earl of something or other, who used to own the Red Butte Ranch. Of course he isn't out here because he wants to be here any more than we are. A couple of years ago I read a story in one of the Sunday papers about an English lord who was ambassador to Spain and got mixed up with a Spanish dancer and raised a family by her. The son, when he got around to it, tried to prove he was legitimate. Maybe Calthorpe's story isn't any worse than that. Maybe it is. He looks like he was half Spanish. Of course he's had English bringing up, has the remnants of an accent with him, though he's trying to drop it. What do you suppose would induce a man who was an educated gentleman to come out to this damned waste and accept the wages of a chief of Indian police? Well, to my humble mind, nothing but crime, my Christian friend."

"Kin you hold him?"

"Well, we can't frighten him. We got to make it worth his while, that's all."

"Will he *stay* bought?" persisted the business man.

"We got to trust somebody," said Ladd impatiently. "He knows more about the country in general and the asphalt lands in particular than any man living, and when I found out he was a surveyor——"

"How did you get onto that?"

"Heard him talking the lingo with Bill, then asked him point-blank. It was a find for us, for his position as chief of police made it possible for him to survey these lands without arousing any suspicion. Don't think the other people know we have been at it. I wouldn't have consented to this powwow this afternoon if I hadn't thought we could have fixed things up beforehand. What in hell do you suppose is keeping him?" But Cadger's mind was still back on the first tack.

"You're in too much of a sweat. You want to go awful slow when it comes to puttin' yourself" (deprecating pause) "and me into his hands."

The force of this observation seemed to impress David Ladd, for he said quietly:

"Well, you know the talk we had last night. The confab will be out here. I'll see to that. Cleaning a gun at that window just where you are now—why, an accident might happen. People are so careless with fire-arms, especially a plum fool like you. Why, it's easy. If you see me take off my hat and hold it in my

hand, get ready: if you see me put my hat back again on my head, why get him, that's all. You're the best shot in the country, unless it's 'Silent' Smith." This as one business man to another.

"Hello, here's Big Bill. Maybe he knows." And Ladd stepped down from the store to meet the cattle-boss.

"Has Calthorpe come in with his men?"

"Hardly think so. I'm on my way to our shack now to see."

"When he arrives, tell him I want to see him at once, will you—*at once!*" and the agent entered his house across the way.

Big Bill was bigger and a good deal slower than in the old days on the Red Butte Ranch, and his coarse hair was very gray, but it still crowned the same kindly, simple face. Bill was feeling his way to the retired list, though he didn't realize it himself, and he had kept his job because no one cared to explain to him that he was getting old. It was hoped that some day he'd tumble to it himself and resign. No one liked to contemplate what would happen then, so no one did. The agent was not a sentimental man, but he knew the working value of sentiment, and so Bill stayed on.

He and Calthorpe shared their house, a little wooden box pitched in the shelter of a clump of quaking ash ("quaking asp" in the vernacular) some little distance below the Agency and on the bank of an irrigating ditch. As Bill came in sight of it he saw Calthorpe calmly sitting in the door-way. Instead of riding into the Agency the young man had deliberately avoided it.

"Hello, Bill," he shouted cheerily.

"Hello, son. Say, Ladd's terrible anxious to see you."

To this the other replied irrelevantly:

"Seen Wah-na-gi?"

"No."

"Seen Appah?"

"No," and the smile of welcome faded from Bill's face, and he sat down on a convenient soap box, picked up a stick on the point of his pocket-knife, and began to whittle. The young man saw he was displeased and waited.

"Say, son, you're kind of runnin' wild on the range, ain't ye? And ye ain't a-gittin' anywhere, or a-servin' any useful purpose 's far as I kin see. Ain't ye kind o' fergittin' what ye come out here fer? What you lingerin' round here fer any way?"

"Oh, for several reasons, Bill, several reasons," said Calthorpe pleasantly.

"You found out all you want to know about the asphalt lands long ago. When you goin' to chuck this job and go over and take what belongs to you?"

There was a pause while Calthorpe looked dreamily off into space.

"Well," he drawled slowly, "before leaving I'd like to turn a trick or two—

make the agent show his hand."

The slang and the metaphor of the people about him came very easily to this alleged stranger.

"Ladd?" said Bill doubtfully, with a tone and inflection that expressed volumes for the danger and uselessness of such a proceeding.

"Wouldn't you like to see him put his cards on the table?" asked the boy. Bill's eyes twinkled and it was manifest that the suggestion was alluring.

"Sounds good. To rope David might be a pleasin' diversion as a form of entertainment; he's a skunk all right, but that ain't a-keepin' you here, Hal, my boy."

"No?"

"No."

There was a pause.

"You ain't asked me what it is, but I'm goin' to tell you. It's Wah-na-gi."

"Bill!" And the light died out of the blue eyes which glittered ominously, and Bill was sensitive to the warning in the cold even tone of the boy's pleasant voice.

"That's all right," he hastened to say as he put up his guard. "You needn't git the blind staggers. Somebody's got to round you up. I was your dad's foreman before you was born. Your dad sure was a gentleman. He sure was, and as to his bein' an Englishman, why, he lived that down."

"You and father were pals, I know that, Bill," said the youngster, softening.

"You and me was pards too, son. I made you your first quirt; taught you how to ride. I helped to bury your little Injin mother. I ain't your kin exactly—"

"You're closer than kin, Bill. I didn't mean to be ugly. Don't mind me. Say what you like."

"Well," said the big fellow with an awkward air of apology, "your dad made me promise to ride herd on you. You know that, don't you?"

"That's right."

"Sure." He blurted, as he felt on firmer ground. "He wrote me you had been a-hittin' it up in London."

"That's right, Bill; I was riding for a fall—going to hell fast." And he watched the smoke of his cigarette and saw in it those evil days. "I didn't belong and I couldn't fit in. It was all wrong. I was all wrong. I knew it, felt it, but couldn't somehow change it. It was the West in me, I fancy—in my blood." Then he turned to the big fellow and said with a smile that won the people who could inspire it: "But I've been a pretty good boy since I've been out here, haven't I, Bill?"

The other looked at him with an affection that was unmistakable.

"Well, say, since you been out here you've made everything that wears a hat take it off to you."

"Then why in blazes are you giving me the spur?"

"Wah-na-gi—that's the answer. Now wait. I got to git this out of my system. Hal, son, don't you go to makin' no such mistake as your dad made."

"And don't you forget, Bill," said Hal stiffly, "that I had a mother as well as a father—a mother I have no reason to regard as a mistake."

It was Bill's turn to look off into the mountains, to go back into the past.

"Say," he said softly, "she was all right. Nat-u-ritch was sure all right. She didn't know anything but bein' a wife and bein' a mother, and that's pretty good, I guess. I suppose you know why she killed herself? Couldn't understand why her kid should be sent away to England. She was a thoroughbred in a way, but, son, it was an Injin way."

"I fancy that was what was the matter with me in London, Bill. My way was an Indian way."

"Well," said the cattle-boss, seeing that he was being diverted from his text, "Don't walk into trouble with your eyes wide open."

"Don't you worry about me, old chap; I'm not in love with Wah-na-gi, but—"

"You jess feel sorry fer her." Bill said this with the amiable sneer of a man who has nothing to learn about women and the world.

"Yes," said Hal simply; "don't you?"

The directness of this appeal caught the guileless Bill unprepared.

"Sure," he admitted. "Sure, I do. She's been to school. Couldn't anything worse happen to her. Edjjication? Why, it's worse'n whiskey fer the Injin."

"And don't you see," said the boy, following up his advantage, "she's alone and she needs friends, and while I'm here, while I'm chief of police, I can keep an eye on her, protect her in a way, but when I leave" (pause) "what will become of Wah-na-gi?"

While Bill was groping in his slow way for an easy and pleasant and convincing way of saying that one couldn't plunge headlong into the tangled affairs of all the misfit people in this crazy world, the figure of a woman appeared in the foot-path that crossed the low ridge on the opposite side of the narrow valley. Before Bill had arranged his arguments Hal, without a change of countenance, suddenly developed initiative.

"Well," he said, rising, "I thought I'd learn all the news from you, but, as usual, I'll have to find out all about it and tell it to you. And now I'm going over to see the amiable Ladd. Oh, by the by," he added casually, "how is 'Calico'—fit?"

"Never better."

"He hasn't been ridden to-day?"

"No. Why?"

"Have him fed and watered; saddled and bridled, then hitch him just behind

the trader's store. Do the same for the best horse you've got."

"Why? What's up? Ain't you had enough of the trail for the present?"

"Don't know, Bill. Don't know what may happen. Tell you later—after it's happened."

And he swung off on foot toward the Agency. Bill did not change his position for several moments; then he rose and looked affectionately after the boy, and, as he turned, the figure of a woman paused for a moment on the ridge and then disappeared in the direction of Cadger's store.

"Of course," he muttered, "of course," with all the sarcasm of which he was capable. "Ain't a man a damn fool!"

CHAPTER IV

The French explorers and trappers called them medicine-men (*médecins*), but it isn't a comprehensive term. The medicine-man is something more than an Indian doctor. He is prophet, preacher, teacher, poet, and priest as well as healer. Before the coming of the missionaries the Indian had become aware of the world within and the world without, and, like every sentient creature, had begun to speculate on their relations and grope his way toward the eternal mysteries. He arrived at a confused intuition of a Supreme Being and he reasoned that everything came from this source, that each bird and beast, each river and tree, had some measure of the divine power and that this could be imparted, and so, when he was puzzled before the ever-renewing miracle of life or helpless before his own life problem, he did as holy men have done in all ages, he went apart into the solitudes, into the mountains or the deserts, and sought in contemplation, in purification, in fasting and prayer to find out God. He prayed and God sent the bear, the wolf, the eagle, the coyote, the thunder to give him strength or wisdom or courage. He became a dreamer and an interpreter of dreams, and from his comparison of the seen with the unseen have come some dignified and poetic concepts. For example, the Milky-Way became for him "the pathway of departed spirits." He invented song and story, myth and miracle, and symbolism dominated his life. Like all who have tried to rise out of the world of matter into the realm of mind, his holy men claimed to find exalted powers and metaphysical forces. He believed as we do in the healing virtues of plants and herbs, and when these failed he, too, resorted to spiritual healing. We are always intolerant of what we do not understand. We

know now that the ghost-dance was nothing more than a religious revival with characteristic hysterical phenomena, and in intention was to usher in not war but universal peace. The victims of the Wounded Knee massacre were religious martyrs. The troops might as well have fired on a Methodist camp-meeting. Underneath the skin we are very much alike. We all travel the same road, only we differ in the mile-stones we have passed in the age-long journey.

Appah was a medicine-man. Whether he was a fair sample of the class I am not prepared to say. Even medicine-men differ in character and sincerity. Only Infinite Wisdom knows to what extent we are self-deceived. What happened at the sun-dance will give you some idea of Appah's position with his people and his relation to the principal characters of our story. All our Indians are more or less sun-worshippers. The sun is to them the most obvious power in the physical world. The sun-dance, to honor the sun or propitiate the sun, is held every year in the early days of July. The Indians will tell you "it's just for good time, same as white people," but it is in reality a religious ceremonial. Two or three miles below the Agency is a flat meadow where the dances are held. This is marked here and there by the medicine poles of former dances. These medicine poles are left standing and a new one cut from the mountains each year. It has a crotch at the top into which a bundle of sage-brush and some eagle feathers are tied. It is planted and raised with ceremonial, reverent and joyous. From it as a centre radiate poles to a circular enclosure made of young cottonwood and cedar trees planted with their foliage on. Inside, on the west of the big lodge, are little booths, sheltered, where the dancers rest when not dancing. The dance begins about seven o'clock at night, just as the sun has gone down. Those who are to participate appear on the plain in single file, blowing on a whistle made of the quill of an eagle's feather, and they keep this in their mouths all the time they are dancing, and its sharp, staccato note dominates the chant and the drum. The dancers are naked to the waist; in fact, have on nothing but breech-clouts and a loin cloth which is elaborately ornamented and falls to the feet before and behind. They have the down feather of the eagle tied to one finger on each hand, and some of the braves wear their rich glossy hair loose like a woman's. The forty-six dancers circled the dance lodge three times and then entered. After that the general public were admitted. As each buck stood before the little booth which was to be his home until the dance was finished it made a striking and beautiful picture.

Bare to the waist, the term "redskin" was justified, though some had obscured the natural beauty of their skins with a white, green, or yellow smear. On the whole they were a fine-looking body of men, though some of them were in the prayer dance with the hope of being cured of various ailments, rheumatism, tuberculosis, and the like.

The old cruelties, the lacerations, etc., have been eliminated, but it is still an endurance test. They dance for four or five days and nights without food or drink, and at high noon they look into the terrible sun. The dance itself is a perpetual strain on the same muscles—the feet held together, hopping forward and hopping back. The women have no part in the ceremonial except to join in the chant, though presumably their presence is not unknown to some of the participants, in spite of their rapt gaze being always turned to the medicine pole or to the sun. In fact, it is understood that some are "dancing for a wife."

The dance had been opened by Appah in very much the same way that we open a prayer-meeting. He advanced to the eastern side of the medicine pole and with his hands together at the waist, and the emphasis of small gestures or movements with the fingers, head reverently bowed, and in a tone inaudible three feet away had uttered a brief invocation. The others could not have heard him, but at his conclusion they clapped their hands together and uttered grunts of approval.

The drummers began to beat the tomtom furiously and swung into their monotonous chant, and the dance was on. The whites and half-breeds stood or sat about the entrance on the north. Appah, having started the dance, remained in front of his booth for some time, waiting for the spirit to move him; suddenly his face set and he moved out to the medicine pole with the wing of an eagle in his hand. He dipped the tip of this in the dust at the foot of the pole, then touched the top of his head, then ran it down each arm, then down each leg, then he held it up dramatically to the east. Just then the cool fragrant air of the night was broken by a laugh—a glad, buoyant, girlish laugh. It would be difficult to describe the shock of this incongruity. Almost without turning to see, every one knew that it came from Wah-na-gi. She was dressed in a neat pink cotton frock with the white of her bodice showing in the neck and sleeves and a pink ribbon in her hair. She had not been back long from school, and she was still very young, took the sun or the shade quickly like a mountain lake, and she could still laugh easily. Appah stopped, turned ashen with anger, saw who it was, and saw who stood behind her—Calthorpe, the chief of Indian police. He saw Calthorpe with a look of dull ferocity and, strange to say, he saw Wah-na-gi for the first time in a new light. He had heard the talk about her since she had returned from the school at Carlisle, but hitherto she had escaped his notice. Now he could have strangled her, and at the same time he was acutely aware that she was pretty, indeed beautiful. He unconsciously excused her in some half-instinctive way and held Calthorpe responsible for the insult. In a measure he was right; it was the latter's remark which made the girl laugh, but that remark was not directed at Appah. The latter did not know that behind him had hopped into view—Tonkawa, a fat, vain little man with a grotesque body set on a pair of grotesque legs. The movement of

the dance threw Tonkawa's superfluous flesh about in a most ridiculous way. Calthorpe had whispered to Wah-na-gi:

"Look at Tonkawa! He's a prairie dog." Indeed, he looked so like a prairie dog, Wah-na-gi giggled. Calthorpe continued: "He's dancing for a wife."

Even Calthorpe did not expect the peal of laughter that followed, but he was the first to recover his presence of mind, and before the general indignation could take form he carried her from the enclosure. Appah was so preoccupied with the unpleasant incident that he *turned his back* on the medicine pole and *walked* back to his booth. Both these proceedings were bad luck, and were noted by his followers, and he was angrily aware of them himself when it was too late. It was a bad beginning. Every one felt it. When at midnight the watch-fire was lighted, the air got very still and hot, unusual in this country, for the nights are cool, and after an interval of suffocating calm, filled with forebodings, a terrific wind-storm sprang out of the night and filled the air with a hot, blinding, choking desert dust. Then, indeed, gloom gathered over the mystic circle and fear and depression invaded each heart.

Appah was conscious, too, that in an unacknowledged way he would be held responsible for these misfortunes, so, smarting with a sense of personal insult, raging against the crowding omens of ill, he redoubled his energy, danced often and with a fierce energy that soon wore itself out, and still the tempest blew on. It blew through the night, it blew through the next day. It looked as if the dance would have to be abandoned. Appah was showing signs of distress. He advanced as usual to the medicine pole and, appearing to be about to faint, he threw out his hands and grasped it, steadied himself like a tired pugilist who hugs and hangs on to his opponent, then, when he had recovered sufficiently, he went through various signs and passes, "making medicine." He continued this until he could stand, then he boldly stood out and addressed his companions.

The Wind-Gods were angry; they were tearing up the earth and throwing it in their faces. Something was wrong. Indian women were turning into white women; they went away from their people, went to school and then came back and laughed at their elders, laughed at the sacred mysteries. Shinob (the God-mystery) was sorry, ashamed of his Indian children. Everything was all wrong. Appah was a big medicine-man, a wise man, knowing many things. He had done much for his people and God was angry to have his servant mocked. It would be bad medicine to abandon the dance; great sorrow and trouble would come of it. Their friends had come from afar to see it; a great feast was to follow, and those who had danced were to have the joy of giving away many gifts to these friends. The dance must go on, while he went apart and made medicine. He would go into the mountains and consult the thunder-bird and in the morning come back and drive away the wind. And with as much dignity as he could command, he

walked out of the corral.

The news of this promise spread rapidly, and the following day the corral was crowded with Indians and whites, all to see whether Appah could "make good." The morning wore away and still he did not appear, but when people had begun to smile, he walked into the dance like a man in a trance. A hush fell upon all. He carried an eagle feather in his hand, and with this made medicine. First he faced the north, rubbed the wrist of his left hand with the feather, then, with a simultaneous movement of both hands, threw off the evil spell. This he did to the east, south, and west. Then all the Indians got up and shook their blankets, and—the WIND DIED! It went out like a candle. You may explain this as you like. Appah may have been lucky in choosing the moment when the wind would have died anyway, or you may say that the skeptical whites who saw this were hypnotized just as the Indians were. That Appah would not hesitate to resort to any trick to impress his followers, I do not deny, but it is certain also that he believed in himself and in his esoteric powers. However you explain it, it was conceded among the whites that it was a sporty thing to do, to stake his professional reputation on a throw like that, and great was the fame of Appah in the land. One result which may interest us was that Appah who had already been the unhappy possessor of two wives, showed an unmistakable desire to take a third, and it was the woman who laughed!

CHAPTER V

Wah-na-gi was about to mount the steps of the trader's store when Appah, who had followed her without her being aware of it, abruptly confronted her and put out his hand as if he would speak to her. As she shrank back startled, Calthorpe, who had likewise followed her, stepped in between the two. With a swift glance at the latter she slipped past Appah and entered the store. It all happened in a moment, but it was one of those moments in which all pretence, all appearances, all conventional restraints slip from the soul and leave it naked, knowing and being known.

"Hello, Appah, you look as if you had swallowed a hair rope. What is it?"

And the young chief of police smiled provokingly into the glowering face of the medicine-man. It was war. The two men knew it: the woman knew it, and Ladd, who had just stepped from his house opposite, knew it.

"Wait a minute, you two," he said in a firm, quiet tone that implied acquiescence. "Better leave this to me."

"I understood that Appah was looking for me," drawled the youngster insolently, then he turned and looked squarely into the glittering eyes of the Indian.

"Always at home to my friends, old chap, only"—and he removed his hat and ran a finger through the hole in it—"don't send up your card; just come yourself."

If Appah knew what was meant, not a quiver of an eyelash betrayed it. There was an obvious pause, then Calthorpe added in a patronizing tone not lost on his enemy:

"A rotten bad shot by the way; it doesn't do you credit." Nothing hurts the Indian like ridicule. Most of us are vulnerable. Poor Achilles! What a pitiful weakness for a warrior—in the heel! Perhaps the story is intended to convey the impression that some one laughed at Achilles' feet and he died. The deaths we die from ridicule! Lingering and conscious! We arm ourselves with contempt for others, but alas for the Achilles spot. Centuries of cultivated philosophy do not protect us. Only love, that love which looks past time into eternity, arms us against the sting of ridicule.

Poor Appah! The woman had laughed at him, and now the man! He did not attempt to reply in kind.

"Maybe so Injin," he said with a movement of the hand toward the store where Wah-na-gi had disappeared.

After a dignified pause during which he looked from one to the other to make sure they knew what he meant, he continued:

"White woman,—white man! Injin woman,—Injin man! You savey—wayno (good). No savey,—heap trouble, plenty trouble!" Seeing that he was understood, he moved away with great dignity.

"That seems to cover the ground, doesn't it?" said the agent pleasantly. "White women are for white men; Indian women are for Indian men, and the man who thinks differently will get into trouble."

"There's a bad boy, if you like," said the young man indifferently, ignoring the insinuation of the other and lounging lazily against the store platform. "He's a naughty boy."

"Yes," said the agent, as he offered his cigarettes to the other and with a lithe spring seated himself beside him. "Look out for him. He's a bit peevish over your attentions to Wah-na-gi."

"Attentions?"

"Call it what you like," said the agent, aware of the irritation of the other's inflection. "You're not going to get any quarrel out of me over an Indian woman."

This frank contempt, including as it did Wah-na-gi, produced a very dis-

agreeable impression upon Hal, but he restrained himself to say quietly:

"I've been wanting to speak to you about that—about her, I mean. You ought to protect her, this Indian girl." He was annoyed to find he was speaking as if he were confused.

"You seem to be making a special feature of that—yourself, Calthorpe."

This was like a blow and Hal flushed with anger, but he was conscious that he was in some way at a disadvantage and so he controlled himself to say coldly:

"I'm your chief of police."

"Has she complained?"

"Yes."

"To you?"

"Yes, but leaving her out of the question, you ought to hobble Appah or let me hobble him."

"Oh, I think he knows I'm agent."

"You let him play a free hand."

"Do I? What do you mean?"

"The last time I arrested him you let him go."

"Appah is a difficult person, very cunning, very influential. He would have posed as a martyr. The cowboys were the aggressors."

"They were," said Calthorpe, "but you leave *them* to *me*. I'll keep them and their cattle off the Reservation, if I'm not interfered with. Appah steals their cattle; they steal back, only, *two* for *one*. Somebody gets hurt and then the settlers yell 'Murder'; there's a call for the troops, there's an Indian war, and the rest of these poor people suffer."

"Why, my dear boy," said the agent, laughing, "we couldn't get on without men like Appah. They divert attention and raise a useful dust."

Hal had no illusions about the agent, but the brutal cynicism of this left him for the moment without a reply. He had a picture of thugs picking a quarrel with a stranger in order to assault him, beat him to death, and rob him.

Ladd had spoken rather plainly. He meant to be even plainer.

"Let's talk about something more important," he said with amusement at the other's blank expression. "Yourself, for instance."

"Myself?"

"Yes, I've taken a fancy to you, my boy, and I want to see you get on. In this country it's etiquette never to ask a man where he comes from or if that's his real name. I've heard it set down to our native delicacy and finer feeling, but I reckon it comes from the fact that most people who come out here couldn't stay at home. For instance, I don't suppose that Calthorpe is your——"

"My real name? No, you are quite right; it isn't."

He said this with almost boyish frankness. Ladd chuckled at his own

shrewdness and felt completely master of the game.

"What does it matter so long as I do my duty and give satisfaction—and I have done that, haven't I?"

"You certainly have," said the other with a cordiality that was meant to be disarming and ingratiating. "You have brought the police force to the highest state of efficiency, and your men—well, they would stand the torture test for you. And it isn't the first time you've had men under your command either," he added with a knowing smile.

"No," said the other simply.

"In fact you've been a soldier."

"Right."

"A British soldier, I fancy."

"Right again."

"You left the service—"

Ladd paused for effect like a police court lawyer, who was having fun with a helpless witness.

"You left the service—well, let us say, for good and sufficient reasons."

"Because I couldn't stay, if that's what you mean. Well, what of it?"

"Why, only this, that I think you and I might be useful to each other, that's all. Now, about this asphalt."

Ladd's voice dropped to a confidential key and slipped into a tone that was intended to chloroform his victim.

"I happen to know that the Asphalt Trust could make use of these lands. At present McShay and his cowboys are in forcible possession, but they can't hold 'em. If the Trust can't get the lands any other way, they'll fight these people in and out of the courts, in and out of the legislature, in and out of congress, in and out of the cabinet, until they wear them out, until the cowboys get tired fighting and spending money, and are glad to sell out for a song. The Trust will get the lands in some way and sooner or later, you can stake your life on it."

Hal was listening with great intentness and Ladd's voice showed that he felt on surer ground.

"Now, we'd like to feel that you were friendly to us, that your interests were identical with ours; we think we can show you that they are identical, and, under any circumstances, we want to feel sure that your knowledge of the Reservation and the country in dispute is not at the disposal of our enemies, the McShay crowd. And oh, by the by, just as a precaution against trouble, during this conference this afternoon, instruct your police to be out of sight, but near at hand, and ready to obey orders. And understand this, that any arrangement we may make with you now will only be a beginning—just an evidence of good-will. Come on into the house and let's fix it up."

Ladd started for the house and turned his head to see if Hal was following him. The latter seemed in a daze. That seemed very natural and very encouraging to the agent. Just at that moment Wah-na-gi appeared in the door of the store. Ladd saw her, beckoned to Hal, and played his trump card.

"And as for Appah and this Indian girl—well, stand in with us and you shall have a *free hand*. Savey? Come on. Let's get together." And Hal followed the agent into his house.

CHAPTER VI

"I'm in a hurry."

Wah-na-gi spoke before Appah had uttered a word. The latter had waited and again confronted the Indian girl as she was leaving the trader's store. She looked for a way to escape and saw none. As for Appah, he cherished no illusions as to his chances. He realized that he must exercise all his resources to win against the young chief of police, but that knowledge only made him the more determined. He was a tall, muscular man, of great natural dignity, very proud. As a lad he had gone to school for a while and progressed rapidly, especially on the foot-ball field, where he gave promise of developing into one of the greatest half-backs ever seen on the gridiron, but he resented restraint, was easily offended, and suddenly left the school, made his way back to the Agency, taking back with him a cordial hatred of the white man and everything connected with him. A swift survey of the situation convinced him that the easiest way to influence and preferment among his own people was to become more Indian than the Indian, so he resumed the blanket, and with it he became the representative of the old order of things. He understood English perfectly, but pretended not to, and he could speak English fairly well, but he loathed it, and affected to speak it with great difficulty, after the manner of the elders who had never learned and did not want to learn.

He had a finely chiselled face in which the ascetic seemed to be struggling with the voluptuary. It is a not impossible combination. He looked at Wah-na-gi now in a kindly way and spoke reassuringly, as one would speak to a child.

"Touge wayno teguin."

She did not hear him. She was thinking of some one else, of many things, and she was frightened. Then to meet her more than half-way, to show that he

could be even indulgent to her prejudices, he translated.

"Heap good friend, me!"

She did not hear.

"Maybe so we talk Injin talk. White man talk no good. All lies, plenty lies, lies all time!"

At last she heard, but she did not look at him as she said:

"No, I won't talk Injin talk. I won't go back and be like you and like them. It's no use for you to try to make me. I can't. It's too late."

It was a curious contrast, these two. They were very far apart, at the two extremes, each going to exaggerated and unreasonable lengths, the one to go back, the other to go on. It was very childish. Appah felt this and, feeling the stronger, made the concession. "Fish—water! Bird—air! Half bird, half fish—no good! Injin face, Injin name, white heart!—no good! White man no savey you; Injin no savey you. Maybe so you come back—be Injin! Wayno!" He looked very well as he said this, for he was very much in earnest and he threw into it all his natural eloquence of voice and gesture.

"It's too late," she said sadly. "I couldn't go back."

There was a pause as she looked over to the agent's house and added:

"Not now."

Appah saw and understood.

"Alone, you! Heap alone! All time alone!"

"Yes," she said with the suspicion of a sob in her voice. "I am alone."

Appah was on his way to the dances in the meadows, not the sun-dance, but the social functions, the turkey, wolf, buffalo dances, and he was dressed in all the glory of feather bonnet, buckskin shirt, and was conscious of looking extremely well. He was a vain man and it was difficult for him to realize that he had not produced a favorable impression, so he made the mistake of calling attention to his advantages.

"My father—big chief—Big Thunder. Big chief—me! Big medicine-man! Heap savey, me! Heap savey Shinob, heap savey—mystery! The bear, my friend, give me his strength! the wolf, he heap savey me! The wind talk to me! the sun, my friend! Plenty cattle, plenty horses! Maybeso you be Appah's squaw."

As Appah finished his eloquent appeal, two of Calthorpe's police lounged into sight from nowhere in particular. The sight of them made the medicine-man angry.

"Pikeway," he said to them. Which means "go away," "get along," and "get out," or just "go," according to the way you say it. It meant several things the way Appah said it. The two men only came nearer and were provokingly oblivious of the big chief. It was plain that they did not intend to hear him. Appah turned to her and, doubly irritated at being disregarded before her, said:

"Injin police—bad medicine! Trail, trail! me! all time, follow me! Tishum, tishum (all time)! Maybeso make heap trouble! You tell 'em pikeway."

"No, I will not," said Wah-na-gi boldly, plucking up courage in their presence.

"I'm afraid of you."

Then Appah forgot that he was trying to win her love. He advanced close to her, as if he would lay violent hands on her.

"Maybeso you heap like 'em white man. I savey you! Chief Injin police, eh? Katch wayno! (No good). Maybeso kill 'im some day!"

Then he noticed that she was dressed very neatly, better than the Indian women dress, that in fact she had on her best clothes, and he knew it was because the chief of police had just got back, and it enraged him to violence. He snatched the string of beads from her neck and threw them to the ground.

"Kill 'im, me, some day."

"Who's that you're going to kill?" said Calthorpe in his soft musical voice as he advanced from the porch of the agent's house. Appah turned on him in a fury.

"What's matter you?"

He pointed to the two policemen.

"Your dog, savey? I look down—saw-reach! (dog). Look back—saw-reach! This side, that side—saw-reach, Injin police! Maybeso you can't do it. Maybeso make heap trouble!"

"You savey this woman?" said Hal quietly. "Her people, dead! No father, no mother! heap bad men all around, plenty bad men, some whites, some Injin. You leave her alone. Savey?"

Unconsciously the white people speak English to the Indians as the Indians speak it, as we talk baby-talk to a baby.

"Maybeso you too all time pretty quick leave Injin woman alone."

Appah's hand was feeling under his blanket for his knife.

"When I speak with this woman," replied Hal simply, "some of these Indian men are always near. She is not to be troubled—not by you, not by me! Chavanaugh, come here."

One of the policemen came forward.

"If anything bad, any harm, comes to this woman through me, these men will kill me. These are my orders; is it so?"

"Toyoch, wayno," replied Chavanaugh slowly. "It is so and it is well."

"Now for you," said Hal to the medicine-man.

"You quit running off the settlers' cattle or I'll arrest you."

"Maybeso you can't, medicine-man, me! Chief, heap big chief!" Hal ignored this boast.



He snatched the string of beads from her neck.

"This woman heap scared, all time scared! Let her alone!"

Appah made a long pause before he replied, then he said with some thing that approached a smile:

"Maybeso yes—maybeso no," and he walked to his pony hitched before the blacksmith shop and rode away.

Up to this time Wah-na-gi had remained alert, proud, outwardly calm; now she seemed to dwindle and shrink as she weakly drifted to some empty boxes which huddled under a cottonwood tree by the side of the little irrigating ditch which brawled along in a joyous hurry to get to the big streams below.

Calthorpe followed her and as she sat down said gently: "You are very tired."

"No," she said; "I am not tired."

"What is it, Wah-na-gi?"

It was a musical name as he uttered it.

"Is it Appah?"

She made a movement with the shoulders, and a half, unfinished, suggested movement of the hands; it indicated weariness and contempt.

"No, he frightens me, but it isn't that. It's *me*. Appah is right. I'm half bird, half fish, and I can't fly and I can't swim. I flop around on the earth and gasp for breath. And I know it, and I can't make it different."

Her lip curled bitterly but he did not try to console her with feeble platitudes. It was a great relief to her to speak to one who knew, and she was grateful for his silence. He simply sat down beside her and she felt that he was sorry and would like to help her.

"I suppose I was always impossible, even as a child. My parents gave me another name, but no one ever called me by it. Wah-na-gi is a nickname. It means 'the spirit when separated from the body.'^[1] You see, even as a child I must have been strange and different."

..vspace:: 2

[1] A Dakota word.

..vspace:: 2

"It's a very beautiful name," he said softly; "the most beautiful name I ever heard. I'm glad they gave it to you."

Though he struggled to control his voice and make what he said very simple and commonplace, his tone was a caress. It seemed to take her by the hand and lead her through the gardens of life and bring her to the gates of Paradise.

It was very terrible for her to be so conscious of misery and so near to happiness. Tears sprang to her eyes; she trembled, she bit her lip and struggled, struggled audibly to control herself, to keep to the earth, to get back to the reality.

"Why did they do it?" she sobbed. "Oh, why did they do it?"

"They?" he said gently, groping, groping in his mind for some way to help her.

"My parents and the old chief Tabywana. No, I must not speak bitterly of them. They're dead now, and they meant well. They meant well. They thought they were doing great things for me—for *me*. Oh! Oh!" As a realization of her position swept over her again, her hands closed convulsively and she moaned as if in physical pain. It was the first time she had talked to any one about herself since she had returned from school. She was suffering it all over again, but it was a great relief to share it with some one. She was calmer now as she continued:

"They thought it was a great thing for me to go away to the Government school. They must have been dreamers too. They were very proud of me and thought I was so wonderful. Parents will think that sometimes about their children," she added wisely.

He smiled as he thought to himself:

"What a child she is! She'll always be a child."

"They thought I would learn all the wonderful things the white people knew, and I was very young; I thought so too. And the teachers—they were so kind. They petted and spoiled me because I learned faster than the rest. A new world opened to me, and I saw that there was nothing very mysterious about the white man's way, that it lay open to me, a poor Indian girl, and then I began to dream, and I forgot everything but my dream, and I worked, oh so hard; and I was happy, happier than I can tell you. Soon no one would have known that I was an Indian, except that I looked like an Indian, and I was not ashamed of that. And no labor, no sacrifice was too great, for I had great thoughts. I said to myself: 'Some day I will gather up all these blessings and take them home, back to the mountains, back to my own people, and perhaps God, the Great Spirit, will let me take them by the hand, these poor, ignorant, helpless children, and lead them out of bondage.'"

She paused for a moment and her face lit up with the glory of this dream whose sun had set.

"And I hoped that perhaps I could teach them to protect themselves against the white man, his cunning, cruelty, and vices. I saw it all so clearly myself, I felt that I could make them see it. And so, walking on the air, my head in the clouds, I came back with my dream. I came back with both hands stretched out to my people, and then—"

She paused, the sunset glow of a departed dream was gone, and in her face gathered the shadows of the long night that followed. It was such a relief to find expression that she was not conscious that she was laying bare her soul before this man, and he was conscious only of the fact that he was living her life with her, and it made him strangely, sadly happy. She had paused before the recollection

of her home-coming and she was grateful to him that he did not try to comfort or console her.

"And then?" he suggested gently.

"I can't tell it, I can't," she sobbed; then with an effort she steadied herself and shook the tears out of her voice and went bravely on:

"The surprise, the shock, the pain as I began to realize the truth. I can't tell it, I can't explain it. I didn't try much at first, just example. I tried to live before them, to let them see the other way, the better way. The women saw me wash my face and hands always before eating, my teeth too. I tried to show them in my dress, my habits, my manner, but instead of seeing that what I was doing or trying to do was better, they only saw that it was different, and they hated me for it. They thought that I felt I was better than they were, and I couldn't make them see that I had only love for them in my heart. They would say: 'Here she comes, the white woman; make room for her; give her the best seat; she knows everything; we are nothing but poor Indians, but she has been to school; listen carefully to what she has to say. She is very young but she will teach us all.' I believe I could stand torture, but I can't bear to be made fun of. Perhaps they didn't mean to do more than tease me, but they tortured me. They hurt me cruelly and I could not hide it. They saw this and it seemed to make them happy, so every one took a hand in the new game. They called me the White Squaw. They praised me, they praised everything I did. It was great sport—for *them*. Finally the chiefs, the elders, took me aside, and talked to me of my effort to change things. The women must look to the men of the tribe; it wasn't wise to attempt new and strange things; it wasn't womanly; it was foolish for me to meddle in matters beyond me. This was more terrible because they were trying to be kind to me. They advised me to marry. Appah had asked for me and Colorow, the head chief, had given his consent. I began to see that it was hopeless. I was not an Indian to the Indians nor a white woman to the whites. I tried to forget, to go back, to be like them, and then you came, and I knew that I couldn't."

She said this simply, quite as a matter of course. Indeed, she was quite unconscious of what this meant to him.

"The worst of it all is they won't let me teach their children." She tried to say this bravely, but her voice broke in a sob.

"No?" he said with deep concern, for he knew that her hope lay in the children, that her heart was in her work as a teacher, and that her cramped, starved soul had found meat and drink in her love for the little ones.

"No. Yesterday the agent asked me to resign my position! He said that if I didn't the Indians would withdraw their children from the school."

Hal did not reply to this. All his faculties were alive and in a flash he saw the situation. He said nothing. What could he say?

She was not only face to face with a big, implacable problem but with a very painful and sordid struggle for existence.

"No, I could not go back," she repeated. "Whatever happens I will never again be like them. They make me shudder. I have no people, no kindred, no country. I am an outcast. Sometimes I get frightened. I seem to be just an empty shadow. I feel dead, but I still walk about. I can't even lie down under the ground and rest like my parents who are gone. I don't know why I tell you all this. You are a white man. You cannot understand."

"Wah-na-gi, I understand. I understand even what you haven't said. I'm glad you told me all this, but I knew it before you told me." And he smiled at her tenderly and she smiled back at him through her tears.

"You are very wonderful," she said with divine candor, and he laughed joyously, because he knew she was incapable of sarcasm.

"No Wah-na-gi, I'm not wonderful. I'm a very ordinary chap. It would be strange if I didn't understand. My mother, too, was an Indian woman."

He thought she would be startled, and he watched her narrowly for a sign. Would she be disappointed? Would her hero crumble? Or would she be glad that they were closer to each other than she had dreamed?

"Your mother?" she said. She did not grasp it. She hadn't thought to speculate about him; to wonder who he was or where he came from or why he was there.

"Your mother! Did you say your mother was an——"

"An Indian woman. Nat-u-ritch was her name.

"Nat-u-ritch? No, it isn't possible. The pretty little woman—they say she was so pretty—who, who——"

He said it for her.

"Killed herself over at the Red Butte Ranch? Yes, the same. She was my mother."

"I see now," she said. "Otherwise it couldn't have been. I couldn't have told you, and you, you never would have understood. I'm so glad you told me."

And without stopping to inquire why, the world seemed a different world, almost possible, perhaps a world in which one would be willing to live, might even be happy. Such small things sometimes make this curious old world.

"It was Fate, Wah-na-gi," he said irrelevantly. "It had to be. It is always like that. Things are so. That's all. We come together, you and I, because we are alone, alone in a big world."

"You, too," she said incredulously. Was it possible that this superior being could have been treated by life with the same want of consideration shown to a poor Indian girl? "Alone? You?" she repeated. It was a joy to find that they had many things in common, even if they were sorrows.

"Yes, I, too, am an outcast."

He said it lightly, because he was not begging for sympathy, for he no longer felt in need of sympathy. Indeed, he no longer felt an outcast. He said it because he wanted to make one more tie between them.

"You? Oh, no, it couldn't be!" she said, and her soul went out to meet him and stood waiting. He saw it but he did not realize all it meant to him.

"Yes," he said reassuringly.

"I pitied myself once, but I don't now. It was all for the best. Otherwise I wouldn't be here. Yes, I had to get out, had to leave England, had to leave the British Army."

"You were a soldier. Of course, I ought to have known that," she said with frank admiration.

"I could tell you a fancy story," he said; "and you'd believe it, but I'd rather you knew the truth. Lies always keep one dodging. They said I disobeyed orders."

"But it wasn't true," she said with quiet conviction.

"Yes," he replied, grateful to her nevertheless. "Yes, it was true. Yes, I disobeyed orders. They were fool orders; they were crazy, cowardly, panicky orders and I disobeyed them, and I dare say I'd do it again if I had the chance."

He said this with more heat than she had ever seen him display, and she was proud and happy because she saw no sense of shame in his face and felt no reservation in the ringing tones of his voice.

"It was in South Africa. I was ordered to retreat. I tore up the despatch and ordered my men to charge, and I'm not bragging when I say I saved the division from annihilation."

"And they punished you for that?"

"Well, you see, it was like this—I don't know whether you'll understand it exactly, but this wasn't done in a corner. It was plain that if I was right our commander was—well—deserved to be court-martialled. He was a great man with the highest social and political connections. The people behind him couldn't afford to be shadowed by his disgrace. In fact, if they let the truth out it would have become a national scandal. It was easier to ask for the resignation of a youngster whom nobody knew, and about whom nobody cared, nobody but my poor old Dad. Even those who knew the truth said I was a fighter not a soldier, that I didn't know how to obey, was insolent and insubordinate, and they bawled that the Empire needed soldiers not heroes. They said I jeopardized the Empire in order to make a reputation for myself. They said a lot of things. The only man who stood by me—God bless him!—was my immediate superior, and he had to resign too, for telling the truth. So I was sacrificed. I had to give up the only career for which I was fitted, the only thing I cared for, and every door in England was shut to me forever. You see I have no people or country either."

"You shall have mine," she said quickly.

"You forget, you haven't any," he rejoined, and they both laughed like happy children.

Ladd had stood for a moment on his veranda and watched them with a cynical smile. They felt the chill of his shadow even before he spoke.

"Have you instructed your men as I told you?" he asked of Calthorpe as he came toward them.

"No," said the young man rising, "but I will."

He signalled to his two men to follow him and he walked away.

"Come," he said to her; "I'll walk a little of the way with you."

"Don't go far," said the agent. "The meeting will take place at once and *I depend on you.*"

As they walked along neither spoke. Both of them had looked forward to this moment many times; both had dreaded it; both had avoided it; both had conspired to postpone it, and now they were face to face with it. Something strange had come into their lives, born of complete understanding. To help him to go away, to urge him to go away, at first seemed to her impossible, now it was imperative.

"You must go away," she said simply, as if they had been talking of it for a long time. "Your life isn't safe here."

This conveyed no meaning to him now. There were other reasons. He was well aware of them. He had in fact laid awake many a night answering them and confusing them, smothering them. His inclinations had silenced them many times. Now he knew that it was inevitable and could no longer be postponed, and yet, what of her? He saw that she had some basketwork and beadwork in her hands; that she had been into the store to try to sell them; that she had not done so. The trader sells these things for very good prices, but he takes care not to pay anything for them. He knew that Appah had been instrumental in having her dismissed from her position in the school, in the expectation that it might help to drive her to the protection and shelter of his home; that this had been done with the connivance of Ladd. He realized that her dismissal would be popular! He thought, too, that he could, if he chose, have her restored to her position, which meant more, much more to her than the salary involved; and that this was part of the "valuable consideration" intended by the agent. He knew that never had she so much need of him as now, and he must go away. "Your life isn't safe here," she repeated, seeing that he had not heard.

"Oh," he said, laughing, taking off his hat and looking at the hole in it quizzically. "Somebody has told you. Oh, it was nothing. Some one was hunting and I happened in the way—that's all."

"It was Appah," she said with complete conviction.

"What if it was?" he said, unimpressed. "He knows I know."

"He's a bad man."

"Well, he isn't my idea of a good man exactly; still—there are worse men than Appah."

"Yes," she echoed with conviction; "the agent, and he doesn't trust you."

"No?" he said, genuinely surprised. "What makes you think so?"

"Last night I was sitting crouched behind an empty oil barrel below the trader's window. I was very discouraged, for I had not been able to sell any of my work, and I was trying to think of some other way, or some other work, and before I knew it or realized that I was listening I heard their voices, the trader and the agent. I couldn't hear it all, but I heard enough. It was how the trader could stand at the store window, pretend to be cleaning a gun, and kill some one outside."

"And you think they had me in mind?"

"I didn't hear your name, only—don't go to this meeting this afternoon."

"I must go, Wah-na-gi; I couldn't stay away; but don't you be worried."

"What is it about?"

"The asphalt lands."

"They are a lot of bad men. Don't go, please don't go."

"Why, bless your heart, little woman, I know all about them, and I can take care of myself. I'm as safe as if I were in a church."

"If you stay on the Agency—they will kill you. You must go away."

"What is it, Bill?" said Calthorpe as the big foreman hove in sight breathing heavily as if he had hurried.

"Ladd wants you; they're ready to begin."

"All right, Bill, I'll come at once."

As Bill hastened away Hal took from his vest pocket a small automatic magazine gun.

"Wah-na-gi," he said, "I bought this for you the last time I was in Denver." And he rapidly showed her its simple mechanism. "Learn to use it. You might need it some day, and if you don't, no harm done." And he dropped it in the beaded pouch that hung from her waist.

CHAPTER VII

"Howd'y, boys?" said the agent in his most genial tones as he shook hands with McShay, Silent Smith, and Orson Lee. "Howd'y? By the way, McShay, I asked Captain Baker to come over from Fort Serene. I hope that is agreeable to you."

"Sure," said the big cowman. "Sure. Baker's all right. Who represents your side besides yourself?"

McShay had not made his way in the world by subtlety. The inference was too obvious to be ignored, but Ladd chose to assume the attitude of the righteous man who is not easily offended.

"I don't represent any side, McShay," he said with an amiable smile.

"Ain't you over-modest?" McShay's tone made it obvious that he did not expect quarter, and it was pretty well known that in a fight he didn't give any. Still the agent preserved his equanimity.

"Like Captain Baker, I'm just an officer of the Government."

"Not even Cadger, the Injin trader; ain't he in the game?"

"Not unless you personally desire his presence," said Ladd genially and without a trace of the amusement he felt at the idea.

"Not me," said the other hastily. "Any time I want Cadger present I'll put the occasion under lock and key and lose the key."

"Hello, here's Captain Baker now. Howd'y, Captain? Thank you for coming."

Baker had played centre rush at West Point and was really too big for a cavalryman. At sight of him one naturally felt sorry for the horse, and associated him involuntarily with the heavy artillery, coast defences, or something in keeping with his architectural lines. He looked like an overgrown boy. His fresh, rosy complexion, blond hair, and round face made him look much younger than he really was. If he was a bit slow mentally, he could mind his own business, and was universally liked by his men and by his neighbors in the country roundabout.

"Shall I get some chairs and benches?" said the agent.

"Mother Earth for me," said McShay, taking in the chances with a swift mental calculation, and arriving at the conclusion that sitting on the ground he could shoot quicker and had a better target than the man who sat on a chair or one who sat on the agent's porch. "Sure of your ground wires down here."

He was about to sit when Dr. McCloud walked slowly toward them, his hat in his hand, as if he felt the burden of the heat.

Ladd went toward him with the deference and respect which it was impossible to withhold from this unusual man.

"Thank you for coming," he said, and turning to the others: "Gentlemen, Dr. McCloud has kindly consented to preside at this conference——"

"Unless there is some objection," said the clergyman, looking from one to the other with his benignant, shadowy smile.

"Objection to Dr. McCloud would be regarded on this side of the fence as the opening of hostilities—what the lawyers would call provocative," said McShay with a drawl which seemed to add weight to the sentiment expressed, and he made the last word his own with an unnecessarily long o, sort of put his brand on it.

Silent Smith looked at Lee with helpless admiration.

"Gee whiz," said Orson in complete sympathy. "Ain't that a bird? And Mike gets 'em out without the aid of a net or any mechanical contrivance—just spontaneous like."

And the two men looked around to see if any one was rash enough to question the superiority of their leader.

Ladd's brow had begun to darken with anxiety when in walked Calthorpe.

"And, oh, by the way, McShay, I've asked Calthorpe, my chief of police, to be present, as he is thoroughly familiar with the country in dispute."

McShay took Hal by the hand and held it while he said, looking straight into the boy's eyes:

"Glad to meet somebody who is goin' to be interested in the proceedin's. Mr. Ladd is gittin' so shy and retirin' it makes us fellers feel kind of selfish and lonesome."

McShay's sharp gaze was a hard one to meet, but Hal looked into it with eyes so steady and serene that the big man was puzzled.

The two had met but seldom, and then in a way not calculated to make them friends. Hal had on one occasion ordered McShay and his men and cattle off the Reservation, had in fact put them off. The young man's attitude had been so quiet but so determined and convincing that, much to the cattlemen's surprise, they had gone without more than an angry protest. McShay had been a police officer himself and knew that the fellow with the law behind him had all the best of it, and so he'd taken his medicine, but he hadn't enjoyed it. On another occasion these same men, but without their leader, had come to one of the Indian dances with the avowed purpose of "having fun with the police." They had been drinking and were quarrelsome, but Calthorpe arrested them, disarmed them, and put them in the "lock-up" so quickly that they had no time to get going, though they were a formidable and dangerous lot. He had earned their goodwill on the following morning, when they were sober, by inducing the agent to let them go without further trouble. So McShay and his crowd had at all events learned to respect him as a man who could take care of himself.

"Well, Doctor, it's up to you. The meeting is in your hands," and Ladd offered him a chair which had been placed on the edge of the veranda. The agent sat on the steps to the right of the clergyman, Captain Baker on the steps to his left, the others were grouped in a semicircle, McShay and Calthorpe opposite the

chairman.

The agent had felt sure of his ability to put McShay and the cowboys in the attitude of law-defiers, and he had manoeuvred to have the clergyman and the army man present in order to have two disinterested witnesses to their confusion, witnesses whose influence might be potent at Washington and before the nation.

"Well, gentlemen," said McCloud, rising, "if I can help you to know each other better and understand each other better, I shall be glad. Misunderstandings are at the bottom of most quarrels, and so we are here——"

"For a show-down," interrupted McShay nervously, anxious to get down to business.

"Well, that poker expression seems to cover it," said the clergyman, smiling—"a show-down."

"Before you go any further," said Captain Baker, "I want it understood that I don't know anything about this matter, that I am here in nobody's interest, merely on the invitation of the agent."

"That is correct." Ladd spoke with condescension and as one far removed from undignified strife, with a lofty and impersonal note; indeed, as one divinely appointed to the task of pouring oil on troubled waters, an attitude intended to put greedy self-seekers in their proper light, an attitude very exasperating to McShay who chafed under the genial implication.

"That is correct," he repeated. "The captain is here by my invitation. I thought he should be present as I may be forced to ask for troops to remove from Government lands all interlopers who——"

"Interlopers is good. It's a glad word. It's all right about interlopers," broke in McShay, feeling that Ladd had made him look greedy long enough. "You brought Captain Baker here as a bluff, but it don't go. We ain't got any quarrel with him or his soldier boys, and we're glad he's here."

"And, like Captain Baker, I have no axe to grind," beamed the lofty one. "I am here just as——"

"—the paid representative of the Asphalt Trust."

It came like lightning. The big man had tired of the fancy sparring and had stepped in with one straight from the shoulder that caught his opponent and staggered him with its directness. McShay didn't know any other way but to take and give punishment. It served its purpose. It knocked the tactics and amenities out of Ladd with a single punch, and he stood revealed, his jaw set, his eyes blazing, a fighter, dangerous and implacable. Every one present gasped.

"You'll have to retract that statement," he said after a moment's pause in which he struggled to control himself. "It's false."

Every one got to his feet and every man's hand went to his gun. McShay had forgotten that he had planned to shoot from a sitting position. He couldn't

resist the simultaneous impulse.

"Wait a moment, please!"

It was the minister who spoke. McCloud spoke as one sure of himself. It wasn't the first time he had exercised control over men. It had been his life work. He had swayed thousands as one man. He had held out both hands to avarice and men had given him the money they loved dearer than their souls. He had faced the frenzied mob and taken the human torch from their mad vengeance. Men had submitted to this power without knowing what it was or whence it came. Perhaps it was the same force which stilled the tempest on the Sea of Galilee and made men say: "Even the winds and the waves obey Him."

"Wait a moment, please," he said, and they waited. As they turned to him, something shone in his face. Perhaps it was the radiance of the dying sun sinking behind the Moquitch Mountains; perhaps it was the light of another world. Whatever it was, human passion became self-conscious before it and shrank back abashed.

"You are forgetting *me*. You have honored me by making me your chairman. As long as I am acting for you and as your servant I will not allow you to ignore me. Your own self-respect should teach you to respect me. I won't be a figure-head. If I am not in control here, absolute control, get another chairman."

It was not what he said, but it was the man himself, that made this cogent.

"Well, that's no more than fair," said McShay frankly.

"Why, of course," said Ladd, not to be outdone and greatly relieved to have the occasion drift into still water.

"Good," said McCloud heartily. "That's understood. And when I say absolute control, I mean just that. Each man has his own pet methods, but for the present it is *my way*."

"Your way goes, Parson," announced McShay grandly.

"I'm glad that is agreed upon. Very well, gentlemen, this being a peace conference we will begin by a general disarmament."

There was a momentous pause before McShay's mind groped its way through the bewildering chaos conjured up by this cataclysm.

"A what?" he gasped.

Quite unobtrusively and without attracting the notice of any one engaged in the powwow, Wah-na-gi had glided into the background, crept up the steps of the store, glanced furtively into the open window, taken a survey of the interior of the store, and then crouched on the steps where, without appearing to, she had been a most intent observer of the scene.

"There's Wah-na-gi," said McCloud, seeing her strategic position for his purposes. "Every man present will oblige me by handing over his weapons to her. They can be reclaimed later."

"Ain't that a bit unusual?" said Orson Lee awkwardly.

"Ain't fashionable in our set, Orson. Don't you think, Parson," said the Irishman, turning to McCloud with his most ingratiating manner, and McShay could be very winning when he wanted to; "don't you think a gun is a kind of civilizen infloence, as it were? Ain't it a check on intemperate speech and reckless statement?"

"Are you going to begin by appealing from the decisions of the chair?" asked the chairman.

"Not me. Me and my men will deposit our hardware and git a rain check." And he began to unbuckle his belt slowly, his example being followed by his retainers in a helpless, bewildered way.

"Mind you, I think you're wrong. There bein' no proper sense of restraint, I'll bet this ends up in the dammedest row! You know, Parson," holding it out, "God made the gun to put every man on an equality!"

He paused for a moment, almost expecting that the preacher might be moved by this powerful almost unanswerable argument, but as he saw no sign of any weakening he put his gun before Wah-na-gi.

Hal had been the first to comply with the request of the chairman, and as he put his weapon before her, gave her a smile, to which she responded with a look in which love and terror struggled for the mastery.

"Make some excuse and get away," she whispered. "He's armed," and she tossed her head in the direction of the store.

"Don't worry, little woman," he said and walked back to the others.

"By the way," said McCloud casually. "Perhaps I didn't make it quite plain. I meant all weapons."

McShay looked at the parson with a smile that was touching in its frank admiration.

"Boys, the parson's on. He's on. There can't be no trumps held out in this discard."

It now appeared that the McShay crowd was a walking arsenal. Weapons made their appearance from the most innocent places. The big man drew a gun from a pocket holster underneath each arm. They were so disposed that he could fold his arms in the most natural way and have each hand rest on the butt of a gun, which he could draw simultaneously and very quickly. Orson Lee seemed to have a preference for the knife as an auxiliary weapon, for he drew one from the leg of his boot and another from the back of his neck, the two extremes.

Silent Smith, the expert, wore a coat, and had a magazine gun of moderate size in each pocket, so that he could sit or stand with his hands in his pockets and shoot through the pockets. It saved a lot of time not to have to draw and aim. It looked as if the cowboy contingent had come prepared for trouble.

While this was in progress McShay said:

"Don't suppose you have political aspirations, Parson, but if you ever git locoed that-a-way, you can put a rope around any office we got runnin' around loose down our way. Now, Brother Ladd, we'd like a contribution from you. Can't let you overlook the plate that-a-way."

"As I'm not armed—" said Ladd, but the minute he said it he knew it was a mistake.

"Guess ag'in," said McShay with a provoking smile.

"Oh, I had forgotten this," corrected Ladd, removing a magazine gun from his pockets. "This is an old hunting coat of mine and I had neglected to remove it."

The cowman looked a quizzical "How careless!" but refrained from further comment.

"Would you like to make sure that is all?" said Ladd to the other.

Much to the disappointment of the preacher, McShay rejoined: "If you don't mind," and proceeded to tap him for further concealed weapons. Ladd submitted to this with a good grace that pleased the chairman, particularly when no further artillery was in evidence.

"I'm not armed," said Baker.

"I'll take the captain's word for that," said the chairman.

"You have no other weapons, Mr. Calthorpe?"

"None," said Hal; "but any one is at liberty to make sure."

"I'll take your word," said McShay.

The inferential insult of this was not lost on Ladd, but he had made up his mind not again to lose his temper, and to let McShay rattle on and expose his hand.

"Oh, by the way," observed the chairman, looking around; "oughtn't the Indians to have a representative here?"

"I represent the Indians," said Ladd laconically.

"Never mind the Injins," agreed McShay.

The chairman made a note of the fact that no one thought it worth while to consult the Indians about lands presumably belonging to them. Both parties to the dispute were agreed in this, so the clergyman let it pass without further comment.

"Now we will sit down," he said, "and listen to each other calmly. First, Mr. McShay, we will hear from you. Don't rise. This is informal. We will try to avoid provocation and also try to be patient under provocation. Go on." McShay fired the first shot.

"Mr. Chairman, gentlemen, and—Injin agent."

The slight pause before "Injin agent" did not promise well for the avoidance

of provocation, but Ladd ignored it.

"I represent the cowboys and settlers who are in present possession of these lands. Possession is usually considered nine points of the law, and when backed up by repeatin' rifles it sometimes tallies up to ten."

"You mean that you are in forcible possession," said the chairman, "but of course you don't insist that might is right."

"Well, might comes mighty near bein' right, Parson. In my experience it's the best argument I'm acquainted with."

"You've 'jumped' these lands and, unless you get off, I shall be forced to get Captain Baker to assist my Indian police in putting you off."

Ladd had regained his composure and said this without feeling.

"You ain't agoin' to put us off, Mr. Agent, 'cause we've a right to be there. We hold two tracts under two separate titles—first, the lands formerly belonging to the Red Butte Ranch, we own them——"

"Under what sort of title?"

Every one turned to the speaker. It was the young chief of police who spoke, and even Ladd showed plainly his surprise at this obvious meddling in matters which did not concern him. McShay was about to ask him what business it was of his, but a second glance at the youngster made him think better of it, so he only remarked:

"By purchase. Bought 'em from the owner."

"The owner? Meaning?"

"The Earl of Kerhill."

"You bought them from the Earl of Kerhill?" persisted the other, but he pronounced the name as if it were spelled "Karhill," and Mike corrected him with obvious patience.

"Surest thing you know. We bought 'em from Charley Short and Andy Openheim, two of his old cowboys, who bought 'em from the earl direct."

"I'm afraid you've been taken in, Mr. McShay."

"Taken in? Not me. Not a take-in. Never been took in—wouldn't know how."

"I'm afraid you were a bit too eager to get these lands. For once your rapacity got the better of your caution."

The muscles around the Irishman's eyes contracted.

"Parson, I don't care much for the word rapacity."

"It isn't parliamentary," said the chairman, amused in spite of himself. "I declare it out of order. I hope Mr. Calthorpe will——"

"I withdraw it," said Hal good-humoredly. "Sorry! What I meant was they sold you something they didn't have, Mr. McShay."

"It's giving our hand away," said the cowman with an assumed serenity he

did not feel, for there was something about the manner and speech of the other which made him uneasy in spite of himself.

"It's a-giving our hand away, but I don't mind puttin' you wise. There's a deed!"—and he took a paper from his wallet—"and it's signed, 'James Wynnegate, Earl of KERhill.'"

"*Karhill*," corrected the boy.

"*Kerrhill*," insisted Mike, and then spelled it—"Kay-arr-hell."

"May I see that?"

"Sure! Strictly speakin', I don't know as it's any of your business, but maybe it'll be good for what ails you."

Hal looked at it, read it, examined it swiftly but carefully, amid a silence which was intense! The interest had shifted from the agent to the chief of police, and every one present was wondering how it happened and what it could mean. While the document was under examination, Big Bill sauntered in, trying to look absent and desultory, and failing completely. He tried to appear on his way to the store, but his open face showed plainly his anxiety to know what was going on.

"The signature is a forgery," said Calthorpe simply.

"What?" bellowed McShay, jumping into the air and feeling for his gun. His dismay on realizing that he didn't have this final argument was pathetic.

"I told you, Parson," he said to the chairman bitterly; "I told you it was a mistake."

"No unsupported statement need bother you, Mr. McShay," suggested the preacher, his eyes, twinkling, for now that he felt that he had the situation well in hand he was amused at the play of human emotions going on before him.

"That's right, Parson," said McShay. "That's right, 'unsupported' is a glad word and it epitomizes the situation. But the young feller'll have to make this good some other time and place."

"I'll make it good now, Mr. McShay. Bill, come here, will you?"

As the big foreman sauntered over to him, the young man went on:

"As you all know, Bill was the Earl's foreman for years, and knows his signature as well as he knows his own. Will you let me submit this signature to Bill?"

As Mr. McShay did not refuse, being by this time somewhat bewildered, Hal passed the paper up to the cattle-boss, who looked it over and over, and then, thinking Of other things, looked at the back of the paper.

"He didn't sign it on both sides of the paper, Bill," growled McShay impatiently, "and it ain't leaked through."

"'Tain't Jim's—the Earl's, I mean," said Bill decisively.

"This is a put-up job, that's what it is, a put-up job," and the representative

of the cowboys, now thoroughly enraged, made a movement in the direction of the pile of guns nestling in front of Wah-na-gi.

"McShay!" cried Ladd imperatively; "I wouldn't advise you to try to get your gun. My Indian police are within call and they have orders to put down violence."

The baffled fury of the cowman was a pleasant sight to the agent and he smiled broadly as he explained:

"You know this is as much of a surprise to me as it is to you," and this was strictly true; "but I am endeavoring to take it calmly," he added with an irritating grin. "You don't see me getting excited."

"Well, boys," said McShay to his followers, "the wheel is crooked and the cards are marked, but we'll sit through the game out of respect for the chairman."

McCloud bowed, pleased and flattered by the deference of the rough man whose sincerity was unmistakable.

"Thank you. I'm sure the agent will have no excuse for using the police even to keep the peace." And he felt grateful to McShay that the latter did not for a moment suspect him of being connected in any way with what he was pleased to regard as a crooked game.

"I thought it best to be on the safe side," explained the agent. "And now I think it only fair, also in the interests of peace, to make my position plain. The rest of the lands you cowboys are illegally holding are on the Reservation and you've got to get off."

"Don't think so," said McShay, having now in a measure regained his poise. "No, don't think so. They were thrown open by Act of Congress and we hold 'em as original discoverers and locators. We hold 'em under the mineral laws."

"This isn't your day at home, McShay. You're wrong all the way round. Calthorpe here is a surveyor——"

"Say, he's all sorts of cute and convenient things, ain't he?"

McShay was getting himself in hand once more.

"All right, Parson," he said in response to a gesture of protest by the chairman; "all right, I ain't a-sayin' what they are. I'm a-sayin' it."

"Mr. McShay," said the preacher with good-humored forbearance, "a wise man once said: 'Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood, so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.'"

Cadger appeared at the window of his store and he was busy cleaning a Colt's 48. Ladd did not look at him, but he knew he was there.

"Now let's get down to business," he said sharply. "My chief of police here has surveyed these lands and boundaries and finds the original monuments have been moved."

"Oh, he's a handy man to have about the house, ain't he?" insinuated Mc-

Shay. "Well, useful," he said, turning to Hal with an ominous sneer. "Get on. Don't you see your master's waitin' fer you. Let's see just how much of a fancy liar you really are."

Every man got to his feet and there was an instinctive impulse which demonstrated the wisdom of the chairman's point of order. This was followed by a simultaneous movement to get between the two men, which was checked by the perfect calmness of the younger who raised his hand in a deprecatory way.

"I let the word liar pass for the present," said Hal coolly. "We can take that up later, Mr. McShay and I. You see the agent isn't quite accurate. I did make a survey."

Before the quiet young man could finish his sentence Ladd slipped his leash.

"And you're on Government lands, McShay, and, by God, you've got to get off." It was an explosion. The austere official went up in smoke, leaving fierce self-interest showing its teeth. It was unmistakable that Ladd meant what he said. His jaws were set and his clenched fist quivered in the Irishman's face.

"Wait a moment, wait a moment, Mr. Agent," said Hal with a soft, soothing menace. "You're going too fast. You must let me tell my own story and in my own way. On the contrary, I told you these lands were *not* on the Reservation."

Ladd turned gray and for a moment could not speak. His eyes contracted in a fierce deadly glitter. Then quite naturally, as a bewildered man might, *he took off his hat* and passed his other hand over his brow. Cadger glanced up from the cleaning of his gun. The movement seemed to arrest his attention.

"What?" gasped Ladd, finding his voice at last.

"Isn't that what I reported?" asked the youngster calmly.

"You? Why, there, there, there must be some mistake."

The agent began to falter, stutter, grope his way. What could it mean? Was the boy crazy? Would he throw away his chances? Had the other side bought him too and paid him more? And there were all these men, all these hostile eyes glaring at him, searching him, gloating over his confusion. There was McShay hovering near like an eagle about to swoop. He could hear the Irishman's mocking voice, like a mischievous boy, playing about him.

"This is as much a surprise to me as it is to you," it jibed, "but I'm trying to take it calmly. You don't see *me* gittin' excited." Ladd realized that they were his own words thrown back in his face like dirty water. His surprise, confusion, shame were being swallowed up in a murderous hate. He would hurt, tear, rend, kill. There was Cadger in the background. All these men faced him, the agent. Their backs were turned to the store. It was easy, so easy it gave him a moment's pause. He must be careful. He must make no mistake. He would be sure. If this boy betrayed him, why then— The only thing he missed in his rapid mental survey of the situation was a little girl crouching on the steps over the discarded

weapons, her fierce little black eyes following his every movement, searching his face for every thought. Yes, there was Cadger cleaning his gun, and—waiting for the signal, the *second* signal!

"He means," he heard himself say with a fair assumption of serenity; "he means he told me they were on the Reservation." He addressed this to McShay. Then he turned directly to Hal, looked him straight in the eye, and said:

"And the monuments—the landmarks?"

Before Hal replied he saw what the answer would be, saw it in the relentless face, the mocking eye.

"That was *your* idea, that they had been moved, *not mine*."

Any hesitation the agent may have felt was gone. Irresolution vanished. *He put on his hat!* And he put it on with decision, as if in his opinion the conference was over. Then for the first time he noticed that Wah-na-gi had left her position as custodian of the armory, had mounted the steps of the store, and stood for a moment by the window like a cat waiting to spring, every nerve and muscle tense, and as Cadger raised his gun she stepped in front of him. The trader drew back swiftly and tried to step to one side. She followed him.

"Git out of my light! Can't you see I can't see?"

He executed a rapid movement to push her aside. Again she covered him.

"Git away from my store winder or I'll break your face, you——" and Cadger called her a name not used in good society.

All those present got up and turned at this sudden and untoward disturbance. Hal was the only one who did not look back. He could see what was happening in the agent's face.

"Have Cadger step here a moment, will you?" said Hal to Ladd.

"What for?"

"Bill," said Hal to the cattle-boss who was manoeuvring in the background, greatly puzzled by what was going on at the window. "Ask the Indian trader to step here?"

"Stop," called Ladd to Bill. "Cadger don't want to be mixed up in this. Besides, he can't leave the store."

The agent was conscious that this sounded hurried and feeble, and it seemed not to impress Bill, for he went on directly into the store. Hal reassured the agent—with the suggestion that Bill would look after the store for the trader. Indeed, one per cent. of small boy would have been able to take care of the trade just at that moment.

"Things are coming my way to-day, Mr. Ladd; better let me have my way."

Whether the agent would have consented to this or not, the chief of police had his way, for Bill appeared with Cadger in charge.

In fact, Cadger knew that Bill would bring him bodily, so he thought it more

dignified to come of his own accord.

"Just put your weapon with the others, Cadger," said Calthorpe, "and come here."

The little furtive man glanced swiftly at Ladd for guidance and Bill took his gun and rags out of his hands before he could determine on what course he ought to pursue. Bill broke the gun, then glanced curiously over the little man:

"Cleanin' a *loaded* gun, too! Ain't you careless?"

"Wah-na-gi, come here, please," said Hal, never taking his eyes from Ladd's face.

She had remained in the background as Cadger came down. Now she came to Hal who was standing with the trader in easy reach. Cadger seemed to shrink and get smaller as he blinked feebly. The business of the meeting was forgotten. Again the young man diverted the interest and every one wondered what would happen next.

"Wah-na-gi, Mr. Cadger wants to tell you before these gentlemen that he made a mistake, that he would like to beg your pardon. Mr. Cadger wants to apologize."

"Like hell I do," growled the trader.

"Calthorpe," called out the agent; "you're the one that's making the mistake. You're going too far. I won't stand for this."

"Oh, yes, I think you will," asserted the boy quietly.

The agent gave him a swift look, trying to determine how far he had gone or would go. Something had gone wrong. The machinery had slipped a cog, but how far wrong was it? Could it be repaired? Could it be fixed up? Was it a strike for higher pay? Or was it the eternal woman interfering and putting them at cross purposes? His own interest in the woman, guarded with the greatest care, kept under lock and key, in the dark, had this boy seen a furtive glance, the flash of a hidden desire? He must proceed cautiously until he saw the other's hand and knew his cards. Still, this boy must be taught his place.

"I want you to understand I'm the agent, Calthorpe."

"Yes, that's why you'll protect this woman from insult."

"You leave that to me. This is outside our business, and—"

"As the insult became a part of our proceedings," said McCloud calmly, "it seems right for the apology to be included."

"Parson," exclaimed McShay, delighted; "you're a sport, and I'll back any play you make."

"I think you would facilitate matters, Mr. Ladd," added the preacher, "if you instructed your man to comply with Mr. Calthorpe's request."

"Please don't make him," begged Wah-na-gi timidly.

"Come on, little man," said Hal coaxingly.

"Oh, well, apologize, Cadger, and get it over with. We're wasting time." And Ladd walked away. Hal applied a sharp squeeze to the back of the trader's neck, just under the ears, and he squirmed with pain.

"Oh, hell, I apologize," he blithered.

"She accepts your apology," said Hal graciously, and every one except Cadger breathed a sigh of relief. *That* was a closed incident.

"Now sit down here where I can see you," and he tossed him lightly on a bale of goods that was leaning against the steps waiting to be unpacked, and he brushed his hands as if they had been soiled. "Now I feel more comfortable in my mind"—and added to himself—"and in my back."

"Now see here, Calthorpe," said Ladd, coming down swiftly and gripping the situation with at least the show of authority. "What do you mean by this? Didn't you tell me these lands were on the Reservation?"

"I did not!"

The issue was joined. For a moment the agent's mind refused to face the situation. His jaw dropped and he looked at the other blankly.

"You, you, you mean to say—" he stammered. Then he gazed into the unrelenting face opposite and fell back and cowered like a whipped dog, white with fear. "You mean to say you didn't tell me? Why, why you're going back on your word, why, you scoundrel, you have, you have——"

"I have your money," said Hal, picking the words out of his mouth and completing the unspoken thought. "That's right, I have. And there it is," and he took some papers from his pocket. "Fifteen thousand dollars' worth of gilt-edged securities in the Asphalt Trust. And here is a receipt for the fifteen thousand dollars I *didn't* pay for them. I took your money because it was the only way to make you show your hand. Every one knows you're a crook and grafter, but nobody could prove it. It's my sworn duty to catch thieves and everybody knows you're robbing these helpless people, and that you're the paid agent of the Asphalt Trust. I've been camping on your trail, David Ladd, and I'm going to camp on it until I have your official head."

The words cut the tense silence like lightning flashes. No one spoke or moved.

The appearance of the agent was pitiable, but only for a moment. As he realized that the young chief of police had not only caught him "with the goods" but, what was worse, had made him look "easy," he felt the agony of unspeakable hate, and it brought him to himself.

"Why, you rotten traitor—" he screamed and threw himself upon Hal to tear him to pieces. The latter caught his right arm by the wrist and threw his own left across the other's throat, forcing back his head and stopping his wind. Ladd was a quick, muscular, wiry man. The boy drew him close for a second and then

he threw him off. As soon as Ladd recovered his balance he made for the pile of guns. Hal blew upon a shrill, sharp whistle that dangled at his wrist. Before the agent could reach the weapons a half-dozen Indian police appeared like magic on the scene. They had been hidden behind the trader's store.

"Shoot any man who moves toward those guns," said their chief to them, pointing. Ladd was phased. He fell back.

"You order my own men to fire on me?"

"Your own orders, Mr. Agent, to preserve the peace."

"Say, Parson," exclaimed McShay; "that gun order of yours was a inspiration. It sure was a inspiration."

"Calthorpe, you're removed. You're no longer my chief of police." Hal smiled.

"It'll take my men a couple of days to get that through their heads. In the meantime, don't forget that they will act under my orders."

Then he turned to them and said:

"Don't let any one put a finger on those guns until I'm out of sight. You savey me all right. And you, McShay," he said, turning sharply to that exultant citizen; "you and your men must get off my ranch."

"Your ranch? What the hell! Your ranch? What next?"

"My ranch. My name is Effington. The Earl of Kerhill is my father. The Red Butte Ranch is mine. I'm going over now to take possession of it. Better come over and see me do it. Come on, Bill."

As he jumped on "Calico" and rode off on the run, followed by Big Bill, McShay exclaimed:

"Say, Parson, the kid's on the level. He's on the level."

CHAPTER VIII

Hal and Bill were well mounted, had an excellent start, and before the members of the peace conference had recovered from their astonishment the two horsemen were out of sight and night had fallen. As they left the Agency behind the heart of Big Bill grew lighter. The fact that Hal had not taken him into his confidence did not worry the simple-minded Bill, but he rejoiced that at last they were on the straight and narrow way and had left behind them the world, the flesh, and the devil, always and everywhere of the female gender. The fact that they had a

dangerous job ahead of them did not worry Bill, for it involved nothing more serious than just men. Bill had dealt with men as men and in a straight and fearless way had found himself capable, but where woman was involved, with nothing like the experience to justify it, he had arrived at the conclusion of the wise man who said: "Can a man take fire into his bosom and his clothes not be burned?" Indeed, greater minds than gentle Bill's have felt bewildered by "the way of a man with a maid." In his role of parent and guardian he had several times started to speak to his companion in words of commendation and encouragement, but impenetrable gloom enveloped the boy and the words died unborn. He essayed blithesome song, but even this personal expression degenerated into a whistle and dribbled feebly away, so, finally, the big man shook himself down into his saddle and they rode in silence—a silence that seemed to drip with a chilling mist. So they rode on into the radiant night indifferent to its splendors. They knew that the horses' stride was steady and strong in the clean, cool air that romped down from the snows, laden with the perfume of the pines, and that a matchless moon made it possible for them to leave the road at every opportunity and hit the trails and short cuts, but the poem of the night was not for them, its melody and its mystery.

Wah-na-gi—"the soul when separated from the body!" That was the meaning of her name. The young man had a queer feeling that *his* body was riding away from his soul into the night, into the unknown, into the far away. All of a sudden it came to him that he had been very happy at the Agency. Why was he riding away? What was this asphalt that made men lie and steal and jump at each other's throats? What was it to him?

What did he care for the Red Butte Ranch, except that his mother was buried there? That it was rich in minerals which could be exchanged for money, wealth, was outside his purposes. It was not the legal but the spiritual ownership which determined him. When we understand more about psychical phenomena we shall know more about our Indians. It wasn't only that the big appeal of the open was here intensified. Half memories, vague instincts, ghostly and subliminal concords met him here, took him by the hand, and said: "Come apart and be at peace." But all this was there, would wait. He never doubted his ultimate possession of the ranch. The Shades who owned it would eventually hand it over to him, their rightful heir. All that was only a matter of time. It could wait. Meantime, what was he doing? He was riding into the future unwillingly. He had left the Agency, and knew it was forever. He knew in a dull way that he had finished a chapter in his life, and that it would never be quite the same again. How did it happen? Ought he to have prevented it?

His thought wandered back over the devious ways he had come. His life seemed so impersonal, his own will and purpose had had so little to do with it.

He could only think of a boat swept from its moorings, floating about on the waves of circumstance, driven before this wind, twisted by that current, tossed on the shore to be caught up again in the high tide and taken back to the deeps, back to the wanton winds and waves. He knew it would be useless to turn the horses' heads and try to go back. Always before he had submitted; what did it matter? Now it mattered. When was it he first cared? Swiftly his thought travelled back until it focussed on those two rough men in the library at Portman Square—awkward, shy, fumbling their broad-brimmed hats in their hands, dressed in their "store clothes"; all the more unmistakable for the London setting and for the contrast with his father with whom they were talking! He recalled his own wonder that the high-bred, delicate man with his distinguished face could ever have been tanned and weather-stained like these uncouth men and been their companion on the frontier. He recalled his own surprise at the familiarity of his father with them. The Earl had called them "Andy" and "Shorty," and he was rather punctilious about the forms and ceremonies. It was a revelation of a hitherto unsuspected talent for unbending. How his father had plied them with cigars and liquors, and their astonishing capacity! The amount of neat liquor they had taken at a gulp!

These men, so different from all the types with which he had been familiar, and each so unlike the other! "Andy," an Austrian Jew, was so determined to be conciliatory and ingratiating that he had developed a conservative stutter which, with its saving clauses and roundabout phrases, enabled him to estimate the effect upon his listener even before he had actually committed himself to the proposition in hand. "Shorty," quick, sharp, explosive, going direct to the point and disarming suspicion by a method the reverse of the other! There was something about these men that had interested him from the first, then amused him, then fascinated him. The subject of the talk did not immediately claim his attention. Every one knew that the ranch had been an expensive experience to the Earl, and it was a foregone conclusion that he would jump at the chance to sell it. The negotiations had gone quickly to a conclusion. The Earl had accepted their first offer and a deed had been prepared and was about to be signed. Then the young man interposed for the first time. He had suddenly received an impression, a "hunch," as the cowboys say, that seemed later to be clairvoyant. At first it was only a vague sentiment, too vague to be expressed, too vague to be used as an argument, or to influence practical men, so he only asked that the matter might be postponed until the following morning. His father and the Westerners were annoyed by this freak of eccentricity, but humored him as we humor children, or the irresponsible, for he remembered that he had been drinking, was perhaps drunk, as he often was in those evil days. The following morning a cable came from Big Bill saying: "Don't sell ranch. Have sent letter." The letter which

followed explained what we already know, that asphalt had been found, that in Bill's opinion a lot of this valuable mineral was on the ranch, which had been "jumped" by the cowboys, and he strongly advised the Earl to send some one out there to investigate the matter; he suggested that this investigation should be conducted as secretly as possible; that he was himself too well known, and his former affiliations with the Earl were too well known, to permit of his doing this successfully. There was a job open at the Agency, the chief of Indian police, and Bill offered to use his influence to get it for any one the Earl would send out to look after his interests.

Then something in the young man's soul rose up and said: "Here am I." And when he turned his face to the West the winds and the waves beckoned to him and recognized him and led him to his own. Then for the first time he recognized purpose in his life. Ladd had seen in him only the usual adventurer trying to hide away from his past and one likely to be amenable and useful. It would have been difficult to find any one more suitable to the position of chief of police. In a country where men required initiative, self-reliance, and courage he had found conditions suitable to his temperament and abilities. He had felt "at home" and had been a success from the start. About the time that he took charge of the police, Wah-na-gi returned from Carlisle, and every phase of her struggle with her environment and heredity was obvious to him. He saw at once what she did not see, that it was hopeless, but it lent to her the charm of poetry and romance, and she was pretty enough not to require such assistance. For a long time he was very cunning in concealing and disguising his interest in the girl, and he continued to fool himself long after he had ceased to fool any one else. And now he was riding away from everything that made life worth living, and the fact that he had just come successfully through a big fight meant nothing to him. He would have liked to go back, but that was impossible, and he rode in bitterness and rebellion.

The cowboys had found the holding of the asphalt territory rather irksome. At first it had been all hurrah, but as week followed week and month followed month, and no armed conflict took place, they grew very tired. The Trust had entered upon the long siege with bomb-proof galleries and an elaborate system of underground approaches. No isolated fort ever successfully withstood such a siege. The asphalt vein stretched across considerable country and to police it all and hold it by force of arms against an invisible enemy that did not materialize but might at any moment do so, and at some unexpected place, was a nerve-racking job for a time, and then grew monotonous, and with monotony came carelessness. The Red Butte Ranch was their base of supplies and operations, and in possession of this they felt legally and morally secure, having been held up for it by two robbers in the usual and conventional way of the business world.

The majority of their men were therefore, as Hal knew, distributed along the asphalt vein, but he also knew that there were more than enough left at the ranch to put up a winning fight against two men. So it was necessary to exercise caution and strategy, and fight only if cornered and compelled to.

In his capacity of chief of police, Hal had ridden over every foot of the country and knew it as well as Bill. It was therefore greatly to the surprise of the latter when the young man, after crossing a spur of the Bad Lands, left the trail and struck into the hills.

"Where you goin', son?" he asked with obvious disapproval.

"We got to do this on the jump, Bill, or not at all. Time is the important thing, particularly if any of those bandits try to follow us. It's an awful bluff, but we'll get away with it."

"You can't git through that-a-way. You'll just run up against the 'Knife-edge'!"

"That's right. I'm going to cross it."

"Why, you're crazy. You can't do it."

"I've done it."

"Gosh! Honest? I never heard of any one fool enough to try it."

"My Indian police and I have done it."

"But, gosh-a-mighty, not at night!"

"No; but it's almost as light as day. My horse saveys it. Just shut your eyes, leave the reins on your horse's neck, and let him follow me."

"All right, son. I've had my innings. A Big Bill more or less don't matter. Go ahead."

The Knife-edge was a narrow ledge of sandstone that crossed a deep gash in the hills. It was not over one hundred yards in length, but its negotiation was apparently impossible. A single false step meant precipitation into the arid abyss, a thousand feet below. It was wonderful the way these Indian ponies felt their way across, a sort of equine tight-rope performance. Hal was right. The rider had nothing to do with it, except to sit straight and easily, without strain or fear, and let the pony do the rest. It was a test of nerves, and Bill, whose avoirdupois was not adjustable to tight-rope niceties, was in a profuse perspiration when his pony had taken the last careful step that put the Knife-edge into the background of things one would willingly forget. Bill had spent the best days of his life as foreman at the ranch, and could have found his way about blindfold, so when they were about a mile from the ranch Bill took the lead.

After riding a few moments over some bare clay hills they descended into an arroyo and followed its tortuous course unseen and unheard, for the horses' footfalls made no noise on the silent sands. It was necessary to dismount and lead the horses, and it was slow work. Suddenly Bill stopped short and pointed.

It was an effulgent night and there against the skyline was limned the figure of a sentry, sitting before a little camp-fire, serenely smoking. He was perched on a little elevation just where the arroyo took a sharp bend, his rifle leaning against some greasewood near at hand. Bill unlimbered his gun, but Hal put his hand out and made a sign to stay him. The young man then uncoiled his lariat from his saddle and, hugging the walls of the dead stream, he crept to within reach of the dark figure and, with a hand that had become more than expert, coiled the deadly loop, then sent it into the silent air, where it poised for a moment like a snake about to strike, then it settled down about the body of its victim with the incredible squeeze of a constrictor. With a swift jerk the figure tumbled into the dry gulch and, before he realized what had happened to him, Hal's knee was on his chest and his gun-barrel at his head. Bill immediately disarmed the prostrate figure, taking his pistol from its holster as Hal said: "Don't speak." Indeed, there was really no need for this injunction. It had happened so quickly and the sentry was so unprepared that he hadn't a sound in him. It took him several valuable seconds to realize just what had happened, and by that time it was obvious that he was a prisoner. Bill took a hitch knot in the lariat and Hal ordered the man to stand up.

"Do as you're told and no harm'll come to you," he said quietly. Then he turned to Bill and said: "Shall we go on or shall we wait for the others? They must have the ranch surrounded by this time."

"I guess you and I can persuade 'em resistance would be useless."

This was to impress the prisoner who was by this time in an impressionable frame of mind.

"All right. Now, Curley," he said to the man whom he recognized; "we got the drop on you fellows. While McShay and your crowd have been gabbing over at the Agency we've got you cornered. Now I want you to walk ahead of us to the house, then call Coyote Kal out and we'll do the rest. Bill will have you covered from the stable and I will have you covered from behind the rock (meaning the rock that marked Nat-u-ritch's grave). If you give us away, neither of us could miss you. You're a dead man twice," he added with a laugh. His ill-humor always vanished in action. When the three men reached the barns, Hal made a short detour, crawling on his hands and knees until he was in the shelter of the rough, undressed boulder which his father had hauled down from the canyons to mark the grave of the little Indian woman who had been his wife and the mother of the son who now crouched behind it, oblivious for the moment of everything except the dangerous business in hand. Then Bill untied Curley and pointed to the house opposite. The space over which Curley walked slowly was bathed in a flood of light. There didn't seem any way out of the predicament, so Curley stood before the adobe house and called softly: "Kal—Kal."

As this was repeated a sleepy voice within growled: "What the hell?" Then a tousled head appeared at the window and said: "That you, Curley? What's up? Has a messenger come from the Agency?"

"Yes. Come on out," urged Curley. "It's important."

The other man drew his trousers on and came out into the moonlight.

"What is it?" Then he noticed. "Where's your gun?"

"They took it away from me."

"They? What are you talking about?"

"It's no use, Kal; they got us surrounded."

With an oath the man addressed as Kal backed toward the house. Instantly Bill and Hal stepped into the light and covered him.

"Don't move," said Hal, and Coyote Kal had a solemn moment when the issue was uncertain.

Curley decided for him.

"Don't be a damn fool, Kal; they got us. What's the use?"

"Why didn't you ring the bell," said Kal surlily, "and call the men in?"

"Ring the bell?" sneered Curley. "Ring the bell? Say, wake up. Ring the bell with a couple of cannon up against your bowels? Does it take you a week to tumble? It didn't me. They stole up the dry creek and lassoed me; jerked me into the middle of next week before I knowed what ailed me. Ring the bell! I'll wring your neck if you say that to me ag'in."

"Bill, get that bench against the wall and put it there," indicating the middle of the court-yard. Bill did this with alacrity.

"Now, gentlemen, we're not going to fatigue you. We're going to treat you with distinguished consideration. Please be seated side by side on that bench. You can hold each other's hands if you get lonesome."

The two men obeyed in an apologetic way. Kal growled: "Why don't you tell us what you're up to and be done with it?"

"Now, Bill, ring that anxious bell for Coyote Kal."

Bill stepped over to the barn and rung a small bell affixed to its outer wall.

"Now, Kal, I want you to tell your men that they are trespassers on this property, and that you will be graciously permitted to withdraw if you do so at once and without trouble. If they stop to discuss the matter, there'll be a fight, and I don't think there'll be enough of you left to get away. Bill will occupy the stable and I will occupy the house, and if there is any show of resistance by your men you and Curley will be the first to meet your Maker; and I think you need more time for preparation."

"You sure ain't prepared," ejaculated Bill. "You sure ain't."

The ranch house was a mixture of styles. A log-cabin met an adobe addition at right angles. Each was supplied with a door, flanked by a window, and a portico

leaned wearily against the house in various attitudes of discouragement. Hal took his stand in the shelter of the angle. He had the house on two sides of him. His position was exposed to the stable, where Bill was secreted, and the space between the house and stable was completely dominated by them both. One could have read a paper in the moonlight.

"My, it's clear to-night," said Hal, surveying the situation with a grin of satisfaction. "Anyway it happens it looks to me as if you two out there were a sure thing."

This was perfectly plain to Kal and Curley, but outside the purely physical situation they were completely dazed. McShay and his men were supposed to be looking out for their interests at the conference at the Agency, and here was Ladd's chief of police claiming their ranch and putting them forcibly off the ground they had bought and paid for.

They merely got a vague impression that this was just an effort on the part of Ladd to shift the battle ground. But as their brains worked slowly over it nothing seemed to fit into this theory. And it was part of Hal's plan to leave them no time to think. He realized that his only chance of success was in rushing them off their feet. It was a perilous game in which time was to be a deciding factor.

As suggested by Kal, the bell was an alarm that called all the men on the ranch in for instructions. They came, and quickly, and all armed; some fifteen men. As they came into view their amazement was comic at the sight of Curley and their boss sitting on a bench side by side in the moonlight like two naughty boys kept in at school.

"Speak your little piece, Kal," urged Hal.

"Well, boys," said their leader, shamefaced; "I don't know how it happened, but the Agency folks got the bulge on us, got us corralled, Curley says, and it's fight or surrender. As they got a bead on me from the house and the stable, surrender looks a whole lot better to me. We can come back and fight 'em for it afterwards."

Instinctively there was a simultaneous movement for cover. The dilapidated sheds leaning against the barn with their bags, barrels, bales of hay, etc., were selected by those nearest to them. Carroll and the rest put the rock that marked Nat-u-ritch's grave in front of them. "Humpy" Carroll, as his name indicated, was a humpbacked little man with ambitions. He had always fallen just short of being a leader and it made him a chronic insurgent. His insubordination had brought him into frequent conflict with Kal, whose place he coveted, and the latter's uncomfortable position afforded him keen satisfaction. In fact, Kal's taking off would not have appealed to Humpy as an irreparable loss.

Kal knew this and it filled him with helpless rage.

"Surrender without a fight?" inquired Humpy in a tone that made Kal squirm.

But he replied calmly with a slow drawl: "You got a nice fat rock in front of you, Humpy."

"I don't mind kickin' the bucket with a gun in my hand," chimed in Curley; "but give us a *chance* to fight, Humpy?"

"Tain't our fault if you let 'em rope you."

"Say," said Kal, "if these fellers'll give me a gun, and will stand by, I'll fight *you*, Humpy; and the feller that gits over it—his word goes."

"Say, that's sporty," exclaimed Hal, delighted; "I'll stand for that."

Humpy's sardonic face grinned.

"Say, you'd like to get us a killin' each other, wouldn't you? Got us 'surrounded' have you? Well, we'll just have a look around and see."

"No, you don't." cut in Hal with decision. "You surrender or fight *now*."

"Boys," called out Kal, "you know I'm no coward, but I think you owe it to me and Curley to give us a chance. I'll give you your innings later. They can't keep what they've took, and no man of you'll beat me in comin' back after it."

"I'll give you 'till I count ten," said Hal.

Voices came spontaneously from various places: "Kal's right"—"Let *him* decide"—"Leave it to Kal," and similar expressions. It was obvious that the men realized the position of their leader and would temporarily surrender possession of the ranch rather than see him sacrificed. Curley's fate was thrown in for good measure.

"Your men are with you, Kal," said Hal, eager to consummate the precarious deal. "Tell them to put their weapons in a pile back of you and Curley."

Kal repeated these instructions, but with evident reluctance. It was obvious that the fact that he was getting away with his life was hardly compensation for the humiliation suffered before Humpy and his comrades. As the men came forward from their hiding places Hal relaxed his tension. It came to him that he was very tired, and he leaned against the window of the log-cabin, the window Kal had opened before leaving the house. Just then a warning shout came from the stable. "Look out, boy! Look out!"

Bill had time to say no more. It all happened in a flash. Two sinewy bronze arms darted from the window and pinioned Hal from behind in a vise-like grip. Hal knew instinctively that it was Appah. Bill, as he was in the act of warning Hal, was over-powered from behind and bound by Appah's men so quickly that he had only time to see that his warning to the boy had come too late.

This had occurred without the cowboys being aware of it, so intent were they on their own part in the drama. Kal's head drooped with shame as he looked at the ground and said:

"We surrender."

"Surrender? Surrender? What are you talkin' about?"

It was Agent Ladd's voice as he strode nervously through the crowd of ranchmen. He stopped in front of Kal and Curley, his eyes blazing with excitement.

"Surrender this ranch to a couple of bluffs? You're a nice chicken-hearted lot!"

CHAPTER IX

As the cowboys turned and saw Hal and Bill with their arms pinioned and in the custody of Appah's men, they suffered a revulsion of feeling that boded no good to the men whose bluff had been called.

"And two of 'em, *two* of 'em hold you up. Why, you'll be the laughing stock of the country."

Ladd lost no time in fanning their smouldering pride into a relentless blaze.

"Gosh-a-mighty; ain't these your men?" gasped Kal.

It seemed such a useless question at this juncture to Ladd that he didn't stop to answer it.

"You lynch cattle thieves out in this country, but you 'surrender' to land thieves."

Hal looked at his adversary with admiration. He hadn't supposed that Ladd would follow him, that he would trust himself in the enemy's country; but here he was in time to turn victory into defeat, and he was appealing to this mob with all the cunning of a skilled demagogue and with the ferocity of a tiger.

Kal came over to Calthorpe and, looking him in the eye, said slowly—emphasizing every word:

"You made me look foolish, boy."

That is an unforgivable sin. You may take a man's honor or his money or his wife, and indeed have his life, and forgiveness is still possible; but don't expect mercy if you have made him look foolish.

"And you *roped me*," added Curley. "Ropin' bein' in fashion, we'll let you in on it." And he threw around Hal's neck a coil of the rope the latter had used on him.

"Wait a minute," said the irreconcilable Humpy. "If this feller ain't your

man, Mr. Agent; who the hell is he?"

"He's the legal owner of this ranch," declared Bill with emphasis; "and if you lynch him you'll be guilty of committin' murder."

"Oh, no," said Kal grimly; "we'll just be guilty of a mistake."

"Fer which," added Humpy, "we kin apologize later."

"Is that right?" demanded Kal. "Do you claim this ranch and the asphalt on it?"

"I do. It's mine."

"Well, I guess that'll be about all."

"I guess we'll have to give your imagination an extra stretch."

"I can prove it."

"Tain't open to argyment."

"If you git a chance to prove it, it'll sure be contributory negligence on our part. Ain't that right, boys?"

Everybody was in on the conversation now. The men gathered around Hal and Bill like carnivorous beasts at the smell of blood. Nothing stirs the average man's imagination like gold. Each one of these rough men had seen visions and had fashioned elaborate impossibilities out of this mysterious asphalt. They told each other apocryphal stories of its enormous value. Each saw himself fabulously rich. There was enormous potential wealth here, but nothing could have corresponded to their grotesque dreams, and the more nebulous and vapory they were the more these rough men clung to them, and at the mention of their "rights" they became feverish, fanatical, ready to tear into pieces whoever looked toward their disputed treasures; ready to tear each other to pieces for the fraction of a claim to that which they did not possess.

"Lynch him first and discuss it afterwards," suggested Ladd, seeing the temper of his audience and playing to its sardonic humor.

"You know what's eatin' *him*?" said Bill, pointing an angry finger at the agent. "The kid showed him up as a crook and a thief. When he's got you so deep in this you can't git out, he'll be the first to turn on you and sic justice onto you."

The eyes of all turned from the prisoner to Ladd, and Humpy expressed the prevailing suspicion of the man they had no reason to trust:

"It ain't been supposed that Mr. Ladd was a sittin' up at nights a tryin' to think of ways to help us."

Ladd faced them with courage and an air of apparent candor.

"I've fought you, but fair and in the open, and I'm goin' to fight you for the land that's on the Reservation, but this land, as I understand it, is yours, bought and paid for."

There was a chorus of fierce assent to this.

"You're in for a long and a losing fight against the Government; so if you lose *this ranch* you lose everything."

There was no approving shout for this, but the force of it was felt by all.

"But this feller here," said the tenacious Humpy, pointing to the prisoner and not to be diverted by the agent; "what about him?"

Ladd looked at the wild animals with their fangs frankly bared and knew that they were easy. Then he played his trump card.

"As for this land-grabber, the best I know of him and the best he can say for himself is that he's a half-breed."

This irrelevant appeal to prejudice was so crude, raw, and unblushing as to be obvious to a child, but its effect was instantaneous. Every vestige of restraint, of irresolution disappeared in the faces of the mob. Human equality! There is no such thing even theoretically. There are differences which separate human beings and will always separate them, but they are moral and intellectual differences. No one admits the principle of human equality, because:

"The principle of human equality takes away the right of killing so-called inferior peoples, just as it destroys the right claimed by some of dominating others. If all peoples are equal, if their different appearances are only the result of changing circumstances, in virtue of what principle is it allowable to destroy their happiness and to compromise their right to independence?"[1]

[1] Finot.

The logic of prejudice is a strange and wonderful thing.

That some criminals were also half-breeds, that many half-breeds were undesirable citizens has crystallized into the conviction in most Western communities that all half-breeds are worthless and dangerous, and are therefore capable of any and all crimes. This has nothing to do with any ascertainable facts, and if opposite to Agent Ladd had arisen a man of intellect who had devoted his life and all the energies of a noble mind to finding out the truth, and had said: "If the word half-breed was strictly applied to the progeny which has really issued from a mixture of varieties, it would be necessary to include under this denomination all human beings with rare exceptions"[2]—it would have meant nothing to the audience to whom Ladd's appeal meant everything. As one man they turned upon Hal, their brows lowering and the pupils of their eyes contracting.

[2] Finot.

"Is it true," said Kal, "that you're a half-breed?"

The boy did not reply at once, but drew himself up proudly and looked them over contemptuously; he saw his last chance was gone, so he took his time and said very slowly:

"I'm the son of the Earl of Kerhill and of Nat-u-ritch, an Indian woman; and I've got better blood in my veins than any man here, you swine!"

"Throw the rope over that beam," said Kal, pointing to the timber that projected over the loft on the barn.

"Yes," added Humpy; "it's time we made an example of some one. Land-grabbin' and half-breeds has got to be discouraged."

"You haven't anything against Bill. Let him go," said Hal quickly.

"He'll be a witness against us."

"You bet I will," said Bill promptly.

"No; he'll leave the country."

"I'll camp on the trail of these murderers as long as I live."

"For God's sake, shut up, Bill," begged Hal, as his eyes filled with involuntary tears.

"Sorry you feel that-a-way," said Humpy; "leaves us no choice. Up with 'em."

"Hold on there—*you!*"

The cowmen turned to see McShay sitting on a smoking, gasping horse with quivering nostrils and trembling flanks, and mopping his dripping brow first with his sleeve and then with a huge bandanna handkerchief.

"Say, I ain't had a ride like this since I was a kid. Well, you beat me to it, Mr. Agent; didn't you? I guess your Injins showed you a short cut. Some of you hold up this horse, and some more of you help me off'n him, though I don't know's I can stand much."

The interjection of this cool personality seemed to lower the temperature several degrees. While McShay was dismounting, Smith and Lee rode in on horses which showed similar evidence of hard usage.

"If these are my legs as I'm a standin' on, I want to observe that you are gittin' precipitate a whole lot. I move to reconsider."

"What fer?"

"Well, boys, I'm afraid we're on the young feller's land."

This declaration from their leader would have made a sensation if it had come before their passions had gained momentum. It might have changed the progress of events, but now Kal voiced the general sentiment in a surly: "We'll give him some of it—just about six feet of it."

There is no use talking temperance to the drunkard who has already started on his debauch. The unacknowledged fear that their acts would not bear exami-

nation made them fiercely resentful of interference, and there was an unacknowledged conviction that what was done and could not be undone justified itself as inevitable.

"Even Judge Lynch usually holds court," suggested McShay.

"We've heard what he's got to say."

"Say; you're foolish to interfere."

"Interferin' is my long suit," drawled McShay. "I ain't happy unless I'm interferin'. Now there are two ways of lynchin' a man. One is to git hysterical and borey-eyed, and lose yer re-pose. The other is to proceed in a regular and high-toned way. Now these fellers has the right to a ca'm judgment, and they will git it."

"They will," glared Humpy; "if you'll agree to abide by the decision of the majority."

"I've always found I had to do that; so I usually fixed the majority."

McShay's imperturbability was irresistible.

"Now, I've mostly presided at functions like this, but I ain't a-pushin' my claims. Who do you want fer judge? Show of hands—who's fer me?"

Up went the hands of the two faithful retainers, Orson and Silent, and Mike saw that his effort to stampede the proceedings was late, perhaps too late. Before the "opposed" were called for there was a concerted shout for Kal.

"Majorities are always wrong," commented the experienced McShay; "you git it, Kal."

Kal took his seat on the bench where he had lately been the prisoner and Hal and Bill sat in the centre of the motley group of men who were accusers, witnesses, jurymen, and executioners.

Perhaps there have been times and conditions when Judge Lynch served a useful purpose, but even when the judge happened by accident to be right, the resulting demoralization must have been worse than the initial crimes. Now that McShay had entered the arena, Ladd retired to the outskirts of the crowd and, having fired the house, was content to stand by and see it burn.

"I got to have an office," said McShay. "Not gittin' judge, I'm attorney for the defence."

"All right," said the judge, getting quickly to business. "You have first in-nin's. How do you come to know mor'n and better'n us?"

"Well, I know a face card when I see it face up. I'm as good as that."

"He says he owns this ranch," interjected Humpy who was the self-appointed prosecuting attorney. The offices Humpy got were self-appointed.

"The worst of it is," answered McShay, "I'm afraid he does."

"You got to show us," said the judge in a tone that indicated the difficulty of such a proceeding.

"Well," replied McShay; "we bought it of Andy and Shorty, and we know they were crooks, 'cause they were crooked with us. Bill here says the signature to the deed is a forgery; and Bill knows the Earl's hand-writin'. That's all."

"Well," smiled Humpy, "that don't go very strong with me. Bill may be mistaken or he may be lyin'."

"Peradventure he ain't," retorted Mike. "Bill couldn't lie. He ain't gifted. Bill's the shortest distance between two points. I've knowed him fer an awful long time, and I wouldn't trust him to lie."

"Is that all?" asked the judge, obviously refusing to be impressed.

"That's all."

"Tain't conclusive," said Humpy, trying to get the impressive lingo of opposing counsel.

"By the eternal it's presumptive," bellowed McShay. "Let the young feller go. If it should turn out that he owns the land, somebody might insist on making it awkward for some of us; if he don't own it, he can't prove it; he can't hold it, and no harm done."

"If he owns the land," said the judge, taking a hand; "why didn't he go to court in a regl'r way?"

Hal almost laughed aloud.

It was the first time he seemed to be even an interested listener. After his outburst of a moment ago his thought had gone back to the Agency and had left in his face a vacant and far-away look.

"Go to court, eh? Judge Swayback owns a nice thick wad of your stock and Sheriff Black owns another. And you have no difficulty in packing any jury in this part of the State."

"The prisoner seems to be unusually well informed," drawled McShay. "In resortin' to violence the defendant is at fault, but it is the indiscretion and exuberance of youth, gentlemen. I sometimes find myself resortin' to violence, and perhaps you gentlemen may remember in your own peace-lovin' and law-abidin' careers the sudden impulse to go and take what you thought was yourn. As a failin' it's distinctly human."

"I think we've heard enough," remarked the judge. "McShay's full of pre-sumin's and peradventurin's, and such misleadin' legal gab, but no feller is agoin' to come around and hold me up at the muzzle of a gun and git away with it."

"Say, you're a judge; you ain't no right to argue."

"I ain't a-arguin'. It's a fact."

Humpy arose and advanced a step as if he felt the importance of the blow he was about to deliver.

"Testimony is conflictin'. Bill says he's all right. Ladd says he's all wrong. Testimony ain't no good any way. Never knew a feller as wouldn't lie if he had

ter. This is the point. This feller wants land we bought and paid for, and he sets an awful bad example by comin' after it with a gun. That's enough fer me."

There were murmurs of approval at this simple statement and impatient cries of "Vote—vote."

"Say, Kid," said McShay to the prisoner; "you better offer to give up your claims and save your life."

"No half-breed would keep such a promise," said Ladd quickly.

McShay turned on the agent a look that held the other in a breathless grip for a second; then he only said: "Don't you interfere in this."

"And I won't make such a promise," said Hal simply.

"Vote—vote," came impatiently from all directions.

"All in favor of lettin' the prisoner go hold up the right hand."

McShay was always sure of the absolute support of Lee and Silent Smith on any side of any question.

"Three!" announced the judge grimly. "All in favor of hangin' the prisoner, similar!"

"He swings!" laconically added Kal.

"Now about Bill. I'm in favor of givin' Bill twenty-four hours to quit the country. If he's caught after that we'll string him up. All in favor hold up their hand. Carried! Curley, you're the feller that got us into this trouble. I'll appoint you to stay on guard, for to see that no one interferes with the course of justice. The prisoner has a couple of minutes with his friends."

The court, jury, and executioners considerably moved away, just out of hearing.

"Boy," said McShay with the shadow of a quiver in his voice; "I can't prevent this."

"I know you can't, McShay; but I thank you just the same for what you've done. You're a square man. I wish I'd known it sooner."

The two men looked each other in the eye for a second and in that silence was born an understanding and a fellowship that each knew to be proof against time, self-interest, and life's vicissitudes.

Bill muttered more to himself than to them: "I'm an old man. It wouldn't have mattered about me."

"Is there anything Bill or I could do for you?" asked McShay, trying hard to keep his voice even and his eye clear.

"Yes; I'm troubled about Wah-na-gi," and Hal's voice shook in spite of himself. "Tell John McCloud I want him to adopt her. He has influential friends in the Indian Office. He's the best man I've ever known. Tell him it's my last request, the only one I have to make. I want him to get control of her and take her away from the Agency. Write my father, Bill, that I'd like the two of them to have this

ranch. And tell the governor I took my medicine like a gentleman's son. Don't forget about Wah-na-gi."

"She shan't want a friend while me or Bill lives; ain't that right, Bill?"

Bill was crying and couldn't answer.

"Time's up," announced Kal.

Hal's hands had been tied ever since he had been caught through the window by the Indians and disarmed. Now they led him over to the barn, tied his feet together, and Curley was placing a bandanna handkerchief over his eyes.

"I rather you wouldn't do that, if you don't mind," said Hal.

"It's fer *me*," explained Curley in an almost tender voice. "I got to stay here with you, and I—Well, you understand."

Hal understood and made no further protest.

"Boys," said McShay with a solemnity most unusual to him, "I think you're a committin' murder, and I won't stay and see you do it. You can have my share of the asphalt—I wouldn't have it. It's blood money."

And he walked off, followed by Smith and Lee, and they made the greatest haste to secure their horses and get away before the silent thing hung in the silent air.

"You might as well make it two instead of one, for I won't quit the country. I'll bring some one to justice for this," said Bill through his tears.

"Bill," called the victim in a pleading voice, "live to do what I told you, for my sake."

"Johnson and McMurdy," said Kal, pointing to Bill; "take him to Carbon and put him on the train."

The two burly cowmen hustled Bill over to the corral, and Bill was thankful that fate had decreed that he need not be present at the ghastly moment. Kal looked the situation over calmly.

"When it is done, every one but Curley hit the trail and forget it. Are you ready, Calthorpe?"

"Ready!" and the voice was calm and steady now.

"Anything to say?"

"Nothing."

"Let her go."

Up went the body into the air that seemed to grow suddenly still and cold.

In a twinkling the end of the rope was made fast to a cleat in the side of the barn, and almost before this was done the crowd melted—vanished. There was, in fact, a horrible haste to leave the uncanny thing behind. Almost before it had begun to twist and twirl, Curley found himself alone with It. He shuddered, turned away, pulled a flask from his pocket and took a long pull, put the cork back, and tried once more to look at It. His legs kind of faded under him and he

sat down at the foot of the rock that was Nat-u-ritch's grave; his jaw fell open and he stared at It, not being able now to look away. He stood this for a moment, then he succumbed to an overpowering sense of horror.

"I ain't agoin' to stay here and watch *that*," he gasped.

Then he drew his gun and took deliberate aim at the twisting target. His hand shook. He steadied it and got his aim. There was a flash from the loft of the stable and Curley sank back against the rock, bleeding.

Then a slender girlish figure leaned out from the loft, a big blade gleamed in the moonlight, and the horrible twisting thing crumpled to the ground.

CHAPTER X

The town of Calamity got its beginning and its name from a mine which a desperate prospector had located there. It was his last throw with the dice, and having tried "The Golden Hope," "Lucky Lode," "Good Fortune," and other optimistic challenges to fate, he at last guessed right, and called it Calamity.

Whether the wickedness of Calamity was unusual or sufficient to justify a special visitation of divine wrath was an open question, but at all events it seemed to the inhabitants to be marked for special affliction. In all the lowlands, along all the rivers of that region the spring floods had left miles and miles of standing water which bred millions of mosquitoes, but Calamity wouldn't have minded just an ordinary Egyptian plague like that. With no one in a position to explain or scientifically justify their presence, a plague of gnats had descended on the town and life became an acute exasperation. Unlike the mosquito and the rattlesnake, this ferocious little beast gave its victims no warning. He was so small that an ordinary mosquito netting was the open door and the satisfaction of killing one's tormentor was largely denied as the angry slap of retaliation found the cowardly assailant gone. A sharp blow simply stimulated his poignant activities. He had to be caught and then rolled elaborately to death. This required special faculties in an advanced state of development and a patience unknown to high altitudes. At first he was regarded as a joke, but when he invaded every walk of life with implacable impartiality, sparing neither age, sex, nor previous pulchritude, the serenity of Calamity developed virulent and baneful bumps. Facility in expletive already abnormal filled the air space not occupied by the insects with violent and unclean words. The first man with the courage to wear gloves and a mosquito-

netting around his hat with a draw-string about his neck enjoyed the martyrdom of all inventors and discoverers. To wear a veil certainly seemed effeminate, and that was the last word in Calamity. But all of a sudden there was a rush to the store for mosquito-netting by swollen and lumpy citizens with angry spots all over their necks, hands, and faces, and strong men worked in the sight of other strong men with *veils*. It may be here stated that one fold of ordinary mosquito-netting was as good as none at all, and women's veils were scarce in Calamity and very expensive. They were, however, the only safeguard, but there was still a lingering suspicion that they were a shade more effeminate than the regular netting. This got on the nerves of the citizens finally and men got to be irritable, morose, depressed. It drove a great many estimable citizens to drink, of those not previously driven by other causes. McShay was the magnate of Calamity. He owned the store, the livery and feed stable, the coach line, and the Palace Saloon. The latter was the business, social, and intellectual centre of the crude town which sprawled with a shameless disregard for appearances on both sides of the gulch through which flowed Bitter Creek.

The Palace wasn't a cheerful place exactly, but it was the nearest approach to it in Calamity, especially at night. It was early evening and, though the lights were lit, except for Humpy, Kal, and several others who were playing poker at one of the tables, the place was empty. After the events of the last chapter the relations between McShay and the cowboys were strained. Mike was a leader who didn't know how to follow and didn't want to learn.

"Hello, Mike," said Kal to the owner as he entered his saloon by the front door.

"Hello," was the short reply, and the Irishman went directly to the bar and began a conversation with his barkeeper without even looking at the speaker.

"Won't you take a hand?"

"Nope."

"Gee, ain't you grouchy!" growled Humpy. "You can't have your way all the time."

"Well, I ain't agoin' to have your way any of the time, Humpy. Your calibre is too small and you ain't got sufficient penetration." This was pretty plain talk, and the men at the table looked at each other and the game seemed to drag.

"You ain't a goin' to quit us?" asserted Kal uneasily.

"I ain't, 'cause I have."

"You said that when you was excited."

"Well, when I stop to think I'm always wrong," retorted the Irishman bluntly.

It seemed unreasonable that McShay should be so rigid about a little thing like a lynching. While Kal was thinking of some way to placate the big boss,

Johnson and McMurdy clattered in. They went directly to the bar and ordered refreshment.

"Well," called out Humpy; "did you put Bill on the train?"

"We sure did."

"And he got off again at the next station," added McShay with provoking assurance.

"Shouldn't wonder," admitted Johnson.

"And you'll have him to deal with when he gets back."

This seemed to the poker players extremely likely, but no one admitted it to their uncompromising critic.

"Bill's a kindly idiot," sneered McShay. "He ain't got sense enough to keep his mouth shut and you ain't got nerve enough to shut it. Two such mistakes wouldn't go even in this kummunity."

"You still think we made a mistake?"

"Huh!" ejaculated Mike with undisguised contempt.

"What makes you think so?" asked Kal meekly.

"Go to Ladd. He's got a ring in your nose. He's your leader. Ask him."

"Can't you answer a plain question in a plain way?"

"I can, but it ain't worth while. It's too late."

"Maybe we was a bit hasty. Anyway we can't git on without you. You know that."

This unconditional surrender mollified the magnate some and, as he really wanted to let them know the full extent of their folly, he added:

"The young feller was on the square. It was to his interest to play in with Ladd and the Trust, but instead he cut the agent out of the herd and was a drivin' him to the slaughter-house. This boy held all the cards, and with him as a partner we could have put Ladd out of the game and beat the Trust that's behind him. Now we'll lose everything. You can have my share; divide it among you; it ain't worth fightin' for."

"Mike," called from the door a tough-looking boy with a face as hard as quartz; "there's a feller outside here wants to see you private."

"Tell him to come in and you git home before I tan yer hide."

The proprietor of the saloon made for the urchin with a view to enforcing an unwritten curfew edict, and as he got to the door something in the appearance of the stranger startled him. He stood for a moment looking intently, then walked out into the night.

Johnson and McMurdy joined the poker players.

"Where's Curley?" asked the latter.

"He ain't turned up yet," said Humpy. "We've sent Dick Roach over to see what's become of him. Hello, here's Dick now."

Dick staggered into the saloon and lurched over to the bar, calling for a drink in a husky voice, and repeating the dose at a rate that indicated undue haste even in a practised hand.

"You got back soon," suggested Kal. "What's become of Curley?"

"Dam'f I know." And as he turned his face to them they saw that Roach was very pale, except for the angry red spots characteristic of the local pest. The combination wasn't becoming.

"I didn't git there. Boys, I saw him; saw it—met it."

"Curley?"

"No; the corpse—the feller we—we—hung."

A slow smile spread from face to face at the table.

"Where did you absorb it, Dick?"

Fortified now by a couple of more drinks, and looking around the familiar saloon and steadied by the cold scepticism of his friends, Roach began to suspect himself, and taking some more courage with him he sat down in a corner white and silent, and the poker game proceeded, but in a perfunctory and listless way. The players felt a growing resentment against Roach. The gnats alone made life unbearable. Then they were in the first throes of a horrible reaction, following on the violence at Red Butte Ranch. Any remaining shred of comfort had been rudely torn to pieces by the ruthless McShay. And now this white-faced idiot had to blunder in and force them to remember what they were trying to forget—"the corpse," and "the feller we hung." It was most inconsiderate. Besides, fear is contagious. It was unmistakable that Roach *thought* he had seen something. Of course he hadn't, but if a vote had been taken it would have been unanimously voted a "depressin' evenin'."

"When I'm out on the mesa," said Kal, trying to give voice to the general consciousness, "I'm a-longin' fer the refinements of civilization, and when I'm enjoying the refinements"—and his gesture took in the embellishments of the Palace Saloon—"why, I'm a-longin' for the mesa. I guess we ain't never satisfied."

Just then one of the embellishments began to smoke. In fact it had smoked for some time before any one noticed it. The barkeeper finally observed it, took it out of its bracket, turned it out, and was in the act of trimming the wick when the oily glass slipped in his fingers, and, in an effort to catch it, he threw it against the mirror behind the bar. Involuntarily the players jumped and then each looked about with annoyance to find out if the others had seen him jump. People are so afraid of being afraid.

"A lookin'-glass," said one.

"Seven years," added another.

No one used the words—bad luck.

No one believed in bad luck in such a connection, but—it was evident that

they were nervous.

Just then McShay entered and with him through the open door a bat flew in. There are people queer enough or scientific enough to like bats, but it is one of those things that most of us can learn to do without, and the eccentric aviation of a frightened bat in the same room cannot be recommended as a sedative for nervous people. Again there are some who tell others that such an incident is an ill omen.

When McShay re-entered the room his eyes were snapping, and if any one had noticed, which no one did, so absorbed were they with the gyrations of the uncanny little beast, they would have seen that something had occurred to encourage or amuse the big boss.

"Hello, Dick," he said as he caught sight of Roach in a corner. "What's the matter with you? Seen a ghost?"

"That's what I have."

"Say," said Humpy with a cheerless laugh; "Dick's got 'em. Thinks he's seen the feller as thought he owned the Red Butte Ranch. Ha, ha."

"Well," said McShay, "the longer I live the less I'm sayin' things ain't so. I ain't a-sayin' positive that dead men come back to camp on the trail of them as has wronged 'em, but if they do, it's a safe bet that Dick ain't the only one as 'll be seein' things."

This extraordinary admission from a hardened materialist did not add to the gayety of the occasion. There was no response to it and the speaker went behind the bar and whispered a few words to his barkeeper. This person had a name but every one had long since forgotten it. He had a smooth round face that looked out on the world with a sort of holy sorrow. McShay had called him "Sad" and the name had stuck. "Sad" was fond of remembering that he had seen "better days." He had been an undertaker and his cultivated manner of subdued sympathy in half lights was Calamity's idea of the last word in elegance and refinement. Sad gave the proprietor a reproachful look and then nodded his head gravely. When a man's money is up he usually exhibits some mental concentration, but the poker game stumbled badly. There were frequent admonitions to "git in on it," and lapses were reproved with unnecessary severity. Somehow the usual desultory talk ceased and the big room became quiet, uncomfortably so. Even the click of the chips was a relief. The strain was relaxed to the comfort of all by the entrance of Orson Lee, Silent Smith, and Rough House Joe, who ambled to the bar, pushing up the mosquito-netting from their faces as they did so. With them also entered very quietly a stranger, his head shrouded by a heavy black close-meshed veil such as women wear. The stranger did not lift his veil but followed the others to the bar where McShay had already placed convenient bottles and glasses. The fourth man did not speak but he had to raise his veil to drink. As he put down

his empty glass he turned and leaned against the bar.

"By G—!" gasped Roach, who had been in close communion with the bottle since he had been in the saloon. "I've got 'em, have I?"

The poker game stopped and the players followed the wild stare of the speaker to the figure leaning against the bar.

"You mean to say you don't see *that*?" whispered Dick, pointing a quivering finger.

It was evident that the people at the table saw something. There was a moment of oppressive silence, then Smith, Lee, and Joe walked over to Dick and looked at him carefully, then at the solemn people at the poker table. Their burly figures hid the stranger for a moment, and when they turned to walk back to the bar the stranger had disappeared. The poker players looked rather relieved and a bit limp.

"You fellers better take Dick home," said McShay quietly, "and git some one to take care of him."

The poker players rose rather hurriedly, some of them tipping over their chairs, and made a concerted rush to the bar, leaving cards, chips, and some money on the table. They gulped their liquor feverishly.

"Gee, it's a hot night; ain't it?" said Humpty in a dry voice, and wiping away the perspiration which stood out in beads on his face.

"Dick sure is bad. He thinks he seen it ag'in—just now—*here*." And he tried to force a superior smile as he looked around.

"Say," said Kal, pulling himself together with the aid of a couple of drinks; "it ain't no use to kid ourselves nor to let no one else kid us. He *did* see it. That was—"

He didn't finish, for he was cruelly conscious of the pity in the faces of Orson, Silent, and Joe. He turned to look at McShay and Sad. The latter wore his professional air of forbearance and bored interest. McShay raised his eyebrows as much as to say: "Well, old man; what is it?"

It was Dick's turn. He rose and lurched to the bar, looking at Kal and the others, and pounding the bar with his fists. "I'm a damn fool, am I? I've got the williamytrimities, have I?" Then he turned to Lee. "You mean to say *it* didn't—*he* didn't come in here with you?"

"You mean Silent?" blandly inquired Lee, putting his hand on the lanky man's shoulder. "Yes," he added in a kindly way. "Yes, Richard; Silent and Joe came in with me."

"Say," said Kal with more courage than the rest; "you can't kid me. He came in here with you. A fourth man came in here with you; stood up to the bar and drank with you."

The three men looked helplessly at each other and then at McShay.

"Say, McShay," bellowed the now infuriated Kal; "you ain't a liar nor a fool. Didn't you serve drinks to a fourth man—here—just now?"

McShay turned with a bewildered look to Sad. "Did I?"

Sad shook his head in the negative.

"What's the matter with you, Kal?" said McShay in a gentle, considerate voice.

"Say," said Kal, grasping a bottle in each hand; "charge these to me. Come on, boys; let's go home."

And the poker players and Roach lurched out into the night fairly on their way to forgetfulness.

McShay followed them to the door and watched their receding figures. When it was safe, he shut the door, and the rough men left in the Palace Saloon could be seen hugging each other, giving each other huge slaps on the back, and rolling around on the bar, the tables, and the floor with wild guffaws and paroxysms.

When the enthusiasm had spent itself McShay lifted his glass, the first he had poured for himself that night, and said: "Well, boys; here's hoping you may like your new job over on the Red Butte Ranch."

CHAPTER XI

When the asphalt conference broke up with the spectacular departure of Hal and Bill, no one gave a thought to the little Indian woman. Almost before the two horsemen were engulfed in their own dust she was in action, without conscious plans or purposes, but also without hesitation. Perhaps she was stirred by vague premonitions, but of this too she was unconscious. She knew that the man she loved was riding away, riding away into danger, and to follow was inevitable. It was an instinct she could not resist, which she did not try to resist or even understand. Behind Cadger's store were hitched the horses of the police. She took the first one she came to. It happened to belong to Charlie Chavanaugh. Chavanaugh was a sport, a lover of horse-flesh, and before she had gone far she knew that she had picked a good horse, in fact his pet racer. She knew how to ride. It was her favorite dissipation, and in the first mad exhilaration she and the fine animal came to a complete understanding. She knew all the crosscuts, cut-offs, and trails. She did not follow directly, but took to the open, over sage-brush

and hillock. It was hurdle-racing, only more dangerous, with hidden pitfalls of gopher holes and prairie-dogs' homes. She knew the Knife-edge and took it as a matter of course. It never occurred to her to think what she would do when she got to the ranch, or her possible connection with what might happen there. The ranch was his objective! Therefore it was hers. She seemed to be two persons, the one riding a horse over difficult and dangerous ground, picking, choosing, active, alert; the other free from the limitations of the flesh, absorbed in her own thoughts, thoughts always of him, going over their acquaintance from the beginning, trying to find herself and him, and what it meant and was to mean. When the young chief of police had bundled her out of the sun-dance, she was not conscious so much of his protection or the need of it as of a wonderful glow and thrill. Something that made existence new and strange and divine. That he liked her in return she had known for a long time. There was no mistaking his look. And yet why had he never spoken? There was only one reason—he was a white man and she was an Indian. And that made her draw herself away cold and proud. She did not suppose it was because she was poor. She had the Indian's metaphysical contempt for the material, and she felt that this white man was superior to the failings of his race. No; this man was not absorbed in *getting things*, in taking them from others and keeping them from others. He could stop to dream and to wonder. No; it was not because she was poor. It was because she was Indian. She knew all the phases of the white man's sense of race superiority. That would account for everything. Then came the revelation that Nat-u-ritch was his mother. That explained many things, but not everything. She knew at last that he did not hate his mother's people. Indeed, this understanding seemed to set them apart from others and then bring them together in a way neither had known before. Still there was something. What was it? She went over the possible rivals. There was the pretty little teacher, Miss Olmstead. She was effective in a pale, blond indefiniteness, but she was a teacher from necessity, not from choice, and uncongenial routine had left her diluted. That Miss Olmstead had cast longing eyes in the direction of the chief of police was obvious, but even jealousy could not suggest that this interest had been returned. Why was he silent? Why was the shadow of restraint over all their intercourse? This eddied in endless circles and always came back as it started, unanswered.

When she got close to the ranch it occurred to her for the first time that Hal might be displeased that she had followed him, so, while he and Bill were busy with Curley, she had slipped by them into the cow-sheds, from there crept into the stable and up into the loft. Fortunately for Hal he had no suspicion that she was the witness of his trial and execution. Fortunately the knowledge of her sufferings was not added to his own. As for her, she was on the rack and acutely conscious. Nothing escaped her. Every twist and turn of the wheel brought a new

pang, an added element of torture. It was the sublimation of cruelty brought to a white heat. She saw it in detail and the end from the beginning. She had a quick and complete sense of the frightened, savage, covetousness of these lawless men. She saw, too, that she was powerless to stop or prevent the murder of the man she loved. She would have tried the impossible, but she was paralyzed with the obvious futility of every wild expedient that rushed through her brain, and while she groped for something else, something sane, the crime went relentlessly on to its certain and ghastly end. Then she tried to shut her eyes and pray, but her eyes refused to close. She prayed wide-eyed, prayed first as an Indian, to the bear to give him strength, to the wolf to give him cunning, to the eagle to give him freedom, to the sun, to Shinob. Then she remembered that she had passed beyond all that, and she called upon God, John McCloud's God. Who shall say that God, the god of the bear, of the Indian, and of John McCloud did not hear her? But to her He did not seem to care. Perhaps it was because she had not shut her eyes. The white people shut their eyes in prayer. She closed hers for a terrible moment, and as she did so she heard the rope creak and groan as the body of her man shot up into the air. When she opened them it was to glare at the awful thing in cold and empty horror. She could not even cry out. She staggered to her feet with an impulse to throw herself from the loft. Something hard in the buckskin pouch struck her sharply as it swung. Then she found it in her hand. She didn't know how to shoot, had not been taught, but something happened. She saw a flash near her hand; her right hand. She felt weak and faint. With the left hand she steadied herself against the adobe wall. Something cut her hand. It was a scythe. If she smote the rope she did not remember it. She only remembered gazing into the beloved face distorted in the agony of a horrible death. Had he passed beyond all help? As she started in panic to the spring her toe struck Curley's half empty flask. That and the ice-cold water of the spring, and her love—surely that would bring him back to life. It was a relief to be doing something at last, even if it should prove futile. Then when all was done, it seemed so little, there was only to wait. That was hard—to wait and watch. Suddenly, was it her own delusion? His eyelid fluttered. Yes, he lived. Then the mountains waved, and the stars danced, and it seemed that days and nights passed as she sat waiting and watching each returning sign of life. She had died with him step by step; so now she returned with him to life. When she remembered again she was sitting with his head in her arms and weeping.

Consciousness came back to Hal through the flickering lights that snapped and cracked, burnt and went out, then burned again in a vast smother of writhing darkness. The first breath of fresh air choked him. He felt that he was drowning in it. Then he slipped out of the mountainous whirlpools into still waters, and he saw the face of Wah-na-gi bending over him, and he felt that this was what men

called Heaven. He tried to reach out his arms and take her but they wouldn't move. It was a dream. She seemed to say: "Don't try, just rest." When he was conscious again his limbs responded and he drew her face down and murmured: "Wah-na-gi, you're mine. I love you. I want you. I want you *now*." And she kissed him.

The moon, now white and cold, still hung in the heavens, but in the east the day was coming with a passionate rush. The snow-white bosom of the Moquitch glowed with its fervor, and through the chill of the dawn stole the breath of a languorous day.

"Deliver us from evil!" That is the only prayer of those who lie helpless in the grip of a mastering passion.

"Deliver us from evil."

Their good angel stirred the bleeding form of Curley, and a moan broke from his lips.

"Water; I'm dying. Water."

While Wah-na-gi went to the spring, Hal pulled himself together, crawled over to his executioner, and made a superficial examination. As he turned his thought to another his strength came fast. With the aid of Wah-na-gi he put a tourniquet on the shattered arm; then he found a wound near the lungs made by the deflected bullet. By slow stages they managed to get the injured man into the house where his wounds were washed and he was made as comfortable as was possible. "He's got a chance, Wah-na-gi. Will you be afraid to stay here with him until I can bring a surgeon?"

"You're not strong enough to ride to the Fort."

"I'll go to Calamity and telephone from there."

When Hal returned to the ranch with Surgeon Flood, Wah-na-gi was *gone*. It was a great blow to him and, strange to say, unexpected. He knew of course that she had no right to be off the Reservation without a permit, yet somehow he had taken for granted her welcome. It was the one thing he thought of while he was away. It enabled him to forget his own weakness. It kept him steadily to the task in hand. Without thinking he had begun to make her a feature of his plans for the ranch and his own future. He felt the void left by her was unbearable. He felt the despair of the thirst-crazed wanderer who rides madly toward the ghostly trees which promise water, only to find them always drifting away into the mocking distance.

All Curley could tell him was that some Indians had called her outside and that she had not returned.

Then after the first bitterness of his resentment over this disappointment came a strange sense of relief. And he knew that he was glad; glad that she had gone.

"Deliver us from evil!"

Yes, he was glad she was gone.

There was plenty for him to do and he threw himself into the doing of it with a feverish energy. Neglect and nature had gone far to restoring the ranch to the wilderness. Houses, barns, corrals, ditches—they called aloud for help. This response to duty and obligation was highly gratifying to Bill, who did not realize that it was a frantic effort to flee from the voices of the night. Hal never spoke of Wah-na-gi, but in the cool silences under the stars his imagination galloped to the Agency, and rode riot there, circling round and round that girlish figure, begging for news, begging for some word, pleading for some token that her love had not died in the night, uncovering pitfalls, digging them where they did not exist, building and tearing down, testing, arguing, threatening, fighting, inventing, inventing and suffering. Life has no tortures to compare with these figments that never happen, these phantom bridges we never cross, these deaths we never die. In the night given to peace, rest, and regeneration, our thoughts stampede like maddened cattle and rush to destruction or exhaustion, and all we can do is avoid their hurtling hoofs, ride herd on them, get them to "milling," round and round in endless circles until they come to rest in wide-eyed collapse. Mysterious phantoms of the night! In the clear day these cattle wander "in green pastures and beside still waters." The strain of it was telling on Hal as day followed day and exhausting night followed night. In action his momentum was fierce and irritable; in moments of repose his face looked drawn, and a world-weariness drooped in his limbs, and a pale light shone out of his blue eyes.

Even Bill began to notice that he never smiled, and in this connection Bill remarked to Joe: "And smilin' is one of the best things the kid does."

He smiled the day McCloud arrived as he put his two strong hands on the shoulders of the invalid's big frame, gave them a gentle pressure, as if afraid of crushing that frail habitation of the spirit, and bade the clergyman welcome to Red Butte Ranch. Then monotonous week followed monotonous week and the hidden fires smouldered on. One evening as the sun was going down he smiled again, but it was a peculiar smile; it got no higher than his lips, and the pale light of endurance in his eyes changed to a fierce flame. Chavanaugh had ridden in about sundown with a letter. It was hardly a letter, just a few words scribbled on a scrap of paper, not over a dozen words, but they were from Wah-na-gi.

CHAPTER XII

In a great city people live so close together there are no neighbors. Isolation is the freedom of the city; it's the city's one gift. Men guard it jealously, are ready to fight for it. It's the only safeguard against the crowding obligations of a common humanity. One is appalled at the suggestion of bringing home the sorrows of others, or letting them peek in at the window—these multitudinous sorrows, so painful, so sordid. We resent the noise in the cells overhead or the cells underneath, and we do not want to know that it is the cry of mortal anguish of those who are as alone as ourselves. It's only people who live apart, or meet each other on the road to Jericho, that are really neighbors. The units of a community that is shut off from the rest of the world huddle together, and gentleness and kindness are born in the solitudes. In the barren soil of common hardships flowers bloom. But the city has its advantages. The loneliness of a great city is as nothing to the isolation of one who is alone in a small community. Wah-na-gi was being made to feel very much alone. The teachers of the school with the exception of Wah-na-gi were white women and with one exception, women of a narrow horizon. They sympathized with her in her struggle not to go back, but there had always been condescension and toleration in their attitude toward her. That she was made much of by the Rev. John McCloud, that she was admired by the chief of police and others perhaps had not added to her popularity. Sometimes such things make a woman a suspicious character. When she was returned to the Agency she found gossip had been before her. Perhaps one may be pardoned for living in a city, to escape from the terrors of tattle. Calthorpe had been seen. His escape was known. That she had saved a man's life without being chaperoned on the occasion, that she remained with the young man at the ranch an indelicate time, that she had to be brought back by force, etc., etc.—the intervening details could be supplied by any one with half an imagination. To the white women on the Agency this was "just what one might expect from an Indian." The moral attitude is sometimes a curious one. The knowledge of what we would have done under certain conditions instead of making us forbearing, strange to say, only makes us more intolerant; but that knowledge makes us very certain of *just what happened*. The only person apparently within a hundred miles who hadn't heard about it was the victim herself. It was night when she reached the Agency and she went directly to the school. The teachers lived together in one of the adjoining buildings. The first thing that met her eyes was her few belongings huddled together on the veranda. The principal came out just as Wah-na-gi stopped to gaze at the unfriendly spectacle.

"We didn't know what your plans were, and thought you might be in a hurry—"

"I would have gone in the morning."

Something of the cruelty of their haste came even to the human logarithm,

and she hurriedly offered to give up to the ex-teacher *her* room for the night.

Tears were streaming down Wah-na-gi's face and she had to wait a moment before replying. Then she said simply: "Thank you; no, I couldn't stay now," and she walked out of the yard, down the deserted street, and out onto the bench where Chapita had her farm and her log-cabin, some two miles from the Agency.

"I'm going back," she thought as she trudged the lonely two miles to the cheerless cabin on the desolate farm. "I'm going back in spite of myself; going back to the savage in me."

Chapita was the widow of the blood-brother of her father. One of her few sentiments had been gratitude to the big chief who had been her husband's friend, and this now flowered in loyalty to his child. She was an unlovely person but she was human. Her cabin was an unlovely place but it was a shelter. Wah-na-gi was very tired with her long ride, too tired perhaps to sleep. She closed her eyes but not in slumber, and each time that she opened them to escape from the mental images which terrified and mocked her, it seemed to her as if the walls of the little cabin were closing in on her inch by inch and that if she lost herself in forgetfulness they would crush her. The strained stillness of the night was broken by the mournful howl of the coyotes and the mournful answer of Chapita's dogs, trying to tell their wild kin how impossible it was to go back! The dogs were explaining that it wasn't a pleasant thing to be man's "best friend" but it was better than being his hunted enemy. But the logic of this made no impression on the coyotes whose only answer to its inevitableness was to call again and again—come back; come back.

The following day Wah-na-gi stayed away from the Agency as long as she could, but it is a long day which has had no night. The odors of the cabin offended her, and she was waiting for the tardy sun when at last it consented to get up. Chapita would not allow her to share the simple chores. They were *her* refuge from consuming loneliness; so Wah-na-gi stirred about in the stillness; she sat down in it; she rose up in it. She looked away off into the distance where was the Red Butte Ranch. She looked down on the Agency buildings and the brave flutter of its flag. She did these things several times. Then by the law of gravitation she found herself in the afternoon at the post-office. She knew she had no letters, but she had to speak to some one. The fat post-mistress had protruding eyes and wore glasses that horribly magnified them. She looked like a mediaeval gargoyle.

"No!" there was no mail for Wah-na-gi, and this simple fact was put through the narrow window in a way to suggest the early Hebrew prophets in their favorite posture toward the stiff-necked and rebellious generation.

Wah-na-gi duly quailed. Thus encouraged the amiable official glared at her malevolently and suggested with clumsy guile:

"I suppose you know there's a *ree*-ception to-night at the agent's to the

Guv'ment inspector, skool inspector?"

"No; I didn't know it."

"S'pose you're goin'?"

"I don't know—I, er—I don't know." And she hastened out of the dingy little office of inquisition. Both knew that she wasn't going.

It would seem that one might face the future without despair even if one should be purposely excluded from so important a function as a reception by the agent to the school functionary, but these things are relative. This was as important here as the king's drawing-room would be in London, and we know that fortunes have been spent, the arts of diplomacy exhausted, homes shaken, and governments jeopardized for social prizes of no more real consequence. *Every one* would know that she was not there, and nowhere on earth where human beings meet can they exist without the approval of their fellows.

Besides the wound to her self-esteem there was a genuine loss to her in not meeting the official. She had started a movement to interest the Indian children in themselves, their own art, music, history, and poetry, to awaken their pride of race and stimulate their desire to preserve and perpetuate these priceless things which were fast drifting back into the unknown and forgotten. The movement had received encouragement from some of the wiser folk at Washington. She wanted to show what she had done, what the children had accomplished. Perhaps it wasn't of consequence, but it seemed so to her. The inspector would be told the experiment was a failure, and at the thought of that she wanted to cry out.

It all seemed so unjust, so cruel. Many of these things were trifles in themselves, but the sum of them was soon to become portentous.

She stood irresolutely for a moment in front of the post-office. Where could she go? What could she do? Her employment was gone. The school was closed—*to her*. She looked over at the trader's store. Cadger had been shamed before a lot of men and made to apologize *to her*, an Indian woman. He wasn't likely to forget it in a hurry, and so the store, the social rendezvous of the Agency, was closed *to her*. There was the blacksmith shop, the saw-mill out on the bench, the corrals and stables, and the agent's house. She drifted aimlessly along. Time hung heavy on her hands. She had ample leisure to think, to face the situation. She felt physically weak. Her limbs began to tremble and she sank down. She looked up at the inhospitable sky. There waving over her was the flag. At least she could sit down here and rest, under her country's flag. But was it her country, or her flag? Would it protect her, a friendless Indian woman? Thousands, tens of thousands had died to make it the symbol of protection.

"Wah-na-gi, my child, what are you thinking of?" And John McCloud laid his long thin hand upon hers.

"I was thinking that *this* has meant so much to the white people, perhaps

it might some day mean something to me.”

The gaunt man followed the direction of her eyes and saw that she meant the stars and stripes, and the simplicity of her faith touched and saddened him.

All he could say was: “Perhaps! Perhaps at an hour when ye think not.” And he took off his hat reverently and without ostentation to that gallant symbol. “It hasn’t always stood for justice to your people, but on the whole we have reason to be proud of it, and perhaps even the Indian may come to love it some day.”

“I was thinking, too, why everything was made so hard for me.”

“That question comes to us all, my dear! To me, too, very often.”

But she was so absorbed in her own perplexities she did not see his wan smile or note his effort to resist the racking cough.

“Have I done anything wrong?”

He looked at her keenly for a second.

“Your asking me the question shows me that you have not.”

“Then why?”

“We seem to want to think the worst of each other sometimes. These good people have decided that you did something indiscreet in following Calthorpe to the ranch, in remaining there, in having to be brought home.”

She looked at him in wonder. He felt ashamed.

“I tell you this because some one will tell you, and perhaps in a less friendly way.”

“It isn’t really worth while; is it?”

“What?”

“Living.”

“Oh, yes, my dear. Life is worth living; life is a glorious thing.”

It seemed a priceless thing to him struggling so desperately to keep it.

“It doesn’t matter if naughty little children make faces at us.”

“Yes; but it does matter. These people are here. I am here. I make my life a little. They make it a good deal.”

“No; just reverse that. They make it a little. You make it a good deal. Wah-na-gi, I have no children. God has not given me that supremest blessing, but I could not be prouder of you if you were my very own. I’ve watched you. You have made a brave, splendid struggle. You must not give up. You must win out. You have youth and you have health; oh, thank the good God for that. You have health. We each mean something in the great sum the Divine Mind is solving. Leave the meaning to Him. Leave the answer to Him! Trust Him. Promise me not to give up, not to despair. I couldn’t go away and leave you here——”

“You are going away?” The warm blood that was coming back into her empty heart at the revelation that this good man trusted her, cared for her, suddenly stopped and left her cold and numb.

"You are going away?"

"I tried hard to like the agent, and when that was impossible, to at least respect him. After what happened at the asphalt conference my presence makes Mr. Ladd very uncomfortable. If I wanted to stay, or could stay, he would not let me. The valley of humiliation is an unpleasant place, even when it's another's valley."

"You are going back East?"

"No; I couldn't live in the East. I am going over to the Red Butte Ranch."

"To live with *him*?"

"With Hal; yes. He invited me some time ago, and I've sent him word I'm coming. I'm going now."

She had an indistinct recollection that he took both her hands in his, that he begged her not to do something, that she promised whatever it was he wanted, that there were tears in his eyes, that he asked God's blessing on her, and then he was gone.

She must have remained there some time, for suddenly she became aware of the presence of some one, and the flag, the flag that was to be her protection, was *coming down*. It seemed an evil omen. She was startled and she thought some one laughed. She looked up. The teachers in their best array were laughing and chatting in the best of humor on their way to Agent Ladd's. There was to be a dinner evidently to precede the reception to the Washington official.

Again she found her way like a wounded bird across the bleak uplands to Chapita's cabin.

So long as the old woman lived Wah-na-gi would have a refuge. She was truly grateful for this, as she thought how rapidly her world was narrowing, and Chapita had her uses, but under no circumstances was it possible for this ignorant, slovenly, unpleasant old woman to be a companion to this young girl. They had nothing in common except a need for the necessities of life, and Chapita was a type to the girl of all she had striven to avoid.

They were driving her back, back to *this*! Yes, when she was old she would be like this. She shuddered. It would not have mattered if she had never known. She could not eat the coarse food badly prepared by the old woman. She knew that in time hunger would make her eat it! So, too, in time she would yield and go down, and back to this. Hunger would force her to it; hunger for companionship, for human ties. She tried not to let Chapita see how repellent all this was to her. She tried hard to be gracious and not to hurt her feelings, but the old woman knew there was a great gulf between them and felt sorry for the child and patient with her. She, too, shared the thought that in time Wah-na-gi would come back to her own people. Wah-na-gi had to leave her food uneaten and get out into the air under the stars. The cabin contained only a single room. It was very primitive.

She thought of her clean little boudoir at the school, which she had somehow taken for granted would always be hers, and which she had taken such pains and such pride in making dainty and attractive. She hadn't slept the first night in that room of Chapita's. She knew she would sleep this second night. Nature would bring her to that too. She was so tired and yet she had done nothing all day, nothing but suffer. Chapita's noisy breathing told her the old woman had not stayed awake to puzzle over any one's destiny, and finally she dragged herself into the dirty room and slept.

She was awake early and unrefreshed. Chapita had not stirred. The first thing that met Wah-na-gi's eyes as she threw open the door for the air was a beautiful buckskin dress ostentatiously laid out in a conspicuous place. It was elaborately outlined and adorned, a striking example of the best skill in Indian beadwork, and it glistened in the shadows of the dull, shabby room. Perhaps Chapita had grown wildly extravagant and had—but what holiday or fête day was it? Her brain refused to account for any public occasion that would justify Chapita in wearing such gorgeous habiliments. She would not wake her to inquire, but dress and get out into the sweet morning air. But her clothes? What had become of her clothes? They were gone. No, some one had hidden them. It was a joke, not a joke she relished! She searched the place. Finally she woke the bewildered Chapita and asked for an explanation. Chapita was more non-plussed than herself. It was plain that she knew no more of the appearance of the new and the disappearance of the old than Wah-na-gi herself. The Indian girl's wardrobe was very limited, but her simple little frocks were such as white girls wore, and now for these were substituted very charming specimens of such clothes as Indian women wear. She sat down to think. Was it a hint, a warning, or an invitation? There was no mistaking it. She began to feel cowed and helpless.

"Yes, they are driving me back to the savage in me," she thought. She sat down helplessly. For a long time she sat so. Finally she put on the buckskin dress. It was evident that she must unless she was prepared to remain within doors. There was no mistaking the look in Chapita's face. It was abject admiration. She thought herself she must look well in it. The lines were simple and graceful. It fitted her as if made for her. The quick gratification to her vanity was momentary. She had a conviction that she looked better in it than in the conventional clothes of the white woman. This startled her, worried her. She admired the dress. It made an unmistakable appeal to her. There is something of the savage lust of color in us all. Was it because the garment was really beautiful, or because she was an Indian forever in spite of her aspirations? She knew that the wearing of these clothes would be hailed by the whites and Indians as a sign of surrender. She saw their wagging heads, heard their jests and laughter. She exaggerated

their triumph, her own defeat. She wouldn't go to the Agency any more, and she stayed away that day. It was a long hard day to get through. She made Chapita's home cleaner inside and out. That was all she could do. The cabin was approachable only from the front and sides. On the north it had been stuck up against some broken, crumbling sandstone cliffs, that it might not be blown off the bench by the north-east winds when the Winter-man came. Toward the north-west these ramparts were low, scarcely more than twice the height of the house. These battlements, a protection in the winter, made the place a flaming furnace in the summer. It was bearable only at night, at sunset and sunrise. At other times it was hell. Chapita's farm was a farm in name. It spread out on the bench in unfenced acres, how many Chapita did not know or care, of dusty sagebrush and cactus lying on the broken foot-hills. Irrigation and great labor might have turned its desolation into a farm; it wasn't likely to get either. Around the house was not a blade of grass or a flower. Two half-starved mangy dogs occasionally relieved the gathering and oppressive stillness. At first there was a sense of relief that no one bothered her, that every one let her alone; then she began to feel that even the society of Appah or the agent would be a relief. The monotony of nothing to do, nowhere to go, was maddening. One day she was wandering aimlessly along a trail feeling that invisible and malevolent influences were hounding her. It came to her that she was being "run down," a process employed successfully by plainsmen and Indians in capturing wild horses. It was very sure if somewhat slow and tedious. It consisted in never letting the quarry rest. Suddenly two horsemen loomed up in front of her, and she was ordered to turn round and go back. They were Indian police and she looked about and realized that she was on the trail leading to the Red Butte Ranch. Then she knew that she was watched. Appah was now in control of the police force and the system invented by Hal for her protection was now used to persecute her. By and by the sense of hostile eyes invisible but present grew to be painful. That night when she got home, she got a very disagreeable impression. Chapita had been to the distribution of the Government rations; she had been to the slaughter-house and had fought with the other squaws for the entrails. Wah-na-gi remembered as a child having once witnessed the hideous and disgusting spectacle. She had seen the squaws practically skin cattle alive, before the death convulsion was fairly started or the glazing eyeball ceased to roll. Chapita bore evidences of the good-natured rivalry for the refuse. It made Wah-na-gi physically ill. She had a violent nausea. Worse than all, it was obvious that the poor old woman had been unfortunate or had been discriminated against, for it looked as if the rations were those no one else would have. Even the spirit of the wild horse on the free and limitless plain is broken. The following morning she went directly to the Agency and walked into the offices. There the clerks and typewriters were busy with the

many details of this little government within a government. They let her stand at the railing while they discussed her in whispers until she called to one of them by name and asked would she be so kind as to let the agent know she wanted to speak to him. The individual addressed brought back the word that Mr. Ladd was too busy to see her. She stood for a moment, gripped her hands, and kept back the tears. Would they tell him it was very important? There was a shadow of a smile at this, but the message was delivered. Wah-na-gi would have to come some other time. She came the next day and the next. It was the same answer. Then she asked for a piece of paper and a pencil and scribbled on it: "Please, Mr. Ladd, oh please give me back my school."

There was no answer. She was dizzy as she came out into the street and she drifted helplessly to the seat at the foot of the flag-staff and sat down under the flag. Charlie Chavanaugh lounged down beside her and slyly put something into her hand. She knew it was money, a roll of bills, and she knew whence it came.

"No; I couldn't take *money* from him."

This contingency had evidently been provided for, for Charlie said softly: "See paper. Not now," and walked away. She retained the paper wrapped about the money and when she got home read it: "Send Chapita to Crazy John at night." Everybody knew about Crazy John. Out on the bleak bench for eighteen years had existed a thing which had once been a man. Under a lean-to so crude and badly made as to offer small shelter from the blistering heat of the summer and even less protection from the rigors of winter, huddled a wretch in rags who, so far as any one knew, had done nothing all these years but lie there. He had a story grim as Greek tragedy. The man had murdered his mother and his punishment was self-inflicted. It was as if he had thrown himself down on the hard bosom of mother earth and said to the elements: "I have sinned past forgiveness. Do your worst." In all the years, so far as any one knew, he had never spoken to a human being or lifted a hand to protect himself except for this wretched lean-to which would not have given shelter to a wolf. Why the fluids of his body did not freeze when the thermometer was below zero was a mystery; as great as his immunity from the greedy wolf and coyote. The Indians believe that the insane enjoy the special protection of Deity. To them he was a sacred mystery and his tragedy was respected. Occasionally food was placed within his reach by his relatives, and white curiosity seekers sometimes tossed him a coin, but he was a fearsome thing and his dwelling-place was a fearsome spot, cheerfully avoided.

Wah-na-gi understood. It was something of an undertaking to persuade the superstitious old woman to go there for the food and supplies left there by Hal's emissaries, but once the route was established it solved the problem of bare existence; at least it did for a time. One night Chapita did not return and in the

morning her body was found near the imbecile with the skull crushed. It was said that the old woman had been trying to steal the food left for Crazy John and that he had killed her.

This theory would not have borne scrutiny. The food contained in the old woman's bag was *uncooked*, and was of a character and quality unknown to the imbecile or his relatives, but Chapita was a matter of no particular consequence to any one except Wah-na-gi, and it did not suit the purposes of any one in authority to question the accepted theory. When Chavanaugh brought the news to the girl she just threw up her arms like one who drowns. Then it was she scribbled the ten words to Hal and gave them to Chavanaugh.

CHAPTER XIII

"Gee, she's pretty!"

Cadger came over to the window of his store to see whose horse was meant.

"Oh," he said, with seeming loss of interest as he walked back to his account books.

"She's give in. She's wearing Injin clothes."

"She's got pluck, grit. A man would have given in long ago."

It was Ladd at the store window, and there was something in his attitude or the vibration in his voice that made the other slide him a covert glance.

"He's a disappointment to me in a way," added Ladd, unconscious of the hiatus.

"Who?"

"Calthorpe. Didn't think he'd give her up without a struggle. She's worth fighting for. Most pretty women are just pretty. She's got something behind it, something sort of tantalizing."

He said this mentally, groping for what it was.

Cadger lifted his head from his figures to shift another curious glance at the agent, but he did not reply.

"I somehow imagined that Calthorpe thought enough of the girl to pay us a visit."

"Why should he?" said Cadger, not looking up and continuing to reckon his gains. "When your worst enemy's a barber, why sit down in his chair and invite him to shave you?"

"You heard what he said?" suggested the agent.

"You bet I did. He handed you a bunch of roses all right. I'm kind o' hard of hearin' but I heard it. He said it loud enough fer 'em to hear it in Washington."

"I'm not afraid of Washington so long as Senator Plumtree and Senator Wilkins are on the job. I hear that Judge Walker wants to go back to his law practice, and if he does, Whittaker'll leave the Land Office to be Secretary of the Interior. Our people aren't losing any tricks."

It was plain that Ladd spoke his convictions when he said he felt easy as to Washington.

"Appah's gittin' kind o' chesty," suggested Cadger with an indifference that was important.

"Yes," drawled Ladd. "Take your hand off their throat and let them get an easy breath and they begin to buck. He's showin' off. He'd like his people to think he's a bigger man than I am."

"Oh, he'll settle down and git tame when he's lassoed Wah-na-gi."

"Well, he isn't going to lasso Wah-na-gi," said Ladd quickly.

"No? Why, I thought that was your idee."

"I had hoped that Calthorpe and Appah would sort of mix it up and save me a lot of trouble."

"Then you never intended him to have her?"

"Never."

"That's his understandin'."

"Hand her over to that surly savage?—An educated woman?"

"A good-looker too," suggested Cadger kindly.

"Good-looking?" said Ladd, caught by the bait and forgetting his audience in the interest of his subject. "Have you ever thought what she would show for with all the harness and trimmings our women put on? She isn't good-lookin'; she's a world-beater. Appah's got another guess. Slowly but surely it will be borne in on him that she's out of his class."

"Chickens is awful human, ain't they?" said Cadger. "One of 'em gits a bead on sumpin' good, makes a rush fer it with wings out, and durned if every other chicken don't leave his job, drop sumpin' better maybe, and chase after the grub the first one's after. Most of our fun in gittin' is in takin' it away from somebody else; ain't it?"

Ladd laughed. "Well, I saw it first. Only I never let anything interfere with business."

Cadger's face never collaborated. He really didn't need features. He didn't stop figuring, but said calmly: "Our scheme's on the toboggan and so are you."

"What do you want me to do? Suppose I let him take her? He's got what he wanted and is independent of us. You and I don't get our pay until we deliver

the goods.”

”It’s all right to hold him off if you can, but if he sees you’re interested, why it’s all off. You can’t handle him, that’s all.”

”Well, if I can’t handle him, I can hobble him, and I will. You watch me.” And Ladd strolled out of the store and watched the retreating figure of Wah-na-gi as she set out for Chapita’s cabin.

If Cadger could have managed it he would have treated himself to a sardonic grin as he said to himself:

”I never knew a good thing yet that wasn’t busted by a woman.”

Wah-na-gi had been down to sit under the shelter of the flag. It is difficult for the Indian to resist the inborn reverence for symbols, but it was futile. She wouldn’t go again. She was, Ladd had said, plucky, but she was at last desperate. Chapita was dead. The cabin which had always been forbidding and forlorn was now empty. She knew that in her way Chapita had loved her and that she was always glad to see her, and then there was some one to talk to. Now she had not even the half-starved, mangy dogs to welcome her.

When the old woman was buried the wretched beasts were killed and their carcasses left at the grave, so that she would not miss their companionship in the spirit world. Solitary confinement drives prisoners mad. Queer thoughts were creeping into her head, thoughts of the grave, of death.

Hal had come into his own. He was interested in other things. He had forgotten. Their paths lay so far apart anyway; they touched for a short distance only, then diverged again, and would go farther and farther away as time went on. He could never live at the Agency again; and she was doomed to it. Should she accept the inevitable, or should she follow Chapita to that desolate village of the dead over in the Bad Lands? She hadn’t the strength to decide. She would let it be decided for her. Before she reached the top of the ground swell on which rested the cabin she was conscious that some one was waiting for her. The first sense of relief was succeeded almost at once by apprehension, and she was therefore not surprised to see the tall form of Appah sitting before her door.

He let her stand in his presence a moment while he looked her over. Then he said with conviction: ”Wayno! Touge wayno!” (Good! Very good.)

His eyes sparkled as he saw her in the picturesque dress of his people. He stood up. His undisguised elation, his sense of triumph, his certainty of possession stung her into life. At last there was something to do. The weary irresolute droop slipped from her like a shadow and she straightened up and stood face to face with him.

”You have done this,” she said, indicating her clothes with a swift gesture that left no doubt of her attitude. ”You have done this, but you can’t drive me back. You can dog my steps and spy on me; you can steal my clothes like a sneaking

squaw; you can take away from me my children, my school; you can starve me and run me down like a wild horse; you can make fun of me to my people, and make them hate me, but you can't drive me back; I'm an Indian woman, but I'm a woman; you can't make me a cringing squaw, crawling at your feet, ready to lick your hand. I'm past that. You can hunt and hound me, but you can't break me!"

His amazement let her get so far, then he advanced upon her with arm upraised.

"Yes and you can kill me as you did Chapita—but it won't make any difference."

The allusion to Chapita startled him and gave him pause a moment to regain his poise and restrain his homicidal impulse.

He drew back, folded his arms and, with a sullen face, said: "Maybe so hate Injin, hate Injin all time."

"No; I don't hate my people. I love them. I want to make them better and stronger and freer. It's you that hates them. Nothing stops. Everything changes. White people change, Indian must change. The buffalo are gone. Lands are gone. Crowded, crowded! Everybody crowded! No room to hunt any more. The Indian must learn to be clean, strong, to work. I love my people; I want to do them good. People like you make trouble, keep them back, deceive them. The old ways are gone. They never will come back; they cannot come back. Once we were hunters, warriors—that was good. Now we must be farmers—that, too, is good. Shinob makes it so. We must obey. You know better too, but you cling to the old ways because they're better for you. If these people weren't ignorant and superstitious they'd know you for what you are—a liar and a cheat."

Appah was in a measure sophisticated, but the fury and audacity of this left him somewhat dazed. He was a reactionary, and the latest phase of the new woman was a form of madness new to him. It might easily have discouraged a wiser man. He was determined to make one more try before falling back on the only recourse left—force.

"Mun-a-ra-tit-tur-nee! (You will be sorry!) Teguin (friend) me! wayno teguin!" he said in an effort to placate her. "Peenunk (pretty soon) pikeway (go away)," and he pointed to the mountains. "Big hunt, maybe so deer catch 'em, make medicine, good time. Maybe so you come, eh?"

"With you? No; I cannot. I will not."

He looked puzzled and frustrated. What would appeal to this woman he wanted?

"Appah way off yonder! By and by you come my wickiup. My wickiup, your wickiup! Pah-sid-uway?"

He was telling her that his home was hers, that while he was away he would

like her to live in it, with the implication that all that was in it was hers.

"Thank you; I must stay here."

He saw he had made no progress and fierce anger blazed up within him. He looked at her, at the squalid cabin and its surroundings, and stalked away muttering to himself: "Mun-a-ra-tit-tur-nee! Na-nunk-quoi-vandum." (There will be much trouble.)

She sank down on the empty box where Appah had awaited her. It was a relief, this burst of anger. She had been fighting shadows. She had been alone with her thoughts, her fears, with no one to share them with her. Here was a human being she could hate. There was a savage joy in battle, and she felt an unholy uplift in having hit hard.

Appah would have the better of it in the end, perhaps, but he would carry a scar—there was consolation in that. How curious it was! Appah was very anxious to make her his wife; there was no doubt about that. Why was it that the man she loved, and who loved or seemed to love her, hadn't ever mentioned that subject to her?

"I'll bet I can read your thoughts."

Agent Ladd stood before her, smiling down at her.

She rose in a startled way.

"Mr. Ladd? You here?"

"Don't be frightened. May I sit down and talk with you?"

Here was something new. The aggressive autocrat could be gentle, even deferential. She was puzzled. What could it mean?

She motioned to the box and he sat and took out a pipe and began to fill it.

"First of all, I'd like you to know I'm your friend."

"You haven't acted much like one."

"You won't have to complain of that in the future. As you know, it's the policy of the Government to keep the Indians apart. To discourage their marrying with the whites and to encourage their marrying among themselves. I couldn't openly oppose Appah or stand in his way. In fact, I've given him a free hand, for one reason," and Ladd laughed at his own shrewdness; "because I knew he didn't have a ghost of a chance. You're an educated woman—a lady—and he's a blanket Injin—a savage. It's preposterous."

"And yet you stood by and let them try to drive me back to being a blanket Indian."

"He is an influential man with his people, and it was the only way he would understand. He had to know it was hopeless. Well, he's had his inning; he's had everything his own way; he's brought every argument and influence to bear, legitimate and illegitimate, and he's failed, completely failed, and now it's time this persecution of you stopped; and I'm going to stop it."

He looked at her in a benevolent way, but she waited.

"You can go back to your position in the school whenever you want it."

"Oh, Mr. Ladd; do you mean it?"

If Agent Ladd had known how beautiful he looked to her in the role of Santa Claus he would have been tempted to live it instead of play it.

"Then you don't believe those stories?"

"There is no one knows a good woman better than the man who has had a tolerably wide acquaintance with the other kind. The only difference in women is love. There isn't anything a good woman or a bad woman won't do for the man she loves. And in that connection I want to ask you a rather personal question. You know that Calthorpe and I are enemies. I've been deceived in that boy. I think you have too." Before she had time to protest he said bluntly: "Has he ever asked you to marry him?"

Before she had time to think, before she realized that the agent had no right to ask the question, she gasped falteringly: "No! No!"

"I thought so. And he's been doing the devoted for a long time."

She was so conscious of the truth of this that she had no time to reflect that the agent was going quite beyond the legitimate bounds of his position.

"He isn't on the level. You can't trust a half-breed."

"Mr. Ladd, you mustn't say that to me.

"I'll show you the difference. I'll ask you to be my wife."

This was so amazing, so direct, that it took her breath away. She could only sink down bewildered on an upturned bucket. All her preconceived ideas of the man seemed to need readjusting. How did it happen?

"Now, take your time and give me an even chance." He rose but did not disturb her by advancing toward her. "Wah-na-gi, I'm playing for big stakes. I'll tell you something in confidence. These asphalt mines are valuable—very valuable, but back of them are coal mines—rich? There's no end to 'em. At the lowest price ever paid for coal they would pay the national debt and God knows how much besides. The cowboys don't know that. There are only three people know it as yet—a big capitalist, his engineer, and myself. These cowboys are children in a game like this."

"How does this interest me?"

"Why, if we can get our bill through Congress before the rest of the world knows what we're up to, you and I won't have to live at Standing Bear Agency. We'll have the world in a sling. We'll make a plaything of it. Every luxury, every pleasure, honors, if we want 'em! Society? Why, if you want society, we'll buy it for you. Culture, learning, genius; why, they'll eat out of our hand. We'll show 'em. Who'll care then who you are or what you are? Who'll know or care whether you are an Indian or a Fejee? You'll be *my wife*—the wife of one of the

three or four richest men in the world. I'll put the world on its knees to you, my girl."

"I don't know that I care much for *things*."

"But you will. You'll learn. Gosh, wants are easily picked up. It's doing without that needs practice."

"And in the mean time?"

"What do you mean?"

"Before all this happens?"

"We must of course keep this a secret for the present."

"Ah!"

"Now, don't misunderstand me. Personally I have no race prejudice and I despise the idiot that has, but I'm on the job here. I can't let go. I'd lose my pull with the Department, with the settlers, and with the Indians themselves. Now, isn't that so? *You know*."

"It is so impossible I wonder you ever thought of it."

"Nothing is impossible with me. People have done that before—kept their relations secret for a time——"

"Their relations?"

The word was an unfortunate one. He realized it. It was a word that uncovered the mental reservation that sneaked behind it. She looked at him in a way that made him uncomfortable. She drew herself up with a mocking smile. He had spoken with such conviction and passion as to please and convince himself. He felt the genial glow of protecting this beautiful woman against the ignorance and prejudice of the world. That it was to be in imagination and in the future made it easier and more attractive.

"You aren't fair to me," he said in a hurt tone of reproach. "I'll do anything any other man would do—I'll marry you."

"When?"

He hesitated. She saw his hesitation. He knew that she did and he felt his dreams melting away. Like other blessings, they "brightened as they took their flight." He had strapped down his passion for a long time because he realized that it wasn't "business." Now he had unloosed it, given it rein, had sensed its realization, and it carried him away. He stood ready to take any risk, make any sacrifice, at that moment; but it was a second thought.

"You came here," she said with a cruel smile, "to offer me relations."

"I'll marry you *now*, if you'll keep it a secret until——"

"You've insulted me, and the shame of it is you don't know it. If I were a white woman you respected you wouldn't have come here in secret and made me such an offer."

Wah-na-gi hadn't the feminine gift of denying men and yet leaving no sting.

It didn't matter. She was reckless, desperate. Her eyes flashed and Ladd bowed before her even through his anger. He had made a bad beginning. He had underestimated her, her intelligence, her pride, and that made her all the more desirable. Inwardly he cursed himself and her, but inwardly, too, he swore to have her, never to give her up.

"I would rather marry Appah," she said with conviction. She wanted to hurt him and she did.

"Wayno, wayno!"

It was Appah who stood before them, with two of his men, and gave his cordial assent to what he had just heard. A miracle had happened and all seemed well.

"My squaw! touge wayno!" he started to go to her. Ladd stood in his way.

"What *are* you doing here?" said the agent fiercely.

"What *you* do here?" was the angry response.

"None of your damn business."

"All same me damn business too."

"What are these men doing here?"

He noticed the small rope carried by one of them. Wah-na-gi answered for them.

"Appah is going off up into the Moquitch to hunt and make medicine, and he wanted to take me with him."

"Oh, it was to be a wedding journey, eh?" sneered Ladd.

"Go? Wayno! No go? Maybe so all same take her, pah-sid-uway?"

"I won't go. I told you that. I won't go!"

"And you won't take her. I'll tell you that." Ladd could not resist the temptation to play the role of protector for her and before her. Appah did not at first grasp the meaning of Ladd's about-face. He had not had occasion before to look upon the agent as a rival. However, in flashes of love and hate, mental photography is almost instantaneous even in dull brains. He faced Ladd with steady eye.

"Pah-kowo-nunk!" (Kill you.)

"Easy there. Easy there!" said Cadger who, missing the busy agent, had rightly guessed where to find him. The two antagonists did not know whether to be annoyed or relieved at the trader's presence. He added an element that could not be exactly measured or overlooked.

"He can't bullyrag women," said Ladd to Cadger, but keeping his eyes on Appah, "and drag them around wherever he likes; and he can't force this woman to marry him—not while I'm agent."

"What's matter you?" glared Appah, furious at interference from a source where it was totally unexpected. "What's matter you? You, too, pretty good liar,

damn quick.”

”The first man that puts his hand on his weapon’ll have me to deal with,” said Cadger. ”You ain’t agoin’ to ignore me. I’ve got some interests at stake here,” and he pushed himself between the two men who fell back before him, and then, turning to Wah-na-gi, he said: ”You better go into the house until we find where we stand. You’re safer there.”

”Yes, go in, Wah-na-gi,” said Ladd; ”leave it to me.”

She was glad to go in; glad to get away from them if only for a few moments. But a cruel thought went in with her and stayed with her. The man she loved had not asked her to be his wife. She tried to put it away, but it came again and again to plague her. If he did not care, why should she? It was settled; she did not want to live!

Cadger watched her retreating figure until it was evident that she had really gone, then he turned to the others and said: ”Sit down. We got to talk this over.”

They sat in a semicircle and each was very alert and watchful. No one smoked or thought of it.

”Now, first of all, Dave Ladd; you’re a white man and ought to have more sense. You can’t afford to quarrel with Appah any more’n he can afford to quarrel with you. I’ve got a lot at stake too. I’m damned if either of you is agoin’ to throw me down and my interests. The first man that tries it’ll git his head blowed off. You a-riskin’ the biggest stake a man ever played fer, just fer a pretty face! There’s millions of pretty faces and only one chance like this. We’ve gone too far with Appah to give him the double cross, and the woman’s his price.”

”He’ll have to name another price. We’ll give him more money, more cattle, more horses, and all that; more of anything else he likes.”

”Suppose he’s as big a fool as you, and rather have the pretty face?”

”It ain’t his to choose. It’s mine to give. It isn’t only this woman—it’s a question who’s master here—he or me.”

Appah said nothing but his face showed he was irreconcilable.

”Will you take anything else?” said Cadger. ”Horses, cattle, wagons?”

”Katch-wayno.”

”*You* won’t,” rasped Cadger to the agent; ”and *you* won’t,” he hissed at Appah. ”All right, I’m not goin’ to sit down while you ruin me between you. It’s a deadlock, and *I* decide it. I decide that you gamble for it, and I kin shoot quicker’n either one of you. Is that a go?”

There was a pause while each of the others looked the *impasse* in the face. It seemed the only way out of a situation that involved the pride of each of these reckless men as well as the asphalt stakes.

Both antagonists were born gamblers. Each believed in his luck.

Cadger paused for a moment while each antagonist quickly weighed his

chances; then the trader saw there was silent acquiescence. It was obviously the only way out of a dangerous dilemma.

The sun had disappeared behind the mountains, and the long shadows had quickly melted into night. There was a sudden chill in the air. Chapita cooked in the open air. There was a smouldering fire before the lean-to which was a sort of summer kitchen. The two friends of Appah threw some dry greasewood on the ashes and coaxed the embers into a blaze. The players sat down before the fire, their faces lit by its fitful blaze.

"We haven't any cards here," said Ladd.

"Appah, you or your friends got a set of bones?" asked Cadger, but he knew they never were without them.

Appah produced them from his pouch.

"Good! The best three in five," said the umpire.

The "bone-game," sometimes called "the moccasin game," because the bones were formerly hidden and juggled in a moccasin, is, I suppose, a sort of Indian version of the "three-shell-game" of the white man.

The small bones are marked differently, one black, one red. Appah was an expert player. Much of his skill was attributed by his people to his medicine, to magic! Perhaps some of it was due to his hypnotic power which he undoubtedly possessed in a measure. He had a snake-like concentration of the eye that seemed to have reptilian fascination in it. He and his Indian companions began the gamblers' song, a weird, monotonous incantation, the two friends beating time to its rhythm. Appah showed the bones to all, then passed them to the agent. Ladd took them, passed them from hand to hand, rolled them together, made passes, and quickly showed that he was no novice at the game, which above all requires dexterity. He finally extended his two hands and Appah chose—and lost. The agent's eyes sparkled with elation as he carelessly tossed the bones to Appah. The medicine man caught only one of the bones, the *one he wanted*, and picked the other up without attracting the attention of the observers. Then it was the agent's turn to guess. The Indian's manipulation of the little sticks was extraordinary—it would have done credit to a skilled sleight-of-hand performer. It bewildered the eye. Ladd had never played with Appah, and he began to grow peevish as the provoking skill of his opponent was made manifest.

He remembered too late the gambler's axiom not to "go up against the other fellow's game." He felt that Cadger should have warned him. While this was passing swiftly through his brain, almost as swiftly passed the bones before his eyes. Appah watched his victim. He brought his two fists together with a series of rapid movements, then paused, saw perfectly well in the agent's face the choice he was about to make, then opened his hand: it was empty. He laughed in Ladd's face and his friends laughed. He was, or thought he was, "having fun"

with the white man. Ladd's relief at not having made the choice he had intended was drolly apparent. Again a series of manipulations more rapid than the first. Sometimes the little sticks seemed to pass directly through one hand to the other. Finally the two hands came to rest before him and the mocking, cruel eyes invited him to the test. He chose and lost.

The incantation swelled with a note of triumph and its insistence was irritating. There was an undefined feeling on the part of the agent that the chant gave the other side an undue advantage. All gamblers are superstitious. He was ashamed to demand silence, and yet the noise was confusing, disconcerting. They were at least even. Each had won once. Appah's eye was fixed on him in supercilious derision and Ladd displayed less confidence, and therefore took longer for his manipulation. Appah chose, and won. This time the agent put the bones in the *medicine man's hand*. If Appah won now the woman was his to do with as he pleased. Among other motions Appah passed his hands underneath his knees. This was fair as the Indians played the game, but Ladd protested. Cadger disallowed his protest and Appah smiled an evil smile. The agent held back as the bronze hands were placed before him. He hesitated before indicating his choice—and *lost*. Quick as a flash he reached over and caught the Indian's other hand.

"Open that other hand—open that hand!" he screamed. Appah with a quick twist of the wrist shook himself free. "You damn cheat!" And Ladd struck him in the face.

It happened so quickly that no one had a chance to interfere. Appah had his knife out and the agent his gun drawn before the onlookers had time to interfere. Appah got to close quarters at once and they came together in a clinch. Then it became a task of some difficulty and no little risk to interfere. Appah's followers began to skirmish to get control of their chief while Cadger bent his energies to restraining the infuriated agent. It was a pretty mix-up, and much admired by an individual who had been an interested observer for some time. He was standing rifle in hand on the small cliff to the right of the cabin, and was busy directing the movements of some cowboys who were scrambling over each other down the perpendicular side of the rock. It was a soldier's trick and the man who directed it had the bearing of the soldier. The first man down after the human chain was formed went directly to the cabin and emerged with Wah-na-gi. Her weight was nothing to these sinewy men and her slender figure went up the man-ladder as if it were part of a perfected drill in a military tournament. The man with the rifle put his hand over her shoulder as the man-ladder was hoisted man by man. The last man was up.

The combatants had at last been dragged apart, frenzied and gasping, their faces distorted with hate.

"She isn't going with you," screamed Ladd at Appah.

"No, she's going with me," called down the man from the cliff.

And they disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XIV

The morning following Chavanaugh's appearance with Wah-na-gi's message, Bill and McCloud awoke to find themselves the only persons besides the man cook left on the ranch. Hal knew how to keep his own counsel, so little was said by his two friends, each supposing that the other had been informed of the boss's plans and had received his instructions. But as day wore on and night came, and no word of Hal or his men, each looked at the other inviting confidences and each went to bed without giving or receiving any.

"Hello, Parson; you're up early."

"Wasn't sleeping very well, Bill."

It was before dawn of the following day and the stars were still blinking in the crisp air. The clergyman had had a bad night and had crawled out into the open to get the rest denied to him in bed. He leaned wearily against the support of the veranda and wiped the cold perspiration from his brow. Bill had come from the stable opposite with a lantern in his hand and, seeing some one looming shadowy and ghostly in the dim light, had come over to the tired, pathetic figure and held his lantern up to the clergyman's face. It was a Rembrandt effect. The great patient eyes burning in their hollow sockets, the white face shining with the borrowed light of another world! Here, in the light of a stable lantern, was a beauty that could not be translated into flesh and blood. Here was a face that had been a battle-ground; the scene of a mighty conflict, a life-and-death struggle. It was all there—the wreckage of high hopes and ambitions, the sacrifice of blood and treasure, the sad evidences of futile charges, repulses, heroic stands, of fallen and recovered flags, of glorious scars and wounds, the ashes of spent camp-fires, and the funeral inarch to the inevitable trench. It was noble; it was pitiful; it would be horrible but for the to-morrow when "the weary are at rest."

The eyes of Big Bill were moist and he threw an almost gruff tone into his morning greeting.

"How clean the air is, Bill," said the parson, scenting the perfume of the morning. "What has become of Hal?"

"Ain't never said a word to me. Thought he must have told *you*. Perhaps he's gone over to see McShay."

"He and McShay have become great friends," said McCloud, smiling.

"Thicker'n thieves; blood-brothers, as the Injins play it."

"What will be the outcome of the asphalt fight, Bill?"

"Oh, sooner or later the boys'll have to sell out to the Trust."

"Hal's worried; very much worried. Is it about the asphalt?"

"Worried, is he? What do you suppose a feller about his age is usually worried about? A woman, Parson, just a female woman; and he's in luck if it's only one."

There was a peculiar note in the air. It wasn't a sound, but the shadow of a coming sound. Both men made a simultaneous movement, paused and listened, then looked solemnly at each other. The beat of hoofs and the advancing rush of man and horse was in the air. In a whirlwind of dust the bronchos were brought from a run to a standstill in a few short, staccato jumps, as the cattle horse is trained, and out of the dusk of the morning Hal advanced with a protecting arm about Wah-na-gi.

"Bill, pay Chavanaugh and these Indians twice the sum I promised them and let them go. I don't want to involve them in any trouble I may have with the agent or the Government, and put the ranch in trim for a scrap. Let no one on the premises without my permission and place my men so as to prevent surprise. They have my orders."

Bill started to whistle but Hal continued: "And have me a fresh horse saddled. I'll go out and take charge of the men as soon as I can explain matters here."

Bill's face was a study in lengthening shadows, but by the time Hal had finished he had got his second wind and managed to take up a hole in his mental belt and addressed the situation thus: "Well, boys, the boss is agoin' some; but he pays as he goes, so I guess you don't mind a little excitement."

"Excitement!" exclaimed Rough-house Joe. Joe had gained his sobriquet because he expressed the joy of being drunk by breaking and smashing things, not with malice, but in a buoyant spirit of playfulness. He was a long, lanky, loosely joined hulk with a solemn, cadaverous face, flanked by enormous ears that stood out from his head like ventilators on a ship. Joe was the kind of person that dies young in the cattle country. He had been unusually lucky. "Excitement?" he drawled. "A scrap with Injins? Why, it's pussy wants a corner. Why, if the boss'll say the word, and the troops'll just look the other way, we'll put Ladd and the Agency out of business before you could sing 'Blest Be the Tie that Binds,' omittin' the first and last stanzas. As fer the boss? We'll stay in the saddle with him if he rides through hell; eh, boys?"

And the crowd of Hal's retainers went off yip-yipping and yapping in the approved cowboy style in their enthusiasm for the young boss and uplifted by the consciousness of having earned a handsome addition to their month's wages.

As soon as Big Bill and the men were gone Hal turned to McCloud with a smile: "Got another boarder, John; you won't be so lonesome now."

McCloud looked past him out to the eternal hills.

Wah-na-gi went to the preacher timidly. "Please don't be angry. I sent him word. I asked him to take me away. Don't make me go back. Won't you let me stay? Won't you?"

McCloud did not look at her but gave her hand a reassuring touch. Then he said to Hal, in a tone of pity: "I thought you were a man. You're only a boy; a crazy boy."

"Don't be too hard on me, John."

He said this with a plaintive appealing smile, very hard to resist, but John McCloud did not see it. He was looking into the future with the prescience and the sternness of the prophet. He had been accustomed all his life to self-examination. He had only an acquired patience with those who act first and think afterwards. He belonged to a race that by instinct and training had learned to scrutinize desire, to stop inclination at the door, and make her tell her business. It was much easier than to turn her out of doors after she was once in.

Hal felt the need of sympathy and understanding, and he put out his hand toward the other but withdrew it. Turning to Wah-na-gi, he said: "Go in, little woman; lie down and rest. You must be very tired."

He walked with her to the door with a protecting hand on her shoulder. It is difficult to altogether appreciate what this meant to her starved soul, worn out with the struggle against her pitiless environment, ready to lie down and die. This hand, so strong, so gentle! At last she could trust, and rest. She could forget the past; she could leave the present and the future in his hand, so strong, so gentle.

"Yes, I'm tired; but nothing matters *now*," she said with a smile from which every trace of care had vanished—the smile of a happy child.

He stood looking after her for a moment after she disappeared into the house—his house. He would have liked to close the door and turn to the world and say: "She's mine. Leave us alone. Forget us. Go your ways and let us be happy."

But no, the world would not do that. It never did. It was a crazy, cruel world, where everything was as wrong as it could be. He turned to find McCloud still sitting on the bench before the door, staring into space. He seemed so much older. The skin seemed to have been drawn tighter over his big bones; or was it the gray, pitiless light of dawn? Now that the stress of action was off he, too, felt

weary and old as he came over and sat down beside his friend.

"I suppose you think I'm mad?" he said patiently, with the patience of physical weariness. McCloud did not look at him.

"It was a mad thing to do, Hal, my boy."

"You won't understand it, John; you couldn't."

"I thought it was agreed that you were to wait until I could determine whether the Government would let me adopt her; make her my ward, my child."

"It would have been too late. She sent me word: 'Will you come for me or must I kill myself?'"

"A momentary desperation is very far from the accomplishment of such an *act* in a young and healthy child."

"I couldn't let it happen. I couldn't take the risk. And the thought of those claws of Appah's. Well, I couldn't see straight. I couldn't leave her to a fate like that! I couldn't!"

"You want her for yourself," said the elder man with the nearest approach to sarcasm of which he was capable.

"I don't deny it. I'm mad with love for her. That's the truth."

"You took her away by force. They'll take her back by force. It's a bad business, Hal, my boy. There is only one way you can keep her now."

"What's that?"

"Why, as your wife."

As Hal made no immediate response to this, the other turned and looked at him for the first time, as he added quietly: "You must have thought of that?"

"Yes, I've thought of it," said the boy brokenly as his hands clutched each other. Then he rose and walked away as if he would physically avoid that thought. "Yes, I've thought of it."

The clergyman's grave face grew graver. It wasn't often any one saw a stern look in those gentle eyes.

"You are not prepared to go as far as that?"

"Oh, you don't understand," groaned the boy; "I wish I could make her my wife. I wish I could!"

"And the mother of your children?"

"Yes, yes; I'd make her mine if I could—if I could!"

"Ah, I see," said the other with comprehension and with a dreary little smile.

"I have a wife in England." And the lad sank down on the remnants of a broken harrow.

McCloud looked at the bent figure sadly.

"You never told me."

"What was the use?"

McCloud shook his head over this world-old excuse of sinners. It is so

much easier to let things drift, to avoid, to trust to events or the mistakes or acts of others. Hal wasn't the first to leave the unsolved problem with the vague, unexpressed, shadowy hope that he would come back to it and somehow find it solved, find the answer staring him in the face.

"And your wife?" probed the inquisitor. "What of her?"

"As to my wife, my conscience is clear, John—absolutely clear." This was said with such boyish frankness and ingenuousness as to bring an almost worldly smile to the face of John McCloud.

"Are *you* a fair judge of that?"

"I try to be. I think I am. I married Edith because I loved the woman I thought she was. She never loved me. She married me because I was the most available man coming into a title. She was a beautiful woman. Perhaps my vanity was flattered. It was a bad beginning. I won't accuse her or excuse myself. Perhaps she would have been different, married to a different man, or to a man she loved. When I saw what a mess we'd made of it, I put up a fairly decent fight to make the best of it, but she wouldn't let me, or it wasn't possible. Anyway, our marriage ended in being degrading to us both. We were going to hell fast, both of us. I ought to have freed myself before I left England. I owed it to myself."

Though he made some effort to avoid it, this was said with some of the bitterness of the past.

"A divorce?"

The way John McCloud said this was a trumpet call to battle, and Hal accepted the challenge. He was at his best in a fight, but it wasn't ground of his choosing, and he felt at a disadvantage with an antagonist like John McCloud, for the boy knew he had no claims to being super-man.

"A divorce? Yes. Why not? You're a big man, John McCloud. You don't believe that God has joined all those whom the alderman, has joined, all those whom ambition, or pride, or avarice, or lust, or even honest mistakes have joined. You don't believe that the words of a church service sanctify marriage? Love makes marriage a sacrament, mutual love."

John McCloud in his strenuous life had gone up into some exceeding high mountains where he had communed with his own soul and with his God, and many, very many things which to the average clergyman seem fixed and absolute, because he has never been higher than the roof of his own church or an office building, seemed to McCloud small and mutable.

"My son," he said with kindly tolerance, "marriage is the most important voluntary act of a man's life, and divorce ought to be like death—inevitable."

"I have a right to be free," and Hal's voice vibrated with passion.

"You mean you'd *like* to be free; but your desire no longer involves yourself alone; it involves others, perhaps the unborn. You cannot trust to your own

inclinations. Are you willing and are you able to take your feelings, emotions, desires to God, lay them bare before Him and ask *Him* for the answer?"

"I don't think of God as a cruel and omnipotent *Don't*."

"That is the test, my lad."

"You're a queer man, John. Up where you are you can look into the next world, but it must be awfully cold up there. You mustn't ask me to live up to your standard. I couldn't do it. You're not like me, a man with passions."

"Oh, my boy, my dear boy," interrupted the other with amused patience; "you don't know what you are saying. I know what you are suffering. I have loved too, not so violently perhaps as you; perhaps as sincerely—at any rate with all my soul—and I ran away—ran away from happiness, because I would not inflict an invalid on the woman I loved, nor make her the mother of sickly children; and so for this world we said good-by, and I am here alone—alone—except for God."

Hal was very still. It meant a great deal to him that John McCloud had taken him behind the curtain. He realized that it was a supreme test of the other's affection, and he felt ashamed that he should have taken for granted so much that was childish in assumption and offensive in its condescension. In the presence of the other man's sorrows his own seemed dwarfed and commonplace. When his voice was steady he said: "Then you know; yes, you know." And McCloud understood what he would have liked to say but couldn't.

"Does Wah-na-gi know?" he asked relentlessly.

"No, I couldn't tell her; but I will."

Swiftly it passed through McCloud's thought: "Is this a house built upon sand? Would this lad run straight? Would he stand the test? Would he swerve under pressure? Or was he one of those infirm of purpose, who take cycles of infinity to develop into a man—God's man?"

"My boy," he said gently; "you must make a calm, relentless examination of your own soul. You must not forget that you are a white man. You have Indian blood in your veins, it is true, but you were born and bred a gentleman. Have you thought of that?"

"Gentleman?" said the boy bitterly. "I'm a half-breed. I've never been allowed to forget it."

It was the first time McCloud had ever heard him use the odious term, and the expression of his face, the tone of his voice, opened up a vision of a journey made tragic with the burden of the cross and the crown of thorns. He knew for the first time what this boy had suffered and it filled his soul with pity. But he saw in the bitter past only a sign and prophecy for the future. Here was the wound. The boy had bared it and placed in his hand the knife. He must use it.

"Then you know, no one better than you, that there is nothing more cruel in a cruel world than race prejudice."

"And nothing more cowardly," flashed back the quivering victim.

"I'm not speaking for myself. You knew that. You know I love this young woman. She is a fine soul—brave, patient, serene. To me she is a child of the living God. Theoretically we are all equal before the All-Father. Theoretically we are all His children; but we live in a world of prejudice and passion, of huge implacable ignorance of the simplest things of divine Love. Is it wise to arouse that ignorance, challenge its ferocity, live face to face with it, and force your wife and children to live face to face with it? Is it wise to subject them to commiseration and that odious sense of superiority which is one unending crucifixion? Do you want them to suffer as you have suffered?"

In his effort to hold up before this youth the eternal truth, to make him bow the stubborn neck under the yoke of duty, John McCloud was as implacable as Savonarola, and Hal lowered his head before the blast. The sick man shook off his limitations, forgot his weakness, rose up out of the trammels of the flesh and stood over the boy, the preacher, the priest, the prophet, aroused and potential, and all the pent-up passion of the savior of souls, the martyr, and fanatic, burst into flame.

"Race prejudice? It's the curse of the world," he cried. "In all ages men have been busy inventing reasons for being better than their fellow men. The Jews called themselves the 'Chosen People' in order to exterminate the un-chosen, and now the Russians persecute and murder the Jews. The Turks massacre the Armenians. The Germans would 'eliminate' the Poles. The Anglo-Saxon is a mongrel who thinks his pure blood gives him the right to make the rest of the world buy the goods he can't sell at home. The amiable and enlightened Dr. Johnson once said of us: 'I am willing to love all mankind except *Americans*—I would burn and destroy them.' And we Americans, the most mixed of mixtures! We are proud of our enlightenment, and yet we call the Italian a 'dago,' the Mexican a 'greaser,' the Chinaman a 'chink.' We excuse our treatment of the Indian by inventing the phrase: 'The only good Indian is the dead Indian.' And recently we burned twenty churches and school-houses belonging to the negroes in order to teach them respect for law and order. It is nineteen hundred years since the Son of God brought 'peace on earth and good-will to men,' and still we have the gospel of Hate."

McCloud's fine eyes flamed and two bright scarlet spots burned in his cheeks.

"Perhaps," said Hal, rising under the torrent of the other's eloquence; "perhaps I can help show the world that mankind is superior to any race."

Swift as the swoop of the eagle came back: "Then you must be willing to be a martyr. Your Indian mother was a victim of this and your own life is shadowed by it. Are you going to repeat *her* tragedy?" And he pointed to the rock that

mutely stood before them and bore its silent witness to the sorrow of the broken heart that lay beneath it.

"God forbid!" ejaculated the boy, tears springing to his eyes as the figure of his mother loomed dimly out of childhood's memories. "God forbid! Poor little mother! I think the secret of her tragedy was that my father did not love his little Indian wife. I love Wah-na-gi."

The boy's sincerity was unmistakable. McCloud hurried on that he might not be swerved from his purpose.

"You love Wah-na-gi; yes, now; but what of the future? Do you dare look into the future? You are heir to a title and estates. You will eventually take up your obligations to an honored name and a glorious civilization."

Hal straightened up and showed fight. Hitherto McCloud had called to the lover, to his chivalry, to the potential father. It was an appeal he could not ignore, that lifted him up and swept him along with it. Now it was to his own interests. It was an anticlimax. The trained controversialist had made a mistake. Titles, estates, an honored name, civilization! The Shepherd of the sheep had put on the garments of the man of the world and they didn't fit. To the youth, in the throes of a mighty passion, they sounded hollow and empty. Hal had never discussed his past, his life, with any one. How was the preacher to know that he was walking among the graves of things already buried? Titles, estates, an honored name, civilization! It probably never occurred to Samson to pause over his duties to Philistine society, and to hesitate over the beauty of the temple where he was on exhibition. Hal started to rise, to throw off this incubus sought to be put upon him, to tear it to pieces; but the hated things had done something for him, taught him restraint, the capacity to measure the other man's point of view, and so he sat down again before he spoke and struggled to keep his voice even, though it vibrated with scorn.

"I hate the whole thing! Why should I be the victim of conditions which are no part of my consent or my will? I don't want the title! I don't want a place in their silly, rotten world. I couldn't live in it or be a part of it. I'll take the ranch and make my own way, and I claim the right to do it. I want my own life and the freedom to live it. I gave the best that was in me to civilization, and civilization kicked me out, robbed me of a career, made my home a hell, and so I say—to hell with civilization."

McCloud was surprised. He was an emotional man too, and he thrilled to the sweep of this violence. He would have liked to take the boy in his arms and cry: "Oh, Absalom, my son, my son!" Instead, he held him away, shifted his own ground, and sought the joints of the other's harness. Hal's allusion to his home seemed to offer an opening.

"This wife in London, this unhappy home—perhaps it is an appointed bar-

rier!”

”Barriers are surmounted—swept away!”

Hal was standing now and he looked audacious and puissant. He looked the master of his own destiny. The man who had passed through the fire, whose proud hopes and ambitions lay in broken heaps where the car of destiny had passed, looked at him in admiration.

”Yes, barriers are swept away; but only by those who humbly and patiently kneel down before them. Perhaps Infinite Wisdom stays your hand, to keep you from bringing sorrow to this helpless Indian woman whom you love, and to her children.”

”Never!” was the answer, in the pride and strength of youth, in the consciousness of capacity, in the joy of a child of battle, the offspring of warriors, who had sung their triumph under torture. It was a wide gulf that separated this fierce courage from the white-faced saint who had learned in patience and humility.

”It’s a feeble-minded man who keeps picking at the irrevocable,” was McCloud’s reply, more to himself than to the savage before him. ”Suppose some day you grew tired of all this and wanted to go back and be a part of the world of convention, of fashion and culture?”

Hal had no argument to make to this, but it had no appeal, no meaning. He only made a gesture of negation and impatience.

”Oh, my boy,” said McCloud helplessly; ”you’re a rebel.”

”Well, America was made by rebels,” said the other with a triumphant smile.

The minister put his hands on the boy’s shoulders and looked into his eyes as David might have done to his wayward son.

”Well, God bless you for a fine, glorious, dangerous rebel.”

The sun was up, a new day was born, all things seemed possible as Big Bill hove into sight.

”Say, Boss,” he drawled; ”McShay’s out here with the toughest looking gang of ruffians—”

”Let ’em in, Bill,” cried Hal joyously, his eyes dancing with the excitement of his conflict with McCloud.

”Turn ’em loose on the ranch?” said the foreman doubtfully. ”That outfit? Gee whiz!”

”May need ’em, Bill.”

”Most worse’n Injins,” grumbled the old man as he went away, doubt, hesitation, protest in the stoop and shrug of his huge bulk.

Bill’s advent had brought them both back to earth, to the business in hand. McCloud spoke first.

”If they would let you keep this woman you could not. You are too near to

her. You must go away.”

”Now?” said the radiant rebel; ”when she has come to me? When she is mine? Mine?”

”You must go away,” said the other, relentless as Fate.

”She’s mine. I’ll take her and hold her against the world.”

”No, you’ll hold her against *yourself*.”

Hal sank feebly down on the bench and clasped his hands in a helpless way.

”I can’t. I can’t give her up! I can’t.”

McCloud came to him and put his hand on him.

”Hal, my son,” he said affectionately; ”I’ve sometimes wondered why I had to give up my work and come out here to die. Perhaps it was to be your living conscience. To this woman you seem divinely appointed, like the Moquitch Mountains. I’ve seen her soul go out of herself and stand expectant before you with outstretched arms. Her temperament, her environment, the very strength and weakness of her character put her in your hands. You know that without stopping to question or think she has laid herself at your feet. Are you going to listen to the passion that desires, that demands, that takes, or is your soul going to rise up within you crowned and glorified?”

Hal buried his face in his hands and groaned. He looked about for some way of escape, but there stood the weak sick man, inevitable and unanswerable. He felt bewildered but resentful. Why shouldn’t he be happy? Why should he be expected to give up his one chance, the only chance he had ever had, would ever have?

”We’ll go away into the mountains,” he exclaimed, ”away from your artificial rules and regulations! We’ll go away.”

”You can’t go where obligation will not meet you.”

”Why should I let *you* decide for me what my obligations are?” he said rudely, fiercely.

”Now you’re a savage, but you’ve got white blood in your veins, blood that has bowed the knee to duty, bowed the back to burdens, bowed the head to God. Now I thank heaven you’re a half-breed. You couldn’t go back to the blanket savage if you wanted to. You’ve got to live up to your higher self. You have assumed obligations to these two women. You can’t avoid the consequences. The heart of this Indian woman has gone out to you because you are part of a social order to which she aspires, that represents to her her better self. You can’t drag her down and back to the blanket Indian. She would hate you. If you are brutal I must say brutal things to you. You can’t force her to apologize to her children, to tell them they have no standing before the law and before society; that they face the inevitable social order with an inevitable stain. You can’t flee from obligation. No man liveth to himself nor for himself. And this other woman—you have in the

past assumed obligations to her. They have become irksome. You say you have a right to be free. Well, then, you must prove it. I don't believe in divorce, but that is a matter between a man and his Maker. Happiness, permanent happiness, is worth fighting for, worth waiting for. If you stay here you will steal it and pay the penalty of the thief, a penalty that will fall heaviest upon those you love best in the world. Again I say, you couldn't keep this woman if they would let you. She must go away or you must."

McCloud looked at the lad, silent but unconvinced, and then he lifted up his heart in secret prayer that God would keep this soul unspoiled.

CHAPTER XV

"Howd'y, Parson! Hello, boy!"

The diversion made by the appearance of McShay was a most welcome one to the youth who felt "baffled and beaten and blown about by the winds of the wilderness of doubt." Hal felt helpless in the hands of McCloud with his metaphysical verities, so fixed, unalterable, and unanswerable, but McShay carried with him something that was tangible and workable. Shadows fled before him. Subtleties disappeared before the sun of his genial optimism, or materialized in rain or snow or ice, assumed a form that could be reckoned with. The presence of the man of action was an enormous relief to Hal. McShay's intuitions were quick and he no longer spoke to the clergyman of his health, but he swept him with a searching glance and took his hand gently in his iron grip as he would have taken the hand of a woman.

"You sent me word you needed help," he said to Hal.

"Yes."

"Things is awful dull over our way; wouldn't like to miss anything. I brought over a few of the boys. It's Wah-na-gi; ain't it?"

McShay was adaptable. It was perhaps a large part of his success in life. He could be vulgar and common with the vulgar and common, or he could follow those who went up into the mountains and looked into a far country, and whether with those who grovelled or those who stood on the heights, each kind felt he was one of them, and there was no hypocrisy in this. He understood and sympathized with both. There was nothing offensive in the way he said:

"It's Wah-na-gi."

"How did you know it was Wah-na-gi?"

"Why, son," and a broad smile spread over the cowman's face, "everybody on the range knows you're sweet on Wah-na-gi. Presumably, too, you was not unaware that the amiable Ladd had threatened to shoot you on sight, and that the gentle Appah has promised himself your scalp as a Christmas present!"

"I knew I wasn't exactly popular at the Agency just now."

"And so you just went over and took her? Well, it was a fool thing to do; but it's kind of appealin', Parson, it's appealin'. What was that young feller's name—none of your *Eastern* tenderfeet—the young feller that come out of the West?"

"Rode out of the West?" corrected McCloud with a twinkle in his eye. "That hero was a Scotchman, Mike."

"Couldn't be, Parson; couldn't be. The Scotchman will risk his neck for religion or a pinch of change, but not for the ladies. No, I'll bet he was on the border, and mostly on our side. But this feller here!" and he put his hand on the shoulder of the boy with unmistakable liking; "an Englishman, too! Beats all, don't it? Anyway he loves a fight. Must have a dash of the Irish in him somewhere, even if it's the damn Protestant variety; savin' your presence, Parson. Sure, I took to him when he put it all over Ladd, and when I count a man my friend, I ain't over-nice as to his failin's. Say, it's too bad he's an Englishman, ain't it? He's saved by the Injin in him, I guess. That's the truth."

"We were just discussing race prejudice," said McCloud.

"Don't believe in it. Nuthin' to it," ejaculated the Irishman warmly.

"A mon's a mon for a' that, eh, McShay?" suggested the countryman of Burns with a smile.

"No use for narrer-minded prejudice, but the *English—excuse me!*" Mike's face and body united in a convulsion that was a three-volume exegesis of the traditional Irish point of view.

"Sure, it's a toss up," he continued. "The English rule Ireland. The Scotch rule England. The Irish rule America, and to hell with the rest of it—it ain't worth rulin'." The preacher laughed heartily. "You know, Hal, me boy," continued Mike, "the parson's human like the rest of us. He don't look like a duck as has swallowed a croquet ball just because a little language slips out now and then. For a gospel-foreman he's aces! Well, as I was sayin' when you interrupted me, we ain't come over to fight, we ain't a-lookin' fer a fight, but if there's goin' to be one, we'd hate to miss it. Does it look encouragin'?"

"I'm afraid there's going to be trouble over Wah-na-gi," sighed the preacher. "I have made a formal application to the Secretary of the Interior to adopt her, but—"

He did not say it, and Hal was grateful. Having expressed himself without

reservation to the boy, he had the wisdom to know when to let the good seed alone. A worldly twinkle lit up McShay's eyes as he said:

"You've made formal application to the Secretary of the Interior. It's a noble move, Parson, and you'll hear from it about the time Wah-na-gi is somebody's great-grandmother, and in the meantime you don't suppose these amiable feller-citizens is goin' to sit down and twirl their thumbs."

"Any news from Washington, Mike?" asked Hal.

"Well, me boy, our fight against Ladd is goin' to precipitate the whole thing. You see, instead of communicatin' in a genteel whisper they're beginnin' to shout in Washington, and when they shout in Washington it makes the God-fearin' business man nervous and hysterical. I guess we ought to let this agitation against Ladd drop."

"Why, we can't do that," protested Hal warmly. "Why let it drop?"

"Well, son, here's the situation. We got a bill before Congress, ain't we? To make good our title if it ain't good already. Well, we're a menace to the Trust. They may queer our bill, but if they do, they got to prove the lands are Government lands, and that shuts *them* out, except for a lease from the Injins, and that we can make cost 'em a pretty penny, maybe we can queer it altogether. If everything is quiet in Washington our bill has a good chance, because we can make terms with the Trust to *let it go through* by agreein' to sell them our rights if it does go through. We are bound to git something! How much we can make 'em pay depends on how close we stick together. Now, if we put up a fight against Ladd in Washington, Ladd is the Trust's agent, they're goin' to stand behind him, and we've got a big fight on our hands, and if we get to screamin' at each other in Washington, why, every newsboy in America'll know all about it."

"Suppose he does?" asked the preacher, deeply interested.

"Well, the present Secretary of the Interior has intimated that he might on investigation insist on these lands being held for the benefit of the *general public*. The 'general public'! What do you think of that? Did you ever hear anything so funny in your life?"

"Why, that doesn't strike me as funny, McShay," said the preacher. "That seems to be a very just and splendid solution of the difficulty."

"And where would we come in?" yelled the Irishman.

"You're part of the general public."

"Hah!" he snorted, then turning to Hal; "ain't parsons the limit?"

"I know Secretary Walker slightly," added McCloud. "He strikes me as a strong man."

"I'll tell you how strong he is," bellowed McShay, now thoroughly aroused. "He can't hold his job. That's how much the 'general public' amounts to. He don't please anybody. He's got to resign."

"Well, you may quit the firing line, Mac," said Hal quietly. "But I promised Ladd to have his scalp, and I'd hate to break a promise I'd made to Ladd."

"You ain't practical, either," shouted McShay. "That's the Injin in you."

And the parson was in a dilemma too. He didn't know whether to praise the boy for being honest or reprove him for being vindictive.

"Boss, Curley's come in with the mail," said Bill as he came to Hal and handed him a telegram. "Nuthin' but this."

Curley completely recovered, but minus a right arm, was now one of Hal's retainers, and like all converts he was a fanatic where the owner of the Red Butte Ranch was concerned.

"I hope it's news from Washington," said Hal. "No, it's from London."

It read: "Your father ill. Come back immediately. Rundall."

"It's from my father's physician," explained Hal, handing the cable to McCloud.

"And say, Boss," said Bill, trying to keep the worst news to the last, "Ladd's out here."

"Ain't a-losin' any time, is he?" commented McShay.

"And he's got quite a few Injins with him," added Bill slowly. "In fact, they got us surrounded, I reckon." And Bill returned to his post.

"Go out and see Ladd, will you?" Hal said to his two friends. "And let me know what he has to propose? It'll give me a moment to think."

"Come on, Parson," said McShay, and he took the preacher affectionately by the arm. "By the way, would you say that Ladd was a *Scotch* name?"

McCloud shot him a sly glance.

"I shouldn't wonder, McShay; but I don't think the yellow canine mixture is *monopolized* by the Scotch, do you?"

"Oh, ain't you touchy about your damned old race?"

And the two queer pals walked away arm in arm.

"Wah-na-gi, come here, please."

Hal called gently at the door. She did not hear. It was a shame to wake her. He called again and then again. When she did awaken it was with a start, her heart throbbing violently until she saw him, then she breathed evenly with an assured smile. He thought she had never looked so beautiful as she stood holding to the support of the portico, and then he noticed for the first time that she was dressed like her people, and the brave flash and glitter of the barbaric colors stirred something within him; something strange, mystical. He felt the touch of an unseen hand, heard the sound of a silent voice. He thrilled to vague impulses, to a half-remembered strain that might have been a love song or a lullaby, that had in it the note of the primeval woods and the vastness of the sky and plain. He forgot the exigency of the moment, the dangers that confronted them, and

said: "Wah-na-gi, wait here for a moment. I've something I want to give you."

And he disappeared into the house leaving her wondering and alone. She, too, was conscious of some occult force to whose vibration she thrilled. When Hal woke her she was quivering with the ragged remnants of a dream. Nat-u-ritch had come to her and said: "You will be very happy. My son loves you." Then John McCloud had come and led her away to the Land of Shadows. Here were shadow streams and shadow hills, shadow wickiups, shadow horses and cattle, shadow lovers and shadow children. Then Hal had come and called her away, and she woke to see him.

This dream came back to her as she waited. There was the grave of Nat-u-ritch. She walked over to it. The gravestone was very simple like her life, a rough boulder torn from the bed of a mountain torrent. It displayed no date of birth or death, no line of eulogy, no word of sentiment, just her name in rude lettering cut into the face of the rock, but to any one who knew her tragic story it seemed appropriate and impressive. To Wah-na-gi it made the whole dingy, desolate place sacred. Nat-u-ritch seemed very real as she stood there by her grave. She knew Nat-u-ritch's story and understood it. The resignation of the Indian woman toiling patiently through life knowing that she was unloved, finding consolation in her child; then bewildered, unable to understand why her baby should be taken from her arms and given to a strange white woman to be taken into a far country; then the tall chief bringing his dead daughter in his arms and holding her out to the white man, all that was left of the little savage who was wife and mother, with the weapon of destruction in one hand and her child's little moccasins in the other. Nat-u-ritch was very real to Wah-na-gi just then. Her spirit brooded near.

"Wah-na-gi, I want you to have these as a keepsake."

Hal held something in his hands at which he looked intently. Something glittered and gleamed like her buckskin dress. They were a tiny pair of child's moccasins.

"They were mine," he said, "when I was a little boy running around here on the ranch. Those were happy days," he added dreamily. "My father gave them to me before I left England. He took them from my dead mother's hand. When my father gave them to me I knew I had seen them before, often and often in my dreams. I used to think it was Nat-u-ritch, my little mother, holding them out to me. Then it seemed to me to be you, calling to me, calling me to leave the cities, the limits, the din, the make-believe, the murderous crowds; calling me to the desert, the naked rocks, and the far spaces, the brooding snows, the camp-fires, the songs of the pines, and the angry rapids; calling me to my own, to live my life in the open, and be a man among men."

His eye was fixed on space and he spoke like one hypnotized or in a dream.

She knew it was the son of Nat-u-ritch speaking to her, speaking to his own soul.

"Perhaps—you would like them," he added. "I would like you to have them," and he held them toward her. "It's the best I have to give. They are my 'medicine,' my 'sacred bundle.'"

Tears were gathering in her eyes as she took and kissed them.

"And now John McCloud says I must go back to all that—to the land and the life where I was an idler, a drunkard, and a failure."

Her heart stood still.

"Go back! Why?"

"Because I love you, because I want you, because I can't live without you."

She was in his arms and knew the supremest joy of her life.

"And nobody is going to take you from me," he added defiantly.

He was fighting McCloud, doing battle with himself. He had forgotten the agent until McShay entered with a face graver than his wont.

"Well, what does he say, Mike?"

"He insists on talkin' things over with you in person."

"Oh, well, bring him in. Wah-na-gi," he turned to her as the Irishman disappeared, "*Ladd is here.*"

CHAPTER XVI

Wan-na-gi shrank back, her eyes set with terror.

"Don't let him take me away. I couldn't go back there. When I sent to you I had stood all I could. Don't let that man put his hand on me. You thought he was protecting me from Appah. I didn't tell you—I was ashamed. It was because, because—"

"He wanted you for himself."

"Yes."

"He won't take you back; not if I live. Now listen and don't be afraid. My men believe in me, better still, in my luck. McShay's men want nothing better than a chance to even scores with Ladd. We have the position. Ladd isn't a soldier. He doesn't know this game. I do. He couldn't take the ranch if he had twice as many braves, except at a fearful cost—"

"My own people!" she said, as if it just occurred to her for the first time. "We shall kill our own people!" This time she included him.

"You are my people," he said passionately. "You are my country, my all. Nothing else matters. Go in, Wah-na-gi, and don't be afraid."

"We must not kill our own people. They're your people as well as mine."

"A fight's a fight, Wah-na-gi. Leave it to me."

"I didn't think of this when I called to you. I was tortured, mad, desperate, and I cried out for help. It was a mistake. I—I—yes, I will go back."

"No, that would be horrible; I could not let you go back. We don't know what may happen, but I could not do that. Won't you leave it to me? Trust to me?"

She raised her eyes to him with a look of serene abnegation, of exalted self-surrender, that transported him, then sobered him.

He took her in his arms, kissed her as a brother might, and she went within.

"Howd'y, Calthorpe?" said Ladd easily as he entered with McShay and McCloud.

"How are you, Mr. Ladd?"

"I want to talk to Calthorpe alone, if you don't mind," said the agent to the other two.

"Certainly," said Hal; "these gentlemen will step into the house for a moment."

The Irishman drew the preacher toward the upper wing of the house, keeping his eye steadily on the agent who sauntered away. Suddenly he stopped.

"On second thought you may have him," he said *sotto voce* to McCloud.

"Suppose we divide the responsibility," responded the preacher with a grave face, "and call him—Scotch-Irish?"

And they went within to continue the animated discussion as to the relative contributions of each country to the world's greatness.

As Ladd turned the two men faced each other.

"I understand," said Hal easily, "that you threatened to shoot me on sight. Well, I'm on sight."

"Well," said the other calmly, "it may come to that, and it may not. That's up to you."

"Sit down," and Hal motioned to a seat with a smile.

"Thanks!" and Ladd sat on the harrow and nursed his knee in a careless off-hand way. "The Indians are very mad. Abduction of women is a serious matter, isn't it? Even a mean, dispirited race will fight for its women. Well, her people think you stole Wah-na-gi."

Hal thought for a moment and then as he did not see any advantage in dodging the issue, he said:

"Yes, I took her. She's here."

"Oh, you admit it?" said the agent with elation. "Well, that's something."

Then perhaps you'll be good enough to hand her over to me."

"Well, no, not exactly. You see she's claimed my protection."

"*Your* protection?" responded Ladd with a cynical laugh. "That's rather feeble, isn't it? Well, the Indians claim my protection; protection for their women, for their homes!"

To Hal, who knew the extent of Wah-na-gi's obligations to her own people and their supreme indifference to the girl, this buncombe was peculiarly exasperating, but he did not honor it with a reply.

Ladd rose and came over to him. Hal was seated and the other bent down over him: "Now, you're no fool, Calthorpe; you know that you've done a wild, reckless, impossible thing, and you also know that you can't get away with it," and the smooth, cool, even manner gave place to the aggressive attitude of the bully who felt secure in his position. "Now, after what happened at the powwow over at the Agency, no one State is big enough for you and me."

"Yes," assented Hal complacently, "I've realized that you and I were a bit crowded."

"You're in wrong this time, Calthorpe, and I've got you where I want you," and Ladd chuckled over the prospect.

In the cold light of day and in the scrutiny of second thought and under hostile criticism, Hal had a sickening sense that his act was crazy, quixotic, indefensible, and yet what could he have done otherwise? Could he as a man have left this woman he loved to be hounded into self-destruction or dishonor? She had called to him in her desperation. Could he have turned a deaf ear to that cry? He had as usual acted on impulse. Having at very great risk effected her rescue, was he to face the ultimate and inevitable and hand her back to these wolves? It was inconceivable. One step involved another. He must go on, trusting to chance, a perilous trust.

"What is the idea?" asked Ladd with sarcastic tolerance. "The Government, the Army, and the American nation is behind me."

Hal knew that this was too true.

"I am responsible to the Government and the people for this girl. And you come over and take her away from me by force."

"Because you have betrayed your trust."

"I was in the very act of affording her protection from the man of whom she complained when you stole her. Well, what are you going to do with her now that you've got her?"

Hal did not quail under Ladd's merciless gaze, but inwardly he writhed.

What was he going to do? Oh, if he could take this wretch by the throat and say: "She's mine—my wife, my wife!"

Ladd waited, then added: "Why, if you try to keep her, we'll wipe you out

of existence—you and your ranch.”

”That sounds like a threat.”

”We’ll make it good. Now you and McShay and your crowd have been getting busy at Washington! You have been trying to get me removed, haven’t you?”

”We have.”

”And you haven’t done it, have you?”

”Not yet, but we have hopes; we have hopes, Brother Ladd.”

”It didn’t take you long to discover that I had a few friends in Washington myself, did it?”

”No, we found that you were a patriot who had all his life sacrificed his own interests to the good of his country. We found it was first Washington, then Lincoln, and now Ladd.”

”Your only excuse is that you’re a kid. You make it hard for me to keep my temper. You make it hard for me to let you out of the hole you’ve put yourself in.”

”Let me out?”

”Yes, I can let you out or I can drown you in it. You want this woman.”

”So do you.”

The two men stood eye to eye for a tense moment. Then Ladd shrugged his shoulders and returned to the business in hand.

”Cadger has decided that I cannot afford such a luxury under the circumstances, and perhaps I can’t. He thinks, and perhaps he’s right, that you and I could do a whole lot better than fight each other. If you think so too, I’ll meet you half-way.”

”What’s your game, Mr. Agent?”

”Well, I can arrest Appah and take these Indians home, and—forget it. Now you call off your crowd in Washington and I’ll call off mine here. What do you say?”

”Your offer takes me by surprise. I’ll have to submit it to McShay.”

As Hal walked to the house it went through his brain that this was a very quick solution of a very dangerous situation. It was obvious that it would meet the worldly views of McShay. That astute politician had just expressed the belief that the war on Ladd was bad policy. It also shot through his brain that it would not coincide with the unworldly views of McCloud. Should he call out McShay alone? It is useless to deny that he was tempted. In fact, he was on the Mount of Temptation and was to miss no phase of that ordeal.

Ladd hesitated. ”Why, you’re not going to—Can’t this be settled between you and me?” he suggested nervously.

”You two Macs come out here,” called Hal through the door.

"These men are interested with me in this fight. I can't act without them. Gentlemen," said Hal to the Irishman and the Scotchman as they came forward with an air of expectancy; "the agent has made me a proposition. Unless we agree to call off the fight against him in Washington, or I surrender Wah-na-gi, he will turn Appah and his friends loose on us and make the ranch a dust heap. That's about it."

"Now, ain't that nice?" said McShay with the air of a pleased child. "Now, Parson, you have an introduction to practical politics. Well, son," he continued, turning to Hal; "it's up to you to decide. Of course my constituents will say I was bought off, but it wouldn't be the first time they've said unpleasant things about me, and I'll see you through this either way. To me and the parson you're on the square with regards to this girl, but we're only two people and we ain't a workin' majority. Ladd's got a strangle holt on you in a way, so if you want to buy him off—well, I'll stand in."

"Thank you, Mike. What do you say, John?"

"What you have done, you have done. For the protection of this fine Indian girl, well, trust her to God. Omnipotence can care for her."

"Well, Parson," said Mike doubtfully, "just for the sake of argument; why not leave Ladd to Omnipotence? Think the agent's too many for Omnipotence?"

The clergyman ignored the irrepressible Irishman.

"You have asserted," he went on, "that Agent Ladd is unfit for his responsible position, that he has been untrue to his trust. If you go back on that you make yourselves liars and frauds, and continue this man's tyranny, and fasten it on these helpless people. There are those who are looking to you, trusting to you, who have enlisted under you in this fight. You can't betray them. You can't juggle with the right. You can't do it."

"That's the answer, Mr. Agent," said Hal quietly.

"Ain't parsons the limit?" murmured McShay to himself.

"Then of course you've decided to hand Wah-na-gi over to me," said Ladd with menace.

"I'll see you damned first," was Hal's reply.

"Then you'll be responsible for hell cut loose," and the agent started to go.

"See here; wait a minute!" cried McShay intercepting him. "I've got it, and I can fix it so as to satisfy everybody."

He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a coin. "I'll match you for it—to see whether we give up the fight against you in Washington, or you throw up the sponge here. Now that's fair, Parson. That sort of puts it up to Providence, don't you see?"

"We're wasting time," snapped Ladd, now quivering with rage. "I'll give you ten minutes to produce Wah-na-gi or take the consequences."

The participants in this scene had been so intent on the business in hand that they were oblivious to the noise of horses' hoofs beating the plain and the rattle of accoutrements as a couple of troops of United States cavalry swept through the Indian lines and the cowboy outposts without stopping to say by your leave, and came to a sudden and spectacular halt just back of the grave of Nat-u-ritch.

Captain Baker dismounted and advanced to the group in front of the house.

"What is the meaning of this, gentlemen?" he asked in a clear, ringing voice that had the cut of a sabre in it. His mouth was set, his face firm and four square, determination and authority written in every angle. He looked from one to the other and waited for the answer. Meanwhile Appah, in war bonnet and war-paint, pushed his pony to the background as if determined not to be ignored in the settlement of the dispute. Big Bill followed him.

It was obvious to Hal and McShay that Baker's advent was not just what Ladd had planned.

"I didn't call on you, Captain," said the agent, "because my Indian police are quite sufficient."

"Police?" said Captain Baker, eying the other sternly. "Why, you've got the whole tribe out here. Some one sent me a wire that a fight was on at Red Butte Ranch between the settlers and the Indians."

The Irishman grinned.

"Sure, I took the liberty of invitin' you, Captain! Knew you wouldn't like to miss a little thing like that."

After the asphalt conference Baker's opinion of the agent wasn't printable, and now he looked him over with unmistakable disapproval. That Ladd hadn't appealed to him or notified him of the trouble seemed to him most suspicious.

"Well, there isn't going to be any scrap between the settlers and the Indians. I'll see to that."

Knowing that he could not move without orders, he had telegraphed to head-quarters.

"Mr. Ladd, your Indians are off the Reservation. I've instructions to put them back."

Ladd saw that he could expect no favors from the officer.

"Correct, Captain," he answered, meeting the challenge.

"And I call upon you to see to it that they go back, *all of them*."

"I'll do that fast enough."

Wah-na-gi could stand the strain no longer. She had crouched within the door of the cabin trying to follow the course of events which were to decide her fate: hearing something, missing much, trying to fill in the gaps, scanning the faces to read there the answer that meant so much to her, every nerve and muscle tense, her heart pounding like an engine carrying too heavy a load. She seemed

to be suffocating in the house, and she walked out and faced them. Every eye was turned upon her. She saw the troopers cleared for action, bronzed, clean-cut figures, with no frills or gold braid, their service khaki covered with alkali dust, weather stained, sitting potential on their smoking horses, so much bigger than the Indian ponies or the cowboys' mustangs, waiting for the word of this quiet young man who eyed her sternly. What was all this fuss about? Nothing but an Indian woman! nothing but an Indian woman! That was what she seemed to feel.

Realizing that the Army would cast the deciding vote, the Indians had broken their formation, and the cowboys had come in from the cover of the out-buildings and their hastily constructed intrenchments and were standing about in groups awaiting developments. There was Appah's hawk-like face, the agent's penetrating stare! Big Bill and McShay! So many cruel, hostile eyes! The air seemed filled with poisoned arrows.

She slipped without design between McCloud and Hal, like a hunted animal seeking shelter. Hal felt her fear, her craving for love and shelter, and put his hand on her arm.

The agent advanced toward the officer and pointed at her.

"Calthorpe, here, has kidnapped an Indian woman, and holds her by force against me, the agent, and against her relatives and friends."

Appah cut his pony with a quirt and pushed to the front.

"My squaw—my woman!" he said, pointing too.

So that was it. All this fuss and fury over a woman, an Indian woman at that. The captain was beginning to feel distinctly annoyed. He and his men in a forced march in the broiling sun and the choking dust! A squaw! However, as he took another good look at the Indian Helen, perhaps there were mitigating circumstances—she was pretty; she was damn pretty.

"Your woman?" he said without looking at Appah, and deciding on the spot that she was entirely too good for that copper-colored malefactor.

"Are you Appah's squaw?" he asked Wah-na-gi, but in a kinder tone than he intended and which he felt was unmistakably unofficial. He was a young man and rather careful of his dignity.

"No," she replied with decision.

"Whether she is or is not," said Ladd sharply; "she's the Government's ward—my ward. I'm responsible for her, and I demand her."

The force of this was unanswerable. The captain paused for a moment. Then he addressed Hal, whom he liked.

"I don't see, Calthorpe, on what theory you take and detain this woman, unless," and he paused again, "unless you claim that she is *your* wife."

It was Hal's turn to feel that the air was filled with poisoned arrows. Ev-

ery eye was upon him. Every one waited. It was *his* turn to speak. There was a clergyman standing beside him who in a half-dozen words could make them man and wife. It was perfectly true he had taken her from the care of the representative of the Government for *what?* The pause was interminable. The silence was maddening. Why didn't some one say something? His position was grotesque, impossible, cowardly. If he shrank from becoming a squaw-man, why didn't he leave the Indian woman to her own life and her own people? He felt as if an armor-piercing shell had burst in his brain, leaving his mind in ruins. He couldn't speak. He hadn't two consecutive words to put together. McCloud, the only one present who knew the truth, had been so conscious of the boy's predicament and so deeply grieved with and for him that he, too, shrank back into silence. The pause was obvious therefore before the clergyman crossed to the officer and began to speak.

"Thank God some one was talking," was Hal's thought, though he did not hear what McCloud was saying.

"Captain Baker," said the clergyman, "it is common report that certain interests are trying to get the asphalt lands belonging to the Indians and that Appah is betraying his people for a price. Wah-na-gi is that price. As you know, I have lived on the Agency, and I know of my own knowledge that this woman has been persecuted by this man with the connivance of the agent, and her honor and perhaps her life threatened. In order to protect her I have made an application to the Secretary of the Interior to adopt her as my ward."

"With her consent?" asked the officer.

"Oh, yes, yes," cried Wah-na-gi.

"Where are the woman's parents?"

"Dead," she replied.

"Any near relations?"

"None."

"Captain Baker!" cried the agent, seeing the drift of this; "you haven't any discretionary powers in this case. I am the Indian agent and I call on you in the interests of peace to restore this woman to the Agency, to my care."

The captain paused a moment, shrugged his shoulders, and then said with obvious reluctance: "That is absolutely correct, gentlemen. I have no discretion in this matter. If the agent insists, she must go back to the Agency."

Well, that was finished. There was to be no fight and no reviewing of that ultimatum. Every one except those immediately concerned drew a sigh of relief, and Baker walked back to give some instructions to his orderly.

What was that? His quick ear detected something.

"What is it, Sergeant?" he asked of his non-commissioned officer whose gaze was fixed intently on the road by which they had come.

"Someone from the fort, sir, as I make out."

"She must go back to the Agency."

That was the final word.

So that was the end. The agent had said it. There was the Army to enforce it, and back of these troops the might of millions.

The Indian agent was an autocrat, a combination of king, judge, administrator, chief of police, doctor, engineer; in fact, it was a position requiring powers almost unlimited and corresponding responsibilities, and this impossible combination of inconceivable virtues was supposed to be tempted into the service of the Government by a salary of one thousand five hundred dollars a year or less. That these unique powers sometimes fell into incompetent or unworthy hands was inevitable, that the consequences were sometimes tragic, likewise inevitable.

"She must go back to the Agency."

Hal heard it in a numb way. Wah-na-gi heard it. Hal had a wild mad impulse to kill Ladd where he stood, and his fingers sought the handle of his gun, to feel the restraining touch of John McCloud.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and incline not to thine own understanding," whispered the calm voice of faith in his ear.

"Come on," said Ladd; "we must be moving."

The troopers made way for the new arrival who spurred his tired horse to the side of the young commander.

"Despatches from department head-quarters, sir," he said, touching his hat. "They arrived at the post just after you left."

Few people had been privileged to see Baker hurry. He was a deliberate body. He took his time now. In fact, he took so much time that Ladd, who was nervous and irritable, finally recalled him to the situation by saying:

"We have a long, hard ride, Captain; whenever you're ready."

"Yes—y-e-s," and Baker drew out the little word until it threatened to break. "I haven't forgotten. Thank you for reminding me."

Then he read the papers all over again. By this time the air seemed to become electrical again, and the little group into which the spectators had divided were hypnotized by the soldier's preoccupation. The attention became concentric. Talking stopped. Everybody waited on the captain.

Finally he said with great deliberation:

"Mr. Ladd, you will probably find similar instructions on your return to the Agency. These are orders from General Ruggles, Department Commander at Denver, directing me to relieve you of your office, pending an investigation, and ordering me to assume your duties until further notice."

Ladd was a man of quick and violent temper, and his hand instinctively felt for his gun.

The husky cavalryman looked him in the eye and said very slowly:

"If you pull a gun on the uniform I wear, you'll go back to Washington as damaged goods. You'd better hit the trail," and he turned away.

"I'm not afraid to go to Washington," said the agent, white with anger, "and I'm not afraid of an investigation," and he walked deliberately over to Calthorpe and said: "I owe this to you, Calthorpe."

"I told you," was the affable reply, "that I'd camp on your trail until I had your official head."

"I owe a lot to you, and I've got a damned good memory." And the agent turned on his heel and disappeared.

McCloud was the first to recover from his surprise and turn the situation to account.

"So you are acting agent, Captain Baker. Then you *have* discretionary powers *now*. This young woman is like my own daughter. I'm sure the Government will eventually let me adopt her. Will you trust her to me?"

"Dr. McCloud," said the soldier, a bit embarrassed by the strange situation, "we all know you. Everybody round here knows you. I guess I'll take a chance on you."

This disposition of the bone of contention seemed to the captain like a special providence, and he was immensely relieved.

"My squaw—my woman!"

Everybody had forgotten Appah.

"You get out of here. Savey? Go on! Get your people home."

Appah looked at the young officer for a moment. The Indian respects our soldiers. The men who fought the Indians have as a rule been just to them, have kept their promises to them when they could, and the Indian fears our soldiers and also trusts them.

"Go on or I'll have you in the guard-house."

Appah turned his horse's head and rode away, but ugly and surly.

Baker was in the saddle and his men were already on the move when he turned and said to the clergyman:

"When people get to scrappin' over a young and pretty woman, I guess it's about time for Bobby Baker to pass up the job of chaperon. You got your work cut out for you, Doctor, and by the holy smoke I'll hold you accountable."

"Thank you, Captain; thank you. I'll try to be worthy of your confidence," and Baker rode after his men.

McShay's eyes were twinkling as he gazed after the boys in khaki.

"Parson," he said, "the Lord and the little old picayune U.S.A. is a fine workin' combination, ain't it?"

And the Irishman went out to round up his desperadoes, almost consoled

for missing the fight by the sight of his adopted country's flag and her fighting men. Perhaps it's an inherited impulse, but even the man of peace stirs to the sound of the bugle, the beat of the drum, and the brave glitter of a fluttering flag.

McCloud turned to see the troopers round up the Indians like a bunch of cattle and start them back to the Agency.

"Wah-na-gi," he said without turning, "after to-day I think you can look on that flag as your flag. For once at least it has stood for protection instead of oppression to the Indian. You will learn to love it too, some day."

As she did not reply he turned to see her in Hal's arms, held close in a fierce embrace, the young man murmuring incoherently: "You are safe, and you are mine—mine—mine!"

They were alone, these three. McCloud regarded the two young people for a moment with sympathy, then he advanced to the side of Hal, touched him on the elbow, and said:

"This is yours."

It was the cable from the London physician about his father's illness.

"Oh, yes," Hal said in a dazed way; "I had forgotten."

"You can't forget; you can't avoid; you can't postpone. You must choose, and you must choose now."

It was hard not to be allowed a moment in which to enjoy the fierce ecstasy of triumph, of possession. Hal's life went out of him. He sank down on the rough bench and buried his face in his hands.

McCloud continued: "I have assumed certain obligations to this child which I consider sacred. I know that I have no power over her, no influence with her, except what you may choose to give me. I leave you together to decide this for yourselves, and I pray that you may deny yourselves the present and trust God for the future," and he went within to lie down to rest, for the strain and the excitement had been a great drain on his small store of energy.

They were alone together, their fate in their own hands. Wah-na-gi came over to him and put her hand on his bowed head with a caress.

"It shall be as you wish."

"No, my girl, it cannot be as I wish. It cannot be."

The acquired powers of review, of analysis, of restraint were forever battling within him with the impulses of the savage. He didn't understand it himself, this tumult, this confusion, this irresolution.

"I'm all wrong somehow," he cried bitterly. "McCloud is right. I'm not fit to be trusted with a love like yours. I'd soil it or crush and destroy it. I want you; I want you like a madman. I hate McCloud because he stands between us. I can't wait and toil and suffer. I don't know how, and yet I know I must."

"Whatever you decide will be right."

"It's that makes it impossible. You trust me."

"Of course," she said with a smile.

"You don't know that I'm a coward or a fool or both. I must live up to your belief in me, and I can't. I haven't the will to go back, to leave everything I want and go back to everything I loathe. McCloud says happiness is worth fighting for, worth waiting for, but I want to take it. How do I know if I let it slip from my grasp now that I'll ever see it again? How do I know that if I do go now I'll ever see *you* again? Oh, Wah-na-gi, worse than all, I haven't had the courage to destroy your belief in me."

"You couldn't do that."

"You have known for a long time that I loved you. You have wondered, of course you have wondered, why I never asked you to be my wife. You saw me stand here like a helpless imbecile when I ought to have stood out and said proudly: 'She is mine. Touch her if you dare. She is my wife.' And I couldn't, I couldn't, because I am married. My wife is living in England."

Wah-na-gi drew a long breath. Then she sat down on a bench beside him.

"It's always like that," she said with the fatalism of her race. "Happiness goes out like one's breath on a frosty night."

She dropped into the figure of speech of her people.

"There sleeps Nat-u-ritch," she thought. "She, too, loved a white man, and there she lies dreaming. Did God make the Indian woman too? I wonder why?"

She always thought of him as a white man.

"The white woman is waiting for you."

"No, she cares for me less even than I care for her. If I go back it will be to be free."

McCloud appeared at the door of the cabin. He had tried to rest but he carried with him the sense of the conflict which he had left behind. He must know the result. Was it victory or defeat?

"Well, Hal, my son," he said gently; "which is it? Do you stay or do you go?"

Hal rose to his feet, pressed his hands to his head and then there was a long silence. Big Bill appeared at the entrance to the stable.

"Well, Boss," he said, awaiting instructions.

"My horse ready, Bill?"

Hal referred to the fresh horse he had ordered to be ready for the fight.

"As you ordered, sir."

"I'll catch the Overland Limited at Carbon. Send my things after me."

"Yes, sir," and Bill disappeared into the stable.

"You are going," said Wah-na-gi in a scarce audible whisper. "Where?"

"Back to London. Back home—no, not home. This is home to me."

Wah-na-gi crept to McCloud like a timid child.

"Must he go?"

"Yes, I think so."

Then she turned to Hal with a pitiful cry: "And you'll never come back."

"Oh, yes I will, Wah-na-gi; yes I will. I couldn't stay away. It's in my blood. I love this desolate land. It's my land. I love these people. They are my people. McShay is here; Bill is here; John McCloud is here; my mother is here; you are here. I couldn't stay away."

"If you do come back," said John McCloud with his eyes filled with tears, "you must bring this Indian woman clean hands and a pure heart. Promise me that."

"I'll do that or I won't come back; so help me God."

Upon the hands of the two men clasped in solemn pledge rested the small brown hand of Wah-na-gi.

John McCloud turned away to hide the emotion that was mastering him. Hal took the girl in his arms, held her long to his breast, then put her at arms' length and, looking into her eyes, said through his own tears:

"I'm coming back, Wah-na-gi, dear; I'm coming back."

Bill stood by with the horse. Hal leaped into the saddle.

"Explain it to the boys," he said to McCloud simply. Once more the girl went to him as if she would drag him from the saddle. He leaned down and kissed her and whispered "I'm coming back." Then he put spurs to his horse, and was off.

No one who has not lived on a ranch or in the wilderness apart can ever know what it is—the solemn aching void left by the one who goes away. Hal turned as he reached the hill before descending into the Bad Lands and waved his sombrero to them. Wah-na-gi was standing on the rock, Nat-u-ritch's gravestone, to get the last glimpse of him. Bill and McCloud were standing below. She stood there looking, looking, long after he had disappeared. They had to lift her gently down. Still she stood looking, looking.

"He's gone, Wah-na-gi, child," said John McCloud gently.

"Will he come back?" she said.

CHAPTER XVII

It is a trying moment when we face the wrong answer and realize that we must go



"I'm coming back, Wah-na-gi, dear; I'm coming back."

back step by step to find the mistake. There is a fascination about the unknown. The future beckons.

Marching always onward, our courage each day finds an uplift in accomplishment. We are farther ahead if only a few inches. Incredible hardships and difficulties are put to flight.

Retracing one's steps, going back, requires more bravery than to go on. Initial enthusiasm looks like a grinning skeleton. It is not the same army in retreat. Doubt, despair hang on its flanks, worry and harass it all the bleeding way.

The moment Hal had decided to go back to England the necessary intermediate processes seemed wholly inadequate. He almost killed a good horse to reach Carbon on the D.&R.G. Railroad, only to find that he had eight hours to wait in that unmitigated by-product of civilization. They were eight heavy, heavy hours. He walked about the station, he gazed at the sage-brush and the water-tank, he went in and out of the "hotel," he attempted unsuccessfully to eat its so-called food, he tried to read its magazines six months old. The only possible object of interest was a very painful object. In the shade of one corner of the veranda on a stretcher lay a coal miner who had been hurt in the company's mines. His breast was heaving as if the life within him was struggling to get out. He was being removed to the company's hospital at Pedro. He had to wait for the train too, and it looked as if his impatient life refused to wait.

The few people in the desolate spot were fortunately busy or they would have gone mad. So no one paid any attention to the sufferer.

"Some people are unlucky, born that way," explained the young company doctor who had the dying man in charge. "Larry's just out of the hospital, and now he's goin' back—to stay this time, I guess."

It seemed to Hal as if he, too, were carrying his maimed life back on a stretcher, but he resisted the suggestion that it was to stay.

At last the train, late as usual, arrived. It was a relief at first. At least it was in motion, and he was going, even if it was backward. He was so preoccupied that it was some time before he was conscious of his fellow-passengers; then he felt rather than saw that he was being elaborately searched, optically swept, marked and staked out; coaxed, petted, and allured. He looked across to see a formidable person of the female sex who was half-pretending to read a book under the solicitous title "Stolen Kisses." This person seemed the last word in modern fixtures. An elaborate baby face peered out from under an elaborate hat of huge dimensions, ornamented with an elaborate mixture of flowers, fruit, and fur. Her face had had elaborate treatment. She wore an elaborate gown with a wholly unnecessary wrap. She had on patent-leather shoes with white cloth tops and exaggerated French heels, and occasionally she unconsciously treated the patient observer to a glimpse of an elaborate silk stocking. Except for the

hat, it looked to be a case of tight-fit. Indeed, she seemed a physical and moral protest against restrictions.

"One of the products of John McCloud's 'glorious civilization,'" commented Hal to himself as he got up and retreated to his own car. From which it may be observed that the young man was not in a mood to be altogether fair to civilization or John McCloud. He sat down at the window but he did not see the telegraph poles flying past or the varying monotony of the landscape rushing by. Each revolution of the wheels was taking him farther and farther from Red Butte Ranch. What were they doing there now—Wah-na-gi, John McCloud, Big Bill, and the others? She was no longer at the Agency and the victim of the devilry of David Ladd and Appah. She was among friends. That was some consolation, much consolation. And the time would pass; then he would be going the other way, going back to pick up his life where he had now dropped it. He wondered at what time of day he would arrive, whether he should notify them or surprise them. Yes, the time would pass. London wouldn't keep him long. Edith would be glad to release him. He felt absolutely confident of that, and yet there was a shadow over all his thoughts. He had a curious unreasonable foreboding of ill. What could happen? Then he became aware that some one was speaking to him. Would the gentleman care to make up a bridge party?

The invitation came to him from one of his fellow-travellers and it seemed a refuge from his thoughts, so Hal was glad to play. It would force him to think of other things. He played and lost quite a tidy sum of money before it came to him that he was being exploited by unfair means.

Having virtuously resolved to do what was right and much against his will, he had a feeling that the way ought to be made smooth and easy. Civilization had never been fair to him, and his return to it was evidently not to be strewn with flowers. He began to grow morose.

He found on picking up a newspaper that he would have two days in New York before his ship sailed, and he determined to spend those days in Washington. He had Ladd on the run. He must see to it that he wasn't allowed to stop short of losing his official head. He had offered to go to Washington at any time to substantiate his charges, and now Ladd was to face an investigation. The papers he had in his possession would go far to establish the agent's connection with the Trust and other papers he possessed would convict him of malfeasance in office. These papers were high explosives and had to be handled with the greatest care, for they involved not only Ladd but officials high in Government circles, and some leaders in Congress and in both of the political parties.

Hal's train arrived at the Grand Central Station in New York at night. He took a cab and ordered the driver to drive to the Hotel Astor. The direct road to the hotel was of course through Forty-second street, which was obviously slow

and difficult of negotiation, and the situation seemed to offer an inducement to go a roundabout way with the amiable intention of boosting the fare. It was a trick with which the proposed victim was familiar, and he resolved that while consenting to the extra ride he would resist any effort to collect an extra fare. It was election night, and as soon as the cab hit Broadway it was caught in a whirlpool of humanity. It could neither go on nor go back.

The great city seemed to have resolved itself into a vast lunatic asylum and to have emptied all the patients into the streets. The incoherent maniacs seemed to be enjoying themselves and to be on the whole good-natured. In its gentlest moments New York is a noisy place, but to the ordinary din of traffic, the sag and smash of trucks, the rush and roar of the elevated on its iron bed was added an indescribable cacophony that was fiendish. Election night with its liberty and license—Hooligan's holiday! It seemed to Hal that he had never seen so many unpleasant faces in such a short distance or in so short a time. The sweat-shops seemed to have emptied into the streets, and the Tenderloin, and the submerged wreckage of the Bowery. They were mauling each other, jostling, joking, babbling, hurraing, hardly knowing for whom or what, blowing fierce blasts on tin horns, ringing clusters of cow-bells, pulling fantastic shrieks out of motor sirens, whirring gigantic rattles—all struggling to see who could make the biggest noise. Women seemed more elated with the spirit of the occasion than men, and they evoked the attentions of strangers without the ceremony of an introduction. The interchange of pleasantries was sometimes marked by freedom and abandon. To Hal just from a country where it was possible to be for days and weeks without the sight of a human being, this seething, writhing mass of humanity, rubbing up against each other, jostling, pulling at each other, handling each other, bawling into each other's faces, was supremely obnoxious. His cab caught in the slow-moving swirl was a fine temptation to horse-play. As he leaned out of one window to try to understand the unusual tumult a vivacious young woman leaned in at the other window and blew a megaphonic tin horn directly into his ear. It seemed as if it would rip the drum of the ear. A greasy-faced urchin blew an expanding and suggestive-looking toy into his face. A buxom Amazon leaned in, gave his necktie a jerk, and screamed through her nose: "Why, sweetheart! I didn't know you was back!"

Other enthusiasts threw confetti over him.

This was civilization's welcome to him! He tried to take it good-naturedly but upon his face was a fixed look of disgust.

The cab got ahead a few feet at a time, then stopped in another block, and he went through the felicitations of these joyous citizens all over again. To his immense relief they at last reached the hotel. Here at last was a haven of refuge. How much was it, he inquired of the cabbie.

"Ten dollars!"

Hal smiled incredulously. He invited the jehu to guess again, to think it over. That worthy reminded him that it was election night, which was put forward as an argument that was in its nature unassailable. Hal patiently explained that he didn't see why he personally should pay five or six times the price because some one had been elected governor of a State which apparently stood in sore need of government. He reminded the obstinate and aggressive person that it was not over half a mile from the station to the hotel and one dollar was ample—two extravagant. He offered to compromise on two. This was received with profuse profanity of a highly inflammable character. In the interstices between expletives were interjected various allusions to the hours it had taken to go the half-mile, to the fact that the cab was scratched, that the horse's life had been endangered, and other more or less irrelevant matters. Hal thought he saw the cab-person signal to a police-person standing a little behind him. Finally the gathering waters of affliction broke and poured forth in righteous wrath. Hal stated with picturesque additions that the man was a crook and a thief.

The burly brute tried to strike the young man with the butt end of his loaded whip. Hal avoided the blow and caught the man square on the jaw, and he went down for the count.

That was all Hal knew until he came back to consciousness in a police cell. It was a very painful consciousness, associated with bandages, a head bursting with pain, and most unpleasant surroundings. Then little by little he came to a vague realization of what had happened. He was practically a stranger in New York. To whom could he turn? He was a British subject. Perhaps he could communicate with the representatives of His Majesty's Government.

In addition to having been very thoroughly beaten, he found that he had been very thoroughly robbed. It was therefore with some difficulty that he could persuade his jailer to communicate with the British Consulate. The promise of a considerable reward finally held out inducements. Fortunately for the prisoner, the British Vice-Consul, Mr. Percy Holmes Tracy, proved to be an old friend of his father's family. Mr. Tracy supplied the prisoner with immediate funds and bestirred himself in his behalf. He found that Hal was accused of being drunk and disorderly, resisting arrest, and striking an officer. Fortunately for the prisoner, Mr. Tracy found that the hotel detective had been a witness of the brutal assault. The detective told the Vice-Consul that the policemen's use of the night-stick was totally unprovoked and unnecessary, that Hal did not resist arrest, that he had no chance to do so, that the policeman and cab-driver were pals who had been suspected of "working together" before, etc., etc. Hal expressed the enthusiastic desire to "make it warm" for all concerned, to have the policeman "broke," etc., etc. All of which Mr. Tracy admitted to be a perfectly natural and

justifiable feeling, but he reminded the young man that it would be a somewhat tedious and exacting undertaking. How much time was he willing to devote to it? Could he stay and give it his undivided attention? No, he could not. In fact he was due to sail at once for London. Ah, well, that was another matter, was it not? Under the circumstances it was Mr. Holmes Tracy's advice to pocket his losses, swallow his pride, smother his indignation, and set it down to valuable experience. It would have been cheaper to have paid the ten dollars. These are some of the disadvantages of a highly organized society. And so it happened that the man who had, single-handed, arrested desperadoes in a country where men carry a gun and know how to use it, was made the foolish victim of the polished machinery of "a highly organized society."

Mr. Holmes Tracy's advice was too obviously wise to be ignored. Confronted with the hotel detective the police-grafter was glad to withdraw his charge, with the understanding that no countercharges should be preferred against him. It wasn't altogether satisfying. Community life was a series of compromises; its law expediency.

The two days Hal had intended to spend in Washington had been spent in prison. Perhaps he was safer there. He and civilization had never been friends. Hal welcomed his escape from New York. He was glad to get out of her canyons and pigeon-holes into the light and air. He was glad to reach the boat. When he left London and had turned his face to the West there had seemed a conspiracy to help him on. The winds and waves had romped about him in the sunshine, and hope and joy sang in his heart. He had not felt lonely, but a great content had brooded over him. Now the elements frowned on him. Head winds blew a hurricane the whole way over. Huge waves smote the ship and shook her angrily. Now she rode them down, now shouldered them aside, now cut her way through them, then bowed her head to the blow, shook herself free, throbbing, quivering in every joint, every muscle and nerve and sinew of her crying out against the incessant wear and tear of it. And over all brooded a sky of fleeing gray and black demons. Not a ray of sunlight crept through the clouds. The voyage was a nightmare. Wind and wave were screaming to him to go back; trying to force him back. He was ill and frightfully depressed. He was as eager almost to get out of the ship as if Love's welcome waited for him; as it seemed to do for all but him. But it was scarcely better on shore. He rode up to London in a cold drenching rain. The land looked old, tired, and discouraged. And London!—this Mecca of the exiled Briton. How many hearts turn to it in far off-India, China, Australia, Canada, and the waste places of the earth! How many eager eyes look back to it or look forward to it! What memories it holds for those who know in their souls they can never see it again, and what radiant visions it offers to those who sweat and save and suffer and perhaps lie and steal that one day they may

come back to it, and bring it the tribute of their blood and treasure. London is compelling like some great sad song that tells of sorrows and wrongs. But it had no message and no welcome to this returning pilgrim. Before they reached the city they rode out of the rain and into one of those fogs which creeps out of its tombs and graveyards and buried horrors, and tries to materialize itself and once more take possession of the actual life of the city.

Hal took a cab and they began to grope their way toward his father's town house. Even in his thought he didn't call it home. Oh for the land of sunshine, he thought, where one can look into the infinite sky, and beyond and beyond and still beyond. Here he felt as if he were knocking his head against it. One didn't breathe; one swallowed the air in chunks and gulps. They almost rode down a procession of the unemployed, an army with banners, but an army with none of the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war. Hal shrank back in his cab and shivered in his great-coat. Their banners were dirty, but it was evident that each soldier of despair had made some little effort with bad success to make as decent an appearance in the public eye as possible. They were a sad lot with their gaunt faces and soiled and tattered clothes. They were of all ages and states of desperation, from the young mechanic with youth and health still left, to the wretch who had been submerged, who couldn't work if it were given him to do, fit only to fertilize the soil. Hal's cabman lost his way for a moment and they got into Hyde Park. One of its orators was about to dismiss his small audience because he could scarcely see or be seen by them as they huddled close to him and to each other, and the speaker complained that the fog got into his throat and wellnigh choked him. Hal called to his driver to stop and they drew up to the curb. Hal was not unfamiliar with the Hyde Park meetings and their speakers, but never in his life before had he stopped to listen. It was an admirable safety-valve where cranks could talk to cranks. That they had or could have any message to him or for the world had never entered his mind. The unemployed had impressed him painfully. They were wandering hopelessly up and down crying in unison: "Work, work! We want work." This dull cry and their faces peering at him out of clammy shadows and yellow smears had got on his nerves. He was curious to hear what the orator of such people had to say on such a day.

"One moment and I'll close. You think I'm a layin' of it on, that I'm a makin' it up, but I 'old in my 'and a report of Lord George 'amilton, Royal Commissioner, on the condition of the English poor, and these is 'is words, not mine, 'is, moind ye.

"The conditions of life in London and other large cities 'ave produced a degenerate race, morally and physically enfeebled."

Hal drove on. When he reached his father's house there was a new servant at the door and he had to explain who he was. This was the glorious civilization

he was coming back to. This was its welcome to him! Oh, John McCloud! Is this your Christian civilization?

CHAPTER XVIII

The Earl of Kerhill's town house was plain and formal on the outside. Within, it was beautiful, but cold and stately. Even the arrangement of its contents was apparently fixed and unalterable. At any rate no one could remember when any one had had the courage to meddle with its established order. Hal remembered that he had early gained the impression that it was not a place for little boys to live in. Thou-shalt and Thou-shalt-not seemed to divide the house between them. And now amid its Boulle and Tudor tables, its Venetian carved chairs, its Chippendales, its tapestries and portraits of knights and ladies, its plate and glass, its marbles and carvings, Hal felt more of an anachronism than ever. Cold and stately and solemn! It was as if it felt superior to its tenants. "Look back," it seemed to say to any one inclined to be familiar with it; "look back and tell me where are the brave and beautiful and gallant lords and ladies who once danced here and feasted here, loved, and made merry here? Gone and forgotten! The present lord, he, too, will soon be with the others. I was before them and I will be after them. I am a house with an individuality. People come and people go, but I remain. Cold, stately, and solemn!" The library was the most livable room and even the library was stately. Perhaps there were people so lost to the eternal fitness of things, so empty and shallow that they might be flippant in it, but it required an effort, and even shallow people were not allowed to forget that Grinling Gibbons had done the carvings about the noble fire-place.

The house seemed to have forgotten Gibbons and to arrogate the carvings to itself. It was a proud house. The library at least looked inhabited. Perhaps the books gave it the human touch that linked up the past and the present and brought people and things into relations, distant relations no doubt, but still relations. It is not surprising that Nat-u-ritch's son had never liked the Earl's town house.

Lady Winifred was writing at a heavy oak table elaborately carved, the light from a jewelled lamp falling over her high-bred face and her abundant hair which had great snow patches lying gently on it. She needed that softening touch of white, for there was a mocking light in her eyes and a cynical play of the lips.

Andrews had placed the coffee service and the liqueurs on a small table before a high-backed Charles II chair on the other side of the room.

"Andrews, ask the gentlemen to take their coffee here with me."

"Yes, my lady."

Back of the library was a recess from which sprang a graceful stairway to the floor above. It was lit by panels of jewelled glass. Crowning the newel post was an electric flambeau. As the butler left the room a beautiful woman entered from the main hall and stood by the stairway, looking quietly but nervously about. The light from the flambeau lit up a face so colorless, so bloodless that it seemed almost transparent. Out of the whiteness, crowned with glowing auburn hair, shone lustrous agate eyes, hard, brilliant, with sensuous lights beneath the surface. She had entered the room and looked about before Lady Winifred was aware of her presence. Then she stole down rapidly but softly to the side of the elder woman and said:

"Well, have you seen him?"

"Why, I thought you were dining with Lord Yester at the Carlton."

"So I was," assented the other, pulling nervously at her gloves.

"And going to the theatre afterward?"

"I couldn't sit still in the theatre. Even the thought of it upset me. You have seen him?"

"Hal? Why, of course."

"What does he say?"

"About what?"

"About me."

"He hasn't mentioned you to me as yet."

"No? Oh!" and Edith, Viscountess Effington, Hal's wife, walked slowly over to the coffee service and lit a cigarette. She watched the vagrant smoke with a retrospective air.

"I had a curious sensation at dinner," she said. "I found I wasn't hearing what Lord Yester was saying. All of a sudden I was frightened. I felt as if I were choking. Hal seemed to stand behind and over Lord Yester and I got a queer idea that he had come back to, to—Winifred, you and he have always been pals; *you* tell him. Tell him all there is to tell, about Lord Yester and myself, so that he will be prepared, and make him understand that if he has come back to interfere with my plans"—and her lips shut and her eyes glistened ominously—"well, don't let him think of it."

"I think he knows you do as you please."

"Why shouldn't I?" said Edith with a little reckless laugh. "Why shouldn't I? I've only one life to live and that's mine, to live my way. I'm selfish; so is everybody else. Some people get a selfish pleasure out of pretending to be unselfish.

Well, let them! I'm not a hypocrite, thank God!"

Edith took from her enormous ermine muff a gold and jewelled bonbon box, extracted from it a tablet, and swallowed it with a drink of brandy which she had poured from a decanter.

"Sir George's prescription for my headaches," she explained in answer to the other's look of disapproval.

"The brandy part of the prescription, Edith?"

"Not having headaches, Winifred, you have a fine superiority to those who have." And she pulled the long opera cloak of emerald green like the breast of the humming-bird about her white shoulders, adjusted her ermine stole as if she were cold, walked slowly toward the stairs. In repose she was very soft, pliant, lambent, but, when moved, quick and violent. She turned and stiffened, threw her head up into the air, and came down swiftly to Lady Winifred's side.

"I must have this settled *now—to-night!* I can't stand this suspense. If he attempts to upset my plans——"

"You may find him quite as eager to be free as you are."

"Do you think so, Winifred? Do you really think so?" she said, rising at a bound to the extreme of elation. Then she crept softly out of the room, purring to herself: "Oh, I hope so; I hope so."

There was a slight elevation to Lady Winifred's eyebrow and the slightest tilt to one of her shoulders. It seemed to suggest that she had ceased to be impressed with the moods and tenses of the other, that it was a pity that men could not see past the surface of things feminine, that Edith's egotism had the noble simplicity of all big things.

"My dear, wasn't Cousin Hal to take his after-dinner coffee here with us?"

It was Sir Gordon Stuckley who spoke as he came into the room. Sir Gordon was known as Lady Winifred's husband. He was a retired army officer and considerably older than his handsome wife. His mind was the amiable repository of everything conventional and commonplace. He walked over to the writing-table and picked up a cigarette.

"He has gone up to say good-night to his father," said Lady Winifred, blotting and folding her finished letter.

"Well, Hal is back," said Sir Gordon sententiously, "and brings his problem with him still unsolved."

"Whose life isn't a problem—'still unsolved'?" said his wife with an enigmatical smile.

"And it's quite difficult enough to face one's own problem, to face one's own mistakes," she continued. "It's rather hard to have to answer for the mistakes of somebody else; mistakes that can't be remedied; can't in the very nature of things. Hal can't help being a half-caste, can he?"

"What is he back for?" asked her husband shortly.

"To see his father, I presume. Sir George, I believe, cabled him to come."

"The Earl is no worse than he has been or may be for some time to come. I hope, for his own sake, and for our sake Hal has no intention of staying, because you know he is quite impossible here, now isn't he?"

"I suppose so," said Lady Winifred with a note of regret, for she was fond of the boy, "and yet we pride ourselves here on being cosmopolitan, on havin' no race prejudices."

"Officially? No! Socially? Most assuredly yes! Officially we treat these Indian potentates as princes. Actually, my dear, we regard them as niggers. Well, there you are."

"Yes," she admitted. "We are fairly tolerant of aliens because there are not enough of them to annoy us. They don't crowd us off the pavement, or take our places in the tram, or lay hands on the stipends and positions we reserve for ourselves, but, as a matter of fact, we are quite the most intolerant people in the world. Still it isn't his being a half-breed that matters so much, I think. He was living that down—it's his having to leave the Army."

"Quite so; but why did he have to leave the Army? Because he didn't know how to obey; because he couldn't submit to discipline, and why couldn't he submit to discipline? Because he had in his veins the blood of the American Indian. It comes down to race at last."

"But why shouldn't a half-breed inherit the best of each type instead of the worst and so be superior to either?"

"Oh, there is only one *best*, my dear," said Gordon as he walked to the coffee with a superior smile. "There is only one best."

"And of course we assume that we are the superior type."

Lady Winifred looked after Sir Gordon with toleration. She was a woman of unusual intelligence and it was hardly fair to ask her to maintain any real illusions as to her husband.

"Well," she continued, "this dear boy is a half-breed; his wife is of our best and purest blood. Yet, with all his peculiarities, Hal is adorable, and Edith—well, if she's a type of superiority, God help the British Empire."

"Edith isn't representative; oh, no; oh, *my*, no!" Sir Gordon's enthusiasm in rejecting Edith on behalf of the British Empire almost upset the coffee urn.

"Oh, *my*, no!" he kept repeating with comic insistence.

"Isn't she?" objected Lady Winifred coming forward to take the cup offered by her husband. "Isn't she? Is the smoking, drinking, gambling woman with a moral code of her own an exception, or is she getting to be the London type?"

"By the way, where is Edith?"

"Dining with Lord Yester at the Carlton."

"Dining at the Carlton the first night her husband is at home?"

"My dear Gordon, you are hopelessly old-fashioned. Husbands are like the vermiform appendix. They must have served some useful purpose once, but no one knows now what it was. A busy woman has no time for such trifles. Edith is just back from a house party at Groton Court, she had to devote some time in the forenoon to her modiste; she went to the races in the afternoon, had tea at the Austrian Embassy, played a little bridge, and naturally she had to dress for dinner. If Hal is patient they may eventually meet here or at some mutual friend's."

Gordon never tried to follow the intricacies of his wife's raillery.

"Well, I must be hopelessly old-fashioned," he said in the most matter-of-fact way. "Modern matrimony is quite beyond me." Sir Gordon was old-fashioned. He belonged to an epoch when men, by an unwritten law, left the gossip to the women.

"Winifred," he began with much hesitation, and speaking with grave deliberation, "are you aware that Lord Yester's attentions to Edith are beginning to create talk?"

"Beginning?" laughed his wife. "Why, Gordon, that is so old that people have ceased to talk about it."

"Is it really?" he ejaculated in hopeless confusion. "Well, Hal must put his foot down at once, at once," he repeated with feeble over-emphasis.

"My dear, the foot and the hand go together. They are both archaic. Since it is no longer good form to beat one's wife, the putting of the foot down or up is of no importance. Women only respected their husbands when they had to."

One of Gordon's qualifications as a fighter and a husband was that he could take punishment. It is a useful accomplishment, and as rare as it is beautiful. It would have been impossible for Lady Winnifred to live with a man who was oversensitive. As she explained the situation herself: "Some amiability is essential to contiguity. The bearings must have oil. Well, you mustn't expect it of me or of the cook. One doesn't look for it in one's friends. Well, there you are!"

"I have no doubt something of this has come to Hal's ears," said her husband, "and he has returned to put his house in order, and quite time indeed."

"Well," she answered, "from the woman's point of view the civilized man is a glaring failure. Perhaps the half-savage may succeed."

"Fancy, Rundall, fancy my wife suspecting the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race!"

This remark was addressed to a polished, imposing person who was descending the stairs, and in the act of returning a thermometer to the pocket of his evening coat. Sir George Rundall had the right but not the time to add a long string of letters to his name. He was a self-made man and was a credit to himself.

He had the figure of one who has been an athlete, the head of a scholar who was also a man of the world, a clean-shaven, florid face and perfectly white hair, what there was of it. The doctor was a man of learning, was an authority on all sorts of unpleasant things, and had a prodigious memory. Here was a man who could put Winifred in her proper place, if any one could.

Sir Gordon had ripped out "the Anglo-Saxon race" with something of its sonorous after-dinner effect.

"Haven't you discovered, Stuckley, that our wives are always right?"

"Oh, I say!" groaned Sir Gordon, dismayed at this cowardly going over to the enemy.

"There is no such thing as an Anglo-Saxon race."

"What?"

"And there's no such thing as a pure type of man. He simply doesn't exist. Finot says: 'All human beings are cross-breeds,'" and the doctor sat down at a small desk set into a bookcase, and began to write a prescription.

"Race" was one of Gordon's strong points. He had all the conviction of the profound amateur. He was an example of a little learning and its consequences.

"You mean to say," he asked with pompous incredulity, "that there is nothing in dolichocephalic superiority?" Having delivered this without a sign of distress he looked about, greatly pleased with himself.

"Dolly who?" asked Winifred. "Sir George, is that a real word, or just aggravated assault and battery?"

"Don't be alarmed, Lady Stuckley, it only means fair-haired people with narrow skulls."

"And so blonds are the elect, are they?" she said. "Now I know the scientific explanation for the popularity of peroxide of hydrogen."

"Joking aside," said the military man. It was a stock phrase in his domestic experiences. "Joking aside, I am sure our man of science will admit the importance of the—ah, the cephalic index?"

"Sir George, I look to you for protection."

"Head measurements, Lady Stuckley, that's all," explained Sir George with a smile. "Well, as to that," he went on, rising and coming to the library table, "a fellow by the name of Parchappe, who went in for that sort of thing, found 'the head of an intelligent woman to be perceptibly inferior to the dimensions of the head of an idiot.' Now, Stuckley, justify that to your wife if you can."

Lady Winifred laughed heartily.

"For Lord Kerhill," added the doctor to Winifred as he put a prescription on the corner of the table before her.

"It pleases Sir George to treat facts as jests," said the discomfited Gordon.

"Facts?" queried Winifred. "Facts? Why that is ground for divorce."

"Facts?" echoed the man of science gravely. "I wonder what are facts? The conviction of to-day is the derision of to-morrow. We have long used the skull and the brain to assign hopeless inferiority to various peoples, now comes along Finot and says: 'The skull and the brain furnish no argument in favor of organic inequality.' Lamarck—I think it's Lamarck—puts it better. He affirms that 'Nature has created neither classes nor orders, nor families, nor kinds, nor permanent species, but only individuals!'"

"That's the answer to the problem, Gordon," cried Lady Winifred triumphantly—"the Individual!"

Down the stairs came the Individual and lounged into the room. Hal knew at once from the suggestion of an embarrassed pause that he had been the subject of the conversation.

It is rather trying to one with a problem to have inept hands dipping in, messing it about.

The doctor was the first to regain his poise. He was used to difficult cases, and when he had to announce to the patient that he had only six weeks or six months to live, his manner was perfect. "Ah, Harold," he said with a kindly smile, putting his hand on the boy's arm with a reassuring touch, "splendid for your dear father, this home coming. You mustn't go away again." Then he dropped his voice for Hal's ear alone. "I'll be back. I want to speak with you before you retire," and the busy man passed out. Hal had on the conventional dinner coat. He looked at his relatives with an amused smile and came down to the table and started to help himself to a cigarette, then thought better of it, took some rice-paper from his pocket and made his own, manipulating it with one hand after the miraculous manner of the Mexican. When it was finished, amid the awed and fascinated wonder of the spectators, he lit a match on the leg of his trousers and lit the cigarette with the same hand to the dismay of Gordon and the joy of Winifred.

To Gordon's mind no well-bred person could really care for miracles.

"Well, Cousin Hal, you have been three years an exile! What a joy, eh? What a joy to be back in dear old London!"

The boy smiled as he took up his coffee.

"Do you remember Grafton? Used to be a pal of mine. Met him on the train coming up from Liverpool." The boy bent forward with an air of startled boredom. One could see Grafton. "Well, old chap, missed you awfully! Where have you been keeping yourself for the last *fortnight*?" He dropped the assumption.

"Cordial place—London! Out our way men and their characters go in their shirt sleeves." And he stretched his arms and the dinner coat popped ominously. For the moment he seemed to fill the library and it dwarfed most people.

"But you don't escape the rotter even out there, do you?" asked Winifred.

"No, but the rotter shouts himself out to all the world, and if you don't like the noise he makes you shoot it full of holes. Here they carry concealed weapons. I'm more at home with the shirt-sleeve crowd," and he sat down in the Charles II chair and threw his leg over one arm of it as he sipped his coffee.

Sir Gordon rose from the upholstered rail in front of the fireplace where he had been sitting, put down his empty coffee-cup, then stood up with the air of taking charge personally of Hal's tangled affairs.

"Well, Hal, my boy, you have come back prepared I presume to settle down, settle down to some career befitting an English gentleman." Sir Gordon paused to draw Hal's fire. As the young man did not dispute this assumption, he continued with patronizing pomposity.

"We must place you. We must place you, my boy. It won't be an easy matter, will it? Of course you can't go into trade. The Army is the only gentleman's game, but—we must not speak of that. We must not speak of that," and he hastened to get away from a subject so painful. "Now, how about the church?"

"The church?" asked Hal with a laugh.

"Oh, your father could get you a living." Then he added hastily: "It's respectable at least."

"For me? The church?"

"Oh, you don't have to go in for religion; oh, no; oh, my, no! None of that bally rot."

Seeing that her amiable husband was in very deep water, Winifred reached out her hand and encouraged him to go deeper.

"Hal, how stupid of you," she said. "You have assistants, curates, and that sort of thing who do the religion for you. You ride to hounds, play cricket for your county, and enjoy similar spiritual diversions."

"Well, you must do *something*," said Sir Gordon petulantly, annoyed with the young man's levity. "Of course whatever you decide to try, it is going to be a long hard struggle to live down the Army record; still with time and pluck it may be done. You are an earl's son and you have influential relatives. Well, then, how about politics?"

"Sit in the House and listen to the gabble on the Old Age Pensions and The Licensing Bill? I'd rather be a suffragette and go to jail."

Sir Gordon had exhausted the careers. It wasn't a career exactly, but people went in for it and it was a devilish nice thing to go in for.

"Well," he suggested, "there's the life of a country gentleman."

"The country would be all right," said Hal, "if the people would only stay away. They spoil everything. Even the gardens are as formal as the odious people, and the flowers, even the flowers, are made to look stiff and stuck-up and well-behaved, as if they felt they, too, were on exhibition and might be talked

about. The country is only another setting for teas, tennis, and top hats, bridge, scandal, and flirting with each other's wives."

"Well, there's shooting," said Sir Gordon in desperation. "You used to like shooting."

"Yes, before people shot in mobs, and made it a function. Now they go into the solitudes, the cosy solitudes, with footmen, a French cook, vintage wines, and a Hungarian band."

Sir Gordon did not realize that his wife and Hal were having fun with his prejudices. He was on the edge of losing his patience.

"Well, if you stay *here*—" He was annoyed to observe that he had raised his voice almost to a vulgar scream. He repeated the phrase in a more temperate key. "If you stay here—"

"But I'm not going to stay here, Gordon. It's the West for me. It's in my blood. When I've visited with father and arranged one or two important matters, I'm goin' back to God's country."

"Bravo, Hal," exclaimed Lady Winifred. "If you stay here you'll end by becoming a conventional little snob, and I should hate you. No; go back to your shirt-sleeve crowd."

"Well, my dear boy," exclaimed Gordon completely nonplussed; "I can't make you out," and he made up his mind to beat a hasty retreat to the United Service Club, where anarchy was not petted and spoiled and fed on chocolate bonbons. Then he thought of something and came back.

"Winifred, speak to Hal about that."

"About what?" inquired Hal.

Again he lost some of his habitual poise in the fervor of his convictions.

"You must put your foot down, Hal; you really must—'er—for our sakes as well as for your own. You ought—er—Winifred will tell you," and the old soldier scrambled out of the trench and effected a most disorderly retreat.

His cousin Winifred was about six years older than Hal, and in all the memories of his childhood and boyhood she was the one bright spot. His step-mother had died when he was but a lad. His father was much occupied with public affairs. No one else seemed to care to understand the queer little chap except this tall, queer girl. She stood by and encouraged him to whip the first little brat that called him an insulting name, a name suggested by his color. Then she washed and wiped his resulting wounds, and encouraged him to believe that he was in the path of duty and on the road to glory. Thus encouraged, the shy, timid lad had quickly developed into a fierce little warrior, and it was Winifred who somehow realized and foresaw that if he were ever to enjoy the blessings of peace he would have to fight for them, and she got the head gardener's son who had a distinguished reputation as an amateur pugilist, to teach him how to box, an

accomplishment in which he soon distanced his teacher, and one which was destined to be of the greatest service to him in his subsequent career. His readiness to meet all comers and his demonstrated ability to do so was his passport through life.

He had fought every step of the way from childhood to manhood. A battle or series of battles marked every change in environment, in school, in college, in his preparations for a military career. Soon it came as a routine. He knew he would have to "lick somebody" in order to be let alone. It didn't worry him, and he didn't seek these encounters, but he didn't mind them. In fact, it was one of the things he did exceptionally well. When he joined a swell regiment he had a terrific struggle to stay. He was "ragged" unmercifully, but he took his medicine, and before he was forced out, the regiment was ordered into the field, went through a campaign in which he had opportunities, which he eagerly accepted and with brilliant results, results which he took modestly. Eventually he compelled respect from his brother officers, but it was earned. Oh, it was earned! In all this bitter struggle with environment Cousin Winifred, this woman "with the serpent's tongue," was the only soul who knew and understood. He came over to her and put his hands affectionately on her shoulders.

"What is it you're to tell me?" he asked her.

"Dear, simple soul, he expects you to change Edith."

"Change Edith, eh?" Hal walked away with a queer look on his face. She continued: "One can dam a river and change its course. You can't do that with a woman. Edith will go on being Edith, I fancy, to the end of the chapter."

"She seems to be still rather careless of appearances," he said.

"She never was discreet, but there are many safely on the inside who are quite as careless. At all events, she's kept out of the papers. That's something. See here."

She showed him a London society journal whose leaves she had been turning and glancing at in a desultory fashion, one of those hybrid products of modern life which make a specialty of social garbage and elevate blackmail to the point of high art; a journal which every one calls "a rag" and which all smart people read religiously. Hal took it and glanced through the article hastily.

It was an account of a "well-known society woman," "name withheld out of consideration for her distinguished relatives and friends," who was found by a police officer wandering aimlessly in Hyde Park and utterly unable to give a lucid account of herself. Sir George *Blank*, a well-known specialist in nervous diseases, happens to be driving by, recognizes the unhappy lady, who is apparently under the influence of a powerful drug, and takes her to her home, etc., etc., etc.

"How awful!" he said. "Do you suppose it's true?"

"My dear boy, these things are becoming so common we're no longer

shocked by them. Society has its favorites, and it has a broad mantle of charity for its favorites, but obviously one mustn't parade one's sins in Hyde Park. Edith hasn't been a huge social success, but she has kept out of the papers; she is still possible and she never gives up. She is still at it—climbing, climbing.”

”And Lord Yester is the latest ladder, eh?”

”Why, you haven't been in England more than a few minutes. How did you find that out?”

”Why, my friend Grafton laid one of these illustrated papers down on the seat beside me as we came up in the train. I saw a picture of Edith and Lord Yester, and I had the pleasure of reading 'an open letter' to my wife. It was very instructive. I thought you said she had kept out of the papers.”

”Oh, that's a small matter. That isn't publicity. That 'open letter' attention is merely an acknowledgment of her social prominence. That is a trifle. Lady Lucretia Burk-Owsley is dancing in one of our music halls. Now, you might object to that, though her husband, I understand, rather enjoys its democracy. It sort of takes the whole of London into the bosom of the family. She can't dance, of course, but she's a revelation. You must see it. Oh, we're not standing still.”

”And Lord Yester?” suggested Hal. ”What is his *raison d'être*?”

”Lord Yester's vocation is Edith, his avocation is being next in succession to the old Duke of Uxminster, and the Duke is feeble enough to satisfy even the most impatient heir.”

”A duchess, eh?”

”Nothing short of that.”

”But Yester,” objected Hal in dreamy retrospection; ”Yester's a boy. His father, though he was old enough to be my father, was a pal of mine. We served together in South Africa. Why you remember, Winifred? He was forced into retirement because he justified my disobedience and refused to be silenced—God bless him! One of the few friends I've had in the world! His son, eh? Why, the youngster must be just out of his perambulator.”

”Some women as they grow older suddenly display a fondness for children. When a woman has escaped being a mother, she sometimes meets her fate in the grandmother class.”

”He's rather a nice child, if I remember correctly,” said Hal.

”Well, not a 'double-first,' not an intellectual giant, but a nicely brought-up child; a credit to his nurse, and, incidentally, just at the age to be madly in love with a married woman, married, of course, to a clod who cannot possibly understand her.”

Hal laughed.

”Yes, the *clod* understands that. They have already made their plans, I suppose?”

"Oh, yes; and you're just in time to give the bride away. Now there's a novelty, and they're rare these days—a wedding in which the ex-husband is the new husband's best man. No? Well, Edith pays you the compliment of believing that you will behave very well under the circumstances. I was expected to prepare you for the inevitable and, if possible, soften the blow."

"And Lord Yester—is he willing?"

"Willing? Strenuously, madly willing. Personally, I think you are in tremendous luck. I congratulate you upon your prospective deliverance with all my heart."

Lady Winifred continued to play with the situation, turning it inside and outside, holding it up to fantastic derision, until she saw that he was not listening. The strain was off. He had resigned himself to pleasant dreams. He had been pulling against wind and tide, every muscle, every nerve stretched to cracking, his head bursting, his heart breaking, and making no progress, barely holding his own. Now the tide had turned. The storm had passed. He could take in his oars, sit in the stern, and just keep her in the current, the current that was bearing him on to his desires. He could rest in delicious lethargy and see the flowers and gardens on the bank, and see at the end of the beautiful journey Wah-na-gi standing on the rock, holding out her arms to him.

"How do you do, Harold? Welcome home."

Edith stood holding out her hand to him.

CHAPTER XIX

Instead of the little bronze figure in the buckskin dress with its straight, simple lines, as straight and simple as the soul within it, he saw a white woman, preternaturally white, the complex product of nature and art, where the dressmaker, the hair-dresser, and the jeweller had done their latest and best, with the soft, warm, dark colors of the library as a noble background, a chromatic frame. Her Paquin gown of canary yellow, cut very low, was bordered and outlined with dark-brown marabou feathers. On her dazzling neck rested a string of emeralds, the gift of Lord Yester. Her red hair was dressed, buttressed and supplemented by braids, coils and puffs, and surmounted by a diamond tiara. Her white hands were covered with rings, many of them with a history. This ornate combination was concealing and exposing an individuality more complex still, its barbaric

impulses crossed and seamed and twisted by generations of acquired stress and strain. She was a radiant creature, conscious of her charms, but about her agate eyes were gathering little signals of distress, grave, insistent warnings, destined not to be heeded, saying that she had lived too fast, that she was at the zenith, the climax, that the descent would be quick and rapid. The wonderful mechanism wasn't working smoothly. "How do you do, Harold? Welcome home." And an extended hand. And this was her husband, returned from a long journey.

"Thank you, Edith," and he took her hand. She did not offer to kiss him and she gave him only one hand. He might have been a stranger to whom she had just been introduced. Indeed, she would have had more interest in a stranger. They had gone past even the forms of domestic procedure.

"Winifred," said her cousin, "Lord Yester is in the drawing-room. You get on so well together. Would you mind?"

"Not at all."

"I just want a moment's chat with Harold."

Winifred glanced at them with a cynical smile as she went out of the room. The situation appealed to her supreme love of contrast.

"You'll pardon my running off to-night, Harold; won't you? You see I didn't know in time, and I couldn't very well break a previous engagement. I asked Winifred to take my place and make you feel at home." And she undulated over to the railing before the fireplace and sat down in the genial glow in an indolent cat-like way. The fog had penetrated into the house and there was a chill in the dampness. She knew, too, that the fire shot strange lights into her hair and over her jewels and neck, and the desire to excite admiration was instinctive and ever present.

"Winifred is good company and she did her best," said Hal simply.

"And I knew that after a little chat with Winifred—well—that you would know all there was to know, and that there wouldn't be anything left for me to tell."

It was evident that neither woman had any illusions about the other. The attitude of rest and repose was only momentary. She got up restlessly and came forward, her eyes bent with fierce concentration upon his.

"Of course you haven't come back with the idea of changing anything?"

"Your attitude would seem to make that hopeless, Edith."

She was relieved. It was not to be open war, then. She turned half away, let her eyelids droop, and surveyed and measured him from underneath them. It gave her an oriental look.

"My dear Harold, it is too late for pretence between us. You will welcome a release quite as eagerly as I shall; and so we ought to be able to arrange matters. We have investigated your movements since you have been away and the name

of the Indian woman will serve our purposes.”

This produced a most disagreeable impression upon Hal.

”No,” he said with a slow drawl that had menace in it. ”No, I think not.”

Edith turned and looked at him in amazement. It was a formality, one of those unpleasant formalities the silly law made necessary. The woman in view would never know of it, wouldn’t care if she did. It seemed much the easier way. To her look of genteel astonishment he said in explanation:

”You see she is nothing but a savage. She wouldn’t understand our refinements.”

She laughed at his irony. Then he was in love, romantically in love. She laughed joyously. It seemed to make his acquiescence very certain.

”I won’t oppose your application,” she heard him say.

Of course he would not. Why should he? He loved this Indian woman. Her fears of a moment ago seemed childish, silly. She felt the situation pliant in her soft, cruel hand. Her heart leaped up within her. Her barque, too, was floating with the stream. It was a pleasure barge smothered in flowers but crowned with a coronet, and as it spread its silken sails to the perfumed breeze, everywhere in the crowded roadway shipping gave way and place, salutes were fired, and everywhere the air was thick with adulation and acclaim. And no small part of the anticipated triumph were the scowls of the envious and the evening of old scores.

”I make two stipulations,” she heard him say.

She held her breath. Had he led her on only to tell her at last that he would fight her application—refuse her freedom? She knew she was at his mercy. He could exact bitter terms. He could in fact prevent the consummation of her crowning ambitions; could wreck the whole elaborate structure of her life. Her assured happiness seemed suddenly threatened. In a hysterical moment she saw it in ruins. Instantly her plans and prospects assumed an importance and insistence they had never had before. At the thought that he might stand in her way she was filled with an insane fury. Still she waited. What would he demand?

”You must not bring the Indian woman’s name into the affair.”

Heavens! Was that all? Willing victims and accomplices were to be found. What else?

”And you must take no steps while my father lives.”

She passed in a second from death unto life. The Earl was clinging to existence by a thread. Hal hadn’t even bargained for the return of the jewels he had given her. She felt that she must make some show of resistance or the terms would be changed. It was too ridiculously simple.

”Of course Lord Yester’s wishes must not be ignored.”

”I cannot allow you or Lord Yester to decide that for me.”

He turned away as he spoke and so was not aware that Lord Yester had entered the room in time to hear this reference to himself. It is universally conceded that it requires courage to interfere between husband and wife; but then Lord Yester was a brave little man. He could wait no longer. His fate, too, was being decided in the library. He felt he must have a voice in deciding it. More than that, she needed him, this soft, plaintive soul that had come through time and space, through sin and suffering, to meet him, her complement, her supplement. Small, slender, with a delicate, sensitive face, distinguished by regular but small features, he had a fine, fresh, unspoiled capacity for suffering, which she teased and worried and played with for her infinite amusement. Quite apart from his coming coronet, she was in love with him; that is, she was a pyromaniac, and she got sensations from seeing his emotions burn, the fresh, beautiful emotions of a poet and a child.

"Harold, I don't think you have met Lord Norman Yester?"

She was the only one of the three who was without embarrassment.

"Yes, I think I met Lord Yester when he was at Eton."

Hal had no intention of making the other uncomfortable.

The clod! thought Yester; the clumsy clod! Eton, indeed! Everything about the boy was small except his spirit. He was like a child who says: "I'm six, going on seven."

"Yes?" he said with a supercilious elevation of the brows. "That was such a long time ago, I had quite forgotten it."

Having put the unpleasant husband in his place, he turned to her with the utmost deference, to the wronged and neglected wife.

"Edith," he said gently—"Lady Effington," he corrected himself and bowed formally to her husband. It was a delightfully ingenuous thing to do. Hal smiled, but not in derision. In fact, he liked the boy. What a funny little mediaeval gentleman!

"Lady Effington," continued Sir Launcelot (pocket edition), "if you can feel that I am worthy of your confidence, perhaps you will leave your interests in my hands—er—in our hands!"

Again he forgot the unpleasant husband and again he bowed an apology for his breach of etiquette.

"Thank you, Lord Yester," she said with a gravity and dignity equal to his own. To Hal it was like a play—this elaborate formality, this adroit indirectness, this dexterity in handling high explosives in a perfectly safe and genteel way, this modern capacity to bring everything down to a common denominator. He could play the game too, but what a long way it seemed from Red Butte Ranch, Big Bill, John McCloud, McShay, and Wah-na-gi, 'the soul without a body'!

"Lord Effington and I are both men of the world," Hal heard the youngster

say. "It ought not to be difficult for us to—to—arrive at an understanding."

Lord Yester had his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, his chest was thrown out, and he was balancing himself on the ball of his foot. It was an acquired mannerism that seemed to add to his height. Like all small men, he was fond of referring to the fact that Napoleon was not a giant.

Edith inclined her beautiful head forward at an angle of supreme deference.

"I leave my happiness in your hands, with the utmost confidence in you both," she said gracefully as she swept out of the room. Lord Yester met her as she moved and gave her the homage of his protection to the door! The movement left the husband in the position of a rank outsider.

What fun Edith must have had, Hal thought, in playing up to these ideals! Edith, who had no ideals of her own.

When Yester returned the two men looked at each other; there was an awkward pause, each man cleared his throat, and each waited for the other to begin.

"Will you smoke?" asked Hal with a motion to the cigars. The youngster made a nervous start toward the table, then it occurred to him that he could not meet on such a friendly basis the man who had treated with inhuman cruelty the woman who had thrown herself upon his protection; so he stopped short and very awkwardly said:

"No! thank you; no, no!"

Again an awkward pause.

"Will you sit down?"

That seemed consistent with dignity and he started to do so, but again recoiled.

"I—eh—I feel more comfortable standing, if you don't mind."

Hal bowed. Yester's awkwardness was catching. He lounged across the room, sat down on the rail before the fire, and lit a cigarette. He could wait. Yester fiddled with his collar, stroked his cheek, and fidgeted.

"This is—this is rather a delicate situation, isn't it?" he said at last with a little deprecatory, nervous smile.

"Nothing seems unusual or impossible these days," said Hal easily.

"Well, you see," said the other, "I was intended for the diplomatic service, but I'm afraid I'm rather direct."

What a kid it was, thought Hal.

"An engaging frankness is sometimes the highest form of diplomacy," he said encouragingly.

"Well, you see," said the other gathering courage, "she has come to rely on me so completely, on my judgment as it were—"

"She? Oh, yes, my wife."

"Yes, yes," eagerly assented the lover, so absorbed in his own romance as

to be beautifully oblivious to any other point of view. Hal smoked and kept an inscrutable face, while his heart sang within him, going with the wind and tide, going out of these eddies, these twists and turns, out into the broad ocean and on to a new world.

Yester walked over to the writing-table and began to play nervously with its furnishings.

"I wanted to say certain things to you, and I—I—I find I hardly know how." Then he pulled himself together as his mind went back over their acquaintance. "You see, as she had no other friends, as she was in trouble and in bad health, my sympathies were naturally enlisted, and almost before either of us realized it—well, you see, while I think you have behaved very badly, I—eh—now that we have met, I—will you let me say, I feel very sorry for you?"

The ingenuousness of this was completely disarming. Hal loved the child. But he continued to treat the situation with becoming gravity, bowed formally, and said:

"That's very generous of you."

"At the same time," exclaimed the little man returning to his purpose, "it is her happiness that must concern us both, isn't it? And I can only say that if you can accept the inevitable—well and good! If not," and again he balanced himself on his toes and expanded his chest; "if not, I stand ready to face the alternative."

Alternative sounded ominous. What did it mean?

"Alternative?" said Hal puzzled.

"I'll meet you under any terms and conditions you may name."

"Meet me?" Oh, yes," and he smiled in spite of himself. "Why, duelling is illegal, isn't it? It's worse than illegal; it's unfashionable." He rose and went over to the boy and looked down at him with a protecting air. "I shouldn't want to take the life of such a gallant little gentleman, and I should care even less to have you take mine. I'm afraid I'm hopelessly commonplace."

Hal's attitude in spite of himself was too obvious.

"I'm afraid that is too evident, Lord Effington," said Yester sharply, resenting the overlordship of the other. "And may I suggest," he added with growing irritation, "that I am not so much younger and smaller than yourself that you need persist in patronizing me?"

"I beg your pardon. I had no intention of doing that." Then he looked at him very seriously and added: "I hope for the sake of my middle-class conscience you know what you are doing."

"I feel quite capable of deciding that," replied the boy easily. "I know something of the world—something, I fancy, of women!"

"And you are almost of age," added Hal.

"I am about to attain my majority," said Yester stiffly. "And when I do——"

"You hope to celebrate it by your marriage to my wife?"

The other bowed with an engaging smile.

"Quite so. Well, I shall not stand in the way of your happiness, Lord Yester."

"That is very noble of you."

"I'm afraid it's rather selfish of me. Your happiness happens to correspond with mine. And I hope in the future you will never have cause to think bitterly of me."

In Hal's eyes lurked an embryo twinkle. What a ripping farce civilization was!

"On the contrary," said Yester, happy beyond words, "I think you have behaved exceedingly well. You conceal your sufferings like a soldier and you join me in protecting the good name of the woman we have both loved. I can only say that you have acted like a gentleman, Lord Effington."

Both men bowed formally.

"Lord Yester," said Hal; "your father once did me a great service. I hope we shall always be friends?"

And they shook hands.

"Oh, Sir George, you know Lord Yester, I think?"

Hal spoke to the physician who had entered from the hall.

Both men bowed slightly. Hal turned to the heir of the Duke of Uxminster.

"Lady Effington will explain to you the only conditions I make. They are very slight and I am sure will meet with your approval."

"Thank you," and the little fellow bowed elaborately to each man and left the room with his arms folded behind him, an attitude very much affected by Napoleon, if we may trust the pictures.

It was with difficulty that Hal refrained from laughter. What a farce, but what a joyous farce! Already he was mentally speculating on the time when he could turn his back on these attitudinizing people with their picture-poster lives, on all this hollow, artificial make-believe, and return to the shirtsleeve crowd. What joy he would bring to one soul! He saw her face as he said to her:

"I'm coming back, Wah-na-gi; I'm coming back." He had forgotten Sir George.

"I beg your pardon, Sir George. Delightful little chap, Yester! Eh? I wonder if I was ever as young as that."

It was evident that Yester's attentions to the wife of another man had not been a recommendation to the sedate scientist. He said dryly: "I don't know whether he's a fool or a knave."

"Well, he isn't either," said Hal. "He's been reading 'Ivanhoe'! You wanted to speak to me of father, Sir George."

"No, my boy; it's in regard to your wife."

Sir George had not only been the Earl's medical adviser as far back as Hal could remember but he had also been his intimate friend as well. Hal was thinking of other things, planning his escape, picturing the welcome the West was keeping for her child, or he would have noticed an extra consideration in the doctor's tone, an added solicitude in his manner.

"Edith?" he queried indifferently and with polite surprise.

"Yes; sit down." The doctor motioned to the little sofa which had its back against the writing-table. Hal sat down carelessly and picked up from the seat the society journal Lady Winifred had put into his hands a few moments before and began to turn its leaves and glance at its pictures, but in a cursory way and with an inclination of the head toward the physician to indicate that he was listening. Of course Sir George did not know—how could he?—that he and Edith had passed into different worlds.

Sir George himself was a study as he stood for a second regarding the other. How was it this custodian of other people's secrets and sorrows, forever intimate with sickness and pain, could look so sufficient, so impeccable, so serene? Well groomed, smooth, and polished to his finger tips, there seemed no surface where trouble or anxiety might stick.

Was it an armor or was it his integument?

"It's quite time you came home," the doctor said, glancing absent-mindedly at his polished finger nails. "You must give some thought to Edith. The life she is leading is exhausting, abnormal. She requires a change. You ought to take her away from London and this fast set."

"She has always lived this life, Sir George. It isn't any different, is it?"

"You have a ranch in America. It's just the thing. Why don't you take her there?"

"She wouldn't go. She is joined to her idols and I'm not one of them, Sir George."

The doctor was standing at the corner of the table. He satisfied himself that they were alone before speaking, then he bent toward the young man and said quietly:

"Of course no one knows it as yet but me; but you ought to know it; in fact, you will know it eventually, when perhaps it is too late, so——"

Hal looked up from his periodical.

"You alarm me, Sir George. What is it?"

The physician's eye fell upon the paper in Hal's hands.

"Allow me," he said and held out his hand for it.

Hal watched him deliberately turn the pages. He seemed to take a painfully long time to do it. Meantime the fog seemed to have penetrated the walls and to have taken possession of the place; the lights grew dim and the fire loomed

ghostly in the dim distance. The air was thick and Hal seemed to breathe with difficulty. Ah, at last the doctor found what he was looking for. He handed it back and pointed to the article. There must be some mistake. He had already glanced through that article. It concerned an unfortunate woman who was found in Hyde Park under the influence of—

He glanced up. Sir George was still standing there. He must have been waiting a long time. Hal spoke at last, very slowly.

"And that was—Edith?"

The physician nodded his head gravely.

Hal glanced back at the paper but he did not see it. He sat still as if everything was just as it had been before, but he knew that the earth was rocking in a convulsion, that the house of his building was tumbling about him, that he was choking with the circumambient dust, and that he could not move or escape, only sit still until it was all over.

CHAPTER XX

The doctor waited patiently while the other readjusted his disordered faculties and groped his way toward the light.

"Good Lord, how terrible!" said Hal, distrait. "Why, Edith is the last woman in the world—strong willed, self-willed, ambitious! Why, I can't grasp it. It doesn't seem possible. I—I can't realize it."

"Oh, it's common enough these days," said the doctor, sitting down beside the boy and putting his hand on his knee in suggested sympathy. "The pace that kills! No rest, no respite! Teas, dinners, receptions, theatres, balls, races, motors, yachts; bridge, morning, noon and night; excitement, fatigue, reaction, depression; then stimulants, small at first, then more stimulants for greater depression, then over-stimulants; then sleeplessness and all the horrors of neurasthenia; then narcotics for rest and quiet, to keep from going mad; then, all of a sudden as it seems, but really by the most logical process, a *habit* is formed—a fixed, implacable, relentless habit."

"Poor old girl," said Hal, trying to follow the professional exegesis. "How awful. How awful! But of course people are cured of such things, Sir George. You haven't let this go on?"

"Unfortunately it had been going on for some time before I discovered it,

and of course I have done all I can, all I know. I'm afraid it's now beyond me. She has one chance in a thousand, and that chance is in your hands: the fresh air, out-door life, simple living, rest, peace, quiet! Then, if she will help you, if she will help herself, why, who knows?"

Again he put his hand on the boy's knee as much as to say: Don't take it too much to heart. We all have some affliction. If it isn't one thing, it's another, and fortunately we have work to do, and that saves us—work. All he said was:

"Well, I must be going."

"I want to see you a moment before you go, Sir George."

It was Edith speaking. She had entered the room as usual—noiselessly.

The doctor gave her a quick look. She was radiant. She had heard nothing, suspected nothing. He gave a sigh of relief.

"At your service, Lady Effington; I'll be in the billiard-room."

She made sure he had left the room, then she came toward Hal, her head up, her face beaming, her eyes dancing, glorious, transcendent! Magnificent to look upon was this wayward woman in the first glow of triumph, but Hal did not see her. He was gazing dumbly into space.

"It's very splendid of you, Harold," she said as she came over and sat down beside him, just where the doctor had sat a moment ago.

"I have come to thank you. You and I were never meant for each other, but it has been no fault of yours, and though I shall be compelled legally to complain of your cruelty, I shall, as a matter of fact, always remember gratefully your generous and considerate treatment. Fortunately it is not too late to remedy our mistakes. Lord Yester tells me you have definitely agreed not to interfere with our plans."

At the conclusion of her rhapsody she leaned forward and put her hand on his. It was almost a caress, the nearest approach to it she had bestowed on him in years. He withdrew his hand and took hers, giving it a little sympathetic pat, then he rose and walked away, the lines of his face drawn. She looked at him in wonder. Was it possible he cared for her a little bit after all?

"One moment, Edith," he said. "You see I didn't know. I couldn't know. And now—well, for the moment I'm bowled over. We'll have to think this thing over, won't we? Hang it all, it isn't fair, is it? It doesn't seem quite fair."

"Fair?" she echoed with a dubious smile. She saw that he was laboring under great excitement. "Fair?"

"To him—to the boy—to Yester."

"What are you talking about?" she said with patient incredulity. He paid no attention to her. He only half heard her questions and answers. He was reasoning it out, laboring with himself.

"He's a mere boy, and not a bad sort either; in fact, he's really quite all right."

I don't see how we can go on with it; you and I."

She was like one who is suddenly and violently awakened from a halcyon dream to gaze into the glare of a dark lantern in the hands of a thief who may at any moment become an assassin. At the first glimmer of what he meant terror gripped her. She rose and came toward him.

"You gave *me* your word. You gave *Lord Yester* your word."

"I didn't know the—the situation, did I? You see I thought I could just put my hands in my pockets and stand off and let it go on, but if I see a blind man walking over a precipice and I don't stop him, why, I might just as well push him over. It's murder either way. I can't do it. I don't see how I can do it. I've changed my mind."

He tried to walk away as if it were settled. She followed him softly, like a cat, then confronted him.

"I won't let you change your mind." She spoke slowly and quietly, but it was a brave or a stupid man who could ignore the threat.

"It's no use, Edith. Sir George has told me, told me for your own sake." Again he turned away, as if he were looking for a way of escape from himself, from her, from the situation. She felt a wild impulse to scream, to leap upon him and tear him to pieces, and then it came to her that that would lend color to his veiled accusations. She must go softly, cunningly, and—wait.

He walked away, over to the fireplace. Was there no way out of it? Oh, if Sir George had not spoken! If he had not known! Was there no other way? Was no compromise possible? Why should the burden of all these lives fall upon him? Why should he be handed the cross to bear? The flames, like little red demons, little fire sprites, danced here and there, threw up their hands, squirmed, writhed, trying to get away, trying to leap into the air, trying to seize an unattainable something, falling back like whipped dogs to lick and bite the smoking log! Gazing into the fantastic fire depths—he saw Wah-na-gi, and beside her John McCloud, just as they stood that fateful day he left the Red Butte Ranch. "If you do come back, you must bring this Indian woman clean hands and a pure heart, promise me that." And he *had promised*. And Wah-na-gi, the soul without a body, heard him promise. He had come thousands of miles that he might keep the spirit of that promise. And now all he had to do would be to let things alone, let them go on as they were going. Why should he interfere? Why should he meddle? Would any one thank him? Every one, even Yester himself, would hate him. What possible good would it do? It was too late to interfere. His own happiness was at stake too. What of that? Why should he ruin his own happiness with theirs? He would go home a free man and who would know the difference? There would be no one to blame him except his own conscience. Oh, subterfuge, subterfuge! The lying little devil flames laughed. John McCloud would know. In

fact, by some clairvoyant mystery, he already knew! Even now he was saying: "And this boy is the son of your benefactor, the son of your friend."

At last he said, as if to the fire:

"I couldn't do this and then go back and face Wah-na-gi and John McCloud. I promised if I came back to come with clean hands."

"You are talking like a wild man," Edith said. "But you see I am not excited. You're not going to betray me into a scene and then accuse me of being as crazy as you are. I sit down and I am calm."

She sat down deliberately in the high-backed chair and clutched its arms, and clung to it desperately like a drowning sailor. "I have perfect self-possession, complete control of myself, and I listen, listen to a madman. Go on."

She was sincere. He was irresponsible. Nothing else would explain it.

Indeed, to most of us, those who act from altruistic motives are quite as incomprehensible as those whose acts suggest diabolical and abnormal instigation. The boy was mad. He had always been "queer." He was the son of his father.

By a supreme effort of the will she brought all her faculties to bear. She would first understand this and then she would know how to meet it. She was a resourceful woman and used to bending others to her will. He was the son of his father. Swiftly her mind climbed the stairs and bent over the invalid. Relentlessly she seized his life and dragged it out of the sick bed, and submitted it to a searching examination. All his life the Earl had been a sentimentalist. All his life he had made mistakes. The woman who loved him had once called them "glorious mistakes." Everybody else called them just mistakes. Out of quixotic love for the Countess Diana he had left England under a cloud, bearing the inevitable implication of another's guilt. Another man would have stayed in London and have been her lover. That was his first mistake. An exile, branded as a thief, he had tried to hide himself away from civilization, became a cattle-man, in a country where white women were a curiosity, was thrown by circumstances into relations with a pretty little Indian woman, had a child by her, and married the woman that he might not be the father of an illegitimate child. That was his second mistake. Any other man would have married her by tribal rites and, when he got ready, made her a present or made it worth while for some one else to marry her. When the death of Diana's husband, the real embezzler, called him back to a title and to the life and the land and the woman he loved, he chose to stay with the little savage who was the mother of his child. Another mistake! And so he continued. Sentimental again with regard to his duty to the child, he had driven the Indian mother to suicide. Free at last to marry the woman for whom he had made such fantastic sacrifices, they were both middle-aged people, the bloom to life, the blush of love was gone. Then, in the first glow of their new-found happiness, Diana died, and he was alone. What had the idealist to show for all his glorious "mistakes"? for

his unselfish adhesion to a self-conscious conception of duty? It was ridiculous. We live in a practical world. That world has two standards—a theoretical one, that no one uses, and the practical one, the actual one. To try to live outside the actual is to try to reverse the law of gravitation. We have invented the theoretical standard to fool others into a course we would not take ourselves. It's a trap for the simple-minded. It was madness. Yes, this boy was the mad son of a mad sentimentalist. And these sentimentalists drag other people to ruin with them. But why should she, a practical woman, a woman of the world, the real world, be made the victim of these madmen? Her will, seldom thwarted and never tamed, rose up for battle and said, no, NO!

"I won't be a party to this, Edith," he said, looking into the fire, and the moment he had said it he began to realize what such a decision would involve.

One step forward or backward wasn't enough. One couldn't stand still. One couldn't stop. My God, where would it end? He couldn't take everything away from her and then leave her to herself. Lord Yester would gladly assume the burden and accept the consequences. If he thwarted her, if he stood between her and her desires—what? He became the nurse of an irresponsible sick woman. The love that might have made that possible was gone, never really existed. She had stolen this boy's love and was stealing his life. To make her drop it, he would have to resort to force—then what? Where would it end? Who made him a policeman or a jailer? He wouldn't do it. He couldn't do it. No one would do it. He was a fool to think of it. He wasn't doing this willingly. He was hypnotized, led, driven by some force outside himself.

"But I won't leave you to fight it out alone," he said. His voice sounded strange to himself. What was that he was saying? He would rebel, deny it, take it all back in the next breath.

"I'll give up all my own plans and I'll stand by you."

He recoiled, frightened, appalled at what he had said, but one thing involved another. There it was; it was his decision, his; he had announced it. Could he become a party to this conspiracy against this innocent boy, the son of his friend, and then could he go back and tell Wah-na-gi and John McCloud exactly what he had done, and then be happy? If not, then he must go the other way, and accept the consequences, and meet them. If they were to be met, it must be boldly. Cowardice encouraged the enemy.

"Yes, there is no other way," he said. "I'll give up all my own plans." And for one cruel moment he stopped to think what that meant to him. "I'll stand by you, give you my hand, and we'll beat it out together." Then he pulled himself together, put a torch to his bridges, and went on, his face lit up with the light of their burning.

"Come now," he said with a show of spirit, going to her as she held herself

with supreme self-control in the big chair. "Be a sport, old girl! Chuck it all, this rotten, artificial life, and come with me out into the open. We'll leave this man-made world, and go out into God's world, and then when you have mastered this thing, when you are free—"

He was about to add that then she could marry the Duke of Uxminster or whomsoever she pleased, but Edith did not let him finish. What would become of this romantic boy in the meantime? and marriageable dukes were scarce. Besides, she had no intention of postponing indefinitely her happiness or her plans. Like all habit-victims, she refused to acknowledge even to herself her slavery. Even, supposing she had to admit it, she would reform herself! Indeed, she had made up her mind to it already and was about to begin. Her marriage to Lord Yester would help her, furnish her an irresistible motive for reformation. To keep him from eventually finding out, she would have to reform, and she had grown very fond of the boy. His romantic idealization of her was very beautiful. Hal could safely leave all this in her hands. In fact, he would have to leave it in her hands. She began to tear at her lace handkerchief in spasmodic jerks.

"I don't know whether to laugh or to scream," she said with a scared smile, "but you see I am calm, and I am listening to you."

"I used to be a drunkard," he said. "Look at me now. You shall choose. We'll go wherever you like. We'll hunt big game in Africa, or fish for tarpon in Florida, or go after the musk-ox in the Barren Grounds. You don't know what it means to sleep under the sky, to bathe your soul in the solitude, to rest in the friendly silences, and live face to face with the Infinite."

He spoke with the enthusiasm of the devotee, of what he knew and had felt. He had in his soul to be the priest, the Poet of the Open, and now, in the white heat of this tense moment, he found expression.

"Don't hang back," he urged. "Don't despair, and don't discourage me."

The last was almost plaintive. He knew that he needed help.

She rose and looked at him through the slits of her eyes.

"You have never influenced one act of my life. What makes you think you can do so now?"

"Sir George says it's your only chance."

She backed away, on guard. She began to laugh, a little hollow, false laugh. She would admit nothing.

"My only chance? Sir George says that?"

She laughed again, the laugh of derision, of defiance. They have an expression in the courts, "the *burden* of proof," and sometimes it's a heavy load to carry. Flagrant sin cries out: Prove it! The habitual criminal, caught, the stolen goods taken from his pocket, says: "I never saw it before. Some one put it there." Prove it, her laugh cried.

"Now, don't try that," he said gently. He did not love her, but it was piteous to see this gorgeous creature, with the world at her feet and destiny in her hand, with possibilities unlimited; it was piteous to see her throw it all away in her lust for something—God knows what—something she called "pleasure!" "life," in the mad race for sensation, for excitement, in the fatuous ambition for place in the shallow mob that called itself Society, sacrificing herself on the Altar of Self, pouring out her own blood before her own image. It was piteous! One can't stand idly by and see a maddened horse rush back into a burning stable. It was impossible not to feel sorry for her, not to want to help her.

"Sir George felt it was his duty to you, his duty to me," he added. She straightened up and her eyes blazed.

"It isn't true. I don't do it. It's a lie—a wicked, devilish lie! Who will believe him? Who will believe a man sworn not to betray his patient's secrets? He has no professional honor. Who will believe him? I don't do it. I don't do it!"

He hadn't mentioned it. She had forgotten that she was admitting that she knew what he had in mind, and that the admission was fatal.

"I've suffered, suffered horribly from headaches and insomnia, and sometimes I've taken it, sometimes for that, but I call God to witness—"

She was screaming in a fierce whisper.

"Hush," he said, trying to quiet her. "The doctor says you must get away from here. It's your only chance. Sir George says, if you will help me, if you will help yourself, you can win out. Come, you must let me help you. Let me try. Won't you let me try?"

What was the matter with the man?

"Can't you grasp it?" she said, regaining some poise by a great effort. "Don't you see that what you call silence and solitude would put me in a madhouse? Leave London? Why, London is my heaven!" And she sat down on the sofa, or rather crouched down, as if the statement was an argument and the argument unanswerable.

"London, Heaven, eh?"

Her words broke through the wall of his prejudices and the stored-up waters of bitterness gushed forth.

"London that is growing sterile in Mayfair and breeding monsters in Whitechapel! London, with one man in every four a pauper; with its thousands of starving school children! With its multitudes who have nothing trying to sell it to those who have everything! With its terrible women and its hopeless men; hollow-eyed vice cheek by jowl with hollow-eyed want; luxury, overdressed, sweeping past wretches who are dying standing up, without the decency of a bed on which to throw the rotten remnants of their tortured lives! London, Heaven, eh? My God!"

He had forgotten her, himself, in his indictment of the city, not London alone, but the city everywhere, the city that reversed the order and the law of nature!

How far removed they were! She had relaxed, and the curl and sag of her body, the sensuous somnolent droop of the eye-lid, the voluptuous lips apart, she might have posed for a statue of lazy luxury. "London is my soul," she said softly, dreamily. "I'd rather be a stray cat crawling among its chimneys than live in splendor anywhere else. The crowds, the excitement, the strife, I love it! People amuse me, their passions, their cruelty, even their meanness, yes, even their dullness, their satiety! It all fascinates me. I'm drunk with it. I wouldn't give it up, and I couldn't if I would." She rose and came to him, and scrutinized him narrowly with soft cunning.

"Don't be foolish! What's your object? Why do you want to play the hypocrite with me? You don't care for me any more than I care for you. And when I am Duchess of Uxminster—"

"I think you'd better give that up," he said coldly.

"Why give it up?" she said with fierce challenge.

"You and I must answer for our own mistakes and sins," he said. "We mustn't unload them onto others. Lord Yester doesn't know."

"Who will tell him? Who will tell him?" she cried with bravado.

"You will," he said.

"Never! Never! I wouldn't; I couldn't!"

Her voice rose to a hysterical scream, then she stopped, struggled for control of herself, and shook like one in a chill, reaching out her hands toward him in mute appeal, unable to speak, to form coherent words. Finally she said in a hoarse whisper:

"Wait a moment. Wait! Let us be calm. Let us be calm. You haven't spared me. I'm not going to spare you."

She crouched and advanced toward him like a tiger.

"I'll never leave London! That's as fixed as death. *You* can't remain in London, and you know that too. You were forced out of the Army; that's enough. You're impossible! You always were impossible. You always will be. You're not a gentleman; you're a misfit, an outcast, a *half-breed!*"

His bronze sinewy hands looked very dark against the white, the dazzling white of her throat, as he lifted her in the air for one terrible instant, an instant when she was near to death and he to murder.

"Edith," he whispered, "if you were a man I'd kill you!"

Then he took his hands away, caught her when she would have fallen, and stammered out brokenly, almost in tears:

"No, no, I mustn't say that. You're not responsible. You're not responsible."



“You will,” he said.

And he dragged himself away as though he might be tempted to put hands on her again, went over to the sofa, threw himself down in terror and abasement, and held his hands as though *they* were the offenders, not his will. On her part the leash was slipped. There was no longer any effort or desire to control herself. She quivered in an infuriate passion of hate. All other considerations were swept away. She followed him like a wild animal that has tasted blood. She wanted to hurt, to tear and rend, and she had a vague insane idea that if she could induce him to violence, that if she could goad him to maim her, his will, his inflexible purpose would break down under pity and remorse. She crouched over him while she screamed:

“You’re a half-breed, and everything you do, everything you don’t do, shows it. My God, what I’ve had to endure as the wife of a half-caste who had

to leave the Army. You, too. It hasn't been easy for you. You've suffered. This is our chance: our chance to escape from each other. You want your freedom. You want it—you want it—you want it. I've seen it in your face. That's why you've come back. You don't want to go through life chained to a woman who hates you, because if you drive me to desperation I'll make you wish you'd never been born. You'll buy your freedom."

It was to be war. He rose, white with passion. She moved away as if it were settled, as if the victory were already hers, repeating hysterically:

"You'll buy it. You'll buy it."

It was a mistake. It made him inflexible.

"But not at that price," he said fiercely. "You will tell Lord Yester or I must."

The noise of the colloquy had penetrated to the drawing-room.

Lord Yester, unseen to either of them, had quietly entered the library.

"Will you or shall I?" was Hal's relentless demand.

She turned and saw him—Lord Yester. The fierce mounting flames of her fury died down into ashes. She seemed to shrink and draw within herself, grow smaller and whiter. Hal followed her intense fixed look to its object. Yester, too, looked older and smaller and paler. It seemed a long time ago when they were agreed and each saw Happiness standing by an open door. Now the door was shut and hung with crape. Lord Yester knew that he had entered a death chamber. He gazed at her in silence. He saw the proud queenly woman cowed, looking haggard and wan with fear and despair. Love and tenderness shone from his eyes and begged her to tell him all, to trust to him—that years of devotion would make amends for all her suffering. He saw that it was not in her thought that he could help her. She looked to the other—to the man she had turned to stone. Her eyes swept him with a plea for mercy. She crept to him, kneeled to him, took his hand, abased herself, drew herself up to a level with his face, searched it for one ray of hope, one sign of relenting pity, then, with a low heart-rending moan such as neither man would ever forget, she crept like a piteous wounded thing out of the room.

Lord Yester did not attempt to help her or to follow her. He knew in some instinctive way that she was past help. He looked at Hal. He saw him stricken, spent, seared by suffering. It wasn't the same man he had talked to a few moments ago. Then he had been a splendid animal, lithe, vibrant, instinct with life and the joy of living. Here was a sad, disillusioned, heart-broken, middle-aged man without hope in the world. It had been a drawn battle—a duel in which both combatants had been wounded unto death.

Lord Yester came down slowly.

What was it this terrible man had said to her as he came in?—"Will you tell him or shall I?"

What was there to tell? What could he tell? Women, and men too, with a past generally tell it before any one else has the chance—their version of it. Edith had her history and she had been the first to tell him *her version* in which she was always the injured and suffering heroine.

"If it is anything discreditable to her, to Lady Effington, I would not believe you," he said with quivering intensity.

"That is for you to decide," said Hal. What a game little chap it was! he thought, as he looked at his sensitive, delicate face, made for suffering. And he'll hate me to his dying day.

"Perhaps it won't make any difference," he added, and at the thought a gleam of hope came into his own life. Suppose it didn't make any difference? Suppose this reckless little Knight-errant threw all caution, all considerations to the winds; suppose that, knowing the truth, all the truth, he still held out his arms to Edith and demanded the right to assume her burdens? Ah, then Hal's hands were clean and would be free to—He glanced up to see Sir George Rundall. Oh, if Rundall hadn't known or had kept silent. It was too late for regret now.

"Sir George," he said to the doctor, "Edith has refused to leave London, to go with me. If Lord Yester would help us—perhaps—"

"Lord Effington," said the physician sternly, interrupting Hal, "I am not in the habit of discussing my patients before strangers."

"Lord Yester is not a stranger," said Hal without irony. "He enjoys my wife's confidence and friendship and if—"

"I am proud to believe that that is true," said Yester with equal sincerity. "And if it concerns the health or happiness of Lady Effington, you may rely on me, Sir George Rundall."

The polished man of the world restrained his irritation, his exasperation, with obvious difficulty.

"Lord Effington has placed me in a most embarrassing position," he said with increasing resentment. "I have expressed the opinion that Lady Effington,—that she should—that it was in fact her only chance—"

"Her only chance?" echoed Lord Yester. "What do you mean?"

"Perhaps that is too strong," said the doctor, floundering, sensitive, over-sensitive as to his professional *amour propre*.

"Perhaps that is too strong. Let me say her best chance. Other scenes, other countries, an out-door life? Unfortunately in cases like this, the will-force is enslaved. Unfortunately most victims of—let me say—" he broke off impatiently. "I cannot see what right Lord Yester—"

"I will relieve you of all doubt on that point, Sir George. I have quite as much right to hear what you have to say as Lord Effington, and I insist on your speaking plainly."

The physician looked to Hal, whose refusal to contradict this was an affirmation of it, and then, with undisguised amazement and under protest, he said: "Well, so be it. What I had in mind was that most victims of the morphine habit—"

Lord Yester leaned forward slightly as if he did not think he heard aright, then he half repeated the dread word, swayed slightly, put his hand across his forehead, like a man bewildered, and groped with his other hand until he found the back of a chair. Then very quietly he found his way into it. The expression on his face was tragic. If the boy had been his son or a brother Hal could not have felt more for him or suffered more with him.

"It's a great shock to Lord Yester, as it was to me," he said after a moment's pause. "My wife trusts him, and I am sure he will join us in our efforts to save her."

Lord Yester did not reply. He raised his head as if he had some difficulty in breathing.

Then there was a painful pause. Not one of the three men spoke.

Finally Yester said: "Sir George, if you are going home—"

"Certainly," said the physician, seeing his distress and anticipating his wish. "I will set you down at your door if you like."

"Thank you," the boy said, struggling to his feet. "This room suffocates me."

"The fresh air will put you quite all right," said the doctor, walking beside him but not offering him physical help. "Quite all right."

And they went out and Hal was alone.

"Poor boy," he said. "Poor boy!"

He put his two hands to his head, and pressed the temples. Was it real or was it a dream? He drifted into the chair at the writing-table, and put his elbows on the desk and rested his chin in his hands, looking into space, trying to understand. Some one had left a current magazine open on the table. His vacant gaze wandered across a dull level of meaningless words to a hill which stood up alone and seemed to call to him, to have a message for him:

"These are my people, and this my land,
I hear the pulse of her secret soul;
This is the life that I understand,
Savage and simple, and sane and whole." [1]

[1] Lawrence Hope.

Yes, that was a long time ago. And they were a long way off—his people and his land. Why had he allowed John McCloud to drive him away from his people and his land? Could he have foreseen this never would he have come, never would he have had the courage to put aside that which was within his grasp. It was a dark, desperate moment. He regretted his lost happiness; he regretted that he had not sinned. What were these abstract things which people called "good" and "right"? Where did they lead one? Malicious shadows! What was his reward? For the rest of his life he was to be the custodian of a rancorous mad woman. His only release was death, his death or hers, and these neurasthenics live forever. His own? The only thing to his credit at this moment was that he pushed aside the thought of self-destruction. He was down in the ring, only semi-conscious, and he heard the referee counting the fatal seconds, but he had the instinct of the fighter and he knew that before ten was called he would try to get up. His land and his people! They were calling to him, in many voices, many ways. Never had they called to him as now. And it was too late. All that was past. Wah-nagi called to him. Oh, she called to him. Again he saw her as he looked back to get a last glimpse of the Red Butte Ranch, standing outlined against the eternal sky, standing on the eternal rock that marked the lonely grave. How simple and elemental she seemed to him sitting in the roar and smash of this huge factory where they were turning out lives by machinery! She called to him, to all that was best in him. Her soul, how clear and clean it was, like a mountain stream. Yes, he was glad he had not soiled it. Yes, he must live up to her faith in him. Perhaps there was another life, another world, where all these crooked things were made straight. He took paper and pen and wrote briefly and simply:

WAH-NA-GI:

I cannot come back. Don't wait for me. Don't expect me. I can't ask you to forget me, because I love you, never so much as now when I am saying good-by.
HAL.

He could only see dimly the address as he wrote it. Then he held it before him and whispered: "I hear the pulse of her secret soul!"

"I beg your lordship's pardon—"

"Lordship? Lordship?" Who was that? And who was speaking? He was out in the shadow of the Moquitch. Ah, no, he was in London, in his father's house.

"Come in, Andrews; what is it?"

It was his father's butler, a slender little old man, with a deferential face and a refined cultivated voice like the gentle-folk with whom he had always lived. Even Andrews felt that there was something unusual in the air.

"I hope I'm not intruding on your lordship."

"Not at all, Andrews."

"Is there anything I can do for you before you retire?"

"No; put out the lights and go to bed. Oh, and mail this letter for me, please."

He and the letter were a long time in parting. He looked at it, passed it from one hand to the other, held it out in view for a moment, then entrusted it to Andrews, his eye following it in the butler's hand and his body straining across the table as if he would go after it and bring it back. As the old man got over to the electric switch he turned and, with old-world deference, said: "Will your lordship permit me to say how glad your father's old servants are to see you at home once more, and we hope you are *home to stay*."

Hal caught his breath. The judge was putting on the black cap.

"Home to stay?—Yes, thank you, Andrews; thank you. Good night."

"Good night, my lord."

And the representative of that which was and would be turned out the lights, and left him to himself, left him in the shadows of the big room.

As soon as the door closed behind the form of Andrews, Hal clutched at his collar, tore it open, threw off his coat, rushed to the windows that formed one side of the room, threw them open, and stood for a moment with his breast and face bared to the sluggish, clammy breeze that was struggling with the burden of the fog. It was the act of a man used to the open.

The light from the street lamp outside struggled feebly through the precious stones that glowed in the windows on the stair. The fire light crept out timidly into the room with a sinister glint. Hal found his way back to the chair before the library table, and fell into it. The light from the jewelled lamp on the table threw a white nimbus about his face that made him look eerie and spectral, like a ghost that had stolen out of the night and the fog.

"Home to stay!" he gasped. "To stay!"

Unknown to him, another apparition evolved from the gloom of the stairs, floated in soft lacy clouds down into the room, stood for a moment looking off into the hall where Lord Yester had disappeared, then drifted noiselessly down and stood beside him. It was Edith.

"Well, he has gone," she said softly. "You have sent him away. You have locked the door and thrown away the key, and now we have the rest of our awful lives to spend with each other."

He did not move or seem to hear, and she slid serpent-like onto the table, and brought her mocking face close to his.

"We shall have many, many glorious years to look forward to, each day of each year a crucifixion. We shall hate each other over our coffee; we shall loathe each other over the luncheon; we shall despise each other through the long, long dinner. With murder in our thoughts and the itch to strangle each other in our fingers, we'll have to be polite and even affectionate," and she chuckled softly as she crossed to the fire, in whose red glow she looked like a satanic Lamia.

"From now on I shall take an active interest in what interests you and I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that I poison every minute of your life. It's a glorious prospect, isn't it? When I think that for a cheap bit of sentimental rubbish you ruined our lives, your own as well as mine, it seems like a joke—a huge, ghastly, ferocious joke. Why don't you laugh? Why don't you laugh? Why don't you laugh?" and she gave way to a burst of demoniac cachinnation as she threw herself into the big chair before the fire.

He did not reply or look at her or turn toward her, but kept his gaze fixed on that solemn rock so many thousand miles away. When she had exhausted herself, he said softly to himself: "Wah-na-gi! John McCloud! I've kept my promise. My heart is empty, but my hands are clean!"

And so they sat as far apart as two worlds in space until the morning of another day.

CHAPTER XXI

Before leaving New York Hal had arranged for a bank account upon which Big Bill was at liberty to call, but otherwise the folks at Red Butte were left to themselves. With the boy had gone the life of the ranch. After him a cold torpor settled down and took possession. Routine ruled supreme. Twice a week Curley rode over to the Agency, the nearest post-office. His return was an event, not on account of anything that ever happened or followed from it, but because of what might happen. Some one might get a letter. Occasionally this unique experience happened to John McCloud who had a married sister living in Washington with whom he corresponded. Except the preacher, no one at the ranch was much of a correspondent. Hal was not a letter-writer. In fact, the writing of a letter assumed huge, formidable, and forbidding proportions. Outside the necessary business matters, the letters he had written in his life could have been counted on two hands. The newspapers were always old. By the time they knew

any event at the ranch the world without had forgotten it or was preparing to forget it. In winter the world without at times disappeared altogether. One day something happened. Curley rode in with a letter for Wah-na-gi. Every one on the ranch knew that an important thing had happened, that Wah-na-gi had received a letter, that it was from London, and consequently from Hal. No one said a word about it; no one asked her in regard to it. She did not read it until it was night and she was alone in the living-room. Then she went to a chest of drawers up under the window, took from them the tiny pair of moccasins which had now become her "medicine," her "sacred bundle," as the Indians call their treasures, their good-luck symbols, brought them down, and sank on her knees before the blazing logs in the big fireplace.

The reading of the letter was a solemn and formal function. She did not tear it open with feverish curiosity. She put it down before her in order to prepare her mind, to calm the beating of her heart. The little moccasins had been a great comfort to her. When she was troubled she went apart and held them next her heart, and had a "long think," and somehow she got the impression that at such times Nat-u-ritch and her son were near. The little shoes had walked into her Holy of Holies, where she dreamed the divine dream of women, and she saw other tiny feet romp about in them, the little feet of him who would call Hal father and call her mother. Then she put down the sacred symbols and in the angry glow of the fire read the bitter message which came to her out of the London fog. There was no mistaking its meaning, its farewell. It slipped from her hands to the floor and in her despair she seized his gift to her and held it to her heart as she had done so often, but this time comfort came slowly; came not at all. It was the end. He had said so; had said good-by. She did not for a moment dispute its inevitableness or question his decision. She remained there a long time, looking into the cruel fire. Then she rose and put the baby shoes away, and this time she knew what the mother feels who gathers up the clothes and playthings her darling will never need again. Then she came back and took up the letter and read it once more. She would never need to read it again. It was burnt into her brain. McCloud came into the room and at a glance saw what had happened. He brought a chair near, sat down in it, and put his hand on her head with a caress.

"Wah-na-gi, my dear little girl," he said after a long pause; "I wish I could bear this for you. You've been a teacher. Try to think of God as a teacher. This life is a plane of consciousness, a kindergarten plane, the primary class, and we may miss no step in the progress to a larger plane, a higher plane, in the search to know God, whom to know is life and peace. This will mean nothing to you now, but perhaps it will when you can see beyond your own tears, and can take up your lesson again. You know what the love of a teacher is; add to that the love of a father, the love of a mother, and know they are only symbols of that love

which is divine.”

Wah-na-gi did not answer, but she hastily picked up her letter and her life and passed out of the room, and routine resumed its normal sway.

Fortunately for her, she was the busiest person on the ranch, for she had the care of the house and of John McCloud. In the death valley these two found each other. They began to see each other face to face, to know and understand, and a great love took them by the hand and walked with them in holy peace. Each was metaphysical; each had been denied what seemed the one supreme need; each had been through the waters of affliction; each seemed to be God’s compensation to the other. The lonely man who had missed the love of children found a child; the lonely child found a father whose love, supreme, benignant, was like the love of God. And so they walked in sad and solemn joy.

”Winter-man” came and went and had come again. ”Cold-maker” had ridden down out of the North and a white shroud lay over all the inert desolation.

Even in the busy summer it is a silent land, its wide, vast muteness occasionally relieved by the tumble of a cataract, the sob of a solemn river, the twitter of a lonesome bird, the barking of a dog, the nightly plaint of the coyote, the sound of the voice of some taciturn ranchman or some wandering cowboy. Sometimes the muffled monotony of the untenanted wastes falls over the mind and the soul, and men and women are monotony-mad. When the cowboy goes to town he wants to ride up and down through the streets making a noise, a noise other people can hear, yapping and shooting off his revolver. The summer has activities, the ranch, the crops, the round-up, social amenities, many things to interest and occupy the isolated. In the winter the bear and the snake go to sleep, and man hibernates too, in the solemn hush that broods over the pulseless world.

Winter was upon them before any one realized it, and it came with an angry rush that boded no good. The few books and magazines were soon exhausted. The men looked after the stock, tried to keep in touch with the cattle, made occasional excursions for deer, and played cards, and then cards, and then some more cards. It was a hard winter and its dull level unbroken except for two events. One day McShay came over with a wagon-load of supplies and brought with him a stranger, a man he had picked up on the trail and who was inquiring the way to Red Butte Ranch. It was obvious to the Irishman that the man was a woodsman and used to hardship. He was clean-cut, wiry, seasoned, built for endurance, but evidently an outsider, not of the region. His equipment was too complete, too up-to-date, and yet he wasn’t an amateur hunter or a tenderfoot. There was something about him hard to describe unless you call it cosmopolitan, and there was a quiet reserve that covered powers of reflection, contemplation, the dreamer or the student. He didn’t fit in to any of the conditions of the Indian country. As he volunteered little information on the way to the ranch, he found

McShay equally taciturn. When he reached the ranch, however, the stranger did not leave them long in doubt as to who he was and what he wanted.

"My name is Gifford—Walter Gifford," he volunteered as Mike started to introduce him to McCloud, "This is Doctor McCloud, isn't it? You're a Princeton man—so am I. You studied at Bonn—so did I. You see, I know all about you, and now I'm glad to have the honor of knowing you personally."

He talked now very fast, as if he were in a hurry.

"I've been out to look over the Moquitch Forest Reserve and before I return to Washington I wanted to see Mr. Calthorpe. I hope—"

As he looked from one to the other and divined that his hope was vain, it was manifest that his disappointment was very great.

"Hal has been gone for over a year," said the clergyman.

"Yes," said Gifford; "we knew he went to London about a year ago, but he isn't in London; hasn't been there for some time, and no one knows just where he is. I hoped I might find him here. Too bad—too bad."

Gifford spoke with such earnestness as to almost necessitate further explanation, but every one hesitated to embarrass him with questions. Finally McCloud said:

"Is there anything that we can do?"

Gifford looked from one to the other. McCloud added: "You may speak freely. We are all his friends here."

"Well, we depended on Calthorpe, on his testimony, on his documents—the incriminating documents we supposed he had which came into his possession while he was chief of police on the Agency—and we were led to believe that he would be on hand when he and they were needed. He failed us, signally failed us. It really is too bad."

McShay said: "Mr. Gifford tells me that Ladd is back on his job with a coat of whitewash that would make the driven snow look dissolute. You know I think they ought to call that place Whitewashington."

"Agent Ladd? Back? Is it possible?" ejaculated the clergyman in dismay.

"Maybe they cooked it up," said McShay, "to pull off the investigation when the kid couldn't be present. It's a disappointment to me in a way. I thought when the boy put his hand to the plow he'd stay with it until the plow fell apart. He promised to have Ladd's scalp, and he's Injin. Something's wrong. The boy ain't a quitter. You can stake your life on that. Did you notify him?"

"We wrote to him again and again, first to his London address, then here."

"We have always forwarded all mail that came here for him," said the preacher.

"Then we found that he was not in London, that he and his wife had gone away, without leaving an address, to South America or Africa, no one knew

where, but supposedly on a hunting expedition. We expected him in Washington on his way to London; but he didn't turn up."

"Anyway," groaned McShay, "Ladd got away with it and is back with the bells."

"Ladd personally is a small matter. Individually he doesn't count," said Gifford earnestly; "but it was a chance, a fine chance, to drag these big malefactors into the light, make them come into the open, make them show their rapacious hands. Ladd's just a common or garden criminal, but we thought we had the chance to show his connection with the big fellows, and their backers in the cabinet and in congress. The trial of Ladd was a farce. Secretary Walker is discredited. He will be forced out of the cabinet. Whittaker of the Land Office will go in, and the game will go on behind closed doors. Something is at stake, bigger than Ladd and his honesty; bigger than even Walker and his reputation, and his honor and his career; bigger than these asphalt lands; bigger than the coal lands behind them, enormous as they are; bigger than you and me or our immediate interests—the right of the people to preserve the resources God has given them from spoliation, to keep them for the public good instead of for private gain."

It was evident that Mr. Gifford was a man with a purpose, an idea, and that he could glow with it.

"Say," said McShay, "you ain't the Gifford of the Forest Service?"

"Yes; I am."

"Well, gosh-all-hemlocks, you're the most unpopular man in the world in these here parts."

"Of course we're unpopular. It'll be a sad day for this country when no one is willing to be unpopular."

"Mr. Gifford," said the cowman rising, "I'd follow your lead if I thought you'd arrive anywhere, but you can't pull it off. I'm a practical man. These fellers are practical men. They'll beat you to it every time. You appeal to love of country, posterity; they appeal to each man's self-interest, his immediate self-interest. It's me first and then the country. That's human nature. Look at my people. You'll get no support from them. We discovered this asphalt. We located it. You have it withdrawn from entry and the Asphalt Trust helps you do it. When we're frozen out and have surrendered, they'll have it restored again. You hope to prevent that, but you won't do it. They control power in congress and in the cabinet. Whittaker belongs to 'em. We won't get the lands, but we'll force them to buy us out. When the gold mines in the Black Hills were thrown open to entry, the Supreme Court held that the original locators had priority rights, and that's a precedent that will cover our case. You have a noble idea, Mr. Gifford, but what the plain American citizen wants to know is: 'Where do I come in?' He'd rather have two dollars and a half in cash than one thousand dollars for posterity."

"Mike is right," said the preacher, "as to his constituency. Your splendid purpose, Mr. Gifford, would get Wah-na-gi's vote and mine, and Hal's, if he were here."

"If he were here," repeated the forester wistfully. "If he were here," but he let the subject drop and shortly after McShay said good-night and took himself to Big Bill's quarters.

When he was gone Gifford said, drawing in to the comfort of the fire:

"Doctor McCloud, I'm glad we are alone; McShay is not for us."

"You mustn't get a false impression of Mike, Mr. Gifford. He's not a man of imagination or a large horizon, but within his limitations, which are the limitations of most men, he is true and big. You know where he stands. I'd trust him with everything but my soul." The other bowed to this and did not contest it.

"I'm going to be very frank with you, Doctor; and I hope you will be as frank with me. At the superficial investigation of Mr. Ladd certain expressions came out that indicated that his backers were in possession of certain of our letters directed to Calthorpe. You know him intimately. Would Mr. Calthorpe ignore these appeals completely, if he received them?"

"I think not. I can conceive of no reason why he should not answer your letters and either promise to come or say why he could not come. Do you think any of your appeals reached him before he left London?"

"I am sure of it. You say he would not ignore these appeals if he received them. If he did not receive them, who that was near him would have a motive for tampering with his mail or his correspondence? Who in his household would be approachable? Who would want to injure him or us? Or would act from motives of hate or revenge?"

"I need not tell you that our opponents would stop at nothing to side-track Calthorpe or get possession of his papers. You know the old saying—find the woman. Well, in this case it leads nowhere. There are only two women in his life apparently—this Indian girl here—"

"She knows no more of him at this moment than you do."

"And his wife."

"It is preposterous," said McCloud, "to think of his wife in connection with a criminal act, and one in which she could have no conceivable interest. As a matter of fact, I have reason to believe that though they once had an estrangement—"

"Ah, there had been trouble between them?"

"A temporary drawing apart apparently, but, as I was saying, I have reason to believe, to know in fact, that they have become reconciled, and been reunited. Their going away together is proof positive of that."

"It's very mysterious, isn't it?" said Gifford. "His papers? Did he take them with him or leave them here?"

"He went away very hurriedly, taking with him nothing, so far as I know, except some of his clothes. He left some papers and documents, not many, which I put carefully in a marked envelope, to await his instructions."

"And of course you know nothing of the contents of those documents?"

"Absolutely nothing. I know he offered to return the certificates of stock to the asphalt company, but they ignored his letter."

"I needn't warn you, Doctor, to take good care of those papers."

"No one here would think of disturbing them any more than I would. If I should die before they are called for by Hal, I have written instructions on the outside of the envelope to have them sent to my sister in Washington, who will hold them until she can put them in possession of the owner."

"Doctor McCloud, we must find Calthorpe and he must come to America and get into this fight. He owes it to himself. He owes it to Secretary Walker who took up his fight in reliance upon him. and whose future is at stake. We have reserved the right to reopen the Ladd case and we have six months in which to do it. Back of all this, back of Walker and Calthorpe, is a big cause which will be set back twenty-five years if we fail. Possibly we can't prove anything against Whittaker, anything illegal, but we can drag these interests into the open and save the resources of the people for the people. If you will write him a personal letter, telling him the facts, asking for instructions, and have it signed also by this Indian woman, I will take it away with me in the morning and eventually put it into the care of a messenger who will have instructions to find Calthorpe, wherever he is in the world, and put that letter into his individual hand. Will you do it?"

CHAPTER XXII

All London knew that the "affair" between Viscountess Effington and Lord Yester was at an end. People in Society are very busy; they work very hard, but they always have time to devote to each other's interests, and they bring to bear on these matters their best abilities, frequently of a high order. If the ingenuity, the penetration, the powers of analysis and deduction focussed upon why Mrs. Smith is not now speaking to Mrs. Jones, or the exact thermometric relations of Mr. White to Mr. Black and Mr. Black's interesting wife, could be concentrated upon, say the subject of unemployment, the world would go forward by leaps

and bounds.

The interesting and accomplished thief is frequently told that if he would keep his splendid gifts within legal bounds he would be the same ornament to Society that we are, but this artist has no taste for our dull levels. The noble river refuses to flow in straight lines and at an average depth. It loves the rapids, and the falls, and the crooked way. So probably Society will go on with its minute microscopic study of itself.

Edith, Viscountess Effington, began to think socially at a very early age, and ever since she had come to years of indiscretion the one aim and object of all life, all hope and endeavor, had been the Court Set. Many people pass through life almost ignorant that there is such a thing, but it is of no use to say to one who cannot breathe at an elevation of ten thousand feet: "I am breathing very comfortably."

While we are pleasantly exhilarated the other is bleeding to death. Edith had seen the ambition of her life possible of realization as the Duchess of Uxminster. Every phase of her struggle to this end was familiar to her friends, and every one knew that it now rested in a fashionable London cemetery, where "Here Lies," etc., could be read by any one in the street who would stop long enough to give it a curious glance. This made London somewhat difficult. It furnished her heaven with some of the characteristics of a warmer place. To know that your grief and despair have furnished amusement to your friends, that your thwarted ambition has given them a keen sense of enjoyment; to hear some one throw the switch when you enter a drawing-room, to feel the embarrassed silence, and to know that a damask curtain has been hastily thrown over the remains of your inmost soul under the knives of skilful surgeons who have left no organ unexamined, is an ordeal for the bravest man or woman. Edith tried it. She went everywhere, just as she had done before. She tried to act and look as if nothing had happened. She made a brave show, but she had climbed in a ruthless way and she was finding out that those who live by the sword shall perish by it. She came to know that she had not only not gained ground, but had lost it. Her world had seen her play her cards, knew what she had in her hand, and had already decided that she was inevitable as the Duchess, and it adjusted its deportment accordingly. When they found that she had played and lost, they did not know exactly how or why, they felt the resentment of those who have been cruelly deceived, who have paid something for nothing, or kowtowed to the wrong person, and the gratification of social resentments is a fine art. To a woman of her pride, pertinacity, and ambition this was maddening. She came back from teas, at-homes, week-ends quivering, lacerated, and of course her habits did not improve. Every nerve screamed for rest, for quiet, for forgetfulness, and she drank more and more and more, and then sought relief in the oblivion of the master drug. She had always

been an accomplished gambler in the usual social sense, but now it became a passion, an obsession, and she played for stakes that increased rapidly and dangerously, stakes she could not afford to lose. It was the one social diversion that helped her to forget. Her passion for play was leading her into questionable associations, into intimacy with shady people, people she would not have wiped her dainty boots on before. She had used people as steps. They were now using her to walk on, and it was likely to be a muddy process.

There was an old-fashioned prehistoric assumption that the basis of social intercourse was similarity of tastes, the interchange of intellectual or spiritual ideas; but when Society becomes an adjunct to politics, business, or when it becomes a formal profession, a vocation, then some strange things happen.

Things very surprising to herself were now happening to Edith. To her own huge disgust and dismay, she found herself one week-end a guest at the beautiful country-place of Solly Wirtheimer, a South African burglar-person, who was trying to jimmy his way into the polite world. Without any more interest in the horse than in the Mithraic mythology he owned a racing stable, and he was trying hard to lose enough money to the proper persons to enable him to associate with them. It really was hard work. He almost had to push it over to them. Edith naturally felt that nothing short of winning a pot of money would compensate her for the degradation of being one of Solly's house party. At the usual game of bridge, however, she lost persistently. Her game was degenerating or Solly's guests were especially clever or lucky. Eventually she became frightened at her losses. Her genial host offered to lend her any amount she required. She chose rather to accept the offer of her own partner, a friendly young American person, whom she met here for the first time and about whom she knew nothing. This loan naturally led to further acquaintance. It is a way with loans. They either lead to intimacy or estrangement. In the course of London activities her own fortune had been pretty well dissipated, and she had been more than ordinarily reckless because the future had seemed so well assured and the estates of Uxminster seemed to guarantee one against misfortune! Instead of bridge being a pastime, it must be confessed that a great many of the most refined people play it to win. Every smart house in London is a casino, and one must play well, or be very lucky, or have lots of money to lose. In the course of bridge Edith found herself again in need of a loan, and the friendly young American person seemed the most available resource. Young American persons have so much and are usually so delightfully careless with it. This was arranged over a luncheon at The Savoy grill room. At this luncheon the "American person" induced the Viscountess to talk of her husband. She took small pains to conceal her animosity. The upshot of this interview was that she achieved a remunerative occupation that promised an assured income and enabled her to gratify her supreme hate. The

combination was delightful. It was understood that she was to give the American person a perusal of all Hal's papers and letters that were available, that she would exercise a supervision of all his future correspondence, and that she would induce him to leave London; that she would keep him out of the way and inaccessible so long as it suited the purposes of the young American person and his friends. This latter stipulation was the only part of the bargain that made her hesitate. She took this under advisement. One day shortly after this interview she was having her breakfast and, happening to look at the clock, she saw that it was six P.M., and after breakfast, when her mind was fairly clear, she looked into the mirror. She was frightened, thoroughly frightened. Her beauty had been her armor, her weapon, her resource, her salvation. She had always suffered. The aches, the pains, the discomfort of ill-health she could endure so long as she kept her personal appearance. Now, in the depths of the mirror, she saw walking toward her a faded, broken woman, with something in the background, something cold, inevitable, horrible, hovering near. Sir George had advised her to travel, to get away from London. London at the moment was difficult. She was under a small temporary cloud. It was very smart to go to the ends of the world in search of sport. Hal had urged it on that terrible night. He had not mentioned it since, because he had learned to conceal his desires. That he wanted to do anything, go anywhere, was sufficient to arouse her vivid opposition, and she was ingenious in making that opposition as painful as possible. He had resort therefore to the trick of advocating the exact opposite of his intent, but she was very cunning in seeing through such subterfuge. She saw, too, in their peregrinations enlarged opportunities of thwarting him. So to his intense amazement she announced her intention of giving up her own pleasures to gratify him, her willingness to go out, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." He concluded that she had become frightened about her health. His own position was deplorable. The atmosphere of the clubs where he would care to go was cold and clammy. The clubs where he would have been welcomed disgusted him. At home he wore the armor of silence and impassivity, to keep from being stung to death. Abroad he wandered here, he wandered there, without pleasure or purpose. At night he frequented the music-halls, bored, with a sneer on his lip for the bald common vulgarity of it all—the brazen women, the vicious youngsters, and the feeble slimy old men. He went to the sporting events, the races. He never missed the Sporting Club, and got some diversion from seeing one gladiator beat another into a bloody pulp. He was drinking again, and gambling too. He didn't have to look into a mirror to see the end of it all. At the suggestion that they go into the wilderness the rubber mask dropped from his face and he smiled. Dormant energy awoke in him. He suggested India. India suited the young American person too, and so it was agreed that they would go after the pigmy hog in Nepal and Sikkim, the

cat-bear (*Elurus*), wild sheep and goats, and the musk-deer in the precipices of the Himalayas. It was the boy's salvation. It gave him something to think of, plan for, and at least he had the joys of imagination and anticipation all the long way to India. Of hunting he got precious little; of game almost none at all. Edith had no taste for hardship or even discomfort, and she was possessed with a satanic restlessness and capriciousness. No sooner had they determined on one course than she changed it. They were lucky to reach any destination before her whim veered. He had not the strength or the patience to fight these moods. It was easier to let her have her way. And so they drifted, drifted from day to day, from place to place, her preference always being for the cities where racing and other forms of gambling offered some diversion.

The cities brought them in contact with the military class, with its painful and odious memories. She wouldn't go into the forests or the mountains with him, and she wouldn't let him go alone. So drifting here and there up and down over the earth like two lost souls, they found themselves one day at Hardwar, near the head-waters of the sacred Ganges, and Hal felt the call of the mountain, and determined to go into the Kedarnath region for game, but, game or no game, he felt that he must get away, go into the solitudes and have a "long think." He had endured the caprices, the nagging, the ingenious cruelties of her devilry as long as it was possible. He knew she would not follow him, at least not far. She returned to Hardwar, as he knew she would, before he reached the waters of the Bhagirati, where they camped for the night.

After the evening meal, as they were gathered about the camp-fire—the guides, interpreter, the carriers—out of the shadows of the night, into the fitful gleam of the flames, walked a religious mendicant, a holy man. Almost naked, oblivious to the intense cold, with the abstraction of the devotee, he stood in proud humility. If he came to beg for food, his purpose was at once absorbed, merged in a rhapsodical fervor. From the perfunctory murmur of what might have been a benediction or a prayer, his voice rose to a penetrating and commanding pitch, reached an intense climax, and then he went out again into the night as he had come. What he said produced a profound impression on his hearers.

Hal was conscious of being moved, thrilled, awed by it, though he had no notion of its meaning. A profound silence followed the disappearance of the fakir, a silence that finally became unbearable. Hal somehow dreaded to ask what the old man had said, but finally he started to discuss the plans for the ensuing day. The interpreter shook his head. On the following day they would go back, he informed the sahib. Go back? What for? They had scarcely started. Then it was explained to him that it would be unsafe, unwise, to go on in face of the warning they had received. This was most annoying. Hal indignantly protested against

having his plans upset by the wild words of a crazy old man. He would go on. He was informed that in that event he would go alone. The natives would go no further. He fumed, raged, but saw that it was to no purpose. They would return on the morrow. Again he must submit. There was no other way. When all the others had retired he asked the interpreter what the holy man had said. He was informed that the devout man had suddenly become conscious of the presence of a stranger, for whom he brought a message. The voices of destiny cried to him to flee from the East; to go back, to retrace his steps, to find his life where he had lost it, in the far-away where the sun sets in the West. Was that all? No. The written word was following him about the world, running toward him; he must turn back to meet it. That was not all. It was difficult to get the interpreter to complete it. Under pressure he admitted that the wise and holy one had seen a serpent coiled about him, slowly crushing, strangling his soul; that he had disappeared into the night, crying to him: "Escape, escape, escape!"

The following day, on the way back to Hardwar, as they halted for the noonday meal, a native joined them and attached himself to their party without attracting the attention of the sahib who was silent, abstracted, despondent. That night as they camped again the native, having in various ways established to his own satisfaction the identity of the European gentleman, handed him an envelope containing two letters, one from John McCloud and Wah-na-gi, and the other from Walter Gifford. The native was attached to the Indian secret police. That night the sahib had a "long think." When he reached Hardwar the following night he found Edith sunk in a complete stupor. Over the writing-table were scattered letters. In looking for his own it was inevitable that he should see complete evidence of the extent to which he had been the victim of her malice. That night he wrote to John McCloud to forward his papers by registered mail to the care of Secretary Walker at Washington. He wrote to Gifford saying that he would be in Washington at the earliest possible moment, and he left a note for Edith advising her to return to London, where he promised to meet her on his return from America.

CHAPTER XXIII

Down from the summits of the Moquitch had swept "Winter-man" with legions upon legions of white cavalry and overrun the land. Trails, roads, trees, rocks,

landmarks, fences, rivers, disappeared. Cabins and stables had to be unsnowed. Man's boasted dominion reached from the cabin to the stable and back again. The throbbing, suffering earth had gone to sleep, to dream under a white silence.

John McCloud was dying and God had said to the world, "Peace! Be still!" In the crowded haunts of men brooding sorrow does not sit down by the fireside, and stay. Even sorrow is hustled and bustled about. The butcher and baker are at the kitchen door. The telephone-bell rings. The postman brings the claims of church, hospital, school, town, county, or State. Friends put books, pictures in our hands, close the shutters, take us away, lead us where music soothes, or into strange lands, or into the playhouse where the tragedy of imaginary sins and sufferings forces us for the blessed moment to forget our own. Life, multitudinous life, goes on and sweeps us with it. In the desert sorrow sits by the fire, comes to the table, lies down beside one in the terrible night. There is no other voice except the voice of God. Wah-na-gi and John McCloud had each a noble gift for loving, a gift that had been narrowed down almost to the other. Silence, solitude, and suffering had put the eternal sign and seal upon their love. Out of the wreck of their lives this seemed to be all. It made them very tender, very thoughtful, very considerate of each other. She took elaborate pains that he should not see her anxiety, her terror, her fierce protest against the cruelty of it. She tried very hard to surround the invalid with an atmosphere of comfort, hope, and courage. At times the pretence wore a very thin disguise, and he tried so hard not to let her see him suffer, not to tax her strength, not to shadow her young life with incurable sorrow. Each made a brave show of a cheerfulness neither felt. Each was very sensitive of the smallest change in the simple elements that made up their lives. Each seized upon the smallest sign of encouragement to hand to the other, and each turned away from the grim truth. The tide ebbed and flowed, but on the morning and evening of each day both could take the measure of his drift out to the eternal sea, the measure of their parting.

All that care, ever watchful; all that prayer, silent and spoken; all that love could do to hold him back had been done, and the tide kept on its inevitable way.

As the certain separation came closer and closer each clung to the other with desperate tenderness.

Oh, if the cruel snows would go, and the warm sun would come, and the flowers, and the gentle spring, and give this brave, battling soul a chance! Finally she sent word to McShay to come. She felt that she must have help, help to face this, to do what was to be done, to meet what was to come, if nothing could be done. She cried out for help, and McShay was a strong man, the strongest man she knew, and he loved John McCloud too. He would come. Mike came, came knowing he could do nothing, but glad to come; glad to bring his silent offering. He came when he could, and with him came a storm that raged with unabated

fury and made his return impossible; a storm that cut them off completely from the world, that blotted out the sky, that swept the great white plains, caught up the snow in angry swirls, throwing it into vast drifts, tearing it up again and tossing it back against the falling heavens, the turbulent air filled with blinding, stinging, suffocating flakes, while through it all the wind moaned and shrieked and called for victims.

"Beats all," said McShay. "Never will let up, I reckon. Ain't seen a storm like this since I kin remember."

He was sitting on a three-legged stool by the chimney in the living-room of the cabin of the Red Butte Ranch, smoking his pipe. The remark was addressed more to himself than to Wah-na-gi, who sat beside a couch covered with skins and Navajo blankets, which had been drawn down into the glow of the roaring fire. The light from a bracket oil lamp swung from the ceiling fell over her and the pale face resting against the black bear skin, and showed her holding the ghostly hand of all that was left of John McCloud. He was sleeping fitfully, painfully. The windows on each side of the storm-door in the back were shivering in their sockets. The cabin nestled close to the ground or the wild wind would have torn it loose. As it was, it trembled as the wind caught it in its teeth, shook it fiercely, and dropped it howling with impotent fury. As the storm-door opened vagrant hurrying flakes danced into the room and died an instant death in the glow of the great fire. With them Big Bill entered and shook the snow from his cap and clothes, and beat his big hands to get the blood flowing in them.

"Well, Bill, any news?" asked McShay quietly.

"Yes, Rough-house Joe's got in, but he's in awful bad shape, frost-bitten, starving; never will git over it, I guess."

"And the supplies? What about the supplies?"

"Lost!"

"Lost?" and Mike indulged in a low, long whistle.

"Snowslide comin' through Dead Man's Canyon. As far as he knows, Joe's the only one of the party left."

"Gee, that's tough, ain't it?" said McShay quietly.

"The stuff you brought in, Mike, is gone, and we're up against it." Bill referred to the former visit of McShay's in which he had brought a wagon-load of supplies.

"We got to git in touch with somewhere or starve."

Both men realized that help from without was unlikely as no one would know of their necessities. It would be natural to suppose that the supplies lost in Dead Man's Canyon had reached their destination. The situation was serious.

Bill got a stool and came down and sat on the other side of the fireplace and they smoked in silence for some time. Finally Mike said:

"No one will try to break through to us."

"Some of us got to git through to them," said Bill. "That's about the size of it."

"I've only been waitin' for the storm to let up a bit," said the Irishman.

"Gosh, it may keep this up for a month of Sundays. No use waitin' any longer. I think it's a dyin' down some. I'm fer a try at it."

"You?" said Mike with incredulity. "Git out. That's my job. You with your rheumatiz? You ain't any longer young, Bill. Better leave it to me."

Both Bill and McShay had reached the age when it is impossible to take advice. Each went about his preparations while the argument continued.

"You can go if you like," Bill suggested, "but I'm agoin'."

"Ain't you old fellers vain?" protested Mike. "You'll only be a nuisance to me. Better stay."

"Old fellers, eh? Say, you needn't be afraid. If I can't pull you through I won't run away from you. I'll bring you back."

"What is it, Bill?" asked Wah-na-gi, looking up and seeing their elaborate preparations.

"Well, we're clean out o' grub, Wah-na-gi, and some one's got to git through to Calamity or the fort or the Agency."

"Oh, Bill," she said; "couldn't you bring back a doctor for him?"

Bill and McShay exchanged looks and the latter bent over the clergyman and listened to his breathing for a second, and then he said very gently to her:

"It wouldn't be no use, Wah-na-gi. He's pretty nearly over the Divide, I guess. You won't be afraid to be left here alone, will you?"

"Oh, no," she answered simply.

Afraid of what? There was nothing to be afraid of, except this grim spectre which sat on the other side of the couch and held the other hand of her foster-father.

"He may pass out to-night," said McShay, following her gaze.

"Don't see how he can play the game much longer. Gee, he's made a game fight! He was just lent to us, I guess, just to show us what a real man was like; a man who was on the level and wasn't lookin' for the best of it. In my experience I've seen men handled; I've handled 'em myself, and you can appeal to every feller's fear or his lust or his cupidity, and that about lets 'em out. I've always thought this 'love-one-another' thing, this 'turn-the-other-cheek' game, this 'bear-ye-one-another's-burden' racket was a beautiful fairy tale, a good thing for little boys and old women, but say, he makes it good. John, here, makes you believe in it. A life like his puts it up to you, the Christ story, and says: 'Say, what about it?'" Wah-na-gi was weeping. The preacher was asleep, so she could have the relief of tears.

"Don't you cry, little woman," said Mike, trying to console her. "He's had a tough job here. It can't be as hard for him farther on. Would you want to keep him here knowin' what he suffers?"

Ah, that's a hard question to ask. It's only answered by another, and not answered then.

"Don't your arm git tired holdin' it that-a'-way hour after hour?" said the Irishman, trying to divert her.

"He sleeps better that way," was all she said.

"Beats all," said Mike with undisguised admiration. "He clings to the Almighty with one hand, and a little Injin woman with the other. Suppose there's Injin angels, Bill?"

"Looks that-a'-way, don't it?" replied the foreman. "It's a sure thing there's *one*."

Bill had always kept a small supply of liquor on the ranch, hidden away with supreme cunning. Where or what his private cellar was no one ever knew, but on state occasions and in emergency Bill could be depended on to produce. The law of supply having been completely suspended, the private cellar had been reduced to a bottle containing perhaps one and a half drinks of whiskey and another containing perhaps a third of a bottle of brandy. The brandy he now divided carefully into three parts. One flask he handed to McShay, the other he put in the inside of his own storm-coat, and the rest he poured into a cup which he held out to Wah-na-gi.

"What is it, Bill?" she asked.

"It's fer him," he said, nodding toward the invalid. Wah-na-gi had to move to take the cup and, though she disengaged her hand ever so gently, the drifting man felt the anchor drag, and he woke with a little start.

"Well, boys," he said with a faint smile, seeing the two men over him; "what is it?"

"Just tellin' Wah-na-gi to make you take a little of this if you should feel faint in the night," said Bill.

"I've reformed, Bill. I'm not drinking now," said the sick man with a quizzical look playing about his eyes, tenuous and vapory. "I won't need it. Thank you just the same."

The noble voice was gone, the voice he had played upon with all the skill of a great musician, the voice that had swayed multitudes. He spoke with effort in a husky whisper.

"Bill and I are going to try to git through to Calamity or the fort, Parson," said McShay.

"In this storm?" asked the sick man.

"Oh, Bill and I don't mind a little thing like a storm."

"And the wind has died down a whole lot," added Bill cheerfully.

"May God go with you," said the clergyman, raising himself upon the couch. "I'll say good-by to you before you go."

"Oh, shucks," laughed Mike uneasily. "'Tain't good-by, Parson. We're a-comin' back."

"But I won't be here, Mike."

Each one knew what McCloud meant, and each one tried to look as if he didn't. Wah-na-gi, seeing that he wanted to sit up, had put a pillow under his shoulders, and now he stretched out an emaciated hand, to the two big brawny men, and his eyes looked from one to the other with admiration.

"You are two fine, brave, splendid men. I'm proud to have known you, to have called you my friends."

The lines about Bill's mouth twitched and all he could say was, "Same here, Parson," and he walked away to the fire.

Wah-na-gi had gone to the window, as if to look out at the storm, but really to hide her tears. McShay glanced at her and Bill furtively, then he sat down on the stool, and bent down over the sick man and spoke for his ear alone: "And say, Parson, just before comin' over this time, I—I—sold out my liquor business. Thought maybe it would please you, and somehow couldn't think of anything else that would."

A smile spread over the wan face.

"Oh, thank you, Mike. Thank you. Perhaps I haven't lived in vain."

"Anything we kin do fer you while we're gone?" asked Bill, not turning, but gazing deep into the fire. "Any letters, or telegrams, or messages you want to trust us with?"

"No, Bill, thank you. There is just one thing troubles me, and only one—this dear child." He nodded his head in the direction of the window where she was standing weeping. "She's made such a noble fight, against such frightful odds, she mustn't go back; she mustn't be allowed to give up or be forced into the old environment. She must be saved."

"Say, Parson, rest your mind easy about that," said Mike earnestly. "She ain't agoin' to want a friend while Bill or me lives. Ain't that right, Bill?"

"It sure is, Mike."

"That's all," said the sick man with a sigh of relief. "And now I'm ready to go." He meant for the long, long journey.

Bill and Mike were ready too. The wind had died down to a cruel whine and their project waited.

"Well, so long, Parson," said Bill with a pretty decent show of cheer in his voice. "If we can't git through we'll have to come back. That's all."

"Now no gittin' low spirited while we're gone," called out McShay as he

went to the door. "Now mind! No gittin' discouraged; no givin' up; no white-flag business! Don't you let him weaken, Wah-na-gi."

"No, no," she answered back through her tears, trying hard to catch the uplift of the big cowman.

"God sure hates a quitter, Parson; ain't that right?"

"That's right," whispered back McCloud, meeting the demand for a rally and a charge. "That's right. Mike. No one shall say I was a quitter. I'm going out with the honors of war, the flag flying and the band playing."

"Good," shouted back the Irishman from the storm-door, and they were gone.

After the paroxysm that followed their departure had passed, the sick man sank back upon the couch exhausted, and closed his eyes to rest. It had been a great strain, but somehow he felt more at peace than he had done for a long time, and he drifted into a great calm.

To Wah-na-gi, who had to watch the struggle, and whose great pity and love demanded something to do, her conscious helplessness was an ordeal. Finally she could restrain herself no longer and she cried out in the agony of her soul: "Oh, my father, why is it? Why is it? If there is a God, why does he let you suffer?"

"Every heart has faced that mystery, dear child," he said gently. "Even the Saviour had a moment when he felt forsaken. I thought once I was to do big things for humanity and God, but who knows what is great or what is little? Some careless word I may have spoken and forgotten may be blessed, or my obedience, my patience, may have touched some heart here, yours or another's, who will redeem the waste places and make the wilderness to blossom as the rose."

His spirit was unquenchable, his fervor undying. His enthusiasm rose superior to the claims of physical dissolution. She didn't try any longer to force him to husband his strength. She knew he wanted to go down with colors flying, militant. She knelt by his bed and bowed her head, so as to lose no word of those precious words which were to be his last.

"I think the great Teacher is educating us out of the physical. He puts two objects in our hands, then He shows us that if you take one object from two objects it leaves one object, and we are altogether concerned with the objects, stones, or sticks, or flowers that fade, and by and by He takes away the objects because we no longer need them. We have grasped the truth, the fixed, unalterable truth, that one from two leaves one. I saw two little street urchins once standing outside a great shop window filled with things they desired—playthings. One said 'I choose *that*.' And the other said 'I choose *that*.' Finally they chose the same object, and there was a battle, a fierce, cruel fight, for what neither of

them had or could have. We are like that. And so God, little by little, takes away from us houses and lands and bodies, playthings, that we may know the truths of spirit.”

Wah-na-gi raised her bowed head to look at him.

”Your face shines with a strange light,” she said with an awed whisper.

”I am very close to the Hereafter, Wah-na-gi.”

”I shall be very lonely when you are gone.”

”Ah, my child, you are lonely now, grieving for him, for Hal, grieving, grieving.”

”Yes, so it will be always.”

He knew that each day as the sun crept up over the Moquitch she stood on the rock and scanned the horizon, and gazed long across the trail where he had disappeared and whence he would return, *if he returned*.

”I came between you and the man you loved,” he said, putting his hand gently on her glossy hair. ”Don’t hold it up against me. I thought I was doing right. I loved you both. Nothing would have made me happier than to see you one. I have prayed that I might be spared to put your hand in his, to say the words that would make you man and wife, to see you happy, but happiness mustn’t be stolen. It must be earned. And so I drove him away, drove him back to duty, because I loved him. When I’m gone, send him word and ask him not to hold it up against me, and God will surely bless this sacrifice. Oh, yes, God will surely bless you.”

A cruel fit of coughing racked the poor remnants of a body, and she held her breath till it was over, and she could lay him back upon the soft couch.

”Talking has tired you. Sleep and rest,” she said, and he fell away into the sleep of exhaustion.

Those were the last words she would hear him say, the last words he spoke—”God will surely bless you.” Often and often thereafter in her life she remembered those words, his last—”God will surely bless you.”

She smoothed his pillow, pulled the blankets up over his wasted form, stirred the logs into a fierce blaze. Then she went to the chest of drawers under the window to the left of the storm-door and took from it a letter and the little moccasins, and brought them down to the fire. She was still a child and needed symbols. These were the words he had written with his own hand, cruel words, that shut out the light and put a blight upon her life, but still they were his words. She had a savage instinct to thrust them into the blaze, with the crude half-formed notion that to destroy them would be to destroy the conditions which they expressed. But this was only momentary. The tokens of their love had been so few, she clung to every scrap and shred of them. It never occurred to her that Hal had trifled with her, had forgotten or deserted her. It wouldn’t have mattered

if he had. She accepted their fate but without regret or bitterness, and her heart eternally asked the question, full of hope, full of fear, that she had asked John McCloud the day he went away: "Will he come back?" And now that John McCloud was going away, she felt the need of Hal anew. The mystery of death was sitting in the room with her. It was hard to sit there in the silent place, to face that cruel shadow which tugged and nagged at the poor tired body, and worried it like a famished dog, and count the ticking of the clock, the strong, steady ticks, like blows, and know that it was counting out the feeble beats of the noble heart which would soon be still, forever still. It was hard to be alone in such an hour. If Hal had been with her! Mike had asked her if she would be afraid, and she was so absorbed in the human drama as to wonder why, but now, now that all was over except the flutter of the black wing of the grim enemy, she felt a cold chill at her heart. She clutched the tiny moccasins and crouched in numb terror before the nameless, the unknown. The breathing of the invalid, the sonorous clock, the explosions of the burning logs assumed unnatural proportions. The wind had died down again to a plaintive lament, a dolorous sob, and then it rose to the fretful cry of a sick child.

She sat gazing into the fire under a premonitory spell. Unknown to her the storm-door had opened, and through the inner door glided the tall sinewy figure of Appah, silent and sinister. He swayed as he entered and the chest of drawers up under the window kept him from falling. It also retained a small bag of flour and a shoulder of venison which slipped from his grasp. He held himself up like a tired wrestler until the warmth of the room relaxed his stiffened limbs and his eyes had grown accustomed to the light.

When he felt that he could stand and walk, he glided noiselessly down to where she was crouching and called her name softly. Her heart gave a great leap and she started to rise, but he put his hand on her head and held her.

"No scared," he said as gently as he knew how. "Heap wayno me! Meat, flour catch 'em! maybeso you hungry. Bring 'em. Pah-sid-u-way?"

He went up and brought down the bag of flour and the venison and threw them down before her. Then he sank down on the stool by her. He was very tired.

"Thank you," she said coldly. "That's very kind of you."

Then he waited that she might have time to think it over, to understand what it was he had done and what it meant. When others were caring for themselves, their own comfort and safety, he had thought of her; there had been suffering in the lonely ranches cut off from the rest of the world; perhaps it was so with her, and he had brought all a man could carry, and had fought his way to her through the storm. It was something a woman might be glad of, proud of. Only a strong man, a big chief with a big heart, could have done it. Surely it was

an achievement. Surely she would know. He must first win her admiration, the rest would follow. He had not given up his suit, but he had waited for his chance. He had held aloof. He must not appear too eager. He had not come to the ranch, but he was familiar with the known facts and had drawn his own conclusions. His gods, his medicine had freed him from the presence of his rivals. The chief of police had gone away by the fire-wagons, by the fire-boat, many sleeps. It was many moons now, and no one ever talked of when he would be back; in fact, no one talked of him any more. He had gone back to his own people, where there were many women to be loved and married. He would not come back. He had already forgotten the Indian woman and soon she would forget him. It was only natural. For a time, too, he had been freed from the rivalry of the agent, but Ladd had returned, was again in power. It was time to act.

He had had a big talk with Cadger too. The trader was a cunning old fox, who could put his nose up in the air and tell what was afoot. Cadger had told him that maybeso there were big treaties (papers, contracts), writings, at the ranch, had advised him to go over and see Wah-na-gi, that if she would come away with him, they were to bring all the big treaties (papers) to him, Cadger, and exchange them for heap ponies, plenty cattle, and the trader kept his bargains. He wasn't like Ladd, a man of two minds. Cadger, too, had made him understand that by bringing away the papers he would do a great injury to the ex-chief of police, and Appah had not forgotten what he owed Hal, and his heart burned hot within him at the prospect of getting revenge for the slights, insults, and wrongs he felt that he had suffered at the hands of the insolent young man. Perhaps it would be safe and practical before returning to the Agency to burn the barns and the cabin. It all depended on Wah-na-gi. Cadger had warned him to be sure of her before speaking of the papers. With her as an ally all would be well. If not—His mind refused to consider such an eventuality. She had cared for Calthorpe. Calthorpe was gone. Nothing stood between them now, but if there should arise— At the suggestion, murder entered his heart. She had laughed at him, ridiculed him, flouted him, scorned him. That would never be again. He could not permit that to be. She must realize that. It was a fateful night and here he was waiting.

"Touge frejo!" he said after a long pause in which each thought very fast but in which neither spoke. "Touge frejo!" (Plenty cold.)

"Yes," she said, "it's a cold night."

"Maybeso you talk Injin talk now, eh?"

"No, never again. Never again so long as I live."

That was not promising. Again there was a long pause. What was it she had left unsaid? That she would only speak the white chief's talk, the talk of the man she loved? Then she still loved him? That was the test—her willingness to speak the tongue of her people, to be like them. He tried hard to be patient with

her. Perhaps she found it hard now. She had lived among the whites and perhaps had forgotten much of her own tongue.

He would go slowly, be very sure, before proceeding to extremes. He made her a long speech in their vernacular. He saw that she had not forgotten the speech of her people, that she followed him perfectly, and he felt that he was eloquent and convincing. He was considered a great orator by his tribe. His talk recited in detail that the white chief had gone on a long trail back to his people, that he would never come again. He watched her face and saw that she had no reason to expect his return. Perhaps she was hungry? Did the white man care? No, he had forgotten. Appah hadn't forgotten. Winter-man had come. Cold-maker had come. White man was scared. Injin was scared. Appah wasn't scared. Cold! Touge frejo! Heap cold. Snow, heap snow, plenty snow, snow all time! The snow came like white wolves. They howled and showed their teeth. White foam flew from their lips. They leaped up and tried to bite, to tear at one's heart, but Appah wasn't frightened. He had big medicine. Pretty soon the snow wolves saw he was too strong for them. The wind told them. The wind told them to pikeway, to get out, here was a big chief, a big medicine man who was not afraid of them, who had a big heart and who was bringing food, gifts, to his woman, his squaw.

"You must not say that," she said promptly. "The food is good. I thank you for that; but you must not call me your squaw. I am not your squaw. I never will be."

He forgot the instructions of Cadger, forgot the papers altogether. He saw only the woman, the woman he wanted, all the more because she was unattainable. He could have had any other woman in the tribe for the asking, but nothing seemed worth while but that which was out of reach. She had flouted him again. It was hard to believe. Again there was a long pause, in which the fires of desire leaped up and threatened to consume him. Cadger had supplied him with a small flask of whiskey before he left the Agency. The fire was racing in his blood, prompting him to nameless things. He sat and smouldered. Passion and hate struggled for control. He stood up.

He told her she was a fool to wait and weep for a man who only laughed at her, who would never come back. Why had he gone away? Because he did not dare to take the woman Appah wanted. He knew Appah would kill him and so he had run away. He was afraid!

She leaped to her feet.

"He never was afraid, least of all of you. You are lying. You cannot say this to me. Take your food and go. I would not eat it. Go." She was very fine with her eyes blazing.

Go? On such a night? The snow wolves were mad, dancing a war-dance,

thirsting for blood. The fire-spirits were good. He had brought her food, and she thrust him out into the wild night. He looked her over and laughed evilly. The big chief is patient; he knows how to wait. Then one day he gets crazy, mad, and then he reaches out and takes what he wants. He tried to put his hand on her. Quickly she eluded him and put the couch of the sick man between them. Yes, she could avoid, resist, but she could not escape.

She had laughed at him, scorned him again and again. Now he would possess her, break her, bend her to his will or kill her.

"Hush," she said, pointing to the sick man; "don't wake him."

Appah moved close to the couch and looked at McCloud. He had been sick a long time. There was nothing to be feared from him. Still he looked again. If there had been the slightest chance that McCloud could have interfered with his purposes he would have killed him there where he lay.

"No scared sick man," he muttered contemptuously.

She had directed his attention to McCloud for a purpose. In the short interval Appah had given to the dying man, she had backed swiftly against the chest of drawers, beneath the left-hand window. A short time before she had taken the letter and the little moccasins from this drawer, and had left it open. Now, keeping her eye on Appah, she had put her hand behind her and rummaged in the drawer until her hand felt the little automatic gun that Hal had given her. Appah glanced up and divined her purpose. Quick as a panther he leaped over the unconscious clergyman and threw himself upon the girl as she tried to bring the gun in play. Her scream awoke the dying man, and he raised himself on his elbow, though it was a perceptible interval before his mind grasped the reality of what was happening. There was a struggle which brought Appah and the girl down in front of the fire. It was a short struggle. Her frenzied strength was as nothing in his grasp. He gave her arm a twist and the gun fell from her hand. Then he stopped her breath until she was helpless, when he picked her up in his arms and bore her through the door leading to the kitchen.

McCloud tried to get up. He did in fact get to a sitting position on the low couch; then he realized for a terrible moment his helplessness. On the small stool beside him rested the cup containing brandy left there by Big Bill. He drank it quickly, drank it all. It gave him a fictitious strength, a momentary capacity. While the struggle was going on in the next room, he crawled to the spot where the little gun had fallen, picked it up, and by slow and painful stages dragged himself across the room to the open kitchen door. He could go no further. He sank down. He could not hold the little weapon without trembling. He rested his elbows on the floor, grasped it with both hands, steadied it long enough to fire. Then he collapsed and lay very still upon his face.

There was a sudden quiet in the next room, then the sound of a body falling

heavily. After a few moments Wah-na-gi appeared in the kitchen door, wild-eyed, haggard. She leaned wearily against the jamb until her mind and some of her strength came back, then she saw the body of McCloud. With a cry she ran to him, turned him over, and looked into the beloved face.

Not in the way he thought, but as he wished, John McCloud had gone out—militant.

CHAPTER XXIV

Hal had plenty of evidence that Ladd had robbed the Indians, that he was the representative of the Asphalt Trust, and had tried to bribe him with its valuable securities. He still had Ladd's receipt for the fifteen thousand dollars he didn't pay for them. As Doctor McCloud had said, he had offered to return the securities to the company, an offer which had been ignored. While he was chief of police at the Agency, and while he was secretly camping on the agent's trail, letters and copies of letters belonging to Ladd's correspondence had come into Hal's possession through a disgruntled clerk who had earned the enmity of the agent and been discharged. It was manifest that the interests behind Mr. Ladd were very anxious to secure or destroy these letters. They would have cheerfully sacrificed the agent, but they were forced to protect him for their own sakes. The fight therefore centred about David Ladd. The interests had won the first skirmish with a shout and a hurrah. It was made to appear that Secretary Walker had given credence to absurd accusations involving honorable business men high in the financial world, accusations which could not be substantiated; had removed a valued public servant without cause, under charges involving not only his position but his honor, etc., etc. The victory of the interests was announced with bellringing and bonfires.

The arrival of Hal in Washington was therefore an enormous relief to those who by reason of their efforts for the general welfare were now forced to fight for self-preservation and vindication. Hal's dismay on learning that Secretary Walker had not received any package or communication from Red Butte Ranch was disheartening. He had written to John McCloud to forward his papers to the care of Secretary Walker. They had not come. No word had come. No one in Washington could give him any comfort. Gifford had informed him that the winter in the Moquitch country had been the severest in the memory of living

man. That was all any one knew. This would explain some of the delay, not all of it, as Hal felt. A council of war was held. It was unanimously agreed that Hal must go in person for the papers. He hesitated. No one knew why he hesitated. Did he dare go? Could he trust himself? At times his sacrifice had seemed so futile. At times it must be confessed he bitterly regretted it. He felt incapable of further immolation. Life had lost its zest, its interest. Could he see her, take her hand, look into her eyes once more, come to life again, vivid life, and then turn away and walk deliberately back into the grave? No, it wasn't possible. It wasn't fair to ask it. Strange chap, this half-breed boy, was the feeling of the serious men who watched him, who saw his hesitation. What was the matter with him now? Unstable in all their ways, these mixed breeds! Not to be depended on!

Gifford watched him narrowly. He knew more than the rest. He remarked casually that much of the country was cut off from communication and it was feared that there was great suffering at the lonely ranches—starvation perhaps.

Starvation? Had they tried to get into touch with the ranch? Yes, but without success. They had telegraphed McShay to go to their relief, but had heard nothing from him. McShay was not at Calamity. Starvation? He would go. When was the next and the fastest train? He would go by way of Fort Serene. They promised that he would be furnished with supplies at the post.

And so it came to pass that he turned his face once more to the West, and every step of the way his heart lifted, the light came back into his eye, the ring came back into his voice, the spring to his step. In spite of his anxiety for their safety, in spite of a painful knowledge of the difficulties in the way, the possibility that he might be too late, his soul sang for joy. He was going back to his own, his country, his people, the land of his desire—going back not of his own volition but in answer to the call, the silent call which could not be denied.

It seems that the examination of Hal's papers in the London house had been thorough, but with small results. It was correctly surmised that the papers of importance were at the ranch. Hal's departure from Washington was promptly telegraphed to the Standing Bear Agency and the race was on.

The nearest post-office to the ranch, as I have intimated, was the Agency, but Hal had directed his letter to McCloud to the post, as being safer and farther removed from hostile influences. He had also written a short note to Captain Baker, asking him to warn the official in charge not to deliver any mail except to some one connected with the ranch, and properly accredited. When he arrived at the Fort Hal discovered that Baker was no longer stationed at Serene. His action with regard to Ladd and Wah-na-gi had been adversely criticised, and though he was not called before a court of inquiry, he was sufficiently punished by being exiled to the Philippines. Hal's letter to him found him eventually long after the incidents of this story were ancient history. The new commandant was a stranger

who knew nothing of the undercurrent of affairs in his domain, and who could be depended on to stick to routine and, if necessary, look the other way. Hal learned that Agent Ladd had been to the fort, had informed the commandant that he was about to send an Indian runner over to the Red Butte Ranch to see if they were in need, and offered to send any mail there was for the ranch people. This seemed quite all right to the soldier, both thoughtful and friendly, and he interposed no objection. It developed that considerable mail had collected for the Red Butte people and it was naturally handed over to the agent. Hal very properly drew the conclusion that Ladd now knew his papers were at the ranch and in the keeping of McCloud. He was also confident that the agent would leave no stone unturned in order to obtain them. As a matter of fact, Cadger had opened the letter to McCloud, sealed it up again, and then given it to Appah with instructions to lose it on the way over. He was for the sake of appearances to lose the entire mail. This was not hard to do. When Appah did not reappear promptly there was anxiety at the Agency. When due allowance had been made for all supposable emergencies, and still he did not return, the best runners in the tribe were sent out to learn the truth. An extraordinary story came back. It alleged that the priest of the white man and the priest of the Indian had passed into the Great Beyond together, that Appah had lost his life at the hands of John McCloud, the man of peace. That the dying clergyman had killed the powerful medicine-man seemed unbelievable. Still, it simplified matters. Ladd telegraphed the news to his friends at Washington and wired them to get for him instructions from McCloud's sister to take charge of his effects. As soon as this authorization arrived, Ladd and Cadger started for the ranch.

The death of John McCloud had plunged the ranch into gloom. It had been a hard, dreary, sullen winter, even before want and hunger came to dwell with them. Cattle were dying, stock suffering everywhere. McShay and Bill did not get through to the settlements. As Mike had anticipated, Bill had been an encumbrance to him. The stubborn old fellow had measured his strength by his courage, and they were no longer equal. McShay had to return to bring Bill in. After a wild night in which both came near losing their lives, they succeeded in regaining the shelter of Hal's cabin. They found the fire dead in its ashes and Wah-na-gi crouching by the side of the dead man where he had fallen, holding his hand, as she had done so many hours in his life, in a dumb vacant instinct of habit, to give him comfort in the long sleep which would know no waking.

Death obliterates animosities, so they laid the body of Appah decently in the stable, to await his relatives and friends who would take it on a sled or a travois to the Agency and weep and wail over it, and extol his virtues, just as we do with our dead.

To those who live apart from the forms and ceremonies of life they assume

an unusual and unnatural importance. It was a real grief to these rough men who had grown to love John McCloud that they could do so little to testify to their sense of his worth. Undemonstrative in life, they would have liked to have made it up in the paraphernalia of grief in the hour of death. It didn't occur to them that the dead man had been very simple, very unostentatious in his life. They did not want to intrude the subject upon Wah-na-gi, so they gathered to discuss it in Big Bill's quarters. Orson, Silent, Joe, Curley, Bill, and the others. Mike, as usual, was the spokesman.

"Boys," he said, after quite a pause, his eyes unduly moist and struggling to keep from showing emotion; "boys, we're up against it. We can't do it right, no way you fix it. John McCloud was a big man; an important man. In any right-minded kummunity, he'd be buried from the cathedral, with a funeral oration which would try to tell but couldn't what sort of a man he was, and the mayor and town officials and the civic organizations would have followed his hearse to the cemetery, and have covered his grave with wreaths and flowers, and everything would have been high-toned and impressive, and all that is good. It's good for the risin' generation. It shows the kids that's inclined to be wild that they got to live decent if they want a big funeral."

"John didn't care much fer fixin's, Mike," said Bill. "He was awful simple."

"Sure he was—never asked fer nothin'. All the more reason we should give it to him; all the more reason we should show the world what we think of him; but we can't do it, boys. We can't even give him a casket. A rough board box is the best we kin do, and we'll have to bury him in the snow until the spring comes. Then we'll do the thing right. We kin git the band over from the fort. We'll declare a half-week's holiday in Calamity, and everybody as is anybody in these here regions will come over here and pay their last respects to John McCloud."

And so it was decided. If John McCloud knew about it he must have been pleased with his funeral. The rough men gathered around his remains in the living-room, Wah-na-gi repeated the Lord's Prayer; she led and they joined in singing "Nearer, My God, to Thee," and they laid him to rest under the soft beautiful snow. When they came back and the others had gone to their quarters, Mike said to her:

"Wah-na-gi, there's one thing I'm awful sorry fer—the kid wasn't here." And he gave way completely and cried like a child. It was the first time he had mentioned Hal for a long, long time, and he had been thinking of the affection that had always existed between the preacher and the boy, and it was the little Indian woman who had to put aside her own grief to comfort the big cowman. Artfully she told of the dramatic happenings of that night, the night he and Bill went out into the storm. She told him what McCloud had said of his notion of God's purposes and they talked of the man and his character and his words, and

recalled many things that would give them good and gracious memories while life should last, and Mike said to her with some misgivings and a good deal of embarrassment:

"Wah-na-gi, I can't take his place. I wouldn't try, but—rely on me. Savey?"

And so routine once more resumed its quiet sway. The food Appah had brought didn't amount to much, but it came at the right time and saved serious complications. Ladd had sent them word by an Indian runner that he would be over in person to see as to their necessities and that food would follow him. Those at the ranch had been physically depleted, so that Mike made no further effort under the circumstances to get through himself or send any one else. They were marking time; but the situation was distinctly not cheerful.

Wah-na-gi in particular did not rally. Instead of recovering from the parson's death and the shock of that night when she had faced its horrors alone, she seemed to grow more and more depressed. It worried the boys a whole lot. One night Mike called them all together at Bill's and they took council—one with another. They discussed the situation from various stand-points. It was pointed out that Wah-na-gi was a child. She was young and, bein' young, needed play-things. It was only natural she should want amusement, relaxation, change. It was awful dull fer a young girl on a ranch. Injins needed fun and frolic, too, like anybody else. She needed companionship of her own sex. In the spring they could git some woman over from somewhere who would be company fer her. In the spring they promised to see to it that she went to the dances that might be goin' on in the settlements, and perhaps go in to Salt Lake fer the Fourth of July Celebration. Some one pointed out that next spring and summer would doubtless take care of themselves. It was the present that had to be looked after. If she went on grievin' and mopin' like she was doin' she wouldn't git to the spring. Finally, when everybody had had their say and no one had really said anything, Silent cleared his throat by a great effort and said gravely:

"Say, fellers, to-morrer'll be Christmas."

Silent had a memory that was unusually retentive as to figures. His statement created a sensation but was, of course, universally challenged. The days had come and gone, one just like the other, and how was any one to know that Christmas was upon them? Reference to calendars and elaborate computations finally showed that Silent had made a serious discovery.

"Boys," said Mike; "I got it. We'll have a Christmas-tree fer Wah-na-gi! What do you say? We'll make it as funny as we kin. Gee, if we sit down here and try to outshin each other we'll all git bug-house."

The cowboy dearly loves a practical joke and goes to elaborate pains in its accomplishment. Suddenly the ranch became busy, very busy, and there were winks and nudges, and an air of mystery. Wah-na-gi was preoccupied or she

would have noticed that there was something unusual afoot, that every one was engaged, alert, and secretive.

The idea broadened as it went along and little plots were hatched against each other. In the bustle and activity the men regained their normal elasticity.

Supper that night was a hurried and a constrained meal with an undercurrent of excitement. When it had been rushed through all the men made a hasty exit, leaving Wah-na-gi alone. When the table had been cleared, and the room tidied, she sat down as usual by the big fire. It was the hour when the absence of John McCloud and Hal was very poignant. The care of the sick man had been onerous, but it had been a joy to know that she could do for him, anticipate his wishes, minister to his comfort. Now there was a great, blank, empty void. Mike stole into the room with a bundle under his arm. This he put on the chest of drawers, then he came down and found her weeping.

"Wah-na-gi," he said to her with suppressed excitement, "sure you mustn't let the boys see you cryin'. It ain't good for none of us to sit down here and calculate to a fraction just how miserable we are. Am I right? Sure I am. John McCloud himself wouldn't like it. He'd want us to lift our head and face the music, wouldn't he? Sure he would. He didn't have strength enough left to die, but he went out like a fightin' man. Sure if I hadn't 'a' loved him before I'd 'a' loved him for that. Now go to your room, wash the tears from your black eyes, put on your nicest dress and your prettiest bow, and stay there until you're sent for."

"Stay there?" said Wah-na-gi with dismay.

"Well, dearly beloved, it's to be a surprise party, and if you stay here divil a surprise will it be. So scoot, vamoose, git out. And you must give me your solemn oath not to peek, or listen, or come in until you're called. Hold up your two hands and make the oath double."

It was impossible to resist the buoyant spirits of the Irishman.

Wah-na-gi laughed in spite of herself as he hustled and herded her out of the room, she having agreed to the conditions imposed. When he had the room to himself, Mike went up to the bundle he had left on the table. These placards, rudely lettered, he began to tack up about the room. They ran along somewhat after this fashion:

"Merri (ha, ha!) Crismas."

Like some eminent literary artists, Mike was long on words and short on spelling.

"Resterant And Food-factory."

Food being mostly absent from its accustomed place, was naturally very much in the minds of the humorists, whose efforts at gayety made up in breadth what they lacked in subtlety.

Another sign announced: "Blew monge—Has Just Blew In!" Another: "Egg-nog, without the egg or the Nog." "Plum (?) Pudin' (?)." "Mince Pi Like Step-Father uster Make." Under the caption "Our Motter" appeared this effort at scripture: "O Lord, Open Thou Our Lips And Our Mouths Shal Sho Fourth Thi Prais a Whole Lot if We Git the Chanct."

The materials or the humor seemed to give out at this juncture.

Mike was in the act of tacking up the last extravagant effort to the shelf over the fireplace when a voice behind said softly: "Gee, it's good to be home."

The hammer and the placard both dropped out of the Irishman's hand.

"Ghosts, is it?" he whispered, fixed, with his eyes wide open; "or the ban-shee?"

"Don't breathe a word," said the voice.

"Breathe a word? Sure I ain't breathin' at all."

Then the startled Mike turned slowly and saw Hal who had watched him for some time in silence.

"Why, Hal, my son; why God bless you," said the astonished cowman as he caught the boy's strong hand in his huge paw, and the men looked in each other's eyes with the silent affection that men feel but cannot express.

"It's good to feel the grip of your hand once more, Mike," said the boy. "How is Wah-na-gi?"

"Wah-na-gi is it?" The secret of Hal's wife had been confined to McCloud and Wah-na-gi. Mike was in ignorance of all complications in Hal's domestic affairs.

"Wah-na-gi? Sure you stayed away long enough for a dozen fellers to have run off with her, and small blame to her, you scamp. It's awful good you've got to be to me, boy. I ain't sure as I'll let you have her."

"You?" said the boy, smiling.

"You got to show me, son, for I'm her——"

He stopped suddenly confronted with the realization that Hal did not, could not know.

"Sure, the good man's gone, Hal."

"Dead?" whispered the boy. "John McCloud?"

He went to the stool by the fire and sat down for a moment, and Mike followed him and put his hand on his shoulder. He knew as well as any one the relations of the two men and understood them. It was a great blow to Hal. He ought reasonably to have anticipated such an event, but his thought had been busy with his own affairs and John McCloud as he was related to them. He had thought that he would have to meet the preacher and face his inquisition, and it had been some consolation to him that he could do so. He could tell the truth and it would be something to have earned the other's "Well done, my son; well done."

Briefly and gently Mike told the boy what there was to tell, and how Wah-na-gi had never quite recovered from the shock of that awful night with its double horror.

"Sure, you're a God-send to us," he added. "My, my, my, won't their eyes pop out at the sight of you? You're pretty well liked around here, son, and say, you're just in time. The boys are goin' to have a Christmas-tree fer Wah-na-gi."

"A Christmas-tree, eh?" and the reaction came. The warmth of the room, the cheer of the blaze, the relaxation following on the physical strain, upon the cold and privation, the familiar objects about him with their associations, the sudden sense of a great loss, and the eternal mystery of death, the sound of a kindly voice, the homely joys conjured up by the words "Christmas-tree," all coming together overpowered him, and he bowed his head and turned away, speechless, and Mike looked away too, that he might not see the other's tears. It was the first emotion Hal had allowed himself to feel for a long time. He had bathed his soul in a hardening solution of indifference; otherwise existence would have been unendurable. Now when the assumption fell away, he felt uncommonly weak. After a moment's struggle the boy cleared his throat and said:

"Mike, I'm pretty glad to get back. I didn't know it would hit me so hard. I don't want to get foolish and play the baby. I'll tell you what," and his eyes began to shine and the old smile to come back to his face; "hide me some place, get 'em all together, then make a joke of it, then bring me out, and there you are, eh?"

Mike chuckled in anticipation of the surprise and joy of Wah-na-gi and the boys.

"Great!" he said. "I'll put you in this closet here; then I'll lead up to it with a few simple words; then I'll bring you out, and take you off the tree as a Christmas present for Wah-na-gi."

"No; don't do that, Mike. You don't understand. Don't single Wah-na-gi out—just let it all come naturally, you know—"

"Say, young feller; who's doin' this? I ain't ever been accused of lettin' anybody else write my speeches fer me."

Both men were fairly aquiver with the excitement of anticipation. Hal had risen, and had removed his belt and gun, thrown off his storm-coat, and stood now in his flannel shirt, hunting boots, and woolen trousers, a trim, vital figure of a man, his eyes dancing, his face aglow.

"Say, that'll be fine," he said. "I can see the whole show from there, can see all their faces."

"Sure; you can see *her* face, if you try hard," said the irrepressible Mike. Hal had tossed his things on the couch in the upper left-hand corner and drawn a bear robe over them, so that his presence might not be prematurely disclosed. Then he entered the rough pine clothes closet on the opposite side of the room.

"Say, it's goin' to be a bit close in here." Then he turned and shook the big cowman joyously. "Work it up, Mike. Work it up."

"You leave it to me, son. If I can't git eloquent to-night, I ain't got no divine fire."

And he pushed the door of the clothes-press to, turned to see that the room was in readiness, and had put on his own cap when Big Bill entered with a suspicious bulge to a portion of his great-coat.

"Bill," said Mike with a nervous tremor in his voice and taking the foreman by the shoulder, "whatever you do, don't go near that closet, and don't let any one else go near it. There's a Christmas present in there fer Wah-na-gi, and it's a horrible, awful secret."

"Gee, you don't say!" said Bill, laughing but mystified.

"Are the boys all ready?" inquired Mike, going to the door.

"Say, Mike," said Bill. "It's all right. It'll make a cat laf. It's the bummiest thing in Christmas-trees you ever see. You better look it over and memorize your impromptu speech."

And Mike went out bubbling over, saying to himself with a chuckle: "My, my, my, won't this be a night!"

When he was gone Bill dug out of his inner recesses a bottle and he held it up to the light and rolled it, examining it critically.

"There's all the liquor there is on the place," he said mournfully. "It wouldn't be Christmas to the boys without a drop of something." Then he scratched his head as if trying to think of some way to make it more. "They can at least smell of it and look at the label." And Bill put it on a small table near the closet.

As he turned away two men pushed open the door and entered quietly. They stood for a second to get over the glare and then one said quietly:

"Hello, Bill."

Bill turned.

"Why, hello, Mr. Agent. Hello, Cadger."

The two men shook the snow from their clothes and came down to the fire.

"Heard you people were hard up for grub. Came over to see what we could do for you," said the agent genially.

"Well, say, that's kind," said the simple-minded Bill. "We need it all right."

"Didn't Calthorpe bring any supplies with him?" asked Cadger, and he and Ladd watched Bill's face narrowly.

"The boss? Hal? Say, what are you a-talkin' about?" said Bill with a glimmer of suspicion.

"We heard he was back or on his way back," suggested Ladd.

"Back your grandmother!" said Bill contemptuously. "The boss's in Europe. Ain't ever comin' back here I reckon; but what's that to you? Are you still lookin' "

fer trouble? 'Cause if you are, you kin git it."

"Not me," laughed Ladd good-humoredly. "I'm for lettin' by-gones be by-gones. If he isn't here, you'll do just as well, Bill. It's a small matter. Doctor McCloud's sister has telegraphed me to take charge of his effects."

"Oh," said Bill, puzzled. "Is that so? 'Tain't much," he added. "He carried his valuables with him I reckon."

Ladd showed the foreman the telegram.

"Oh, that'll be all right, I guess," said Bill with reference to Ladd's implied request. "Wah-na-gi's put everything he left in his valise—he never had a trunk—and she says his instructions was to have his things sent to his sister in Washington. There it stands under the table, there, ready to go by express soon as ever kumunications are established once more. You don't want to take it with you this kind o' weather, do you?"

"I don't know," said Ladd, taking the bag from under the table below the window on the right-hand side of the entrance. "Is it heavy?" and he lifted it. "We got a pack mule through with us, but no, I don't think we care to take it this time. When we come again will do. There's no hurry that I can see," and he put the bag back where he got it.

"Well," said Bill, recollecting the impending festivities, "you'll have to excuse me. I've got to help with the fixin's and come in with the peeracle. Say, you're just in time fer the doin's. We're goin' to have a Christmas celebration fer Wah-na-gi and the boys."

"Go right along. Don't mind us."

"Well, make yourselves comfortable," said Bill and went out into the night. As soon as Bill was out of the room Ladd turned with a look of triumph to the trader.

"Did you watch Bill's face? He ain't seen him, and if Bill hasn't seen him, he isn't here. We've beat him to it. Why, it's a cinch."

Ladd examined his weapons carefully, then put a chair carelessly against the door leading to the kitchen, so that any one entering there would be stopped for a perceptible moment. Cadger stood just within the storm-door as a sentinel, to warn him of any one approaching from without. Then Ladd opened the valise which was unlocked. John McCloud had never been afraid of any one robbing him of his unpretentious belongings and the key had been lost early in the bag's history. With his face directly to the closet and his back to the fire, Ladd quickly examined the contents and had no difficulty in immediately locating the papers, which he slipped into the inside pocket of his short storm-coat. He rearranged the contents of the bag as nearly as possible as they had been, closed it, and put it back under the table. All was well. It couldn't be better. He called in Cadger.

"It's all right, Cadger; I've got 'em. Now you go to the stable ostensibly to

look after the mule, but never take your eyes off that entrance door. Anybody that enters gets the light of this room. If he comes while we're here, well, we'll have to take care of ourselves, that's all. From the stable opposite it's a certainty."

We'll get away just as soon as we can without arousing suspicion. So far it couldn't be better."

Cadger pulled his cap down over his eyes and slouched out into the night. Ladd looked carefully about, removed the chair to its former position, then walked over to the fireplace, and stretched out his hands to its genial glow. Hal had been an interested listener and observer. In the strain of it he was wet with perspiration. His weapons were with his coat on the couch, in the farthest corner of the room. Ladd was armed to the teeth. To wait until the room was full of people would complicate matters; some one might get hurt! She might get hurt. He pushed the door of the closet open just enough for him to slide out. He dropped to the position of a runner on the starting line, on his toes, the tips of his fingers to the floor. He looked altogether Indian as he crept stealthily across. Just as he was in the act of springing upon Ladd's back, the latter looked up into the mirror over the fireplace and saw him. Quick as a snake Ladd drew his knife, turned, and struck. Hal caught his descending arm on the slant and with the force of the blow Hal's hand slid to the other's wrist, where it clung. They clinched immediately. The agent was a powerful man, quite as muscular, perhaps a shade more so, than the boy. Hal therefore exerted only so much strength as was absolutely necessary to keep the quivering knife from his body. He had forced it well down on the clinch and held it down. The agent, having tried in vain to get it up, strained every nerve and muscle to put it in the artery of his antagonist's leg—a favorite blow with Chinese assassins. Hal managed to stop it always just short of penetration. In the struggle they had worked over to the centre of the room and up against the stout wooden table. Over-balanced with the impact, they fell over it and the knife, descending, stuck quivering in the top, where Hal held it, the other trying to wrench it and himself free. The room was silent as the grave except for the ticking of the clock and the breathing of the two men. The agent was putting forth every pound of energy of which he was capable. Hal was trying to save a little out. He knew that if he could wind the agent he had him beaten. Suddenly Ladd got a purchase against the table and lifted himself and the other clear of it. It was a stupendous effort, but it was his best. He began to tire. The younger man kept him going, let him struggle, just held his own until once more they came close to the table from above, when he caught Ladd over his hip and lifted him clean off the floor, throwing him heavily on his back on the top of the table. It was the boy's best and all he could do for the time being. The agent squirmed and fought and struggled like a madman, but the other held, held and held, with the older man tiring all the time. Soon the youngster got his

second wind, when he edged and worked his body over the prostrate man, pulled the other's left arm across his throat, brought his own arm with it, and threw his weight on the two. They rested across Ladd's windpipe and shut off his air, the position meanwhile resting the other. Ladd saw he was beaten unless he could throw off his antagonist, and he put forth a mighty effort. He lifted the boy with all his weight and all but slipped from under, but Hal held him for the crucial second and he dropped back—beaten. Hal now disengaged his left hand, holding the other with his arm across the throat, and with both hands pulled the agent's knife hand up and over his exposed neck. Then he pressed down and threw his weight upon the knife. Quivering, quivering, slowly it descended until its point rested on the flesh of the prostrate man.

"Surrender," Hal gasped; "or I'll give you your own knife."

"I surrender," gurgled the agent with what breath was left in him.

"Let go the knife," said Hal when he could speak. The other did so. When Ladd had released his hold on the weapon, Hal transferred its handle to his right hand and with the left took the agent's gun from its holster, then he passed the gun before Ladd's eyes to let him know that he was disarmed. Keeping his enemy's revolver in one hand, he transferred the knife to his teeth. Only then did he stand up and away from the other as he lay.

"Wait a minute," he warned through his set teeth as Ladd made as if to rise. Coming back to him, he removed from the agent's inside pocket the papers he had taken from Doctor McCloud's bag. These papers Hal transferred to the back pocket of his trousers. Then he took the knife from his teeth and, covering Ladd with his own revolver, said:

"Now, get up, if you can."

The beaten man was game. He half got up, rolled from the table, staggered to his feet, and fell against the clothes-press, breathing hard. Hal could stand and control his weapons but he wasn't much better for the moment, though his strength was returning fast. Just then a long peculiar whistle was heard outside.

"What was that?" demanded Calthorpe. "Cadger's signal?"

"Yes."

"What's it mean?"

"That everything's all right."

"I don't trust you. I'll see for myself. Get into that closet. I damn near suffocated in there and I hope you will."

Ladd backed into the closet under the muzzle of Hal's weapon. The latter turned the key on the imprisoned agent. Then the boy took a long deep breath, put on his storm-coat and hat, and, coming to the clothes-press, said:

"I'd advise you to be quiet in there, for if my boys find out what you've been up to, they'll come pretty near lynching you. And now I'm going out to get your

pal, your hired assassin, and then I'll present the pair of you to the Government as a Christmas present."

Hal started out of the door, then recollected what he had heard, glanced back at the fire and the swinging lamp, closed the door, pulled back the table from under the window, to the right of the storm-door, threw up the sash, and, lifting himself through, closed the window from without and disappeared.

Wah-na-gi had responded gamely to Mike's call. She had understood from her new foster-father's anxiety that the boys were worried about her, that she must have been so abstracted and depressed as to give them concern, that this tomfoolery, whatever it was, was intended to divert her, give her pleasure or, at least, make her think of other things beside her loss. Determined to make amends, she had gone to her room, put on her best dress, tied a bright ribbon in her hair, all the while infected with a growing curiosity. Having finished her simple toilet, and not having been summoned, she sat down and tried to wait. She found this rather difficult. The air was electrical. She found she was under the influence of intense excitement, conflicting emotions. Finally she could bear it no longer and she went to the door of the living-room and knocked on it impatiently. Mike had just entered by the outer door and thrown down his cap.

"Aren't you ready for me yet, boys?" she called through the door.

"One moment, lady," called out Mike as he went down to the door, threw it open with a great flourish and, offering her his arm, led her into the room.

"Lady," he said to her with his most impressive manner, "the Young Men's Aid Society and Band of Hope has arranged these here festivities particular fer you. Let her go!" he called out toward the entrance.

The "peerade" was headed by Orson carrying a miniature, moth-eaten Christmas-tree, decorated mostly with corks, the sole relics of by-gone festivities. The others carried such "presents" as could not be harnessed to the tree, and all were singing at the tops of their lusty voices, "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night."

They got a laugh from Wah-na-gi on their first appearance, which put the stamp of success on the show right at the start. They circled the room until the song was done, then the tree was placed on the table in the centre, and the solitary half-hearted candle at its apex was lighted ceremoniously. Wah-na-gi, as the guest of honor, was left on one side of the room and the boys all gathered on the other. McShay advanced to the tree and began a speech in a mixture of his best Fourth-of-July camp-meeting manner.

FELLER CITIZENS AND LADY:

Somebody, who is probably a liar, has just informed us that to-morrer is Christmas. To-morrer bein' Christmas, it follers as a sequence before the fact that tonight is Christmas Eve. That this is likely to be a Hell of a Christmas ain't no argyment fer not celebratin' it before we git to it and find out how bad it is. Let us therefore humbly and devoutly git agoin' and ketch the spirit of the occasion even if we have to rope it and throw it on its head. All you as has blue tickets and been in reg'lar attendance can git in on it, and *perhaps* look fer a prisint, and those as gits left kin fill up on good wishes of which we have a superfluous supply. First, we will have the usual Christmas-tree.

At this juncture Joe broke into the proceedings with a loud guffaw. McShay eyed him severely.

"I said a Christmas-tree, and any feller caught laffin' at it will be showed the door." And he walked away after the manner of platform lecturers who move about to show their perfect command of the situation. As he did so Orson stepped into his place and Silent handed him a small article wrapped in paper which he took from the tree. Orson, trying to imitate the Sunday-school manner of the big man, said:

"Will Mickey McShay please step forward? Mickey, here is the last see-gar you unloaded on us, and if you kin smoke it, we'll some day give you the proudest banquet in any of the local joints this side the Missouri, at which banquet you kin eat your own words and damned if they don't choke you," and he handed Mike a cigar with the added insult:

"It's a onion with a alfalfa wrapper. It ain't fit fer perlite society." Mike joined in the laugh at his expense, but at once took charge of the occasion, determined not again to lose control. He turned with a kindly smile to Big Bill.

"Will Little Willie push his presence as near to us as circumstances and his *waist line* will permit?"

Bill ambled forward, glancing down over his ample figure with an awkward smile, looking a bit teased and very close to blushing. Mike took a "sinker" from the tree and handed it to the big man.

"Here is a cookie for Little Willie," he said. The disproportion between the size of the present and the recipient was so great every one laughed, including the victim. Then Mike looked Bill over critically and, turning to his audience, said:

"If the prevailin' starvation prevails, and little Willie dies by inches, how long will it take his equator to reach his poles?" During the ensuing laugh Mike took up a small school-house of home manufacture, with the paint scarce dry on it. "Will Wah-na-gi, little bright-eyes, the spirit child, communicate with us?"

Wah-na-gi came forward, laughing. Every one was in high glee. It was many a day since any one had seen her so radiant.

"Wah-na-gi," said Mike, "here's a school-house for you with the hope that some day you may have it full of children of your own and be beholden to nobody."

While Wah-na-gi was blushing furiously, Silent broke in with the remark: "Gee, I'm awful dry. Ain't nobody got a drink?"

"That's the one topic of conversation," said Mike, "upon which Silent can and will discourse. Gentlemen, git your cut-glasses."

The mob broke for the cupboard en masse and there was a wild scramble for drinking vessels, no one stopping to discriminate, and this was followed by a frantic rush back to Mike, who in the meantime had possessed himself of the bottle of whiskey brought out by Big Bill from his private stock. Mike, having with some difficulty protected himself from their violence, called out:

"Don't crowd; don't crowd. Now stand in line. Stand in line, ye beggars. Ain't ye ever been invited to have a drink before?"

They stood obediently in line but each with cup or glass outstretched to the limit, while Mike rolled the scanty supply critically in the bottle and made a rapid calculation as to its distribution. Shaking the bottle so as to wet the cork, he removed the latter and carefully dropped a few drops into Big Bill's cup, who eyed the result ruefully, scornfully.

"Silent," he said to that worthy, "four drops every four years for you."

To Orson, who was bald, he said: "Externally fer you, Orson; if you can find it, use it fer a hair tonic."

To Rough-house Joe he said: "Not to be taken before meals, or at meals, or after meals." Here the liquid gave out and he shook the cork over the next cup.

"Lady," he said to Wah-na-gi, "I'll guarantee no one will git drunk or disorderly. Boys," he said, turning to them, "I'll bet there's a name in all our minds this night, and it's the absent owner of this ranch. Here's to 'im and, wherever he is this night, let's hope his heart is with us. I ask you to drink a merry Christmas to the boss."

The boys extended their drinking vessels and gave vent to vociferous yaps in the approved cowboy style, and drank, or did their best to drink, to the health of the absent boss. Then Mike, with his eyes sparkling and with a most elaborate manner, walked up to the centre of the room, glanced toward the closet, and said:

"And I'll ask him to respond to the toast in person."

Wah-na-gi looked as if she might faint. Bill said quickly: "Mike, be careful. Wah-na-gi's here."

"Sure, I know she's here," replied the buoyant Irishman. "And if she had the choosin' of her own present, I'll bet I could name it. Wah-na-gi, here's a

Christmas present for you,” and he went to the clothes-press and tried to open it. To his great surprise he found it locked. Quickly unlocking it, he threw the doors wide and walked away with a supreme air of triumph. When David Ladd, pale and wild-eyed, staggered out and to the table, the sensation was complete. Not hearing the cries of joyous tumult he had expected, Mike turned and saw the agent. He was the most astonished man of the lot.

”Holy Mother of Moses,” he ejaculated in a whisper. ”Is it one of them cabinet tricks?”

Just then a shot was heard outside. Every one turned from the central figure and listened. Then, by common consent, every man grabbed his hat and rushed out of doors, all except McShay, who made no movement to go but kept his eye on David Ladd.

”What was that, Mike?” said Wah-na-gi in a scared whisper.

Ladd lifted his head. Swiftly it passed through his mind the hope that Cadger had got his man. Just then there were cheers outside, and all the boys came tumbling back, Hal in their midst with a gun in one hand and Cadger in the other. The trader looked sheepish and blood was flowing from a nasty scalp wound over one eye where Hal had clubbed him with the barrel of his own gun.

As Hal came suddenly into the light he did not see Wah-na-gi, and she, as she caught sight of him, drew back and whispered to herself: ”He has come! He has come back. My man has come back.”

Then he saw her and, coming swiftly to her, took her in both hands and lifted her up clear of the floor as he might have lifted a child, while the rough men gave vent to their joy and excitement by cheers.

”Put me down, please,” she begged. ”Please put me down, Hal.”

When her feet touched the earth, her first impulse was to go to the wounded man. Apart from her kindly instincts she could hide her emotions at a moment when she suffered at their exposure.

”I’m all right,” said Cadger surlily. ”I don’t want to be fussed over.”

”You let her fix you up,” said Hal, in a tone that implied obedience, and Cadger submitted with a bad grace.

”Boys,” he said to his retainers, ”I can’t tell you how glad I am to get home and how sorry I am to have broken up this party. Never mind, to-morrow is Christmas and I’ll have a wagon-load of supplies here in the morning and we’ll have a Christmas that you won’t forget to your dying day.” At this there was a lusty cheer. ”For the present there’s a little matter of business must be disposed of before we go any further. Get chairs all of you, all except Silent. Silent, you stand by the door, take my gun, and see that neither of the prisoners gets away or disturbs the proceedings. All the rest of you sit down and while Wah-na-gi is fixing up Cadger we will determine what is to be done with these two scoundrels.”

The table was cleared and the men sat about in a council of war. When all were seated, Hal said: "Well, what shall we do with them?"

McShay said: "I'd take 'em outside, give 'm one hundred yards, and let 'em get away, *if they could*."

"Why take us outside?" said Ladd, coming down and standing before them. He had regained his aplomb, and never had appeared to better advantage.

"No," said Hal, "I couldn't do that. If I'd wanted to do that I wouldn't have taken 'em alive. I'll have to take 'em East and hand 'em over to the United States authorities and send 'em to the penitentiary."

"That's a lot of trouble for two such skunks," said McShay.

"I'd rather you shot us as McShay suggests," said Ladd. Then, turning to Hal, he said: "Calthorpe, you got us. You turned the trick. You got the documents we were after. They're all you need for your purposes. You don't need us except to get even with us, and you're too big a man for that. You can send us up for God knows how many years, for life, for all I know, but what good will it do you? Give us another chance?"

"Gee, you got your nerve," said Bill.

"We'll hit the trail for Canada, that is, if we ever see a trail."

"Say, what have we got agin Canada?" asked Orson.

"If you turn us loose now it's a hundred-to-one shot we'll never get to the Canadian line. Give us a chance; won't you?"

"What do you say, Wah-na-gi?" said Hal, calling to the girl.

She came down to the table.

"I think perhaps John McCloud would give them another chance."

"All right, you get it," said Hal. "On your way. You can take it as a Christmas present from John McCloud."

"I hope you won't regret it," said Ladd. "And here's a telegram I got for you at Fort Serene. That'll help some," and he handed Hal a telegram which had been opened. Hal took it and put it in his pocket.

The two prisoners had their own provisions! They were given their mule and told to "beat it." They were never seen again or heard of. Perhaps they reached the Canadian line and disappeared in the northern wilds; perhaps they were the men whose bones were found the following spring at the foot of one of the ravines of Dead Man's Canyon.

When they were gone, Hal turned to the others and said: "Boys, you take your Christmas dinner here with us to-morrow." He looked at his watch. "Gee, it's *to-day*! It's midnight! Merry Christmas, Wah-na-gi! Merry Christmas, boys! Merry Christmas to all at Red Butte Ranch," and all gathered round and shook him and each other by the hand, and if the angels didn't sing on high they did in the glad hearts of these homely folk.

Then they all went to bed. And Hal was alone. He lit his pipe and sat down before the fire in the living-room, and was glad of the solitude, of the quiet, of the peace, the unspeakable peace that had stolen into his heart. Wah-na-gi was near, under the same roof. He had seen her. She was, if possible, more beautiful than ever, the same simple child, without pretence, without guile, unspoiled, true as truth! And he knew she loved him, would always love him. Long he looked into the embers. He was alone and yet not altogether alone. There was something strange, mysterious in the room. Was it the presence of his mother? Something seemed to whisper to him: "Make her happy." Was it little Nat-u-ritch? or was it John McCloud? He said again as he said that night in the London fog: "John McCloud, my heart is empty, but my hands are clean."

And John McCloud would never know, never know what it cost him to say those words, to have the right to say them. And yet—perhaps he did know. Hal thought he would like him to know. Then he happened to think of the telegram that Ladd had given him, that had been purloined with the other mail at Fort Serene. He took it out of his pocket and glanced at it indifferently, but did not see it. It belonged to the routine, the details of life. This moment, this quiet moment apart was his. He had earned it. It was sacred. This was home. This was his home. These were his people. This was his land. Here was the woman he loved. Here were memories, influences, elusive but potent, subtle appeals stealing out of the past, out of the grave before the door, out of the subconscious, out of the trifles of childhood. Sky and plain and peak had welcomed him. All these silent things had called to him, called him back to his own. He felt that he must be alone with them. He would have the night, and the morrow; and then he would have to turn his back on them forever, on *her* forever. He had no thought of sleep. He must have a long think. These moments were few and precious. The world without, that world which had always been so unfriendly, must not intrude. He would not read the telegram. It might disturb this sacred harmony. He would put it by and read it on the backward trail. It was open in his hand. Involuntarily he glanced at it. He saw the name—Winifred. Evidently it was from his cousin. He shuddered apprehensively. A voice out of the cruel London fog! calling him back, calling him away. Just ahead of the name—he could not help seeing it—were these words: "buried at sea." He was reading it backward. "Never regained consciousness. Over-dose sedative by mistake." Then his eye ran quickly to the beginning and read: "On way from India Edith took—"

The cable slipped from his hand. How still and solemn was the world! And he sat there into the morning of another day, listening to the voices of the silent call.

THE END

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