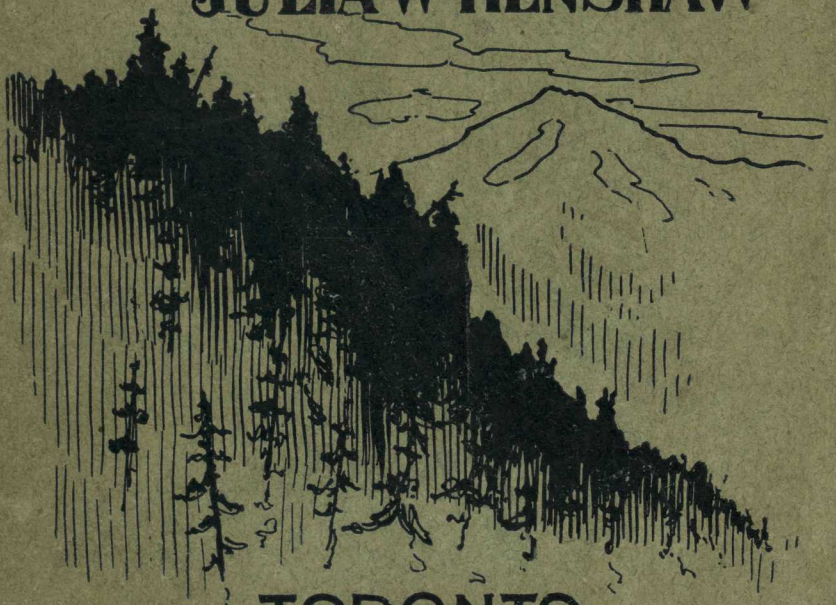
Why not Sweetheart?

By JULIA W. HENSHAW



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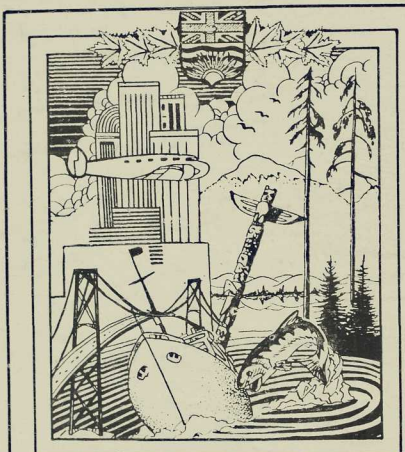

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To my good friend
Mr. Pound
in remembrance of many
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from
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Why Not Sweetheart?

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Why Not Sweetheart?

BY

JULIA W. HENSHAW

(JULIAN DURHAM)

Author of 'Hypnotised?' 'British Columbia Up-to-Date,' etc.

TORONTO

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Why Not Sweetheart?

CHAPTER I

THE MIND-EASE ASYLUM

'That he is mad 'tis true.'—SHAKESPEARE.

'Is that man hopelessly insane?' asked Jack Maclyn, as the superintendent of the Mind-Ease Lunatic Asylum opened the door with a master-key, and signed to his cousin to leave the ward.

'I fear so,' replied Doctor Dufft, quietly; 'still, under certain circumstances, good results might—' He paused, and his thoughts whirled on, leaving speech for a moment handicapped.

'Might what? Lead to his recovery, do you mean?'

The superintendent threw back his head with an impatient gesture.

'In most of these hereditary cases,' he went on quickly, 'the chances are a thousand to one against a complete cure; though some times—oh! well,' with a professional shrug of the shoulders, 'of course, sometimes they get all right, and in time learn to fend very well for themselves. As far as Christopher

Sabel is concerned, however, I have little real hope that he will get beyond that stage when a fellow hangs grimly on to the wrong end of a right idea.'

'What a cursed shame! And yet he talked quite sensibly to us just now,' said Maclyn, thoughtfully, a deep furrow grooving his forehead. He was a strong, healthy-minded man, but the sight of so many lunatics had a trifle unnerved him. Poor distraught creatures! They were not physically repulsive, only a sudden loathing of their madness had taken possession of him as he followed the doctor on his rounds, amongst scenes that were commonplace enough to be pitiable.

In each large, scantily-furnished ward a few uniformed attendants, alert and watchful, guarded the patients, some twenty or thirty in number, whose orderly behaviour testified to discipline rigidly enforced.

Near the door through which the superintendent and his cousin had just passed, an old man lay upon the sofa, humming a hymn tune, harshly, and with no regard to time; beside him sat a youth, his hands pressed tightly to his head; half a dozen of the inmates walked aimlessly about, muttering curses and philosophical remarks with impartial monotony; others leaned silently against the walls, watching vacancy with placid eyes; and in the centre of the room, where the strong glare of the May sunshine fell through the grated window full upon his impassive features, stood Christopher Sabel, gentleman—madman—a bodily tower and a mental ruin.

The place oppressed Maclyn. These human beings

were irresponsible, and he knew it, and a great wave of relief swept over him as the last door closed upon them.

'I am not surprised that the man attracted your attention,' remarked the doctor, abruptly, as they turned into the main corridor of the building. 'He is a fine-looking chap.'

'And seemed so much more rational than the other patients,' added Jack. 'What a devil of a life you must lead here, Hallam, always amongst these crazy folk!' he wound up emphatically.

'Oh! I am used to it, and besides—'

'Yes, I know,' interrupted his cousin, and he smiled, for Dufft's love of his profession was an open secret.

The superintendent's eyes contracted slightly.

'Every man has his pet hobby, and I suppose the care of imbeciles is mine,' he remarked casually, as he led the way down a passage towards his private quarters.

'Always thinking of others, old boy! You have not changed a scrap since the days at Charterhouse. But, to go back to the subject, who is the fellow, anyway?'

'An Englishman named Sabel. He was sent to me little more than three months ago with a bad record behind him.'

'Of crime?' queried Jack, in astonishment.

'No! Of hereditary insanity. There are some rather mysterious features connected with the case. Come in here,' continued the doctor, as he flung open the door of his office, 'it is more cheerful, and I see this atmosphere does not agree with you.'

'You are right. I never was in an asylum before, and I promise you I shall never enter one again. How on earth can you stand it, Hallam?' burst out Maclyn, excitedly, as he flung himself into an armchair and began to smoke.

'Needs must, my dear chap. I am not what the mossbacks in this part of the world call "a real gentleman with a bank account," so when a spasmodically-grateful director, to whom I had once done a good turn, offered me the billet, you bet your life I tumbled to it pretty quickly. Only a fool would refuse three meals a day and a good income. But now give my affairs a rest for a bit, and tell me about yourself,' said the superintendent, banging the door shut upon the institution and all its horrors.

Jack knew perfectly well that the doctor had not answered him truthfully. Money cut a small figure in Hallam Dufft's calculations.

In the days of their boyhood the cousins had been at school together, but had afterwards practically lost sight of each other for many years, until one sunny May morning they met on the Western edge of Canadian soil, with a hearty handshake and a genuine 'Glad to see you.'

Jack Maclyn was merely a bird of passage through British Columbia; a man with few ties, travelling for pleasure. A barrister by profession, and a sportsman by inclination, he was lucky enough to have inherited an income that made him independent of briefs. Hallam Dufft had, on the contrary, long ago settled down to his life's work in the Mind-Ease Asylum, and he therefore listened with eagerness to the most trivial

details about the doings of his kith and kin in England. When a man has lived for a long time on the Pacific Coast, he grows hungry for news of his old home and friends, told at first hand.

Chaff was briskly exchanged between the two men for a space, interlarded with such pertinent queries from the doctor as: 'Are you married yet, Jack?' 'Why was Jim plucked a second time for the army?' and other similar questions, the answers to which bore no interest at all for the general public, but for the bachelor, six thousand miles from his native country, contained the whole Gospel according to Home. So they smoked their pipes, and laughed buoyantly, as they found each other again in reminiscences of a common past, that sweetest of all intercourse to those whose ways have long been widely sundered. After a while, however, Maclyn returned to his previous charge.

'Now, joking apart, old man, tell me honestly why on earth you have stayed so long in this ghastly place?'

'Well, I will if you like. Simply because I discovered ages ago that I had special gifts for dealing with this particular branch of my profession,' replied his cousin, steadily.

Jack was silent. He never failed to recognise the truth when he heard it. There is something wonderfully sobering in being confronted with stalwart sentiments from lips that you know to be sincere; and when you come across a man of gallant principles, who is not afraid to say what he means, and mean what he says, you are instinctively braced up to try

and do likewise. There are plenty of good people in the world, but half of them are ashamed of it and try to hide their upright natures as if they were stolen goods, pretending to wrongs they never practise and faults uncommitted. It takes far more courage for a man to brave the ridicule of his companions, by refusing to indulge in the very vices that he hates, than to face the business end of a revolver. Self-respect comes high, but it wears well, and in the West, where everyone is more or less a law unto himself, the possessor of it is a 'white' man.

The doctor's idea of duty, and one which he relentlessly followed, was to tread the narrow path without a backward glance, giving himself up heart and soul to his work, and living a life of unselfish devotion to those rudderless beings who wander for ever alone in the mental mistlands of forgetfulness. Little did anyone reck that the road to healing power led him to suffer in, for and with the whole world. To fail was nothing, but to have stopped working for humanity would have been to Dufft a blasphemy, for the blood of his heart pulsed to quicken all life, girdling the earth with a stream of infinite pity.

When the great 'rounding up' of souls comes, such men will be branded with the mark of righteousness, for the real test of a man is his motive.

CHAPTER II

THE CLUE

'You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still.'—MOORE.

As Jack Maclyn entered the superintendent's room, the golden gleams of a sunburst shot through the open window, and struck his clear-cut profile into silhouette against the cedar wainscot. He was a type of the real —strong with the strength that is born of gentleness, kind, honest, a man to trust. Hallam Dufft, sitting in a revolving chair, one foot resting on the edge of his desk, and his long, nervous fingers clasped behind his head, was a tangible embodiment of the ideal—a man full of aspirations and renunciations.

'When Christopher Sabel came to this asylum,' said the doctor, thoughtfully, 'he had been travelling about the world for some years, and during that time, except for occasional fits of melancholia, had remained to all appearances quite rational; but one day in Vancouver he suddenly grew violent, and it became necessary to place him at once under proper restraint.'

'Did you hear of any direct cause for the attack?'

'No, none whatsoever. The local doctors sent him to me, and after communicating with his relatives in

England, it was settled that some of them should come out to British Columbia this summer, and make arrangements for his removal to a private institution on the other side.'

'That will be an expensive business, will it not?'

'Yes, but there is evidently no lack of funds in the family, so the poor beggar may as well have every comfort money can give him.'

'Is this all you know about the case?'

'Not quite. Before returning to the Old Country, Brook, Sabel's attendant, gave me a few particulars regarding his master's first seizure and subsequent roving life, but the way he juggled with words led me to suspect that if one scratched the valet one would find a confidential servant bribed to silence. Do I bore you?' exclaimed the doctor, suddenly. 'To me Sabel is my patient, but to you the whole business—'

'Go on, Dufft; I told you the man interested me.'

'Well, it seems that Sabel, who must now be past forty years of age, knows nothing of the strong taint of insanity which he inherits from his mother, for the elder members of the family kept their secret so judiciously, that only recently has it begun to leak out that one of his aunts is a lunatic, and that his grandfather died in an asylum.'

'Odd thing that he should have lived so long in ignorance of all this. How came matters to a climax?'

'That is precisely what I failed to find out. Either Brook did not know, or else, as I shrewdly suspect, he would not say, for all I could extract from him was

the bare statement that about six years ago, Sabel, who until then had been perfectly sane, was seized with a violent attack of mania as the result of some unusual mental agitation, the particular nature of which he refused to divulge.'

'Poor fellow! What a disjointed history! But you alluded just now to certain circumstances that might lead to his recovery.'

'Yes.'

Hallam Dufft looked dreamily over his cousin's head, out through the open window, where the great unending sky stretched, a-flutter with feathery clouds, beneath whose soft caresses the tired afternoon was falling asleep.

'If I could only find out what the excitement was which caused that first attack,' he murmured abstractedly, 'I should see my way more clearly. Jack,' he continued briskly, 'there is just one chance for that man's sanity.'

Maclyn sat up, startled.

'The deuce there is!' he ejaculated.

'Three months will prove it, but the thread is so frail that I dare not hold out hope, even to his relatives. Still, I have a clue to the situation, though a slender one, and at best only knitted together out of the ravellings of a madman's talk,' went on the doctor, thoughtfully. 'Sometimes, when Sabel is in one of those awful paroxysms, he raves incessantly of a ring. Only last week I heard him cry out: "I saw it drop—it must be found—I tell you it is no longer mine—it is her wedding ring." And then he rambled on about a church organ that never ceased playing, and

a crowd of people closing in upon him, who would not let him pick up something. "I heard it clink," he kept on repeating, "clink, clink, as it rolled along the stone floor—the golden band that binds her to me for ever." It is little enough to come and go on, and of course I can do nothing more until his people arrive, which may be any day now.'

'I must confess I do not see a clue in such speeches myself,' remarked Maclyn, in a puzzled tone.

'No, nor I, any reasonable one, but take my word for it, Jack, the eternal woman is at the bottom of the whole damned business,' concluded the doctor with comical finality.

'That is a pretty stiff accusation. What makes you think so?'

'His wild words for one thing—a church—a wedding ring—do they not point to the same conclusion?'

'But surely if a girl had gone the length of marrying him, she would have stuck to him, or at least have kept in touch with him during his exile.'

'The fact that personally I have held no correspondence with her is insufficient proof that she does not exist, or is not kept regularly informed through other channels of his condition. You must remember lunacy is a serious bar between a man and his wife.'

'Yet women adore battered idols, and will spend one half of their lives glueing on the broken virtues that were chipped off in youth, and Bohemia.'

'Yes, Jack, and then spend the other half guarding the defaced image safe hid from further hurt

in the softest corner of their hearts. But that is only when they truly love the broken statue. Now Sabel is no dissipated blackguard, but just a poor devil whose mind has been unbalanced by some terrible shock. Mania is the biggest stumbling-block to a woman's devotion, and it is not altogether her fault that here Nature so often steps in and swallows up duty in a crushing horror; for the closer the tie that binds her to him, the greater will be the revulsion of her whole being against his madness. Infinite pity born of infinite love can alone surmount such a barrier.'

'Then you think that your theory of a marriage is compatible with the non-appearance of a wife?'

'Entirely so, provided that she is one of those cold, agreeably-indifferent sort of women, of whom—God forgive them—the world is full.'

'Yet that seems to be only a starting-point, and explains nothing in itself.'

'My dear fellow, it explains ninety-nine out of every hundred mysteries in the world.'

Maclyn laughed. 'I believe you are right, Hallam,' he said in the *débonnaire* tone of a heart-whole man; 'still, you know—'

'That is just it; in my professional capacity I am not supposed to know anything—at least, I mean not about psychological problems,' and here the doctor's tone grew quizzical. 'Privately I may landscape-garden as much as I please with the flowers of my patients' rhetoric, but as superintendent of this asylum I am forced to ignore their babble.'

Thus they discussed the story of Christopher

Sabel's wrecked mind, little dreaming what an ordinary event had led to the extraordinary climax, when at one bound he had leaped from the world of sanity and sunlight into that gloomy region where a lost intellect for ever eluded his grasp, and thick cloud-drifts wreathed the tattered rim of his disordered brain.

'You must be getting utterly tired of this subject,' exclaimed the doctor, suddenly, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and brought his feet down on to the floor with a thump. 'Come, you have not told me half the home news yet.'

Maclyn protested, but when Dufft spoke again his cousin was quick to mark the change of voice that betokened a change of front.

CHAPTER III

THE MARCH OF PROGRESS

'Westward the course of Empire takes its way.'—BERKELEY.

'WHAT do you say to a turn in the grounds before dinner? For, of course, you will spend the night here,' said the superintendent, hospitably.

'No, I am sorry I cannot do that; I must catch the last tram back to Vancouver at ten o'clock, but I will stay and dine with pleasure,' replied Jack Maclyn, heartily. 'By Jove! what a view!' he commented, as they paused for a moment on the steps of the Mind-Ease Asylum, and looked over to the south upon a landscape burning under the conflagration of the evening sky.

In a blaze of light the scarlet clouds reeled away to surround the sinking sun, and the purple-headed mountains caught the glory of its effulgence as they hurled deep reflections upon the bosom of the Fraser, where that mighty river answered the haughty challenge of the hills with an arced curve to the west, and swept on majestically between its scarred banks past the town of Fraserville. The gardens of the institution were terraced with grass, and bounded by a timber wall, blank and high, that shut out

the adjoining fresh unfurrowed ground, and fields sweet-smelling with wilding bloom, now bronzed by the amber dust of sunset. Some tall, haggard trees grew near the gateway, and Japanese lilies nodded drowsily in their beds, lulled to rest by the gentle breeze. On every hand glowed the sentient colours of May, and warm, moist odours arose from the pulsating earth.

The asylum looked out through barred windows and guarded doors, across rich acreage, soft-toned, save where last year's stubble gleamed in the sunshine, and reaching up to the rosy sky the vigorous Western outlines melted in a golden mist. A few Siwash Indian log huts, and a Romish church with a scintillating tin roof, fringed the opposite banks of the stream, and millions of gaunt, half-burned firs, that speckled the country as far as the American border, told tales of the fires that occasionally devastate the magnificent forests of the Pacific Province. Behind the buildings the horizon was rimmed by the Coast Mountains, so dear to the heart of every Westerner; grand and grim, they guard the land, fit types of the rugged exteriors, but faithful hearts, of the British Columbian settlers whose homes they shelter.

'In which direction is the town?' inquired Jack, as his eyes leaped to a vanishing point. 'I do not see any sign of it from here.'

'No, it lies lower down the river, over there to your right,' replied Dufft, 'and further on still is the open sea, where the waters of the Fraser run out for miles in a swift current, wriggling through the blue waves of the ocean like a great brown snake.'

'Ah !—and Vancouver ?'

'Is situated about twelve miles, as the crow flies, to the north of us ; but, as you know, it only takes three-quarters of an hour to cover the distance by tram.'

Jack smiled. 'Yes, I thought as we came over the Interurban Line this afternoon that those electric cars were most unexpected luxuries to find in this hazy-mazy land which Englishmen chiefly regard as a fine dumping-ground for impossible younger sons.'

'Very true, old chap. It was the Canadian Pacific Railway Company who, in 1886, first piped the tune of the "March of Progress" for the Westerner to dance to. There was no end of Van Horne-blowing in those days, I can tell you, and now the British Columbian crosses the continent by rail, instead of ox-team, and rejoices in telephones and elevators. It is always the unexpected that happens out here.'

'I believe I am beginning to experience the fascination of the West already,' laughed Maclyn, as they strolled about the enclosure.

'Everyone does sooner or later. Old and young come here—to British Columbia, I mean, not the asylum,' added the doctor, lightly, 'expecting perhaps to stay only for a little while, but when they go back to older and more established places, they feel cramped, stifled, and in the end many of them return to settle permanently in this province.'

'How long have you been on the Pacific Coast, Hallam ?'

'Nearly five years.'

'And I scarcely as many days, yet we seem to equally appreciate its wonderful charm.'

'And well we may,' remarked Dufft, tentatively. 'After all the country is pre-eminently natural, Jack, and her people very human. I mean,' he continued, seeing the puzzlement in his cousin's eyes, 'that the big heart of the West throbs with kindly impulse. In the early "eighties" privation taught men and women on the mainland the great lesson of unselfishness, and those days, when luxuries were unknown, and three square meals a day were a luxury, are not yet ancient history.'

'Conventionality evidently counts for little in the free life and fresh air as you get it out here.'

'Oh! that's all right! But we are strictly loyal and law-abiding citizens, though we do not put steel clamps on fun.'

Maclyn looked amused. 'I daresay,' he assented; 'still the freedom is intoxicating.'

'I am afraid there are several different kinds of trouble waiting round the corner for you,' remonstrated the doctor, emphatically. 'It is true our men no longer pull their guns to straighten a crooked deal, nor do our girls tote round like walking arsenals, for pioneer days are over; but make no mistake, Jack, liberty is not license in the West, nor has there been any slump in justice, that I ever heard of, since the days when good old Sir Barnaby Kent held court under an alder tree, with a stout limb overhead and a rope coiled at his feet.'

'Whew!' whistled Maclyn, softly. 'At anyrate, it is pleasant to hear that the fighting times are out of joint, for I have no desire to be shot in return for some trivial transgression of local etiquette.'

'British Columbians are essentially broad-minded and open-hearted,' said Dufft, didactically, ignoring his cousin's chaff, 'but they expect you to treat their hospitality with the respect to which it is entitled every time.'

'I understand you well enough, though you might find it precious hard to convince people at home of what you say. To the average Englishman the West is the stamping-ground of big game and a likely place in which to locate a gold mine, nothing more.'

'May be,' replied the doctor, as he mechanically stroked his moustache, 'may be, but that does not alter the facts.'

Silence fell for a few moments as each man thought of the wide gulf which separates the old life from the new; thought of the unlimited possibilities of the great Canadian West, of her inexhaustible wealth, and of the dauntless energy of her settlers that strikes the keynote of their success.

It was a vast subject, and to Maclyn a fresh and absorbing one. For, familiar as he was with many other parts of the British Empire, having shot tigers in India, hunted lions in Africa, and roamed across the Australian bush, Canada had hitherto been a sealed volume to him. He was just beginning to realise that the ice and snow scenes in the ordinary Canadian picture-book do not describe a British Columbian winter with any attempt at faithfulness; and that far less do they paint the springtide, when, from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific waters, flowers and tender fern fronds cover the ground, and the sunshine invites one out to boat and bicycle with a warmth that

the invitations of society frequently lack. That chilly idyl of sixty degrees below zero, with a blizzard running at a hundred miles an hour, is no more typical of the Western climate of the Dominion than it is of Paradise.

The Eastern Canadian frosty season is certainly a very cold and dignified circumstance, but in British Columbia, where one may gather roses on Christmas Day and picnic under the pine trees in January, winter is a lost art.

Faintly from the distance came the sound of cheerful whistling. The iron-barred doors in the boundary wall were swung open by the gate-keeper, and a man entered. It was Joseph Kingsearl, the Provincial Member for Illicilliwaet.

CHAPTER IV

JOSEPH KINGSEARL, M.P.P.

'A man he was to all the country dear.'—GOLDSMITH.

'HULLO, Dufft!'

'Where did you drop from, Kingsearl?' Then in a more formal tone the doctor continued: 'Let me introduce to you my cousin, Jack Maclyn.'

Joseph Kingsearl acknowledged the introduction with a hearty handshake as he answered Dufft's question.

'I came down from the Spalumcheen to-day. The fishing up there has been grand for the past week.'

'You have been out of the way of civilisation for a time then—and—er—newspapers,' added the superintendent, hesitatingly.

'Yes—but—well—not altogether,' replied Kingsearl, jerkily.

'Is that so?' was all the doctor rejoined.

Both men felt the constraint of the presence of a third person.

The strong sense of personal dignity that characterised the politician contrasted at the moment somewhat ludicrously with the fringe at the ends of his trousers and the frayed points of his collar, for

when a man has just returned from a fishing trip up-country he scarcely looks at his best, nor do his clothes. Yet there he stood staring down at his boots (an undeniably old pair which could hardly be said to warrant such close scrutiny), a stern look deepening on his face, and lines that had their origin in painful recollections seaming his sunburned forehead.

Joseph Kingsearl had read and re-read with painful attention, and a growing sense of resentment, the brilliant, sarcastic letters that from time to time had recently appeared in the Victoria *Herald*, a strong Government paper, commenting in a daring and most damaging fashion upon the political actions of the member for Illicilliwaet, holding up his opinions to ridicule, and dissecting his speeches with a merciless knife. The doctor knew that in their cleverness lay the harmful power of these letters, and the politician knew that the writer of them was Agnes Arbuckle, the sister of the Cabinet Minister.

As Maclyn wandered off to converse with the Chinaman who was weeding the flower borders, the superintendent laid a firm hand on his friend's shoulder.

'They are just nothing whittled down to a point,' he said incisively.

'Still she is making history for a time in Victoria with them.'

'Don't you believe it, Joe. There never yet was a member of the Provincial Parliament that the newspaper daws did not peck at, and the nobler the prey the better sport the birds think it. Her negatives only made your conduct more positive, and your character—'

'Is a poor thing, but my own,' said Kingsearl, with a forced smile.

The doctor took the hint.

'You are right,' he rejoined, adding obliquely, 'The Sphinx was a woman.'

Kingsearl made no reply. None was needed. He and Hallam Dufft had been staunch friends for years, and they understood one another, and the present situation, thoroughly. Probably to no other human being would the politician have spoken of these letters which were causing him so much annoyance and the Government benches such unbounded satisfaction; for he was naturally proud, and to be thus handled without gloves by the woman whom, though outwardly nothing to him, he secretly adored, kept him wondering how many different kinds of a fool he was. As the superintendent had truly remarked, to be pecked at by critical daws is the fate of nearly every public personage, but to be harried and maligned by the girl he worships would pass the endurance of most men. Kingsearl knew that it was lamentably weak of him to thus tacitly submit to the accusations contained in the letters signed 'Mars,' and which he felt certain were written by Miss Arbuckle; but he also knew that it was the weakness of love, not fear of the issue, that held him silent.

'Let the breath of scandal blow till it is tired,' he thought; 'no word of mine shall ever turn its current back upon her.' So is a man with a powerful brain and a strong character but as wax in the hands of a woman—when he loves her. Yet all the while a pained wonder that she should thus try to injure him

beat upon the door of his heart. 'Why does she do it?' 'How can she do it?' These questions rang in his mind with strange persistency, which showed how much the Member for Illicilliwaet had still to learn of the ways of a scornful girl.

Agnes Arbuckle was a distinctly worth-while sort of person, who neither giggled nor danced the cake-walk, two excellent traits in woman. Little more than a year previously Joseph Kingsearl, then a rising man, and the coming leader of the Opposition Party, had taken her out canoeing one exquisite spring evening up 'The Gorge' in Victoria. There he lost his heart, and almost his balance, but wisely choosing the dryer and better part had delayed proposing to her until they once more reached the landing-stage. Love-making in a canoe obtains not in Canada, where both crafts are pretty well understood, and only the latest arrival in the country thinks a moonlight paddle an effective moment for a kiss. Now, though the interval was short from the time when they stepped out of the 'Peterborough' until they entered Mr James Arbuckle's front door, it was long enough for the girl's heart to pass for ever into the keeping of her lover.

For a space all went well; but alas! there came a day in the following autumn when Agnes abruptly broke off her engagement, why, no one except her *fiancé* knew, and from that moment the bottom dropped out of everything for Kingsearl. He ceased to bother his head about what he was going to do, and just went on living. Then Miss Arbuckle took to playing the star part in a comic tragedy, and a

dozen little kindergarten devils prompted her to fight the great human duel of hurt pride against love, with an iron nerve and a steel pen. So she grieved his mother, antagonised his sisters, and tore his fingers from about her heart with a recklessness that savoured of despair. The secret bravery in social life is prodigious. Some people see it, and most people don't.

Joseph Kingsearl gave his friend a sidelong glance. 'When all is said and done, the real reason of a woman's actions is far to seek,' he remarked.

'Of course it is, you old chump, and I'll lay you a hundred to one that she is playing some deep game in this business. That girl is clever—so for the matter of that are her writings—far too clever to waste time and ink on the idiotic persecution of someone she does not care a brass button for. Mark me, she is gambling for big stakes. Half the men in this world sin for gold, and the other half for a woman, but a woman only sins for, or against, the man she loves.'

'And always arrives at a right conclusion, totally regardless of how she gets there, worse luck! I loved that girl, Dufft. My God! I love her still, and she loved me too—once.'

'Why employ the past tense?'

'You mean—'

'Yes.'

Kingsearl paused on the edge of the terrace, half blinded by the sunset glow. His heart beat to suffocation as the doctor's words aroused hopes long since dead, and his eyes became suffused with blood until the whole earth quivered before him in a blaze

of colour. The clouds flamed and floated in royal radiance overhead, but the tumult in the soul of the man was more intoxicating to his senses than the rosy smile on the bright-browed face of the sky.

'In spite of their folly and their train of sorrow, I would not barter those past days for all my hopes of heaven!' he exclaimed. Truly love knows no criticism, for he added gently: 'Her greatest fault is her witty tongue,' a remark which doubtless tickled the grim sense of humour of the Recording Angel.

Heigh-ho for the feminine sex!

CHAPTER V

AT THE HOTEL VANCOUVER

'As it fell upon a day,
In the merry month of May.'—SHAKESPEARE.

'And so they talked,
Lord! how they did talk.'—ADAMS.

'WILL you kindly pass me the marmalade?' said Agnes Arbuckle, with a touch of asperity in her voice.

'I beg your pardon; I did not notice that I was monopolising the only pot on the table,' replied Maclyn, apologetically, handing her the jar against which he had propped up the morning paper.

They were sitting at breakfast in the Hotel Vancouver a couple of days after Maclyn's visit to the Mind-Ease Asylum, and had more than once looked across at each other during the progress of the meal; he eyeing her with the semi-interested, but wholly critical glance so characteristic of the British tourist; she subjecting him to that shrewd scrutiny with which Western girls invariably 'size up' strangers.

'Thank you. I am sorry to interrupt your study of the local political situation, but perhaps the cruet-

stand will answer your purpose equally well,' and Miss Arbuckle held it out to him as one conferring a favour.

'Quite; though, as far as my limited experience goes, neither Western newspapers nor British Columbian politics require additional seasoning.'

'Contrariwise, as Tweedledum would say, a leading article on the sins of the present Government, or the iniquity of the Eight Hour Law, forms a capital *sauce piquante* with broiled steak.'

'That idea never occurred to me before,' said Jack, with a smile which curled up the corners of his handsome mouth. 'Hitherto I have only read the papers during meal-times as an antidote to monotony, not for any ulterior tabasco purposes.'

'Are you a Vancouverite?' inquired Mrs Bates-Post, a gracious lady of an inquiring turn of mind, who thought it 'Colonial' to address searching questions to the nearest stranger upon every conceivable subject and occasion.

'By no means,' replied Jack. 'Indeed I fancy that the Terminals would certainly call me a "tender-foot," for I have only been in the city five days.'

'We arrived last Thursday,' remarked Mr Bates-Post. 'What a grand trip that is across the Rocky Mountains, and down through the Kicking Horse Canyon.'

'There is nothing to equal it on this continent,' assented Maclyn, cordially.

'The sharp contrasts of scenery are so magnificent,' continued the old gentleman.

'Yes, particularly between the snowy peaks and

the soft, dark green of the valleys. On a fine day I think that the effects of sunshine and shadow in the Fraser Canyon defy description,' added the younger man with enthusiasm.

'There was just one drawback to the journey,' sighed Mrs Bates-Post, in a plaintive tone.

She was a well-preserved woman of forty, with regular features and very white teeth. Her hair was artistically dressed, so was her face. Soft of heart and sweet of speech, she seldom made an enemy, though she equally failed to win lasting friendship; yet life, as seen through the rose-coloured spectacles of her overweening self-complacency, seemed to Miriam Bates-Post a pretty enough comedy, and the hero of it was always her husband.

'We had no less than three children in the car,' she continued, still addressing Maclyn, 'and they insisted on putting pieces of bread-and-jam on my seat when I got out of the train at Moose Jaw. It was horrid. I sat on them when I came back, you know, the bits of bread-and-jam I mean, of course, not the children, though that did not make much difference, as both were equally sticky. Celestine could not get the spots off my skirt. She rubbed them well with bandoline or brilliantine, I forget which, but it only seemed to make matters worse.'

'How annoying,' said Jack, sympathetically; 'but surely that was rather odd stuff to use.'

'Do you think so? You see my dress was made of camel's hair and so—'

'Tut, tut, my dear,' remonstrated her husband, good-humouredly.

'I fancy, auntie, it was benzine that Celestine used,' said Naomi Crocus in a gentle voice from the other side of the table.

Jack glanced across at the girl, and having done so once, he found that the habit grew upon him.

'At anyrate my gown was ruined,' purled on Mrs Bates-Post. 'Really someone should invent a system of "checking" babies with the luggage.'

'I believe in Providence, but not in tempting it,' remarked Mr Bates-Post with quiet decision.

He was a ruddy-faced, white-haired old gentleman of portly habit, and quite twenty years his wife's senior; a staunch Tory, who divided his time between excusing the weird inanities of the woman he adored and upholding the British Constitution.

'Perhaps you are right, my love,' assented his wife, sweetly. She always found it easiest to agree with the last speaker. 'But the other day I trusted in Providence, and Providence took a very mean advantage of me.'

'How was that, Aunt Miriam?' inquired Naomi; and again Jack Maclyn looked at her as though to that end alone had his eyes been created.

'Why, my dear, I was so late in arriving at the station the day we started for Vancouver that I just left my hat-box to Providence, and Providence left it behind in Montreal.'

'It is certainly wiser to trust to a porter than to Providence on such occasions,' said Agnes, with a twinkle in her eyes.

'I am afraid you are of a very practical turn of mind, just like my dear Richard, who is always looking at the other side of things; so unwise when everyone cannot afford silk linings either for their clothes or their ideas,' said Mrs Bates-Post, beaming affectionately at her husband.

'To be thoroughly practical is the only safe course in this world,' asserted Mr Bates-Post, emphatically. 'The trouble with everything nowadays is that people are continually bent on executing some sort of rabid reform (but assuredly not of themselves), and Anarchists, and Socialists, and a dozen other disturbing bodies are for ever cutting fantastic tricks before high heaven, in order to secure to themselves a ha'porth of fame and a place in the annals of the police courts.'

'Strange to say I heartily agree with you on that point,' remarked Miss Arbuckle, with a twinkle in her eyes. 'Reformed Radicals are as unsatisfactory as re-made frocks. But what I cannot understand is why you Conservatives take so much pride in a narrow political creed that good men should be ashamed of.'

'Are you sure, Agnes, that it is wise for girls to think so much about these matters?' crooned Mrs Bates-Post, as she sipped her coffee.

'Indeed I am. There is a terrible lot of harm done in this world by people who do not think,' she replied with unconscious sarcasm. 'A door is always open or shut. Either we bachelor girls must try to think and act understandingly, and for ourselves, or else we must be content to settle down to a tabby-cat-

and-weak-tea existence for the rest of our natural lives.'

'Surely women were not meant to tax their brains too severely, my dear,' said Mr Bates-Post, indulgently. 'I may be old-fashioned in my opinions, but I maintain that your sex can rule men far better through their hearts than by their heads.'

'Yet look how seldom women win perfect love, or, having won it, keep it,' said Agnes with an odd break in her voice.

'As long as your sex is beautiful, and men are men, love and devotion will always be a woman's heritage,' replied the old gentleman, gallantly.

'Oh! That is one of your lovely, chivalrous speeches which remind me of lavender and knee-buckles. But alas! the end of the nineteenth century wears golf stockings, and the smell of sweet herbs is not upon it,' said the girl, shaking her head in playful regret.

'Do you not think that you are a little hard on us?' chimed in Maclyn, reproachfully. 'And so early in the day too.'

Agnes laughed. 'I think you are a newcomer to the West,' she answered naïvely, 'and are therefore entitled to suspended sentence.'

'You alarm me. Your standard seems so high that I fear we mere men will have to stand on tip-toe to reach it.'

'That is quite probable,' she replied nonchalantly. 'In the old days you were masters of the situation, but now the chestnut tree is waving over the grave of that very meek and "impossible she"

who lived on sal volatile and was eternally falling down at the feet of her tyrant lord.'

'Agnes, how can you say such things, when you know very well that you do not mean half of them?' said Miss Crocus, looking quite vexed.

'My dear girl, do not go barking up the wrong tree. Does anyone ever mean even a quarter of what they say?—at anyrate in public,' she added bitterly. 'Never mind, Naomi,' seeing the really distressed look on her friend's face, 'this is the era of good manners, so we will bury the disreputable fact of man's inferiority snugly out of sight, and talk on a more congenial topic.'

Jack was surprised to hear such cynicism from the lips of a woman. He did not understand that a sad heart prompts sharp words.

CHAPTER VI

A GALLANT GIRL

'Words are the daughters of earth, things are the sons of heaven.'
JOHNSON.

MANY years ago, Mrs Arbuckle, who then lived in Montreal, had sent her only daughter to the same school in England where Naomi Crocus was a boarder, with the result that a firm friendship sprang up between the two girls, and also that the little Canadian spent most of her holidays in Dorsetshire with the Bates-Posts. In those days Agnes was a high-spirited, warm-hearted child, more fond of play than lessons, and consequently often in disgrace with her teachers; but so frank and so lovable withal that her punishments were usually light, and her pardonment speedy.

Later on came the parting with the English friends she had grown much attached to, and her return home; not, however, to Eastern Canada, but to British Columbia, whither, since the death of their parents, her eldest brother James had gone to settle, and where for the future she was to live and keep house for him. This occurred when Agnes was eighteen, and during the years that followed the girl was supremely happy, until at length a time came when with tortured heart, but proud, disdainful lips she said

every Mass in the Ritual of Pain. Thus Naomi met her old schoolmate after a separation of nearly seven years, and found her a brilliant, intellectual woman, and a journalist of more than local celebrity. Idolised by her brother (who had climbed to the top of the political tree and become a Cabinet Minister), and trusted by all her friends, she hid under sarcastic speeches and independent manners the cicatrices of wounds inflicted by the blundering stupidity of a right good man.

On the face of Agnes Arbuckle was stamped an expression of authority. The deflected line of her chin showed great determination of character, but the pretty natural curves of her mouth were wrenched by a cynical curl, and her voice, though resonant and clear, had an echo of mockery in it that rang in the memory long after the words had ceased. During a revolution she would have been a heroine, but she was too angular to fit comfortably into the daily round of life.

When Joseph Kingsearl crossed her path, won her whole love, and because he could not bend her will elected to let her break his heart, the girl, with all her sweet-graciousness and belief in the goodness of men, died; and in her place there arose a woman strong in the consciousness of her own powers, and constantly on the defensive to do battle for her own sex. Thus it came about that she rode rough-shod over everything masculine, and never wearied of trying to make other girls hold their heads up.

No little child, or sin-sad woman, ever appealed to her in vain. She had tenderest pity for all suffering

and was so thoroughly good herself that she could afford to help those from whom others, more Pharisaical but less truly charitable, turned aside, fearing lest they should be classed with the weak ones they had no honest wish to save. Only the Agnes Arbuckles of this world, the fearlessly, genuinely upright, dare thus to openly comfort stricken souls, whose transgressions nevertheless pale beside the scarlet embroidery of mean actions and false-witnessing that trims the lives of those very people who scornfully draw their draperies away from the bleeding hands outstretched by hopeless humanity, unconscious that in so doing they display the muddy lining of their own skirts.

In spite of her ambition to succeed in a literary career (for her face was steadily set towards the hill of fame), her interest in public affairs and the uncompromising opinions she held upon many subjects, Agnes was far too clever to be unwomanly, though, at the same time, far too human not to despise all men because one man had failed her.

She was tall and slight, with a wealth of dark-brown hair, drawn back and coiled high upon her head, after a fashion peculiarly her own. Eyes of cobalt blue contrasted curiously with her olive skin and crimson-tinted cheeks; whilst, as for the rest, she carried herself with a well-bred air, and moved with the long, even stride of lithe-limbed health.

CHAPTER VII

EASTERN FRIENDS AND WESTERN PROCLIVITIES

'A few strong instincts, and a few plain rules.'—WORDSWORTH.

'She, though in full-blown flower of glorious beauty,
Grew cold, even in the summer of her age.'—DRYDEN.

'ARE you bent on proving your assertions a second time at the expense of your clothes, dear Mr Bates-Post?' inquired Miss Arbuckle, mischievously, as they sat after breakfast on the hotel verandah overlooking the harbour. The old gentleman had dropped some butter upon his coat sleeve.

'Now, look here, Agnes, if you dare to make fun in this manner out of the misfortunes of your father's old friend, I shall call down the Curse of Kehama upon your most audacious behaviour.'

'Why pile up the roses in Sharon by adding to the doom that has already been pronounced upon me?' she replied gaily. 'Am I not even now under the ban of the Opposition Party, and have not the supporters of the Member for Illicilliwaet vowed to silence my pen, or perish in the attempt?'

Jack, who had strolled out with them to smoke a cigarette in the open air, started slightly. Surely, he

thought, this Member alluded to must be the Mr Kingsearl he had met in Fraserville, and about whose career Hallam Dufft had told him some stirring particulars. The doctor had also briefly alluded to the fact that Kingsearl had once been jilted, and—why—yes—this might be the very girl who had done it. The situation was becoming attractive. Maclyn at once decided to find out her name, and, if possible, the true story of the broken faith.

'It is very clever of you to turn the conversation in that adroit manner,' said Mr Bates-Post. 'No doubt, my dear, you think that if you can once launch me on the sea of political controversy, I shall flounder about quite comfortably for the next hour. But it will not do. Either you must give me your promise of silence, or else—'

'Oh! uncle! if you only knew how comical you looked yesterday!' exclaimed Naomi, impulsively, and, as she laughed, a merry sparkle brightened for an instant the depths of her dark grey eyes.

'Girls, you are positively cruel! Even if I did walk down Granville Street labelled as a very superior article, what was that to Vancouverites?'

'A dig for their Terminal pride,' chuckled Miss Arbuckle, who was enjoying herself immensely. 'You must remember, dear Mr Bates-Post, that you advertised yourself as of English manufacture, and though you are a British M.P., and were not "made in Germany," still—there are others.'

'You irreverent little Radical! But, Agnes, do not, I beg of you, be so absurd. My dear sir,' he continued, turning to Maclyn, 'you can have no

idea in what a ridiculous position I was inadvertently placed.'

'My curiosity is tremendous. Will you not tell me about it?' pleaded Jack.

'After all those mischievous girls have said, I suppose I may as well make a clean breast of the whole matter,' assented the elder man. 'On my way to town yesterday morning I noticed several persons smiling at me in a rather marked fashion, but being totally unacquainted with them, I merely put it down to the score of Colonial friendliness.'

'People are so sociable in the West,' murmured Mrs Bates-Post, meditatively.

'We trust everybody till we prove them "cultus," and then we drop them,' said Agnes with cheerful alacrity.

'More generous, but perhaps less cautious, than sticking to the old-fashioned method of proving them first and trusting them afterwards,' put in Jack. 'But you were saying, sir,' he went on, turning to Mr Bates-Post, 'that several persons smiled at you.'

'Yes, and more than that, a crowd of small boys followed me down Granville Street. Presently a Chinaman—one of the pig-tailed, pug-nosed variety that infest all these Pacific Coast towns—called out in Pidgin-English, "What for you wear him all-a-samee piece paper?" and grinned most derisively. This was exasperating, and I was just beginning to wonder what it all meant when a stranger stepped up and asked me if I was aware that there was a placard on my back. Bless my soul! sir, in two minutes I was inside the post-office, gazing ruefully over my

shoulder at a fly-paper, one of those vile tangle-foot sheets, which had stuck fast to my coat. Just then these girls joined me, and read, printed in large letters on the exposed side of the plaster, "The latest thing out from England. Note the nobby style. Only ninety-eight cents." Now that was a nice sort of label for a respectable old Britisher to walk round the town with, wasn't it? The latest thing out, indeed!'

'So true too, dear Mr Bates-Post, but who doubted it?' suggested Miss Arbuckle, archly.

Jack was convulsed with merriment, but managed to keep his face grave and say sympathetically,—

'Too bad, sir, upon my word.'

'The deuce it was!' retorted the old man, testily, though his kindly expression belied the words.

'How did it get there, uncle?' questioned Naomi in the same sweet tones that a few moments previously had struck a chord of the seventh in Jack's heart.

'I have not the ghost of an idea, my child,' he replied, 'unless when I was in the Hudson's Bay Store I accidentally leaned up against the confounded stuff. I know they have sheets of it pinned in front of the shelves in order to catch flies.' Then, turning to Maclyn, he continued, 'By the way, Mr—I forget I do not know your name.'

'Maclyn, sir.'

'Thank you. You see, old as I am, and full of insular prejudices, I am sometimes forced to own that travelling may promote good-fellowship irrespective of formal customs,' and Mr Bates-Post smiled

humorously as he made this statement wrung from him by circumstances.

'In the West the introduction of the roof-tree usually suffices,' interposed Agnes, succinctly. 'And really I think that such an arrangement is infinitely more sensible than going about the world with your visiting-card in your hand, as if it were a soup ticket, or an admission to an ice-cream social.'

'What strange notions you have, my love,' demurred Mrs Bates-Post. 'I certainly approve of proper introductions on principle.'

'I cannot see where principle comes in myself; for out here gentlemanliness is something more than well-cut clothes, and strangers, being such, are offered the glad hand,' continued Agnes, in a voice that vibrated with feeling.

'Such a state of affairs savours somewhat of Utopia,' remarked Mr Bates-Post. 'Surely you must be badly "taken in" at times by unscrupulous persons?'

'There you have to reckon with the sixth sense that is the heritage of all Colonials,' replied the girl, dauntlessly, 'namely, the faculty of placing people.'

'I do not quite understand you, my dear,' said the old man, in a puzzled tone.

Agnes smiled drily. 'Well, you see it is this way. From the time we are babies we are taught that dogs are not the only creatures with a "yaller" streak in them.'

'But you cannot ask to look at the roof of a man's mouth to see if he is thorough-bred; at least, not until you know him pretty intimately,' said Jack, argumentatively.

Miss Arbuckle amused him hugely, she was so utterly unlike any of the girls he had met before.

'Of course not,' she assented demurely, 'but you have only to wait a little and his own actions will betray him. In British Columbia we do not care what a man says about himself, or what is said about him in stereotyped letters of introduction, that are often recklessly written by people in England who know practically nothing of the real characters of the men they endorse, and foist upon the hospitality of some Colonial acquaintance. His repetition of the Thirty-nine Articles, capped by the Oath of Allegiance, would not weigh one jot in favour of a "tender-foot" so far as Vancouverites are concerned; but if he is a "white man" one soon discovers it, and if he is not, why, it is best to drop him right then and there.'

'How curious!' exclaimed Mrs Bates-Post. 'Just like the harlequinade at a pantomime.'

'Oh, no!' cried the girl, with a quick turn of her head, which served to show how exquisitely it was poised upon her shoulders, 'it is just common sense and the use of a discriminating power that Nature has bestowed upon Canadians as a protection against cads.'

'You make me fairly shake in my shoes,' remonstrated Jack.

Miss Arbuckle looked a trifle supercilious. 'Never mind, I like to talk that way occasionally; it is my besetting sin,' she said coolly. 'If you turn out to be a rank impostor, I promise to hold a grand sympathetic wake over your defunct reputation.'

'Let me rather cry "Peccavi" from the start. I have no cards or letters of introduction in my pocket at the present moment, but I have a most healthy belief in the efficacy of truth. On my word of honour my name is John Horton Maclyn.'

'Of Elmdale?' asked Naomi, gently.

'Yes. Do you know Cumberland?'

'A little,' she replied. 'The Chillinghams, old friends of ours, with whom I have often stayed, used to live near Keswick. That is why the name of Maclyn of Elmdale is familiar to me.'

'How strange that you, who also know them, and I should meet on this outer edge of the world. But do not be alarmed, I will refrain from the usual platitude. Bryce Chillingham and I were at Oxford together. So you heard of me from them,' said Jack, with more satisfaction in his voice than the circumstance appeared to warrant.

'Yes, often; but you were so much abroad after your uncle, old Mr Maclyn, died, that somehow we never met, though I spent two summers amongst your quaint Dales-folk,' she replied, and into the habitual reserve of her manner there crept a trace of eagerness.

Naomi Crocus was an orphan, and the adopted child of her uncle, Mr Bates-Post. More than that, her physical beauty was very great, and her moods were as numerous and her fancies as changeable as the lights on a sun-smeared sea. Those soft grey eyes, that had so quickly wrought havoc in the heart of Jack Maclyn, could sparkle with pleasure, grow tender with sympathy, or deepen to black when she

was excited or pained. They were the one infallible barometer of her feelings; for her true qualities were often hidden under the mask of a stimulating reserve, that made men worship her, even whilst they called her cold. Naomi's half-shy, half-impulsive nature was a complex puzzle, upon the solution of which many lovers had staked their happiness—and lost. Had they but known that the thread which formed the key to her maze-like character was just a conscience of which she never could get the whip-hand, things must have turned out very differently; and if one, bolder than the rest, had followed along the guiding line, he would have found at the end of those tortuous windings a temple, empty, swept and garnished, save for an Idol of Duty, clothed in the Mantle of Obedience. Only the man that Naomi Crocus might some day learn to love would ever see that this idol wore the iron crown of a narrow creed.

Once upon a time the girl had been all impulse, and heart, and sweet content, until there came that into her life which darkened her days and left her at twenty-three to bide the bitterment of it. To her aunt the continual presence of this old tragedy was peculiarly irritating. She called it hyper-sensitive nonsense, and implored Naomi to ignore the whole affair; but then Miriam Bates-Post was indolent, and kind with the charity that would rather forgive and forget an injury than be worried with the recollection of it. Mr Bates-Post took a very strong view of the matter. He loved his niece dearly, and grieved over her wrecked happiness, but when he urged her

to blot out all unpleasant remembrances, and begin a new life unfettered by the events of the past, he did so because he firmly believed such to be the only right course to pursue. The real reason why the girl disregarded this sensible advice was to be found in the influence exercised over her by Professor Panhandle, a man who had been her father's friend, and who, at the time of his death, Mr Crocus had appointed her legal guardian. Now, unfortunately, Cyr Panhandle was an excellent but a very narrow-minded man.

The world called Naomi shallow, and thought her inordinately fond of gaiety. In this it proclaimed itself ignorant, mistaking an innate desire to please for vanity; calling her tact artifice, and never seeing the stern devotion to duty that peeped through the crevices of her commonplace compliance with society's demands. No wonder the girl counted her lovers by the score. In the first place she was indifferent to admiration, accepting a certain amount of attention as her due, and treating all ardent devotion with a platonic tenderness that is infinitely more dangerous to men's hearts than the most outrageous flirtation; and secondly, she was very lovely. The utter want of colour in her cheeks seemed only to heighten the lustre of her eyes, whilst her lips, like scarlet geraniums, were made but to kiss and be kissed. Truth and gentleness shone in her expression, honour dwelt in her soul. Naomi Crocus had suffered as girls will who have no mother.

CHAPTER VIII

A CURIOUS ENCOUNTER

'The electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound.'—BYRON.

'IT was a great surprise to us all when the Chillinghams decided to leave England and settle in British Columbia,' said Mr Bates-Post. 'They are now living near Sapolill, as you probably know, where they have a very fine ranche.'

'Yes, so I have heard,' replied Jack.

'The move was a risky experiment. Old people, like old trees, seldom bear transplanting, and this province resembles most Western places in being essentially a land of, and for, the younger generation. We intend to visit the Chillinghams before returning to England, and I expect to get some capital shooting while in that Okanagan country.'

'It is wonderful how many delightful people we have already met in the West,' babbled Mrs Bates-Post, 'but they warned me in England to be very careful not to fraternise with strangers, for fear they might turn out to be bunco-stalkers. That sounds quite like the Highlands, doesn't it? Now can you tell me what a bunco really is? I have always fancied it must be a sort of Canadian deer.'

'They are certainly dear to some Canadians—most costly game,' muttered Jack, convulsively.

'I think you mean bunco-steerers, sort of confidence men, you know,' explained Agnes Arbuckle, mildly.

'Do I? Perhaps so, my love. But I forgot, probably Mr Macthin is as ignorant of such things as we are.'

'Maclyn,' corrected Jack, politely.

'Oh, yes, thank you. I never can remember names,' and the good lady smiled benignly.

'At least I can assure you that I am a perfectly harmless person, and never committed a desperate deed in my life,' said Jack, in an amused tone. His brain was literally whirling in the cross-currents of Mrs Bates-Post's chatter. 'I fancy, however,' he continued, 'that you will find British Columbia a much more prosaic place than you expect. My cousin, Doctor Dufft of the Mind-Ease Asylum in Fraserville, told me yesterday that the days of "hold-ups" and lynchings were long past, and that a woman is as safe in the rowdiest mining camp, or on the loneliest ranche, as she is in the Court of Chancery.'

'How nice! but not so exciting, is it?' said Mrs Bates-Post, disappointedly. Turning to her husband she added in an undertone, 'Did you hear that, Richard? He knows Doctor Dufft; perhaps he has also seen—' then, catching sight of the agonised look on Naomi's face, she suddenly fell to silence.

'Better be safe than sorry,' remarked Mr Bates-Post, sententiously, ignoring his wife's aside, but giving her a loving look to atone for the defection.

'You will find few Westerners to share your desire for danger at the price of comfort,' said Jack, unconscious that his casual allusion to the doctor had desperately startled three out of four of his hearers. 'Their marvellous civilisation is evidently their proudest boast, judging from Hallam Dufft's remarks, and—'

'There you are quite right, Mr Maclyn,' broke in Agnes, quickly, as Naomi gave a tiny gasp, 'only your definition is too limited; it stops far short of the mark. We are proud of our whole country.'

Jack turned to the girl with increased interest.

'Do you know it is just this supreme pride of their province that impresses me as so strikingly characteristic of the Western temperament.'

'Miss Arbuckle is a true British Columbian,' laughed Mr Bates-Post.

Agnes gave him a quizzical look as she murmured,—

'At anyrate it is well to belong to a place so eminently worthy of championship.'

'Of course it is, my dear,' assented Mrs Bates-Post. 'I entirely agree with you. Vancouver is delightful as a new experience. It is so fashionable nowadays to be Colonial and unconventional.'

'And honest,' interrupted Agnes, eagerly, 'honest in public action as in private thought. To behave like rational human beings, instead of mere puppets controlled by little bits of red-tape. Yes, Mr Maclyn, we are proud of our colonialism, and all that it means to us, and we love the Mother Country with a passionate devotion that lies too deep for words. Here on the Pacific Slope, six thousand miles from London

Bridge, people rally to a man under the banner of Imperialism; and should the Queen ever ask for proof of our loyalty we Canadians will answer her with our lives,' and a glow of satisfaction overspread the girl's face.

'Oh, Lord! What it is to be twenty-five and enthusiastic!' exclaimed Mr Bates-Post, dramatically.

'I have just been wondering,' said Mrs Bates-Post, suddenly, 'whether that man at breakfast in the grey suit was eating maple syrup with his bacon because it is the custom of the country, or because he really liked it. What do you think, Mr O'Flynn?'

'That he must be very rugged to stand such an extraordinary mixture,' replied Jack, confidently.

'How nasty to make such a bazaar of himself,' remarked Agnes. 'It reminds me of the contents of a "General Store" in a small up-country settlement.'

'I must really introduce you properly to our party,' here chimed in the elder lady, with a sudden spasm of propriety, serenely indifferent to the fact that they had all chatted most complacently together for the past hour on the strength of their mutual friends, oblivious of any necessity for further formalities. She was a woman peculiarly punctilious about trifles, except when they bore some real significance, and her faculty for observing them out of season was stupendous.

'This,' she went on with a delicious air of insouciance, 'is my husband, Mr Bates-Post; that,' indicating Agnes, 'is our young friend, Miss Arbuckle, who lives in Victoria, but is now visiting us here for a few days; and my niece sitting opposite to you in the rocking-

chair,' with another wave of her hand, 'is Miss Naomi Crocus, Mr—' then, with a triumphant effort of recollection—'Mr M'Ginty.'

The two girls laughed heartily; but Jack was only conscious of a pair of exquisite grey eyes that were regarding him in a distinctly friendly fashion. Yet it was to Agnes, whose eyes were blue as lapis-lazuli, that he addressed his next remark.

'Your brother's name is already familiar to me, Miss Arbuckle,' he said, 'and I hope soon to have the pleasure of meeting him.'

'Jim will be very glad to see you when you come over to the Island, I am sure,' responded the girl, frankly.

'Shall you remain long in Vancouver, Mr Maclyn?' asked Naomi.

'Only about another week. Then I go to Victoria for a few days, and expect to sail from there for Yokohama on the 2nd, by the *Empress of India*.'

'What a pity,' remarked Agnes. 'June is by far the loveliest month of the whole year on the Coast, and in Victoria is simply heavenly.'

'Yet look at the sunshine this morning. Could anything be more glorious?' questioned Jack.

'It is superb,' agreed Naomi, rapturously. 'What do you say to a walk round the—'

'A gentleman to see you in the reception-room, sir,' interrupted the bell-boy, handing Maclyn a card.

'From my cousin, Doctor Dufft,' remarked Jack, glancing at the name. 'He promised to run over and spend the day with me if possible. I should like, with

your permission, to introduce him to you, Mr Bates-Post. By the way, being an old resident in British Columbia, he may be of service to you during your stay here.'

'Oh! but—' cried Mrs Bates-Post, excitedly.

'My love, this Doctor Dufft is a perfect stranger to us,' said her husband, quickly.

Jack thought the remark a superfluous one at the time, but he remembered afterwards the repressive tone in which it was made.

'I am much obliged to you,' continued the old gentleman, addressing Maclyn, 'and shall be very happy to meet your cousin later on. This morning, however, I fear that other engagements will prevent me from availing myself of your kind offer.'

The younger man was silent. He felt instinctively that something had gone wrong.

'Good morning, Jack,' cried Doctor Dufft, cheerily, as, following closely upon the heels of the bell-boy, he stepped out into the hotel verandah.

Rising brusquely, Maclyn bowed mechanically to the ladies, and started forward, thus arresting his cousin's progress.

'Glad to see you, old man. Let us go upstairs, my cigars are in my room,' he said, drawing Dufft towards the door.

If the Bates-Posts were not anxious to meet the doctor, Jack decided he would certainly not force the acquaintance upon them. When they reached the main entrance, however, he could not resist the temptation of a backward glance.

Good Heavens! What was the matter? There

sat Naomi Crocus staring at Hallam Dufft with eyes that looked like dark sunken wells in her ashen face, whilst Agnes, who had half-risen from her chair, was regarding their retreating figures with mingled scorn and derision.

CHAPTER IX

ALL IN A TERMINAL TOWN

'To see her was to love her,
Love but her, and love forever.'—BURNS.

THE Hotel Vancouver was taxed to its utmost capacity. A train-load of people, bound for Australia, had arrived to take passage by the out-going S.S. *Warrimoo*, and several Government officials, on their way to Hong-Kong, were awaiting the departure of the R.M.S. *Empress of India* for the Orient. Thus the tide of summer travel rose rapidly, as the magnet of the May sunshine drew tourists from all parts of the world out to the great Canadian West.

Down in the town, and along the water-front, all was life and bustle. Prospectors just off to Atlin swaggered along in brand-new corduroys, each man's heart aglow with hope, and his mouth full of prophecies concerning the placer claims he was going to locate in the new El Dorado. At the street corner some returned Klondykers were pulling gold nuggets, as large as marbles, out of their pockets by way of illustrating Northern yarns, and the crowded thoroughfares re-echoed with the hum of business. Here a mining man rushed past, urged to withstand the temptation to turn

into a bar by the certainty that, if he did so, the newest thing in English capitalists would slip through his fingers and fall into the clutches of a rival firm. There a curbstone-broker had pounced upon an inoffensive citizen, and was trying to sell him something that he did not want, and on every side were heard quotations in stocks and the latest news from Dawson City, coupled with a hint at some rich 'strike' just telegraphed from Kootenay, or a tip as to the 'best buy' on the market.

What a glorious thing it is to be a prospective millionaire, and to have no shadow of doubt but that the sun will always be shining upon you! The sanguine enthusiasm that is the very breath of life in a Western settlement, and which makes all things seem possible to all men, is wonderfully infectious; even the local policeman manages to catch it, and the cleverest sinner who evades the law cannot escape from its thraldom.

Ships from every clime lay within the port, and sailed out, through the lion-guarded gateway of 'The Narrows,' off to the golden Klondyke or the sunny Southern seas. No wonder Vancouver was proud of her magnificent harbour, which stretched from the wharves fringing the town over to the foot of the tree-stocked slopes, above whose deep green borders a line of snowy peaks jagged the horizon, for upon the waters of this well-nigh land-locked haven the whole British Navy might with ease and safety ride at anchor.

Jack Maclyn never forgot the vivid impression branded upon his mind by the contrast and epi-contrast of Nature during his stay in Vancouver. Looking

late one night across Burrard Inlet, he saw, seated upon a throne of rocks and robed in cloud drifts, a mighty mountain that raised itself skywards, and around whose stately head a crown of Northern Lights flashed and glittered like the Diadem of Truth. In the opposite direction, beyond Point Grey, the glories of the sunset had faded to purple-pink, and then turned aquamarine, as the stars shone out in the greenish sky like golden flowers amongst the leaves of heaven.

At the edge of the bay the sea was hushing the shore to sleep, and the great heart-beats of the waves pulsed against the rocks with passionate throbs. Between the dying twilight in the west, and the garish Aurora Borealis in the north, stood the city of Vancouver. The asphalted streets were bare of all foliage, but in the residential quarters rows of young trees, planted symmetrically in the boulevards, rested the eye, and gave promise of shade in days to come. The townsite, which was formely a primeval forest, had only been roughly cleared by fire of its standing timber, and therefore betwixt the finest buildings and most artistic houses lay vacant lots, filled with lame, limb-lopped trunks and blackened stumps, the burnt logs piled criss-cross, and greened over with delicate vine maples and the dark shiny leaves of the sallal bushes.

A week had passed since that eventful morning when Jack Maclyn had first made acquaintance with the Bates-Posts and their party at breakfast. He had been not a little puzzled over the startling *finale* caused by the arrival of Hallam Dufft, and had naturally questioned his cousin upon the subject afterwards, but

the doctor, though admitting that he had known Miss Arbuckle slightly for years, flatly denied ever having heard of such a person as Miss Crocus. The fact that Dufft was a friend of Kingsearl's sufficiently explained Agnes's attitude ; but why, if they were total strangers, should Naomi have displayed so much agitation at the mere sight of the superintendent ? This was the single, and, taken in conjunction with Mr Bates-Post's refusal to meet Dufft, the double acrostic Jack spent many hours in trying to solve.

A queer undercurrent of jealousy tinged Maclyn's ruminations. He believed Hallam's denial, but then, he reflected, a doctor might be forced to tell an untruth to hide a professional secret. In this instance, however, he was mistaken. Dufft really knew nothing whatsoever of Naomi's existence, and, by one of those strange chances which change the course of people's lives, Maclyn when speaking of the two girls did not mention the Bates-Posts' name to his cousin, but merely alluded to them as the relations of Miss Crocus ; had he done so, Dufft would have recognised in the old gentleman an English correspondent, and thereby saved Jack from months of miserable uncertainty.

What Naomi knew of the superintendent, and why the sight of him so deeply moved her, was part and parcel of the same circumstance which made her uncle decline a casual encounter with the doctor. Mr Bates-Post had a good reason for refusing to meet Hallam Dufft in the presence of his niece, and a better one still for not wishing Naomi to meet the superintendent at all.

The doctor did not come over to Vancouver a

second time prior to Maclyn's departure for Victoria, and the latter was so occupied with other matters that he postponed going to Fraserville from day to day, until he was finally obliged to write a note to Dufft bidding him good-bye, and promising to pay him another visit on his return from Japan. Thus the cousins failed to meet again, and consequently Maclyn did not hear that during the week when he was in a seventh heaven, talking, walking and cycling with Miss Crocus, Mr Bates-Post spent many anxious hours at the Mind-Ease Asylum in consultation with its superintendent.

Meanwhile it had been arranged that Agnes Arbuckle should return home on the last day of May, taking Naomi with her for a short visit, in order to leave the Bates-Posts free to conclude the business which had brought them out to British Columbia. Jack was going to travel down to Victoria on the same afternoon. Of course he said this was 'a jolly coincidence,' yet it necessitated the cutting down of his stay in the Queen City to a single day, a deplorable act, and one he was unlikely to have committed had Naomi Crocus not possessed a face lovely enough to have sowed discord betwixt Abelard and Héloise.

'I am glad Mr Maclyn is going across the Gulf with you and Naomi!' remarked Mrs Bates-Post, amiably. 'It is only a short voyage, still a man is often useful on board ship.'

'Very,' assented Agnes, readily, 'especially if he has the good sense to efface himself during the greater part of the journey. I hate people who stick to

conversation like a burr when I want to read. They are the most irritating creatures on earth.'

'Not half so aggravating as men who try to outstay each other in one's drawing-room,' argued Naomi. 'That little game may be very exciting to them, but it is excessively wearisome to their hostess.'

'There is nothing pious about a bore at any time. He is always bad form,' surmised Agnes. 'Give me a man whom Heaven has not scrimped in the way of unselfishness, and who goes through life sprinkling sunshine with both hands, that is the kind of being who blazes the trail for his weary fellow-mortals that have lost their way in the dark jungle of misfortune and despair.'

'Heaps of people would be considerate for others if they only had the opportunity.'

'My dear girl, what is opportunity? It is temperament that counts, and not to confound amiability with imbecility.'

'In fact to be thoroughly good-natured.'

'Is that an advantage?' said Agnes, in a scornful tone. 'I doubt it. A man who is good-natured is usually so remarkably kind to himself, so remarkably easy-going, so remarkably a prig. No, personally I prefer the selfless type.'

'Like Tolstoi.'

'There you are right up against it. He is a man who keeps his fingers on the pulse of humanity, and the unselfish thoughts, words and acts that ennoble his wonderful existence strike a sweet true note in the chord of life—a keynote for the angels to tune their

harps by. But enough of ethics ; I must descend to pen and ink, and the problem of bringing my ideas and those of the editor of the *Herald* together without bumping,' and so saying Agnes turned her back on her companions and started work.

The three women sat upstairs in a private room. Mrs Bates-Post was busily engaged in spreading dainties before her poodle, but Phroso's appetite was capricious, and his mistress, who adored his every tuft, felt much disturbed over his lack of interest in things comestible. Naomi stood by the open window, idly watching the electric cars as they crept past like fat green slugs on a garden path, and from time to time cast impatient glances in the direction of Agnes, who, oblivious to all surroundings, now sat with her head bent over the writing table, covering foolscap at a furious pace.

'I admire him immensely,' murmured the elder lady, as she held a piece of sponge-cake under the poodle's nose.

'His coat is lovely,' assented Naomi, cheerfully, leaving the window as she spoke.

'My dear child, what an odd remark to make,' replied her aunt, a little nettled. 'When I speak of Mr Maclyn I usually refer to the man and not to his clothes.'

The girl laughed.

'I fancied you meant Phroso,' she said.

'Of course not. But tell me, do you like him?' inquired Mrs Bates-Post, anxiously. She had not been blind to Jack's ardent devotion to her niece, or the latter's half-frightened acceptance of the same, and the

hope of a possible happy ending to all Naomi's troubles made her glad.

'Yes, rather,' replied the girl's lips, but truth in her heart whispered otherwise.

'You are generally so indifferent to men. At your age it is strange.'

'I do not think so,' replied Naomi, significantly, and a momentary quiver softened the serenity of her face.

'Well, at anyrate, Mr Maclyn is a delightful young fellow, so manly and such good form. He is very much in love with you, too, my dear, of that there can be no doubt.'

'The fact does not interest me,' remarked the girl, telling a flagrant fib.

'Then it should. You are just a cantankerous baby,' replied her aunt, testily. It annoyed the good lady when matters did not run smoothly.

'I admit that he is very nice, but I am not the least little bit in love with him. Funny, isn't it?' retorted Miss Crocus, rebelliously. Gentle as she was by nature, the promptings of her relations on the subject of marriage always roused her to wrath.

'Naomi, don't be flippant. I really believe you dislike all men just because—'

'Aunt Miriam!' she cried imploringly. This quick change from truculence to entreaty softened Mrs Bates-Post in an instant.

'Well, well, my dear, I will not refer to the past as it distresses you so much; but you are really quite morbid on the subject. Christopher Sabel is nothing to you, or you to him.'

'It is no use going over the old arguments. I simply do not care for the attentions of men, that is all,' said the girl, wearily.

'Stuff and nonsense!' exclaimed her aunt, with renewed spirit. 'Brooding over that miserable business has put all sorts of ridiculous ideas into your head, and the way in which Professor Panhandle encourages you is positively absurd. I cannot understand it. He is so charming in all other respects.'

'He is perfectly right. You see he was there when —when—'

'Yes, I know, my dear. What a fatal day that was! But, Naomi, your uncle and I feel quite sure you are hyper-sensitive on the subject.'

'No, Aunt Miriam. My guardian knows best, and he says I must never marry. I have told you so ever since—but there, why should we argue about it now?'

'I suppose because this journey has brought the subject up again. After you go to Victoria your uncle will wind up affairs as quickly as possible. Did he tell you that Christopher is to remain in Fraserville under Dr Dufft's care?'

'No. Oh, auntie, I wish you would let me go to the Mind-Ease Asylum and see him!'

'Certainly not. It would be most distressing for you, and could do him no good.'

'But Professor Panhandle said that I ought to.'

Mrs Bates-Post drew herself up.

'Naomi,' she said imperiously, 'Professor Panhandle is a very good man, but good men make great mistakes sometimes.'

'I know just how you feel, little girl,' said Agnes as

she got up and put her arm round her friend's waist, 'but it is foolish. You are as free as I am to love and be loved by any man. Your uncle and aunt are right. The past is dead, and though I do not doubt that your paragon is acting from the best of motives, still he is head over heels in the wrong. To give unpalatable advice is a positive disease with some people.'

Naomi shook her head.

'If the professor were not your guardian, would you still think his opinion on the subject infallible?' asked Agnes, impetuously.

Naomi started. 'I never thought of that before. Yes—no—I do not suppose I should.'

'Oh! I see.'

Miss Arbuckle was quite clever enough to realise how useless it was to kick against the pricks when the scruples of such a girl were involved. In this deduction she was correct. Naomi had grown up from childhood under the guidance of Cyr Panhandle, a man of rigid views on all subjects temporal and ecclesiastical, and, as a natural consequence, he exercised an inexorable influence over her.

'You are just a bundle of prejudices,' said Mrs Bates-Post, 'and if you are going to be so reserved and narrow-minded you had better have stayed at home. Now, while we are in British Columbia, I want to see everything, know everybody and behave just like the natives.'

'Meaning the Indians?' inquired Agnes with an amused smile.

'No, people like you and your brother, of course,'

replied Mrs Bates-Post, with dignity. 'Do you suppose I want to wear feathers and live in a wigwam?'

'Not at this early season of the year,' replied Agnes, laughingly. 'It is far too chilly for such gay doings in May; besides, our Siwashes are sensible enough nowadays to prefer Herr Taeger's latest Ipsilante horrors and gaudy Birmingham shawls to the traditional wampum belt and bead necklace of their forefathers.'

CHAPTER X

THE LOVE TRAIL

'None without hope e'er loved the brightest fair,
But love can hope where reason would despair.'—LYTTELTON.

JACK had fallen in love with Naomi, openly, honestly and wholly ; and Naomi, in spite of her protestations, had fallen in love with Jack, secretly and with fear in her heart. One week had sufficed for all this, one lovely, delicious week of companionship. At times the girl was so joyous, and the man so content, that they wandered together along the green lanes of happiness, forgetting all else save one another. When he was beside her in the sunlight, the incense of his worship rose up around her in pure white clouds, shutting out all the world and bathing her soul in the perfume of love, but when she was left alone Naomi would awaken with a sigh from such sweet dreaming, and in an agony of terror remember the barrier built up between them. Then in a tempest of remorseful restitution she would recklessly sacrifice pleasure, happiness and love on the altar of a chimerical duty.

So Naomi blew hot and cold by turns, and poor Jack took the express elevator between heaven and hell a dozen times a day.

'Miss Crocus,' he began abruptly, as they strolled through the trails in the park one afternoon, 'I am an awful duffer at saying things, but there is something I want to tell you—something I believe I've wanted to tell you ever since we first met.'

Naomi turned a surprised glance on him. The man's voice was full of suppressed emotion.

'Is it about yourself?' she asked kindly.

'Yes. It is about myself—and you,' he added softly.

The girl was at once on her defence.

'You and me. How disappointing!' she said with a chilly smile. 'Do you know for a moment you quite excited my curiosity, but now I am afraid it is nothing of importance after all, for when two people have only known each other for a week, as we have, their mutual interests are of necessity very superficial.' This with studied pedantry.

'My interest in you is not superficial, Miss Crocus, surely you must know that. Why, I would gladly give up half my life if only for the other half we might always be—'

'Friends.'

'Yes, but the best of friends.'

'And why not?' she asked defiantly.

'Because you refuse to give me the hope without which I shall never again be content. I do not want a friendship that will shrink and fade, but—'

'Please don't begin that sort of thing,' she pleaded anxiously.

'I am beginning nothing,' he protested hotly. 'I am just going on with something that will never have

an end for me. You would not listen before, but you shall hear me now,' he went on firmly. 'Why do you treat me so strangely, Miss Crocus? One day I almost believe that you do care, and the next your manner is so distant that it cuts me to the heart.'

She was silent, not knowing what to answer. No one was in sight. He moved a step closer to her side.

'Tell me,' he urged impatiently, 'what does it all mean? What are you afraid of? Not of me, surely?'

'I am afraid of nothing,' replied the girl, lightly, but her heart sank as she uttered the words. 'I am tired,' she added with the air of one desirous to change the subject.

Then Jack understood that Naomi was afraid, but not of him.

'Let us rest here for a few minutes; we can talk better so,' he suggested, quick to take advantage of the idea. 'This fallen log is not very wet, but you had better sit on my overcoat.'

'That is very kind of you.'

'There is no need for thanks.'

'Really?' she said archly. 'Then that makes it all the easier for me to refuse.'

'But if I will take no refusal?'

'Better do so, even at the risk of violence to your feelings, than take a chill.'

'Come now, I insist. You must not sit on the damp wood, or you will be the one to suffer.'

'Such may be your opinion, but it does not follow that it is a correct one.'

'Very likely,' he assented meekly.

'And yet perhaps you are right,' she admitted, succumbing to the desire to obey which subdues most girls when the command is from the man they love.

'If I were not a weak idiot where you are concerned, I should be very severe now, and read you a lecture on the sin of arguing.'

'And pray what right have you to scold me, even if censure were due?—which it is not,' she finished, tilting up her chin.

'The greatest right of all. I love you.'

'Oh! why do you say that? You know it is not true. Don't spoil our friendship,' she said excitedly.

'Do you call that spoiling it?'

'Yes, it is madness.'

'Then madness is sweet.'

She shuddered. Why had she used that word? How hateful it was of him to repeat it!

'It is all wrong,' she exclaimed violently, as if warding off something. 'I never thought—'

'No, you *knew*.'

Thus brought to bay Naomi grew angry.

'I did not.'

'You did—darling.'

'Don't contradict. It is rude,' she replied haughtily. But that last word 'darling' sounded sweet in her ears.

'Do you want me to say one thing and mean another?'

'Men generally do. There would be nothing strange in that.'

Then Jack in his turn waxed indignant.

'For myself, I tell the truth and detest insincerity, and all the rest of it.'

'Am I the rest of it?'

Jack admitted to himself with a groan that she was the whole of it, but he was distinctly annoyed, and dignity held him silent.

'Are you very cross?' asked Naomi, at length, looking up at him with an adorable smile as she seated herself with great deliberation on the wet log.

'No, but I think you are.'

'Quite the contrary,' she replied nonchalantly. 'I've carried my point.'

'If I could only carry mine, you should never tempt Providence by sitting in damp places.'

'Still the shade is pleasant on such a warm day.'

'All the same, if I had my way, you should always be in the sunlight. You believe that, don't you?' he added tenderly.

Naomi realised that he was trying to influence her with his words, but she knew that it was his personality that swayed her.

'Yes,' she said simply, 'that is what I do believe. Mr Maclyn,' she continued softly, 'I will sit on your coat now if you wish it.'

Then the man felt unreasoningly glad.

For a while they chatted in the quiet green depths of the park, ever skirting round the absorbing topic of love, like moths round a flame. Jack feared to frighten the girl again by too forcible words, and yet they had reached that stage when love-making was imperative.

'It is growing cold,' said Naomi, presently, with a little shiver. 'Come, let us walk on again.'

'Just as you like. I only want you to be happy,' he said.

'Is anyone ever really that?' she asked as she rose.

'When with you everyone is.'

'What a pretty speech!'

'If I did not admire you so much I would often pay you compliments; but, as it is, I can only think them.'

'The nicest things are not always said in words,' replied the girl, mindful of the many unspoken thoughts of Jack that nestled warm in her heart.

'Do not turn homewards just yet,' he urged, as she took a step in the direction of the bridge.

'I must go back. My aunt will be expecting me. Perhaps next time—'

'So long as you promise me a next time.'

'Of course I promise,' she answered hurriedly, glad to procrastinate at any price.

'Then next time I shall tell you again how dearly I love you,' announced Jack, to whom the smallest encouragement gave hope.

'Oh! Stop, please,' cried Naomi, aghast at his words.

'You don't really hate me, do you?' he urged, catching her hand and holding it firmly between his own.

The girl sighed.

'Won't you look up and answer me, Naomi?'

His use of her name roused her.

'I have nothing to say—nothing,' she murmured in a frozen tone.

'You are dearer and sweeter in my eyes than anyone else on God's green earth, darling; but you—do you care for me a little bit—as I care for you?'

For a moment she looked over the barbed barrier into a land lit with love-light, a land of celestial weather, then with a shudder she wrenched her fingers away from his clasp, crying, 'Let me go! Let me go!'

As Jack released her a terrible fear gripped his heart.

'Is there someone else?' he said almost roughly. 'Answer me truthfully.'

'I cannot, I dare not,' she moaned.

'I am not half worthy of you,' he urged gravely, 'but at least you owe me a reply to that question.'

'Do not ask it. If you only knew,' she faltered.

'Naomi, tell me what it is that stands between us. Your troubles must always be mine from to-day, dearest,' he went on, his heart throbbing violently, and every throb an agony.

In her eyes the pathos deepened.

'It is useless. This must end,' she said.

'Death alone can end some things,' he returned quietly.

'Death!' She started. Yes, of a truth, that, and that alone, would end her hateful bondage and unloose her tongue.

'Do not make things harder for me,' she went on. 'Forget what we have said to-day.'

'Impossible. Naomi, are you engaged to any other man?'

'No—but—'

'Or in love with someone else?'

'No, no!'

Then happiness dawned in his heart with an exquisite light.

'How I love you!' he said, a world of tenderness in his voice.

The girl paled at the words.

'It is unfortunate,' she replied icily. Then, catching sight of his earnest face, she added quaintly, 'Perhaps you could not help it.'

'Why should I try?'

'Because we can never be anything to each other,' very sadly.

'Then you do not love me?'

'I did not say that,' she faltered.

'Then you do?'

'Oh! don't question and torture me so,' she remonstrated wildly. 'I can't love you. I won't love you. You must give up all thought of such a thing.'

'Never. Do you understand me, Naomi? Never, until you look me straight in the eyes and say, "Jack, I do not love you."'

'I shall never say that,' she answered with sudden calm; 'but, all the same, I can never marry you.'

'If you love me everything is possible,' he said fondly. 'I will wait, I will be so patient, darling, for now there is nothing can part us—you and I.'

'There is, there is,' she protested. And again Jack felt the presence of a nameless shadow between them.

'Tell me what you mean, my sweet?'

'There is my self-respect.'

Naomi passed a sleepless night in bitter repentance, and with a firm hand pulled the curb on her feelings. When she went out bicycling the next afternoon she put on an unbecoming hat.

'Good gracious!' exclaimed Agnes, as they went down in the hotel elevator together, 'why do you wear that hideous straw sailor?'

'Don't you like it?' very sweetly.

'It is out of sight!'

'I wish it were,' groaned Naomi, inwardly. Aloud she said, 'Is Mr Maclyn coming with us this afternoon?'

'No,' snapped Miss Arbuckle. She was angry with her friend for playing fast and loose with Jack, and secretly longed to see them happily married.

Naomi began to cheer up. Things might have been worse. She had recklessly worn her best frocks every day during the past week, therefore conscience demanded a sacrifice.

'I think any old thing is quite good enough for Vancouver,' she said truculently, as the hope that perhaps after all Jack would not see her that day lent her courage.

'I should not care to add to the gaiety of the nation by riding round the town in it myself,' observed Agnes, indifferently. 'I always maintain that smart clothes are a woman's armour. If you choose to walk defenceless through life you may tempt Providence, but you will assuredly not tempt public admiration.'

Out in Stanley Park the scene was grand. In front

stretched a road of smooth-rolled shell, edged by Douglas firs that towered up three hundred feet into the blue sky, and high above their spiky tops a hawk swooped in triangular orbit and then swiftly darted beyond the clouds. To the left a fringe of wave-worn rocks, haunted by myriads of crows, held the surf in check, as the tide rolled merrily up the beach and the opalescent sea trended away to the western horizon. On the right lay a tangle of underbrush, hanging mosses and tall ferns, beneath whose tropical growth the ground was carpeted with starry blossoms and scarlet-fruited pigeon-berries. Through a trail, cut deep into the heart of the Reserve, where stood a virgin forest as yet unwedded by the sun, rode Agnes and Naomi on their wheels, down past a lake bordered with skunk-cabbages and devil's-clubs, and over a rustic bridge spanning a gully, until they reached the foot of Prospect Hill, and turned once again into the main road.

'I thought perhaps I should catch you up here,' called out Jack Maclyn, as he raced up behind them, having skirted the shore from the Lighthouse. 'What a day for a spin!'

The joy in his heart was tender as the green buds of spring. The girl he loved would be near him to-day—to-morrow—the next day—until he sailed for Japan. Ah! but he would return, and then—So far he ventured in imagination, but a mist caused by Naomi's perplexing behaviour obscured the future. Jack could not fathom the look of fear that had flashed from her eyes at his courting. Ardent words had made her shiver, an earnest look driven the colour

from her cheeks, and yet she had admitted that she loved no one else, nay more, she had not denied that she loved him. All this puzzled the man sorely, but it did not daunt him, though he was forced to admit that he understood the girl's variable temperament as little as he liked her April manœuvres.

Maclyn was beloved by many, for he acted honourably and lived cleanly with the punctilious rectitude of one who rules his life by principles and not by creeds, though some hated him because he made the great mistake of expecting all men to be as honest as himself. That he had hitherto remained heart-whole was not the fault of the opposite sex; it was simply the result of a fine sense of justice, which forbade him to trump the suits of his opponents with his own strong hand of diamonds in the Game of Life. If Jack ever played to win, he would stake his chances of happiness on a single card, and take the Queen with his King of Hearts, or—not at all.

'By this time on Wednesday we shall have seen Victoria, and I shall be on my way to Yokohama,' he said as they swept along the road.

'And we shall all have said good-bye for a very long time,' replied Naomi, bluntly, conscious of her unbecoming hat and a wild desire to cry.

'I think not. I intend to return here on the *Empress of India*.'

'I understood that you were going to tour for a couple of months in Japan.'

'No, I merely propose to take the trip across

the Pacific Ocean and back,' replied Jack, as if this were quite a usual thing to do.

'But we leave for Sapolill shortly to stay with the Chillinghams,' said Naomi.

'Then we are quite sure to meet again soon, for I am going to shoot in the Okanagan in September.'

'Why, I thought you said—'

'For Heaven's sake, Naomi, don't argue about trifles on such a hot day,' interrupted Agnes, irritably. 'That man has a talent for picturesque lying which would make the fortune of any company promoter,' she commented to herself.

'I was only going to say that I thought Mr Maclyn told me he was obliged to be back in London in three months on account of some legal business,' persisted Miss Crocus.

'I have—er—arranged all that,' stammered Jack. 'Another man will plead the case for me. But,' he continued more firmly, 'I must be in England again by the end of October. Life really is not all beer and skittles for we poor barristers.'

'Umph!' assented Miss Arbuckle, doubtfully. 'Perhaps you are right. I fancy that when men in British Columbia are called to the bar they find it principally whisky.'

Jack laughed.

'That is a nasty hit,' he said. 'But, Miss Crocus, now that I have told you of my plans, won't you give me a *quid pro quo?* Are you going to stay long at Sapolill? Was it to visit the Chillinghams that you came out to the Pacific Coast?'

'Not exactly. I—we—that is, my uncle and aunt came on business.'

'The same hesitation and secrecy,' thought Jack to himself. 'Deuce take it! What does it all mean?' Aloud he said: 'To invest in the mines, I suppose. That is what brings most people to the West nowadays.'

And Naomi let the suggestion pass uncontradicted.

CHAPTER XI

GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART

'Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted!'—BURNS.

THE S.S. *Islander* left Vancouver the following day, with the two girls and Maclyn on board.

It was nearly seven o'clock when the steamer tied up at the Victoria Dock, and Agnes insisted that Jack should at once drive up to her brother's house and dine with them. Nothing loath, he promptly accepted the cordial invitation, and an hour later found him seated at the well-appointed table of the Cabinet Minister.

Two other guests, friends of the Arbuckles, were also of the party, and presently conversation flowed apace, stimulated by an excellent dinner and good wines.

Mr Frisbee, the millionaire-manager of the Klondyke Bonanza Syndicate, had just finished telling a wonderful Yukon yarn.

'It is scarcely credible!' exclaimed Agnes, as he wound up a tale that would have brought a blush of shame to the face of Ananias.

'To resent a fact does not lessen its value,' he returned suavely, his sense of humour not being sufficiently developed to appreciate jokes against himself. 'Truth stands alone, my dear Miss Arbuckle,' he concluded pompously.

'Like Luther before the Diet of Worms, I suppose, or my best silk frock. But tell me, Mr Frisbee, have you all got Klondycitis so badly up there?'

'Of course they have, and in its most virulent form too,' broke in Mrs Dreux, a pretty grass-widow, who was dressed in—or rather partly in—red, and looked as if she had put on her gown with a shoehorn. 'Did you ever know a Dawson City man who did not talk about "creek diggings," and "bar diggings," and "bench diggings" with a familiarity that fairly stuns one?' she wound up pathetically.

'I fear the universal British Columbian mining man is a universal bore,' remarked Mr Frisbee, complacently.

'But his stories are always so good that it seems a pity to ask him how much of them is true,' murmured Agnes aside to Naomi.

Mr Arbuckle caught the words, and smiled.

'You must remember that pioneers up North see strange sights,' he said, 'and a large American element in a camp always provides substance for capital anecdotes.'

'So Bret Harte discovered,' remarked Jack, as he struggled manfully with a bounding *blanc mange* that threatened momentarily to overwhelm him. 'Ameri-

cans are—' He paused as the mould precipitated itself wildly over the edge of the dish, and sat down in a heap on the tablecloth beside him.

'A people renowned for liberty and pie,' put in Agnes.

'And a very good sort too,' said Mr Frisbee.

'Of pie?' queried Mrs Dreux.

'No, of people. Why, I assure you, my dear sir,' turning to his host, 'that some of those Yankee chaps are as capable of managing a big company as I am.'

'I fully believe it,' assented Miss Arbuckle, audaciously.

'I missed you dreadfully while you were away, Agnes,' said her brother, quickly, giving her a reproving glance, 'and so I fancy did your friends, for there is a tremendous pile of letters lying unopened on your desk.'

'Mostly bills, and notices to attend various gatherings, I expect. No doubt I have escaped some trying hours, for I hate meetings worse than mice, don't you, Lola?'

'I never went to one,' returned Mrs Dreux in a superior tone.

'Lucky woman! The Conventions of Amalgamated Hens weary me beyond words, unless they end (as they sometimes do) in a free fight. I would infinitely rather go to a big "afternoon tea," where everyone tells devilled stories about their dearest friends, and decides who ought to marry who.'

'But, my dear girl,' remonstrated Mr Arbuckle, 'you cannot sort out the hearts of men and women in pairs, like a game of Old Maid.'

'Nothing easier; the only difference being that in this case the odd card is the lucky one.'

'What rank heresy!' exclaimed Jack.

'Not at all. The man who is a social success is always a wealthy bachelor.'

'Or the husband of a beautiful wife,' added the Cabinet Minister.

Mr Arbuckle was an able diplomatist, grown prematurely grey in the service of his country, and one who 'bore without abuse the grand old name of gentleman.' He was devoted to his sister, and thought no one in all the wide world one half so clever or so charming as she. Of her treatment of Joseph Kingsearl, however, he in no wise approved, but Agnes was determined to carry on the warfare after her own fashion, and James Arbuckle's protests and entreaties went for nothing.

Maclyn meanwhile felt preposterously happy, for Naomi sat beside him, and was in one of her friendliest moods. Under cover of the general conversation he had from time to time whispered in her ear a few of those sweet nothings that mean so much to lovers, but the silent movements of the white-coated, lean and slippered Chinaman, who waited at table, were a sore trial to his equanimity. No sooner would he begin to make a tender speech than there stood the imperturbable Celestial at his elbow, offering him food in a lordly dish. Once towards the end of dinner, however, he managed to bend over and say softly, 'To-morrow, dearest, I must see you. I must talk with you alone, and say good-bye.' But before Naomi could reply, Agnes, who

had overheard the words, gave the signal to rise. As they left the room Jack caught the quizzical look cast at him by his hostess, and to cover his confusion poured a glass of claret over some salt he had accidentally spilt.

When the ladies reached the drawing-room, Miss Arbuckle folded herself up on the sofa as only a tall girl can.

'Excuse me, my dears, I'm very tired,' she said apologetically. 'Establish yourself in that cosy armchair, Naomi, and, Lola, please put your feet on the fender if you want to. May I read my letters?'

'Only on condition that you share any gossipy contents with us,' returned Mrs Dreux, amicably.

Agnes began to look over her correspondence.

'Mrs La Marr writes to ask me for the name of my Wash-Chinaman, and sends me a pressing invitation to tea in a postscript. I shall not go. She sneers every pretty woman's character off, until some kind friend contradicts it on again.'

'The poor thing has two left-over daughters with plain faces to fight for,' remarked Mrs Dreux, lazily, as she surveyed the beaded toes of her slippers, directed towards the fire, with great complacency.

'I do not like those sort of women,' rejoined Agnes, indifferently.

'They are not very inspiring, I admit, though perfectly respectable,' drawled Lola.

'Oh! very,' assented Miss Arbuckle in a furred voice. 'Why, here is a note from Mrs Gresham! She is such a dear, uncritical soul, and her daughter Kate is altogether delightful. I want you to meet

them, Naomi. What is this? She invites us with charming phrases to a "musical" next Monday. Then of course we shall go, and take you with us; so please don your sweetest smile, and let your frock foam with frivolity on that occasion, for you will meet everyone who is anyone in Victoria there, and I intend that all the men shall fall in love with you.'

'One would fancy to hear you talk that you presided over the Ladies Entrance into Paradise,' murmured Mrs Dreux, casually.

'Because I have the influenza, I do not necessarily dance the polka,' retorted Agnes, tartly.

'Meaning that in your simple little Western way you do your friends every kindness, but will take no credit for the same,' responded her friend, serenely. 'I know you, my dear, so it is no use trying to throw dust in my eyes like that. You can twist society round your finger, which is—'

'Unimportant—if true,' interrupted the girl, carelessly.

'Now don't befeather your Stetson hat with any such mistaken ideas, and don't get catty because I choose to tell you nice little home truths,' pursued Lola, aggravatingly.

Whereupon Miss Arbuckle took refuge in dignified silence, beaten, for once, with her own weapons.

'You are about the best and cleverest girl in British Columbia,' continued Mrs Dreux, following up her advantage, 'and as for that last letter of yours in the *Herald* on the delinquencies of Mr Kingsearl, why, it is just the very funniest thing that you ever wrote.'

Agnes started up as if she had been shot.

'Funny!' she almost screamed, and then with a peal of hysterical laughter sank back on the sofa.

Lola Dreux little dreamed that her innocent speech had succeeded where all the influence of the Cabinet Minister had failed. Funny—the word whipped Agnes like a lash. Funny—did Joseph Kingsearl think of the letter thus? Was it, could it really be—funny? She threw away the thought as she might have torn a trail of bindweed from her skirt, and walking across the room smoothed her hair before a mirror, a ceremony which is of great importance to a woman even in a crisis.

Gradually the scorn faded from her eyes and all the bitterness died out of her heart.

Late that night when the household had gone to bed, and she was left alone face to face with memory, Agnes sat before the fire, too happy to sleep.

'If I were a man,' she whispered joyously, 'I would go on an idealised spree to-night, but as I am only a girl,' here her voice curved tenderly, 'I will pray "God bless him."'

June had come, and all the world wore cap and bells. Around Victoria the roads were inhemmed by bushes of golden broom and fragrant dog-roses, whilst the sun-steeped fields wore new spring dresses broidered with bluebells and fritillaries. Out by the edge of the ocean wandered Naomi Crocus. She was a girl with an infinite love of Nature, and on this particular afternoon had strolled off by herself, anxious to be alone for a space under the blue and balmy sky, with only her thoughts for company.

Close to the water's brim the waves stumbled

sleepily up against the rocks. Here she found a nook amongst some sheltering boulders, and throwing herself down upon the sand, fell to dozing in happiness. Behind her rose the austere and treeless hills, before her lay the green sea, shimmering like molten malachite in the glorious light of the radiant afternoon; only a few gulls, purposeful of wing, lent life to the scene. On the bosom of the ebbing tide her thoughts swept out into eternity. Occasionally a fresh idea fell into the moving depths with a sullen splash, and ringed slowly until it expanded into expression.

'It would be a horrible thing not to have men admire one,' she mused dreamily. 'And yet, if I were to fall—no, I mean as I have fallen in love—myself—with Jack—it is even more dreadful still. What are all the losses in the world compared with loss of hope? Must I give up everything?' She started into a sitting posture. 'Ah! no, surely Heaven holds some mercy still for breaking hearts.'

At this moment all the little pretences with which girls usually protect themselves from themselves were shattered; Naomi and her conscience looked at each other with a fixed and terrible regard.

'There is nothing I could not, would not do for his sake,' she moaned, 'so I will give him up. But it is so hard, dear God, it is so very, very hard.'

The girl was treading the Way of Love's Cross, and the hurt of it ravened her heart.

'Naomi! Naomi! at last I have found you,' cried a joyful voice from the top of the bank, and Jack scrambled down between the stones and flung himself breathless on the beach beside her.

'Oh! why did you come?' she said, chiding him, womanlike, for the very deed she loved him for committing.

'To say good-bye, my love; to tell you that when I come back again there shall be no more partings for us.'

'It cannot be, Mr Maclyn. There must be an end now, even to whatever friendship may have existed between us,' she said pitifully, but the tension was too great, and she burst into tears.

'Don't say that, and don't cry, darling,' returned Jack, caressing her with extreme gentleness. 'You were kind—'

'But that was yesterday,' she sobbed vehemently. 'No, no, Jack, to-day we say good-bye for ever. It is like those dog-roses,' and she pointed to a bush luxuriating near by; 'now they are beautiful, and flushed with life, but soon—'

'There is still next year, even when the roses die, next year when they will bloom again, dear love.'

'Oh! Jack, my heart is aching so, do not make it worse,' she pleaded with quivering lips.

'If you have no pity on yourself, darling, I implore you have a little on me. I love you, Naomi,' he said fondly, folding his arms more closely round her. 'Do not cry, my sweet,' and as he thus soothed her with soft words the girl instinctively clung to him.

'Jack, Jack,' she sobbed, 'I am so afraid. I am falling—'

'In love, dearest. Is not that it, Naomi? We have both fallen in love together.'

The words sounded like a benediction. Tenderly

he drew her face towards him and pressed a kiss upon her trembling lips. In that moment earth and sky reeled away from her ; she saw only her lover.

'It is all right now,' she murmured weakly, 'but later on—to-night—when I am alone,' with a shiver, 'I shall suffer for this. When you are gone— Oh ! Jack, you are going from me to-night for ever, and I —I dare not keep you, or even bid you return, darling.'

The fond name wrung from her lips in her pain went to his heart.

'But why, sweetheart ? Could you not be happy as my wife ? '

'Your wife ! ' She repeated the words in a lingering tone, and a tiny smile rippled across the sombre depths of her eyes. 'I could not,' she said bravely.

'I do not believe you,' he returned with confidence.

'But you must submit.'

'Must, Naomi ? ' unsteadily.

She mistook his tone.

'At last you understand,' she urged.

'Why you should be unhappy all your life ? ' he questioned feverishly. 'Certainly not. There is enough misery in the world, God knows, without senseless sacrifices. The other day in Fraserville I saw a man, rich, well-born, handsome, but quite mad. Poor Sabel— What is the matter, dear one ? Are you faint ? ' for Naomi had suddenly turned ghastly white, and was struggling wildly to free herself from his encircling arms.

'In mercy's name, go, leave me ! ' she cried, the syllables coming in gasps from between her set teeth.

'Did I frighten you, my love? I am so sorry. That asylum haunts me, but I should never have mentioned the hateful place to you. Forgive me.'

'You saw him?' The question came scarcely above a whisper.

'Who? Sabel? Or do you mean the superintendent?' demanded Jack, sternly, a hideous doubt of Hallam Dufft surging over him as he remembered the episode on the hotel verandah.

'I am so afraid of mad people,' faltered Naomi, in a choked voice.

She was gathering the stinging nettles with both hands.

'Forget my stupid speech, and let us talk of other things,' said Jack, mollified by her evident disinterest in his cousin.

'It is time we went home, I think,' replied the girl, with sudden irrelevance.

'Certainly, if you wish it. But why cut short our last chat together?'

'The others will wonder where I am, and you must see them also to say good-bye before you go on board.'

She spoke rapidly, as if to defy contradiction. Perhaps she dreaded more arguments, more entreaties.

'What do I care about the others? they can wait,' he returned impatiently. Then, seeing the look of surprise on Naomi's face, he added gently, 'They bore me, because, sweetheart, they are not you.'

'I suppose you think women like to be told those sort of things, whether they are true or not,' she said coldly.

When a girl's heart is breaking, she does not care what words she uses to wound.

'If you will go,' he said, ignoring her cutting speech, 'let us at least say our real good-bye here alone together.'

Alone together! Ah! that was the thought which filled her life from end to end.

'Yes, let us say it here—now. Help me, Jack, to do right, to remember.'

'To remember that I love you, and that I shall never give you up, that is all you need of memory, my darling.'

She made no answer, but there was a world of misery in her eyes. When a woman's heart breaks there is no sound. In the infinite silence only God hears the hopeless confluent anguish of all stricken souls knelled in that passing across Love's Gethsemane. From the hurt of the heart the death-damp drips, the life-blood of love ebbs slowly away, despair's gate opens wide—opens and draws her through.

'Good-bye. God bless you, Jack!'

'And keep you for ever, my sweetheart.'

CHAPTER XII

THE LANDSLIDE

'The storm that howls along the sky.'—SMOLLETT.

A WEEK later Maclyn was well on his way across the Pacific Ocean towards Japan, and the Bates-Posts and their niece had boarded the Canadian Pacific Railway train bound for the upper country. After much persuasion from Naomi, Agnes Arbuckle had consented to accept the cordial invitation extended to her by the Chillinghams, and go to visit them at Sapolill with her friends, so that a merry quartette was seated in the centre sections of the sleeping car attached to No. 2 Express, as it steamed out of Vancouver Station.

Along the southern bank of Burrard Inlet rolled the train, where the roar and splash caused by gigantic timbers as they rushed down the chutes, and bounded off into the water, told of lonely logging-camps hidden far up amongst the heavily-wooded hills, on past the orchards and ploughed lands surrounding Yale, until with a whistle of exultation the engine rushed through Hell's Gate, and sped up into the Fraser Canyon.

The short spring afternoon soon began to fade in

the narrow gorge, and as Naomi watched the sunbeams die upon the massive mountain sides, and the last faint flicker of daylight sink into the seething whirlpools of the river, she shuddered at the tragic loneliness of the scene. Presently the girls went into the observation-car, in order to better enjoy those wonderful views that meet the tourist's gaze west of Spuzzum, where the cliffs close in, their rocky profiles standing out clear-cut against a background of rich, dark-green fir trees, overtopped by impregnable cragged fortifications, and where the waters boil two hundred feet below the railway track. There not a sound of animal life, not a sign of human habitation relieves the gaunt grandeur of the Canyon.

That night the travellers stayed over at the hotel at North Bend, a pretty chalet built on a bench right in the heart of the Canyon, and shut off from the great outer world by those stupendous stone battlements and bastions of rock, that the Westerner justly ranks amongst the finest handiwork of the Great Architect.

The following morning dawned brightly, and the whole party spent a pleasurable day wandering about the vicinity, first visiting the quaint old Indian burying-ground, where the corpse of a recently-deceased Siwash, rolled in a blanket, still hung up between two trees, according to the ancient traditions of his faith, and later on watching the Chinamen washing for gold on the banks of the Fraser. There these Mongolians sit, day after day, at the river's edge, shovelling gravel into their 'cradles' with one

hand, whilst they gently rock them to and fro with the other, and continually pouring dipperfuls of water into the sluice boxes, an operation that cleanses away the pebbles and dirt, and leaves the tiny specks of gold firmly adhered to the woollen lining of the primitive machines; the little bits of yellow metal being afterwards run together on an iron plate by means of quicksilver.

All these things were vastly interesting to the Bates-Posts, and with genuine reluctance they proceeded next day on the second stage of their journey, sorry to leave the matchless spot and take their last look at the Fraser Canyon. They had decided to leave the trans-continental line in 'some wee short hour ayont the twal,' at a wayside station, and drive from thence to Sapolill, a distance of about seventy miles, spending a night *en route* at the rustic hotel at Kamas, run by one John Gregson, and thus obtain an excellent idea of the British Columbian ranching country.

Gaily they started off, right merrily they chatted to the driver of the rig (a thing of phenomenal joltiness, that held them and their baggage in considerable discomfort, but which, being the only available vehicle in the place, they had perforce hired for the trip), and greatly did they at first admire the pastoral landscape, the large herds of cattle, the bands of horses, and the scattered farms that formed the *mise-en-scène* of their progress; but by-and-by the increasing heat disposed them to restrict their observations more and more to objects in the immediate foreground. After a halt for luncheon the spirits of the party once more revived, stimulated by a cup of strong tea, brewed gipsy-fashion

in a tin pail hung on the end of a stick over the camp-fire, and as only ten miles still remained to be covered before nightfall, they elected to rest for a space under the shade of the pine trees—perchance to sleep.

'For meself individually I'd say nought, but there be a storm comin' up, sir, and we've a nasty bit road afore us round Chinook Mountain.'

As he spoke the driver pointed to where the sun was sinking into a bed of dark, angry clouds. Just then the wind blew up from the west with a defiant puff. Mr Bates-Post laid down his pipe.

'Come, Miriam,' he said to his wife, 'get the baskets packed and we will make a start at once. Bless my soul! it is six o'clock already. Look out there!' he exclaimed sharply, as a man dashed past them on horseback, raising a choking dust, and nearly knocking down Naomi, who was standing at the side of the road.

'Pardon, pardon. Reckon I didn't see yer,' called back the rider, as he reined in and faced about. 'Going to Gregson's?' he inquired friendly-wise.

'Yes, we expect to put up there for the night,' growled Mr Bates-Post. He felt annoyed, as men do when they have been startled.

'Mighty slick layout at Gregson's,' remarked the stranger, encouragingly. 'See yer later,' and with a nod he galloped off.

'That's Tom Potter what owns the store down to Kamas,' volunteered Hooper, the driver.

'An American, eh?' queried Mr Bates-Post.

'Seems so. He's a rare good un, though for meself individually—'

'I believe we are going to have a bad storm,' interrupted the old gentleman, hastily. 'Listen,' he added as a clap of thunder broke overhead and awakened a thousand echoes amongst the neighbouring hills.

'It will be a magnificent sight,' exclaimed Agnes, and she scrambled into the rig.

'Oh, dear! oh, dear!' cried Mrs Bates-Post, putting her hands over her eyes as a second flash of lightning half blinded them. 'Richard, this is dreadful,' and the good lady shivered convulsively.

Away they whirled, the now frightened driver urging his horses to their best speed along tbe trail that presently entered Lantner's Rift, a deep ravine lying between Chinook Mountain and the Pilchick-amin Range, where the round-headed hills had apparently been split asunder in some pre-historic period by a terrific convulsion of nature. Rising steeply from the level of the valley, the road, a mere cutting scarcely ten feet wide, wound up the precipitous side of Chinook Mountain, and at every step showers of stones and gravel, displaced by the passing of the carriage, fell upon the track from above and slid down at the edge of the wheel ruts into the abyss of the river, which ran hundreds of feet below. It was a dangerous route to travel in a storm, as Hooper, an old resident in that district, well knew. One false step, a swerve of the horses, an unexpected 'washout,' or a sudden landslip, and instant death would be their fate. But there was no time now for doubts and delays; Gregson's Hotel must be reached with all possible speed, so he lashed the cayuses into a lather and put his trust in Providence.

On the back seat of the vehicle Agnes and Naomi clung to each other, and watched the tempest raging around them, awestruck at the passing anger of the elements.

Soon darkness fell heavily round about, and a drenching rain descended in torrents.

'It is like a *Danse Macabre*,' said Agnes, excitedly. 'Listen how the trees gibber and gibe in the wind, and look—'

Just then the lightning lit up the sky, and an appalling noise reverberated down the Rift.

'What is that?' gasped Mrs Bates-Post in a frightened tone.

'I do not know; perhaps some rocks blasted by the storm.'

A man, who had been fishing all day in Coyote Creek, was walking along towards Gregson's, some distance ahead of the tourists, when he heard the same crash so close behind him that for an instant it paralysed his senses, chaining his limbs to the spot; then in the glare of another flash he turned and saw what had caused the cataclysm. Down the mountain-side a mass of boulders, soil and trees, riven by the storm, was rushing in headlong flight to the bottom of the ravine, and obliterating the trail under an avalanche of *débris*.

'Help! help!' came an agonised shout out of the darkness.

The words roused Joseph Kingsearl to action. He strode back, feeling each step as he went, for the road was narrow at this point, and the precipice dropped sharply away to the left of it.

'All right,' he shouted in reply. 'Where are you?'

'At the bend,' came the answer, this time in a feeble voice. 'Hurry—no time—to—' but the rest of the words were drowned by a peal of thunder.

Prone upon the ground, half buried under a huge tree-trunk, lay Tom Potter. Of his horse there was no sign. The unfortunate animal had evidently gone down with the landslide. Kingsearl saw at a glance that the poor fellow was beyond all help, his chest being literally crushed in by the weight that had fallen upon him and pinned him fast, and which, without further aid, the politician could not remove. Rapidly he poured some whisky out of his pocket-flask and forced it between the sufferer's lips.

'Folks behind—dark—might keel over,' gasped the dying man.

'Strangers?'

'Yes—women—with Hooper.'

'My God! that fellow can't drive,' yelled Kingsearl.

The American struggled for breath.

'I'm done—go—get over—warn them—or—'

Death finished the sentence.

Without a second's hesitation, or a qualm at the awful dangers ahead of him, Kingsearl quickly flung off his coat, and then muttering, 'Poor beggar! grit to the last!' he began to climb up the escarped face of the mountain in a frenzy of fear.

'Shall I be in time?' was his only thought, as, now clinging to tufts of bunch-grass with nerve-tightened fingers, now stepping with the wary sure-footedness

of a mountain-bred man on the rocks made slippery by slime, he struggled doggedly on and upward, hurling himself over logs, and forcing a passage with bleeding hands through the tangle of stalks and stems that perpetually barred his way, his clothes torn to tatters, his heart beating madly, his head bursting with the terrific exertion. The darkness hampered him, the rain blinded him; would he ever reach the summit of the chaos, and get down again on to the road north of the landslide?

Each moment as it passed might mean death to every soul in that party. Still he clambered furiously up the side of the Rift in a very passion of strength, surmounting obstacles that would have daunted any man not bound on so reckless a mission. Only one more bluff to round, and then the descent. Was there foothold on its almost sheer face? Oh! for light, if but for an instant. Again a flash in the sky. Kingsearl made one rush forward, and swung himself on to a ledge that overhung the ravine. Then darkness again, thick with rain. The next step—would it land him in the river a thousand feet below, or safe past the precipice? A wild lurch, a stumble, and he fell headlong to the ground, his leg jammed between two enormous boulders.

Exhausted, the perspiration streaming from every pore, the man made a frantic but futile effort to pull his foot out of the crevice. From far down the road sounded the thud of the horses' hoofs. To get so near and then to fail? Never! The mere thought was damnable. With a hideous wrench that dislocated the bones and lacerated the bruised tissues, he at last

succeeded in wresting his imprisoned leg free, and half-slipped, half-rolled down the gravel bank that sloped away at an angle of fifty degrees to the trail.

A few seconds later a vigorous bump told Kingsearl that he had gained the level of the cutting, and to his unbounded relief he found himself fully twenty yards away from the landslide, a sufficient distance in which to avert an accident. As he crawled painfully on to the road, his injured leg dragging limply behind him, the noise of the approaching rig rose above the tumult of the tornado. 'Stop! Stop! Coo—EE!' he shouted with all the strength he could muster.

Ah! Thank Heaven! the driver had paid heed to the warning. Kingsearl could hear the girding grind of the brakes as the rig pulled up not six yards from where he lay. Then for the first time he felt cold all over, and turned sick with the agony of his mangled foot.

'Stand still—you'll go over me—there's been a landslide—no way past,' he called out, this time more feebly; but the horses, already terrified by the crashing peals of thunder, were hard to control, and as they plunged and reared one of them struck the politician such a violent blow on the head with its hoof as to instantly deprive the man of his senses.

Agnes seldom recalled the events of that awful night without a shudder. How Hooper and Mr Bates-Post managed to take out the horses, and turn the carriage on the narrow trail, and how they found Joseph Kingsearl, and laid him down at the bottom of the trap, and drove him with them six miles back over the rough road, regardless of the blinding storm, to a

log shack occupied by some Siwash Indians, where the whole party camped until daybreak, too thankful for having a roof between them and the pitiless weather to carp at the dirt and stench of the place, the girl could never clearly remember; for not only did Mrs Bates-Post and Naomi claim her attention, so unstrung were they by the catastrophe which had put the climax to their terror, but all the while her heart was torn with fears for the safety of the injured man. Dimly she realised passing occurrences, and bent all her faculties upon the task of cheering and consoling her companions, and making the politician as comfortable as circumstances permitted during the long, cruel drive.

'If he dies 'twill be another good man gone, and them as ain't such-a-much'll be left for no use at all, meself individually,' muttered Hooper, as he and Mr Bates-Post laid the Member for Illicilliwaet down on a bench before the cabin fire.

'He is a hero if ever there was one,' agreed the old gentleman, as he and Agnes applied restoratives, and did their best to bind up the wounds of their rescuer.

'And he does not know it,' jerked out Mrs Bates-Post, tearing up a handkerchief to make a bandage as she spoke.

'But I do,' thought Agnes, and she sponged his bruised features and lacerated hands with a tenderness divine.

All night long the girl sat beside the half-conscious man, giving him stimulants and food at regular intervals, and listening with an anxious ear to the laboured breathing and stifled moans of the lover she

had lost. When in the dawning they removed him on to a bed of fir boughs, she went and sat where he had lain through the dark hours, and pressed her cheek against the coat upon which his head had rested, repeating softly to herself, 'I love him as much as ever. I do. I do.'

Morning brought substantial relief to the worn-out travellers; for a rancher, who lived only a couple of miles from the Indian's shack, on being informed by Hooper of Kingsearl's plight, at once placed his house at the disposal of the entire party, a piece of true British Columbian hospitality none of them were slow to accept.

Under the care of a doctor who was quickly summoned from Kamas, combined with the ease consequent upon the dressing of his injuries, followed by a sound sleep, Kingsearl began rapidly to regain his normal state. Later in the day he was pronounced convalescent.

'My dear sir, the members of our party owe their lives to your courage, and, in their names and my own, I thank you,' said Mr Bates-Post, in cordial tones.

'It was nothing,' returned the politician, gravely. 'I merely climbed over the slide and warned you, that was all.'

'Good Heavens! man, look at your condition. It tells a different and a sorry tale.'

'An accident that might happen to anyone. Out here in the West we believe in going where duty calls, and not standing round idle when we get there either.'

'A brave man is the same East or West, and in this

instance it would be cruel of you to add to our obligations by refusing to accept our most earnest thanks.'

'I appreciate your kind intentions, sir, but, hang it all, I hate being thanked!'

'That is always the way with men,' remarked Agnes, who had noiselessly approached the door, and now stood within its shadow, regarding him fixedly.

Joseph Kingsearl started violently, and tried to rise.

'Agnes! Miss Arbuckle! You here!' he exclaimed.

'Yes, but please lie still,' she begged. 'You must be very careful of that foot. Heroes are scarce, you know.'

He gazed at her in astonishment. Could this girl, with her sweet smile and courteous words, be the same Agnes who had once loved him and then persecuted him to the limit of human endurance?

'You flatter me by implication, Miss Arbuckle. That is a thing few women and no man can withstand,' he stammered, and the hope inspired by Hallam Dufft's words blazed up afresh in his heart. 'But I am afraid if there were no women there would be no heroes.'

'Not many, but still a few,' she returned, and the look which accompanied the words gave them a direct personal significance.

'Beyond peradventure of a doubt,' laughed Mr Bates-Post. 'It is the gentle sex that crowns our common acts with the laurel of fame.'

'Ordinary humanity is not heroism,' said Kingsearl, gravely, and he turned down the subject; but all through the weeks to come the thought persistently

recurred to him that by loyally doing his duty he had unwittingly saved the life of his lady-love. It was a comforting reflection.

In a few days the last of the landslide was cleared away, and the travellers were enabled to resume their journey. The politician drove with them as far as Gregson's Hotel, and stayed there for a week to recuperate, but no sooner was his foot out of bandages than he proceeded with all possible speed to Vernon, and put up at the Kalamalka, a charming hostelry that was situated only thirty-five miles from Sapolill—and Agnes Arbuckle.

When Naomi, generalising after the fashion of youth, remarked, 'I think it shows extremely bad taste on the part of a man to follow a girl when he knows how much she must dislike it,' great was her surprise to hear Agnes reply airily,—

'Oh! Westerners don't mind a little thing like that.

'"I care for nobody, no, not I,
And nobody cares for me,"'

hummed Miss Arbuckle defiantly.

'I wish I could say that.'

'Why don't you? I did.'

'Because it is not true.'

'Quite so. In neither your case nor mine. But that really does not matter so long as you believe it.'

'To talk with you is a liberal education of a peculiar kind. I am fast learning to mistrust your words and to pin all my faith to your actions.'

'Like the rhymster with unhappy hair, who said,

"Teach it me only with thine eyes"—but then he said a great deal. Naomi, you are a goose.'

'Really, Agnes, I shall commence—'

'Never do that. It's vulgar. You should always begin.'

'Stuff and nonsense!' retorted Naomi, irritably.

'Now, my dear girl, don't get cross; it's not worth while.'

'I think you had better go and have your manners mended and ironed out,' said Miss Crocus, haughtily.

'With pleasure, when I return to Victoria.'

'When will that be?'

'Probably in a couple of weeks.'

'Um—so soon. Things are generally mixed with mercy in this world,' remarked Naomi, piously.

'Yes, even carriage accidents,' assented Agnes, complacently.

And then they both laughed.

CHAPTER XIII

CONFIDENCES

'Sweet is revenge—especially to women.'—BYRON.

'But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.'—TENNYSON.

TIME passed quickly with the Bates-Posts amongst the rural surroundings of Sapolill. The summer had been an exquisite one, steeped in sunshine, and full of sweet, subtle breezes, that rendered the hottest day bearable as they ran hushing through the pine-tops, or stirred lazily amidst the tall grasses with softly-moving harmonies; consequently life on a typical British Columbian ranche appealed to the English visitors with every seductive charm which the beautiful Okanagan country is capable of putting forth to tempt the stranger to turn settler.

The Chillinghams' house, a large, one-storeyed building of rough-hewn logs, stood near the main road, enclosed by a snake-fence, along which the chipmunks frisked in gayest mood. The vegetation of the neighbourhood was luxuriant, irrigation and an ideal climate having conduced to wonderful results in the gardens, orchards and grain fields of the 'dry-belt.' Behind the house acres of semi-open park

land, dotted with bull pines, and edged by bands of white-stemmed cotton-wood trees, swept away to the foot of the hills down whose grey-green slopes, wine-stained here and there with clumps of warm-hued scrub, numerous tiny streams rushed to find the level of the lake. Mile after mile up the valley stretched the low-lying meadows of adjacent farms, their richly-verdant flats cut by the sharp scythe-sweep of the Mission River.

For two long, glorious months Agnes and Naomi had revelled in the pleasures and freedom of real ranche life, assisting Mrs Chillingham in the poultry-yards, watching the Siwash labourers felling timber, or alternately helping and hindering the Chinese cook in the big summer kitchen (a lean-to consisting of a shingled roof supported upon stout cedar posts), and narrowly escaping from sudden death a dozen times a week in the course of long rides on the cayuse ponies of the district—small, wiry, wily animals, that climbed the mountains like goats, loped like rocking-horses, and occasionally bucked with the utmost fervour.

Bryce Chillingham had welcomed the advent of the girls with undisguised delight. Petticoats, especially pretty ones, were rare in the neighbourhood of Sapolill, and after twenty-four hours of feverish hesitation he finally fell desperately in love with Naomi Crocus. So, by a natural coincidence, did also Mr Anthony Santashe, his college chum, a youth possessed of much money and apparently little mind, who was staying with him for the express purpose of getting some sport.

But alas! and alack! though deer were plentiful enough on the hillsides, and a fairly good shot might with ease bring down a fine buck, or bag several brace of blue and ruffed grouse any morning of his life at sunrise (provided he possessed a miner's license), Tony Santashe never hit anything he aimed at. In vain did a couple of Indians bring him within forty or fifty yards of his game, Tony remained guiltless of blood. Sometimes he would take aim as steadily as his wabbling foresight permitted, and would pull the trigger, only to discover that he had omitted to bring the rifle to full cock; at other times he would forget to extract the old cartridge, or again he would cut loose and send shots tearing through the air in a radius that embraced the highest fir trees. It made no difference. Every bullet was an orphan.

'Halo Kloske! Him no good hunting mowitsh,' Dan the Siwash would mutter contemptuously. 'Anah! t'kope pelton.'

Still, if it was going to take fifteen years to make a hunter of Santashe, at anyrate it only took fifteen minutes to make a first-class lover of him, so far as Miss Crocus was concerned.

Naomi meanwhile had a lovely time. One or other of the infatuated but misguided young men was always at her beck and call, whilst she, encased in an armour of bland indifference, enjoyed their homage, and accepted it with a serene disregard of consequences. Mr and Mrs Bates-Post found the rest and quiet of the place most refreshing after the rush of travel, and experienced a sincere pleasure

in the renewal of their old friendship with the Chillinghams. Mornings employed in wandering about the garden, afternoons devoted to drives, and evenings spent in comprehensive chairs on the cool, wide verandah, such was the daily routine of the elders of the party; but for the young people life meant a series of picnics, fishing trips, rides and boating excursions on the Okanagan Lake.

The Member for Illicilliwaet, whose political duties were at that season particularly light, lingered on in Vernon, and frequently spent a few days at the ranche. His relations with Agnes puzzled Naomi sorely just then. In public they bickered perpetually about trifles, and when Kingsearl refused to give in to her opinions, Agnes said he was cranky, and he replied that she only thought him so because he would not agree with her; but on several occasions Naomi intercepted glances cast by her friend at the politician when the latter was engrossed in a novel, or busy tying a fly, that belied every sarcastic speech her lips had ever uttered. Towards the end of July, Kingsearl received some information which necessitated his immediate departure for the capital. Early the next morning he rode over to Sapolill, and arrived at the farm just in time for luncheon.

'I have come to say good-bye, Mrs Chillingham,' he called out as he tied his bridle to the hitching-post.

'I am sorry to hear that,' replied the old lady, cordially. 'Bryce, put Mr Kingsearl's horse in the stable, and give it a good feed of oats. You will not return to Vernon to-day, surely?' she went on, turning again to her visitor.

'Indeed I must in order to catch the train to the Coast. But I need not start until the evening. There is a full moon, and the road is in excellent condition, so a night ride will be quite pleasant,' concluded the politician in a business-like tone.

'Here is the mail, governor. I drove into the village for it when I took the buckskin to be shod,' said Bryce, as they sat down at the table in the dining-room, a cheerful apartment, panelled in fir, and hung with heads and horns and other sporting trophies. 'Only one letter for you, Mrs Bates-Post,' he continued, handing her a bulky envelope fastened with a huge red seal.

'From dear Professor Panhandle!' exclaimed the good lady, as she tore it open. 'Listen to this, Naomi,' she went on, running her eyes quickly along the lines, 'he is coming out to British Columbia in October for a holiday, and will join us in the Kootenay.'

'That will be very nice, Aunt Miriam,' murmured the girl, politely, but her voice lacked enthusiasm.

'By Jove! Kingsearl, you have a strong supporter in the Victoria *Gazette* to-day. Look at that,' and Mr Chillingham handed the newspaper in question to his guest. 'A column and a half, and all in your defence. Deuced well written too.'

'Signed "Justice,"' commented the politician, thoughtfully, as he glanced at the letter referred to. 'I never saw that signature before.'

'Answers "Mars" very effectually anyway,' resumed his host, throwing down the bomb with fine unconcern.

Kingsearl looked embarrassed, and Agnes deluged her curry with cayenne pepper.

'Who is "Mars"?' inquired Mrs Chillingham, looking up from her correspondence.

'I do not know, my dear,' replied her husband, 'but he has been roasting our political friend here most unmercifully in the *Herald* of late, and now some fellow calling himself "Justice" takes up the cudgels on the other side, and refutes all the charges of "Mars," besides drawing attention to the admirable work done by the Member for Illicilliwaet in the Local House.'

An awkward silence followed this explanation, Agnes and Kingsearl being beyond speech; whilst Naomi maliciously enjoyed the former's discomfiture, and the rest of the party became re-absorbed in their letters, oblivious of any *contretemps*. After luncheon Miss Arbuckle disappeared, nor did she return to bid the politician farewell.

Late in the afternoon Naomi came unexpectedly upon her friend sitting in a distant corner of the pasture, eating squawberries, and industriously reading a Blue-Book upside down. Not that it mattered much.

'Mr Kingsearl has just gone, Agnes.'

'Bother Mr Kingsearl! Have some fruit?'

'And he said—' pursued Miss Crocus, determinately.

'Something hideously truthful, I've no doubt. He generally does.'

'Not this time, however, I think. He merely said he was sorry not to see you to say good-bye.'

'Was that all?' asked Agnes, wincing at the girl's unaccustomed acerbity.

'No, the truthful part came last. He added that he was going to Klondyke on some important political business, and would leave for the North almost immediately.'

Naomi had a purpose in view that day, and she meant to carry it out.

'He is such a clever man, and so implicitly trusted by everyone, that he has been appointed over the heads of several other people to do this special work,' she went on dauntlessly. 'It will be a disagreeable and difficult mission, but Mr Kingsearl is not the man to consider trifles when a case of duty is involved.'

'How I hate this everlasting and garlanded talk of duty!' exclaimed Agnes, fiercely. 'Only duty takes him away now. Only duty made him save our lives on Chinook Mountain. He thinks of nothing but his duty to the country, the people, politics, everyone, everything—but me,' and to her friend's unmitigated astonishment the girl burst into tears. 'Naomi, Naomi, that was what separated us!' she sobbed, as she buried her face in her hands.

Naomi was dumbfounded. The possibility of such a breakdown had not once entered into her calculations. Agnes was usually so strong, so fearless, that this sudden collapse frightened her companion, and killed on her tongue the words of sympathy she would have offered under similar circumstances to a less self-reliant girl.

'Do you really care so much?' was the first lame

question that came to her lips, as Agnes at last threw back her head and looked up with steadfast eyes, which shone clear and true through a mist of weeping.

Miss Arbuckle smiled. It was not a successful smile.

'I love him,' she said simply. 'I have loved him all the time.'

Naomi leaned forward and laid a caressing hand on her friend's knee.

'I don't quite understand, dear,' she said gently. 'Will you, I mean if you care to—I don't want to ask for your confidence—but, Agnes—'

'I have never told anyone about it before. I could not. But things seem changed of late. I know you wonder how, if I care for Mr Kingsearl, I could have written those damaging letters about him last spring, but that is just what I cannot explain to myself. He hurt me and I wanted to make him suffer in return. Can you understand that, Naomi? Of course you cannot, you are far too sweet and tender-hearted, but I just felt that I must be revenged. I believed he had neglected me, and I vowed to repay him with scorn for scorn, yet all the time it tortured me infinitely more than it ever harmed him.'

'But you loved him.' Naomi's tone was incredulous.

'Yes, that was it; I loved him as such women as I am do love. I gave him all, myself, my life; I could have slaved for him, sinned for him, died for him; I could cheerfully have broken every tie, sacrificed every other living soul in this world for his sake, his pleasure or his advancement, but he—he put duty first. Then,

Naomi, I grew jealous, oh ! so bitterly jealous of his public work and of the political interests I did not share. There is a confession of weakness for you ! But somehow I must speak out the truth for once, and you will keep my secret, won't you, dear ?'

'You know that I will, Agnes, most faithfully.'

'Yes, I know, I trust you. The smart of that jealousy drove me mad, I think. A hundred little incidents fed it. Appointments made with me were cancelled because of political work ; his time was not at my disposal on account of the claims of his constituents. Oh ! I cannot begin to tell you all the trifles that aggravated my resentment against what he called his duty. At last the climax came. We started out that day with a twist somehow. I pleaded with him with all my soul. "Because a man has a duty to his country, has he therefore none to a woman ?" I urged. Finally I demanded my sacred right to the life of the man to whom I had given all, and when he still remained firm, I broke our engagement—and my own heart.'

'Poor old girl,' murmured Naomi, giving her hand a squeeze.

'It seemed to me at that time,' went on Agnes with a quiver in her voice, 'that he depreciated my love, so I hid it away. During the following winter I played my part so well that I passed for a cold, sarcastic woman. People were a little afraid of me, I fancy. When I was alone I laughed and cried (it was the same thing), over my outward pose and my real self, and spent my nights making arrows to shoot in the daytime.'

'I do not understand how Mr Kingsearl could ever have let you go.'

'Nor does he, I think,' said Agnes, with a passing sigh. 'He never really understood me at all, that was the whole trouble. He never realised that it was because I loved him too much, not too little, that I refused to share him with others.'

'Forgive me, Agnes, if I say anything to wound you, but why did you not try to make his interests your own?'

'Because I was an idiot, my dear, nothing more or less. Lola Dreux saw it. Do you remember that evening in Victoria when she called my letter in the *Herald* "funny"?' and Agnes shivered as she recalled the odious word. 'Well, that night I saw the truth in all its horrid nakedness.'

'What do you mean?' No wonder Naomi was puzzled.

'Just this, that if Joe and I had only each given in a little, and gone half way to meet one another, we should at this moment be the happiest couple on earth.'

'Why don't you go to him now and—'

'Because I do not care to spend my time looking for any more trouble. Don't you know, Naomi, that even if a man were to forgive his sweetheart for such a fault as mine, he might remind her of it after they were married. I could not stand that. Joe knows that I concocted those abominable letters to injure him, and now he thinks some other anonymous correspondent is writing in the *Gazette* to refute them, and help to reinstate him in the public con-

fidence. Some day he will know better; meanwhile it is amusing.'

'No, it is not, to anybody, and least of all to him. I see what you mean, Agnes; you are "Justice,"' and the faintest shade of irony tinged Naomi's voice.

'Yes.' The beautiful proud head of the speaker was bent low.

'Well, you are the queerest, most contradictory girl I ever knew.'

'Quite so. You see, imagining myself immensely the superior of men did not prevent me from falling abjectly in love with Joe, nor would it prevent me from humiliating myself in the dust at his feet at this very moment if I thought it would do a particle of good, but it wouldn't,' said Agnes with a touch of her old humour. 'I have grown a coward where he is concerned, Naomi. After all a woman can only suffer in silence as atonement for her folly.'

'Not in this case if I can help it,' thought Miss Crocus, but she very wisely kept the reflection to herself.

It was a strange impulse, engendered by months of rack and misery, that had induced Agnes Arbuckle to confide in her friend; and though the confidence fell far short of the actual facts, Naomi had learned sufficient during their conversation to feel sure that if ever the breach was to be healed, it must be done speedily, whilst the softened mood of the proud girl lasted. She need not, however, have feared on this score. Agnes had 'dreed her weird' in the east wind.

Independent and self-confident from childhood, Agnes had never felt the want of moral support, or asked for aught beyond the calm affection of her brother, until she fell in love with Joseph Kingsearl as thoroughly and completely as she did everything else, and craved in return his undivided attention; a strange mistake for a clever girl to make. Alas! that 'man's love is of man's life a thing apart!' Before a month had passed the tiny jar and fret began, she growing more and more exacting, and he more and more determined to make her see reason from a masculine standpoint. Poor foolish fellow!

Had the politician set out on a different track he might have won her round to his way of thinking in a week, for no true woman ever yet resisted an appeal to her love or for her help, but he was blind to the fact that she hated the borderland between them. Then in anger and resentment she warred upon him with her pen. It was an ignoble battle, and totally unworthy of a fine nature, but the jealousy of a strong woman is ever a terrible force, thrusting her out from the pure, unsinning places into the abyss of despair. When at last the bar of her will was bent, and she came to the full knowledge of how causeless and useless had been the conflict, a restitution as sweeping as the revenge that had preceded it seemed to Agnes imperative, but the new, tender phase of her love had made the girl fearful both of herself and of her lover.

The Member for Illicilliwaet did not go to the Klondyke after all. Within a few days of his arrival

at Victoria he received a letter from Naomi Crocus; then for the first time in his life he faltered between two opinions, and committed the only crime in an otherwise blameless political life. He refused the mission and waited in the capital for the return of Agnes Arbuckle.

CHAPTER XIV

NAOMI'S PROMISE

A long, long kiss, a kiss of youth and love.'—BYRON.

ON flew the gladsome days. August had passed away, and September dawned clear and crisp. The frosts at night, and the hot suns by day were turning all the foliage to scarlet and yellow, and clothing the country-side in a garb of flamboyant splendour. The predominance of mauve amongst the late British Columbian wild flowers struck a solitary note of sadness in the happy rhythm of Nature's autumnal song, and everywhere throughout the Okanagan shades of purple and prune, puce, pansy and plum met the eye, and whispered of widowhood, parting and woe.

'The summer dies slowly,' mused Jack Maclyn, as he strolled down the main street of Vernon, his steps bent towards the lake and his thoughts towards Sapolill. He had returned, according to promise, on the R.M.S. *Empress of India*, and lost no time in following up the trail of Naomi Crocus. As good luck would have it one of the first people he met was Bryce Chillingham, who, bound on the perpetual errand of having some horses shod, had driven into

Vernon little expecting to run across an old classmate there. Nothing would satisfy the young rancheman but that Jack should go out to the farm and stay with him. Hospitality in Western Canada is unlimited. That residents 'put up' every passing friend is accepted as a matter of course, that they treat him right royally follows as a natural consequence, and when, as in Maclyn's case, the invitation spells heaven to the invited guest, there is small delay over preliminaries.

'Thanks awfully, old chap. I'll come out to the ranche the first thing in the morning,' said Jack, as grateful a man as ever trod in shoe-leather.

'The road is easy to find, and you can ride the bay mare back. She is a pretty fair mount,' rejoined Bryce. 'I'll take your valise now, there is plenty of room for it in the waggon. I'd like first-rate to stay and go home with you to-morrow, but the governor is in a devil of a hurry for the team; there is so much "logging up" to be done on the new clearing.'

So it was settled, and at sunrise the next day Jack Maclyn was in the saddle, the mare's hoofs beating time to the pulse of hope that throbbed in his veins. A rose-red light, like the flame that burns in the heart of an opal, flooded across the Mission Valley, and kissed away the tears of dawn from the upturned faces of the flowers. Gradually the sun mounted towards the zenith, each touch of its golden warmth bringing to birth a blossom, for autumn is lavish to the last. Then it seemed to Jack that Naomi's face looked up at him from every opening bud and bent down out of the blue hollow of the sky above to bless his path.

'I never thought heaven was so far away before,' he speculated, roused to the idea by the vision of his love.

Mr and Mrs Bates-Post were delighted to see Maclyn again, and the Chillinghams welcomed him with hearty words. Even Agnes accorded him a kindly greeting. Naomi said nothing, but her eyes told more tales than she guessed. What Jack read in their beautiful depths satisfied him at the time of meeting, but as the days passed, and his admiration for the girl strengthened, fed by constant association and companionship, her variableness once more pained and puzzled him. Cold and impulsive by turns, she was at one moment on the point of casting conscience to the winds and accepting him, and the next instant vehemently discouraging the slightest approach to intimacy. More deeply in love with the man than ever, more conscious of all the happiness that lay within her grasp, and of what perfect contentment a life spent with the only person whom she felt could, and did, thoroughly understand her (save only in connection with the great secret of her life), Naomi nevertheless fought hard against his pleading and her own wild longing to say 'Yes' and be at rest in his arms.

Anthony Santashe had laid his heart and fortune at her feet on an average five times a week, but the girl merely laughed at him, and so occupied was she with thoughts of Jack that she scarcely realised how intensely devoted the young Englishman was to her.

'It is a shame to treat him so cavalierly, Naomi,' remonstrated Mrs Bates-Post, as she and the two girls

walked through the woods. 'The poor fellow is deeply attached to you, and you heed him no more than the door-mat.'

'Pouf!' replied her niece, nonchalantly. 'I don't believe Agnes thinks any more of him than I do.'

'That might easily be. I grant you he is the slowest thing that ever happened, but still he is not altogether stupid,' pronounced Agnes, impartially. Then turning to Bryce who had joined them, she continued: 'Tell us what is Mr Santashe's best point.'

'That he is straight as a die,' replied young Chillingham, emphatically, adding with a smile, 'And a wonderful shot too, eh, Miss Arbuckle?'

'Except when he gets buck-fever,' demurred Agnes, quietly.

'Or shoots at a man instead of a bird,' put in Naomi, slyly.

'That was a lucky escape for Kingsearl,' acquiesced Bryce. 'But if a chap will wear a round, fuzzy cap, and sit on the far side of a haystack, what can he expect?'

'No quarter,' laughed Naomi.

'So it seems,' rejoined Agnes.

'Too bad!' retorted Naomi.

'Mr Santashe is always so determined to kill something,' remarked Mrs Bates-Post, cheerfully.

'That was the reason why Mrs Chillingham sent him out into the yard to shoot chickens for dinner yesterday. It safeguarded our lives for the time being at anyrate,' put in Naomi, lightly.

'By Jove! There is Tony now over amongst the

fall wheat, talking to the Siwashes with an English accent,' laughed Bryce.

'Oh, Mrs Bates-Post!' exclaimed the young fellow, excitedly, as soon as he espied the party, 'have you heard the news? There is to be war out in the Transvaal—real war. Everyone was talking of it this morning in the village. If it is true I shall go home at once. Might get a chance to go to the front, you know.'

'And kill a few Boers. You would enjoy that, Mr Cutadash.'

Santashe stared. 'Oh! Ah! yes, of course, you know,' he muttered.

'Are you in earnest, Tony? Is it a fact?' asked Bryce, eagerly, whilst Agnes and Naomi tried to stifle their mirth with indifferent success.

'So they say, or will be precious soon.'

'I would give my head to go and have a crack at them too,' ejaculated Chillingham, with a flash in his eyes. 'I am sure that I could do scout duty all right.'

'There are plenty of good horsemen, and good shots in the West,' rejoined Agnes, warmly, 'and, if the War Office accepts any Canadian troops, British Columbia could easily supply a regiment of picked roughriders.'

'How about rough-writers?' queried Naomi, *sotto voce*, with an untranslatable smile.

Only Agnes caught the words. She made a grimace, and turned to Bryce.

'What a desperate struggle those Boers will have to keep up if they declare war against the Empire,

and what an awakening they will have when they find out how useless it all is,' she said tentatively.

'Dear, dear, so inconvenient for everyone,' sighed Mrs Bates-Post, as if war were a charade. 'And what is it all about, Mr Scattercash?'

'I haven't an idea,' replied Santashe, and he cackled away as if he were the only goose left in the green grass field.

'There I agree with you,' retorted Agnes, sharply, at which Tony joyed afresh, thinking it a compliment.

'Miss Crocus,' said the youth, in a lower tone, as he and Naomi dropped behind the others in the narrow trail, 'will you listen to me now? I may go away soon, and you know how I love you.'

'Oh! no, Mr Santashe. Really—'

'Your kindness is boundless to everyone except me.'

'It is impossible. I am very sorry, but—'

'Do you care for someone else?' he forged on valiantly.

The girl's eyes fell before his ardent gaze.

'Tell me, is that it? If so I won't say another blessed word to vex you,' he went on. There was a chivalrous ring in his tone.

Still Naomi remained silent.

'No one could love you more than I do, Miss Crocus, as perhaps some day I'll have the chance to prove,' continued Tony, an odd mingling of pride and pathos in his voice. 'My life is not worth much, but it is yours if you want it, and if you don't, why, I'll try and get sent to the front, and then if I am potted

I can at least die decently, and in the Queen's uniform.'

Naomi felt touched.

'I will tell you the truth, Mr Santashe,' she said very quietly. 'I do love another man.'

Tony jibbed at this, but he took his trouble standing.

'I didn't know, you know,' he said stupidly, and turning on his heel he left her; nor did he reappear at the ranche until late that night, but spent the rest of the day walking across country, and kicking all the stones and things that came in his way.

The others had meanwhile wandered back to the house, and Naomi, feeling a little forlorn, sat down at the foot of a clump of trees, and curled herself into a dream. Out there in the whist of the woods nothing disturbed the slumberous languor of the afternoon, save a pine-scented breeze, to which the long grasses made deep obeisance, and at whose bidding the cotton-woods turned their silver cheeks to the sun.

'Poor fellow!' mused the girl, vaguely, 'he has a belief in himself no one else seems to share, but he really looked in earnest when he said he would prove his love some day. Ah! well, I do not suppose that the chance to do so will ever come his way, still I am sorry for him, very sorry. Heigh ho! I wonder where Jack is? I have not seen him since luncheon.' And so her thoughts ran on.

Presently the tune of a quaint little song she had many a time sung for Maclyn floated across her memory. First she hummed it softly in closed tones,

then more distinctly, and finally, stirred by an irresistible impulse, Naomi raised herself from the mossy ground and sang in a clear soprano voice :—

'A hundred years from now, dear heart,
We shall not care at all;
It will not matter then a whit
The honey or the gall.
The summer days that we have known
Will all forgotten be and flown;
The garden will be overgrown,
Where now the roses fall.'

There came a catch in her throat, a faint sob, and then the girl went bravely on to the last verse, the courage of a great hope ringing out in the last two lines :—

'A hundred years from now, dear heart,
We'll neither know nor care
What came of all Life's bitterness,
Or followed Love's despair;
Then fill the glasses up again,
And kiss me through the roseleaf rain,
We'll build one castle more in Spain,
And dream one more dream there.'

As the words died away a distant sound caught Naomi's ear. Nearer and nearer it came, and with a throb of joy she recognised those dear footsteps that she would have known amongst a thousand.

Jack never forgot the lovely picture presented by the girl in her white summer frock, with her hat thrown down, her glorious hair ruffled by the wind into a halo of tiny curls, and her graceful figure outlined by the flaming tints of autumn against the soft green background of the wooded hills, as in a sweet voice she poured forth the glad refrain :—

'We'll build one castle more in Spain,
And dream one more dream there.'

It was a triple harmony—colour—music—love.

Then the man pleaded more fervently, and wooed her more gallantly, than he had ever done before; remembering how soon she was to leave Sapolill and that with her departure would vanish his last hope of winning her. A fuller life called to Naomi in his words, but she still repelled him, and battling down a wild desire to surrender fought to keep faith with her conscience. Fiercer grew the struggle, weaker her defences, until with a cry of exceeding bitterness she at length flung herself into his arms and sobbed out,—

'Jack! Jack! There is no one in all the world like you!' Then raising her eyes to his she grew crimson with mingled shame and desperation, but her gaze never faltered. 'I know it is wicked of me, I know that I can never, never marry you, but I do love you, and you only, with all my heart and soul,' she wailed.

'Heart of my heart, is this the end—this?'

'I tried, and tried. Oh! if you only knew how I tried to forget you!' she moaned, staring up at him with dilated pupils.

Then the force of the man's love likewise burst all bounds. He felt he could crush her to death with his arms, and choke her with kisses till she cried for mercy. For a moment he held her fast in a close embrace, then slowly clasping his fingers round her smooth white throat he pushed her firmly back from him and looked into her burning face. Under his

searching gaze the girl shuddered with a chill of reaction. It seemed to her that the star-eyed marguerites stared up at her from the ground, and that the shadows cast by the branches overhead were like fingers interlaced in prayer on behalf of her lost obedience. Was she indeed accused of earth and accursed of heaven? The strangling pain of too great a love bound her tongue. Sternly Jack released her.

'I'm beginning to understand you at last,' he said, and his words fell like dull blows, splintering the silence. 'I will not urge you any more at present, but some day, when the barrier, whatever it is, has been removed, will you say to me: "Jack, I am ready to marry you now." Will you promise me to do this, Naomi?'

'Yes, I promise,' she replied mechanically.

'Thank God for that,' and he sealed the pledge with a kiss. 'Meanwhile I shall just go on loving you, dearest, more faithfully than ever woman was loved before.'

'You mean that, Jack?' with returning animation.

'For all time and eternity, my darling. Can the sun cease shining? Even when we do not see it, we know that it is there behind the clouds. So with us, Naomi, through all the changes and chances of our lives my love will always be waiting for you.'

Jack's voice was thick with restrained passion.

'And you will not tempt me again?'

'I shall do nothing against your wishes, dear heart, as long as you do not forbid me to hope, and,' very tenderly, 'as long as your love is all my very own.

But, whatever happens, dearest, do not let that awful word "never" come between us.'

'Oh! no, I could not bear that either. And, Jack, please do not try to—to kiss me again, it seems so wrong, and—and—it makes me so ashamed—afterwards.'

'I will never willingly be the cause of self-reproach to you, Naomi.' ('If I can help it,' he added grimly to himself.) 'You are my promised sweetheart now, little girl, therefore I owe you reverence.'

'I never promised to be that,' she cried, still quick to take alarm.

'No, darling, but it was your unspoken vow all the same. Never fear, Naomi, I accept your refusal to marry me at present, but I reserve to myself the right to wait, with what patience I may, until you come to me of your own free will.'

These were the last words spoken between them as they walked home. Their silence expressed a pathos that lay too deep for speech.

CHAPTER XV

THE PROFESSOR WRESTLES

'One thought of thee puts all the pomp to flight,
Priests, tapers, temples, swim before my sight.'—POPE.

THE words of Cyr Panhandle were most emphatic. They left not the smallest room for doubt as to his meaning, yet they jarred unpleasantly upon the ears of Naomi Crocus, as she sat deep in conversation with him, on board a steamer whose stern-wheel gaily kicked up the waters of the Arrow Lake, as it churned away down to Nakusp. Since her last sad parting with Jack at Sapolill the girl had brooded perpetually over the question of what her future life must be, and unconsciously influenced by Maclyn's entreaties she had determined to appeal to her guardian on the first opportunity to release her from the hateful bondage of the past.

The professor had joined the Bates-Posts at Revelstoke in order to travel with them through the Kootenay country, and Agnes Arbuckle, feeling in no hurry to return to Victoria, under the impression that Joseph Kingsearl was even then on his way to Klondyke, had also decided to make a tour of the mining camps with her friends.

The luminous haze of a mid-September morning still enveloped the mountains which rose abruptly from the rock-strewn shore, their massive bases clothed with conifers, and their sharp upshooting peaks protruding like splintered bones through the scanty soil-covering. Down in the rifts between these jagged points lay a few tired clouds, for whom there was no rest in the wind-swept sky.

As the sun mounted higher, and the horizon became crisp-etched against the bright blue heavens, innumerable pearl-grey shadows slipped softly away into the crepuscular crevices of the rocks. Over all the scape hung a thin blue veil of mist, through which the face of the lake looked scintillantly up to the sky, as with tender touch the sunbeams consoled the restless bosom of the waters.

To right and left towered the crenulated ranges, partly covered with century-old, high, unbending fir trees, that caught stray golden gleams in their spiky network as the light filtered joyously through worlds of branching greenery still dripping with the dews of dawn—dripping big, liquid, desultory drops on to the supine earth. Sweetly the penetrant smell of virgin soil moistened the air—the pungent smell of bruised leaves and decaying wood—the cool, fragrant smell of pine-cones. It was Nature—quite warm and sweet—quite beautiful—yet it was autumn.

Grey-blue hills, peacock-blue lake, green-blue trees, and overhead a sky blue like the eyes of a doll—true blue, royal blue, the inverted hand of God, pale blue shimmers, dark blue shadows, velvety, misty blue shekinah—blue—blue—blue.

'No, no. It is absolutely impossible,' observed Panhandle, hurriedly.

Naomi was struck, even in the midst of her anxiety, by the sharp ring in the professor's voice. Eagerly she had pleaded with him to remove the embargo against her marriage, hoping to find in his acquiescence some salve for her own conscience, and to gain this end the girl had repeated for his benefit all the arguments previously urged upon her by Jack, but to which she herself had refused to pay any heed. Not one hair's-breadth, however, was her guardian apparently to be moved from his determined stand. At first he listened patiently to her entreaties, but presently a new idea struck him, and he grew more stern.

'What I said to you six years ago, Naomi, I repeat to-day. As long as Christopher Sabel lives you cannot marry.'

'But you say it in a different tone now,' asserted the girl with a flash of intuition.

'Only a little more decidedly, perhaps, because of the thought which I believe underlies your persistence. You are in love, Naomi.' As he uttered the last words the man's face stiffened.

She shrugged her shoulders lightly.

'Tell me, is it not so?' he demanded severely.

The independence of the girl took fire.

'I am not obliged to answer that question, professor.'

Then the iron entered into the soul of the man, for he knew that it was true, and without another word he rose and left her, his long lean limbs strangely out of

control as he paced down the broad deck, and a curious set look sharpening his white features.

In the solitude of his cabin Cyr Panhandle looked matters squarely in the face, and the sight revolted him.

'I am in love with that girl myself,' he groaned. 'Oh! the hideous sin of it all! For years I have taught her it would be a grievous wrong for her to marry whilst that miserable madman lives, and so it would. That is quite true. In my inmost soul I believe it. The sacrament of marriage is inviolable, and the Church makes no allowances for half-spoken vows. Yet now I, who have been her guide and trusted friend through girlhood—I, who have upheld to her the sacredness of the Church's rite, and bound so firmly about her pliable nature those ties which unite her body and soul to the man at whose side she stood before the altar—I love her better than my own salvation.'

The man closed his eyes, and pressed one hand tightly over them, as if to shut out a vision.

'She is so very, very beautiful,' he murmured. 'Ah! what am I thinking of? I cannot marry her. I dare not even breathe my adoration for her. But if she is not for me, by Heaven she shall not belong to any other man! I will chain her to me through her fear of the curse of the Church. She dare not defy that. Love crept so softly into my life that I never until this moment realised its full force, but in her heart affection has awakened suddenly—since she left England. Who can the man be, I wonder? I could kill him with my own hands; yes, even though I

burned in hell for it, and bought his death at the price of my own soul.'

Cyr Panhandle strode up and down the small cabin, devoured by such acute anguish of mind as can only be held at bay by continuous movement. The drops of perspiration ran down his livid face like tears.

'Merciful God!' he gasped, 'forgive me such murderous thoughts!'

There were strange happenings in the professor's soul that day. For some time past, unsuspected by himself, an absorbing love for Naomi had steadily grown up until it had become part of his very being, and now the shock of discovering that she was in love with another man had burst the barriers of a lifetime, and his better nature was swept away in the *maelstrom* of passion.

The feelings of forty-five years, pent up during a scrupulous youth and a high-principled, ascetic manhood, suddenly asserted themselves. He must, he would marry her despite all. That old tie—ah! well—let that be forgotten. It was not a legal one, so they could afford to ignore it altogether—just he and she—his wife. The Church would not approve, but then, what mattered that?

The professor leaned against the wall and clenched his hands until the nails sank deep into his flesh.

'Am I going mad,' he cried, 'mad like poor Sabel? Naomi, Naomi, you have turned my brain and wrung every fibre of my being!' and he flung himself upon his knees beside the berth. 'Remove this awful temptation from me, O Lord,' he prayed in a delirium of torture, 'and in Thy mercy keep me sane!'

Naomi had vaguely felt that in Cyr Panhandle lay her only hope of release. A great natural piety filled her life, and morally enervated by the lassitude of perpetual and unquestioning obedience, she had hitherto followed his advice in all matters connected with the past; but now above everything else there arose a factor stronger than habit, namely, her human nature that thrilled within her and coursed in the quick pulses of her rich young blood. She longed to be free, to shake the heavy clogs of sad remembrance from off her feet, and dance in the sunshine of love with Jack —her own darling Jack.

No ghost of a dead-and-gone attachment appeared to trouble her new and perfected happiness in the devotion of Maclyn. She had never loved Christopher Sabel. In the days long past she had liked him, and had tolerated the curious tie which afterwards bound her to him, merely because she was then too young to feel the gall of a loveless yoke; for what did the girl of barely seventeen summers know of life, its possibilities or its sufferings? Nothing, simply nothing. Like a little innocent child, Naomi had walked calmly along the path pointed out to her, experiencing a certain pleasure at the flatteries of her handsome cousin, and giving implicit obedience to her parents' wishes. After the death of her father and mother, she had accorded to the professor the submission of a dutiful child, and if it was a fact that he, a thoroughly good, religious man, had controlled her within very narrow lines, it was equally true that only from the purest of motives did he forbid to her all thoughts of love and marriage so long as Christopher

Sabel lived. Then came the day when Panhandle saw the first, faint gleam of love, and now a couple of years later the blazing noontide of passion, kindled into flames by the knowledge of a rival, scorched his soul and shrivelled up his moral fibres, leaving him dead to everything save the woman he adored.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PAYNE BLUFF

'The cliff above, the stream below,
And they themselves in dire predicament.'—HOSKINS.

FOR the next few days Naomi avoided being left alone with her guardian. This was not difficult of accomplishment, as all the members of the party were more or less engaged in sightseeing and making expeditions out to the various mines of the silver country. The week they spent in Sandon, the gulch town of the Slocan (so called on account of its peculiar location at the bottom of a deep cleft between two ranges of mountains), was full of interest to the tourists. Never before had they seen such a quaint settlement, consisting as it did of a single street that ran along beside the bed of the river, with a row of houses on either side, the front doors of which opened upon the narrow footway, whilst the second-storey windows were on a level with the ground at the back, the hills rising up steeply from the road. During the summer the sun shone for a few hours each day in Sandon, but in winter time its face was never seen there at all, so narrow and profound was the gulch.

On the last day of their stay in this peculiar place Mr Bates-Post and the professor determined to pay a final visit to the Payne Mine. Mrs Bates-Post, however, utterly declined to accompany them, preferring the verandah and her novel to the dubious joys of mountaineering and a perilous ride in an ore-car, when the thermometer stood at ninety degrees Fahrenheit in the shade. As for the girls, they also declared that it was much too hot a morning for a stiff climb, and could only be induced to accompany the men half way on their expedition.

Having walked together along the railway line as far as the Payne Bluff, the party separated, Mr Bates-Post and Panhandle to commence the ascent up a rough trail which led to the mine, and Agnes and Naomi to stroll on a little farther by themselves. Presently thoughts of luncheon caused the young people to retrace their footsteps towards the hotel. As they again approached the Bluff, a terrific precipice, past which the track runs on alternate rock-spurs and wooden trestles, built out from the face of the cliff over a thousand feet up in the air, the girls looked down between the 'ties' into space, and their brains fairly reeled at the awful chasm that yawned beneath the rails. Suddenly with a spasm of fear Naomi clutched her companion's arm.

'The train!' she gasped.

It was only too true. So engrossed had they been in conversation, and so filled with pleasure by the exquisite, ever-changing vistas that each turn of the road opened up before their enraptured gaze—pictures of pale, feathered greenery and solemn Lincoln-

hued pine trees, with a sparkling stream bubbling over the stones below and a wilderness of starry blossoms covering a foreground where the insect life that thronged the grass mingled its plaintive hum with the music of the breeze at whose piping the leaves twirled and twittered, a merry, madding crew—that they had completely forgotten the hour at which the train was due to pass this particular point on its way from Kaslo to Sandon. In an agony of terror Naomi stood transfixed upon the middle of the long trestle. There was no time in which to reach the opposite end of the bridge before danger must overtake them ; to go back was doubly impossible, and between the track and the cliff no human being could with safety stand as the cars rushed by. Even Agnes, so courageous as a rule, felt her blood turn to ice.

On came the engine, thud, thud, puff, puff—another instant and it would appear round the curve of the Bluff. Like lightning the elder girl seized her friend by the arm and darted across to the edge of the sickening abyss, her wits stung into action by the imminent peril that threatened them.

'Quick, Naomi,' she cried, 'sit down on the guard-rail—close beside me—so—and let your feet hang over the edge—you must—don't be an idiot—it means life or death for both of us. That's right—now hold on tight—shut your eyes.'

Whirr, whirr—roar, click, clash—chay—chay—chay—the train sped on.

A traveller who was sitting on a camp-stool on the rear platform of the car, and peering down between

the spans into the ravine as the train passed the celebrated Bluff, caught sight of two figures crouching at the verge of the trestle, and drew the attention of the conductor to their ghastly predicament. The latter instantly pulled the check-string, thus bringing the engine to a halt, and ran back with all speed to aid the girls. The traveller, who was no other than Anthony Santashe, quickly followed in the man's steps. So did his two companions, Kingsearl and Maclyn.

'By thunder! It's them!' shouted Tony.

The words did not sound particularly lucid, but they sufficed. Before their echo had died away against the hillside the men were at the spot, drawing back Agnes and Naomi from their perilous position and gently loosening the convulsive grip of their fingers upon the wooden beams.

'Narrow escape, by Jove! Miss Crocus. Never thought I'd find you here. So deuced dangerous, and all that,' remarked Tony, cheerfully.

Naomi was half crying with terror. The shock and strain had completely upset her nerves.

'It was dreadful,' she stammered, as she obediently gulped down the stimulant out of Jack's flask.

'Have some too, Miss Arbuckle,' urged Maclyn, proffering the cup as he spoke. 'It will make a new woman of you.'

'No thanks. That would be worse than anything yet!' Agnes laughed, but the laugh ended in a falsetto. She also was unstrung.

'You have got real Western pluck, I see,' remarked Jack, with genuine admiration for the girl who could

joke even while battling against a wild desire to faint. 'Come, Miss Crocus,' he went on, turning to Naomi, 'brace up, it is all over now,' and he gave her a look which did far more to restore that young woman's equanimity than the stiff horn of whisky she had downed at his bidding.

'We had better make a move in the direction of the train as soon as possible,' suggested Kingsearl, quietly. 'They will not wait much longer for us, eh, conductor?'

'I am afraid they cannot, sir,' replied that official, deprecatingly.

'Are you able to walk now, Miss Crocus?' continued the politician, courteously.

'Oh, yes, I think so,' she replied, struggling hard to overcome the dizzy nausea that threatened her senses.

Just then Maclyn drew Naomi's hand deliberately through his arm with a gesture that gave her confidence.

'My brave little sweetheart!' he whispered encouragingly, as they wended their way slowly along the track.

'How did you get here, Jack?' questioned Naomi, suddenly roused to curiosity in spite of her sufferings and fears.

He laughed. 'By a queer turn of the wheel,' he replied. 'Santashe is going to see the Lulu Mine near Roseberry with a view to buying a half-interest in it, and Mr Chillingham asked me to go with him. You see Bryce cannot leave the ranche just at present, now that the harvesting has begun, and the

old man is anxious that Tony should invest his bit of capital to advantage, so I agreed to see the boy safely through the trip and—'

'Jack, that is not the truth.'

'Yes, on my honour it is, part of it. Of course I knew it would mean seeing you again, Naomi, and I could not resist such a chance when Fate threw it openly in my way. I'll be hanged if I could!'

'Oh, Jack!'

'I beg your pardon, darling, but that is the whole truth anyway.'

Meanwhile Kingsearl was finding it rather hard to explain to Agnes the why and the wherefore of his unexpected reappearance up-country, when she supposed him to be on his way to Klondyke. As a matter of fact, no sooner had the politician learned from the Cabinet Minister that Miss Arbuckle was going to tour in the Kootenay with the Bates-Posts than he packed his valise and started for Nelson, where he fell in with Maclyn and Santashe, who had come through the boundary camps from Sapolill, and were going up the Kootenay Lake to Kaslo, and thence on to the Lulu Mine. From them he heard that the Bates-Posts had branched off at Nakusp and gone into the Slocan. That was enough for Kingsearl. The next day saw him pressing hard upon the trail of the woman he loved, in company with a feather-brained youth who was pursuing Dame Fortune and being in his turn pursued by John Horton Maclyn.

Now these circumstances, when stripped of their motive, presented but a bare skeleton of disjointed

events, therefore the politician, though he vainly strove to clothe them in a decent garb of verisimilitude, was totally unable to account satisfactorily to Agnes for his presence at the Payne Bluff on that particular morning, she being still ignorant of Naomi's letter and its consequences.

'I only once rescued a girl from death before,' ruminated Tony, when they were all safely ensconced in the train. 'It was quite easy, you know. We were skating—she fell in—and I called for help. That saved her. Her mother said I was her noble preserver—life preserver she meant, of course, not jam.'

'I expect you were very sweet to *mademoiselle* all the same, eh, Tony?' chuckled Maclyn.

'No. Oh! dear me, no. She was distinctly plain, and I prefer to flirt with pretty girls,' he returned blandly.

'That is a crime you can only atone for in the British Matron's eyes by marrying her ugly daughter,' said Agnes, solemnly.

'Oh! I say. By Jove! I really couldn't do that, you know. She has omelette-coloured hair; her father is a barber—'

'And her mother keeps a little candy-store,' quoted Naomi, maliciously.

'Not quite, but they are distinctly impossible,' remarked Tony with an air of comic disdain.

'In these days of dollars and cents class is largely a matter of clothes—in some people's estimation,' rejoined Agnes, impartially.

Mrs Bates-Post was much alarmed when she heard

of the girls' narrow escape from a horrible death, and mentally thanked her stars that she had not accompanied them on their eventful walk. To master the technique of touring undoubtedly requires a very persistent nature, inspired by the daring spirit of adventure, and these requisites Mrs Bates-Post most assuredly did not possess. Her gratitude to Tony Santashe was however unbounded, for was it not he who had first espied Agnes and Naomi in their terrible predicament and hurried to their rescue?

'You won't catch me ever travelling on a "tie-pass" again, that's certain,' remarked Miss Arbuckle, as she lazed in a capacious chair.

'Nor I, either,' responded Naomi, in a yawnful voice from the depths of her aunt's bed, upon which she had flung herself full length to rest. 'I shall never forget the awful sensation of being suspended out like Mahomet's coffin between heaven and earth, and looking down into space.'

'My poor child, it was enough to have turned your brain,' agreed Mrs Bates-Post, sympathetically.

'Just fancy, it is over one thousand feet from the railway track to the bottom of the valley. Ugh! the very thought of that place makes me shudder!' said her niece with a little *moue* of disgust.

'What a donkey that young cub is,' commented Agnes, *àpropos des bottes*, blissfully ignoring the accepted canons of zoology.

'That is a very ungrateful speech, if you allude to Mr Santashe, my dear,' demurred Mrs Bates-Post, 'considering that he practically saved your life and Naomi's to-day.'

'Far from it!' replied the girl with derision. 'Such may be his private opinion, which he does not hesitate to make public, but all the same it is not mine.'

'Still, matters would have been infinitely worse if the men had not come to our aid when they did,' urged Naomi, impelled to this remonstrance by the recollection of a certain occasion upon which Tony had proved himself chivalrous, and a man.

'In any event he was merely the person on the spot,' replied Agnes, in no wise impressed. 'My experience of the youth is that he acts simply according to the light of nature, which in his case is particularly ill-trimmed; and now that he has got the death-or-glory fever so badly, he is likely to develop into a permanent bore.'

'Pray do not tell him so,' laughed Naomi; 'it would wound his loyal British sensibilities sadly.'

'No fear. He never understood a little witticism like that in all his life. To take a rise out of him is as easy as rolling off a log. For even should he manage for once to catch the point of a flippant remark, he'd be so serious over it that he'd just look hurt, and pose to the soft strains of the National Anthem.'

'I can easily picture Mr Sabretache out in South Africa, with his uniform on,' mused Mrs Bates-Post.

'In which he would look radiantly ridiculous, and the rank and file would treat him as a capital offence,' interrupted Agnes, petulantly. 'But at least he can be easily spared, that is one comfort.'

'I do not agree with you there. I like him, and

somehow I think—' Naomi paused, unable to finish the sentence.

What was it she really did think? Those few earnest words of the love-sick boy—'My life is not worth much, but it is yours if you want it,' had left a deeper impression upon the girl's mind than she cared to acknowledge, and a curious presentiment that some day she would claim their fulfilment bound her to his defence.

'Think as you please, *chère amie*,' laughed Agnes, unabashed, 'but if you pursue your present defensive course we shall soon have you working turn and turn about with Mr Tony's guardian angel.'

'He is always courteous to women,' rejoined Naomi, hardily.

'Yes, in the hope of getting his wings singed.'

Naomi blushed frantically. She knew that she had played the Flame to his Moth but too well.

'And he is a man of honour,' she persisted with energy.

'Of course, my dear. Who accused him of a freckled past? Not I.'

'He has an honest freckled face, and that is better. I daresay he is not a genius—'

'Praised be the stars! Men with brains generally write for obscure journals, and get miserably paid. Oh! Naomi, what a child you are!'

The little town of Paystreak lies on the western shore of the Lower Arrow Lake, and constitutes a striking example of the miraculous mushroom growth of

many British Columbian settlements. So remarkable indeed is the record of this place—it boasted of eighteen hotels, a water system and an electric light plant on the twentieth day of its existence—that the Bates-Posts and their friends (for Maclyn, Santashe and Kingsearl were travelling as far as Rossland with them, the two former bound for Spokane on their return journey to New York *viâ* the Northern Pacific route—the Lulu Mine deal having been arranged to the satisfaction of all concerned—and the latter because he could not tear himself away from the society of Agnes Arbuckle), decided to seize the opportunity offered them by the tying-up of the steamer at the Paystreak wharf, for the purpose of unloading freight, to enjoy a stroll through the primitive town.

Mr and Mrs Bates-Post, accompanied by Agnes, walked over to the railway construction camp, and were soon engrossed in a chat with the foreman of the works, whilst the rest of the party dispersed in various directions; Tony and Naomi bestowing all their attention upon a small bear, which had recently been caught in the mountains and chained up near one of the hotels—a playful, furry little beast that afforded them plenty of amusement. After a time, however, they grew tired of the creature's antics, and wended their way slowly down to the boat, expecting every moment to be joined by the others. Presently Kingsearl and Maclyn came up, breathless after their race back from the shack of a miner, with whom they had been arguing over the value of some ore samples, and at that instant the steamer blew her first

note of warning. Once, twice, thrice the shrill whistle sounded, but not a sign of the Bates-Posts or Agnes was visible.

'Have you seen Aunt Miriam anywhere?' cried Naomi, excitedly, to Professor Panhandle, as he arrived upon the scene from yet another quarter.

'No, not since we landed,' he replied.

'Come, Maclyn,' said Kingsearl with decision, 'there is not a moment to lose; the boat will scarcely wait much longer, so we must hurry up town and try to locate them. Miss Crocus, you had better go on deck with Panhandle and Santashe,' and so saying the politician, followed by Jack, started off at a quick pace to hunt for the missing members of the party. Then they too disappeared from view.

Naomi's heart sank like lead as she obediently boarded the steamer. A numbing sense of approaching evil weighted down her limbs and strung her nerves up to concert pitch; yet so bewildered and upset was she that somehow it never occurred to her to wait on the wharf until the arrival of the others, rather than risk being carried off in the boat without them. As the seconds throbbed into minutes, and the minutes to the number of fifteen passed by into eternity, and still none of her absent friends appeared, the girl leaned over the side of the vessel, straining her eyes upon the road taken by the two men, and praying incoherently with silent lips for the return of at least one of the party. With clenched fists she drummed upon the taffrail, intending to wait until the last moment and then to leave the boat before the gang-plank was withdrawn; but

so intently was she watching for her uncle and aunt that she never noticed the wharf-hands cast off the heavy ropes, until the soft soughing wash of the waves, as the steamer once more started on its way over the then fast darkening waters of the lake, told her that she was being rapidly carried away from all chance of rejoining her relations that night. Then with a faint, startled cry Naomi suddenly realised the full unpleasantness of the situation.

The Bates-Posts, Agnes, Kingsearl and Maclyn were forced to spend the night in Paystreak. In vain the older lady lamented her fate, whilst her husband — good soul that he was — generously blasphemed the clanging of an engine bell which had prevented them from hearing the steamer's whistle. To get away from the place that night was impossible, so they finally made the best of a very bad situation, and went to the nearest hotel for dinner.

'It is most unfortunate, Mr Maclyn, that you and Mr Kingsearl should also have missed the boat through coming to look for us,' said Agnes, as they sat down to their meal.

Jack heartily agreed with her, but on the politician's face no sign of dissatisfaction was traceable.

'I am so thankful that Naomi has the professor to look after her. They will not reach Rossland until midnight, will they, Richard?' questioned Mrs Bates-Post, uneasily.

'Scarcely, my dear. But there is really no need to be anxious on that score. Panhandle will take excellent care of her, and Santashe too, I've no doubt.'

'I forgot that Tony was with them also!' exclaimed Maclyn with an idiotic spasm of jealousy.

'I am glad of it,' said Kingsearl, quietly; 'for his sake, of course,' he added as Agnes looked up sharply from her plate. 'You see our young friend does not like roughing it.'

Jack scowled and muttered 'Puppy!' under his breath.

'But bred of a fine stock,' argued Kingsearl, in a low tone, answering the Englishman's angry ejaculation. 'Good points, and no treacherous tricks.'

Maclyn stared.

'How the deuce do you know that?' he asked, unheard by the others, who were talking merrily amongst themselves.

'Colonial instinct, my dear fellow,' laughed the politician. 'Take my word for it, Miss Crocus is perfectly safe with Anthony Santashe.'

And she was.

CHAPTER XVII

LOVE TEACHES

'There is a higher law than the constitution.'—SEWARD.

'Truth crushed to earth shall rise again ;
The eternal years of God are hers ;
But evil, wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies among his worshippers.'—BRYANT.

'AGNES !'

'Joe !'

The moon blushed—it was a harvest moon—and the merry eyes of the stars twinkled with sympathy. Down on the beach the lake and the rocks were playing at lovers. Ruffled into foam-tipped combers by a passing night-wind the waves ran to woo the shore, pleading for affection in rippling tones, and then falling sadly back into the trough, repelled by the stern front of the stones. Again and yet again they rose, and reached out long, wet arms to encircle the naked outlines of the boulders, only to meet with a cold rebuff. As the breeze strengthened the strife increased, kissing and hissing, the waters importuned, but the shore refused to yield, until with a passionate rush the waves swept far up the beach, drew a few long, deep breaths, then slowly, softly clasped the

object of their desire in a close embrace—and conquered.

In Paystreak lights flared from the windows of every bar-room, where the poker chips changed hands almost as rapidly as the whisky ran down the throats of the players. Occasionally snatches of a song with a 'La-la-la' chorus, a fierce oath, or the raucous accents of rough men who quarrel in their cups floated down to Kingsearl and Agnes on the beach. Not a sound of it all, however, did they hear, so loudly was the music of love pealing in their ears, neither did they pay any heed to their surroundings, as they stood blinded by the love-light in each other's eyes.

'But your career, my darling,' said the politician, when the infinite joys of 'making-up' had flooded out the corners of their hearts. 'How about that?'

'I don't want one now, Joe. No really happy woman ever does. It is only of your success that I shall think in the future.'

He smiled, and tenderly kissed her upturned face.

'Such flattery is doubly sweet from your lips, dearest, for I fancy there was a time when you thought otherwise.'

'You are right. Long ago I used to imagine that the only thing worth having in this world was fame. My sole ambition was to become a popular writer, and through that means to wield a power over men and women. How I used to work in those days, and how I prayed to succeed! It was all very real to me then; but did you suppose that because I indulged in politics and journalism I could not fall in love?'

'I only know that I wooed you, won you, and lost

you, my darling, but that now I shall hold you in my heart throughout all the years.' There was a latent caress in the tone.

'Why, even from the very first moment that I met you I believe I transferred all my energies from literature to love,' she said, as if pondering over a settled question.

A puzzled look crossed the man's face.

'It is true, Joe, I did,' she continued, answering his expression. 'That time—when — when—well, you know, when I lapsed into newspaperdom again, that was only an interlude born of jealousy.'

'I know this, my sweet, that your talents are far too brilliant to remain hidden long. You have the certainty of a great future before you, when the world recognises what love showed me long ago.'

'You mean—'

'That you have true genius.'

'And I know that my heart is too full of love for any dreams of greatness,' whispered Agnes, softly. 'I am afraid no woman can ever become a really able politician,' she continued with a sigh of resignation, 'for she always sees the good and bad too plainly—on both sides.'

Kingsearl laughed.

'I believe that is so. Women generally put principle before party.'

'It is very humiliating, but also equally proven, that we invariably sit upon the fence until the best man in the world helps us down on the right side.'

'What do you imply, dearest?'

'That, in point of fact, a girl who is truly in love

has no politics at all—except her husband's. No matter what she has professed before, she climbs serenely down the steps of his arguments, and sees, hears and believes in nothing but—him.'

'Oh! Mars! Mars! How are the mighty fallen!'

'Don't, Joe.' Agnes buried her face in his coat sleeve.

'Those letters were—'

'Abominable.'

'No. Undoubtedly very clever,' he continued imperturbably, 'though I could not understand them. Do you know, Agnes,' and here his tone grew quizzical, 'that they were quite the cleverest things of the kind I have ever read, except those written by "Justice." I must admit that his were even cleverer still.'

The girl kept her eyes tightly hidden against his shoulder.

'If that fellow goes on as he has begun, he may yet end by becoming editor of the London *Times*,' speculated Kingsearl.

'But he won't. I only long now to throw away my pen, and upset the inkbottle for ever.'

'You!'

'Yes, I—I who wrote them all.' Agnes flung up her head and looked straight into Kingsearl's face, as she thus openly fastened her colours to the mast-head with the long rusty nail of pride.

'You—you called me a piece of political *bric-à-brac*, and smashed me up, and then in the same breath mended me together again, and set me up

on such a top-lofty pedestal that no one could even detect the flaws?' he exclaimed incredulously.

'That was just the eternal woman of it,' she hazarded naïvely.

'My heart's love!'

'When a politician is good he is perfect, like you, dear, but when he is bad—well, he is the limit. That is why I had to abuse the man you were not and—'

'Love the man I am. I never thought of that.'

'Of course not, because you are a man yourself, and so you do not comprehend that though a woman will sacrifice herself utterly for love's sake, she will never, never understand that a man can sacrifice love for her sake. To each the renunciation is like the hurt of the cross—an agony and a glory.'

'So it must always be, dear heart. You cannot alter human nature.'

'Yet both the woman's sacrifice of acceptance, and the man's sacrifice of refusal can only be worked out through the same agony of spirit. In one case she accepts maybe poverty and misery for his sake, in another, for her sake, he refuses to buy his joy at the cost of her suffering.'

'How thankful we should be that with us, dear, it is different. The triumph of love is ours—complete.

Agnes pressed closer to his side.

'I shall remember it in my prayers all the rest of my days,' she said soberly. 'But, somehow, it is my very content that reminds me now of those who know only the sorrow of this world, those who have never entered hand-in-hand into that kingdom, sweet with

the breath of the blossoms of happiness, who have never said, "We are young, we love."'

'What sacrifices indeed are theirs,' said Kingsearl, looking grave.

'And—and those others,' continued Agnes, softly. 'Do you remember Blanche Hazelton and Paul Dunbar? She would have accepted the world's scorn; for his sake endured the wreck, and wrath, and fierce undoing. He refused to allow the woman he loved to offer up to his manhood that terrible sacrifice of the soul's life, and in that refusal himself consummated the supreme sacrifice of renunciation.'

'It was the self-martyrdom of a noble man and the salvation of a much-tried woman. But such sad and serious thoughts are surely not for us, nor that piteous story for this hour, dearest. Rather let me remember only that I love you, and that you are mine. Only that I can look into your eyes—that I can hear your voice—can feel the clasp of your fingers—can see you—hold you—kiss you. No words can describe those joys. God sees my heart—it is too full for language—it is all—all—love.'

'Oh, Joe, it frightens me to think that perhaps my sins against you have been of the kind which men forgive but can never forget.'

'Perfect love can forgive all. Do not ever let such ideas trouble you, darling.'

'I never meant it, not really and truly, not in my heart,' she faltered.

'So I sometimes fancied, and that thought grew in my mind like the grass between the flagstones.

Now a new life is opening before us, Agnes, in which we can work together, I for my constituency, you at your desk, and we'll help one another up the ladder without any fear of misunderstandings.'

'Or jealousy.'

'Please God, I'll never again give you cause for such. I was a blundering fool before, but I understand things better now.'

'So do I. Only don't ask me to write again. I couldn't. It would remind me of those horrid letters. Let me drop the old life for good and all.'

'On the contrary, I am going to insist on a promise that after we are married you will continue to devote your splendid energies to literature, so that all the world may recognise you as the clever girl I knew you to be. It will make a proud man of me, dear.'

'But, Joe—'

'No "buts," my sweet. Your determination to succeed as a writer is a noble one, and its fulfilment will some day bring pleasure to thousands of human beings. Let our motto henceforward, both for work and play, be "Together."'

'Very well,' with a bewitching smile; 'I promise on one condition.'

'Which is?'

'That you will join the new party I am going to form.'

A shade of consternation contracted the man's features. What was this strange, ambitious girl premeditating now?

'It is politic, not political,' she said with an arch

intonation, adding softly, 'And the membership will be limited.'

'To whom?'

'You and me.'

'Has it a platform?' inquired Kingsearl, struggling with the humour of the suggestion.

'Of course it has,' she assented gaily. 'And a very practical structure too, built on a single plank not hitherto endorsed by the Member for Illicilliwaet.'

'And that is?'

'What for want of better English we will call—Ideal Reciprocity.'

'I'll join,' he cried enthusiastically, 'so seal my induction with your lips, dear heart.'

They kissed—and in the glory of that embrace they reached the boundary of a perfect world.

Poor Mrs Bates-Post did not spend a very happy time in Paystreak. When it came down to a little real 'roughing it,' she found things trying; and yellow soap, hay pillows and canned beef palled somewhat upon her fastidious taste after a first trial. The comfortable Colonial ways of Vancouver, and their counterfeit in a new construction camp, were, she discovered, two very different matters, and only the near prospect of getting on to Rossland enabled her to endure the inevitable with a decent show of fortitude.

'Have some celery, my dear,' suggested Mr Bates-Post, genially, towards the close of their last meal at Grigg's Saloon.

'No, thank you, Richard. I actually saw a China-

man scrubbing it in a bucket of water with an old hairbrush this morning.'

Her husband laughed.

'Don't look so horrified, Miriam,' he said unctuously. 'Chinamen never use hairbrushes on themselves, you know.'

But even this assurance failed to console the good lady, and she persisted in dining off eggs—not new-laid, or even fresh ones, be it noted, but just eggs.

'An egg is such a safe thing,' she urged, 'not like a nasty tinned food, or Chinese mixture.'

'I see you are only eating the yolk,' commented Kingsearl. 'Perhaps it is not a very nice one. Will you try another?'

Mrs Bates-Post glanced at him in mild surprise.

'Of course I only eat the yolk,' she replied blandly; 'that is the bird, and therefore most nourishing. I never eat the white, that is only the feathers, and could not do me any good.'

This view of the time-honoured accessory of the British breakfast table struck the politician as unusual, so he merely murmured politely, 'Ah! yes. Just so,' as he finished his coffee.

The respect and ready courtesy with which the men belonging to the railway gangs, and the miners, treated the ladies struck the Englishmen very forcibly. To Agnes it was an old story; she had frequently experienced it before, and was in point of fact rather amused than otherwise over the timidity of Mrs Bates-Post, to whom a Siwash was still a possible savage, and a prospector a dangerous desperado. All desire to study the natives at close quarters had eva-

porated at her first experience of a real proximity. To view camp life from the safe shelter of a good hotel was one thing, to put up at Grigg's Saloon amongst the riff-raff of a new mining settlement was quite another, and in spite of the unquestionable novelty of the situation, Miriam Bates-Post was not at all sorry when the time came for her to shake the dust of Paystreak from off her shoes.

CHAPTER XVIII

FORCEFUL ARGUMENTS

'There was a laughing devil in his sneer.'—BYRON.

NAOMI felt ill at ease. Why, she herself could scarcely have explained; but as the boat slipped away from the wharf an indefinable fear crept over her and thrilled her with almost physical pain. For a space she continued to lean against the taffrail, with her eyes fixed upon the receding shore, as if she would fain compel there the reassuring sight of her relatives. But no sign of their familiar faces was visible when distance at length blotted out the camp, and sighing a trifle forlornly the girl resolved to seek her cabin. Turning abruptly she came face to face with Cyr Panhandle.

'There will be an hour before twilight sets in, and at least another two before we reach Robson,' he said, and it struck Naomi that he spoke with unusual fluency. 'Will you come and sit aft? I have a rug here, and some cushions.'

All the rebellious animosity with which the girl had regarded the professor ever since their conversation on the way down to Nakusp, when he had so

peremptorily reiterated his prohibition against her marriage, and she had for the first time combated his authority, rose up afresh in her mind, and she was on the point of refusing his invitation when a second thought supervened and checked the words on her tongue.

Suppose she were to try once more to induce her guardian to absolve her from her obligation to Christopher Sabel? Inclination urged the attempt, but a sense of repugnance to the man made her stammer over accepting his suggestion. What was this strange intuition that sickened her? Some silly prejudice, no doubt, the natural consequence of their disagreement, she concluded. But here Naomi was wrong. Nature has implanted in most created beings a subtle instinct that warns them of the approach of danger, and when that instinct is awakened in a woman's heart, let her beware. It is invariably aroused for the purpose of her self-protection.

They found the upper deck deserted, and there in a snug corner, behind a boat swung from the davits, Panhandle established her, and placed himself in a position where he could drink in the beauty of this girl whose lovable personality was fast driving him to his own destruction. Each look in her eyes, every turn of her head played upon the sensitive strings of his heart; he was fascinated to thraldom, and passion tossed him to and fro like a shuttlecock.

'How beautiful you are, Naomi!' The words seemed wrung from him.

A little *frisson* of apprehension chilled the girl. She was in no mood for flattery.

'What nonsense!' she exclaimed, struggling to speak lightly. 'But now seriously I want to talk to you again about that old tie. Are you really sure I am bound by it—for always?'

A smothered imprecation sprang to the professor's lips.

'Bound to Christopher Sabel? No! Bound not to marry anyone else? No! You shall never be bound by anything, or to anybody except me!'

'What are you saying?' she cried, terrified at his ardent manner and wild words.

'That I love you, Naomi, love you desperately, madly if you will, and that I must have you—do you hear me?—have you, and hold you as my wife.'

'Never!' she gasped, as she rose to her feet, now thoroughly alarmed.

'Sit still,' said Panhandle, thrusting her firmly down again. 'The time for concealment is past. You shall listen to me now.'

'Stop. I will not hear another word.'

'You must. Naomi, why can you not love me? I want you so much. Most men fritter away their affections on a dozen different women, but I have never cared for anyone except you, and because you are the love of my later-day life, I—'

'Oh! Hush! hush! What are you thinking of, professor? I have always looked up to you as a good man, and obeyed the commands you laid upon my life because I believed implicitly in your honesty. And now you propose this horrible thing. You tell me in one breath that I am free, and in the next that I must marry you—you, who have kept me bound body and

soul for so many years in the toils of that dreadful tragedy—you dare to make love to me?'

'Yes, because I adore you, and intend to marry you.'

The look in his sombre eyes frightened Naomi. She recoiled involuntarily, and put out her hands as if to ward off their glance. This act, small as it was, tempted him, and he seized her wrist and kissed it fiercely.

'Let me plead with you so — with your hand clasped in mine. Oh! girl, girl, have a little pity.' It was the starved nature of the man crying out.

'Are you having any on me?' she demanded through her set teeth.

'Yes, the pity that is akin to love. Heaven knows I really was the man you thought me once. I swear it. I taught you only what I then believed to be the truth, namely, that in the sight of the Church you were bound to Christopher Sabel. Now the spell of your presence is upon my life, and there is nothing else in the whole universe for me but your sweet face and form—nothing. To win you I would brave hell itself.'

The words came with a rapid strength that was irresistible, as he strove to master her.

'Love me, Naomi. Say that you will, and thus come between me and the curse of the Almighty. I have sinned. Well, so be it. You can redeem back my soul—the love of one pure woman can do that—and so cheat the devil.'

'The devil, perhaps, but not God. You forbade

me marriage on the authority of His Church, and that command remains. I shall obey it.'

'And how about Jack Maclyn? You start. You did not think that I knew your secret. Oh! I have watched you—I have seen it all. You love the man, curse him!'

'As he loves me, and as we both hope for heaven.' Naomi's face shone with a glow like the ecstasy on the features of some martyred saint. 'But I shall not marry him,' she added slowly.

'Then why not marry me? Let us cut off the social gyves that bind our actions to conventionality. I will give up my professorship, you renounce your vows to Sabel, and then we shall be happy, and the world can munch its *caviare* of calumny till it dies of the surfeit, for aught I care.'

Right and wrong seemed distractingly mixed up to Naomi, and her spirit was rapidly breaking down under the strain of this extraordinary interview. The traditions of a lifetime were suddenly washed away, leaving her to steer rudderless through the sea of topsy-turvydom. One ray of light alone shone out across the chaos—Jack. She would prove herself worthy of him, no matter what happened, and strengthened by the memory of his unfailing love, she spoke to the man beside her in a calm, even voice.

'I am just beginning to understand you,' she said very quietly.

'I have not tried to conceal or excuse my fall.'

'No, because it would have been useless. That you have blasted your own honour is yours to answer

for, you shall not touch mine. To the command you laid upon me when you were an honest man' (oh! the ironical cruelty of youth!) 'I shall continue to yield absolute obedience, for I believe it is a just one, though I have rebelled against it of late. I shall not marry Jack, but I shall love him so long as we both may live. Death may separate us for a little while, but in the Great Hereafter we shall meet and love again through all eternity, for immortal love is the heritage of our own immortal souls.'

As Panhandle looked at her transfigured face, he realised how near and yet how far away she was from him. It had been a profitless struggle for the professor. Naomi's faith in him shattered, her disgust and contempt aroused, his influence over her at an end, what remained? A beholding of Paradise from a place of torment. 'Man has only his little life with which to front eternity.' Was this true? If so, his doom was sealed.

'Naomi, think things over again, I implore you,' he begged. 'I love you, and that is the rightest right on earth; you cannot deny it; you cannot control passion by a religious formula or break love on the wheel of an ascetic creed.' Great beads of sweat pearled out on the professor's forehead as he leaned forward with burning eyes. 'When the dam bursts the flood must follow. All my days I have crushed down human nature with an iron hand, repressing all emotions and living austerely the chill existence of ignorance; now the bonds are broken, and I love only life lived for love, whilst you, in all the arrogance of

that knowledge which stands midway betwixt innocence and experience—'

'Dinner is ready in the saloon, sir,' said the steward, respectfully, looking over the top of the skylight.

So they toppled from pathos to bathos, but the end was not yet.

At Robson the travellers left the steamer and went to Trail, proceeding thence up the switch-back railway line to Rossland. During the journey Naomi kept close to Santashe's side, much to the surreptitious delight of that individual, for though, like Cyr Panhandle, he had guessed that she loved Maclyn, he was still young and generous enough to feel glad that the object of his boyish affections should turn to him for help when so unexpectedly deserted by her rightful protectors.

On arriving at the Kokanee Hotel, Panhandle, who had maintained an almost unbroken silence both in the train and in the cab, asked Tony to take the girl into the parlour, while he wrote their names in the book, and ordered the baggage to be sent up to their respective rooms.

'Certainly, my dear sir, but don't stick my name down. I sha'n't stay here. Mean to put up with Danvers, old pal of mine, don't you know, we were college pudding chums together, and all that sort of thing, by Jove!'

'All right,' replied the professor, and to himself he muttered, 'The luck is with me.' Then he walked over to the office desk and registered.

Presently Santashe bade Naomi good-bye, for it was nearing midnight, and she went upstairs to her

room, but not to sleep. Hour after hour the girl lay in the dark, half-maddened by the power of solitude to torture her, and longing fervently for the moment when her uncle and aunt would rejoin her.

Every syllable spoken by Cyr Panhandle came back to her recollection with painful distinction.

'He must be ill or going mad,' she thought, and she shuddered as this last possibility crossed her mind. 'He could not be so wicked as to urge me to marry him when he has so often assured me that it would be a sin, and when I do not even care for him, unless he were irresponsible for his words. I wish I could forget them,' and in an earnest endeavour to do so Naomi called to her aid old memories of the days when she had trusted her guardian implicitly and never found him wanting. In vain. Across the pictures of that happy past there floated the vision of an ascetic face convulsed with implacable love, the square jaw, indicative of power and tenacity, contorted by a mirthless smile.

Next morning, not wishing to encounter the professor again until the arrival of her friends, Naomi ordered some breakfast to be sent upstairs, and then settled herself with a novel out on the private verandah which opened off her room, ignorant of the fact that a French window likewise led on to it from the main corridor of the hotel.

Scarcely had she turned a couple of pages when a low exclamation caused her to look up, and she saw Panhandle step over the sill and carefully close the glass doors behind him.

'Good morning, Naomi,' he said as he approached her.

'Good morning,' she replied coldly.

'I am sorry to intrude upon you in this unceremonious manner, but necessity demands it.'

'Why?' queried the girl, briefly.

'Because, as I told you yesterday, I love you, and I intend to marry you—and that at once.'

In the clear light of day this statement sounded less overwhelming than it had done the evening before.

'And I repeat that I shall never agree to any such thing,' she replied with some show of spirit, 'so please let that end the matter.'

'Naomi, Naomi, think how utterly worthless my life will be to me without you!' The very fact that he was braving an anger which he believed threatened him with eternal punishment increased his resolution to succeed.

'At the present moment I merely think that it shows a great want of tact on your part to pursue a disagreeable subject, when there are so many other topics—'

'Silence, girl. Would you tempt me to take you in my arms, and press my lips upon yours, in order to convince you of the strength of my determination?'

The man's voice was discordant.

'I am not afraid of you,' she said with scorn.

'Do you know that I would rather kill you, and then shoot myself, than see you the wife of Jack Maclyn.'

The words clinked in his parched throat.

'You dare not harm me,' she replied haughtily.

'Because you are a woman ringed round with a petticoat which you imagine protects you, eh?'

The sneer set the girl wondering whether there were any words permitted to women which would express the unutterable loathing she felt at that moment for the man at her side.

'I am not going to hurt one hair of your beautiful head, never fear,' he went on with penetrating emphasis, 'but you must marry me at once, all the same.'

'Must?'

'Yes, must. Have you seen our names in the hotel register? No? "Professor Cyr Panhandle and wife." Yes, that is all. No "Miss Crocus" —just "and wife."'

'You infamous wretch!' The girl sprang to her feet. 'How dared you do it?' she demanded in concentrated rage.

'To force your consent. You see I am truthful. There is no help for it now, so you may as well give in. You are compromised before the world, your name linked with mine, your fair fame threatened—'

'My God! what are you saying? Are you man or fiend to torture me like this? It is not human. Oh, Jack, Jack, why don't you come to me?'

'It is useless to call for your lover,' sneered the professor, his eyes blazing with a vindictive light born of jealousy and absinthe. 'Do you suppose he would marry you now?'

'Do you really think that I could doubt him?' The girl's tone was superb. 'Oh! it cannot surely

be as bad as you say. It was a mistake. It can be altered—explained.'

Panhandle smiled unpleasantly.

'Impossible. Dozens of people will have seen the entry by now, and then look at the evidence against you. We have stayed here alone together since last night, our rooms adjoin, we are registered as man and wife. Who would believe your story in the face of such damning testimony? I tried at first to win you, Naomi, by fair means, but you have forced me to adopt this course, and now I tell you that there is only one way out of the difficulty, only one way by which to save your reputation; we must be married privately to-day, otherwise I cannot protect you from—the devil!'

The last imprecation was uttered in a startled whisper.

'No, only me,' and Anthony Santashe walked out on to the verandah.

The young Englishman glanced keenly at Panhandle, whose perturbation was painfully evident, and then looked straight into Naomi's eyes. She too showed traces of the recent struggle.

'I just came to see how you were, Miss Crocus,' he said quietly.

'Umph!' muttered the professor, under his breath, as he turned away.

'Not going, I hope?' remarked Tony, serenely.

'No,' replied the other, and his lips shut upon the syllable like a steel trap.

'Glad I turned up; you seem out of sorts this morning.'

Panhandle made no answer. He was racking his brains for a device to get rid of Santashe. With much irritation and many matches he lighted a cigar.

'Take care how you throw those beastly sulphur abominations around,' said Tony, coolly. 'It's dangerous. Last night, after you had gone to bed, I nearly set fire to the place with my cigarette, I did, by Jove! Dropped it on the hotel register, don't you know, and burnt a big hole in the pages. The clerk was ripping. You see he had not had time to read the names of the passengers who came in from Trail.'

Naomi, who was steadying herself against the railing, and trying to regain her grip on things, flashed round at these words.

'You burnt part of the book! Tell me quickly,' she cried. 'Oh! Mr Santashe, say you did, say you did!'

'Yes, unfortunately I destroyed the entries of the last few days. But it is all right, Miss Crocus,' and he took the girl's shaking hands in his; 'I entered Panhandle's, yours and my own names quite correctly on a fresh page.' Then, as if in answer to her puzzled look, he added: 'You see I changed my plans at the last moment, and spent the night in the hotel after all.'

With a sob in her throat Naomi bent swiftly down and kissed the kindly hands that held hers.

'How good you are!' she said. There was a passionate warmth of commendation in the tone,

and as she looked into Tony's honest eyes she knew that he had saved her.

'Please go to the parlour and wait for me there,' he said firmly. 'I will come presently and take you out for a walk.'

The girl obeyed in silence, not daring even to cast a glance at Cyr Panhandle as she passed him.

'One moment, sir,' broke in the young Englishman, as the professor prepared to follow Naomi from the verandah. 'I want a few words with you.'

'Kindly be quick about it then, as I wish to rejoin Miss Crocus.'

'Sorry, but you will do no such thing. I overheard your last speech to her as I came through the window just now, and let me tell you, Panhandle, you are a poisonous blackguard.'

'Allow me to pass, sir. I will not stay here another instant to listen to such insulting language.'

'I think you will, however, just so long as I damned please. Look here, I spotted your little game of bluff last night, and now I am going to "call you." You are a blooming scoundrel to trade on the fears of a defenceless girl who believes herself compromised by your scurrilous forgery, but you are a Cambridge Don, and out of respect for your position I'll not expose your villainy this time, if you swear to leave her alone in the future. But you must clear out of British Columbia at once, and not stand upon the order of your going either. An imaginary cablegram calling you home will answer the purpose. Is it agreed?'

'No, it is not. I decline to be dictated to by a

young fool like you, and in any case,' with an audacious assumption of indifference, 'you have not one jot of evidence to prove what you allege against me. So now what are you going to do?'

Tony made no reply, but the next moment he had caught the professor a smart blow between the eyes, and sent him reeling to the ground.

'One must use force to ill-conditioned brutes,' he said.

'You shall owe me redress for this assault,' spluttered Panhandle, as he sat up and mopped his bleeding nose.

'Yelp away like a whipped hound, but it will keep you pretty busy collecting the debt, though, no doubt, you won't scruple to use foul means to get even with me.'

'In this case the end will justify the means,' responded the professor with a feeble attempt at dignity.

'Unless they are too mean for anything—like yourself,' retorted Tony.

Panhandle's eyes flashed red with hate.

'Physical violence is no argument,' he said.

'But it is good medicine for curs,' replied Santashe, and then he proceeded to give the professor such a tongue-thrashing as the latter had never before experienced.

'They should cage you up with the mauve monkeys and the purple pussy cats in a dime museum, don't you know,' he concluded top-loftily. 'You are far too big a freak to be safely let loose on any decent community, you are, by Jove!'

CHAPTER XIX

SPECKLED LIES—AND OTHERS

'The lie circumstantial, and the lie direct.'—SHAKESPEARE.

ACHING in every limb, and with his heart full of baffled rage, Cyr Panhandle slunk away from the verandah. Half crazed by jealousy, and fiercely vindictive against Santashe for having so successfully foiled his schemes, he felt in no mood for further parleying just then, but sullenly sought in seclusion to remedy the damages inflicted upon his personal appearance. During the remaining hours of that, to him, well-nigh interminable day, the professor went over all the events of the past week with painful precision, neither blaming nor excusing his actions, but simply reviewing the rapid phases of his fall, and hugging to himself the conviction that he would yet succeed in winning Naomi to wife.

Like the heavy ground-swell of a resistless sea, the impulses of the man's nature, once set in motion, were as incapable of check as those mighty rollers that surge into shore in sure and even succession after a storm. He had deliberately set his feet to tread the downward path; there could be no going back to grace for him now, except through the medium of

Naomi's saving purity; and yet in a measure he was to be pitied, this sinning man, for his self-abandonment to passion had already begun to devastate his life in like manner as the poison of the absinthe (to which he had of late become an abject slave) was sapping at his mental strength and racking to pieces brain and will-power in the general wreck of his character.

According to promise Anthony Santashe rejoined Naomi in the hotel parlour as soon as he had seen the professor's coat tails disappear through the doorway; and then thinking that a little fresh air would be a capital stimulus, he took her out to see the town. As they strolled along Columbia Avenue, where a prosperous tide of humanity, chiefly of the male sex, ebbed and flowed with ceaseless energy, the girl was gradually drawn out of her frightened mood to observe the numerous types that formed the cosmopolitan population of Kootenay's largest mining camp. Prospectors just off to the hills with their packs bound upon their backs; well-to-do brokers hob-nobbing with vividly imaginative 'special correspondents,' and other men whose kodaks and field-glasses proclaimed them animated marks of interrogation, and tourists. Old and young, Britishers and Americans, shrewd speculators and affable company directors, every nation, rank and temperament were represented in that motley throng.

At first Naomi talked so fast from sheer nervousness that her words fairly tumbled over each other, but presently a genuine interest in her novel surroundings triumphed, and she fell into easy argument

with Tony, who rose nobly to the occasion, and held up his end of the conversation in excellent style.

Gilded by the gay sunshine the town looked quite picturesque that morning. A mass of shacks and frame buildings, pretty shingled houses, and more pretentious stores and offices flung against the steep sides of a horseshoe of mountains, the upper slopes of which were covered with gold mines whose names had already become famous, and whose dividends had enriched thousands—a locality of precipitous streets and great enterprises—the place of confirmation of the immense future that lies before the mining industry of the West—the banner camp of Kootenay—such was Rossland.

To the English-bred girl the general atmosphere of a Western settlement was peculiarly attractive. There is no room for pettiness in the minds of people who live so near to Nature's heart; with them meanness is unknown, and as long as they have the wherewithal to buy a dinner you are entirely welcome to share it, even though they themselves may not know where their next meal is coming from.

Suddenly in the midst of an excited discussion about the relative value of the Le Roi and the Centre Star mines, Naomi turned to Santashe and asked abruptly,—

'What did he say to you?'

'Not much,' replied Tony, sagaciously, catching the drift of her question. 'We only exchanged a few remarks.'

'Then what did you do?' she persisted eagerly.

'Nothing at all; I just knocked him down.'

'O—h!' gasped the girl, and her eyes grew as big as saucers. 'Thank you,' she murmured doubtfully.

'You need not. Any fellow in my place would have done the same. But, Miss Crocus, let us keep silence about it to the others when they arrive, shall we? Panhandle is leaving for the Old Country immediately, and I promised him, for the sake of his position, to hold my tongue—that is, if he goes at once. The beggar who could insult you is beyond the pale of forgiveness, and I'd like to break every blessed bone in his body, but—'

'Not to attempt a brave act sometimes requires gallantry,' interrupted Naomi, softly. 'I understand you, Mr Santashe. It is to save me from the faintest breath of scandal that you wish to conceal the professor's actions. Oh, you are good!'

Tony actually blushed.

'I've let him off easily this time, but if he lingers about here, or ever causes you the slightest annoyance again, I'll give him an assisted passage to England with the toe of my boot, by Jove, I will!'

'Surely he must be ill, for he was always so kind to me in past years, and he really is a very good man. I know it. A thousand things have proved it to me since my father and mother died.'

'Has bats in his belfry, more likely,' speculated Santashe. 'Must have,' he continued with conviction, 'to treat you as he did. But we'll drop the subject now, Miss Crocus, if you please, and him too, and no one will ever be any the wiser.'

To this arrangement the girl tacitly consented, as she was still far too much upset by the strange

occurrences of the past twenty-four hours to plan any definite course of action for herself; but at the same time she resolved that some day she would tell Jack the whole story from beginning to end, for the truth was being slowly but surely borne in upon her that had she only summoned up sufficient courage to confess everything to him, some months before in Vancouver, this last terrible fiasco would never have happened. Yes, she would tell Jack all about Christopher Sabel, and about the queer behaviour of Cyr Panhandle, and then he should judge what it was best for her to do. First, however, she must wait until her guardian went away, and even then she must make Jack promise never to breathe a word of the professor's dastardly conduct to Mr or Mrs Bates-Post. The knowledge would distress and shock them so dreadfully. The matter should remain a secret between Tony, herself and Jack.

It was characteristic of the girl that she never for an instant doubted the effect that such a communication might have upon her lover, or saw any necessity for supporting testimony. Even had Santashe not been able to corroborate her version of the affair, she would still have told Maclyn the facts in a simple, straightforward manner, and expected him to believe her implicitly. In this she was right. He would have done so.

In spite of the anguish and turmoil of mind caused her by the professor, Naomi clung fast to the new anchor of her life. The faith of her childhood was destroyed, the belief of long years lay shattered into fragments, her best friend had proved false to himself

and to her, yet the trust born of love never faltered; Jack would understand, she knew, understand all and comfort her.

Such a handshaking and rejoicing there was when the belated travellers reached Rossland that night, and Naomi felt as if she would cry for very joy when she saw her aunt's kindly face and heard the deliciously reassuring taffeta swish in Agnes's walk as they entered the hotel.

In answer to Mrs Bates-Post's inquiries for the professor, Tony volunteered the information that Panhandle had received an urgent cablegram calling him back to England, and was at that moment engaged in packing his valise preparatory to an early start on the following morning; but scarcely were the words out of his mouth when the subject of them entered the dining-room, where the tourists were partaking of some supper, and having courteously greeted the new arrivals, proceeded to inform them that, owing to unforeseen circumstances, he was obliged to postpone his departure for another day. As he made this announcement he threw a direct challenge at Santashe with his eyes, to which the latter made a slight movement of assent, thinking that surely such a short delay could make no material difference, and that at all events Naomi must be protected from the horrors of a public scene. Thus Panhandle won his way, and the girl, whose every charm formed a new mesh in the golden network that had ensnared his heart, was destined in her turn to destroy the web of evil intent which he began swiftly to weave around Jack Maclyn.

While Mr and Mrs Bates-Post protested vehemently

against the departure of the professor, Naomi rapturously congratulated Agnes and Kingsearl on their engagement, and everyone talked and laughed at once, and nobody thought of anything beyond the interest of the moment—just then. As the chatter buzzed louder, and a brisk fusilade of chaff was fired off, Mrs Bates-Post put her hands up to her ears, exclaiming,—

'For goodness sake, girls, stop talking in a circle; it makes my head go round,' and then she peremptorily ordered them both off to bed.

Late as the hour was the professor drew Maclyn into the smoking-room for a cigar—and a reason of his own. He felt that the time left to him was all too short in which to accomplish his purpose, and therefore he determined that the first nail should be driven home before they slept that night. After a little bleached conversation on indifferent topics, Panhandle, with dexterous insinuation, and a few ambiguous phrases, gave his companion to understand that the fact of his going on unchaperoned to Rossland with Naomi had been a more embarrassing circumstance than appeared on the surface. To the presence of Santashe he made no allusion, and Jack became so wrought up by the professor's innuendoes that he quite forgot even the existence of the young Britisher. Step by step Panhandle led him on from curiosity to astonishment, until at length it dawned upon his bewildered mind that the man's hints could have but one foundation.

'What the deuce are you driving at?' he queried irritably, for he was very tired, and the world seemed turning upside down.

The professor blew a cloud of smoke into the air, and smiled sardonically.

'Do you actually mean to imply that you and Miss Crocus have been privately engaged for months past?' went on Jack, unable longer to control his excitement.

'When affairs are still of a confidential character one naturally hesitates to speak of them openly, but—well—suppose you are right, and suppose we are engaged, what then?'

As the professor leaned forward with a baleful yet triumphant look on his face, the reality of the suggestion boxed Maclyn's ears.

'Then I think that you are the luckiest chap on earth,' said Jack, and in his tone there rang the echo of a great agony. The man's face grew sickly-hued beneath its coat of sunburn as he rose and added in a level voice, 'I'm going to turn in now. Good-night, Panhandle.'

So this was the reason of it all. This was the explanation of Naomi's odd behaviour on many different occasions, and of her repeated avowals of love and mysterious refusals to marry him. She had been engaged all the while, thought Maclyn. Oh! if she had only told him so before! He would infinitely rather have heard it from her lips than from those of the professor. It was hard to lose her, and yet she had sworn she loved only him—things did not agree somehow. Could Panhandle possess some hold over her? Was he forcing her to keep an old promise against her will? Jack lay awake half the night trying to put the puzzle together, but the pieces

would not fit into place. With the dawn came wiser counsel. He resolved to go down to Trail for the day and argue matters out by himself, and then, when he had in a measure mastered that awful gripping sense of loss, he would return and ask Naomi for the truth. The professor's words had been like a sword thrust, and Maclyn knew that no human anodyne could ever assuage the heartache that threatened to strain his powers beyond the point of endurance; nor was he ashamed to yield to his lost love what no other sorrow could have wrung from him—the dry, choking sobs of a strong man's weakness.

CHAPTER XX

AH!

'Chaos of thought and passion, all confus'd.'—POPE.

'WHAT shall we do with ourselves to-day?' asked Agnes in a voice that vibrated with energy, as the party were finishing breakfast. 'Mr Maclyn has already deserted us in the most abominable manner, and gone off to Trail, which is particularly unkind, considering that he leaves for New York in a couple of days; so I vote we plan some excursion or other at once, before any more of the men folk decamp.'

'I'm game for anything, barring being left behind,' remarked Tony, cheerfully.

'So am I,' assented Naomi, 'though I do not believe it was ever a case of being "alone in a great city" with you for more than an hour, Mr Santashe, especially in a mining camp,' she added naïvely.

'How you do snap a fellow up,' he protested. 'But it is a ripping morning for a jaunt, so I suggest we visit one of the mines.'

'Would you like to go through the "Golden Buck"? It is quite the finest and best developed property in Rossland,' said Kingsearl.

'That would be lovely,' exclaimed Agnes with alacrity. 'And you will both come too, won't you, dear Mr and Mrs Bates-Post?'

To this proposal the elders agreed, and the party was soon afoot along the side of Red Mountain, where the sand lay deep upon the path.

Cyr Panhandle alone refused to join the expedition, pleading as an excuse letters that must be written, but in reality because he wished to follow up the advantage he had gained over Jack Maclyn, as soon as the latter returned from Trail.

On arriving at the 'Golden Buck,' the travellers were courteously received by the manager, who, however, looked a trifle dubious when told that the ladies wished to go through the mine.

'It is very dirty and wet in there,' he demurred.

'Indeed we shall not mind that at all,' urged Agnes, boldly, 'and my friends, who have never been down in a "skip" before, are so anxious to see the whole thing.'

'As you please,' he replied resignedly, 'but you must first permit me to provide you with some mackintoshes to protect your clothes.'

This he did, and when they were fully equipped, Naomi declared that they looked more like a band of brigands than a party of peaceable tourists bent on sightseeing. Arrayed in tarpaulin coats and rubber boots, with old cloth caps pulled well down over their heads, and carrying lighted candles in their hands, they wound their way into No. 1 tunnel, led by the foreman, and rear-guarded by the reluctant manager.

'I feel like a glorified tramp,' remarked Tony, as he inadvertently dropped a stream of grease down Agnes's neck.

'You look like one,' she said. The grease was hot.

'So much the better. It is useless to make up like a mountebank, and then let your fatal beauty shine through,' he remarked imperturbably.

If Agnes had not exercised a professional command over her feelings at that moment she would assuredly have boxed his ears. As it was she merely retorted,—

'It is equally of no use to be first-rate in your appearance and third-rate in your opinions.'

Down the shaft and along the drifts went the little procession, pausing here in a niche to let an ore-car run by, and there to watch some of the men at work on a machine drill.

'It is just like a perpetual Posterland!' exclaimed Naomi, and the weird outlines assumed by the party in the flickering light of the candles were certainly grotesque enough to warrant her idea.

Everything in the mine was so new and wonderful to the strangers that their interest never flagged, and even Mrs Bates-Post forgot to be nervous. Fifteen hundred feet into the heart of the hill they penetrated, trudging valiantly on through mud and slime, and laughing merrily as the water dropped on to them from the roof of the timbered drifts, and the candle grease fell thickly down their clothes.

'I should not like to be one of the miners,' said Mrs Bates-Post, unctuously. 'They must take a very

narrow view of things, cramped up in these dark tunnels.'

'Strange to say, a little experience of life in a mine tends to widen the horizon of most people,' replied Kingsearl, quietly.

'And one can learn many a good lesson from the men,' put in Agnes. 'Look how they will risk their lives to save a comrade, and will help him, when ill, to pull through his trouble; or, if he is out of work, will keep him going until he can get another billet.'

'Still I suppose you have your quota of scallawags out here, just as we have at home,' remarked Tony.

'Certainly, there are a few rascals in the West,' assented Agnes, agreeably; 'but then, you see, there are also plenty of good men to do the horsewhipping. Have you got them at home too?'

'Yes,' came the vehement corroboration from Naomi's lips, 'we have,' and she flashed a glance of gratitude at Santashe.

Forth they came at length from the deep recesses of the earth, unscathed and ravenously hungry, to find the manager waiting to take them over to his house for lunch.

'I hope you saw all you wanted to in the "Golden Buck," Mrs Bates-Post?' he said politely, as he helped to take off her rubber coat.

'I have seen a great deal more on my clothes since I came out of it,' she answered, somewhat aggrieved.

'You cannot expect to indulge in the coquetry of cleanliness in a gold mine, dear Aunt Miriam,' said Naomi, gently.

'I don't see why we did not take candles and go

and sit in the cellar,' remarked Tony, reflectively; 'it would have been just as dark, and much dryer.'

Naomi laughed, but Agnes swooped down on her pet foe.

'Do not try so hard to be funny,' she said with a cultivated scowl. 'You should economise your talents.'

'Saving costs so much more than spending sometimes,' he replied airily.

'Joe, please make Mr Santashe be quiet,' she begged.

And Joe did. He handed Tony some bannocks to eat.

When they returned to the Kokanee Hotel, the first thing which greeted them was the startling news that a young Englishman who had ridden down to Trail that morning had been thrown from his horse and killed near the smelter. No one for an instant doubted but that the man in question was Maclyn, and Naomi, half-frantic with grief, threw prudence to the winds and poured out into her aunt's astonished ears the whole story of her love for Jack, and her panic at the outrageous behaviour of Professor Panhandle.

'I loved him so much, and now he is dead,' she wailed, clinging to the elder woman's neck. 'Oh, Jack, Jack,' she moaned, and all the horrified Mrs Bates-Post could do was to murmur, 'Poor child, poor child,' as her thoughts jumped spasmodically from Maclyn's shocking death to Cyr Panhandle's shocking conduct.

When the girl, with many tears, told them how chivalrous Tony had been, Agnes exclaimed with honest admiration, 'Oh, that I might shake him warmly by the hand!' and Mrs Bates-Post wanted to go and do it on the spot, but as Naomi just then relapsed into bitter weeping the project had to be temporarily abandoned.

And in the end it was all a mistake. Some stranger lay stiff and stark at the foot of the smelter hill, and Jack rode back to Rossland blissfully unconscious of the hubbub the report of his death had created. This placed Naomi in a very unenviable position. She had wildly made confession to her aunt and Agnes on the spur of the moment, a thing she dared not do to Jack while the professor remained in British Columbia.

The day had not been wasted by Maclyn. During the course of the long ride he had thoroughly threshed out the subject of his love for Naomi, and of hers for him, in the face of her supposed private engagement to Panhandle, and had come to the conclusion that a greater dishonour awaited the girl in marriage with the professor, for whom she entertained not a particle of affection, than in breaking off old ties and giving herself to the man she really loved. Therefore he resolved to make a final appeal to her sense of justice and then abide by the outcome, let it be what it might.

At first they naturally talked at cross-purposes, but when Naomi discovered that Cyr Panhandle had deliberately misled Jack, she grew very angry, and indignantly denied the existence of any engagement

between them, or that she had ever regarded the professor except in the light of a friend. Then Maclyn pleaded his own cause with redoubled ardour, and felt as mystified as before when the girl still refused to marry him.

'I cannot, Jack, indeed, I cannot.'

Was that a sob ?

'Oh ! don't, don't, Naomi. Is it not enough that my heart is breaking ? I do not want yours to break too.'

'Forgive me, I am still upset. I did not believe it was in me to suffer so much on account of anyone as I suffered to-day when I thought that you were killed.'

'And you do not love the professor ?'

'I swear it. Some day I will convince you—to-night I dare not—but this I do say, I never was, and never shall be, engaged to my guardian, for I love you and you only with all my soul. Jack, I have something very, very serious to tell you. I—I—have made up my mind at last to confess the real reason why I will not marry you. My uncle and aunt know it, so do a few people in England, and so does Dr Dufft—'

'Hallam Dufft !' exclaimed Maclyn, bewildered, as a jealous remembrance of the episode on the Hotel Vancouver verandah, when Naomi had betrayed so much agitation at the sight of the superintendent, recurred to his mind.

'Yes, he—he was very kind about it,' she blundered on. 'I scarcely know how to begin the story. Will you understand it, I wonder, and love me just the same when you have heard—'

'So it was not your neck that was dislocated this time, Maclyn,' broke in the voice of the professor.

At these words Jack and Naomi started, so softly had the man approached the end of the garden where they sat.

'No, by good luck. Who was the other poor fellow?'

'That has not yet been ascertained, I believe,' rejoined Panhandle, as he sat down on the rustic bench and took out his pipe. He had overheard the girl's last words, and determined, if possible, to prevent further confidences, at anyrate until after his departure on the morrow. His plan to separate the lovers by means of the fiction of his engagement to Naomi had evidently failed, but he could not be certain whether Jack had as yet discovered its falsity; still *tête-à-têtes* were dangerous to his safety, and so he stayed, joining occasionally in the desultory talk that followed his appearance, and paying little heed to its drift until the girl rose to go indoors, and Maclyn, detaining her for a moment, asked pointedly,—

'Will you come out for a walk with me to-morrow morning, Miss Crocus? We can go over to the Grubstake Mine and finish our interrupted conversation on the way.'

'Thank you, I shall be very glad to do so,' she replied, and both question and answer bore a double meaning that was not lost on Cyr Panhandle. 'Good-night and good-bye,' she continued coldly, addressing the professor. 'As you leave by the early train I

shall not see you again,' and she turned into the hotel, followed by Jack.

The professor understood. Before he was a hundred miles on his journey from Rossland these two would have arrived at a complete comprehension of their relations to each other, and his perfidy towards both of them. At all hazards this must be prevented. But how? His motives were becoming confused. Reckless love for Naomi, a thirst for revenge against Maclyn, a fierce desire to shield himself from the consequences of his treachery and lies, all these consumed him as with a fire. He could not discriminate between them. He could not think coherently.

In moments of supreme agitation the mind acts with violent velocity, and as Panhandle paced up and down the path a dozen plans to foil the union of this couple, who loved one another so truly, whirled through his head. The very notion of that walk to the Grubstake Mine drove him to frenzy. He gone — they together — explanations — vows exchanged — perhaps kisses—death and devils, it should not be! If only Jack could be got rid of—ah!—

The professor reeled against one of the trees and something snapped in his brain as a sheet of flame swept across his vision. Drunk with one terrible scarlet idea he staggered to his room and locked the door.

'The chances are good — in a mine,' he muttered, as the unthinkable horror choked all other emotions.

When later on Jack sought for the professor to—as he explained—'have it out with him about that trumped-up engagement story,' he could not find him; nor did he ever again see the face of Cyr Panhandle.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GRUBSTAKE MINE

'Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your teacher.'—WORDSWORTH.

'Profaned the God-given strength, and marred the lofty line.'—SCOTT.

THE morning was exquisite. The wild aromatic smell of the fir woods came wafted along on the breeze that tenderly swept the haze from the rock-faces of the mountains, and above the changes and chances of a few fleecy clouds the sky stretched from horizon to horizon a clear, vaulted dome of blue. The horseshoe bend of hills lay exposed to the full strength of the sun whose rays penetrated into each nook and cranny between the boulders, and saturated the scrub-grown slopes with a mellow radiance, painting every bush rich red and yellow.

Autumn had arrived at last in the Kootenay camps, though not as she goes to other places, dressed in sere brown garments to hide her shivering nakedness, but decked out in flamboyant scarlet and gold-broidered cloak, and the glamour of her sun-steeped splendour lay upon all the countryside.

Up the rough path which led from the town to the Grubstake Mine went Jack Maclyn, with his feet on

the ground and his head in the skies; but Naomi felt depressed that day, and clung persistently to the realities of life.

'Do not let us talk of serious subjects just yet,' she pleaded, as they walked along the trail.

'All right, my darling, anything you say goes, and if you would rather not begin that story until we are on our way home, well, that is all right too. But you will not shirk it altogether to-day, will you, Naomi?'

'No, Jack, I promise to tell you the whole thing before we return.'

'Then I am quite content.'

'Did Professor Panhandle really go away this morning?' inquired the girl, anxiously.

'Yes, that was one of the first questions I asked at the hotel office when I came down to breakfast. Last night I searched everywhere for him, after you had gone in; I wanted to have an explanation from the man of that lie he insinuated to me about his engagement to you, but he had gone to bed, so I was obliged to leave matters alone, and as he went this morning—I hope out of our lives for ever—perhaps it was just as well that I did not find him. There would certainly have been a row had we met.'

'Then I am very thankful that you did not,' rejoined Naomi, with a shudder.

'You are not yourself to-day. What is the matter, dearest? You must cheer up, or I shall have to take you in my arms and kiss away those unshed tears, right here under the open sky.'

The girl gave a wan little smile as she replied,—

'Don't laugh, Jack, but I feel as if something were hanging over my head—some terrible disaster. I cannot explain it, but it frightens me, and I dread lest this presentiment should have been sent to me as a warning. The world is so full of trouble,' with a sigh.

'Little goose!' said Maclyn, taking her hand and pausing to look reassuringly into her face with his honest eyes. 'Come, rouse yourself, my love, it is not like you to be so fanciful; and do not abuse the patient old world that goes toiling on its own way, and makes it possible for you to go yours.'

'If only mine had been a better one.'

'We are none of us perfection, sweetheart, but you come nearer to it than anyone I ever knew.'

'I am afraid that you only think me an angel because I am a woman,' she whispered shyly.

'You have promised to tell me the chief incidents of your life; in anticipation let me tell you my story. It is full of errors, dear one, and some of its pages are blotted with the follies that most men commit sooner or later, but they shall all be opened for your inspection, the good and the bad alike, for the woman I would make my wife must marry me with her eyes wide open to all my faults, so that no shadows out of the past may ever have power to arise and darken the happiness of our life together.'

Then Jack confided to her some of those things which a man does not usually tell a woman until he has to, and then wonders why she heeds them so little, forgetting that in her estimation time only

counts from the moment when she first met him.

'I wish you were not going to England on Tuesday,' she said presently.

'And yet a month ago you were ready to bid me an eternal good-bye.'

'Somehow I am frightened now. I do not know why, or of what, but I am sure some dreadful calamity is going to happen to us.'

'Nonsense, darling. Let us sit down here in the shade of the trees, and I will try to reason you out of this ridiculous prophetic mood.'

The girl shook her head.

'It is no use, Jack,' she argued. 'Women never see reason very plainly at any time, and when they are nervous and anxious, as I am to-day, they simply cannot see it at all. Just talk to me as you used to during those long rambles of ours in Stanley Park at Vancouver, talk of anything you like, only keep me from thinking my own thoughts,' and Naomi threw herself down on the moss with a weary gesture.

'I will, if I can, for you are far too much given to self-analysis, dearest. It is unwise to be constantly dissecting one's own motives and feelings. Look at the flowers, as they grow in the open ; they are lovely, but pick one to pieces and you spoil its form, colour, scent, all that once made it perfect. Do you remember Tennyson's lines :—

'"Live pure, speak true, follow the king."

I think they contain the whole duty of man.'

Rarely had the girl found him in this humour before. Like most men he kept the emotional side of his character snugly tucked out of sight, yet a greater worshipper of Nature than Jack Maclyn never breathed.

A short silence followed the man's last words, then he continued earnestly,—

'Out on a wild hillside like this, with God's own celestial weather around us, our petty annoyances shrink and fade when brought into contact with the calm, strong majesty of Nature. Look about you, Naomi; do you see any nervous strain in the life that pulses in the green growth of tree or grass? Do the flowers indulge in obscure motives, or the mountains worry their stately old heads because they cannot quite see into heaven? Why, the very idea of such things would be absurd; yet here are you, the dearest little girl in the world, distressing your pretty self over problems that are best left alone.'

She moved a trifle closer to her lover, and stole one hand into his in mute acquiescence.

'What you and I and everyone else ought to do,' he went on, 'is to waste less energy haggling over useless introspection, and spend more time in looking at exquisite scenery, listening to good music, and studying the artistic in all things, and all things artistic. Believe me there is more subtle pleasure in the tints on a purpling moor at sunset, more stimulation in the sight of the storm-racked sea giving battle to a rock-bound shore, than can be found in any moral laboratory. No one can estimate the moulding influence that a single hour spent with

Nature may exercise upon the human mind, but all can recognise the marvellous beauty of the source from which such inspiration is derived. Only cultivate a heart at leisure from the cares of life, bringing yourself into perfect harmony with earth and sky, and you will feel in wonderful sympathy with all mankind. But there, I have preached long enough,' he wound up abruptly, 'and we must travel on if we want to arrive at the mine before noon.'

'Jack, you have done me a world of good,' said Naomi, brightly. 'The feeling of dread has quite passed away, and if trouble comes now I am sure that I can face it—and win.'

'There speaks my own brave sweetheart,' he returned fondly, and they pursued their way up the trail, chatting merrily meanwhile.

The Grubstake Mine was situated on a ledge near the top of a steep declivity, and from the mouth of the main tunnel a tramway, eight thousand feet long, had been built down to the railway siding. Small trucks, attached to a wire cable, ran perpetually on these tracks, carrying the ore from the upper to the lower ore-bins, and the miners often rode in them as a quick means of getting up and down to their work. Visitors to the place also frequently availed themselves of this easy method of ascending and descending the mountain, of course always at their own risk, though owing to the power of the brake the danger of an accident was slight.

After spending an interesting hour examining the mine, Maclyn and Naomi were about to leave the

place, when the girl seized her lover violently by the arm, and whispered in terrified accents,—

'Look quickly, there is Professor Panhandle.'

Jack glanced hastily in the direction indicated, but could see no one.

'You are dreaming, dearest.'

'I am not. I saw him quite plainly. His head came up out of that "stope-hole," and then disappeared again.'

Maclyn strode along to the spot and looked through the opening. A ladder led away into inky blackness.

'If you really saw anyone it must have been a miner. However, I will go down to satisfy you, if you like.'

'No! No! For goodness sake don't do that. Don't leave me alone. I know he is here somewhere, and his face wore such a vindictive expression.'

Jack made no reply, but led the girl out of the tunnel into the full glare of the sunshine. Then he laughed and said cheerily,—

'Remember your promise. No more silly fears today. I know what will clear all the cobwebs out of your brain. We can ride down the hill in one of the ore-trucks. It is just like tobogganing, and the dash and excitement will brace you up splendidly.'

'Is it quite safe?'

'Now do you for one moment suppose that I would suggest the thing if it were not so?'

'N—o,' doubtfully, 'but it looks dreadfully steep.'

'You need not be afraid, lady,' said a workman who was standing near them. 'This here tramway has

been running regular for nigh on a year, and never a spill yet.'

'Shall I go down alone first, and come up again, and then you will see that it is all right?' proposed Jack.

'Very well. I can watch you from here, and when you return we will take the next trip together. Is that a bargain?' she asked, regaining a little of her customary gaiety.

'Yes; but before I start I want you to come across to the manager's house with me. I am going to ask him to give you a cup of tea; you need it, dear, you look so white, and we cannot possibly get back to the hotel in time for luncheon.'

To this proposal Naomi readily agreed, and together they turned to leave the head of the tramway, first telling the man in charge that they would return shortly.

'The cars ain't been running yet this morning,' said the latter, 'but I'll be setting them going soon after my dinner hour.'

'That will suit us splendidly,' replied Jack. 'We shall be back again presently.'

Refreshed by the substantial meal which the manager with true Western hospitality pressed upon them, Maclyn and Naomi felt in excellent spirits when they once more reached the brink of the hill, and walked into the shed built there as a shelter for the wheels round which the cable revolved. This shack was completely open on one side, so that the man who controlled the cable could see the whole line, and watch the movements of the trucks.

'Be you interested in mining, sir?' inquired the labourer.

'Yes, slightly,' replied Jack. 'This looks rather an ingenious system you have here of working the tramway.'

'Pretty good, sir. Just them two wheels and a steel wire rope, and then the brake is mighty powerful, and that is the principal business. The gentleman as came here when you was over at the manager's a while ago, he seemed greatly took with it too.'

'What gentleman?' questioned Naomi, sharply.

'I don't rightly know, miss. Looked most like a sky-pilot, I reckon. Jumping Jimminy! there goes the signal to turn her loose,' he exclaimed, as an electric tinkle rang near them.

'Then I'll be off,' said Jack, before the girl could utter the words of fresh alarm that sprang to her lips at the workman's description of his visitor. 'You stay here until I come up.'

'I'll look after the lady, never fear, sir,' said the man, and with this assurance Maclyn vaulted lightly into the foremost car of the bunch, which had been left empty to accommodate him.

Slowly, with a dip and a bound, the line of trucks slipped over the brow of the hill and sped down the steep incline. As Naomi turned to watch its descent, a door at the back of the shed was flung violently open, and a man, who was no other than Cyr Panhandle, rushed in and struck the labourer a sickening blow over the head with a drill, which sent the latter crashing to the ground like a felled tree.

'Good Heavens! What are you doing?' she cried in horrified accents.

'Going to send your lover to perdition,' replied the professor, with a fiendish leer. 'See,' he went on in rising tones, as he dragged the terrified girl to the edge of the bank, 'there he goes down the tramway. Do you know what will happen when he reaches the centre switch? No, of course you don't. I shall put the brake on full and then the car he is in will become detached from the rest by the force of the sudden jerk, and rush to the bottom, where he will be shot into the ore-bins and crushed to death.'

'Impossible!' gasped the girl. 'The cable is too strong.'

'Quite so. But while you and your lover were away I loosened the nut that holds the ring-bolt through which the coupling is fastened that joins the first truck to the bunch,' said the professor with malicious directness. 'I overheard Maclyn's plans, and turned them to my own account. He cannot escape me now.'

Too stricken to cry out, Naomi stood motionless as dire despair shot through her heart, then, gathering her senses together with a supreme effort, she sprang across the prostrate form of the miner and placed herself between Panhandle and the brake.

'You shall not touch it,' she said in a hoarse whisper, and faced him defiantly, her arms held behind her to guard the lever.

'We'll see about that.' The professor cast a look over his shoulder. The cars had run past the switch; there was not a second to lose.

'Let go at once,' he shouted.

'Never,' she hissed through her clenched teeth.

Infuriated at this attempt to frustrate his purpose, the man lost all command of himself, and grasping her by the shoulders swung her violently to one side; but the girl's hands were locked tightly around the handle of the brake, and she clung fast to it, her interlaced fingers cracking at the joints from the terrific strain.

Lashed to frenzy by this determined resistance, the professor seized hold of Naomi's wrists and fiercely wrenched them backwards till the agony made her scream. The truck was already nearing the bottom of the incline. Another moment and it would be too late to send it loose. Still she clung to the lever with almost superhuman strength, struggling to save Jack's life with muscles that were twisted to the last point of endurance; but as Panhandle's grip upon her arms tightened, the torture became unendurable.

'In the name of pity, stop!' she shrieked. 'I will do anything—anything you ask of me—only spare him!'

The echo of her anguished appeal went shivering up the side of the hill, as with a final effort the man flung her to the ground, and seizing hold of the brake pulled it hard over. At the violent check the cars came to a standstill, and the loosened nut on the first one flew off, the bolt slipped out, and instantly the truck in which Maclyn sat ran down the line at a tremendous pace.

'Look, there he goes—your precious lover—nothing can save him now. Ha, ha, ha!' and the professor

yelled with maniacal laughter, seeming to gloat over the impending catastrophe.

Choking with fear-sickness, Naomi raised herself on her elbow.

'Fiend!—murderer!' she gasped, but no human ear heard the accusing cry. Cyr Panhandle had fled.

With infinite pain the girl crawled to the edge of the bank, and clinging to an old tree stump stared at the gruesome sight below. On whirled the car at an accelerating speed. Jack was surely travelling to a hideous death. Naomi closed her eyes, dizzy at the awful danger. When she opened them the truck was a mere speck in the distance.

'Merciful God! save him,' she moaned, and sank fainting to the earth.

An instant later the car tore down the last bit of the hill, and just as it reached the up-curved rails at the end of the tramway, it suddenly jumped the track, with the result that Maclyn was shot out into a clump of bushes and bracken many yards away from the line, where he lay stunned and bruised, but otherwise unhurt; for the answer to Naomi's prayer came in the form of the tamarack branches and saplings whose powerful resistance broke his fall, which had been already mitigated by the bravery of the girl in delaying the execution of Panhandle's villainous plot, at the cost of her own intense suffering. To his sweetheart Jack primarily owed his life, for had she not been plucky enough to cling on to the brake, and thereby hinder the professor, her lover must inevitably have been killed.

CHAPTER XXII

AGNES MAKES A DISCOVERY

'The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.'
SHAKESPEARE.

'Pluck out the heart of the mystery.'—SHAKESPEARE.

'How is she now?'

The words as spoken by Jack Maclyn contained a mixture of anxiety and love impossible to describe.

'A shade better, and sleeping quietly under the influence of an opiate. The doctor has just left her; he anticipates no further change until to-morrow, then —then we shall know the worst,' replied Mrs Bates-Post, brokenly.

'Or the best,' urged Jack.

'Please God!' ejaculated the good lady, softly.

Many hours had elapsed since the accident occurred at the Grubstake Mine, and already long evening shadows fell across the street and crept up the western wall of the hotel, as the sun sank toward the horizon. When first attracted to the tramway shed by Naomi's piteous cries, the manager and some of the miners had found the unconscious girl stretched upon the ground. They had at once bound up her injured wrists with

kindly hands, and conveyed her as best they could by team back over the rough waggon road to Rossland; while Maclyn, severely bruised, and dazed by the violent shock, had picked himself up out of the tangled scrub-growth near the lower ore-bins, where he was flung when the car became derailed, and with considerable difficulty reached the town by a lower trail, ignorant of the fact that any evil had befallen his sweetheart.

The man's horror and mystification over her serious condition was unbounded, as was also his astonishment at the extraordinary breaking loose of the truck, nor could the people from the mine throw much light upon the matter, for the labourer who was struck over the head by Cyr Panhandle did not even catch a glimpse of his assailant before he fell senseless to the floor, and poor Naomi, as yet only semi-conscious and in great pain, could not, of course, be questioned.

Once in the hands of her uncle and aunt, everything love and skill could accomplish was done to alleviate the girl's sufferings, and Agnes, who possessed considerable experience in that line, was installed as head nurse; but the terrible mental shock and strain, to say nothing of the physical agony Naomi had endured, had wrought sad havoc, and when night came she was still in a very precarious state. Strange to say, the idea that his sweetheart had been so horribly injured in trying to save his life never once crossed Jack's mind.

'I wish you would come in here for a few moments,' said Mrs Bates-Post to Maclyn, a rising excitement betraying itself in her voice as she opened the door of

her private sitting-room. 'I particularly want to tell you about something that occurred to-day after you and my niece started for the Grubstake Mine.'

'Certainly,' he replied. 'It was nothing serious, I hope.'

'That is exactly what I do not know. An old friend of ours, who is also a cousin of Naomi's, has for some time past been confined in the Mind-Ease Asylum at Fraserville. Poor Christopher Sabel, he was mad, but very nice.'

'What?' exclaimed Jack. 'I beg your pardon,' he added, as Mrs Bates-Post looked at him inquiringly, 'but you will understand my surprise when you hear that I saw and talked with this same Mr Sabel last May when I visited the superintendent of the Mind-Ease, who, as you may perhaps remember, is my cousin.'

'Ah—yes—Doctor Dufft. Well, then, you must have noted how completely irresponsible Christopher was. He arrived in Rossland this morning.'

'Who? Doctor Dufft?'

'No, Mr Sabel, of course.'

'You don't say so!'

'But I do. He is quite cured now, and so they had no power to detain him any longer at the asylum. Christopher says that both he and the superintendent wrote to my husband that he was leaving Fraserville this week, and these letters must have gone astray, for they have never reached us. He looks well, but I thought he seemed very excitable.'

Jack remained silent, revolving this new factor in his mind. Presently Mrs Bates-Post moved a step

closer to him, and laid a twitching hand upon his arm. 'Mr Maclyn,' she whispered in an awed tone, 'do you think that Christopher could have caused that accident?'

The man started.

'No. Why, how came such an idea into your head?'

'I—I told him that Naomi was in love with you.'

'And what on earth has that got to do with the subject?'

'Well, you know he—he might have been angry about it, and when people have been mad they take strange notions into their heads.'

'Still I do not see that, because Sabel is Naomi's cousin, is any radical reason why, sane or insane, he should object to my being in love with her, or she with me. Surely you would not accuse the poor fellow of a wish to murder me?'

Mrs Bates-Post wrung her hands feebly.

'I cannot explain everything. Naomi would never forgive me if I did. But, oh! Mr Maclyn, I am afraid it was very unguarded of me to tell Christopher about you, or about the professor.'

'What did you say to him about Panhandle?' asked Jack, rather sternly. He was beginning to fear some unforeseen complication.

'Only that until lately he had strongly objected to Naomi marrying anyone while Christopher lived.'

'Was that all?'

'Well, I believe I did hint that I thought the professor now wanted to marry my niece himself. Do you suppose any harm could come of that?'

'No, I certainly do not,' replied Jack, seriously. 'But why are you telling me all this?'

'Because I cannot help wondering whether Christopher was in any way responsible for that accident. The mere suggestion terrifies me, for it implies that he may be guilty of an awful crime, and yet if he should have gone mad again—' here the good lady waxed incoherent with agitation.

'You need have no fears on that score, Mrs Bates-Post,' said Jack, steadily. 'It is extremely unlikely that Sabel would, under any circumstances, injure his cousin, and what possible grudge could he have against me? We do not yet know what caused the car I was in to run away, or even whether that mishap had any connection with the assault made upon the workman, or with Naomi's pitiable plight.'

'How you comfort me! To tell you the truth I was really frightened after I had spoken to Christopher, his eyes looked so wild and he laughed in such a dreadful way. I wonder if he is quite cured?'

'Assuredly, otherwise they would never have let him out of the asylum. Where did he go to after his conversation with you?'

'I have not heard. My husband and Mr Kingsearl had started for a walk, and Christopher said that he would join them. However, none of us have seen him since, and that is the reason why I imagine he may have followed you up to the Grubstake Mine.'

'Not at all likely. No doubt he will turn up again later on,' suggested Jack with a confidence he was far from feeling.

'I sincerely hope so. Then perhaps we can

persuade him to travel home to England with the professor.'

'Surely Panhandle went away by the early train this morning.'

'Oh! dear me, no. I saw him about ten o'clock. He said that he had overslept himself and would not leave until to-morrow. Good gracious!' cried Mrs Bates-Post, in sudden alarm, 'it never struck me before, but Christopher and the professor must not meet. The sight of Naomi's guardian would be sure to bring back to him a vivid remembrance of—why, it might send him mad again,' she interrupted herself hastily, 'especially since my injudicious words. Just to think that I talked to him about the professor's infatuation for the poor child. Oh! how imprudent I was,' and the good lady sobbed distractedly.

'It is improbable than any great harm has been done,' said Jack, nervously. He held that a woman should never cry in the presence of a man who is not privileged to kiss away her tears. 'We will consult Mr Bates-Post and find out how he considers it best to act in the matter.'

Night came, but not a sign of Christopher Sabel. Stranger still, Cyr Panhandle did not appear either, and Jack fell to wondering whether after all Naomi really did see him in the Grubstake Mine, as she had so emphatically asserted. In view of the fact that the professor had not quitted Rossland, such a thing was quite within the bounds of possibility; though, even so, that did not explain his prolonged absence from the hotel.

The next morning Naomi was pronounced out of

danger. Youth clings to life with a wonderful tenacity. As the girl lay near the open window, listlessly watching the cloud-waves rolled up from the horizon, and scattered into wreaths of foam by the western wind, she tried to recollect the events of the previous day. In her mind were hills and valleys; occasionally an incident arose out of the chaos, and shaped itself clear-cut and distinct on an eminence of memory, but all connected thought still lay smothered in the depths of her half-drugged senses.

'Agnes,' she called feebly.

'Yes, dear. Do you want anything?'

'It was Professor Panhandle who—who—'

'Hush, Naomi, you must not talk. Do your arms hurt you now?'

'No, not much.'

Agnes deftly bathed the girl's forehead with *eau-de-Cologne*, and drew the curtains so as to shut out the slanting rays of the sun.

'Try to sleep, dear,' she urged softly.

'He meant—to—kill—Jack.' The words came with difficulty. 'Oh'—with a faint moan—'Jack—Jack—'

The look of agony that sprang into Naomi's dull eyes at the remembrance of her lover startled her companion.

'He is perfectly safe and well,' she said soothingly.

Not a sound escaped from the sick girl's lips in answer to this assurance, but gradually her muscles relaxed, her eyelids closed, and she slept.

'What is the matter? You all look as solemn as if it were a full meeting of the British Association,'

said Agnes as she walked along to the end of the verandah, and joined the Bates-Posts, Kingsearl and Maclyn.

'Is she free from pain yet?' asked Jack, rising eagerly to his feet.

'Yes, and sleeping like a child.'

The man sat down again. The relief depicted on his face was very genuine.

'We were talking about the accident, Agnes,' said Mr Bates-Post. 'The workman who controls the cable at the top of the tramway has just been here, but he can give us very little information. He says that he suspected nothing wrong before he got the terrific crack on his head which rendered him insensible. The greatest mystery still surrounds the whole affair, and the police have discovered absolutely no clue to the identity of the coward who struck the blow. Of one thing, however, I feel convinced, namely, that the same hand which knocked down the miner also wrecked the car and inflicted those horrible injuries on my dear little niece.'

'Stunning day,' called out Tony, cheerfully, as he blossomed in from the garden like a new-blown morning glory. 'What's up?' he inquired, seeing the anxious expression on the faces around him.

'Who do you think is responsible for this dreadful disaster, Mr Santashe?' said Mrs Bates-Post, turning to him with animation.

'Panhandle,' replied the youth, laconically.

'Stuff!' ejaculated Maclyn, denying his own conviction.

'No, I said Panhandle,' persisted Tony. 'Bet you a farm he did.'

'My dear fellow, you have taken a dislike to the professor, and when a chap like you gets hold of such an antipathy as that, he just worries it for all he is worth. Though I have no liking for the man myself, especially since you told us of his atrocious plan to compromise Miss Crocus, still I draw the line at accusing him of the wilful intent to murder.'

'But I do not. The professor was the author of that accident. Naomi says so.'

Had Agnes fired off a shot-gun in their midst her hearers could not have been more astonished.

Santashe, who had felt bound under the coincidental circumstances of Naomi's unaccountable injuries, and Cyr Panhandle's disappearance, to give the girl's friend a true version of her guardian's attempted coercion, was the first to recover himself.

'I knew he had a double face from the start,' he said as he gave the ends of his moustache a supercilious twirl.

Explanations ensued, and little by little they put the puzzle together, fitting the disjointed events round the central fact of Panhandle's guilt. Maclyn retailed how Naomi had seen her guardian's head rise up, and then disappear again into the 'stope-hole,' and how he had probably overheard their conversation about going down the track in one of the ore-cars, and the arrangement that Jack should make a trial trip alone. These things, taken in conjunction with their knowledge of the professor's infatuation for his ward, his dastardly conduct toward her at the hotel,

and his inexplicable absence since the catastrophe, all strongly corroborated Naomi's statement, of the full truth and import of which, however, no further proof could be obtained until the girl was convalescent.

'In spite of what occurred before we arrived, the bare idea of his committing such a ghastly act is preposterous,' expostulated Mrs Bates-Post. 'Cyr Panhandle attempt to murder anyone! Oh! I cannot believe it!'

'Yet you know him to be a—a—' Kingsearl hesitated.

'A libertine,' said Jack, boldly. 'The man who would deliberately kill a girl's belief in faith and honour, and ruin her reputation to serve his own foul ends, would not stick at taking human life.'

'In my opinion he is as mad as a March hare,' remarked Tony, with conviction. 'No sane chap could possibly behave as he has done.'

'I entirely agree with you there, Santashe,' said Mr Bates-Post. 'Panhandle has, to my certain knowledge, been a good man and true all his life, and his recent disgraceful persecution of my niece, and subsequent evil actions (even supposing that he is not guilty of this last appalling crime), can only be the outcome of a diseased state of the mind. Of that I feel convinced.'

They were not very wide of the mark. Cyr Panhandle had for months past been wandering in that borderland where right and wrong intertwine, and a warped judgment is incapable of discerning betwixt the two. Goaded to frenzy by jealousy, and intoxicated with increasing doses of absinthe

(a drug under the equipoise-destroying power of which he had completely fallen), the professor was at this juncture little better than a maniac—and a dangerous one at that.

'I see it all,' cried Agnes, suddenly, clasping her hands in great excitement. 'Naomi rescued your life, Mr Maclyn, at the imminent risk of her own.'

'Eureka!' shouted Tony.

'It must have been the professor who struck down the workman, and somehow caused the accident to the truck,' continued Agnes, speaking rapidly, 'and then, Naomi, in trying to save you, was mangled in this horrible fashion. Oh! the brave girl!'

Jack turned deathly pale.

'Great God! Is it possible?' he gasped.

'Richard, do you think that our darling niece actually did that?' said Mrs Bates-Post, her eyes filling with tears.

'We shall soon know, my dear. I can well believe it. She is a courageous child,' he replied, his kind old voice choked with emotion.

'What made you guess such a thing, Agnes?' asked Kingsearl, looking at his *fiancée* with undisguised admiration.

'Oh! I'm a wiz!' she retorted, and laughed.

It was the shrill, jerky laughter of the woman who will not cry over the doing of a gallant deed.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MILL GRINDS EXCEEDING SMALL

'Revenge, at first though sweet,
Bitter ere long back on itself recoils.'—MILTON

'Now conscience wakes despair,
That slumbered, wakes the bitter memory of what he was,
what is, and what must be.'—MILTON.

UP in the Kootenay hills the setting sun illumined the face of the dying day, vermilioning the sky, and staining wood and wold a blood-red hue. To the north a storm was slowly gathering, black like the brew in a witch's cauldron, that would inevitably burst ere night fell, and drench the world with its foul contents. Dense, murky clouds scowled at the yellow gleams which sparkled on the bosom of the Skookumchuck, a turbulent stream that ran like a mill-race down between the rocks; now laughing over the stones and flinging wreaths of snowy spray high up into the air as it dashed against the larger boulders, now hemmed in on either side by perpendicular cliffs as it swirled along at the bottom of the narrow gorge to join the Cinnabar River.

On one side of this mountain-born torrent, where some gaunt pines fringed the precipice, and cast inky

shadows athwart the needle-strewn moss, lay Cyr Panhandle; hatless, his clothing torn by rock-spurs and briars, and a silent agony expressed in every line of his tense, emaciated form. Suddenly a scarlet ray shot out from the sinking sun, and as it touched the prostrate man he turned his face towards the west, and uttering a startled cry sprang to his feet.

'Will the Judgment Day be like this—all golden glory for some, and dark despair for others?' he muttered through his clenched teeth, as he shuddered at the effulgence in the sky, where Tyrian purple was fast paling to green at the edge of the flaming arc already half hidden below the horizon, and the wisps of cloud assumed brilliant prismatic hues.

The radiance dazzled the professor and turned his brain sick. Bewildered by the intensely bright colouring, now rendered positively appalling in its striking contrast to the sombre majesty of the rising tempest, he leaned against a tree and covered his eyes.

'This is awful,' he groaned. 'Heaven itself is dressed in wrath, and I stand here accursed before God and man. Even Naomi is revenged upon me. Ah!—' he shrieked as the crimson light of the sun-glow enveloped him, 'there is blood upon my hands—my clothes. The very sky is soaked with it.' Then with a cry of horror he gazed as his feet sunk deep in the tussocky herbage. 'The grass stands thick in the lush of the hot red flood,' he muttered, and reeled to the ground.

No wonder the gorgeous sunset had awakened strange hallucinations in the man's mind, weakened as he was with want of food and sleep, and totally un-

nerved by haunting memories ; for it was an extremely impressive sight, even in a land where vivid natural effects are of common occurrence, and, enhanced by the approach of the mountain storm, it presented a positively weird and terrifying spectacle. For thirty hours the professor had wandered amongst the hills, hungry and cold, and only saved from consuming thirst by some water he discovered at dawn in the hollow of a burnt tree-stump. When he rushed away from the top of the tramway at the Grubstake Mine, convinced that he had sent Jack Maclyn to certain death, fear drove him to seek shelter in some solitary region, and consequently the next day found him at a spot seldom traversed even by prospectors, a lonely *plateau* covered with scrub and conifers that overlooked the Skookumchuck as it brawled along several hundred feet below.

One moment he was full of vindictive joy, the next cast down to the nethermost depths of gloom ; again he would gloat over the thought that now his rival was dead, only to suddenly fall a prey to a frenzy of torment. Half-frozen by the keen bite of the early hoar-frost, he had lain all night upon the chill earth ; half-starved, he had roamed about during the day, his befogged brain taking no cognisance of time or place, until when evening came he stood on the heights above the stream—a sin-wrecked, passion-racked man. Ignorant of the fact that Naomi had saved her lover's life, torn by conflicting emotions, rent alternately with delirious joy and dire remorse, Cyr Panhandle was expiating in ghastly fashion the hideousness of his crime.

Crisply the dry twigs crackled under the feet of a stalwart man who came up with long, swinging strides over the pine-dotted upland, and halted beside the unconscious professor. Giving the latter a kick with no gentle intent, he said in forceful tones,—

'Get up. Do you hear me?'

Panhandle opened his eyes and stared vaguely around. As his gaze fell upon the man standing near him, it became instantly riveted, and a livid pallor overspread his already colourless face. Slowly he raised himself, never for one second removing his eyes from those of the newcomer, and his breath began to come in tortured gasps.

'Another fiend sent to plague me,' he whispered, writhing and trembling like a leaf in the wind. 'I know you, Christopher Sabel. Why do you come here? I never harmed you. I kept her bound to you. Are—are you dead?'

'No, I am not. I am very much alive. For hours I have tracked you in these mountains, keeping close on your trail, nearer and nearer I have followed you up—'

'What for?' The professor's eyes dilated as he shrank backwards.

Round the corners of Sabel's mouth there crept a smile it was not good to see.

'I'll answer your question with another. Where is Naomi Crocus?'

'I cannot tell you,' replied Panhandle, whose intellect was temporarily jolted back again into its proper groove by the shock of meeting Christopher so unexpectedly. 'On my honour I do not know.'

'Your honour!' The concentrated scorn with which Sabel repeated the words was the essence of insult.

The professor shifted uneasily.

'It is true,' he asserted surlily.

'What is true? Not you, or your words, you lying scoundrel! If you do not remember where Naomi is, at least you shall tell me what has become of Jack Maclyn.'

Panhandle darted a look of abject terror at his interlocutor. Was it possible that Christopher knew of the catastrophe? The thought of the young Britisher rushing down the tramway to a frightful death returned and grinned at him.

'I cannot do that either,' he answered feebly, his eyes wobbling in their sockets.

'But you rather suspect that he is crushed beyond recognition—dead—murdered by you.'

'That is false.' The words came with a snarl. The professor's lips were drawn back from his teeth like those of a wild beast at bay.

'Come, come, it is no use acting like this. I know of all your villainy. So you would have forced my pretty cousin to marry you against her will, eh? And when she successfully defied you, you tried to kill Maclyn.'

'I did kill him.' The tone was triumphant.

'No, you did not. Naomi saved him. I saw the whole episode. I had followed them up to the Grubstake Mine, and was not a hundred yards away from the shed when that brave girl would have sacrificed her life in order to save her lover. That

is how fate turns powerful wheels with small hands.'

Panhandle glanced at Sabel's face. In the latter's eyes the light of madness shone for an instant with a feverish brilliancy. It was quite true that Doctor Dufft's treatment had completely cured him for the time being, but the great shock of hearing about Naomi, Maclyn and the professor from Mrs Bates-Post, and then witnessing the awful accident at the mine, while still too far off to interfere on behalf of the victims, had partially unbalanced his mind again; and though he was in some respects still quite sane, there were not wanting signs of a returning attack of violent mania.

Retaliation upon the author or all his cousin's troubles, and her terrible physical injuries at the time of the disaster, was Christopher's one absorbing thought, and for this reason he had left Naomi lying insensible on the ground, after having assured himself that the manager and his men were hurrying to her assistance, and started off across the hills on the trail of Cyr Panhandle.

To avenge the girl he had formerly loved so dearly, and to punish the professor for his sins against her, and against the man whom she loved, seemed to the half-demented fellow the only just course to pursue.

'Then it is all right,' exclaimed Panhandle, with a spasm of relief. 'No one is killed after all.'

'Not yet,' replied Sabel with menacing calmness.

'What do you mean?' cried the professor, in quick affright.

'I once loved Naomi Crocus deeply and devotedly,' continued Sabel, ignoring the other's protest, 'and I would have tried in all sincerity to make her happy; but it was not to be. Love is the ladder by which a man climbs up into heaven, or down into hell, and—well, I had the misfortune to go to the latter place in the shape of an asylum. How you kept that innocent girl tied to the wraith of an uncompleted vow, and then to gratify your own vile passion persecuted her with odious attentions, I have since learned, and by Jupiter! hanging is too good for such a cur as you have shown yourself to be. She loves Jack Maclyn, and I hear that he is worthy of her, so now I intend that they shall be happy together. I love her still—my beautiful wife that was to have been—I even love her enough to lay down my life for her, and thus remove the barrier which she fancies exists betwixt her and marriage with the man of her own choice.'

Christopher appeared to have forgotten the presence of the professor as he uttered these last sentences. A rapt expression stole over his features, and for a moment the light of a steadfast purpose was reflected upon his face. Calmed by the recollection of old days, the true nobility of his race rose to the surface. Panhandle listened in amazement as his companion went on, seemingly oblivious of aught beyond the theme of his words.

'It is little enough to do for the girl you love—to die—and yet it was once said, "Greater love hath no man than this." I do not believe that. It is not the giving up of one's life that costs, it is the

giving up of the woman. To deliberately kill all hope of a love-life together is the greatest sacrifice in the world—the rest is of no account.'

In the grandeur of his agony Sabel looked like a modern Saint Paul. A vision of Naomi rose before his eyes, and gave another twist to the rack. He staggered slightly, and swayed like a flame in a draught. Then gradually the picture faded, and in its place he saw only the professor crouching at his feet, sick with apprehension at his half-crazed wrath, and yet not daring to leave the spot for fear of arousing a more personal animosity.

The western sky had paled to the hue of a corpse, and across it lay a funereal pall of heavy black clouds, for the day was dead, and over its bier the wind moaned a soft requiem. The wan light glimmered on Panhandle's ashen face, as he ventured at last in hoarse whispers to persuade Sabel to return to Rossland.

'Had we not better start for the hotel?' he suggested limply.

'Yes, you shall start—at once,' Christopher wound up with a jerk, and sprang forward.

'Here, I say—hold on—what are you doing?' yelled the professor.

The madman's hand was at his throat. Fiercely he tried to tear off the grip of Sabel's fingers, but finding himself powerless against his antagonist's superior strength, he squirmed round and grappled with him.

'Let go,' he gurgled thickly, as he wrenched at the other's wrist.

'Not while there is one ounce of breath left in your poisonous body. I am going to put you out of her path for ever,' retorted Christopher, shaking him till his features grew convulsed.

'Spare me,' shrieked the wretched man. 'I'll—go —away—if—'

'You shall die first, and then go wherever the devil pleases.'

The struggle waxed hideous; on Panhandle's contused face and neck the purple veins stood out like whip-cords, as he gasped and choked for breath. Locked in each other's arms the two men swayed desperately near the brow of the cliff; Sabel, reckless of everything save his determination to kill, and the professor too blinded by terror to at first perceive the new danger which threatened him. Christopher's sole idea being to save Naomi, the total removal of Cyr Panhandle seemed to his disordered brain to be the Alpha, and his own effacement the Omega, of such a purpose.

Suddenly his opportunity came; he recognised it, and the glare of insanity instantly dilated his sombre eyes. At a point where the rocky walls rose up perpendicularly at the edge of the Skookumchuck, he dragged the miserable culprit to the edge of the precipice. Then the extremity of fear fell upon the professor and loaned his craven soul a fleeting courage. Seeing that his own death was inevitable, he resolved that Sabel should at least die with him, and rapidly changing his tactics he ceased to wrestle.

'Look down there,' commanded the madman, savagely indicating the river, and as he forced his

victim to lean out over the abyss the latter's eyeballs protruded horribly. It was a sheer drop of over three hundred feet to the boiling torrent below. A shove from Sabel, a grab by Panhandle, and two bodies hurled through space. With a sullen splash they struck the surface of the water, and immediately the swift current of the Skookumchuck sucked them under and carried them beyond human ken.

CHAPTER XXIV

AT THE SUMMIT

'Breath and bloom, shade and shine,
Wonder wealth, and—how far above them—
Truth that's brighter than gem,
Trust that's purer than pearl,
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe all were for me
In the kiss of one girl.'—BROWNING.

'POOR Christopher,' whispered Naomi, softly, and her hand stole into Jack's as if to seek solace from his strong clasp.

'You must not grieve too much for him, dearest,' said Maclyn, 'for had he lived he would always have been in danger of a return of madness. As it is he is at rest, and perhaps in that shadowy world where all earthly infirmities are healed he rejoices in the knowledge of your happiness.'

'I hope with all my heart that it is so,' assented the girl, 'for he loved me very dearly once himself, Jack. I have never told you yet why he first became insane, or exactly what the tie was which bound us together, and which during so many years Professor Panhandle pulled tighter and tighter around me until I feared both him and it with an almost superstitious dread. Though many a time I fought hard with my conscience

on your behalf, the battles royal always ended in my total defeat at the barrier that my guardian had built up between me and marriage. I should like to tell you the whole story now, so that not even the vestige of a secret may spoil our perfect sympathy with one another.'

'So you shall, my darling. It is a lovely afternoon, and as your uncle and aunt are too busy writing letters to miss us, suppose we stroll along the railway track up into Roger's Pass; there we can talk without fear of interruption.'

Scarcely two weeks had gone by since the disaster at the Grubstake Mine, and its awful sequel on the edge of the Skookumchuck; yet already the severe injuries to Naomi's wrists were practically healed; and she and the Bates-Posts and Jack Maclyn had left Rossland, and were spending a few days at Glacier, an exquisite spot right in the heart of the Selkirk Range, where a chalet hotel stood alone on a *plateau* surrounded by the white spiral peaks of the mountains.

Of all the beautiful places in British Columbia—and their name is legion—none can excel Glacier. There the lower slopes of the hills are clothed with conifers of a deep Lincoln hue, the fir, pine, spruce and cedar growing in magnificent luxuriance, just relieved here and there by the pale greens of the hemlocks and alders. When Jack and Naomi walked up the steep grade to the summit on that fine autumn day, the Indian-summer sun was shedding its warmth abroad, and flooding earth and sky with a mellow radiance. Below in the valley the Illicilliwaet River

sparkled and danced merrily along towards Albert Canyon, and belted by a brotherhood of venerable trees the marvellous loops of the Canadian Pacific Line coiled and curled down under the base of Ross Peak, the railroad tracks (only a stone's throw apart), paralleling one another in wonderful fashion. Truly it was a sight for gods and railway men !

Amongst the deadwood beside the stream masses of mauve blossoms opened their fringed eyelids each morning at sunrise, and brakes of wild, blue-stemmed raspberry canes, yet bearing a few bronzed leaves, rose above the red and yellow foliage of the underbrush. Half disrobed by the cold hands of the early hoar-frosts, Nature still sought with modest delicacy to veil her nakedness by long, canary-coloured trails and sprays of coppery vines, scarce disdaining to employ even russet fern fronds, browning mosses and rough grey lichens as a covering for the barer patches of ground, so fearful was she lest the valley should be ashamed at the contrast between its poorly-clad outlines and the rich cone-decked garb of the ever-green mountain sides.

Above the timber line a series of snow-capped peaks towered up to the altitude of twelve and thirteen thousand feet, and the immense ice-fields of the Asulkan and Great Glaciers lay gleaming betwixt the beetling crags of Mount Sir Donald, Mount Abbott, Eagle Peak, and a dozen other lofty crests, each one of which formed an irresistible temptation to the mountaineer. Across to the north stood the Hermit, a gaunt figure with granite hood and grim, inaccessible shoulders. Tradition avers that an Indian

once reached the heights of this stupendous crag, but all authentic confirmation thereof has been lost, and it probably yet remains for some daring expert to scale and conquer this virgin ascent; a feat which, if ever accomplished, will eclipse the record of the most intrepid Alpine climber in Europe.

As Maclyn and his pretty companion walked along the top of the snow-sheds, and turned the corner of the bluff at the eastern portal to the pass, Naomi shrank back involuntarily, appalled at the gigantic rocky wall a mile and a quarter in height that rose perpendicularly from the level of the railway line up to the top of Mount Macdonald. Here a narrow chasm alone separated this sheer cliff from the huge stone folds of the Hermit's robe, that fell in rugged grandeur from the head to the feet of the cowled monarch; for, as if rent in twain by some volcanic upheaval, these two mountains stood riven from crest to base, and in the cleft between their mighty sides lay the pass across the summit of the Selkirks, through which the 'iron horse' crept on its trans-continental route.

'It is beautiful,' murmured Naomi, softly, overawed by the solemnity of Nature in her most majestic mood.

'How such mountains dwarf our little humanity,' said Maclyn, 'and make us realise the pettiness of life's ambitions. They are so restful, too, and seem to breathe out peace from every pore. But that story, Naomi, am I to hear it at last?'

'Yes, Jack, though now it seems as if the whole thing were just an ugly dream, from which I have awakened to the reality of your love.'

'Still I want you to tell me all about it, and then we will bury its memory in the same grave with Sabel and Panhandle. For some weeks past I have had a strong intuition that the mystery was closely connected with one, or both, of those men, and lately this idea has been strengthened by your changed attitude towards me since their death. Before that tragedy occurred you steadily refused to marry me, in spite of my persistent entreaties and even the fact that you owned you loved me; whereas, since that day at the mine, you have tacitly accepted me as your future husband. Is that not so, my darling? Say that it is. Say that you will be my wife.'

Naomi blushed deeply when thus suddenly brought face to face with the knowledge that her release from the old bondage had of late entirely altered her manner towards Jack, making her, unwittingly, less reticent of her real feelings for him, while as yet, though avowed lovers, no definite words of betrothal had been spoken between them.

'Uncle Richard told me that the two bodies had been found in the Skookumchuck, a long way off from Rossland,' she said hurriedly to hide her confusion, and not wishing, in her ultra-conscientiousness, to say 'Yes' until she had told Maclyn the truth about Christopher Sabel. 'Oh! Jack, how do you think that it all happened?'

'No one will ever know, dearest. They are dead and gone beyond our judgment. But you have not answered my question, and I will not wait—'

'Just a tiny bit longer—please,' she interrupted him. 'I can almost forgive the professor now—I am

so happy,' she went on, as her eyes saw a love-lit land in which there lived only one man and one woman—he and she.

Maclyn stooped and kissed her. The chains of his worship clanked at every movement, and the captivity was inexpressibly sweet.

'My little saviour and sweetheart,' he said tenderly.

'Yes, that is it, you are my sweetheart too, Jack, only and all mine. Men may call you by your surname, other women use your Christian name, but no one in the whole wide world can call you sweetheart except myself.'

'You are right, darling. Sweethearts we have been through trials and troubles, and sweethearts we will remain through the bright days ahead of us, on to the end of our lives.'

'Are you sure that what I am going to say will not make any difference between us?'

'Quite sure. Nothing can ever do that.'

'Not even if I tell you that all the time you were making love to me I was half-married to another man?' The words came with a frightened rush.

Maclyn started.

'What do you mean? I do not understand how that could be.'

'It came about like this,' she went on quickly, with a desperate resolve to let him know the worst at once. 'When I was only seventeen years old I promised to marry my cousin, Christopher Sabel. My uncle and aunt were very anxious that the match should take place, and he was deeply in love with me.'

'Did you care for him then?'

'Only as a friend, nothing more.'

'Infamous!' muttered Maclyn.

'I was scarcely more than a child at that time, and he was very kind to me, and somehow I drifted into an engagement with never a thought of the life beyond our wedding day. Do not look so horrified, Jack. It is only what hundreds of other English girls do every year.'

'I cannot imagine how the Bates-Posts could have sanctioned such an arrangement.'

'There was a question of some large property involved, and so, for family reasons, they urged it; but I believe that Christopher only did so for love of me.'

'And you consented to link yourself to a man for whom you cared nothing?' A shade of reproach tinged his voice.

'I did not know then what love and marriage meant,' she answered simply, the pride of her womanhood enwrapping her like a regal cloak.

'Forgive me, Naomi. It is as hard for a man to realise the perfect ignorance of a young girl who has been shielded from all knowledge of the world as it is for him to comprehend the absolute innocence of a nature that has never felt a ripple of emotion.'

'We did not know that there was insanity on my cousin's side,' she went on, tacitly accepting his apology, 'until that dreadful day when—when he went mad. It was in church; he and I were standing before the altar. Professor Panhandle, as my legal guardian, gave me away. Oh! I can see it all now!' Naomi drew one hand across her eyes. 'The

clergyman in his white surplice, the crowd of guests, and Christopher beside me. I went through the first part of the service as in a dream, repeating mechanically the words which bound us together, till just as he took my hand to place the gold band upon my finger, saying: "With this ring I thee wed," an awful change came over his face, his features grew convulsed, foam frothed on his lips, and a gush of blood spurted from his mouth and nostrils, dying my satin gown with a deep red stain. The ring, which he held half on my finger, fell off, and rolled away, the paroxysm increased, and the last thing that I remember before I fainted was seeing the professor holding my bridegroom down on the floor, while some other men secured him.'

During this recital the girl had turned very pale, and deep purple shadows darkened her eyes.

'My poor little darling! What a terrible ordeal!'

'Now you can understand my horrible predicament. I was not legally married because the service had not been completed, and the formal words pronouncing us man and wife were not spoken; still, the vows of that half-finished ceremony held me fast, and my guardian lost no opportunity of impressing upon me the binding character of my obligations to Christopher. We had both gone through part of the service, hearing the questions, and repeating the responses with the full intention of being wedded, he said, and yet, Jack, we were not husband and wife.'

'I never heard of such an extraordinary case before!'

'Of course everyone thought that Christopher

would recover, and that then we would be properly married all over again, but though he travelled abroad for several years, he never quite regained his mental balance, and finally when in Vancouver last winter he became violently insane for the second time, the doctors sent him to the Mind-Ease Asylum, and my uncle and aunt came out to British Columbia to arrange for his future maintenance.'

'Did you go to see him in Fraserville?'

'No. Aunt Miriam would not permit it.'

'Very sensible of her. It could have done no possible good to him, and might perhaps have frightened you,' said Maclyn, remembering his own instinctive aversion to the place. 'Well, the poor chap is drowned, and your bondage, real or imaginary, whichever it was, is at an end; but I am glad that you have told me all this, darling, for now I can better comprehend your past treatment of me, though I cannot agree with you as to there having been any necessity for it. Dear heart, let us not refer to the subject again. Panhandle is dead, and can no longer harm anyone, and both he and Sabel must account to a Higher Judge than you or I for their actions. How they met death, whether separately or together, by accident, foul play, or deliberate intent, God alone knows, and in His hands we must leave them.'

There was silence for a space, and then Maclyn asked in an altered tone,—

'Have you heard from Agnes Arbuckle to-day?'

'Yes, I got a letter from her just before we left the hotel. She and Mr Kingsearl are going to be

married next month, and she wants me to be her bridesmaid.'

'I am afraid that will be impossible, dearest.'

'Why, Jack? Oh—' and Naomi grew as red as a poppy as she suddenly divined his meaning.

'Do not put off our wedding any longer,' he pleaded earnestly.

'But what will Uncle Richard and Aunt Miriam say to such haste?'

'Shall we ask them to come down to the coast for a few weeks, and allow us to be married in Vancouver? There is really no reason why we should wait until you return to England, is there?'

'No, I suppose not; but it seems such a short time since—'

'The sooner you are my wife, the sooner you will get over the shock and strain of the past month, dear one; and as to your cousin's death, from what I know of his character I feel certain that he was the very man to wish that sad event to make no difference in our case. Remember, sweetheart, how long I have loved you; think of the kisses—'

'It is not your fond kisses that I remember best, darling, it is those times when you have said some little word of love, given me some lingering caress, small things in their way, perhaps, but which went straight to my heart. Once at Sapolill, when I had done some trifle to please you, you took my face between your hands, and, looking into my eyes said, "Thank you, sweetheart." Those words sank down into my very soul, and the sweetness of their tone and of your expression will always remain with me.

Such memories as that come back to one in after life, Jack, and bring comfort in dark hours.'

'You are right. There is no thread so strong and bright as that which love weaves across the weft of sorrow. Naomi, do you remember a promise that you once made me?'

'Yes,' very timidly.

'Well, darling?'

'Must I say it?'

For answer he drew her to him and kissed her on the lips.

'Jack—I am ready to marry you now,' she whispered softly.

'Did ever man hear such a sweet confession before! Heart of my heart, I accept the gift of yourself, to hold you for ever sacred as my love—my wife.'

'How I adore you, Jack!'

'Not half so much as I worship you.'

'We will not quarrel over it, but you could never convince me.'

'Not in a whole lifetime, dear one?'

'No, not in twenty. But perhaps when you find out how I love you, and how every thought and action of mine are of you, and for you, you will admit—'

'That I still love you the best,' and Maclyn caught her in his arms and kissed her again and again.

When approached on the subject of a speedy wedding, Mr and Mrs Bates-Post did not demur, as Naomi had half-expected that they would, at the idea of a return journey to the coast; but seeing that Jack was anxious to marry their niece at once, and

thereby put a full stop to all her past wretchedness, they willingly assented to the suggestion, and were as eager over the discussion of plans and the hasty preparation of a *trousseau* as the young couple principally concerned.

So it was all settled, and the wires were at once set going with such excellent results that before nightfall answers had arrived from Agnes and Santashe promising to act as bridesmaid and best man respectively at the wedding, which was fixed to take place at an early date. Tony was still visiting friends in Victoria, for when he found—after the discovery of the bodies of Panhandle and Sabel in the Skookumchuck—that Maclyn possessed no intention of leaving British Columbia until he took Naomi home with him as his wife, he had returned to the Island with Joseph Kingsearl, determining to wait there and join some regiment going to South Africa from Canada; for war had finally been declared between Great Britain and the Transvaal, and Colonial troops were soon to be sent out to fight for the Empire.

On the last night spent by the Bates-Posts in the Selkirk Mountains a full moon rose early above the summit, and touching with light caress the stately snow-crowned head of Sir Donald, glinted along the ridge of the Asulkan ice-fields, and flooded in a silver stream down over the billowy formations of the Great Glacier. There it was lost to view for some time amidst the conifers that stood grouped in dense masses at the base of the glittering slopes, only to reappear farther down the valley in the grey-green

phosphorescence that shimmered upon the restless bosom of the Illicilliwaet River. Spanning the ravines with shafts of radiance, the moonbeams ran lightly up the dark forbidding bluffs that stretched away to the back of Beyond, bringing a gentler look into the face of the gaunt old Hermit as he told his rosary in drops of dew, which fell a string of frozen crystals from his chill fingers, and tingeing with mystic glamour the defiant outlines of stern Cheop's crags.

Wisps of mist stole up from the depths of the canyons, floating like elfin ships across to the dim horizon—shadows turned to indigo—trees grew more shapely defined against the moonlit rocks, o'ertopped by frosty spires—stars shone out—Nature had put on her festal robe of dazzling hue, and decked herself with diamonds.

'Let us sing,' whispered the spirits of the wind to each other as they crept timidly through the primeval forest. 'Let us dance,' echoed the moonbeams as they trembled with ecstasy on the soft white spume that rose in clouds from the surface of the glacier-born cascades. And so together they celebrated the wedding feast of heaven and earth.

Upon this scene of matchless beauty Naomi gazed from her open window in the Chalet Hotel, her soul overflowing with thankfulness and joy.

'Dear old hills, how I love you,' she murmured tenderly, stretching out her arms towards the mountain monarchs. 'You have given me the man I love. The happiest days my life has ever known have been spent beneath the protecting shadow of

your peaks. Dear Christ, keep me steadfast as you have stood throughout the bygone years, and pure in heart as those everlasting snows that crown your lofty crests; keep me true to my God, and true to myself, so that I may be worthy of my sweetheart.'

CHAPTER XXV

EIGHT MONTHS AFTER

'There's a Queen, a dear Queen, whom no Briton forgets,
And upon whose Dominions the sun never sets;
Who has governed by love and has help'd us to fight
For conquest of evil, and succour of right.
Best reign! Blest reign! Longest! Strongest!
This year of all years we'll sing and we'll pray,
Glorious! Victorious! Thy Queen! My Queen!
God bless and keep her both now and for aye.'—AGNES SIBLY.

IN the drawing-room of a pretty London house sat Mrs Maclyn, pouring out afternoon tea for her husband and Agnes Kingsearl.

The May sunshine flooded in through the open windows, across the flower-boxes filled with glowing geraniums and calceolarias, and touched Naomi's golden hair with a soft caress, just as it had done a year before in Vancouver when Jack first met her. But it was a far more contented face that smiled up at him now from beneath that glorious crown of wavy tresses; a look of completed happiness shone in the young wife's eyes, and the sweet serenity of matronhood had entirely superseded the nervous tension of her girlish days.

'It is so nice to hear about dear old British Columbia again,' she remarked, eating her toasted muffin with

great satisfaction. 'How long are you going to stay in town, Agnes?'

'Only for a couple of weeks, I am sorry to say. Joe is obliged to be back in his constituency by the middle of July, as they rather expect that an election will take place before September.'

'How tiresome! Just when I thought that I was going to have you all to myself for at least a month. Uncle and Aunt Bates-Post are coming up to stay with us soon, so we shall have a regular Western reunion. How I wish Tony Santashe could join us!'

'Where is he now? I have not heard of him since he sailed in the *Monterey* from Halifax with Strathcona's Horse last March.'

'Nor have we, except through the cable despatches which announced the safe arrival of the regiment at Cape Town. They have probably gone up country and joined General Buller's forces in Natal.'

'He was always playing the fool over-time,' remarked Agnes, sipping her tea reflectively, 'but all the same I must admit that he was full of the right sort of sentiment.'

'Indeed he was. There is a noble way of doing everything, and dear old Tony followed it as straight as a die. I shall never forget his chivalry towards me in Rossland when I so bitterly needed a friend. If he is as loyal to the Flag as he was to me, the Queen will have no finer soldier.'

'Hear, hear!' broke in her husband, enthusiastically. 'Santashe is a brick. It takes a very clever chap to play the fool as gracefully as he did. Why, when he

made a joke no one thought of getting hurt, and no one sent for the police.'

'Who is this you are praising so warmly, Maclyn? Ah—Mrs Maclyn, how do you do?' said the Member for Illicilliwaet as he entered the room.

'Jack was just speaking of Tony Santashe,' replied Naomi, shaking hands warmly with the newcomer.

'We saw a good deal of the lad in Victoria during the winter,' went on Kingsearl, 'and were delighted when he was accepted for Strathcona's Horse. He was very keen to go out to the war.'

'The papers say that a splendid body of men went from British Columbia,' said Maclyn.

'That is so,' acquiesced Agnes, eagerly. 'Tall and straight as our own Douglas firs, brave, broad-shouldered fellows, and men of energy too, with their heads well set on and their hearts full of hope. There will be lots of friendly hat-smashing when our soldier boys come home, I can assure you.'

'Did you go to the Duchess of Daintree's ball last Tuesday, Agnes?' asked Naomi, suddenly following up a fresh train of thought.

'Yes, I made my *début* in London society at it, fortified in a new gown; and though, truthfully, I was a trifle conscious of my experienced Western complexion and inexperienced Western manners, still I managed to have a very good time. By the way, who do you think I met there? That most recoiling person, Lady Greenwig.'

'The one you had a passage-at-arms with in Victoria?'

'The same, my dear. I thought she would have

fainted when she saw me walking up the room on his Grace's arm. You remember how she tried to snub me that night at the Greshams' "Musical." I was only a Colonial girl then, and she the wife of Sir Hercules Greenwig, soap-boiler and millionaire; now I am a Western girl in London, where Canadians are regarded as the salt of the Empire, and the Duchess is civil to me—so Lady Greenwig kisses me.'

'Just like her,' laughed Maclyn.

'But, all the same, I inspired the good dame that night with a reverence for Canadians she will retain for life.'

'Oh! worthy daughter of a most worthy land!' exclaimed Kingsearl.

'When the Prince of Wales arrived at twelve o'clock,' continued Agnes, ignoring her husband's chaff, 'Lady Greenwig rushed up to me and said nervously, "Pray tell me, my dear Mrs Kingsearl, what am I to do? How shall I greet His Royal Highness?" "Just make a curtsey to him as he passes down the room," I replied carelessly, and was turning away, when she grabbed my arm and whispered frantically, "But which one?"'

'Which what?' inquired Naomi, with more force than elegance.

'You may well ask—that is precisely what I did, and in reply she explained deprecatingly, "You see I only know two curtseys, the one I make in the Creed, and the one I make in the Lancers." Then with terrible earnestness she added, "Which would be best for the Prince?"'

'And your answer?' cried Jack, vastly amused.

'"The latter, by all means," I said with decision. "The Twelfth—His Royal Highness's Royal Regiment — yes — certainly — the Lancer one would be the most appropriate." Then the poor thing overwhelmed me with thanks, and Canadians at once rose fifty per cent. in her estimation.'

'"A consummation devoutly to be wished,"' quoted Kingsearl, as the laugh became general.

'Tell us what you really think of a ball in the height of the season?' suggested Jack with some curiosity.

'It is certainly not a source of unqualified joy, the rooms are so crowded with people; however, I amused myself. Her Grace received us in a lovely spangled gown and a worried manner. She is charming.'

'Were there plenty of nice men to dance with?'

'I really dare not offer an opinion on that point. You see the West has spoilt me for anything less than a three-to-one majority of the male sex who have arrived at years of discretion, and when the fifth fledgling was introduced, and repeated in the same insipid tone as his predecessors the same inane remarks about the floor and the heat, I lost my temper, and then forthwith retired in dismay to the seclusion of the conservatory with Joe.'

'What did you say to him?' asked Naomi, with amusement.

'I'm ashamed to tell you. Honour bright, I am. But he did exasperate me so. His opening remark was: "I say, don't yer think the rume is—er—verwy hot—er—Mrs Kingsearl?" and to save my life I could

not help retorting: "You bet your boots it is—hot as blazes." It was rude and unladylike I know.'

'I would have given a pony to see his face, chuckled Jack.

'The temperature became unbearable after that,' said Agnes, comically. 'Made me want to go out like smoke. I am afraid that Joe will be obliged to muzzle me in polite society if that is the sort of youth I have to talk and dance with. Callow youngsters do not fit into the curves of my temperament.'

'Did you meet the new belle, the famous Mrs Tempest?' inquired Naomi.

'No, but she was pointed out to me. I thought that she looked like a Christmas tree.'

'She usually decks herself out with the oddest collection of jewellery. Any woman less beautiful would look vulgar.'

'It was very amusing to see how every man in the room struggled for her programme, while the dowagers with marriageable daughters avoided her with the cold, cutting manner of the "unco guid."'

'Merely the natural law of cause and effect, my dear, though that bit of knotty embroidery on her otherwise downy pillow will not trouble her much,' put in Kingsearl, quietly.

'At least she is preferable to that ugly Lady Greenwig. I never see that woman without wishing she were the Winged Victory.'

Thus they chatted on merrily, and presently the conversation drifted back to British Columbia, all allusion to the Kootenay tragedy being, however, avoided by common consent.

'We lived with Jim in Victoria last winter,' said Agnes, in reply to a leading question from her hostess, 'but Joe will have to spend most of the coming summer up-country. It is rather nice having a constant change of scene.'

'Your brother would miss you tremendously if you ever left him altogether,' remarked Jack. 'I remember how devoted he was to you.'

'Oh! Jim's all right. Politics first and last, and his sister in between, like the jam in a sandwich. That is the way, is it not, Joe?'

'I fancy so, my dear, for I know that with you all the sweetness of my life begins and ends.'

'There is a pretty compliment from the man one has been married to for six whole months,' and Agnes gave a happy, ringing laugh as she rose to bid her friends good-bye.

. . . . . .

One morning early in July, as Jack and his wife lingered over a late breakfast, the ring of the postman echoed through the house, and presently the butler entered with a number of letters on a salver, which he handed to his master.

'The Canadian mail is in earlier than usual this week. Two epistles for you, Naomi,' said her husband, handing them to her as he spoke. 'Some bills—um—they'll keep. A few lines from Kingsearl to say that he sails for Montreal to-morrow at daybreak; and—why, here is one from South Africa, but not addressed by Santashe.'

While Naomi perused her own correspondence, Maclyn opened the bulky foreign envelope, and drew

out a half-completed letter penned in Tony's familiar writing, a brief note in a strange caligraphy and a small packet tied up with a bit of dirty string. As a sentence in the young soldier's letter caught his eye he checked his first impulse to read its contents aloud, and murmuring an excuse to his wife, who was deeply engrossed in an effusion from her aunt, he rose and went into the smoking-room. Santashe's letter ran thus :—

'On the Veldt, *June* — 1900.

'Dear Maclyn,—Thanks awfully for your letter, which reached me at Halifax just before we sailed. So you and your wife are settled in a town house for the season, and here am I sweltering under a South African sun in all the honour of regulation khaki, amidst the dusty horrors of this hot campaign.

'When poor old Cardew was knocked out with enteric fever at Cape Town I was appointed second lieutenant of our troop, a piece of good luck I hardly dared to hope for so soon. We are with Buller's column now, near Standerton, and the regulars seem no end glad to have us here, for the men of Strathcona's Horse can stand up with the best of them, "even though I say it as shouldn't." We have had a fairly quiet week of it, but are under orders to march south at dawn to-morrow, where it is reported that the Boers have gathered in strong numbers, and things are rather more than likely to end in an engagement.

'I have a foreboding to-night that the end is near for

me. There is no knowing how or why such an idea comes to one, but I have got it sure enough. And I am homesick, too, for old friends—not places. That is the worst kind. It makes an idiot of a fellow. If things should go against me in the field to-morrow, old chap, will you—'

Here the letter broke off abruptly, and Jack quickly took up the other note and read :—

'*June* — 1900.

J. H. MACLYN, Esq.

'DEAR SIR,—I beg to send you the accompanying letter from Lieutenant Santashe, Troop D., Strathcona's Horse, in accordance with his last request, also the enclosed packet which he desired should be forwarded to you intact. You will therefore excuse the blood-stained wrapper, for the packet was in young Santashe's breast-pocket when he was shot yesterday through the left lung, while leading his men in one of the most brilliant and courageous charges that has been made during this war. Santashe died at daybreak this morning. The whole regiment mourns his loss. He was a brave soldier and a "white" man.—Yours truly, PHILLIP RAMSEY,

'*Captain*.'

As Jack finished reading his head dropped forward upon his hands. He was stunned by the shock of this sad and unexpected news, as through some mischance he had never seen the cable despatch relating to Tony's death. Naomi entering the room

a little later found him still in this attitude, and coming behind his chair, she bent over and gently kissed his forehead.

'What is the matter, dear?' she questioned anxiously.

For reply he handed to her the two letters.

Slowly the girl read them through with quivering lips and tear-dimmed eyes, and then opening the packet she drew out a small bunch of dead anemones, whose dry petals had been dyed with the life-blood of the gallant young Canadian soldier.

'They are the flowers I put in his buttonhole that day in Rossland when he saved me from Professor Panhandle,' she said brokenly. 'Poor, poor Tony! Here are some lines written inside the paper they are folded in. Why, they are the words of that little song I used to sing so often last summer! He was very fond of it, I remember.' In a voice choked with emotion she read them over.

'The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,
Are as a string of pearls to me,
I count them over every one apart,
My rosary, my rosary.

Each hour a pearl, each pearl a prayer,
To still a heart in absence wrung
I tell each bead unto the end,
And there a cross is hung!

O memories that bless and burn!
O barren gain and bitter loss!
I kiss each bead and strive at last to learn
To kiss the cross, sweetheart! to kiss the cross.'

'Plucky lad,' said Maclyn, and his face was pale and stern from sorrow.

'He has kissed the cross, and died facing the enemy like a true soldier of the Queen,' whispered Naomi, brokenly, as she nestled in the embrace of her husband's sheltering arms.

'He has, my sweetheart; and the blood spilt by that brave man of Strathcona's Horse will help to keep Canada for ever green in the heart of the British Empire.'

THE END

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