

I wondered how Fitzgerald could quietly listen to this announcement, read in the most deliberate manner. I could barely refrain from getting up and yelling. My astonishment increased when, having asked for the paper, he carefully re-read the item; then, taking his great fur coat, he left the room. In a few minutes I joined him, and we walked to and fro together on the hard-packed snow before the shanty.

"You see, Jack, I must leave at once."

"Yes," I acquiesced; "I suppose you could not rest here." Then I protested: "Fitzgerald, let her go. She is weak, faithless, unworthy."

He repeated my adjectives with evident perplexity.

"I see. Your old injustice to her. You misunderstand. The case is as plain as daylight. The Count dances attendance on her; her parents encourage him; people talk of them together, and a wholesale manufacturer of lies—a newspaper correspondent—sends idle gossip across the Atlantic as a fact. She is the victim of a persecution. They may have discovered our secret, and prevented her writing to me. How far away is she? Not miles, days—ten, twenty, thirty. I shall not rest till she is safe in my arms, for she is my wife. You know it, Jack. They may marry her to a thousand counts, but she is my wife."

Feeling that the moment was not happy for the presentation of my views, I presented no more. I agreed to all the absurdities he chose to advance.

The next morning he announced to the camp that he was going to Fort Garry to consult some engineers, and would probably be absent about two months. I was to accompany him, and undertook the preparations for the journey.

About noon an Indian runner came in on snow-shoes with an extra mail. There was one letter for Fitzgerald, and the handwriting was that of his wife. I sent the letter to his private room. In about half an hour I knocked at his door, and he said, "Come in."

He was sitting before a table, leaning on it with folded arms. As if anticipating and wishing to evade inquiry, he said, "I suppose you have been getting things ready?"

"Yes. We can leave at any minute."

"I am undecided about going now. I think I will put it off until to-morrow, at all events. I am sorry to have given you so much trouble."

"Just as you please," I said. "I am indifferent."

"What a good fellow you are, Jack," he said standing up and looking at me. A casual observer might have thought his face only pale from overwork or want of rest. To me it was dead, like a fine portrait without any light in the eyes.

I thrust my hands in my pockets and shuffled my feet, overcome by the embarrassment which words of sincere kindness always excite in me.

"Can't I help you? Tell me something to do for you."

"The kindest thing you can do is to let me alone."

I glided to the door.

"Do go, Jack," he burst out impetuously. "I can't bear to have even you—"

Before he could finish his sentence I was on the other side of the door.

I felt that Mrs. Fitzgerald's letter had merely confirmed the newspaper report. If the marriage, which had been but a legal form, could be annulled I suspected that Fitzgerald would do it. I had no doubt that he would scorn to strike the woman who had wounded him mortally. When I fell asleep that night all my suspicions and beliefs had merged

into burning anger against her, and a determination to seek the opportunity to inflict on her some imperishable ill.

I fell asleep with this one idea in my brain, and I was awakened from that sleep by a cry:

"Jack! Jack! Help! Help!"

My senses were penetrated by the voice of a man in agony, crying for succor, crying to me, and the voice was the voice of my friend Fitzgerald.

I tried to lift myself from my bed, but a heavy weight held me down. I struggled to speak, but my tongue was tied. I rubbed my eyes, but the lids seemed glued. At last they parted slowly, and I saw that of which my mind never lost the faintest impression. I was not lying on my bed; I was not in the low, square room, with half-a-dozen men sleeping about me. I was standing on the river's brink several miles below the station, standing there alone in the awful stillness of a winter night in the wilderness. The moonlight was so brilliant that every object was distinctly visible.

I saw not twenty feet from me a break in the ice, and the blue water bubbled up clearly. Above the water rose a man's fair, strong head, and two hands grasping, trying to lift the body beneath up to the ice, which broke and crumbled away from their touch.

He was dying before my eyes, and I could not stir an inch to save him. I saw the beating of his hands grow feeble and the tension of his face relax.

"Spare her, Jack—spare her!" he cried.

I was silent.

Then once again he cried, and that sound I think will always echo about the world with me: "Speak to me. Give me a sign."

I forgot my hatred of her and my resolve to hurt her; I was sensible only of his pitiful pleading. By a great effort I flung up my right arm as a sign of acquiescence.

His hands fell, his head sank backward, and the blue water sparkled and bubbled in the moonlight. I shouted, "Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald!" I seemed to spring forward, when the whole scene was transformed. I was sitting up in bed, and the watch by the fire was saying, drowsily:

"What's the matter? What are you making such a row about?"

"Where is Fitzgerald?" I said, looking round and seeing that his place in the row of mattresses was vacant.

"He went out about an hour ago. He said he couldn't sleep, and was going to skate up the river to Thompson's station."

I got up slowly, and the motion was painful, for my whole body was numb. I spoke with hesitation, as if the power of speech were new to me.

"Fitzgerald did not go up the river; he went down towards Carter's station. He has been drowned six miles below."

My shout had roused most of the men. They all exclaimed, incredulously, that I had been dreaming. I stood my ground, and was already getting ready to go out. The dogged persistence of such a matter-of-fact fellow as I, impressed them, and they prepared to accompany me. When we reached the river we put on our skates. We could not distinguish tracks, for we had been skating a great deal, taking advantage of the clear ice, rare so late in the season. I led down the river, the others following, laughing at my expense. Soon the infection of my profound hopelessness spread, and in ten minutes all were skating swiftly, silently