

CHAPTER V

THE morning after she had buried her father Hilma Ring set herself to a conscientious survey of the debit and credit aspect of her future; what were the assets and what the liabilities of Old Man Ring's daughter, left fatherless? She did this methodically and without any hindrance of emotion or grief born of the events of yesterday. Not once had she given way to tears since first she met Uncle Alf riding with her father's body swung across his saddle horn. Tears she'd not known since the day her mother died; grief there could not be where tragedy had not trampled on love. Instead, her single inspiration, aside from the dominant one of necessity, was a vague, formless curiosity: What had this grubby little man she had lived with so long to show for all the years of bitter isolation in the Big Country?

So, when she had breakfasted on bacon and coffee and washed her plate and skillet, Hilma