

## CHAPTER II

## THE WOMAN

BARELY had the dust of the half-breed's sudden departure sifted from the air, when Buckley arose and announced his intention of "taking a little look round." He was gone two hours, and returned looking solemn and earnest. Billy and Alfred were cooking things over a small fire. Buckley spat in a propitiatory manner towards seven small bushes, and conversationally informed the north-west corner of the the canvas top on a near-by schooner that he, Jim Buckley, had decided to take along a woman.

Billy and Alfred thereupon spilled the coffee, and could not believe their ears.

"She's goin', if I have to take 'er by myself," Buckley concluded. And then Alfred and Billy looked up into his face, and saw that he was in earnest.

Alfred turned pink and wriggled the bacon, trying immediately to think how he was going to make the best of this. It did not look easy.

Billy Knapp exploded.

"You go to hell!" was his method of objection.

"She goes," repeated Jim, with even greater quietness of manner. "An' if you all don't like it, why, jest say so. I quits. You got to have her, if you have me."

"I'd jest like to know why," complained Billy, a little sobered at this threat.

Whereupon Jim found himself utterly at a loss. He had not thought as far as that. He suddenly appreciated the logical weakness of his position; but then, again, intuitively, he realized more subtly its strength. So he said not a word, but arose lightly, and brought unto them the woman herself.

She was a sweet little woman, with deep, trusting blue eyes, and she accompanied Jim without a thought of the opposition she had excited. Jim merely told her she was to meet the other two men. She intended only to show her appreciation of their kindness.