

"I won't see him to-morrow," he said, helping himself to more tea, "because he's gone."

Gail started. Very much awake now, she gazed at her parent open-mouthed.

"Gone!" she exclaimed, blankly. "Gone. An' gone for good. Cut me another slice o' bread like a good girl."

"Why, how strange!" she mused, as in a daze she cut the bread. "Do you suppose he's given up the idea—like the rest? Oh, he seemed so—so different."

"Well, he's gone," repeated Menary, placidly.

"A man with a jaw like his! A man with—such eyes—eyes that could snap like steel! Oh, I just can't believe it, daddy!"

"Guess you gotta, girl. He's cleared out, sure 'nough. He an' Dan come to loggerheads to-night, an' Dan he put the run on him in the usual way. He wasn't ten minnits pullin' up stakes an' beatin' it. Guess he's got to the Crossin' by now, with moonlight an' his hoss fairly fresh. Dan cussed hot 'nough to blister a stone!" and Menary grinned at the recollection.

He gave her an account, with certain reservations, of what he had overheard. The girl's eyes, usually so soft, flashed.

"Dan Comox is a crazy old hermit," she said, indignantly. "It's time he was taken in hand. He oughtn't to be allowed to run at large. That time he shot you, dad, you remember I wanted you to take action and you wouldn't? I often wonder why you're so easy! Now I'll tell you what I've been thinking, I believe Dan has a secret of some kind."

"Nonsense, girl!" Menary cut in harshly. "Your imagination's workin' overtime. D'you know that it's nigh twelve o'clock? Time you were in bed."

"Listen, dad. I've got a stranglehold on the idea and I don't mean to let it go till I find out why Dan's so—so touchy about Saddle Gap."

"Oh, the Gap!" said Menary with a laugh. "I guess every man's gotta be bug over somethin' when they git up in the sixties. Don't you worry yourself, girl. You an' me'll take a trip to the Fort soon an' get you some pretties. You'll have a nice visit an' forget all this business. I guess my gal can stack up with any town gal for looks, eh? Come kiss me good-night now."

Gail obeyed and went to bed but not to sleep for a good many hours. When she did sleep it was to dream of Bestwood and the soft, caressing look in his quick eyes when they had rested on her, of the way the snap and hardness melted from his voice when he spoke to her. But with awakening came realization that he was gone and her little sister surprised her in a sob, a sob quickly smothered in the pillows.

When Dan Comox came out of his shack at sunrise his first glance was across the river to see if by any chance the nosey stranger had sneaked back. But no. He was gone true enough. Dan was a little uneasy nevertheless. The debonair "detective" had gone away too willingly, quite as if he had taken a sudden notion to go, anyway. Could it be that? But what could he find out at this late date and from whom? Every day on rising Dan reconnoitred thus, and five days, a week, ten days, two weeks passed with nothing unusual occurring. The old man's mind became easy. He went away on several more of his long trips and was absent for days at a stretch. He never took his old pal along, evidently preferring solitude on these excursions. And he didn't know that in his absence light-footed Gail Menary, borrowing her father's birch-bark canoe had crossed the Chinook and wandered about over his claim a dozen times, examining the caves as Bestwood had done, but with a more professional eye. A daughter of the hills, she could read certain of Nature's signs and many of man's that perforce escaped the engineer, keen as he was, and on her last visit she had climbed up the sheer under-wall beneath the Saddle clinging precariously with fingers and toes—she had removed shoes and hose—and had found a curious eyrie, dark as a wolf's mouth, under the rock formation which gave to the Gap its name. The opening was small, scarcely admitting of head and shoulders, and puzzling a little over this remarkable find she had returned to earth and begun to clothe her feet again when suddenly she was arrested by an idea. Entering the old man's cabin by one of the windows she borrowed his lantern and a length of rope and filled her pocket with matches. From the cabin, which was at the mouth of the Gap, to the wall she had

climbed was a matter of forty yards, but she covered the distance in less than a minute, almost palpitating with eagerness. The second climb was a slower and more difficult procedure because of the lantern swung over her shoulder, but at length she was up at the eyrie again. Carefully she lighted the lantern and more carefully still began to lower it into the opening. She was directly beneath Saddle Gap at a point which would of necessity have required to be filled in with masonry, probably blasted a little—or clamped to the walls with iron had the engineers succeeded in getting the right-of-way.

Down the smoky lantern went, casting a murky glow on the rough, rocky interior. There was no glint in this rock and Gail began to feel her hopes sinking. She hadn't known just what she expected to find but vaguely she had thought of a private gold mine or a great cache of silver fox skins, or something in the nature

of booty. She let the lantern drop to the full extent of the rope, which was short, and then securing a firmer foothold, peered over the rim of the jagged hole. For a time she could discern nothing. Gradually however, a nebulous white blur beneath the lantern became evident and slowly it took definite shape, a horrible shape. With a smothered scream the girl drew back, almost losing her grip and dropping the light as well. For the thing her eyes had seen was a human skeleton! It lay at the bottom of the pocket not five feet below her and the bones were of a bleached grey-whiteness that betokened age, the fact that they lay in a very natural though rather huddled posture making the sight additionally revolting.

Gail lost little time in putting considerable distance between herself and this concealed horror, for though an absolutely fearless girl this daughter of the hills had never before witnessed the like, and the

shock was a lingering one. Not till she had paddled out to mid-stream did she pause to draw a long breath. She beached the canoe and hastened up to the cabin. It was a cloudy morning and her father was at home mending fish nets. She had told him that she was going across to Moose Mountain to look for berries. Now, however, she decided to tell the truth and risk his anger, never a very violent anger to be sure.

But almost at the top of the hill she stopped short, her eyes widened in astonishment. Her heart gave a great throb and then began to beat tumultuously for in the same spot where it had first appeared to her sight stood the calico pinto! Bestwood had come back!

As quickly, however, was she doomed to disappointment for advancing a little timidly, though not without a certain glad eagerness, she again halted. A man was pacing up and down the little pathway



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