

CHAPTER XIII

LONELINESS

THE first misery of loneliness takes the form of a restless inability to concentrate. It is as if the victim wanted to escape from himself. After Cosme's departure Sheila prowled about the silent cabin, began this bit of work and that, dropped it, found herself staring vaguely, listening, waiting, and nervously shook herself into activity again. She tried to whistle, but it seemed like somebody else's music and frightened her ears. At dusk she fastened sacking across the uncurtained windows, lighted both Cosme's lamps, bringing the second from her bedroom, and heaped up a dancing and jubilant fire upon the hearth. In the midst of this illumination she sat, very stiff and still, in the angular elk-hide-covered chair, and knitted her hands together on her knee. Her mind was now intensely active; memories, thoughts, plans, fancies racing fast and furious like screen pictures across her brain. And they seemed to describe themselves in loud whispers. She had difficulty in keeping these voices from taking possession of her tongue.

"I don't want to talk to myself," she murmured, and glanced over her shoulder.

A man has need of his fellows for a shield. Man is