

to be. Say, Molly," he continued, with a kind of pleading earnestness in his voice, "ye've done hankerin' arter the city, ain't ye? Kind o' gettin' used to the mountings ag'in, ain't ye, Molly?"

It was quite dark on the little hill-side now, and Molly could turn her face boldly toward her husband.

"What makes ye keep a-harpin' on that, Sandy? I ain't hankerin' after the city—not for a long time," and a slight shudder ran over her. "Just put that idea out of your head, Sandy. Nothin' could ever tempt me to go to the city again. I hate it!"

She spoke with fierce emphasis, and rose to go in. Sandy, somewhat puzzled by her manner, but reassured by her words, heaved a sigh and rose also.

The stars were out, and from a little patch of swamp at the foot of the hill came the shrill piping of innumerable frogs, and a whip-poor-will's wild, sad cry pierced the silence. The baby had long since fallen asleep. The mother laid him in his cradle, and night and rest settled down over the little cabin.

Spring had passed into summer, and summer was already on the wane; an August morning had dawned over the mountains, and, although the sun shone warmly down upon the dew-drenched earth, the air was deliciously cool and fresh.

Molly stood in the doorway, holding in her arms the baby, whose look of preternatural wisdom had merged itself into one of infantile softness and benignity. She was holding him up for the benefit of Sandy, who, as he went down the red, dusty road, driving the white cow before him, turned now and then to bestow a grimace upon his son and heir. Mother and child made a fair picture in the twining green frame of the trumpet-vine, touched up with flame-like clusters of bloom—a picture which was not lost upon Sandy, who, as he passed out of sight of the cabin, shook his head, and said to himself again:

"Blest ef I see how I ever got up spunk enough to ax her!"

Molly watched her husband out of sight, and then let her eyes wander over the summer landscape. There was a look of deep content in her face, which was no longer pale and worn. The traces of struggle and suffering had disappeared. The past may have had its anguish, and its

sins, perhaps, but the present must have seemed peaceful and secure, for she turned from the doorway with a song upon her lips—a song which lingered all the morning as she went in and out about her household tasks, trying to make more trim and bright that which was already the perfection of trimness and brightness. When she had finished her work the morning was far advanced and the sun glared hotly in at door and window.

She had rocked the baby to sleep, and came out of the inner room with the happy mother-look upon her face. She turned to look back, to see, perhaps, if the fly-net were drawn carefully enough over the little sleeper. As she stood thus she was conscious of a human shadow which fell through the outer door and blotted out the square of sunshine which lay across the floor, and a deep voice said:

"I'd thank you for a drink of water, ma'am."

Molly turned quickly and the eyes of the two met. Over the man's face came a look of utter amazement which ended in an evil smile.

Over the woman's face came a change so sudden, so terrible, that the newcomer, base and hardened as he looked, seemed struck by it, and the cruel smile subsided a little as he exclaimed:

"Molly Craigie, by all that's holy!"

The woman did not seem to hear him. She stood staring at him with wild, incredulous eyes and parted lips, from which came in a husky whisper the words:

"Dick Staples!"

Then she struck the palms of her hands together and with a sharp cry she sank into a chair. The man stepped across the threshold and stood in the center of the room looking curiously about him. He was a large, powerfully-built fellow, and in a certain way a handsome one. He was attired in a kind of hunting costume which he wore with a jaunty, theatrical air.

"I swear!" he exclaimed, with a low, brutal laugh, as his eyes took in the details of the neat little kitchen, and came at last to rest upon the woman's white face. "I swear! I do believe Molly's married!"

The idea seemed to strike him as a peculiarly novel and amusing one.

"Molly Craigie married and settled down! Well, if that isn't a good one!" and he burst into another cruel

laugh. His mocking words seemed at last to sting the woman, who had sat smitten mute before him, into action. She rose and faced him, trembling, but defiant.

"Dick Staples, what brought ye here only God knows, but ye musn't stay here. Ye must go 'way this minute, d'ye hear? Ye must go 'way!"

She spoke firmly but hurriedly, glancing down the road as she did so. The man stared blankly at her a moment.

"Well, now, if that ain't a nice way to treat an old friend! Why, Molly, you ain't going back on Dick you ain't seen for so long, are you? I'd no idea of ever seeing you again, but now I've found you, you don't get rid of me so easy. I'm going to make myself at home, Molly, see if I don't." And the man seated himself and crossed his legs comfortably, looking about him with a mocking air of geniality and friendliness.

Molly went nearer to him; the defiance in her manner had disappeared and a look of almost abject terror and appeal had taken its place.

"Dick," she cried, imploringly, "oh, Dick, for God's sake hear me! If ye want to see me, to speak with me, I won't refuse ye, only not here, Dick—for God's sake not here!" and she glanced desperately around.

"What brought ye here, Dick? Tell me that, and where are you stayin'?"

"Well, then," he answered, surlily, "I ran up for a little shooting, and I'm staying at Digby's."

"At Digby's! That's three miles below here." She spoke eagerly.

"Dick, you noticed the little meetin'-house just below here in the hollow?"

The man nodded.

"If ye'll go away now, Dick, right away, I'll meet ye in the woods. Follow the path that leads up behind the meetin'-house tomorrow mornin' between ten and eleven an' I'll meet ye there, but oh, Dick, for God's sake go away now, before—before he comes!"

The desperation in her voice and looks produced some effect upon the man apparently, for he rose and said:

"Well, Molly, as you're so particular I'll do as you say; but mind now, don't you play me no tricks. If you ain't there punctual, I'll be here; now see if I don't, my beauty." He would have flung his arm about her, but she started back with flaming eyes.

"None o' that, Dick Staples!" she cried fiercely.

"Spunky as ever, and twice as handsome, I swear!" exclaimed the fellow, gazing admiringly at her.

"Are ye goin'?"

There was something in her voice and mien which compelled obedience and the man prepared to go. Outside the door he flung his rifle over his shoulder and looking back, said: "Remember now, Molly, 'meet me in the willow glen, you know. Punctual is the word!' and with a meaning smile he sauntered down the slope, humming a popular melody as he went.

The woman stood for a time as he had left her, her arms hanging by her side, her eyes fixed upon the doorway. The baby slept peacefully on, and outside the birds were twittering and calling, and the breeze tossed the vine-tendrils in at door and window, throwing graceful, dancing shadows over the floor and across her white face and nerveless hands. A whistle, clear and cheery, came piping through the sultry noontide stillness. It pierced her deadened senses, and she started, passing her hand across her eyes.

"God!"

That was all she said. Then she began laying the table and preparing the midday meal. When Sandy reached the cabin she was moving about with nervous haste, her eyes gleaming strangely and a red spot on either cheek. Her husband's eyes followed her wonderingly. The child awoke and she went to bring him.

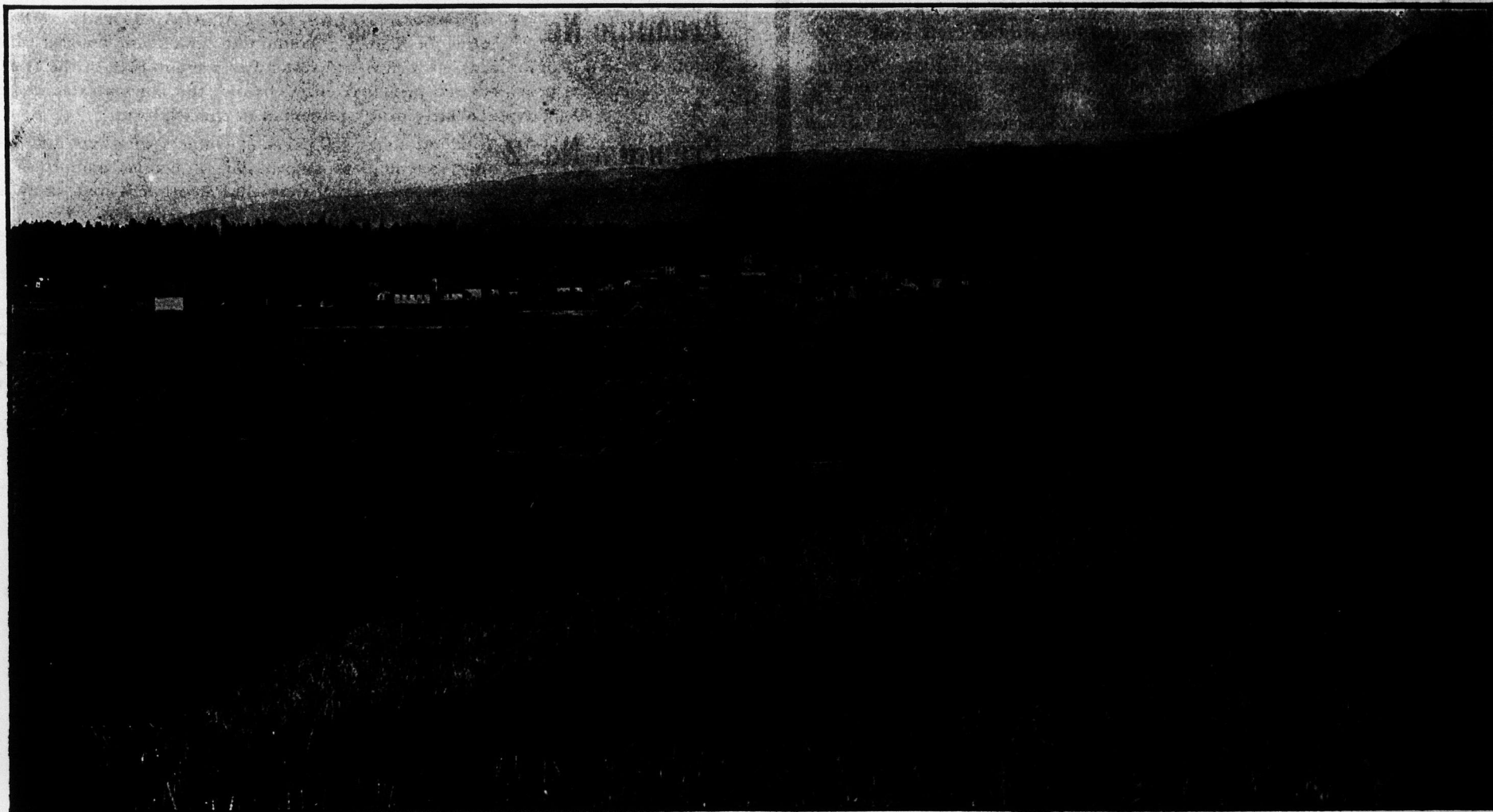
"I wonder what's up now?" he muttered, combing his beard with his fingers as he was wont to do when perplexed or embarrassed. "Women is cur'us! They's no two ways about it, they is cur'us! They's no countin' fur 'em no how, 'deed they ain't!"

At this point the baby appeared, and after his usual frolic with him, during which he did not cease his furtive study of Molly's face, Sandy shouldered his hoe and started for the field. As he reached the door he turned and said:

"Oh, Molly, I seen a man again' across the road down by the crick; one o' them city fellers, rigged out in huntin' traps. Did ye see him?"

Molly was standing with her back toward her husband, putting away the remains of the meal.

"A man like that came to the door an' asked for a drink," she answered, quietly.



The Town of Armstrong, northern end of Okanagan Valley.