

# Kwail

By Mary Josephine North

HERE was night in the valley—night and a great vague stillness. Up above no moon gave her light, and the north stars were far apart and dim. Kwail, crouched low against the door, wrapped his blankets closer about him; but his eyes never stirred from the far corner. It had been a long and weary vigil that tomorrow would end, but he dared not give any thought of tomorrow. Hunger and a terrible blinding weariness had begun their work upon him. Physical inertia he had suffered long before and forgotten; it had passed, bringing with it a strange mood, when his mind worked clearly and methodically, with a precision that maddened him and left him without any kind of hope. But again the mood had changed. Imagination caught him dizzily to a seventh heaven of emotion, of exquisite delight. Superstition, with its bitter melancholy, had gone, all. He forgot his cowering fear of the power which brooded so evilly on the great waters and the veiled hills; he ceased to mutter to his god incantations weird and sad. A mighty faith rent goldenly with sight gave him strange victory.

He called up his life before him, scanning the days of his childhood, the happy idle days on the quiet plains of Kadoondatinda, in the valley where "the-wind-was-always"; following the long trail which had brought him to the big sea, and the hills, and the snow-flowers blowing. Now came visions of great deeds done daringly, he and his fellows stalking the bear and the stealthy cougar among dim mountain fastnesses, trapping the caribou and horned elk, luring the deer among the rocks and crags. Mighty hunters, all of them, loving death as life, but mightier, more daring than them all, was Kwail, son of the plains. The man stirred suddenly, his black eyes on fire with passion. A vision, more vivid than any that had gone before, came like a flash before him.

He saw morning, with a great light on the hills, and the sea shot grey with mist. In the forest the trees were blowing softly, white spruce and mountain larch feathering the black gloom of the pines. Flowers were everywhere, little tender gleams among the fir cones and the moss, loveliest the yellow lilies flashing in the sunlight; while the hill-streams broke over silvered rocks and melodied of emerald glaciers which high up above the snows had given them birth. There was a trail bending from among the shadows; up it a man was coming, strung bow in his hand. War was in his heart, and a great melancholy. Yesterday one had killed his brother; to-day he would kill *him*. The man bent to his arrow. Again he raised his head, poised, alert, and saw her. He had thought it a black day, heavy with omen; he saw that the sunlight was glinting goldenly on a country of desire. He had thought he lived awake and keen; he found he was but sleeping with one dream in his heart. She stood upright, slender as a little fawn, holding in her bare brown arms the herbs which she had been gathering.

"How!" said Kwail, and trembled at his boldness.

She shook her head gently. He was a stranger to her, this man with his great lithe form; she was of the Squamish people dwelling in the valley. "I not know you," she said, and turned away among the heather.

He dared not call to her or touch her—he feared to waken from his dream—but when he thought she would not know, he followed her, saw her pass down the mountain trail into the valley, watched her for long hours as she sat before the little house, sorting her sweet-smelling herbs. And next day he sought Kwatek, her father.

"Squamish man," said he, for he was very bold now that the girl, Sali, was not