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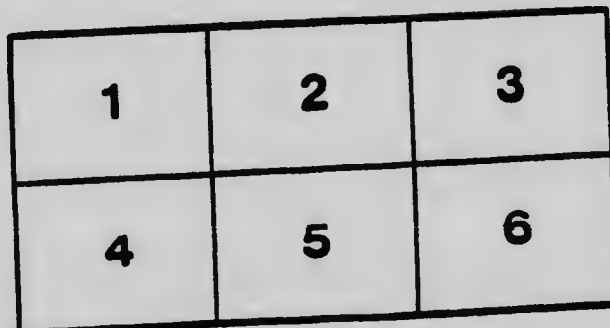
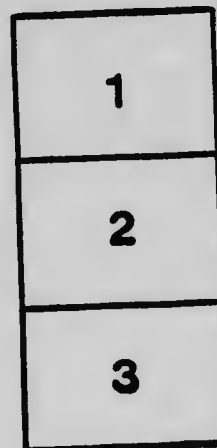
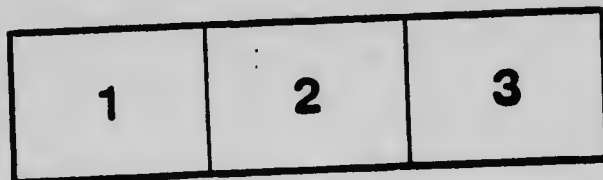
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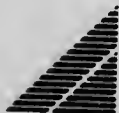
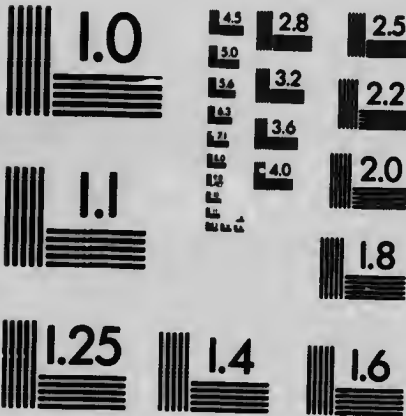
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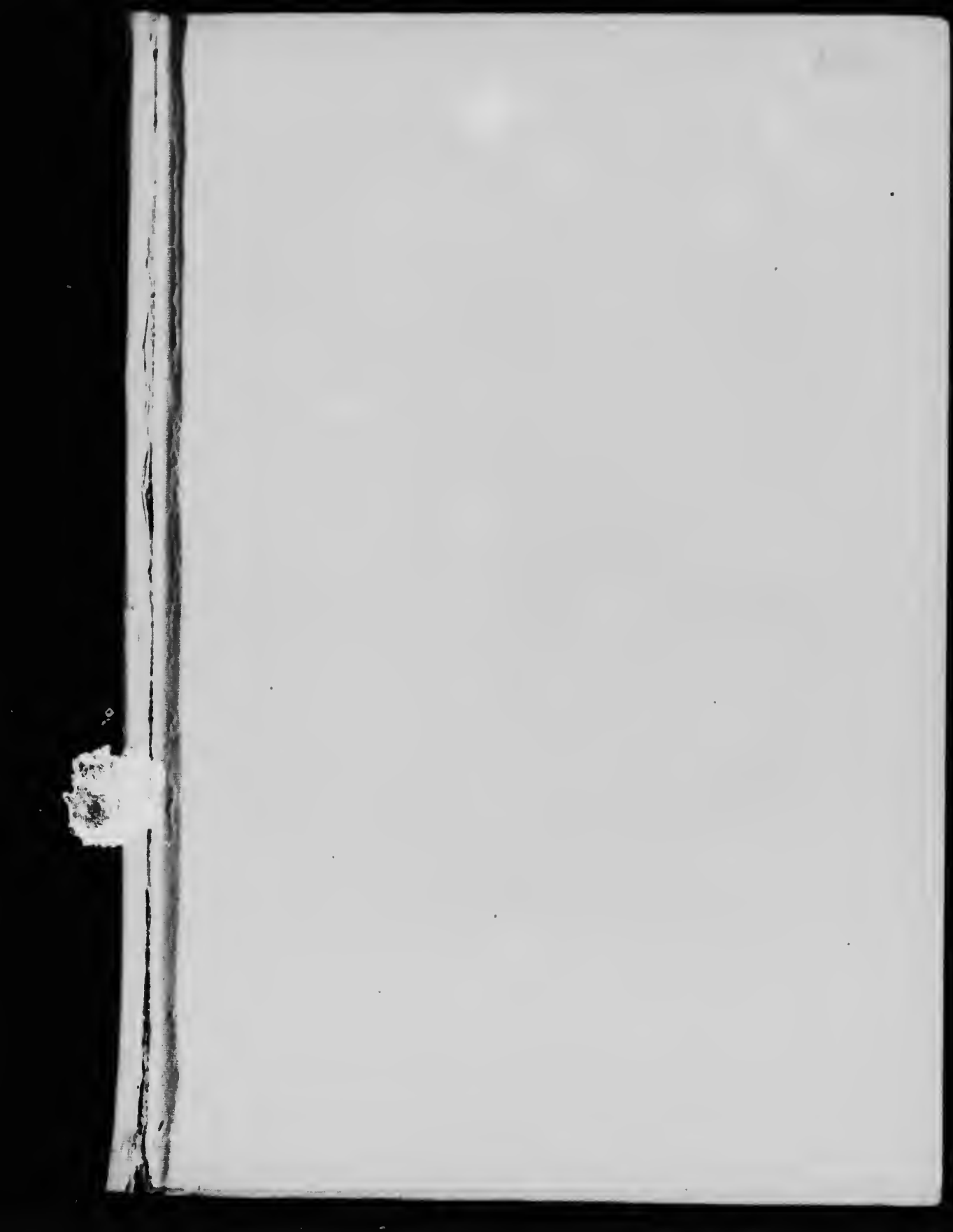


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THE CHRYSLIS

HAROLD MORTON KRAMER





"FOR THE LOVE OF GOD DON'T GO DOWN!" SHE PLEADED.
Page 312.

THE CHRYSALIS

BY

HAROLD MORTON KRAMER

AUTHOR OF "HEARTS AND THE CROSS," "GAYLE LANGFORD"
AND "THE CASTLE OF DAWN"

ILLUSTRATED BY H. C. EDWARDS



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THE CHRYSALIS

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"A chrysalis is an ugly thing, but it contains possibilities that are beautiful. Maybe your heart has been a chrysalis."

Courage, St. Simeon! This dull chrysalis
Cracks into shining wings, and hope ere death
Spreads more and more and more, that God hath now
Sponged and made blank of crimeful record all
My mortal archives.

— TENNYSON: *St. Simeon Stylites.*

WOU

TENAS WAUWAU

TO you whose eyes will scan the pages of "The Chrysalis" I beg the privilege of addressing a brief foreword. In this humble volume I have written of a country I know as I know my own dooryard, of a people to whose broad charity and sturdy virtues I am no stranger. I knew this country "where the mountains turn to the glowing West and slope to the sunset sea" in its picturesque days; with broad sombrero and flapping fringe on leathern "shaps" I have ridden its trails across the hills where the long bunchgrass waved; at night I have made my bed on the prairies of the Palouse and watched the stars come out in the sky, or pulled a blanket up to protect my face from the falling rain, while coyotes wailed their lullaby.

But "The Chrysalis" is in no sense intended to be historical, and the shortcomings of some of its characters could as easily be found among the residents of other communities. I simply chose to have them play their drama in

the Palouse. And at the same time I wished to give to fiction some bits of the life of that great "Inland Empire." In the telling of the story I have used, here and there, words and phrases of the Chinook jargon, once common in that Northwest, but now rapidly becoming a fading memory. The Chinook jargon is a sort of universal language which was gotten up, I believe, by the Hudson Bay Company when it first established its trading posts in that country. There were so many languages and dialects among the adventurers and the different tribes of Indians that it was found necessary to establish a trade language that all could speak. The Chinook jargon was the outcome of this necessity, and a decade ago many of the words were used frequently by the ranchers of that section. As used in this story, they are correct. I have endeavored so to arrange the dialogue that the reader will have no trouble in immediately catching the meaning whenever the Chinook is used, but for the convenience and entertainment of those whose interest in this strange jargon may lead them to give it more than a passing notice I append a lexicon that will give the Chinook and English of all jargon words used in this

story. To those who have never known the far Northwest this may be a revelation. I assure you that it is correct.

H. M. K.

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THE CHRYSALIS

CHAPTER I

MAKING A SENATOR

THERE was grim joy in the Yale club house that Thanksgiving day at the end of the first half—joy, because the score stood Yale, 6; Harvard, 4; grim, because every one of those panting athletes knew that many desperate, heart-breaking minutes still lay between them and final victory.

Outside, they could hear the playing of bands, and from the windows they could see the rooters' brigade marching around the field, waving their blue and white pennants and singing their battle songs. The trainers were darting about the room, unheeding the tumult without, but devoting every precious moment of the intermission to the examination of legs, arms, and aching heads, for upon the condition of this flesh, bone, and muscle depended the

game. During all of it the head coach was speaking rapidly, tersely criticizing a guard for playing too high, complimenting a tackle for his heroic blocking of a tandem play that had threatened the Yale goal; explaining, commanding, scolding, pleading!

"And now, listen, all of you!" he said. "Here's a spur I've been saving for the last half, and the same spur is being gouged into Harvard. This game will decide more than the question of which college has the better football team. It will decide whether a Yale or a Harvard man is to be President of the United States! Hah! I thought that would open that swollen eye of yours, Marley! It's the chance of a lifetime for you huskies!"

A trainer turned from the ankle he was massaging and, still kneeling, a bottle of liniment in his hand, stared up at the coach. But in an instant that autocrat's finger was pointing at him.

"Get busy, there!" was the command. "Keep that joint working for another hour and he can ride in a wheel chair for the rest of his life if he wishes to, but he's got to get around the end in this next half. Senator Warren Nelson and Judge Granville Garrison, of the

United States Supreme Court, are watching this game. Both are from the State of Washington, and both are Republicans. Nelson is already a United States Senator from that State and wants to serve one more term and then become President. Judge Garrison wants to leave the bench and go to the Senate from Washington. Both are prominent Presidential possibilities and have strong followings. If both stay in the race there will be a deadlock on the part of the Republicans, and a Democratic Senator will be elected."

"That suits me, all right," chirped the guard, who still smarted under the lash of the coach's reprimand. "We're not playing politics now, anyway."

"Shut up, Bronson; time's too short for arguments. Of course you're not playing politics, but Garrison and Nelson are too smart to make a hole in the line for a Democrat to go through for a touchdown. Each has tried in every way to get the other to stand aside, but they could not agree until ten days ago, when they met in New York at a political banquet and got to arguing about this game. Nelson is a Yale alumnus and Garrison is prouder of Harvard than he is of his mother. Finally,

Garrison banged the table with his fist and swore that his faith in Harvard was so strong that he would agree to withdraw in case they lost, providing Nelson would stake his chances on Yale. Half a dozen heard the argument and the proposition, and Nelson could not refuse. He's game, anyway. So there you are—Yale or Harvard for the Senate, and probably the Presidency. Either man is sure to win with the other out of the way, and as one or the other is certain to be out of the way after this game, you see we are not playing politics at all—(his eyes focused on Bronson, who grinned and nodded)—but are playing for Yale against Harvard in the high places. What's the answer?"

"Y-A-L-E!" came the shout with a vigor that brought a smile to the coach's face.

"I knew it! You can do it, but you've got to fight. Luck helped you in the first half. Only a miracle made 'Foxy' Brown miss that goal kick for Harvard. He'll not miss again if you give him the chance. Time's up. Now go to 'em!"

The door was flung open, and the eleven trotted out onto the field, a storm of cheers greeting them, pennants waving frantically,

and their band striving manfully to make the horns and drums heard above the tumult. Forming a circle, they began passing the ball, and then a billow of applause rolled out from the Harvard side of the grounds and crimson pennants bobbed excitedly as the Harvard team trotted out and also took the circle formation for practice.

A moment later the referee's whistle sounded, and the vim with which Harvard's gladiators sprang to their positions proved that they, too, had received the "spur" and were eager to give battle. Sharply and crisply the signals came after the kick-off, and then the two teams crashed together. It was Harvard's ball, and the Yale line yielded slightly, but still enough to save Harvard from losing on downs.

"Hold 'em! Hold 'em! Hold 'em!" shrieked thousands of voices, while as many yelled at Harvard: "Tear 'em up! Eat 'em up! It's a paper line!"

At last Yale held, and the repeated assaults of the Crimson availed nothing. Bronson broke through the line in time to block a punt, and the ball went to Yale. Along the side-lines pandemonium held sway until the quarter-back

was forced to shout the signals at the top of his voice, but gradually the tumult died away and the spectators gazed almost in silence at the terrible battle being fought before them.

"Good God, it's awful!" muttered the referee as the teams came together with a sickening crash.

The ferocity of the struggle awed even the megaphone brigades, and instead of bellowing their slogans, the most of them sat in tense silence, watching Yale slowly work the ball toward the Harvard goal. By this time each team was sending an unconscious or otherwise disabled man off the field after each scrimmage, and the marvel of it was the eagerness with which the substitutes rushed to fill the places of the injured ones, and the pleadings of the crippled men to be allowed to return to the line.

"Layton," said the Yale captain, during a pause while Bronson's arms were being "pumped" in order to get breath back into his body. "Can you hit that line once more? I don't want to work you to death, but we have more subs in the game now than they have, and I've got to use you again if your shoulder will stand it."

The half-back stood with his hands on his hips, surveying the field. He was a tall, broad-shouldered young fellow; his hair was auburn, his nose straight and sharply chiseled, his chin firm, his eyes a steel gray, and his gaze steady.

"Give me the ball," he replied, quietly, his gaze passing from the field to the side-lines. "I can go through that tackle all right."

The ball was on Harvard's thirty-five yard line and had been forced well to the Yale side of the field. Suddenly Layton's jaws seemed to tighten.

"Wilkins," he asked, turning to the captain, "who is that man yonder—standing upon the seat of that big red automobile? No, farther to the left. Don't you see him? The fellow with the gray mustache and the silk hat. He's holding a girl in front of him. See her? The girl with the heavy furs."

"No, I—Oh, sure I see now. What's the matter with you, Seb? That's Senator Nelson!"

"Senator Nelson! Is that the man who rises or falls with this game?"

The half-back whirled and faced the captain, and in his usually cold gray eyes something was blazing. Then he turned again and

walked nearer to the side-lines and looked closely at the man in the automobile. Wilkins followed him up.

"Don't you know the western celebrities, Layton?" he asked, laughing. "You're a westerner yourself, aren't you?"

"Yes, but I never got interested in politics—before. And *that's* Senator Nelson?"

"It is. And now I'm certain to give you the ball. You're both westerners—and they tell me that out there they teach a fellow never to forget."

The half-back whirled to the captain and parted his lips, but no word came. He moistened his lips with his tongue and glanced again at the automobile. The girl was fluttering a blue and white pennant, and the man with the gray mustache was smiling broadly as he leaned to accept the hands of several men who had crowded their way to him, evidently congratulating him on the victory his alma mater was bringing to him.

"Yes, some of us are built that way," said Layton, at last replying to the captain. He moistened his lips again. "How much time have we left?"

"Can't be more than five or six minutes, and

we've got this game won sure. I'll try an end run, and give you the ball on the next line-up. You can make the final touchdown. By thunder, it is a great opportunity for you."

Layton nodded slowly.

"Yes, it is a great opportunity for me. Do you suppose Garrison and Nelson will stick to their agreement?"

"They've got to. Their agreement was witnessed by too many people for them to back out. Nelson has more to lose than Garrison, because Garrison can stay on the Supreme Bench for life and have a good thing, but if Nelson is compelled to withdraw from the race his political career is ruined. Don't you see?"

"Yes, I see—I see."

"This is your last year at Yale, Seb, and you will finish your football career by making a United States Senator—perhaps a President! If I—there's the whistle. I'll give you your chance."

The right end made a desperate effort, but one yard was the best he could do, and again the Harvard rooters began their frantic work, hoping against hope to stouten the hearts of the eleven that was standing in the very shadow of defeat. Time and again the Crim-

son's nine 'rahs sounded, long and deep, while Yale was giving cheer for cheer in the sharp and quick manner customary to the blue and white.

Again the whistle sounded, and the squirming mass of men slowly untangled itself and the players took position, Yale with alacrity, Harvard with bulldog grit that bade them fight to the last second.

Wilkins glanced at Layton. The half-back's face was showing a gray pallor, but his eyes were burning, his lips tight-pressed.

"Signals!" shouted the captain.

Layton arose and looked over the heads of the line to where Senator Nelson stood in the automobile, smiling happily, while the girl waved the gaudy pennant and screamed something that was lost in the general uproar.

"Get down, Seb! Play lower—damn it, man, lower—lower!" cried the captain, and the half-back with the muscles of his mouth drawing deep lines around his face, dropped to the old crouch.

"Fourteen — twenty-two — ten — ninety — five!"

The ball was snapped, the pass to Layton cleanly made, and the half-back bored forward

like a battering ram, crashing through between guard and tackle, while ten thousand voices shrieked in joy or despair.

Then the tumult stilled for an instant. No one could explain just how it had happened, but Layton had straightened after tearing through the line, and with the Harvard full-back bearing down upon him to tackle, he had in some unaccountable way fumbled the ball, apparently made a desperate effort to catch it as it bounded from his hands, but his fingers struck the ball instead of catching it, and the oval shot straight into the hands of the Harvard full-back, who dashed around the surprised Yale end and fled down the field.

For a moment not a sound came from the side-lines. The Yale full-back had been playing well back to guard against a possible fluke, and he alone now stood between Harvard and victory. Nimble the man with the ball sprang aside in an effort to escape being tackled, but the effort was not successful. With a desperate lunge the defender of the goal threw his arms about the runner's thighs. The shock was terrific, and both went rolling over the ground, but with a grip like death, Harvard clung to the ball, and rising to his knees, he threw him-

self forward his full length, his arms reaching just across the precious goal line with the ball as the referee's whistle signaled that the time was up. A roar of victory rolled out from the Harvard side of the field. Wilkins ran to where Layton stood near the side-lines, his face still showing its pallor.

"Seb—how—?" The captain choked, and tears streamed from his eyes. "Explain it! Don't stand like that! I don't want to think—!"

His shoulders shook, and, dropping his head, he walked away. A man bearing a tattered Yale pennant ran up to Layton and cursed him.

"You're a traitor! You did it purposely, you—you dog! That for you!"

He spat squarely in the face of Layton, but the half-back's clenched fist caught him on the jaw and he went to the ground.

Layton gave the fallen one no further notice. His eyes were on the red automobile, where a small group of people were applying restoratives to a gray-mustached man who had collapsed. Then the half-back turned and walked back to the club house, and no one spoke to him as he passed.

That night he stood alone in his room, watching through the window the crowds that surged along the streets below him, and listening to the wild rejoicings of the victorious men from Cambridge. A cigar, half smoked, had died out and the ashes streaked his clothing unheeded as his teeth sank steadily deeper into the other end of the cigar. There was the sound of footsteps in the hallway and a moment later Bronson flung the door open and limped into the room. A handsome fellow he was, stalwart of build, and with a frank countenance that always won him friends even before his sterling worth had opportunity to prove itself, but now there was that in his face that checked the speech that had come to Layton's lips, and Bronson paused after closing the door. The two looked into each other's eyes in silence for a few breaths. Then Bronson spoke.

"I've come to pack up, Seb, for I've decided to change my room." He hobbled across to the wardrobe and began throwing things out onto the bed.

"That's a fair sample of the 'true as steel' business we hear exploited so often! Very

well. I'll help you pack up—and then you may go out and help tear me to tatters. It's the way—”

“Hush that!” Bronson sent a pair of silk pajamas sprawling on the floor and turned to Layton. “We’ve roomed together too long for that. I left a group of our own fellows this evening because I wouldn’t listen to their talk, and a while ago I punched the face of a jabbering monkey from Cambridge because he sneered. But I don’t think I can room here any longer.”

Layton shifted his cigar stub to the opposite side of his mouth, and again bit at it savagely.

“Thanks, Joe. It was good of you, but—”

“No thanks are due. I did it for Yale.” He turned again to the work of packing.

The other dropped into a chair and watched his companion in silence for a time. Finally he reached under the table and held a box of cigars toward Bronson.

“Won’t you smoke?” he asked, quietly. “The season’s ended and you can break training now, you know.” There was the faintest suspicion of a smile on his lips as he finished speaking.

The guard half turned toward the cigar, but

quickly caught himself and seized a trunk, instead, and dragged it toward the doorway.

"No, I thank you." He straightened up and looked full at Layton. "Seb, I'm going to ask you point blank: Are you going to quit college or finish your course?"

The cigar box was banged down on the table between them, and, quickly leaning forward, Layton brought his clenched fist down on the frail box, smashing the lid to splinters.

"I'll finish!" he exclaimed, his eyes blazing. "No gabbling narrow-heads can drive me away! I know the value of an education, and I'm here to get it. Life has always been a serious thing with me, and I'm glad of it. I'm fitter for this race where everybody is trying to trip one and leave him hunting for a gun with which to blow out his brains! It's every man for himself while we're alive, and I don't think we'll find any bigger devils after the breath leaves us than the ones that are trying their damndest to get us by the throats while we're on earth! I'm going to stay, Bronson! I'm going to stay, and any polly-woggle that doesn't like it can go to hell!"

Long after the other had gone, Layton sat in front of the grate, where the flames leaped

and roared and the glowing coals took fantastic shapes before his seldom-blinking eyes. A gust of the chill November wind moaned at the window and rattled a shutter; occasionally he would take from his lips a cigar and blow from him a cloud of smoke that circled about his head in a hazy veil and then harked to the call of the grate and swept up the mammoth chimney like a writhing spectre.

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CHAPTER II

THE POLITICAL GAME

IT was Junetime in the Valley of the Palouse. From a thousand hills came the fragrance of wild flowers to sweeten the summer winds; from a thousand hills waved the green growing grain, and all too infrequently a cluster of giant pines crowned the rougher summits with their grateful shade and mingled their breath with the wooing breezes, while down where the creeks wound their uncertain way cottonwoods fringed the banks and sheltered the lazy herds that slaked their thirst and chewed ruminatively and contentedly where there was not a spear of grass to be found.

Lying at the northern edge of the Palouse "country," as every son of Washington styles it, and close to where the Cœur d' Alenes lift themselves in rugged grandeur, the city of Spokane draws tribute from hundreds of surrounding miles of that "Inland Empire." The

marvel of the great Northwest that Marcus Whitman saved for the United States of America by a ride of four thousand miles to Washington, Spokane boasts of most of the wonders and delights of the commercial centers of the East, with few of their grimy sorrows, and no city of this continent is more picturesquely framed by Nature.

Thirty-five miles away Lake Cœur d' Alene has for its outlet the Spokane river, and through all of these miles, between rocky walls, the river rushes on with ever-increasing force until with a mighty roar it flings itself in marvelous cataracts over stony precipices in the very heart of the city, and the voice of the falls is the voice of Industry, a voice whose power is excelled in America by Niagara only.

Hundreds of miles to the westward the beacons of Seattle and Tacoma send their lights far out through the mists of Puget Sound, and ships follow the sea's highways from remote corners of the globe to their docks; and, too, close beside this sunset sea Olympia proclaims to the world that it is the capital, that here the statesmen assemble to enact the laws and appropriate from the State's

treasury. But, notwithstanding the truthfulness of all this, it is in Spokane that the politicians foregather to smile and smile—and grip the throats of their antagonists. It is in Spokane, with the breath of the flower-splashed Palouse Valley sweeping across her troubled breast, and with the eye of Nature's God looking down upon her from the Cœur d'Alene's grim watchtowers that destinies are made and unmade and revealed later in Olympia on the Sound.

On Riverside Avenue an imposing structure rears its granite front full two stories higher than any other building in the city, and from the Rocky Mountains on the east to where the Columbia empties its waters into the Pacific on the west it is known as the Eagle's Nest, for every suite of rooms in that magnificent office building is occupied by politicians and lawyers. Fitting appellation? It is for you to judge. A broad, column-studded entrance from the street is flanked by the usual office directories, with the news stand and cigar cases convenient, while straight ahead heavily wired doors click as they slide open and shut and the elevators speed silently upward with their impa-

tient prey for the "eagles," or as noiselessly descend with those who have given battle and withdrawn.

The third-floor front suite is especially handsome and convenient in its appointments, and evidently was designed by one with a far-seeing mind, for the partition walls are of double thickness and deadened until one must shout very loud, indeed, if he wishes to be heard in an adjoining room. These were the offices of the Honorable Granville Garrison, representative from the State of Washington to the Senate of the United States. Not always were political conferences suggestive of Quaker meetings. Ofttimes some obstreperous county boss must be whipped into line, and not infrequently there were stormy scenes before the hostile one was ready to hold up his hands and answer meekly to roll call.

Senator Garrison abhorred the stuffy, roll-top desks, and chose as his work bench a large table that stood in the middle of the room, and always when at his work he faced the one door opening into this retreat. Were you to be particularly observant as you entered the room you might detect a jagged hole in the mahogany wainscoting back of where Garrison sat, and

perhaps you would observe that the hole was but an inch or two higher than the Senator's head. The explanation lies in the fact that soon after the Hon. Granville Garrison's return to Spokane from his first session of Congress he had been waited upon by a wrathful ranchman from over in the Big Bend country, who damned Garrison in no uncertain language for his failure to obtain the passage of an anti-barbed-wire fence law for the ranges, and who stamped his high-heeled boots on the polished floor until certain that he was having no effect on the Senator, who smiled exasperatingly during all of it. Then there was a flash of blued steel and a bullet chugged into the wall just behind Garrison.

Before the second shot could be fired the Congressman had leaped at the rancher and sent the gun flying from his hands, after which a blow in the region of the ear had accomplished much as a pacificator. For Granville Garrison was not a coward, nor could he be classed with that genus since designated by a strenuous President as "molly-coddles." In early life he had roughed it on the range, and he was not long into his teens before he could ride a broncho or rope a steer with skill. That

abundant wealth came to his father as it did to so many cattle kings is another story, and has naught to do with this tale, save as it explains how the boy was able to desert the saddle for school, where he turned to his passion, law, and went steadily upward to the bench of the Supreme Court of his country. Not an uncommon incident in the land of the Stars and Stripes, and, therefore, the more easily understood in this instance.

In spite of his very active life, or perhaps because of it, he carried his fifty-seven years easily. His step was elastic, his eye clear, his smooth-shaven face ruddy, but his hair was iron gray. Trouble sat lightly upon him, and once he decided upon a project he was never known to turn from it until he met either success or defeat. Hesitancy or compromise had no part in his rule of life. Chivalrous and courteous as a court-gallant to women, he seemed neither to seek nor avoid their society and, therefore, was idolized in secret by many, but there had never been a hint of scandal resultant. With men, it was his motto to love his friends and hate his enemies; to reach out the helping hand to his friends, and to pursue

relentlessly and crush effectually his enemies.

Promptly at nine o'clock this June morning the Hon. Granville Garrison's electric run-about glided up to the curbing in front of the Eagle's Nest and the Senator alighted. Bowing politely here and there, he paused at the cigar stand, took a handful from a box that was brought out from some hidden nook, and entered the elevator, stuffing his cigars into his pocket as he did so. In his outer office demure stenographers paused to smile across their desks and bid him good morning, while a brass-buttoned office boy sprang from his seat in the window to take the master's hat and stick.

"Four waiting, sir."

The boy nodded toward the reception room, the door of which stood partly open. A sudden epidemic of nervous coughs from this room told the waiting ones were aware of Garrison's arrival. The Senator picked up the four cards from a small tray and glanced at them, finally selecting one and holding it apart from the others while he apparently weighed some question in his mind. Then he handed the card to the boy.

"This one first," he said, and with the outer cards in his hand he turned and entered his private office.

He had scarcely seated himself before the door was again opened and the office boy, stepping aside, announced:

"Mr. Jamieson, sir."

Garrison arose from his chair, and extended his hand with a peculiar upward turn to the palm that always made his handshakes appear in the nature of a tribute he was offering. His smile was genial, his voice undemonstrative.

"The *Journal's* men are always welcome, Mr. Jamieson. Be seated—there near the window where you can fill your lungs with that sweet air fresh from the hills. With that in my lungs I always want to speak of the herds and the growing crops, the real things worth discussing, and not politics. It has too many artificialities, and though we may regret it we cannot deny it—nor remedy it. Yet I presume that your call has to do with politics."

"It has, sir. The *Journal* would be pleased to have you read this dispatch, just received from the Associated Press."

The Senator took the type-written sheet and read aloud:

"Washington, June 10.—That the far west must be reckoned with at the next Republican Presidential convention was made evident here this morning by the announcement on good authority that Senator Granville Garrison, of Washington State, is to be a candidate, and is actively at work even now in the interest of his candidacy. He is said to be planning a thorough tour of all the principal cities of the Northwest this summer and fall with the object of getting that section of the country completely organized.

"It will be remembered that at the last session of Congress Senator Garrison came in for much criticism because of his alleged friendliness toward the 'barbed-wire men,' as the interests were called who were fighting for legislation that would permit them to construct fences across the cattle ranges of the west, fences that oftentimes shut the herds away from sufficient water. However, it is denied that Senator Garrison was friendly to the parties referred to, and it is declared that he has been made the victim of over-confidence in the integrity of certain of these barbed-wire men. Doubtless, at the next session he will rectify the mistake, if such it can be called.

That he will prove a powerful candidate is generally believed."

Garrison held the dispatch and smiled blandly across at the reporter, but had that young gentleman been studying the Senator's eyes instead of his smile he would have detected in them a glitter that utterly belied the pleasant curve of his lips, a glitter like the sparkle of the winter's sun on frosted steel.

"The *Journal* wishes to secure a statement from you on the dispatch," said Jamieson, taking it from Garrison's outstretched hand.

"Then you may say that my most earnest wish is that I may fill my present office so well that the people of my State will not want me to leave the Senate for the Presidency. As for myself, really I have been so busy trying to be of value as Senator that I have had no thought for other things."

"It's a trait that the State appreciates, too, Mr. Garrison."

Mr. Jamieson was warming under the affability and confidential manner of the great man.

"Ah, if it were only so!" Garrison drummed lightly on the table with his fingers,

and then continued: "Perhaps it is so, as you declare—I do not mean that I am not satisfied with the people's attitude. I only mean that the reward you speak of is the highest I could wish. It rounds out a man's life most gloriously. But the acts of a public man are viewed from so many different standpoints that his purposes oftentimes are misunderstood, and a broken heart is the culmination of his years of hard work that is not performed for the salary there is in it."

Jamieson arose, and the Senator did likewise, holding out his hand again.

"Oh, yes, I came near forgetting one point—the tour spoken of in the dispatch."

"But I remembered, and was about to remind you, for I want a complete understanding between myself and the people. I had been invited by a number of cities to visit them and speak, but the invitations had no political significance. However, in view of this story from Washington I shall endeavor to cancel my engagements, though I had anticipated much pleasure and a relaxation from work in the brief tour."

"It isn't for me to offer advice, but I hope

you will not do this, Senator. I'll try to see that the *Journal* makes it strong and sets you right before the public, and—"

"No, no, no! Do not quote me beyond what I have said, please."

"Certainly not—but if the *Journal* says it on your behalf that's different."

"Quite different, of course."

"And it would be a shame to have you give up your pleasant tour just because—"

"Tut, tut, young man! It is nothing compared to the risk of being misunderstood."

Jamieson carried away with him the vivid memory of a cordial hand clasp, an engaging smile, and a conviction that high up in the Eagle's Nest was a man who held the people close to his heart. As for the Senator, he made short work of the callers who still waited in his reception room, and as the last one withdrew the politician touched a button. The boy answered the summons with alacrity.

"Run down and get me a copy of yesterday morning's *Times*. Move lively. I'm waiting."

And while he waited he paced the floor, his hands jammed deeply into his trousers pockets, his head drooped in study. A furrow crept between his eyes as he tramped back and forth,

and when the paper was handed him he spread it out on the table and dropped into his chair. Carefully he scanned the columns until he found the modest heading, "Steamship Arrivals," and then his searching eyes quickly found this:

"*Empress*, from London to New York, reached her dock last evening at 5:30. Pleasant voyage reported."

His lips puckered slightly, and then he turned the paper page by page until he discovered another heading for which he had been searching, "Lobby Chat of New York Hotels." Each hotel was given a sub-head and under these headings were given observations of some of the more prominent guests. Under the Waldorf-Astoria heading he found this:

"The Honorable Warren Nelson with his wife and daughter, of Spokane, Washington, registered this evening soon after their arrival from a stay of some months abroad. They sailed from London on the *Empress* and came across in five days, the *Empress* beating her

record by some hours in honor of the distinguished passengers. Mr. Nelson is expected to be prominent in the next Republican national convention, as he has long been considered Presidential timber. After serving his State well in the United States Senate he declined to accept another term, but withdrew from public life to give his personal attention to the Nonesuch mines, of which company he is president and general manager. However, his great interest in the questions of the hour has made it impossible for him to follow his determination to devote himself entirely to his personal interests.

"'No man can live the true life if he constantly keeps his mind centered upon his own gain,' said Mr. Nelson last evening when asked if his return at this time was in any way connected with politics. If he accepts the nomination for the Presidency (which subject he declines to discuss) he will have given one more demonstration of this rule of his life, for the keen mind that has met so many complicated public questions has also been responsible for the Nonesuch becoming one of the most valuable mining properties in the world. Mr. Nelson will run down to Washington to-mor-

row, and in a few days the family will leave for their western home, where, it is hoped, Miss Nelson will enjoy a complete recovery from an annoying throat trouble that developed in foggy London."

Garrison read this through twice, arose from the table, then sat down again and read it the third time very slowly and carefully, after which he drew a cigar from his pocket and lighted it.

"I was certain of it, damn him!"

He sent a great cloud of smoke from him as though it, too, had felt the force of this explosion. Then he leaned both elbows on the table and smoked steadily for a minute or two, the furrow between his eyes once more. At last he took up a telephone directory and consulted it, after which he pulled his desk instrument toward him.

"Main 2217," he called.

After waiting and getting no response he ordered the number rung again. Still no answer. He hung up the receiver and consulted the book again.

"Main 1577," he ordered.

A moment, and then:

"Hello! This Mr. Layton's apartments? Is he there? What? Sick? Can't he come to the 'phone? You think he'll be at his office this afternoon, you say? That's queer. No, no name. I'll hunt him later."

He banged the receiver back onto the prong.

"Sick, the devil!" he growled. "He's had a night of it!"

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CHAPTER III

THE MORNING AFTER

SEB LAYTON dimly became aware that something was tapping with annoying persistency. His eyes opened just the tiniest crack and then closed instantly and the sheet was spasmodically pulled across his face to shut out that sudden glare of light that had struck his eyes.

Tap, tap, tap! He rolled over on his side and pulled a fold of the sheet across the ear that was not pressed against the pillow, and was vaguely conscious that he was doing this. But it was useless, and of a sudden he seized the covering sheet and, giving it a jerk, wadded it up and flung it from him in peevish rage. It had failed him in his moment of annoyance from this devilish tapping—and, besides, it had grown too warm for any covering. So he stretched his length on the bed and was grateful for the cool breeze that reached him. But still that monotonous sound, and in a flash he

opened his eyes, wide awake, to find a half-lowered window shade beating the window at the caprice of the stiff breeze that was coming into the room.

He swore softly and again closed his eyes. But it was a vain effort, and after a few moments he yawned, stared thoughtfully at a cluster of cupids in the ceiling decorations, and then slowly raised himself and sat on the edge of the bed. His eyes burned strangely, and a dull throb was in his temples. He sat with his hands resting beside him on the edge of the bed, and tried to think it all out, but the whole affair was sadly mixed up and evidently he was far from well, for his head felt dull and heavy as so much lead. He raised one hand and surveyed it critically. The fingers were trembling; his lips were dry, and he moistened them with his tongue. Yes, he must have been taken suddenly ill.

Of course last night had been a bit riotous, but this was illness; a fever was clutching at him. Then his thoughts broke again and he forgot his trembling fingers, his hot lips, and wrestled with a confused recollection of recent events. In despair he reached out and struck

a silver bell resting on a small table at the head of his bed.

A door at one side of the room opened and a swarthy youth entered, a lad of probably eighteen years, lithe as a panther, and with the dark eyes and straight black hair of a Mexican. The youth stopped just inside the door and stood silent, a scowl on his face.

"Jose," asked Layton, still sitting, "what time was it when I arrived home?"

"At four-thirty, señor." The lad remained standing where he had paused.

Layton looked at him sharply. Whenever Jose addressed him in that tone it was sure indication that the young Mexican felt himself aggrieved.

"Four-thirty this morning?"

The man on the bed was puzzling his befuddled brains in an effort to decipher the cause of Jose's attitude.

"You did not leave until eight last night, señor."

There was fine sarcasm in the tone, and it brought a faint smile to the hot lips of Layton.

"Of course—of course. Damned fool question, wasn't it?" He paused, but no reply

came, and he continued, a bit waveringly:
"And was I—considerably—was I very—"

"*Si*, señor. You sang like the devil."

"I sang?" A shadow of a smile played about Layton's lips. "Positive, 'drunk'; comparative, 'drunker'; superlative, 'sang.' I must have been—very. Um-m—what time is it now?"

"The clock struck eleven just before you rang for me."

Layton looked up again, astonishment in his face.

"Good heavens! Eleven o'clock?"

"Yes, and the telephone,—devil take it—has been—"

"Well, why the deuce didn't you call me? You know that—. Say," he suddenly broke off, "what smashed that mirror?"

He pointed a shaking finger to the panel mirror, in which were great cracks running in various directions, and from which several jagged pieces were missing. Jose did not heed the pointing finger, but kept his face steadily toward the man on the bed.

"Señor, I came when the telephone rang—came three times, and the last time you cursed me and hurled a shoe at me. I dodged, but

the glass could not. Santa Maria! I did not return!"

Layton stared at the youth in incredulity. Then his eyes dropped to the floor, but quickly he glanced up again.

"You said I threw a shoe—but both of my shoes are here by my bed."

"This is the shoe you threw."

Stepping toward the shattered mirror, Jose stooped and then held before Layton's astonished gaze a woman's slipper—a slipper of glossy patent leather and the extreme of French heels. A moment the man stared in silence, and then he started to his feet with a gasp, a quick intaking of breath that sounded loudly.

"I—I—threw that? Impossible, Jose! Impossible, I tell you! I never saw it before. How did I get it to throw?"

"*Quien sabe!* You had her in your arms—you carried her up those last few steps. Maybe—"

"Stop! I 'had her in my arms,' you say? Oh, Lord! I remember something of it now!" He dropped back onto the bed, and again his tongue moistened his feverish lips. "In my arms—yes. I am beginning to remember!

Half a dozen dancers from the Gaiety were brought to the supper after the show. How they could dance—and drink—Jose!" He laughed a little, but the mirth died on his lips. "But I didn't—the one I carried—she wasn't in—here—was she, Jose?"

"No. She slipped out of your arms in the hallway and ran down stairs. On the landing she stopped and looked back at you and laughed at you, and—"

"Yes, yes, and I? What did I do?"

"Santa Maria! Señor, you leaned against the door and howled a song. I told her I would call a carriage, but she said no, that hers was waiting. She blew you a kiss and you sang louder. Then I put you to bed. Holy Virgin! It was time, for the police came up."

"I'm sorry, Jose. It's a burning shame and a disgrace, and I'm going to cut all that from now on. Honestly, I am. But it was my birthday, you know, and so I gave a supper, and—well, all the rest happened. There was one good-looking blonde there who argued with me about Sappho; said Jean never carried Sappho up that stairway. I must have laid a wager and carried *her* up. Ugh! It's ugly business, Jose, and I'm going to cut this high-

ball-cocktail-champagne route and the dancing girls. I'll send that slipper back to the theater this evening."

There was no reply, but Jose seemed a bit ill at ease.

"You saw—her," continued Layton. "You shall go down to the theater this evening and return the slipper. I'll give you a note to the stage manager. I know him. Now let's forget it. Is my bath ready?"

With a cat-like tread the youth stepped quickly to the foot of the bed and, leaning over it, looked steadily into the face of the other.

"Señor—it was not a dancer! No. You are confused! It was Señora Benton!"

Layton leaped to his feet and clenched his hands.

"You lie, you imp! I'll—"

The sentence was not finished. Instead, the man made a lunge to clutch the Mexican, who sprang back and then flung the slipper onto the bed.

"I lie? There is the slipper! Look within it!"

Layton paused, glowering at the servant, and then slowly turned and took up the slipper. In the lining the initials, "F. B.," were worked

in red silk. He shut his teeth hard to stop the flow of words that rushed to his lips. Looking up, he saw that the eyes of the Mexican were on him, and something like triumph was shining in the black orbs.

"Bring me a cocktail—a Manhattan," he said, turning to the youth. "My nerves are all shot to pieces."

Jose bowed slightly and withdrew in his panther-like way. Layton slipped a bathrobe on and then picked up the slipper once more. The initials, "F. B.," seemed flaming before his eyes. It was Mrs. Benton's slipper, beyond a doubt. Not only were the initials there, but, now that his brain was clearer, he recognized the dainty article, and he remembered that it was her pet hobby to have her initials in red silk in her footwear and on her hosiery. He remembered now of that time when he had taken her automobiling, with a little dinner out at the club house; she had complained of the slipper hurting, and while they sat in the private dining-room she had handed him the offending slipper with the request that he remove the crease that was annoying. He saw her initials that evening. And she had laugh-

ingly confessed to the whim for thus marking slippers and hosiery.

He walked over to the window and looked out onto the small court where the grass was green and the flowers were blooming. From his apartments in this flat perched high upon one of the city's evergreen-studded slopes he could look down to where the turbulent Spokane fought its quarrelsome way along the small valley below, and this morning the roar of the falls came to him faintly, as it always did in June, when, because of the melting snow in the mountains, the river was swollen. The mists, dashing high, were kissed by the bright sunshine and, plainly visible from Seb Layton's window, a magnificent rainbow hung above the falls.

He turned away and stood with his back to the window. He hated himself less when he was not facing the sunshine and the flowers. The roar of the falls still came to his ears, but the taunt of the rainbow was not before him, and as for the sound of the cataract, he liked it; it bespoke power, a care-free existence that defied conventions; in it the voice of Nature spoke to him. He delighted in the river's

turmoil, and always felt in his heart a strange sympathy and self-satisfaction when, leaning over one of the numerous bridges that spanned the river, he watched the waters come rushing and leaping, flinging themselves in great waves upon the rocks and tossing spray high into the air, spray that fell back like heavy rain into the river and again joined in the glee dance of the waters.

On many days when he was weary of the cares of his office and disgusted with the hypocrisy of the civilization he saw about him, he would turn the key in his office door and take to the hills alone, striding along in his vigorous way, unmindful of the miles and heedless of the rough way, and always his steps would lead him to where the river was. Then he would drop down on its banks and, with his chin in his hands, watch its onward sweep, often staying there until the sun had gone down and the stars had come out to light him on his slow return to where he could board a street car and have electricity whirl him back to the city's throbbing heart.

As he stood with his back to the window Jose entered with a small tray bearing a slender stemmed glass in which an amber-colored

liquor sparkled. Instinctively Layton hid the slipper behind his back, but almost immediately stepped forward and placed it on his dresser. Then he reached for the glass and drained it.

"I beg your pardon, Jose. It is her slipper, after all. My memory is poor this morning. I ought not to have spoken to you as I did."

The Mexican took the empty glass.

"You suppose I care, Señor Seb?" he asked.

"The slipper—I have forgotten whose it is! The woman—in your arms—it is gone from my memory, too. I spoke bad to you. Santa Maria! For that I should be lashed. But I was afraid for you, Señor Seb—for you! Señora Ben—the woman—had such a look on her face when she looked back at you and laughed! The look I have seen given gringos in the fandangoes, and the next morning a knife was found in the gringo—and the woman said a rosary and paid the padre for a mass. I have gone to your schools, but I do not know the ways of your women. I had no right to anger—but you have been so good to me. You—"

"All right, Jose. You've more than paid me for all of it. And I have been very trying, I know. For instance, last night. I gave the

supper to a few friends—and it became a little jollier than I had counted on. But it's great to be thirty, Jose, with the blood running warm in one's veins and friends by one's side! Of course, they won't care for me when I'm old and rheumatic, but to-day is to-day! Who knows whether there will be a to-morrow?"

Jose set the tray and glass down on the table and made a pretense of putting the room in order, but after a moment or two he faced Layton, and his dark eyes bore a look of gravity.

"May I ask a question?"

Seb nodded.

"Certainly. Fire ahead."

"Are you going to get married, Señor Seb?"

The man flung out his arms and laughed. The liquor had stirred his blood and quieted his nerves.

"Married? Heavens, no! Who would want to marry me?"

It was the time-honored reply of all good-looking bachelors, but Layton took no heed of that. The question had been such a ridiculous one that any foolish answer would do.

"Who? May I say? Pardon, but—the Señora of the Slipper!"

The laugh died from Layton's face, and for a few breaths he stood staring at the youth. A slight shiver passed over him.

"She? Why—nonsense!"

"Maybe so. I am a youth and Mexican, but—the way she looked at you while you sang! It is in the blood of my people to early see these things."

Layton dropped into a chair, pulled his robe closer about him, took a cigarette from a case on the table and lighted it. He turned once more to Jose, but blew a few rings of smoke before he spoke.

"How did she look?" he asked.

The youth came closer and looked down into the other's face. His expression held a knowledge beyond his years.

"How? Maybe I can't explain. It was as if she was—yes—hungry. She looked hungry, and when she laughed—maybe you will not understand me—but, señor, when she laughed it was just like she was holding in her hands the tortilla she was hungry for."

Layton drew a deep draught on his cigarette and, gazing thoughtfully at the glowing coal, slowly blew the smoke upon it.

"I'll take my plunge now, Jose, and then go

get a bite to eat." He arose, tossed the cigarette aside and started for the door.

"I will serve you what you wish, Señor Seb."

"No, thank you, I'll go down to the café. I need the walk, anyway."

Half an hour later he was walking down the street, his step elastic, his head well poised, but with the faintest trace of weariness in the lines that were beginning to show about his eyes. A cripple sat on the corner with hat outstretched, and, as he passed, Layton dropped a quarter into the hat.

In his mind Seb Layton was much troubled, a rare state of affairs with him. He could not clearly recall the events of last night. Up until midnight he could trace all happenings, but, after that, things were very much confused. He had escorted Florence Benton to the birthday supper and had said some extravagant things to her, for she had been unusually radiant in the pale blue evening gown her modiste had delivered to her but the day before, and his tongue loosened the moment she snuggled down beside him in the coupé in that fetching way of hers. And though she had partaken very sparingly of the wine, her beauty had glowed rosier, her wit

had become more scintillating, her charms more seductive as the clock hands crept closer to midnight, and he remembered how the other fellows had crowded about her at every opportunity, and how elation had gripped him in its exhilarating clutch when he noted how her warmest smiles, her softest words, were for him. And rash impulses had come to him in the glow of it all. Now that he was sober and away from the glamor he knew that the impulses were rash, and he knew that until midnight or a little later he had been able to analyze his impulses properly. After that—? Again that faint shiver swept over him. It was chaos from then until the devilish tapping of his window blind had aroused him. Instead of driving to her flat they had driven to his, and he had carried her up those last stairs! And he had thrown her slipper!

A sudden tremor struck his nerves, and he turned and entered a saloon. It was not a fashionable place, for the floor was deadened by sawdust, and ranged along one side of the room were several whiskey barrels on their sides, and on these, drink-sodden loafers sat and blinked at the doorway, waiting for some newcomer who would invite them to drink.

At the far end of the room were two or three plain tables, at which a group of men were seated, playing cards and arguing noisily one moment about the game and the next moment about the reported gold strike up in the St. Marie's country in Idaho. At the bar a few others were standing, puffing huge clouds of smoke from cheap cigars, and alternating gulps of beer with visits to the end of the bar where a large platter of cheese and a big bowl of crackers awaited those who chose to help themselves.

Layton was not caring for style; it was liquor he wanted, and so he called for whiskey and seltzer, certain that the straight whiskey would be less poisonous than any concoction that might be mixed for him in this place. He had swallowed the liquor and was raising the seltzer to his lips when a hand slapped him on the back so vigorously that the seltzer was dashed onto his sleeve.

"Hello, Layton! You're almost a stranger!"

Facing about, Layton found before him a swarthy-complexioned fellow of about thirty-five years, stockily built, smooth face, with the skin drawn taut over high cheek bones; small, beady eyes, and coarse black hair. He wore a

badly soiled sombrero, a blue flannel shirt with a flaming red necktie, a cheap suit of "pepper and salt" clothes, and a pair of heavy shoes that had been recently polished. Seb mechanically extended his hand.

"That's right, Dan. I haven't seen you for months, have I?"

The other grinned as he took the outstretched hand, and as he attempted to lean on the bar beside Layton he lurched unsteadily.

"Year ago this spring, when you come over into the Rock Lake country duck huntin' with them railroad fellers."

"Well, I've never been back there. But why didn't you hunt me up when you came to town? I owe you something for swimming out and getting the duck that fell out on that little lake."

Dan pounded the bar and laughed noisily.

"I sure got the duck for you. You don't owe me nothin', but if you say so I'll take a drink on you." Without waiting for a reply, he called the bartender and ordered whiskey. Pouring out a stiff drink, he swallowed it, wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and again took up the conversation. "This is the first time I've been to Spokane since, or I'd

looked for you. I'm here on important business to-day."

He leaned toward Layton, put one hand on his shoulder familiarly, and grinned knowingly.

"All right; come up and see me any time." Seb thrust a card into the man's hand, but, thinking he was too brusque, he paused and asked: "What's the important business, Dan?"

"*Klootchman!*"

"*Klootchman?* Oh, yes, that means woman, doesn't it? What about it? Not getting married, are you?"

Dan looked about, and seeing that no one was listening, he patted his foot in the sawdust, and began to sing in a low tone:

"Oh, I'm going to quit my tramping
And carrying blankets around;
I'll build me a little cabin
On the banks of Puget Sound,
Where there's *hyu* clams and *mowitsh*
And *klootchmen*, by the way,
Nika iskum tenas moosum
When the daylight fades away."

He ended with another noisy laugh, and hammered Layton on the shoulder.

"I can't follow you, Dan. I've forgotten much of that Chinook jargon."

"Oh, I said I'd build me a cabin and settle down with a woman, and '*nika iskum tenas moosum*'—I'll get a little sleep—when the daylight fades away. Won't be ramblin' around none o' nights, you see."

"Then you're going to leave the Palouse and go over to the Sound, are you?"

"Naw. That's just in the song to make it rhyme, I suppose. But I ain't goin' to get married right away. I'm goin' to meet her to-day an' take her home—down in the Rock Lake country. She's been down to Portland to school four years, an' she's comin' home now for the first time. Fool idea, sendin' her down there, but the old man's cranky, an' he took a notion to send her. She's old Sam Barr's girl. Know him? 'Coyote' Barr, they calls him."

"No, I don't know him. And she's going to marry you, is she?"

"Well, that's the calculation. She used to watch me scratch bronchos, an' one day she said she wouldn't never marry no feller that couldn't scratch a broncho without clawin' leather. She can ride some, herself. She derned near lived on the back of a cayuse."

"Is the old man willing for you to marry her?"

"He sure is. Old Coyote Barr ain't much on affection, an' it ain't been more'n a month since I broke that milk-eyed pinto for him, an' he told me I could marry Tess as soon as she come home."

"Perhaps the school—"

"I spoke to him about that, but he said he knowed good an' well I was as good as she was. Damned sensible old man, Coyote Barr is, Layton."

He peered solemnly into Seb's face as he voiced the declaration, and Layton gravely assured him that he had no doubt of the fact.

CHAPTER IV

TESS OF THE HILLS

AFTER buying another drink for Dan and promising to be at the depot at three that afternoon to be introduced to Tess Barr—which promise he had not the faintest intention of keeping—Layton shook hands with the broncho rider several times, each at Dan's request, and managed to get away. But the diversion had done him good. His nerves were steadying, and he faced facts and suspicions with his old *sangfroid*.

Seeking a café, he gave a substantial order and ate with relish. Then he walked briskly down the street, humming a light opera air, and finally turned into an office building, where he nodded to the elevator boy and was let off at his proper floor. A short distance down the hall he stopped before a door bearing gilt letters, "Seb Layton, Attorney." He unlocked the door, and then opened a small private mail box at the side of the door and took therefrom

several letters, after which he entered his office, threw up the windows and sat down at his desk. His stenographer was enjoying a vacation, and as Layton had never permitted himself the luxury of an office boy, he now had the office all to himself.

Very soon after entering his office he was deeply engrossed in his business affairs. That had been one of the secrets of his success, his ability to dismiss at will all other subjects from his mind and to concentrate his whole thought on such business matters as might demand his attention. He had been out of college five years, and the years had not been idle ones, nor altogether frivolous, as one might suppose by the not at all enviable record he had made in other ways. Life was a serious thing with Layton, as he had more than once declared, and while he was ever ready to tread what has been termed "the primrose path" when leisure granted him the chance, he was just as ready to devote weary days and nights to business. When he left college one of the few friends he had left in the University had asked him this question:

"What are you going to do, Seb?"

And Layton, unsmiling, had gravely and sententiously replied:

"Get rich."

Thus far he had never wavered from that determination, and each year saw him steadily plodding closer to the goal. The father who filled a suicide's grave had left him a modest competence, enough to educate him and afford him an opportunity to obtain a start in life after school days had ended. His mother, dead of a broken heart, was sleeping beside his father down there close to where the mighty Columbia, which Bryant in his "Thanatopsis" knew as the Oregon, swept onward to the sunset sea, and when Seb Layton had turned his face to the East to enter college he was an orphan.

Sorrow and bitterness had come early into his life and left their stamp upon his nature, but the business world, alert and crying for ability, was quick to recognize the master mind of this stalwart, steady-eyed young man who was unafraid of work—or of anything else—and by the time the half of a decade had passed he was spoken of as a success, as a man who always got what he went after, though there

were those who winked solemnly or shrugged their shoulders knowingly when methods were being discussed.

This day he scarcely had finished reading his mail when a uniformed messenger boy entered and handed him a note. On one corner of the envelope was embossed, "Granville Garrison" in the Senator's bold chirography, and below it were the words, "Representative to the United States Senate." Layton smiled slightly as he read the inscription in the corner, and then, noting that the boy was waiting, he tore open the envelope and found this:

"Will Mr. Seb Layton please call on the undersigned at his office at once?"

"GRANVILLE GARRISON."

Layton ceased smiling and read the note the second time. Then he flung it down on his desk.

"Well, the gall of him!" he exclaimed. "Call at *his* office!"

He took one of his business cards from a drawer and wrote on it: "Office hours, 8:30 a. m. to 12 m.; 1:30 p. m. to 5 p. m." Placing

this in an envelope he addressed it to Garrison and handed it to the messenger.

"Here's your reply," he said, and turned again to his work.

The telephone rang and a friend asked him to go to the theater that night, but he replied that he could not for he had some work that demanded his attention; a Salvation lassie came in, and he tossed a piece of silver into her tambourine; a solicitor entered to ask him to place an advertisement in a "business men's directory," and he had to rise from his chair and say some crisp words before his refusal would be accepted; two little girls timidly asked him to buy tickets to a Sunday-school entertainment, and he bought six—and threw them into the waste basket after the children had gone away with beaming faces; he was served with a subpoena to appear as a witness in a damage suit to be tried the next day; he declined to accede to the wishes of a young woman with a high pompadour who tried to sell him a set of Shakespeare's works for only one dollar down and a dollar a month for twenty months. And between all of this he worked cheerfully at his desk until he turned

to see before him a man correctly and carefully attired from his well-polished shoes to his silk hat, a man whom he at once recognized, though he gave no sign of the fact.

"How do you do, sir?" Layton greeted him in the absurd and meaningless manner of the century.

"You are Mr. Layton, I presume." A nod was the reply. "I am Granville Garrison."

Layton arose and extended his hand.

"I am very glad to meet you, Senator Garrison. Please be seated. Now what can I do for you?"

Garrison hung his hat on a rack, sat down and crossed his legs. Then he surveyed the other very critically before speaking, and Layton submitted to the scrutiny in silence, in the meantime taking his own inventory of his caller, for although he had often seen the famous man in his comings and goings about the city, he had never had the opportunity for a close study of him. Finally Garrison spoke.

"I don't know that you can do anything for me. That depends."

"On what, please?"

"On several things, I should say, the first

and principal of which is the question as to whether we are to be friends or enemies."

Layton turned his gaze from his caller and looked out of the window, apparently in abstraction, in reality thinking rapidly and analyzing closely.

"I fail to see what gives rise to the question," he said, at last, facing the Senator. "Do you go on the theory that he who is not for you is against you?"

"Not exactly, though it is a safe rule. I know of no reason why you should be my enemy, but—well, your reply to my note was brusque."

The lawyer stretched his legs out, leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head.

"Why should you regard it as being that? Would you have come to me had I sent such a note?"

Garrison uncrossed his legs and rubbed his hands unobtrusively as though hard put to frame a reply.

"No, probably not," he admitted. "But I confess I felt that my position entitled me to the call. And when you so coolly refused I

could not help thinking that there was somewhat of enmity against me in your heart. Of course, it's all right if there is—all public men have them—but I want to know it if it is so."

"Your reasoning is justified in the main, but I had not sought you, and I felt and still feel that if you wanted to see me you could come here. You are a member of the United States Senate, Mr. Garrison, but what of it? Is not the maker the equal of that which he makes?"

Garrison's hands clutched the arms of his chair, and he leaned forward quickly.

"You speak in riddles, young man. The maker? Just what do you mean?"

Layton's hands suddenly unclasped and he arose to his feet, standing over the politician.

"Garrison, I made you Senator! That's what I mean!"

For an instant the two men looked into each other's eyes, unspeaking. The Senator was the first to break the silence.

"You made me Senator?" He laughed easily. "You are not deficient in vanity, at least."

"Oh, I don't know that it's anything for which I should be vain. Some would—and did—call me a damned scoundrel!"

"You interest me. How did you make me Senator?"

Layton walked to the window and turned once more before replying.

"By losing that game to Harvard. Is that plain?"

"Perfectly! Perfectly! I'll admit that Harvard victory opened my way to the Senate. For you it was an unfortunate accident, but—"

"It was not an accident, sir. I fumbled the ball purposely."

The lines were drawing about Layton's mouth again, and Garrison, slowly arising, stood staring at him in amazement.

"I did not know," he answered. "Men usually are not this long in making known the favors they have rendered an official."

He would have said more, but a gesture from the other caused him to pause. There was something commanding about this young man that robbed Garrison's tongue of its usual ready speeches.

"Cache that, Senator. I didn't render you the favor intentionally—that is, I did not mean it especially for you. It was my own affair."

"Then why are you telling me now?"

Layton dropped back into his chair and tapped the floor with his foot.

"That's pretty hard to explain. I think one reason was that I had a fool wish to puncture your conceit; you nettled me by that note. Another reason was that when you came to me, asking if we were to be friends or enemies, I knew good and well that it was to be no common business deal between us. People don't go at business that way, ordinarily. And I think I wanted you to see something of my real self. I'm a hater, Garrison. That's my rule, to out-hate the other fellow—and make it hurt."

The politician smiled, and a shrewd light began to shine in his eyes. Once more he crossed his legs.

"Recapitulation: You fumbled purposely; you knew what the political result would be; you were not aiming at a favor to me. Add these facts together and you have a grand total of hate to be accounted for. Subtract me from this total and you have a balance on hand of—Nelson." He pulled from his pocket the noon edition of the *Journal*, and pointed to a Washington dispatch, around which he had drawn a ring with a blue pencil. "Read that care-

fully," he added, as though quite dismissing the former subject.

Layton took the paper and slowly read the dispatch the reporter had shown Garrison that morning, and then he lowered the paper, but before he could speak, the Senator thrust a copy of the *Times* into his hands.

"Now read that lobby chat," he said.

"Well?" was Seb's sententious query after perusing the news of the return of the Nelson family.

"It's just this, our books balance to a nicety—yours and mine. Nelson is responsible for that dispatch about me. He's trying to force me out into the open and knife me before I am prepared to fight; and then while the eyes of the country have been properly focused on the Northwest and I am beaten, he will loom up as the Moses who is to lead them. I don't dare make that little tour, and he knows it. If I do I'll lay myself open to too many attacks; as a trip on purely personal pleasure bent it would have given me opportunities—opportunities; as an ante-campaigning tour it would draw down upon me the keenest searchlights and I would find myself fighting for my life before I got back to Spokane. Nelson did this, I tell you!

"He came back from Europe two months earlier than he had intended, just to do this—and to be on watch for whatever might develop. That throat trouble of Frances Nelson's did not bring them back."

"Isn't it rather unusual for you to be thus confiding in an almost total stranger?"

"Generally speaking, yes. Specifically speaking, no. I've pricked you and your blood analyzes with mine! It isn't political counsel I want. I'm surrounded by political harpies every time I stick my nose out of the house, but I'm trying to dodge them. Their counsels have one word for me and three for themselves, and I can't trust a damned one of them, so—"

"So in search of a thoroughly dependable man you come to the fellow who deliberately flunked when they gave him the ball!"

Layton's tone was heavy with sarcasm, and the short, dry laugh that came from his lips was not pleasant. Garrison leaned over the side of the desk and spoke crisply.

"I do. You're the man I want. I've taken your recapitulation and I like the balance on hand. This isn't a game of precepts and examples for the children. The 'public welfare' sops can look after that. It's a game of out-

hating the other fellow—and making it hurt. I didn't expect to find this when I came to you. I wanted to secure the assistance of a good lawyer who wasn't attached to Nelson. That's pretty hard to find, for he's got his fingers into mines and railroad affairs good and deep. But I looked them over and decided to take a chance on you. I'm going to trust you because of that recapitulation."

"And now—what?"

Garrison looked into the gray eyes before him and found them cold and steady; in them was something that seemed searching him, spying into hidden recesses of his nature and taking memoranda of it all. By the slant of the shadows that lay on the floor he knew that the afternoon was waning, and the shrill cry of newsboys that came up to him from the street below was a reminder that the dispatch from Washington was being hawked about the city, a warning that he had been smoked from his lair and that henceforth his movements would have a double significance in the minds of the public.

"'Now what?'" he repeated after the other. "In military circles they would reply, '*a coup de main.*'"

Layton had remained standing, but now he sat down and leaned comfortably on the desk.

"Much of my French has been forgotten, but I think I follow you—and I enlist for the attack." He reached into a drawer and took out a box of cigars, which he held toward the Senator. "Smoke. It helps surprisingly to bite a cigar while you plan the other fellow's political obsequies."

Lighting a cigar himself, he arose and locked the door, after which he returned to his desk and listened carefully to what Garrison said. Once or twice the telephone rang and the Senator paused and looked inquiringly at Layton, who gestured slightly and said, "Go on. I'm not in." The shadows veered closer to the wall, and finally crept out the window as the sun moved farther to the west and dipped behind the piles of brick and mortar. Garrison outlined that which was in his mind, and then Layton questioned and cross-questioned closely, and never was there aught in his face that gave a clue to the convictions forming in his mind. Finally there was a pause in which neither man looked at the other, Garrison studying the opposite wall, and Layton, reclining far back in his chair, staring at the ceiling.

The politician was the first to speak. His gaze came back from the wall, and he leaned toward his companion.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked.

Layton laughed and straightened up in his chair.

"What do I think of it? It's predestination—for me." He laughed again. "I see now that I learned football just for this. If I hadn't, you wouldn't be United States Senator—there, you dropped your cigar; take a fresh one. Without you in the Senate—and so on, *ad infinitum* up to the present moment when I begin to see that it has all led me right up to this."

"Then you can be at liberty in ten days?" Garrison arose and took his hat.

"In ten days—yes. I have to go over into the Big Bend for a week, and then I'll be ready to drop down into the Palouse for you."

They shook hands and Garrison withdrew, but long after he had gone, Layton sat by the open window, musing. The coal on his cigar died out, but he gave it no heed. Neither did he see the dull red and gray of the buildings within view, nor the smoke cloud hanging grim and gloomy above where the June twilight was

painting the city's structures a glowing gold. He saw two lonely graves on a hill above where the Oregon rolled. Somewhat of warmth crept into his eyes for a time, and then it faded, leaving there the old chill. A sharp rap at the screen door opening into the hallway aroused him, and as he turned his head a messenger boy boldly marched in and handed him an envelope.

"Guess you're Mr. Layton, ain't you?"

Seb did not reply. He was tearing his way to the contents of the envelope which he recognized instantly, as he did the fashionably scrawled address.

AT HOME.

"Naughty Seb! The sun is nearly down and I haven't received a line from you this day—nor a rose, if I must confess to that disappointment, too. I called up your office, but no response to the 'phone. I tried your rooms in the same way, and that Mexican of yours was rude. I am sure he had a dagger under his serape. You must discharge him. I have instructed Susan that to all callers but one this evening she is to reply demurely, 'Mrs. Benton is absent.' If you are curious to know who the

exception is—but that is a problem for you to solve.

“F. B.”

“P. S.—If you are interested, that is.

“F.”

He pulled a sheet of paper toward him and wrote:

“I’ll attempt to find a solution.

“SEB.”

He sealed the note, handed it and a quarter to the boy, and turned to close his desk. Then he went down to the street. Occasionally he whistled a lively bar, but the tune was rambling, for his mind was elsewhere. He rather dreaded this call he was to make on Florence Benton, and yet he was feverishly anxious to be near this fascinating woman again. If only he were certain as to all of last night’s events!

Riverside Avenue was pulsing with life as he strolled along, but suddenly a familiar figure was unmasked just ahead of him by the crowd and he recognized Dan Johns, who was walking slowly along, hesitating often and looking

about him as if confused. And then an exclamation came to Layton's lips as he noted that by Dan's side was a woman, evidently his companion, for she paused when he paused, but she did not stare wildly about as the broncho rider was doing.

Seb slackened his pace and watched the two curiously. The girl was dressed in excellent taste from the jaunty street hat to her shoes, which he glimpsed occasionally and noted that the heels were not run over nor the leather worn and shabby. If this were Tess Barr she was quite a different-appearing person than one would have expected to see in view of Dan's statement that she had vowed "never to marry no feller that couldn't scratch a broncho without clawin' leather."

She was a slender young thing, and—but Dan had paused again and the girl looked back. Annoyance was plainly written on her face, and the brief glimpse that Seb Layton had of her features revealed the fact that she was more than a wisp of a school girl. She must be twenty-four, he told himself, and she was really pretty after a certain fashion. The color of the wild rose tinted her cheek, her features were regular, and hair like the wings of a

raven clustered about her ears. He drew closer—and then hastily stepped aside, for Dan had whirled and looked behind him. Layton's move was too late. Dan looked him squarely in the face, and began to grin.

"Layton—Layton!" he called, and bolted forward, leaving his companion alone. "We're lookin' for a good place to eat. I no *sabe* this town very well. Put me on the trail."

"That's easy. There are plenty of good places. Now, let's see—" He tapped his cheek reflectively, and looked at Dan. "There's a place just around the corner that isn't expensive, and—"

"I've got the *chickamin* to pay for it, but—we ain't lookin' for stylish places where the *hyas tyees* round up."

"Well, maybe you'd better go over to this next street, and you'll see—"

Dan shook his head and interrupted.

"Come go with us, can't you? You ain't had no supper, an' you can eat with us."

Seb started slightly as the suggestion was made. The girl had been standing a short distance away and he had given her but little heed in his anxiety to be rid of the broncho rider, whose breath smelled strongly of liquor.

But now he glanced at her, and his eyes swept her in one swift glance.

"I—I might do that," he replied, turning to Dan. "But I haven't been introduced." He turned his eyes to the girl again.

"She's my *klootchman*," whispered Dan. "Tess Barr, come here. Mr. Seb Layton's goin' to supper with us. Now you're introduced."

Layton raised his hat and bowed to the girl, who had stepped closer, and she smiled her acknowledgment, showing just the faintest flash of white, even teeth between lips that were thin and traced with scarlet.

"I fear that Mr. Johns, who came to guide me, is completely lost," she said, and Layton laughed, more because of something he saw dancing in her dark eyes than because of her words. "And father has so much confidence in Dan, too," she added.

"Well, Riverside Avenue is quite metropolitan at this time of the evening," responded Seb. "Mr. Johns will be a splendid guide in the hills of the Palouse, but just now you had better let me point out the trail."

He stepped to the side of the girl, and the trio started down the street.

"'Trail!' Surely I have left the school room. I used to use the word when I was at home—down in the hills, you know. Down there every little path is a 'trail,' but I have been away from it four years."

There was a note in her voice that caused him to glance quickly at her, but she had turned her face toward the other man, who was bellowing to her something about the pinto cayuse. Layton led the way to a modest little café on a side street, and by the time they had reached the place Dan had explained in stentorian tones that the train from Portland had been three hours late, and so they had missed their train for Whitman, from where they were to drive out to the Barr ranch. They must spend the night in Spokane.

The girl sat beside Johns at the table and Layton faced the two from the other side. While waiting for their orders to be served Dan leaned his elbows on the table and grinned in the face of Tess.

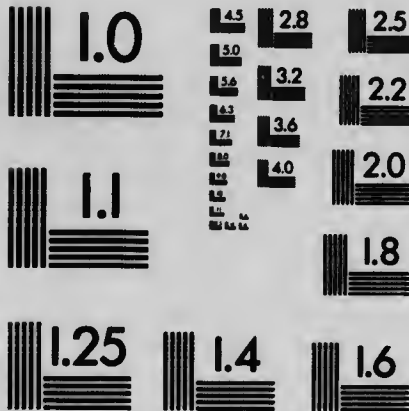
"Say, Tess, I ain't sorry such a heap that your train was late."

He intended it for a whispered confidence, but the words were plainly audible to the man



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across the table, who coughed and glanced carelessly about the room.

"I'm afraid father will worry."

The reply was spoken in an ordinary tone, and Layton again turned toward her. There was a deepened color in her cheeks, he thought, and she toyed rather nervously with the menu card. The grin was slowly fading from Dan's lips, but his eyes did not leave her face. Instead, they seemed devouring her, unheeding the man opposite them.

"Huh! He knows he can trust *me!*" He chuckled softly, and then looked across at Layton. "Let's ride around over town on the street cars after supper, what do you say?"

Seb had dropped his hand into his side pocket, and was fingering an envelope he felt there.

"Sorry, but I cannot join you. I have an engagement."

"I am very tired, and I think that I will go to a hotel immediately after supper." The girl leaned forward slightly. "Perhaps you, Mr. Layton, will be kind enough to go to the hotel with us and help me get located. Then Dan can enjoy the evening as he wishes."

"Ain't no use o' that. I can look after—"

"I'll be very glad to do so," interrupted Seb, for her words had seemed very like an appeal. "Then I'll escort Dan to a summer theater where he can spend a lively hour. I have plenty of time. My engagement doesn't demand my presence at an early hour."

Dan sat back in his chair, and made no reply, and the girl after a word of thanks, spoke of other things, apparently dismissing the entire subject from her mind. The supper menu was not an elaborate one, and within an hour the three were again on the street, the girl chatting unreservedly of events of her school days, and Dan keeping his eyes on her constantly.

"To-morrow I shall be back at the old ranch—with my father." Seb thought that her long lashes drooped slightly. "It will be a different world, Mr. Layton. I scarcely can realize that I am the same girl who left there four years ago. I have never been back. I thought I ought to in the summer vacation—but father told me to stay in Portland. He thought I'd learn more. And I did, I suppose. I went many places in the summer with friends—and they never knew how I studied them. Something woke up in me, and I realized how differ-

ent their world was from what I had left—and am going back to-morrow.”

“Yes, you will find it quite different, I am sure. But why not try to arrange to come to Spokane. Lots of young women are making their own way here and living in the world. Why not you?”

There was something of fire showing in his gray eyes now.

“Because I am needed—down there. I am going back there because that is w^hat I ought to do.”

“I have no wish to be rude, but I think that is nonsense. Why is it that one should do a certain thing when one wants very much to do something else? It’s an old-fashioned notion and never gets you anything—”

“Except peace o^f mind,” she added. “Isn’t that something?”

“It is,” he admitted. “But—Oh, well, you wouldn’t understand me, nor I you. My creed is to get what I want if I can.”

“No matter who moans?”

The words were voiced lightly, but when he looked into her face he saw that she was quite serious.

“If it is to be a question of moans, why

should not the other fellow have compassion on me? No, no. If I fight for myself the world will give me its smiles. If I bow to the other fellow he gets the smiles and I get the kicks."

"Oh, of course all people are not alike, Mr. Layton."

The sting of the barb was not felt so much just then as it was later. He dismissed it from his mind the moment it came to his ears. This unsophisticated girl-woman was following Destiny and was going back to the hills, there to milk cows and ride cayuse ponies and gradually slip back, back, back, as the blood of her ancestors dominated her, until she would marry Dan Johns and rear a brood of boys who, in turn, would follow in their sire's footsteps and "scratch bronchos without clawing leather." There was a certain air of tragedy about it—but what life was devoid of tragedy? It was all a part of the unfathomable mystery that demanded that she should follow her bent and that he should follow his.

At the hotel he stood back while she placed her name on the register and paid the bill in advance, declining to accept the money which Dan tried to thrust into her hand.

"Good-night and good-bye, Mr. Layton," she said as the bell boy nodded to her.

"Good-bye," he returned, and then quickly stepped forward and blocked the progress of Dan Johns, who was following her toward the elevator. "Mr. Johns will call for you in the morning," he added.

For a moment fury swept in a storm cloud across Dan's face, and his hands came up spasmodically as if to clutch Layton's throat.

"By God—," he growled hoarsely, but no further words came. The old-time glint of frosted steel was showing in the gray eyes, and Johns' curving fingers slowly relaxed and his hands dropped to his side.

The soft whirr of the elevator sounded. Seb glanced toward the cage. Tess Barr was not in sight.

"Come on, Dan," he said, calmly, and the other walked away by his side.

CHAPTER V

"KLOSHE BOSTON MAN"

THE Nelsons returned to Spokane during the following week, and for a few days following their home-coming the papers contained interviews with the financier and politician on European money affairs, on the effect of the protective tariff as viewed from the other side of the ocean, the feeling in New York and Washington as to the advisability of the party's next Presidential candidate being a man from west of the Rockies—and in every interview the reporter managed by the exercise of the arts possessed by the shrewdest interviewers to elicit from Mr. Nelson a few reluctant (?) admissions as to the healthy condition of the Nonesuch group of mines up in the Okanogan country.

This touched so closely on personal matters that Mr. Nelson disliked any appearance of thrusting the information before the public. The interviewer fully explained this, and con-

fessed that it required the most adroit questioning to secure the pleasing information. The facts would all be laid before the stockholders in due time, and Mr. Nelson felt that to exploit the rising value of the stock would be very similar to parading before the public just the profits a certain business firm was making. However, in the face of the financier's reluctance to give out any such information, the *Journal* secured a few statements that were very specific in some sentences and heavy with intimations in others, but, taken all together, that enterprising paper, whose circulation probably was double that of any other of the Pacific Northwest, felt fully justified in devoting bold headlines and a first page position to the article which, when read with an eager and receptive mind, pointed conclusively to the fact that Eastern capitalists had quietly undertaken to secure all of the Nonesuch stock on the market. These Eastern interests had sent their own engineers and experts to the Okanogan to investigate without permitting the managers of the property to know aught of who they were or whom they represented.

Within two days after the *Journal* had scored this triumph concerning a question that

was close to the hearts of the people of the state, the Honorable Warren Nelson sold fifty thousand dollars worth of Nonesuch stock at five dollars per share, but it was evident to every man and woman—for fashionably dressed ladies were numerous among the number that bought stock—who called on Mr. Nelson in his private office in the Falls City Bank that he sold this stock with great reluctance. He was very sorry that the *Journal* had printed the article relating to the Nonesuch. He had not intended saying so much, but had fallen a victim to the arts of the practised interviewer. However, he could not and would not deny any part of it.

Still, Mr. Nelson wished all purchasers of the stock to fully realize that mines always were more or less uncertain; a vein that promised to develop millions had been known to exhaust very suddenly. One never could tell to a certainty. However, it leaked out through some source that Mr. Nelson was planning to buy up all of the stock himself, but could not bring himself to refuse those of his own city and State who applied. As for the Eastern capitalists, Mr. Nelson was determined that the Nonesuch stock should not go so far from home.

Once let the greedy ones in the East gain control of the property, and the smaller investors in the Northwest would be squeezed and forced to relinquish their holdings.

Just how this important secret got into general circulation no one could tell. The newspapers had not gotten scent of it, for not a syllable of it appeared in their columns. Most of those who sought Mr. Nelson for the purpose of investing in the stock had heard before they called of his personal wish to buy up the stock, and so the callers smiled blandly as the financier pointed out the dangers and uncertainties attending an investment in the None-such, and, still smiling, they laid down their money and declined to accept Mr. Nelson's suggestion that they cut their investment just one half.

Mr. Nelson was also president of the Falls City Bank, and during the last few years he had so dominated the directors of the bank by his genius as a financier that more and more had they given over to him the management of the institution. He had been a hard worker, at the bank early and late, strong, forceful, and tactful to the superlative degree when occasion arose, and by this time he had grasped the

power so thoroughly that his dictums were never questioned. He knew everything that was going on in the bank, and he had absolute power over every officer and employe of the bank, and could remove them at will. Under his guiding hand the bank extended its influence, and its deposits steadily grew in amount. Bank inspectors came to it from time to time, as they did to other banks, and always they departed with a cordial handshake for the president, and when the bank statements were published in conformity with the law the very few depositors who read them nodded approvingly as they noted how much greater were the assets than the liabilities.

Senator Garrison and Mr. Nelson met upon the street very soon after the latter's return, and there was a very cordial greeting, a few moments of conversation, and at parting an urgent invitation from each for the other to "drop in" and have a chat. Each gave warm assurances that it would be his early pleasure, and then each went his way, busy with his own thoughts, thoughts that had to do with the other.

At the time of the home-coming of the Nelsons, Seb Layton was absent from the city, but

over in the Big Bend he eagerly sought the Spokane papers and read with great interest the Nelson interviews and other incidents connected with the financier's return from abroad. He read that Miss Frances Nelson's throat trouble was improving, but that she would not take part in any of the mid-summer social affairs for the present, it being her intention to first seek a few weeks of quietude on one of her father's ranches down in the Palouse, where, her physician had declared, the pure air and out-door life would speedily effect a cure. While abroad she had been presented at the German court and had been a favorite with society in London. As usual, her name had been whispered in connection with one of the scions of a proud old English family, and there had been a story that the young nobleman would follow her to America and continue the suit for her heart that he had begun when they had ridden to hounds on his estates. To add zest to the gossip, the paper printed a two-column picture of Miss Nelson in riding costume.

Layton's stay in the Big Bend lengthened from the expected ten days to three weeks, and it was the day before the one he had finally set for his departure for Spokane that he was re-

turning to the little town which had been his headquarters, after a visit to another point. Evening was coming on, and he still had fifteen miles to cover when his horse stepped into one of those pitfalls of the range, a prairie dog hole, and became so lame that it was impossible to proceed much farther, so he was forced to make a lonely camp for the night on the bank of a little stream close by.

He still had some remnants of a lunch tied on behind his saddle, and as it was a rule of the country never to start for a long ride without a blanket, he was able to meet the situation with considerable cheerfulness. A piece cut from his saddle blanket was dipped in water boiled in an old can found beside the creek and then bound over the swollen ankle of his pony, a treatment which, persisted in until near midnight, had the effect of reducing the swelling and giving promise that the animal would be able to bear him on his way in the morning.

He was very weary when he finally ceased his attentions to the horse and, pulling off his shoes, stretched himself out with his feet to the fire and his head pillowed on the saddle. A coyote wailed out on the prairie, and presently another over in another quarter gave tongue to

the peculiar, plaintive cry that defies all but practised ears to determine whether there is one animal or half a dozen wailing. Layton lay looking up at the stars and thinking of his return to Spokane. He smiled a bit grimly as he recalled the visit from Senator Garrison and that gentleman's "recapitulation." "Subtract me from this grand total of hate and we have a balance on hand of—Nelson." So the Senator had spoken.

Then Layton's thoughts jumped back to a football game, and he chuckled as he remembered of seeing a man collapse and sink down into the seat of a red automobile. "Damn him!" he muttered, and the smile left his lips. A moment later he arose and fished a piece of newspaper from his coat pocket, and then sitting down by the fire he spread the paper out on his knee and studied the picture of Frances Nelson.

For a long time he sat there, cross-legged, one elbow on his knee, his chin on his hand, and looked at the picture. Finally he folded it carefully, replaced it in his pocket, and again rolled himself in the blanket.

The coyotes still wailed, but they were farther away now. Nearby his pony was

munching the bunch grass and gradually working around in a circle at the end of a stake-rope fastened to the pin driven into the ground. But Memory was full of pranks to-night, and as his closing eyes shut out the starlight he forgot the prairie, the lonely bivouac and the cry of the prairie wolves, and was back in college once more. Old, familiar faces flitted before him, and again he heard the students singing:

"In after years should trouble rise
To cloud the blue of summer skies,
How bright will seem through memory's haze
The happy, golden by-gone days."

He turned over and muttered a savage imprecation, but still he could hear the old song floating to him across the years:

"Oh, let us strive that ever we
May let these words our watchword be
Where e'er upon life's sea we sail:
'For God, for country, and for Yale!'"

The coyotes' chorus grew fainter and fainter, and finally ceased; the fire burned down to a few smouldering embers, from which occasional tongues of flame leaped up and flickered

feebly; a belated moon showed its crescent form above the horizon and slowly mounted into the sky, its faint rays but dimly lighting the prairie. The late June night was warm, and as the man slept he gradually freed himself more and more from the clinging folds of the heavy blanket.

A dozen paces away the little creek flowed between rugged banks, the stream having worn a course several feet in depth. Sometimes when heavy rains came in the spring the creek swelled until its waters were close to the top of these banks, but now the stream had shrunk some distance below the level of the prairie, and the sloping banks were dry and irregular.

Layton had slumbered probably two hours when a head was raised above the creek bank just far enough to permit a pair of eyes to study the little camp closely. Then a man's body was raised above the bank, and after the prowler had stretched himself out motionless for a full minute, he raised himself and moved slowly forward on all fours, walking on his hands and toes with apparent ease and in perfect silence. The feeble moon cast a faint shadow of his form on the prairie, but he well knew that there was now a cloud in the sky

behind which the moon might soon be hidden. All of these details had been studied while the man was crouching close to the bed of the creek.

The sleeper moved slightly and the prowler dropped to the ground as lightly and as silently as a falling leaf, and there he lay for several minutes until the motionless form by the fire convinced him that sleep still remained. Then the fellow again arose to all fours and circled around the camp, his eyes always on the sleeper.

Seb Layton was not a man much troubled by dreams. His physical being was far too healthy for that. Usually when his eyes closed in sleep the cares that had leered at him during the day left no impress upon him, and his slumber was refreshing, but he did not sleep in the heavy, sodden manner of the yokel—that is, not unless he had been making a night of it; his mind was too keen; his brain too active for that. And it may be that the thoughts that had come thronging upon him this night and had caused him to sit for so long studying, by the camp fire's glow, the picture of a girl, were responsible for his sleep-

ing lightly in spite of his fatigue, and for his being awakened by the sudden snorting of his horse.

Instantly his eyes opened and he was wide awake, but he made no move. His training had been too thorough for such a mistake. He knew that he had heard some unusual sound, but nothing was within range of his vision, and he waited with tense muscles for something further. He was lying with his back toward where the horse was tethered, and the fact that he did not hear the animal cropping the grass nor stamping the ground brought the belief that the beast was watching something. It is the way with horses, and Layton knew it well. Perhaps a coyote was sneaking up to the camp expecting to steal a slab of bacon, as is the habit of the brutes! Again the pony snorted loudly, and Layton sprang to his feet.

Beside the fire lay a torn newspaper that he had expected to use in starting the fire in the morning. Seizing this, he thrust it into the coals and instantly it burst into flame and he held it aloft. By the burning paper he saw a man crouched close to the horse, a man who

arose to his feet and sprang toward the animal when the flame revealed him.

Without an instant's hesitation, Layton made for the would-be horse thief and seized him just as the fellow after jerking the stake pin from the ground had sprung to the horse's back. Layton clutched one arm and dragged the thief to the ground, and there they battled desperately. The horse ran away a short distance and then stopped, for no cayuse pony will ever go far with bridle reins or stake rope trailing. It is a severe part of their breaking.

Not a word was spoken by either of the fighters, but the athlete realized very quickly that he was the other's master. For a few moments his opponent fought viciously, and then his strength seemed to fail rapidly until he lay prostrate on the ground, gasping for breath as Layton's fingers clutched his throat. The conqueror's hand moved rapidly over the other's person in search of a weapon, but none was found. Then he arose and jerked the captive to his feet, after which he forced him over to the fire, into which he kicked some dry fagots. The blaze sprang up and his captive was revealed to him.

"A *siwash*, by God!"

The Indian made no reply, but stood stolidly blinking his small eyes at Layton. The prisoner had once been a powerful fellow, undoubtedly, but now he was stooped, and even in the uncertain light of the camp fire a pallor showed through the natural bronze of his cheeks, which were seamed by age and exposure. Deep lines furrowed his brow, and his long, unkempt hair was plentifully streaked with gray, while his hands were gnarled and his fingers but dark, bony talons. He wore a battered sombrero, a gray flannel shirt, open low at the throat, a pair of old trousers, and moccasins, to which an Indian will cling long after he has adopted every other article of the white man's wearing apparel. Layton released him, and stepped back a pace to survey him, but instantly the Indian made a dash to escape. It was futile, as the white man's quick clutch stopped him.

"None of that, you devil!" growled Layton. "What are you doing here?"

He knew that the query was superfluous, but it came natural to voice it. The prisoner still stood silent, his beady eyes studying Layton. In sudden exasperation, Seb adminis-

tered a very ungentle kick with the side of his foot.

"Come, speak up!" he commanded.

A scowl settled heavily on the Indian's face, and his eyes blazed.

"*Wake kumtuks,*" he grunted.

"You're a liar! You do understand!" Layton pointed to a can resting on a chunk of wood by the fire. "See that can? Well, I'm going to put your ears in there and boil them if you don't talk."

The prisoner sprang forward and seized the can, and peered into it. Then he dropped it.

"*Wake muckamuck,*" he said. He turned suddenly to the white man. "*Potlatch muckamuck! Potlatch muckamuck!*" There was pleading in his tone.

"Well, you've got gall to try to steal my horse and then beg for something to eat."

"Heap hungry! No eat to-day. *Nika chahko syah!*" He pointed to the west. "*Nika klatawa teahwit; wake kinatan. Klatawa teahwhit! Potlatch muckamuck!*"

Seb scratched his head and looked at the other in a puzzled way.

"Let me figure that out," he replied. "It sounds like a football yell, but I think you mean

that you have come a long distance from the west; you had no horse, had to walk, and want me to give you something to eat. That it?"

"Nawitka! Nawitka!"

"I thought so, but you've got to hand me that jargon slowly. It's something fierce." He spoke jocularly, but something about the Indian caused him to pause. "By thunder, I believe you are starving. Here!" He stepped over to the saddle and took from under it a can of dried beef, some crackers, pickles, cheese and a can half full of baked beans. These he spread out by the fire, and then pointed to them. "Get busy," he said.

Without a word, the Indian dropped to his knees and began eating ravenously, pouring the beans out into his hand and scooping them into his mouth, and also crowding crackers, beef, and cheese into his mouth, until the man who stood silently by with his hands jammed into his trousers' pockets, watching him, thought he would choke. Finally the Indian turned to the other, and licking the last vestige of beans from his hands said:

"Kloshe! Kloshe!"

"I thought they were good from the way you licked them up. Sorry I haven't anything

more for you. I'll have to do without my breakfast as it is, but I'd rather do without dinner, also, than to see anybody as hungry as you were. Where are you going?"

"Syah!" He waved his hand toward the east.

"A long distance east, eh? Where?"

"Nez Perces reservation. Me Nez Perces. Been *yahwa*"—pointing westward—"long time. Me sick; die soon—*nawitka*! So *klatawa* back to reservation. Want die there. *Nawitka*."

The Indian arose to his feet as he gave this broken explanation.

"It's a mighty long *klatawa* if you have to walk," said Layton. "Didn't you have any horse when you started?"

The nomad looked at him some time before replying.

"*Nawitka*," he said at last. "*Kloshe kiuatan*. Got drunk; sold *kiuatan*; more drunk. Heap walk. Hell!"

Layton laughed.

"I should say so. Now look here, I'm going back to bed. You pile down here by the fire, and in the morning I'll let you ride with me to Carson. That cayuse can carry us both that

far if we take it easy. There isn't much of you but bones, any way. But I want to tell you something." Seb went over to his coat and pulled a revolver out of the pocket. "I forgot all about this gun when I woke up a while ago. I've been living somewhat civilized, you know. But if you try to steal that horse again, I'll— Do you know what I'll do?"

He patted the weapon as he spoke, and the Indian nodded.

"*Mamook memaloost*," he responded briefly.

"You're right; I'll kill you. They don't like horse thieves around here, and a dead *siwash* won't cause any grief. You *kumtuks*?"

"*Nawitka*," was the reply. "*Nika hyu kumtuks!*"

Layton went out to the horse and again drove the stake pin into the ground to prevent the animal being stampeded by any sudden fright. Then he went back and rolled in the blanket again, taking care that the revolver should be close to his hand. The Indian was already stretched out by the fire and was breathing heavily. Confident that there was no cause for bother, Seb closed his eyes and was soon asleep.

He was awakened by the sun shining on his face, and when he opened his eyes he saw his captive of the night before crouching over the fire, his chin on his hands, staring moodily across toward where the sun had peeped over the horizon. There was no breakfast to get. The Indian had settled that question at the night meal. Seb went out and was pleased to find that the horse had almost entirely recovered from its lameness. He motioned to the saddle, and the Indian flung it onto the horse and tightened the cinches.

"I'd rather have you in front of me, but I want to use the saddle myself," said Layton, "so I'm going to take a chance on you behind my back. You're not dangerous, though. Just a damned thief; that's all." He swung into the saddle, and turned to the other, who was watching him anxiously. "Come, hop up," he said, and the Indian sprang up behind the saddle.

The journey to Carson was necessarily slow, but they rode into the town a little before noon, occasioning considerable comment, to which Layton gave but brief replies. He rode down to the railway station and dismounted. Then he pulled a ten dollar bill from his purse.

"There's an east-bound train due here in an hour. This will buy you a ticket to Tekoa, at the edge of the reservation. No drunk goes."

The Indian's eyes opened wide as he took the bill. Then he seized Layton's hands.

"*Kloshe Boston man!*" he exclaimed, and raising his face toward the sun, he chanted some words in a tongue unfamiliar to the white man. Then he looked at Layton again. "*Kloshe Boston man!*"

He turned and shuffled into the depot, and Layton rode back to the little hotel.

"*Kloshe Boston man, eh?*" he muttered. "Well, it's nice to have some one brag on you, even if it is nobody but a *siwash*."

CHAPTER VI

HOUSE CAT OR LEOPARD?

IT was characteristic of Mr. Seb Layton that when the loafers about the hotel pressed him for an explanation as to how he chanced to bring an Indian into town behind his saddle, he replied that it was because he did not care to bring the *siwash* in in front of his saddle. One or two forced a laugh at this response, but when they were about to renew the discussion they seemed suddenly to change their minds. There was something in the manner in which the tall, broad-shouldered stranger lighted his cigar and met their gaze steadily that convinced them that the subject was quite exhausted.

It was equally characteristic of him that by the time he reached Spokane some thirty-six hours later he had dismissed the matter almost entirely from his mind and was centering his thoughts on very different subjects.

Before he left the railway station after

reaching Spokane he had sought a telephone and called for a number that had been on the tip of his tongue for the last fifty miles of his journey. Florence Benton herself answered the telephone, and his blood warmed at the subtle note of pleasure that sounded in her welcome. Yes, she would be at home that evening. She had an engagement—but it would be easy to cancel it. Such a pleasure to have Seb give her an excuse to escape from what was certain to be boredom!

And then he went to what he called home. Jose was effusive, as Jose always was on Layton's return from an absence of more than two days, and while Seb sat looking over the mail that the boy had brought from the office, the Mexican stood close by. Finally Jose spoke.

"Señor Seb, maybe I not be with you many more months."

Layton looked up in surprise, and saw at a glance that the Mexican was holding back something.

"Why not?" he asked, tersely.

"Well, maybe—of course, not sure—but maybe I have plenty money and I go travel some place. *Quien sabe.*"

"The devil you say! Plenty of money? Safe-blowing or train-robbery?"

Jose laughed happily, and with his quick tread he left the room a moment, but returned immediately.

"Look!" he said, and thrust into Layton's hands several very gaudily printed papers, each bearing a mammoth seal. "What you think of them?"

"Mining stock—and in the Nonesuch, too, by thunder!" Layton glanced quickly at the different papers. "Sixty shares! And you paid—"

"Only three hundred dollars, Señor Seb, only three hundred. Yesterday I got a printed paper telling how the rich men in the east trying to get this. Maybe this soon be worth—I forget how much; the paper tells;—and all I paid was three hundred!"

"*Only* three hundred? Why, it's every red cent you had in the world, Jose! And you were saving it to—"

"*Si, si*, to go back to Mexico, and to put a grand stone on a grave—where my mother sleeps. But it is slow, Señor Seb, even if you are so good to poor Mexican boy, and now I

will get much money! It is such good mine! The printed paper says—"

Layton had looked up into the beaming face, and now he interrupted.

"But if the paper lied, Jose?"

"Lied? Oh, Señor Seb, it—." He paused suddenly, the happy smile faded from his face, and a look of perplexity followed. "If it is a lie—why—I will not get—no, I will lose—." Again he paused, and his brow knit. Then he leaned forward quickly and the play of lightning was in his eyes. "If it is a lie—if my money is stolen—by God, I'll kill some one!"

Seb shuffled the stock certificates in his hands and turned his eyes from the Mexican's face. There was that in Jose's eyes that was not pleasant to see.

"It's an ugly word, Jose. Besides, you wouldn't know whom to kill."

He forced a light laugh in an effort to relieve a situation that had become tense.

"Yes, I would. Señor Warren Nelson! He took my money and gave me that paper! It was all I had—and the next evening I saw him leaving the Country Club in a fine automobile, and he laughed and the woman laughed when my cayuse tried to throw me. Was it my

money, Señor Seb, that bought the wine that made them laugh? I hate her when she laughs! Damn her, I hated her when she laughed while you sang that—”

“She laughed when I sang?” Layton sprang to his feet and gripped Jose’s shoulder. “Who was it in the automobile at the Country Club?”

“The Señora of the Slipper!”

Gray eyes looked steadily into flashing black eyes.

“You are sure, Jose?”

“*Si, si!* Santa Maria, I know what I know!”

“Oh, of course, of course.” He sat down and took up his letters again. “You may lay out my clothes now, Jose. We’ll talk about these papers later.”

The Mexican turned away, but at the door he paused.

“I forgot. Yesterday Señor Garrison telephoned to tell you—”

“Damn Garrison! Tell me to-morrow.”

He crumpled a letter in his hand and flung it into a small basket. Jose hesitated, then with a slight shake of his head, he withdrew, and had Layton been observing him he would

have seen the lad make the sign of the Cross. However, the lawyer gave him no heed, but as soon as he was alone he tossed the mail, with which he had ostensibly been busying himself, onto the table and strode to the window. It was a cloudless day and warm, the rays of heat forming a gauzy veil between him and the mountains that reared themselves in the distance, cool looking and rugged. The June freshet had almost entirely spent itself, but the Spokane still swept down from the Cœur d'Alenes with sufficient force to carry the voice of the falls to him, though it now was nothing more than a faint murmur. The sun was barely visible over the tops of the buildings on the west, and before he left the window it had dropped from sight, the heat rays no longer danced, and the city was bathed in a ruddy glow reflected from the western horizon. Jose tapped at the door, but received no response. Then the youth peeped in, but paused as he noted the tall figure motionless by the window.

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At midnight an automobile party whirled down Riverside Avenue and several very merry young ladies and gentlemen sprang from the

machines, while the gray-haired gentlemen and ladies who had yawned and dozed peacefully in the rear seats during the twenty-five mile run clambered patiently down from the quivering touring cars and, with faint protests, followed the laughing, chatting young people into a famous café, where a luncheon, ordered by telephone, was awaiting them. Their appetites were sharp—the exhilarating dash through the night with the searchlights of the speeding machines unrolling the hard, smooth roadway before them, had been responsible for that—and so they ate and jested with all of the zest and freedom of young Americans, healthy in mind and body.

Suddenly one of the young ladies leaned toward the man beside her and asked:

“Tell me, Mr. Bronson—who is that gentleman just entering?”

Her companion glanced toward the doorway, and his lips tightened quickly as he saw a tall, broad-shouldered man by the side of a stylishly gowned woman with dark hair fluffing out from beneath a rose-trimmed picture hat of generous dimensions. The newcomers carried themselves with an easy grace and confidence and seemed utterly absorbed in each

other's company, the woman addressing herself vivaciously to the man, and he slightly bending his head toward her and with a half smile on his lips. They gave no heed to the automobile party, but crossed over to a table in a cozy nook and sat down.

"Miss Nelson, I am practically a stranger to this city. Why should you ask me such a question?"

The girl turned and looked full into his eyes.

"Why? I asked because—because I rather thought you knew. If you say you do not it is quite sufficient and answers all that I wish to know." There was a pause. Bronson's eyes evaded hers and his gaze roamed about the room, flashing now and then to the two who sat at the table in the nook, unheeding all but themselves. "You have not answered," she added. "Do I understand you to say you do not know him?"

The man did not give any reply at once. Others of the group demanded their attention, and for a few minutes the conversation was general.

"I confess to an attempt at evasion," he said, finally, in a low tone. "I will not say that I do not know him, but I will say that you should

not care to know him. I do not wish to be rude. You rather forced this from me."

The girl's cheeks showed a deeper tint, but she smiled at the words.

"I forced it—yes. And suppose I should say that I already know him? It is Mr. Layton, isn't it?"

"Seb Layton, without doubt. I haven't seen him for years, but one doesn't easily forget him."

"No—not easily."

The words came low and hesitatingly, as though the speaker were not entirely aware of speaking at all. Bronson looked around at her sharply. She was toying abstractedly with a rose.

"He still has that same habit of tapping his cheek with one finger while he is listening. It is rather annoying—but it is Seb Layton."

She nodded.

"And if I remember correctly, Mr. Layton has a habit of being just himself in his own way, without consulting books or people to ascertain if he should do thus or so."

"Precisely. And it will ruin his life—that is, if it has not been ruined for several years. Independence and so-called 'naturalness' are

excellent qualities, but if allowed to dominate—well, one must expect a rough pathway. It smacks very much of selfishness when you bring it down to the last analysis.”

The girl laughed lightly.

“If it would not attract too much attention and distract the others from their arguments I would applaud. But it is too important that they should settle the question as to whether Kubelik or MacMillan is the greater artist. I am interested in violinists, you know, and will welcome a settlement of this problem.” The laugh died from her lips, and she finished quite soberly: “But, really, should a leopard be expected to change its spots even if it could?”

“Perhaps not,” he answered, glancing toward where Layton and his companion were seated, “but as long as it retains those spots we cannot mistake it for a house cat. If it is to remain a leopard the jungle must be its home.”

“Then I would cling to the spots. I hate house cats. And the jungle—well, there no one chases the leopard around with a broom, and it doesn’t climb up on the piano every time a little poodle comes in sight.”

“Spoken like a—a—”



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"Like a barbarian."

She finished the sentence for him as he floundered. His cheeks reddened.

"I didn't mean that at all," he protested.

"Certainly not—but I did. What you really had in mind, Mr. Bronson, was that I am a woman and should be humored and flattered, no matter at what tangent my thoughts might travel. But you are too polite to hint at this, and for once the complimentary words you wished to speak failed to come to your tongue."

Bronson coughed nervously, and glanced at the others, but they were so absorbed in the question of artists that this little discussion was receiving no attention whatever. Besides, in the circle in which Miss Nelson moved, it had become apparent during Bronson's few weeks in the city that he was an ardent suitor of the noted financier's daughter, and as the English nobleman reported to also be in the lists for her favor had not yet arrived in the city, her friends very skilfully contrived to grant Mr. Bronson abundant opportunity to press his suit. He was courteous, gentlemanly, independently wealthy, of a good New England family that guarded its family tree sacredly and vigilantly—a trait undeveloped but thoroughly appre-

ciated by the best society of this great Northwest—and society approved of him immediately. Besides, there was something a bit distasteful in the contemplation of a Spokane heiress wedding a foreigner, even if he did speak the same tongue and was above the suspicion of being a fortune hunter. Therefore, *tête-à-têtes* between these two that often appeared purely accidental were, in reality, the outcome of much deliberation—on the part of their friends.

"But," he argued, "you surely do not mean that one should follow one's inclinations at all times and hold the opinions of others in contempt?"

"No, I don't think I mean just that. At least, that doesn't sound like what I mean. Perhaps, though, if my meaning were to be reduced to what you term the 'last analysis' it might resolve itself into something dangerously near to that. Often the results of analyses are perfectly hideous. One's own thoughts are apt to be sugar-coated, and it is left for others to discover the bitter and the nauseating in them."

A smile came to his lips as he nodded approval.

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"Now I have found the word I wanted a moment ago. You have spoken like a philosopher."

"Have I?" she asked. "Is it philosophy to probe one's self and then shrink from what one discovers in the depths?"

"The world would call it strength of character to crush that and to—"

"Follow the dictum of the world of fickle, pretending mortals."

Surprise flashed into his eyes, and, for a moment, he minced with the squab before him, pretending to eat, but not more than a bite passed his lips.

"I confess that you are proving something of a mystery to me to-night," he said rather stiffly.

"I know it. You must have been very much preoccupied during all of our acquaintanceship not to have made the discovery sooner. 'Caprice' Nelson they called me at school, because I was always declaring my belief in this or that and then as certainly doing something very different."

"I have not found you notional, nor fickle in your views."

"You still fail to catch my confession. I'll

say it flatly, then: I am not fickle in my views, but I often lack the courage to live them. The leopard cannot change its spots, and I do not believe it would if it could. It is a leopard and does not try to disguise itself as a bird of paradise nor a turtle dove. It roams the jungles true to itself in all things. Man alone, the highest order of animal created by God, is untrue to himself because he fears what some other specimen of the same genus may say."

Bronson found that it had grown warm suddenly, for the perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"Surely you are joking," he replied, touching his handkerchief to his brow. "You do not realize what your philosophy would amount to. It would tear down—that is, it would destroy—"

He paused in confusion, the perspiration again starting from every pore. She placed her elbows on the table, interlaced her fingers and rested her chin on the bridge thus formed.

"I know it." Her response was spoken slowly, and her face was turned toward him, but she did not see him. Her gaze had passed beyond and was resting on Seb Layton. "That's the reason I do not follow my philos-

ophy—if it is that. I haven't the courage. I am afraid of the tongues of the rest of the masqueraders."

"And all of this because of a man who isn't true to anything, unless it be to a monumental selfishness—a man whom I was not aware that you even knew!"

"Have you so soon forgotten that Yale commencement ball? Why, it has been only—let me see—only five years ago. And you begged me to erase his name from my program—and give you the number. Fie on your short memory, sir!" She laughed in a light-hearted way. "And I confess that I have never forgotten the incident," she added.

A blaze of light shone in his eyes, and he leaned swiftly toward her, a fact that did not escape the observation of the others of the party, and which caused the previous question to be argued with feverish interest, while an occasional wink by one to another gave token that they considered this occasion to be one fraught with much importance.

"You have never forgotten!" Bronson exclaimed softly. "It is good of you—and generous. I remember almost everything connected with that night. I remember how—

how—beautiful you were! I remember that during one number for which my name was on your card we didn't dance, but sat out on the balcony. That is, you sat—and I stood. I remember how bright the moon was and that I said something—do you remember?—and you told me you were sure that it was a way with graduates, to be foolish. But you laughed when you said it, and I knew you weren't offended. Then you spoke to me of the duties of graduates—just as though you were not still in school, yourself—and told me that when a young man graduated he should be looking forward and planning his career. Do you also remember that?"

"Perfectly. And you declared that you intended to go 'right into the fight.' Those were your exact words."

"Yes," he said, eagerly. "I believe those were my words."

She faced him and looked searchingly into his eyes.

"And have you done so?" she asked, simply. His cheeks reddened at the question.

"No, I have not," he acknowledged. "I have been an idle spectator of the battle. I have had too much money."

"It is not a good excuse—but a common one. I know something of that, myself. While others have made use of their education and advantages I have frittered away my time on the decks of yachts on the Mediterranean; I have danced the winters away in Madrid, or listened listlessly to the songs of Venetian gondoliers. My home city has known me but little."

"The Mediterranean—Madrid—the songs of the gondoliers in the moonlight? Yes. Let me adopt a man's usual tactics and excuse myself for being there, also, by laying the blame on—a girl. Because she was there I was there—and because she is here I am here."

"Poor, unfortunate, misspent years!" She smiled graciously. "And while you have been following a will-o'-the-wisp, Mr. Layton has been in the fight. At least, I have a vague memory of having heard so."

Benson frowned.

"Layton? Oh, yes. I had forgotten him for the moment. And have you never met him since that ball?"

"I have never even seen him since, to my knowledge. We were in Washington much, you know—and then the other places that I

have mentioned. But I never quite forgot him. There was something rather pathetic about him on the night of your commencement ball. On every hand he was cut cold, but he never flinched, though his face was pale all the evening. There was something of the leopard about him, I think, else he would not have asked me for that waltz."

"And in spite of all your friends could say, you danced with him."

The girl again looked across to the other table, where Layton and his companion were chatting and laughing gayly in total indifference to the others in the café.

"Yes," she replied. "Did I not tell you I admired the leopard because he would not take to flight every time a poodle barked at him?"

"Well, yonder's your leopard—right in from the jungles." There was that in his tone that was meant for sarcasm.

"He really is quite a handsome animal, too, don't you think?" She spoke a bit quizzically, and paused for a reply, but none came, so she continued: "By the way, do you chance to know his companion?"

"Humph! I don't think a man could be in Spokane three weeks and not have her pointed

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out. Her name is Mrs. Florence Benton. I don't know just how she would be classed in your zoo, but she's a divorcee from Los Angeles."

CHAPTER VII

GETTING INTO THE FIGHT

"SEÑOR SEB," said Jose, when Layton came into his rooms at two o'clock that morning, "the telephone has been ringing like the devil all night. Señor Garrison would not let me sleep. Santa Maria! If I had him down on the Rio Grande!"

"What did he want? Confound him, I intended going around to see him in the morning."

Jose yawned, and then rubbed his eyes vigorously.

"He wouldn't tell me until an hour ago. Said he was bound to locate you or make sure I would be awake to notify you. An hour ago he swore and said he would give it up, and said for me to tell you that you must go down in the Palouse to-morrow."

But Layton did not leave Spokane on the morrow. When Jose awakened him that morning the lawyer found that a sudden rain

storm had swept down from the mountains, and when he walked to the window it was to see the familiar hills wrapped in a gray mist. There was no pattering of raindrops now; that had ceased, but a sodden mantle had lowered until the Cœur d'Alenes were hidden from view, and the eaves of the buildings dripped unceasingly.

The Mexican served the fruit, coffee, and rolls in silence, but when Layton had arisen from the table Jose pointed to the morning paper which had been lying before him.

"You've been reading?" he asked, and there was a hint of anxiety in his tone.

"No, not much. I was thinking of something else. Why?"

"There is something about the mine—the Nonesuch. Look there."

Layton took the paper and read the article which Jose pointed to.

"Holders of stock in the Nonesuch—which has come to be regarded as peculiarly a Spokane mine—will not be displeased to learn that Mr. Joseph Bronson, of New York City, who has been in the city for several days, has invested ten thousand dollars in Nonesuch stock.

Although Mr. Bronson is a young man of independent means and this is not a heavy investment for him, the significance of the transaction lies in the fact that he is a mining engineer, having specialized in the branch at Yale. It is understood that he came west for the express purpose of studying the Nonesuch, and that he would have taken more stock had not Mr. Warren Nelson, president of the company, protested against permitting so many shares to go East. It is hinted that Mr. Bronson is representing the Eastern syndicate referred to a few weeks ago in these columns."

Jose was half smiling, and his look was expectant as Layton raised his eyes from the paper.

"What you think now?" he asked. "You think I've been robbed?"

Seb laid the paper down and stood for a moment, tapping his cheek with one finger. He was not thinking so much of the youth's question as he was of Bronson's presence in Spokane. He had heard of him on but few occasions since that commencement day, and while he knew that Bronson had studied mining engineering in college, he also knew that it was

because of a natural taste for the science rather than because of any expectation that he would apply his knowledge. Bronson had never taken life that seriously. And now he was here in Spokane! Layton found himself rather hoping that they would not meet. He glanced at Jose and saw the anxiety deepening in his eyes.

"Maybe you'll make a stake with this stock," he answered. "I know this Bronson, and if he says the mine is good I'd back it with my pile."

Then he went down to his office, and as he ran down the stairs he heard Jose's voice raised in a Mexican love lilt.

About the same time, a man was lying in bed in the Empire hotel, and abstractedly watching the water trickling down the window panes. Finally he yawned and arose, but as he stood with his clothing in his hand, ready to dress, he glanced out of the window again at the dripping skies, and changed his mind. Stepping to the telephone, he ordered a morning paper sent up to his room, and when he had received it he piled the pillows on the side of the bed nearer the window and stretched himself out in a half reclining position to read. He scanned the first page, giving but passing heed

to the Washington correspondent's political gossip, but reading with great interest an account of an accident to a party that had attempted to scale the Matterhorn. Then he turned to the inside pages and a quick clutching of the crumpled paper showed that he had found something of interest. A moment later and he sprang from bed and began dressing in considerable haste, the paper being tucked into his pocket.

It was but a few minutes past ten o'clock when he entered the Falls City Bank and sent his card in to the president. When he was ushered into the luxurious private office he found Mr. Warren Nelson busily engaged with his stenographer, but upon the entrance of the caller the dictation ceased and the financier arose with extended hand.

"Good morning, Mr. Bronson. I didn't suppose you were astir yet. Automobiling makes heavy lids even for young people."

Bronson took the outstretched hand and smiled at the banker's chaff.

"It was a delightful spin we had. But I had rather wake up and think it all over than to sleep and forget it."

"Yes, I suppose so. Mrs. Nelson said that

Frances was very enthusiastic when she reached home." He motioned toward a chair, and dropped into the seat beside his desk.

"The road is fine across the prairie, and we made some records, I think. But I would like to talk business to you a few minutes, Mr. Nelson."

As he spoke he glanced suggestively toward the stenographer, and Nelson nodded as he caught the look.

"Certainly." He turned to the stenographer. "You may get those letters out at once. I'll call you later." The girl disappeared into another room, and he again faced his caller. "I am entirely at your service now," he said.

Bronson drew the newspaper from his pocket and unfolded it.

"The *Times* has some statements this morning that quite surprise me," he said, and handed the paper to the banker, at the same time pointing to the article.

Nelson took the paper, but merely glanced at it.

"Yes," he replied. "I supposed that was why you had called, and I am glad you came. I wanted to confer with you regarding this article. The question that is bothering me is

as to what action will be the most advisable in this case."

Bronson looked at him in surprise.

"Why," he exclaimed, "it is a rank untruth, and you ought to demand a correction. I haven't put a dollar into the Nonesuch—of course, you know that!—and I can't imagine how the paper got hold of such a story. I haven't been interviewed, and—"

"But I have." Nelson's tone was quiet. "I have—yes. But of course I did not give out such a story."

"Then call up the editorial rooms and have it corrected. These newspaper men are always ready to do the square thing when some cub reporter imposes on them!"

The financier folded the paper carefully, as though it were important that the corners should exactly meet. Then he looked at Bronson.

"You're right on that. I've had myself at their mercy long enough to know. But you don't fully understand this case yet. It wasn't a cub reporter. It was one of the ablest men on the *Times* who wrote that, and I don't understand how the tangle occurred, for he is one of the best known political writers in the

Northwest; when he writes the people take notice. He has made and unmade more men politically than any other man west of the Rockies and north of the Golden Gate—and he would be glad to see Senator Garrison's toga thrown about my shoulders once more, if something better did not come within my reach. Point number one—and of course you catch it."

"Yes, yes, of course. But he ought to correct this."

"He would do so without a word if I should ask it. But I always figure men as being human—it's a secret of good politics—and I know that if I should discredit his statements he would have a hard time forgetting. That's where the human part crops out. He thinks he wrote the truth. It is a clear case of misunderstanding."

Bronson shook his head.

"I don't see how it could be. It states alleged facts too clearly. But I understand perfectly that you cannot afford to awaken any resentment in him, so I'll see him myself and square it. The Nonesuch may be all right, but it wouldn't be honorable for me to let this paper deceive the people regarding me. I'll see him and tell him that it's a mistake, that I had con-

templated investing the amount named and that you thought I had so decided, but that I have changed my mind. That may not be truthful, but no one will suffer and it will clear up this thing."

Nelson arose and paced slowly back and forth across the office, apparently in deep thought.

"That may do," he said, pausing a moment. "The truth is, Mr. Bronson, that this man came on a political mission and then took advantage of his close acquaintance with me to probe into some personal affairs concerning my family—and you. He had heard that you and—well, no matter—he heard that you had chanced to visit many of the same places in Europe at the same time some members of my family were there, and he had learned—heavens knows how—that you sailed from London on the *Empress* with us. You are in Spokane. He quizzed me very pointedly regarding these coincidences, and, I confess, for once in my life I was hard put for replies that would prevent embarrassment should he exercise a newspaper man's prerogative and print certain suppositions. I managed to shift from—my family—to the Nonesuch; it was anything with me for

refuge. Then he drove me into some close corners by his surmises. The Lord only knows what I did lead him to think in my floundering. He also made me admit—I cannot lie straight out, even to a newspaper man—that the None-such belongs to Frances instead of to me. But I got his promise to smother that. She doesn't want her name to be dragged into business, and neither do I want her to have the notoriety."

Bronson's face had grown very red during the time Nelson was speaking, but now he arose and stood looking into the banker's eyes.

"I begin to see that I've been something of a cad, sir," he said, slowly, but with firmness. "I didn't mean it, but I ought to have had horse sense. I've danced around over Europe at your daughter's heels; I crossed the ocean in the same ship, and I've tagged her across America—and I didn't have sense enough to realize that I was making a target of her. I beg your pardon, sir. I've always tried to be a gentleman, but I've been a cad. Now I want to ask you if you have any objections to my being a suitor for your daughter's hand?"

Nelson smiled and reached out his hand in a friendly way.

"Bless you, Bronson, you're one of the old

school. I thought they were all gone from the earth. Don't bear down too hard on yourself, though. I've never thought you a cad at all. But as for objections—well, you have my hand. It's the American way, you know."

He laughed again, waved his hand toward a chair, and sat down himself.

"Thank you, Mr. Nelson. If I haven't been a cad, I have at least been a dawdler, and within the last twelve hours I've begun to realize it. Now for a moment let's return to the subject of those Nonesuch shares. I can't live this lie the *Times* has unintentionally put on me."

Nelson studied the face of the young man sharply for a moment, and then a peculiar light shone in his own eyes, the light such as one sees in the eyes of a gambler when he puts heavy stakes on the turn of a card. He reached over and drew his desk telephone toward him.

"You're right about that," he said. "It doesn't matter what comes of it, the *Times* will have to correct that. I'll call up the editor now."

He took down the receiver and slowly raised it to his ear, but Bronson sprang forward and

thrust the prong down, thereby cutting off the call.

"Wait!" he cried, and the banker with a sudden gleam of satisfaction in his eyes, replaced the receiver on the prong. "There's an easier way out of this," added Bronson.

"An easier way? I myself cannot permit this error to continue before the public, now that I have considered it fully, and I cannot conceive of an easier way than this."

"I'll take the stock, Mr. Nelson!"

Nelson started from his chair with a display of astonishment that was well simulated if it was not genuine.

"You'll take the stock?" he echoed. "No, no, that is not fair to you. Ten thousand dollars is a tidy sum to toss into an investment blindfolded."

Bronson laughed as he drew a check book from his pocket.

"I've spent it for touring cars that smashed themselves into junk within six months and gave me no return but a fractured thigh and a hospital bill. This promises better than that." He seized a pen and filled in the blank, which he laid at Nelson's elbow. "You can make out the certificates at your convenience."

Nelson picked up the check and inspected it.

"I don't think I can permit this," he replied.

"If any one is at fault it is I."

"Nonsense. I have quite decided to quit dawdling and get 'into the fight'—I think I remember of hearing it referred to in that way—and that blundering scribbler has opened the way for my start. My father was regarded as a keen financier. He left me his money, and lately—very lately—I have discovered that he bequeathed me at least a trifle of ambition. Mr. Nelson, I want to take a man's part in affairs. I'm going to quit leaving to my lawyers the entire job of making a living for me."

He laughed quite gayly, and it was evident that his spirits were rising.

"Of course, if you feel that way about it I'll not contend with you. In fact, it's the spirit I admire. But being a success isn't poetry, Bronson. Don't mistake on that point. It's working hard and keeping your eye on something besides money. If you see only that, you'll quit, because the money isn't worth your fight."

The young man sobered, and leaned back in his chair.

"I know it, sir," was his answer. "I'll not

flinch, though I know full well that it will be different from some of the things that have made up my life—for instance, gondoliers singing their plaintive songs in the moonlight. I know all that, but, lately, I have been studying on the question, and I want that men should say of me something different from, 'There's a rich man who has done nothing in the world but spend money.' It's legitimate to make money, for while you're making it you are doing something that helps along the world's advancement in some way."

"Young man, if you stick to that platform you'll win, and your money will be a benefit to the world."

"I'm twenty-eight and I haven't had the business training I need, but I'll start in on something and buckle down. I'm going into the fight, I tell you."

Nelson dropped his hands to his knees and leaned forward suddenly, but hesitated in a moment of indecision. Then he spoke.

"Bronson, I believe you mean every word, and I'm going to offer you the first intrenchment in the fight. Would you be willing to become cashier of the Falls City Bank?"

For a moment there was no reply. The

young man sat staring at the financier in an incredulous way.

"You're not joking, are you?" he asked, at last.

"No. I mean it. Our cashier is ill, and the physicians say he'll never enter the bank again. If you want training you can get it here."

"But the others—the rule of promotion, and all of that?"

Nelson flung out his hands in a gesture that smacked of impatience.

"There's only one rule in this bank, and it is a living, breathing rule by the name of Nelson."

"Perhaps the directors—"

"That's not your affair. It's mine. You'll find out all of that if you come into the bank. As cashier you will get an insight into affairs that will strengthen you. You have a solid education and a good head. It's enough, for you must understand now that I have my grip on every department of this bank. I'll tell you what to do, and the assistant cashier will take much of the work off your shoulders. You'll get your orders from me, and you'll give them to him."

Bronson sat silent again, but in his brain his decision had already formed, and his heart was throbbing with exultant pleasure. Only last midnight Frances Nelson had looked straight into his eyes and chided him for his failure. He had vowed to take up life in earnest, and already his opportunity was here! He struggled hard to keep the smiles from wreathing his face, and his lips were twitching as he answered:

"I believe it is a good chance that you have been kind enough to offer me."

"An excellent chance, and I confess that I have my reasons." He smiled blandly. "I have not been blind to certain things, Bronson, and after you asked—after you spoke a while ago—well, I would like to have you in the bank."

Bronson laughed outright in his flood of pleasure, and reached out his hand.

"I accept the offer, and here's my hand—the American way, you know. It's really the brightest rainy day I ever saw."

"For a man who is turning his back on indolence and facing work, you seem quite happy."

Bronson nodded, still smiling.

"Physiologists teach us that the human system requires a certain amount of salt. So does the life the human lives. Mine has been all sugar and I'm craving the salt."

"It is settled, then. And, since you insist, I'll have those stock certificates made out at once, and I'll hand them to you to-morrow. Frances will be surprised—"

"No, no, no!" Bronson sprang to his feet. "Not a word to her about this mine deal."

"But the *Times* article—it must be settled."

"Tell her it was a mistake—for it was, you know. Maybe she will not give it much thought. Perhaps she will not notice the article at all. But I don't want her to know about the stock, and—and—is it necessary to tell her I know the Nonesuch property is hers?"

The banker turned his head quickly and coughed. Had the man before him been analyzing carefully he might have suspected that the movement and the forced cough were resorted to as a means of concealing a sudden light in the eyes.

"All right," was the reply, "we'll not mention that subject to her. I think I know how you feel about that. But come out to dinner

this evening and I'll introduce the Falls City Bank's new cashier to her."

"Thank you. I'll accept the invitation. I'll bid you good morning now."

He went away humming a merry roundelay, and as the door closed Nelson laughed softly. Then he picked up the check Bronson had left, and the smile that clung to his lips was distinctly one of triumph. The check was made to his personal order, and, taking up the pen, he endorsed it. Then he touched a call bell and the bank's boy responded.

"Tell Mr. Thompson to come here."

The boy nodded, and hurried away to do the bidding. In a few minutes Thompson, the assistant cashier, entered the president's office. Thompson was a man of forty-five, dark of complexion, with a pair of black eyes that always seemed to be looking to the side of whomever he was talking to, never meeting a look squarely. A short black mustache illy concealed a mouth whose curve was sinister.

"Here is a check for ten thousand dollars, Thompson, which I have endorsed. Place it to the credit of James Wilton. Understand?"

"Certainly, sir." Thompson took the check

and glanced at it. "Wilton's account is a thousand dollars overdrawn at present."

"I know all that. This will square it. And another thing, while I am thinking of it. I have named a new cashier to take the place of Haskell."

Thompson's face illumined, but he did not answer. He only looked the query. Nelson eyed him steadily for a moment.

"It is Joseph Bronson, of New York," he said.

The assistant cashier stared dumbly, and a pallor began to show in his olive cheeks.

"Why, I thought—I supposed—" he stammered, but Nelson interrupted him.

"Yes, I know all of that. But I need this Bronson, and I need you right where you are. Your salary will be increased three thousand a year from the first of the month. Now what do you say? Do you want to go or stay?"

Thompson's cheeks had lost their pallor, and a smile was on his thin lips.

"Three thousand increase? Thank you, sir. I am quite satisfied."

Nelson nodded his head slowly.

"I thought so. You're not a damned fool. You're forty-five and your health is bad. I

thought you would stay. Oh, yes." He opened a drawer and took out a package of papers. "Here are some Northwestern Traction bonds—thirty-five thousand dollars worth. I have examined them and they are good collateral. Wilton wants a loan of twenty-five thousand on them. Put these in the vault, and draw the check for that amount and credit Wilton's account with it."

"Yes, sir, the Northwestern bonds are excellent, I am sure."

"Couldn't be better. How is Mrs. Thompson?"

"She isn't improving very rapidly, sir."

"She needs a change. Get her and the children ready and let them spend a few months at the old home back East. Come to me for a check for expenses when they are ready. That's all."

After Thompson had poured out his thanks and had gone, Nelson unlocked a drawer, took out a small, leather-bound book, and began studying the notations and figures contained therein. As he was about to replace it, a photograph lying in the drawer caught his eye, and he took it in both his hands and sat looking at it moodily for a long time. It was a picture

of a young woman not more than twenty-two, and though the style of dress, the arrangement of the hair, and all, bespoke it as having been taken long ago, the quaintness of it could not hide the beauty of the woman, whose eyes looked out from the picture with a tenderness that told of a warm heart, and whose lips seemed ready to smile. Across the bottom was written in a flowing hand, "*Meum et tuum.*"

His chin sank down on his chest as he sat brooding, but finally he replaced the picture, carefully locked the drawer, and then arose and walked to the window, where he stood leaning on the casing, watching the drip, drip, drip of the rain, and the soggy dreariness of the mists.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEÑORA OF THE SLIPPER

SEB LAYTON went directly from his rooms to Senator Garrison's office in the Eagle's Nest, that rainy morning, and although it was not yet the politician's customary time for reaching his office, Seb found him already there, just as he was certain that he would.

He was quickly ushered into the Senator's "den," as it had come to be known among those who had bearded the political lion there at divers times, and there he found Garrison with his long table littered with blue prints, typewritten memoranda, and lengthy documents, each marked with the word, "Copy," in red ink, and with seals and attests giving them the appearance of legalism. That Garrison was in good spirits was evident at a glance as he shook hands cordially with his caller and placed a chair for him beside the table.

"I expected you back from the Big Bend long

before this, Layton, but it's all right at that, I've improved every hour of the time, as you will see by looking over these."

As he spoke he pushed the mass of blue prints and documents toward the lawyer, who bent over them with interest.

"I should say so," replied Seb, tersely, shoving aside a large sheet of blue print and taking up one of the type-written pages marked "Copy."

"Yes," continued Garrison, edging his chair closer to Layton and looking at the paper the latter was examining, "I've been busy, and your prolonged absence hasn't hurt anything. I've got our foundation just that much better." He paused, but the lawyer did not speak, so he resumed. "You see that I have certified copies of most of the deeds and mortgages securing the notes for the Northwestern right-of-way. As you know, Nelson did not ask many land owners to give right-of-way through their places. He bought it. The mortgages show how he did it."

Layton nodded, and smiled in a satisfied way.

"A fair example of to-day's 'high financiering,'" he laughed. "He gave his notes for the

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right-of-way, and secured the notes with mortgages on the land 'and improvements.' Under the terms of these mortgages they are liable to foreclosure within two years from date of execution, provided the Northwestern Traction Company does not before that time run a car over its line bearing passengers, 'the running of said car bearing passengers to be considered as the opening of said Northwestern Traction Company's line for its regular business of transporting passengers and freight.' Um—! Let's see; the two years will expire on the first day of this coming December."

"Exactly," said Garrison, leaning forward. "If the car is run the notes do not become due, but are to run for a period of five years, without interest, the mortgages securing them. If the car is not run, the notes are due and payable December first, and the mortgages may be foreclosed. It's a good enough proposition on the face of it to the people down there, who are anxious to have the line constructed, and who are bound to get paid for their land sooner or later in this way, besides getting the road. In the meantime, it gives Nelson a chance to make the road buy itself. Or if he succeeds in dis-

posing of it to a syndicate he ought to clean up a million easily, and leave them with the mortgages to meet."

"Certainly. I understand all of that—if the car runs."

Garrison smote the table with his clenched fist.

"By God, the car won't run! I promised you that before. I'll see to that. You look after the other part, and we'll cage this old rat before Christmas!"

Layton looked into Garrison's face and there was a sparkle of pleasure in his gray eyes.

"I told you once it was predestination. I'll do my part, and when we corner the rat I'll laugh when he squeals, damn him; it will be music to me. I saw him collapse in an automobile once at a football game—don't scowl, Senator—and I thought that was happiness, but this is bliss."

"Well, he'll squeal good and hard if you do your part—and I'm not uneasy about that. But we've got to get to work at once. I wanted you to get out of town to-day, but there is no use in leaving in this sort of weather." He drew a check book from his pocket and handed it to Layton. "There are checks all signed,

ready for you to fill in. I have gotten a little syndicate together on this thing, a few gentlemen who have reasons for wishing to hear Mr. Warren Nelson do the squealing. Be liberal if you have to—*but get results!*”

When Seb Layton left the office of Senator Granville Garrison an hour later he carried with him a small grip containing the copies of mortgages, etc., that had been scattered over Garrison's table. He went to his own office and busied himself with other affairs, closing up such business as he had on hands in order that he could be absent from the city much of the time during the rest of the summer.

July had come with its heat and lassitude, the Fourth had been noisily celebrated, and all who could do so were getting away from the city for a vacation. Court had adjourned until the first of September, and there were but few things threatening an interference with Layton's plans, but he was a man who ruled things and never let things rule him, so he put pressure here and there as it was needed, and in a few days' time, during which he worked hard, even declining Florence Benton's repeated invitations, he had everything satisfactorily adjusted.

He sighed with relief as he carefully placed the last document in his office safe, and after closing and locking the heavy steel doors he dropped back into his chair and sighed again. For days the clouds had hung dark and lowering, and when it was not raining there was a heavy mist that made life unpleasant for all who ventured out of doors, but to-day the cloud mass had been slowly lightening, and at noon the sun had broken through and brought with it good cheer to the world.

As the lawyer sat looking out at the sunlit world, he felt the recoil of his nature after the days of hard work. The sunshine seemed brighter than ever before, the rain washed buildings reflecting it with unusual brilliance. His blood coursed faster in his veins; he felt the throb of his heart sending a new life through his body; he arose and stood at the window, throwing out his strong arms and rejoicing in their strength, drawing himself up to his full height and noting with satisfaction that his was a generous stature.

To-morrow he would go down into the Palouse and begin his part of the work that was to make Warren Nelson "squeal," but to-day—well, why not answer the call of his blood to-

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day? Turning, he picked up the telephone and called Florence Benton. She had urged him to "come out of his cocoon," and the vitality surging within him was answering the plea.

From the night when first he had met Florence Benton she had never said no to his requests for permission to spend an evening with her. She had often put aside others almost at the very last hour in order that handsome, auburn-haired Seb Layton might be entertained. She was two years his senior, but looked younger, and his usually calm, steady manner appealed strongly to this woman, who was a bundle of nerves, bright and vivacious when the sun was shining in her heart, but passionate and fiery as the lightning's gleam when storm clouds crept into her life. Usually it was the former side of her nature that was shown to Layton, but occasionally he glimpsed the electric fires, and the complexity of it all lured him.

When he touched the electric button at her flat that evening Florence Benton herself admitted him.

"I gave Susan an evening out," she said, and smiled.

She knew his favorite nook, and arm in arm they made their way to it. The large divan he liked so well was close beside the piano, in just the right angle for him to laze and watch the play of emotions in her face as she ran her fingers over the keys and sang the songs he admired. As he reached the divan he suddenly stooped to kiss her, but she sprang back.

"Naughty, naughty!" she laughed. "But if you will promise not to use your man's strength and take more than is offered, I will extend my fingers, sir."

He looked at her as she stood with outstretched hand, a most tempting picture. Her lavender evening gown was wondrously becoming to her style of beauty, and above the cluster of flowers in her corsage her throat and shoulders were revealed to him in the perfection of creamy satin. A coral line traced the curve of her lips, and from beneath arching brows as delicate as spun silk her lustrous eyes gazed into his with a soft glow that set his pulse to dancing.

"I decline to compromise," he answered, and sat down. "It isn't safe to offer a hungry man a cake and tell him to take only a nibble."

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"So you spurn my poor fingers, do you?" She sank into a chair with easy grace. "And it was only a few evenings ago that a great man—a very great man—vowed that my hand was—let's see, what was it? Oh, yes, 'a poet's dream warmed into life.'"

She laughed merrily as she finished, but Layton did not. Instead, there was something of a scowl on his face. Perhaps she noticed it. But if so she gave no heed. The laughter still danced in her eyes.

"Who said it—Nelson?" he asked.

"You must be a clairvoyant, Seb. It really was the great and good Mr. Warren Nelson, ex-United States Senator, banker, capitalist, financier, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera—as long as your breath lasts. And that very hand you decline to salute with your lips."

"Did Nelson?" His tone was rather surly.

"Don't be ugly, Seb," she chided. "You were wandering around up in the Big Bend among the cannibals—or are there any cannibals up there?—and I was positively perishing for a little dinner out at the club. Mr. Nelson also was very lonely—he told me so, himself—as his wife and daughter had gone down to

Walla Walla for a few days to pay a duty call, and so—well, isn't that new automobile of his a perfect beauty?"

"Really, I haven't had the pleasure of seeing it. But Jose called it seven kinds of devils in his best Spanish. He said both of you laughed at him when his cayuse bucked."

"Was it Jose? So you are not a clairvoyant, after all? I did not recognize the young savage. I don't like him."

Layton smiled indulgently as he arranged the cushions more to his liking.

"And the 'young savage' doesn't like you, Florence. I know it's beastly of him, but he doesn't. He calls you 'the Señora of the Slipper,' and seems to think you are a sort of a vampire planning to drain my body of every drop of blood. The rascal is devoted to me."

"I know it," she answered, slowly. "And it almost forces me to like him." She looked into the man's eyes again, and there was a new light in her own eyes. "I like gratitude in any one, and Jose has it. When I remember that he appreciates your saving his life, I find myself liking him. Has he any relatives?"

"Not a soul. His mother died down in Mexico."

"And his father was drowned when your ship went down just outside the Golden Gate. I know that. And I remember reading in a San Francisco paper how you left your raft and battled with the sea to save this little Mexican boy. No wonder he is devoted to you and hates me. He thinks—"

She paused and sat looking thoughtfully at the man before her. Layton suddenly flung the pillows aside and arose to his feet.

"He thinks I am going to marry you, Florence!" he exclaimed, standing close to her. "And I am!"

Her white hands clenched spasmodically, and the blood surged to her face, but after a moment it receded slowly, leaving her deathly white as she looked up into his eyes.

"Sit down, Seb," she answered in even tones unusual to her, and, strangely enough, he felt the power she was wielding over herself, and obeyed. She reached over and took a cigarette from a jeweled box lying on the table beside her, and, striking a match, she drew a full draught of smoke and then exhaled it slowly and watched it float away in fragrant haze. Then she again turned her eyes to Layton. "You are going to spoil it all," she added.

"Spoil it all, Florence? Why, I'm just wanting to make it all sweeter and more glorious. I'll send Jose away if you don't like him."

"No, no, you don't understand." She leaned forward, and with her elbow on the table stared at the glowing coal on her cigarette. "The Mexican isn't a fool, Seb, and he has been seeing things at which neither of us have looked. But I have suddenly seen them, and I know he is right." She dropped the cigarette into a china jar and arose with a laugh. "I'm going to serve tea now, so let's forget all about what you said."

He started to speak, but she waved her hand and fairly ran from the room. He sat glumly staring at the faint cloud of cigarette smoke that hung near the ceiling. Florence Benton handled her cigarettes very daintily and very prettily, and he had always admired the grace of her manner. It was one of her charms when he dropped in for an evening. If she were his wife—! His thoughts broke, for Florence Benton had stepped to the door.

"I am awfully sorry," she said, "but I haven't a drop of wine in the house. If you care to, you may step to the telephone and order Rietz-

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millar to send up half a dozen bottles. Just tell them it is for Mrs. Benton. They know my brand. I am busy with the lunch."

Without waiting for a reply, she turned away. Layton arose and went to the telephone, but with his hand on the receiver he paused. For a full minute he stood studying, and then walked back to the divan and sat down. Something unpleasant was jarring on his thoughts. He could still detect the odor of her cigarette, and his musings flashed back to where his thoughts had broken. If Florence Benton were his wife!

She handled her cigarettes with rare grace, indeed, but would he care to mention to his friends that this was one of his wife's accomplishments? He pictured a home in which he should be devoting his evenings to study and work at home instead of in his office, as now, and with his wife blowing clouds of smoke from a cigarette which she handled so gracefully. He tapped his cheek nervously.

"Did you order the wine, Seb?"

He looked up to see her standing in the doorway again, and there seemed to be something of a shadow in her eyes.

"No, I decided that the tea was enough," he

answered, and though he was unaware of it, there was a new note in his voice. She caught the note, and as she turned again from the room there was more of a mist in her eyes than there had been for years.

Rietzmillers place knew the brand of wine she preferred! He leaned indolently back among the cushions, crossed his knees and stared moodily at the tip of his patent leather Oxford. "Rietzmillers, send up a dozen bottles of my wife's favorite wine—you know the brand!" A grim smile came to his lips at this fancied order. Confound it, something was wrong with him to-night; trifles were giving his nerves sad twinges. She handled her cigarette gracefully, he again vowed, and she did not become ridiculous over the wine. What was troubling him? He had known ever since he knew her that cigarettes and wine were incidents of her daily life, and they had all been a part of their *camaraderie*.

What strange ideas were these that were beating at his brain? He had found no fault; rather had he admired; was there any reason why he should view them differently now? Was there a gulf between the graces that added charm to the companion of his convivialities

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and those that would give lustre and charm to his wife?

A hassock rested on the floor close beside his foot, and he kicked it savagely. He must have been working too hard lately, and he would welcome the outing among the hills of the Palouse Valley. Such queer thoughts had never found lodging in his mind before—but then he had never before asked any one to be his wife. Perhaps that offered the explanation. And then he wondered how it had chanced that never before had he studied this question.

Further communings were cut short by the entrance of Mrs. Benton bearing a tray laden with a tea service, dainty sandwiches and a salad.

"I knew you would rather have me serve in here," she said, removing the cigarettes and other articles from the small table and spreading a snow white cloth thereon. "Here is your favorite salad, but I confess that Susan made it. I did manage to prepare the sandwiches myself, but I am fearing that I have made the tea bitterly strong. I am almost helpless in such matters without Susan."

She sat just across the little table from him,

and they ate and enjoyed an hour in which there was no hint at his proposal of marriage. The woman's wit was never keener, her well-trained mind never was revealed to better advantage, and Seb Layton never found his tongue less ready with quip and jest than on this occasion. He was trying to enter into the conversation with his whole soul, but he also was trying to evolve some explanation for the undeniable pallor showing in her cheeks, and the shadow in her eyes that belied the brilliance of her spirits as evidenced by her words and actions.

"And now I think I'll take another cigarette," she said. "That is, if you will join me."

He reached for the case she had thrust aside and offered it to her, after which he lighted one himself.

"You haven't asked me about that dinner with Nelson," she suggested.

"Certainly not. It was ill taste for me to say what I did. I have no intention of asking anything about it."

She rested her elbows on the table and again breathed the smoke from between her lips.

"Thank you, Seb," she replied, and her eyes did not meet his. "I was with him because—

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Oh, a friend asked—that is, I was trying to help a friend. Lately, I have been wishing I had not done so. He has some powerful reasons—but let's change the subject. I'll tell you all about it sometime, but not to-night. I'm not quite equal to it. Let me play for you."

She dropped the cigarette and went to the piano, and he sat with one elbow on the table, watching her. His cigarette went out and the ashes dropped onto his coat, but he gave it no heed. He was listening to the music and studying the player, and he was still grappling with a problem. They heard a step in the hallway, and a few minutes later some one entered an adjoining room.

"It's Susan," said Florence, reaching over and touching a bell. The maid entered. "You may remove these things." The woman at the piano waved her hand toward the table.

"Yes, madam." She placed the dishes on the tray and turned to leave the room. "Shall I bring in the wine, as usual?" she asked.

Florence Benton bit quickly at her lip.

"Never mind the wine, Susan. There isn't any."

"I beg pardon. I ordered some this evening, you remember."

"Certainly I remember, but—but—I thought it did not come. I must have overlooked it. Do you care for wine now, Mr. Layton?"

The red of annoyance and confusion was in her cheeks.

"No. Your tea answers all demands. Please play for me again."

At midnight he took his leave. She stood beside him, and, fired by the magnetism of her presence, he put his arms about her and drew her close to him. She did not resist. He had held her in his arms before, but there was something vital about this moment. She looked up into his face, and he stooped and kissed her, kissed her half-closed eyes, kissed her glowing cheeks, and kissed her red lips again and again. And then he released her and strode out of the room without a word, leaving her thrilling. But he scarcely had reached the street until she had staggered to the divan, where she sank down with her head among the cushions and sobbed out a grief that was in her heart.

Seb chose to walk home, and as he swung along, his brain again wrestled with the problem the night had developed. Had she lighted that first cigarette just at the time she did for the purpose of making him see realities? Had

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she really overlooked the wine or had she asked him to order it in order to still further open his eyes to conditions as they were? Why had he not asked her again to marry him, while he held her in his arms at parting?

He knew that he had drawn back after the other incidents had been brought before him, and he knew that it was because of the gulf he had discovered. Further than that, by the time he had reached his apartments he had analyzed it all and decided that Florence Benton had cleverly contrived to save him from himself by making it possible for him to see the gulf.

Jose was in bed, but he called to ask if there was anything Señor Seb wished, and Señor Seb knew that the faithful Mexican lad was anxious to hear his voice so Jose could determine whether he was drunk or sober. The knowledge brought a grim smile to Layton's lips.

"Not a thing wanted, Jose. But I must get out of town to-morrow."

Then he went to bed, but it was long before sleep came to close his eyes, which was a condition quite novel to Seb Layton, who always in the past had gone to bed to sleep and never to ponder on any problems of ethics.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE PALOUSE

THE July afternoon on which Layton arrived in Whitman was hot, but the breeze that usually came up from the southwest about three o'clock tempered the sun's rays to a degree. He gave his suit-case into the care of the one-armed man who languidly solicited his patronage of the Bolton House, which, he was gravely assured, was the best hotel in Whitman. It was nothing especially disparaging to the hostelry that he learned later that it was the only one in the town.

A few loafers had perched themselves on the baggage trucks in the shade of the little frame depot to enjoy the daily treat of seeing the train from Spokane pass through on its way to the road's terminus down in Idaho, and these gave him a casual survey as he left the station and started up toward the main street. Across the broad, irregular street stood a mammoth

grain warehouse, and in its shadow two men were pitching horseshoes, while four or five others stood by or squatted on their heels and watched the game closely.

As he neared the corner of the main street, he heard loud voices, there was a rush of feet, and around the corner streamed a crowd of men and boys, laughing and excited.

"Look out, Mister, he's headed this way!" shouted one youth, and as he spoke he scrambled up onto a pile of lumber near at hand.

Seb paused in surprise and uncertainty, but his mystification was only fleeting. There was a clatter on the board walk, half a dozen men were seen darting across the street in another direction, and then there came a wild cry:

"E-e-e-e-yoo-o-p! Ye-e-e-o-ho-o-oh! Jump, ye milk-eyed devil, jump!"

Simultaneously with the shout, a broncho sprang into view, bucking with all of the devilish vigor known to the breed. It had cleared the sidewalk of spectators by bucking from the street onto the walk, and now it cleared the corner and, springing high and bawling like a calf, it lunged straight toward a hay wagon standing beside the road. In its blind fury the broncho would have plunged into the

wagon, for bridle reins are as useless as cotton threads in guiding a bunch-grass cayuse on a bucking spree, but the yelling rider snatched off his sombrero, and, leaning forward in the saddle, began beating the animal on the side of its head. The heroic treatment was effective, for the brute turned its head to escape punishment, and the next leap carried it away from the danger. Then the rider straightened in the saddle, and again the time-honored slogan of the broncho "buster" rang out: "E-e-e-yoo-o-p! Ye-e-e-o-ho-o-oh!"

The heavy spurs flashed from withers to flanks, and the cayuse's bawl of rage was changed to a shrill scream of pain as it again sprang high and "sunfished," that is, turned while in mid-air and came down facing in an entirely different direction, and with its head close to the ground. Layton knew that a bucking broncho saw nothing and heeded nothing in its awful plunges to unseat a rider, so he quickly sought a point of safety, from where he watched the battle between man and beast. Finally the broncho threw itself on its side and tried to crush its rider, but the man was too wary; before it had touched the ground he was out of the saddle, and before it had fully re-

gained its feet again he had sprung to the saddle, and quirt and spur were scourging the animal mercilessly. The broncho yielded. Its bawling ceased, there were one or two "sheep bucks," and then it stood stock still, sweat dripping from its flanks, and where the spurs had bitten blood mingled with the foam.

"Git up, ye devil!"

The triple-lashed quirt stung its haunches and the rowels again prodded the bleeding flanks. The cayuse trembled in every muscle, and then slowly trotted forward to the cheers of the crowd. To show his confidence in his mastery, the rider withdrew one foot from the stirrup, threw his leg over the saddle horn, and fanned himself with his sombrero. After riding up the street a short distance, he turned and trotted the animal back to the corner. And now Layton got a good look at him. It was Dan Johns.

Dan drew rein and sprang from the saddle, dropping the long reins to the ground as he did so. The pony stood panting and blowing. Seb stepped forward.

"That was a good job of riding, Dan," he said, extending his hand.

Johns looked at him in surprise.

"Lordy, how are you, Layton?"

"Oh, I'm well—better than you are, I suspect," laughed Seb.

Dan lashed his leather shaps with the quirt.

"Hell, I could roll a cigarette on him if he didn't git no worse than that. That back cinch is rotten, an' I thought it'd break, but it didn't."

He wiped the perspiration from his face, and as the dust had settled thereon, his action streaked his features in a comical way. "Wait till I git shut o' this cayuse an' we'll take a drink."

"Isn't he yours?"

"Naw! Feller offered me two bits to ride him, so I borrowed the shaps an' clumb on." He turned toward a boy in the crowd. "Here he is, sonny, tame as a dead *siwash*."

He hung the quirt on the saddle horn, unbuckled the shaps and spurs, put the quarter in his pocket, and led the way to where a board sign bore the word, "Saloon," in rude letters. The crowd had disappeared as soon as Dan had conquered the broncho. Such incidents were too common to merit discussion.

"I'm a heap surprised to see you down here, Layton," said Johns, as they leaned on the rude bar. He wiped his lips with the back of his

hand as he spoke. "Aint huntin' this time o' year, are you?"

"No, it's business this time. I've got to spend a few weeks—don't know how long—along the Northwestern Company's line—that electric line, you know."

"Yes, I *sabe* the Northwestern, but, Lordy, it ain't within ten mile o' Whitman yet."

"I know it. I'll have to hunt a hang-up at some rancher's out that way. I can't stay at the Bolton House. It's too far away."

"Huh! Reckon the hotel's good enough, but you'll git a temperance lecture every time you take a drink." His black eyes flashed resentfully. "A woman over there called me a drunkard an' said I was goin' to hell."

Dan stopped and puckered up his lips, and Layton laughed.

"She got mad," continued Dan, "because that pinto cayuse o' Coyote Barr's I was ridin' took a fool notion to buck right into the hall where the W. C. T. U. was a-holdin' a convention." He grinned at the recollection. "That pinto aint a sociable beast, I'll admit, an' he shortened their prayers some. Lordy, they went plumb *loco* when we smashed through the doors an' begin amusin' 'em!"

Layton made a significant gesture to the man behind the bar, and Dan quickly reached for the bottle that was set before him.

"I'll take to the hills to-morrow," said Seb, "and I suppose I can stand one temperance lecture. Maybe it will do me good. I haven't listened to preaching of any kind for some years." He leaned against the bar and slowly turned his glass in his fingers as it rested on the polished walnut board, and meditatively watched the afternoon sunshine that filtered through the dirty windows glint on the liquor. "I haven't had much time for those things, Dan. I've been too busy keeping the other fellows from getting a good clutch on my wind-pipe."

Dan wasted no time in studying the effect of sunbeams on whiskey. His empty glass attested that he had not poured the liquor from the bottle for any such purpose.

"Well, if you want to git plumb filled up on preachin' jist bounce into a W. C. T. U. meetin' on the back o' that pinto. You'll git a heap. The pinto won't mind it, an' maybe you'll like it."

He grinned good-humoredly and put his arm on Layton's shoulder, who stood unsmiling and

unspeaking for a moment, and then raised the glass, took one little swallow, and with a quick movement threw the remainder of the liquor into the sawdust cuspidor. The broncho rider gasped with astonishment.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Fly in it?"

"No—I don't know just what. I just didn't want it, I suppose." He laughed lightly and straightened up. "It's bum stuff they sell here, Dan. Come over to the hotel and I'll give you a taste of something good. I've a flask in my suit-case."

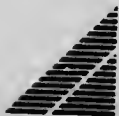
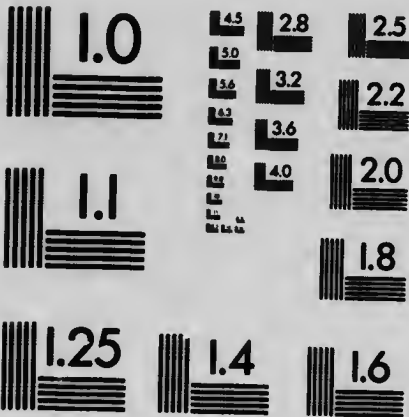
"I sure will," was the answer, and the two stepped out of the place. Then Dan stopped. "No, I don't think I'll go over to the hotel. I'd rather miss the drink." His face suddenly lighted. "Yonder's Coyote Barr, an' I bet I can fix it for you to hang up at his ranch. It's close to the Northwestern. I'll take that drink with you out there if it's a go."

Coyote Barr was a wizened old man of about sixty years, closely cropped gray beard, grizzled hair that hung over his ears, and a pair of eyes that glittered in an uncanny way could one but see beyond the squint of the lids. A battered sombrero, a gray flannel shirt, and a



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pair of faded overalls tucked into high-heeled boots made up his attire. After Dan had introduced the two, Barr kept his glittering eyes busy studying every detail of Layton's appearance, while Johns was suggesting that Seb be permitted to "hang up" with him. He pondered deeply before he answered.

"I hain't no objections. You won't get no style, though Tess has got things lookin' different since she come home."

Layton started slightly. He had entirely forgotten Tess Barr, but a lightning-like flash of his thoughts brought him to believe that she might in a measure relieve the tedium of the weeks in the hills. He remembered that she was pretty—and engaged to marry Dan Johns. The old impulses warmed his blood, and in that brief conversation with the rancher he mentally resolved that not all of Tess Barr's charms should be wasted on Dan Johns. They had no trouble in reaching an agreement, and as Barr and Johns had driven into Whitman in Barr's "hack" after groceries, there was plenty of room for Layton and his suit-case. Seb rescued the traveling case from the hotel, and half an hour later the trio drove away from the little town, Barr and Johns in the



HE PONDERED DEEPLY BEFORE HE ANSWERED. — *Page 166.*

front seat, and Layton riding behind, with sacks of flour, a keg of syrup, a bag of sugar, several sacks of coffee, a jug of vinegar, and his suit-case tucked in the seat and under the seats until there barely was room for him to place his feet on the floor of the vehicle.

They rattled across the wooden structure that bridged Pine Creek, and then almost immediately began a long and laborious ascent.

"After we reach the top of the divide it won't be so bad," volunteered Barr, looking back over his shoulder. "Of course, there's a heap sight o' hills, but they ain't so bad as this."

Where the road wound up to the top of the divide it lay in shadow, and the faintest chill of evening was noticeable, for in the Valley of the Palouse there are few nights that are not cool, no matter if it be mid-summer. As the sturdy team toiled up the grade, Layton felt the rising temperature, another peculiarity of a region where the frost comes first to the valleys and gulches while the hill-tops are free from its nip. Half way up the grade Barr set the brake and held it firmly with his foot while he permitted his horses to slack the traces and regain their breath.

The road was narrow here, and when an-

other team swung into sight around a curve just ahead, descending the long grade with brakes fising from the contact with the wheels, Barr clucked to his team and drove part way up the steep bank beside the roadway in order to make room for the other to pass. The hack careened alarmingly, and Layton clung to the upper side of the seat to escape pitching from the vehicle. However, the two men in the front seat gave it no heed, but after the descending team had passed, the rancher backed into the road and again began the ascent.

At last they reached the summit, and here the sunset's kiss was lying warm. Ahead of them and on all sides was a panorama of rolling hills, splashed here and there by the yellow of ripening grain and the green of the waving bunch grass. Far away to the northeast a mountain-top bare of any timber showed itself in a blue haze, and Dan tersely informed the lawyer that it was "Old Baldy," and that the patch of white at its apex was snow. Then he waved his hand toward the south to where a conical-shaped hill thrust itself high above the others of the Palouse.

"Yonder's Steptoe Butte," he said. "It's one o' the curiosities o' this country. Maybe you've

seen it before, though. You know the hostiles chased old Colonel Steptoe an' his soldiers up on that butte a good many years ago an' surrounded them. They had grub with them, but was derved near dead for water when a spring busted out way up on the side of the butte an' give 'em all the water they needed. It's still runnin' an' as good water as there is in the world."

Coyote Barr spoke but seldom, but kept a tight grip on the lines and a steady foot on the brake lever, for now they were descending a long, easy slope at a swinging trot. Then sweeping around the base of a grain-clad hill, the road took the up grade once more to a plateau, and as they reached this they saw a horse and rider coming toward them. A glance showed that it was a woman, for her long riding skirt flapped rhythmically to the rise and fall of the horse's steady lope.

The rider was gowned as though she were enjoying a morning canter in Central Park, her jaunty hat, gauntlet gloves, and silver-mounted crop seeming in strange contrast to what one would have expected. The horse was not of the mongrel, cayuse breed, either, but in every line of its slender limbs, erect

ears, and proudly arching neck it bore the indefinable stamp of equine blue blood. Framed in the glow of the setting sun, she was a pleasing picture, and Seb Layton sat more erectly. Then, following the example of Barr and Johns, he swept his hat from his head in a very courteous salute as the girl galloped by with just the faintest inclination of her head.

"That's Nelson's girl—Nelson, the Spokane banker, you know," said Dan, staring back at her.

"Frances Nelson? By George, I ought to have recognized her, but I didn't. What is she doing down here?"

"Oh, Nelson's got a big ranch down here—I'll show you his place pretty soon—and the girl comes down in the summer if she ain't humpin' around some foreign place. I didn't know she'd come yet, did you, Barr?"

The old man clucked to the horses and remained silent for so long that Seb thought he did not intend replying, but Dan, knowing him, waited patiently, and finally Barr spoke.

"I heard in town that she'd come yesterday." Another pause. "She'll be over to see Tess, I suppose. She used to think a heap o' Tess."

"Lordy, I'd say so," said Johns. "You'd

think they was sisters—hell, where you drivin', Coyote?" One wheel of the hack had dropped into a deep rut and Layton had plunged forward. Barr pulled the team back into the road, but made no reply. "The Nelson girl used to teach Tess things from books—but I don't reckon she could learn her much *now*," added Dan. "There'll be a heap goin' on now, for she always has a big band o' people around the Nelson ranch when she's in the Palouse.

"Does Nelson ever come down?" asked Seb.

"Not often. The old woman and the girl like the hills, but old Nelson ain't cut out for the ranch. The girl gits a heap of fun out o' things, but she's skeery as hell for fear folks will talk about her. She give me a dollar oncet just to make a cayuse buck, an' then blamed if she didn't give me two dollars to not say nothin' to nobody. But you'll sure meet her, Layton."

"I hope so," was the response. And Seb meant what he said.

He had not forgotten their last and only meeting—the commencement ball when he left Yale with a diploma and the contempt of nine-tenths of his fellow students. He remembered how they had been left alone for a moment

by the well-meaning and blundering lady who had introduced them, and how both had stood for a breath or two in embarrassed silence.

"And you are Layton," she had finally said.

"Yes," he had replied. "Layton—horns, hoofs and all. Let me see your program."

She had protested feebly, but he had quietly taken possession of the card and written his name after a waltz. Then others had surrounded them, and the scene was ended. Later he had claimed the dance, and she had allowed him to lead her to the ballroom floor. Now as he towed along over the hills of the Palouse he wondered if Dan had not solved the mystery of her acquiescence that night, if she had not danced with him rather than to risk a scene, and if she had not been wanting to give him "two dollars to not say nothin' about it to nobody."

"Yes, I'd like to meet her," he said again, musingly.

"Well, you will. People are kind o' free like down here. By the way, yonder's the Nelson ranch."

He pointed to a large frame house, two stories in height, and spread over considerable ground space. The house stood well back

from the road and the front yard was as near an approach to a lawn as yards come to be in the Palouse. A broad veranda surrounded it on three sides, and a general air of ease and comfort pervaded all of the surroundings.

Layton studied the place carefully as they drove by, but he made no comment. Coyote Barr still maintained his silence and did not even turn his head to look at the Nelson place. The next few miles were passed with but few words. They forded Squaw Creek, and finally Dan turned to Seb and waved his hand toward a small, unpainted house at the top of the hill just ahead.

"There's the Barr place," he said. "Ain't it about time we're takin' that drink?"

Seb laughed as he dived down into the suitcase and brought forth a flask with a cup screwed on for a stopper. He offered it to Dan, who tilted it and took a long pull without going to the trouble of using the cup. When the flask was handed back, Layton held it out toward Barr.

"Won't you join us?" he asked, politely.

Barr looked back at the lawyer and shook his head

"I ain't drinkin'," he answered. "See that cottonwood in front o' the house? Well, when I quit I swore I wouldn't never touch whiskey as long as that tree stood."

CHAPTER X

THE SIGN IN THE SKY

TESS BARR gave Layton a quiet welcome, showing but little surprise and as little interest in his coming. Her father told her that the lawyer would be with them for a few weeks, and that ended the explanations. Within an hour life at the Barr ranch was going on just as it had before the arrival of the boarder, and he was left to shift for himself.

There were just three bedrooms in the story-and-a-half house, all on the second floor, and as Seb climbed the stairs with his suit-case in hand, the old rancher stood at the bottom and gave him directions as to which room he was to take. His room faced the south, and from his window he could see the rocky, uneven road winding its tortuous way here and there, now over stony plateaus, now being lost to sight as it dipped down into a tiny valley and appeared again farther on, clinging to the

side of hills where sagebush and bunch grass found meagre sustenance among the rocks.

It was not until the next day after his arrival at the Barr ranch that he obtained more than a brief conversation with Tess. She had slipped up to her room early the night before, but now that breakfast was over he had gone out to the corral and saddled a cayuse pony, having hired it from Barr to use during his stay in the neighborhood. It was while he was leading the animal out to the road that he saw the girl returning from the well with a bucket of water.

"Let me carry it," he said, and took the bucket.

There was an air of hesitation about her as she yielded to him, but she made no protest.

"I hope you will enjoy your vacation down here, Mr. Layton," she said.

He burst out laughing, but as he glanced down into her face he saw there a look that stilled his mirth. There was a shadow in her eyes and she was studying him as if the words were not spoken idly.

"Vacation?" He shook his head. "I have never taken one since I left school. I am here to work."

The shadow in her eyes deepened, but she turned her gaze away from him.

"I didn't know that. I thought it was a vacation." Another slight pause. "You are a lawyer, I believe."

"Yes, a lawyer. But I'm not going to be much bother to you. I'll be gone much of the time. I'll manage to get enough to eat at the ranch houses, but I expect to get back here in the evenings."

"Is Dan going to help you?"

"No—no one is. This is my own work, and no one can help me, even if it is a big job."

They had reached the house, and he dropped the bridle reins to the ground while he carried the water into the kitchen for her. Then he turned to leave.

"I thank you," she said in her simple, direct way. "And I hope—you—yes—I hope you will be careful in your work. I wouldn't like to have you get hurt."

This time the serious look on her face did not curb his laughter.

"I'm not altogether a tenderfoot," he replied. "I may not be able to ride as well as Dan, but I can keep the saddle pretty well." He paused at the door and turned his eyes full onto her

face. Then he added in a lower tone: "It's good of you, though, to warn me. I think it will make the day brighter."

He saw her cheeks flame red at his words, but he did not wait for her reply. He believed in sowing a word and letting it have time to do its own work. So he turned and went to his horse. As he sprang into the saddle and set off at an easy lope he looked back and saw her standing in the doorway, watching him, but she gave no sign and he denied his sudden impulse to raise his hat in salute. As he rode, a smile curved his lips.

"Dan Johns' *klootchman*, eh?" he muttered, and the smile came again.

He was riding toward the south, where the hills were more broken, the ridges sharper and grayer in their stony desolateness, with giant pine trees standing out on beetling cliffs like gaunt sentinels on the ramparts behind which mystery brooded. For, but a few miles to the south of the Barr ranch, was the notorious Rock Lake country, a region of rugged peaks, of gloomy canyons, of trails that led to small valleys framed by seemingly unbroken walls of rock, of caverns which held the secret of

many strange disappearances of desperate men when officers of the law pressed closely.

At intervals—and not infrequent intervals, either—wails arose from different sections of the Palouse that choice steers had disappeared, and always “Rock Lake” came to the ranchers’ lips the moment the theft of the cattle was discovered. That the region was infested with “rustlers,” the common name for cattle thieves, was known from Walla Walla to the Canadian line, and from the Cœur d’Alenes on the east to where the Columbia made its big bend on the west, but the years had come and gone with the officers making but slight effort to end the reign of the rustlers. Occasionally they went through the form of searching the region, but it was not of record that any of the gang were ever in the least disturbed by such superficial visits, and not a steer was ever found in any of the peaceful valleys.

And it had as well be admitted right here that it was an open secret that not all the members of the rustler gang were in hiding among the secret places of the Rock Lake region. It was common knowledge that many of the ranchers who swore the hardest and clamored

the loudest for justice to overtake the thieves would have fled the country had they really believed that justice ever would triumph. And there were officers of the law who galloped bravely down into the district of crime who well knew that the six-shooters swung at their hips would not be drawn unless it was for the purpose of disposing of an aggressive rattlesnake.

Some weeks after the raids a few cattle cars would be set off on a lonely siding of the Union Pacific, miles from the seat of trouble, and a large "band" of steers would be loaded some dark night and sent on their way to where confederates waited to place them on the market. Perhaps on each steer's hip would be a large spot where the bottom of a red-hot frying pan had obliterated the original brand, but that made little difference. They were not overly inquisitive at the market places.

It was evening when Layton returned to Barr's. The sun had dropped behind the bluffs, but the tops of the ridges held twilight's faint glow, and he whistled merrily as he rode, for the day had brought its successes.

As he drew near to the ranch house he saw a saddle horse standing in front, pawing im-

patiently, and in a moment he recognized it as the thoroughbred Frances Nelson had ridden. A sidesaddle on its back told him that it was she who was in the house.

He sprang from the saddle and led his cayuse toward the stable, but paused and tapped his cheek in indecision. Then he returned to where the thoroughbred was tied, and tied his own mount close by. This done, he walked up to the house and stepped in at the open door. The table was spread for supper, and in the adjoining room Tess and Frances Nelson were chatting gayly. Tess arose as he entered.

"Mr. Layton, this is Miss Nelson, of Spokane," she said. "She is spending a few weeks on the ranch near here."

Frances had also arisen as Tess spoke, and Seb, hat in hand, stood before her, a hint of a smile on his lips.

"Thank you for the introduction," he said, bowing, "but I remember of having met Miss Nelson before this evening. Possibly she has forgotten, though."

For the faintest perceptible space of time, Frances Nelson stood looking at the man whose gray eyes were regarding her steadily. Plainly

she was uncertain as to what course to pursue. Her gaze was averted, but almost instantly it flashed back to meet that of the man. The faint smile still was traceable on his lips, and something in his eyes dominated her.

"Certainly not, Mr. Layton," she responded, hesitatingly. Then with a sudden rush of spirits she laughed softly. "I remember very distinctly our meeting. We danced together, did we not?"

He nodded.

"It was five years ago, but I remember the horror written on Joe Bronson's face. He thought—but no matter. That was far from the Palouse."

"I think I hear father in the kitchen, so you must come to supper at once," said Tess, stepping to the door and looking out at the table.

Frances sought an excuse, but all explanations as to why she could not remain were brushed aside. Layton went to his room and hurriedly made himself presentable, after which he joined them at the table. The old rancher asked him if he had had a good day, and kept his squinty eyes on Seb as he spoke.

"First rate," replied the lawyer cheerfully. "But it's a rough country down that way."

"Rather," was the answer. "Don't suppose you'll be goin' back that way soon."

"To-morrow. Have you ever visited this mysterious Rock Lake, Miss Nelson?"

"Never—but several head of our cattle are supposed to have made the journey recently."

"I've heard of that gang of rustlers, and I don't understand why the ranchers don't clean them out."

"That would be a hard task, Mr. Layton," said Tess. "It is a weird region—even to the lake itself. You've heard the legend of the lake, I suppose?"

"I think so. Something about it being inhabited by a monster of some sort, isn't it?"

"That's the old Indian legend. The Rock Lake monster is supposed to be partial to a diet of Indian flesh, and years ago when some brave and his bride were paddling across the lake, this monster upset their canoe and devoured them. No Indian will venture on the lake under any circumstances, and few white men care to trust themselves to its waters."

Barr managed to change the subject, and it seemed to Layton that the rancher was doing so deliberately. But the supper progressed very pleasantly.

"I haven't seen Dan to-day," observed Seb. Barr shook his head.

"Dan went up to the sawmill," he answered, "to see about gettin' some lumber. He calculates to put up a new house this fall. He's been batchin' in a little shack just over the hill here, but maybe he'll quit that."

He spread his lips in a dry grin and the squint of his eyes tightened as he turned them toward Tess. The girl's cheeks flamed a fiery red, and she hastily went to the kitchen.

After supper Barr and Layton sat out on the little front porch, and the odor of burning tobacco stole back into the house. The glow had died out of the sky and darkness brooded heavily over the hills. The rancher by broad hints gave Layton opportunities to reveal the nature of his business in the Palouse, but the latter was wary and avoided all traps set by the inquisitive one.

Frances Nelson came to the door and voiced her surprise as she saw how dark the night was. Down near the gate her horse could be heard pawing the hard ground. Seb arose.

"You must let me be your escort, Miss Nelson," he said.

She hesitated a moment.

"I do not like to make the ride alone," she confessed.

Tess urged in vain that she spend the night there. Frances was firm in her intention to return to the Nelson ranch, and so at last she permitted Seb Layton to assist her to mount, and with him by her side she rode away into the night, calling her good-nights back to Tess.

"I wonder if I ought to tell you that I was surprised to find that you had not unsaddled," she said, as they rode slowly down the rough road.

"I did not unsaddle because I expected to ride home with you," he answered calmly. "It was not accident. In fact, Miss Nelson, there is less of accident in the world than we generally believe. Trace back from the result and you will nearly always find design."

"The darkness hides your face, but I imagine your look is something like the one you had when you walked into that crowd at the commencement ball and asked me to dance."

"Perhaps. I didn't consult a mirror that moment, and I can't see myself now. But I asked you simply because I wanted to dance with you. I supposed that was why you danced with me."

"Did you? Well—" There was a break and a moment of silence except the beating of the horses' hoofs on the road. "Well—it wasn't. Your candor encourages mine. I danced with you because I was afraid to refuse."

"Oh. You were afraid of the tongues—and yet you braved the tongues as it was. It's too bad we are so hedged about with tongues—tongues to the right, left, and all around us."

"Yes, I did not escape the tongues by dancing with you. Mr. Bronson—" She paused.

"Yes—Mr. Bronson." He laughed, but there was no mirth in his laugh. "Joe hadn't forgotten that football game. The one that I lost, you know, and cost your father his political future."

"Mr. Bronson was rather unjust. He was one of those who said—that—"

"That I threw the game. Yes, I know it."

"But I never believed it—never!"

There was considerable warmth in her tone, and he turned his face toward her, but the darkness denied him all but the faint outlines of her figure. A sudden glow welled from his heart, but he checked it with an icy barrier.

"Generous—very generous. But you are mistaken. It was not accident. It was design, Miss Nelson. I threw the game!"

There was the faintest gasp from the girl, and as she touched her horse with the whip the animal stretched out with a long, easy gallop that rendered conversation impossible. Overhead the sky was splashed with stars, and on the bluffs the pines and cottonwoods were silhouetted sharply. From a distant hillside a light winked from the window of a ranch house. He rode by her side in silence until she again slackened the pace.

"That sounds brutally frank, I suppose," he said, again taking up the conversation where it had dropped. "But I want you to know the truth about me. I believe in truth."

"Your notions seem quite odd. Frankly, I am disappointed."

"I suppose so." He leaned forward and patted his horse's neck. "You wanted me to be a hypocrite, I presume. It's more popular, I know."

She drew rein suddenly, and whirled her horse facing him.

"I prefer to finish the ride alone, Mr. Layton," she said, icily. "Good-night."

He saw her drop her riding crop quickly to her horse's flank, but as the animal sprang away he slacked his reins and his cayuse galloped beside her.

"You needn't speak to me if you don't care to," he said, leaning toward her as they rode, "but I refuse to leave you here in these hills."

There was no reply, and settling back in his saddle he rode in silence, but his eyes saw the rise and fall of her figure, and even the night could not hide the grace of it. A steep hill lay before them, and the horses slowed to a plodding walk as they ascended. At the brow both riders drew rein with one accord, for the animals were breathing heavily. The girl sat silent, nervously tapping her riding skirt with the crop. Turning in the saddle, he looked back over the little valley which they had crossed, and his gaze wandered to the distant ridges. As he did so he suddenly whirled his mount and sat upright.

"*Look!*" he cried.

Instinctively he waved his hand, but though the darkness hid the motion from her, she wheeled her horse and looked away to the southward.

A great ball of red fire was rising above the

earth. Rapidly it mounted skyward and then hung motionless high in the air; they sat silent and watched the curious phenomenon blazing against the starry sky.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"I don't know. I'm not superstitious or I'd—there, it's gone!"

As quickly as the wink of an eye the fiery ball had disappeared, and only the stars greeted their eyes.

"Superstitious?" She laughed lightly, but there was an uneasy note in her voice. "That would do for negroes or Indians, but—ah-h, I remember now!"

Her voice dropped until he scarcely could hear the words, but he noticed that she rode closer to him.

"What do you remember?" he questioned authoritatively, as if she were on the witness stand. "What does it mean?"

"I don't know what it means. Perhaps nothing. But I remember of seeing that red ball of fire once before—two years ago, I think, and—look at that!"

Far away to the southward a pillar of flame shot upward, burning its way into the night with startling suddenness.

"Well, I'll be---." He coughed to cover his confusion, but it is doubtful if the girl was aware of his strangled oath. She was staring across the miles to where that fiery column was glowing.

"You know this country pretty well," Layton said. "How far away is that?"

"It's hard to estimate," she replied, slowly. "But it must be on Eagle Butte. That's the highest peak in the Palouse except Steptoe. Eagle Butte is several miles from here."

Gradually the column of fire died away until only the blackness of the July night remained. Layton sat silent for some moments, almost unblinking, straining his eyes for some further sign. There was something uncanny about it all, and instinctively he fumbled for the heavy quirt that hung over the saddle horn. Down below them Squaw Creek splashed along over the rocks, and a loon suddenly arose from its waters with a shrieking cry that brought his teeth together in a sharp click.

Instantly he realized what it was, and laughed, laughed the more heartily because it was born of a nervous shock.

"We had better ride on," he said. "I still insist on tagging."

"I don't think I'll protest," she replied, wheeling her horse. "I believe I'm having 'nerves.'"

They rode at a brisk gallop and soon glimpsed the big ranch house with many lights flashing from its windows. Two tall posts held the front gate, and these posts were topped with mammoth lamps encased in glass, much after the manner of old-time gas street lights, and to-night these were shedding light and cheerfulness out into the road and for many feet in all directions.

"Judge West always lights them in my honor," she laughed.

"Who is Judge West?" he queried.

"Haven't they told you? Oh, of course not. Judge West is the manager of the ranch. He never was judge, but he was a peace justice for many years, and the Palouse is almost as generous as Kentucky with titles. He's a delightful old gentleman, too."

"Probably uneasy because you haven't returned sooner."

"Well—." She hesitated. "To tell the truth, I told him I probably would remain all night with Tess."

He sprang from his horse and dropped the

reins. Then he reached up and lifted her down. In the light of the gate lamps they stood facing each other for a breath. Her brown hair had given stray wisps to the wind, and now it clustered about her ears and brow in a disorder that was not unpretty.

"And then Layton the Terrible arrived and you fled."

Her eyes sought to avoid his, but something forbade it, and she looked into his face as she replied:

"That is the truth. I wanted to avoid you."

"Why?"

She shook her head; and now her gaze dropped and she switched her skirt again.

"I don't know—yes, I do know." She had looked at him again. "I didn't believe you had done—that, but I was afraid—of tongues."

"But you have ridden with me."

"Yes. I could not avoid it—and I didn't exactly want to avoid it. The road is long and dark. Yes, I tried to avoid tongues, and I am in your hands."

A dull red crept into her cheeks, but his voice remained calm and steady.

"You need have no fear. No one shall know

it. I said I believed in truth, but I'll lie for a woman. Good-night."

He bowed and turned away, but a hand on his arm stayed him.

"I have been thinking about that light in the sky," she said, "and I want you to be careful. I remember that a man was found dead in the road the next day after that light appeared. He was a stranger."

"Thank you. I like mysteries; they're salt to life. When life grows stale—well, it's time to find a fellow in the road then. But I thank you again, and again good-night."

He swung into the saddle and galloped away into the night, but as she stood there by the tall gate posts she heard the thud, thud, thud of his horse's hoofs, and she listened until they faded into silence.

Then she went into the house, and after requesting that her horse be stabled, she went up to her room and threw off her riding habit. The clock on her dressing table pointed to the hour of ten, but she donned a loose garment and sat down by the window, her chin on her hand, her elbow on the window sill.

The night was still, and the mournful hoot

of an owl came to her from a clump of pines on a neighboring hill. Suddenly she sprang to her feet with a scream, for from a far-away point came the faint report of a rifle.

CHAPTER XI

UNCERTAINTIES

HER nerves had been given a severe test during the ride home from Barr's, and that distant rifle shot broke the tension for a moment and left her in a condition closely bordering on hysteria. As she sprang to her feet, screaming, she turned and sped from the room and down the stairway, and the darkness of the rooms below gave her new terror.

Judge West had just extinguished the lights and gone to bed when her cry startled him, and as he sprang to his bedroom door he heard Frances running down the stairs.

"What's wrong?" he called.

"It's murder!" came her reply. "It's murder, and you must go to him! Saddle Vixen—and take the men with you! It's murder, and I saw the sign in the sky!"

Judge West may not have been a judge in reality, but he was a cool-headed old gentleman who had known many exciting hours dur-

ing the conquering of the Northwest, and while he hastily donned his clothes he soothed the terrified girl by his steady voice, and drew from her a hasty account of what had taken place and what she feared. By the time she had lighted the lamps he was dressed ready for action, and had summoned the two ranch hands. A brace of heavy pistols hung on the wall of his sleeping room, and these he thrust into the pockets of his coat.

He was close to sixty, but his figure was erect, though rather inclined to stoutness, and the eyes that looked out from under his sombrero were still bright. An iron gray mustache partly concealed a mouth whose lines were firm. His wife, a gentle, motherly woman a few years his junior, had implicit confidence in his ability to do all things for the best, and she it was who had hurriedly aroused the hands while her husband was dressing and Frances was lighting every lamp she could find in the house.

"Now don't worry, dearie," she said softly, returning to the distracted girl. "Tom will find the trouble if there is any. Maybe some one shot at a coyote. They're great chicken thieves, you know."

"It wasn't that—it wasn't, I tell you! That awful ball of fire in the sky meant murder! I don't understand it, but I was afraid, and I ought to have kept him here!"

Mrs. West glanced at her husband, who had taken a box of cartridges from a drawer and was pouring them into his pocket. The trampling of horses was heard through the open window.

"You couldn't have kept him, child," she replied, placing her arm about the girl's shoulder. "A man won't hide from a danger—especially if a girl asks him to. That is, if he isn't a doll baby."

The ghost of a smile came to the girl's lips as she shook her head.

"He isn't that. He isn't all that he could be, but—yes, I suppose you are right. I couldn't have kept him." She followed West to the door. "Bring him here, won't you?" she added tremulously.

The master of the ranch spoke to her reassuringly, and then he vaulted into the saddle and the trio rode away at a sharp gallop.

They kept up the pace until after the horses had splashed through Squaw Creek, and then they reined down to a walk, for although the

stars gave some light, most of the road lay in dense darkness, and if a body should be lying there they might ride over it unless due care was observed. Besides, those broken hills and gulches contained possibilities, and while one hand of each rider held the bridle reins the other clutched a ready weapon. Occasionally they stopped and in perfect silence listened, but no sound greeted their ears. Judge West scanned the southern sky anxiously from time to time, half expecting to see some mystery flame out in the heavens.

The story related by Frances Nelson awakened no ridicule in his mind, for it was not the first tale of the kind he had heard. At rare intervals rumors had crept through the Palouse that a mysterious ball of fire had hung far above the Valley, and about many firesides on winter nights the tales had been retold, growing in uncanniness with each retelling. West never had seen the phenomenon himself, but he entertained no doubt as to the fiery ball having appeared as described.

The trio rode slowly forward until from where the road topped a small hill they could catch a glimpse of a light some distance ahead of them.

"That's Coyote Barr's house, a good two mile from here," observed West. "If we don't find anything this side of there we'll turn back. Rather odd that he's burning a light at this hour, but he's a queer codger."

Carefully they proceeded, but almost a mile was covered before another light sprang up before them. This time they drew rein with a jerk, for the light had blazed in the road not more than three hundred yards away. It flickered and went out, but a moment later another tiny flame showed close to the ground.

"It's a match," whispered one of West's men, and West nodded, though he knew the others could not see the motion.

"Dismount!" he commanded, and silently they slid from the saddles.

He moved cautiously forward, leading his horse, the others following, but after advancing a short distance he handed his bridle rein to one of his companions and whispered for them to wait. Then he disappeared in the darkness, moving with the stealth he had learned in earlier days on the frontier.

The light in the road had grown larger, and he saw that a small pile of twigs had been fired. As he drew nearer he heard voices,

and a form moved between him and the tiny fire. Evidently whoever was there was making no attempt at concealment. Still closer West crept, and then kneeling behind a giant boulder beside the road, he called out:

"Hello, there!"

Instantly a foot scattered the little fire with a kick. There was a moment of silence, which was broken by a long, trembling moan, as of pain. Then silence again.

"Hello, I say!" West again gave the challenge of the west.

"All right, say it if you want to!" came the sharp reply from out of the darkness.

"You're surrounded," called West, glibly. "Now, who are you?"

"Seb Layton!" was the unexpected response. "Who the devil are you?"

Another shuddering moan came from the road, and the man behind the rock hesitated. Perhaps, after all, it was a clever ruse the other was working.

"My name is Tom West," he finally answered. "If you are Seb Layton, who was it that groaned?"

"Dan Johns! He's shot. Come up here

and quit hiding if you are the man they call Judge West."

A match rasped on a rock and a wisp of paper fed the flame, which was held aloft, and West caught a faint glimpse of a man lying in the road with a girl crouching beside him, while the one who held the burning paper was standing erect.

With his pistol still clutched in his hand, West walked forward and looked into the face of the man with the light. Then he glanced down at the girl.

"Tess Barr!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it is Tess," she answered, looking up.

West turned and shouted to his followers, who were waiting, mystified, where he had left them. Seb had gathered another handful of dry twigs and was crouching over them, coaxing a fire. Dan Johns' head was supported on the girl's knee, and in the feeble light his face was ghastly. The front of his cheap shirt was splotted with blood.

"How did it happen?" asked West, kneeling and taking the wrist of the wounded man.

"Haven't found out," replied Seb, tersely. "I was riding along when I heard a shot. I

jumped off my horse and listened. I heard a horse going down the road at a tearing pace, but no other sound. I waited a while and then edged forward until I found him. He hasn't spoken."

"But—" West glanced toward Tess, and she caught the look.

"I heard the shot," she answered. "And—and—I was afraid Mr. Layton was in danger. I ran down the road and found him trying to carry Dan to the house."

Somewhere close by in the darkness a horse stamped its foot.

"I laid him across the cayuse," said Layton, "and brought him some distance that way, but it was too rough and he bled too freely, so I took him in my arms and was doing my best when I heard some one running down the road. Then I laid him down and got ready to fight. But it was Miss Tess. We were trying to stop the bleeding when you came."

West had torn away the shirt and by the light of the small fire was examining the wound with the skill of one to whom bullet wounds were not altogether a novelty.

"It's bad," he said, looking up. "But maybe it ain't a finish. Dan's pretty tough timber."



WITH HIS PISTOL STILL CLUTCHED IN HIS HAND, WEST WALKED
FORWARD. — *Page 201.*

Turning to one of his men he ordered: "You hustle over to Pineville and fetch Doc Lang. He's the closest. Take Vixen—she's good for another ride yet to-night. And stop at home and tell mother and Miss Nelson that it's Dan."

No one ever questioned Judge West's authority in an emergency. He was one of those to whom people naturally looked for direction, and whose orders were always executed with the utmost cheerfulness, for the heart of the man was as tender as a child's, and he had never been known to ask any one to perform an act that was not for the best. He was broad in his views of life, a man who believed in men and who had a simple, steadfast faith in the goodness of God and His purpose to do all things for the best. And as every seed has its own harvest, so had the life of this man come into its harvest of universal respect and confidence from all who knew him, and from their lips the title of "Judge" came in love and honor. And so it was that there was no hesitancy in the fulfilment of his requests this night, but almost before he had ceased speaking, the ranch hand had swung into the saddle and West's last words reached the rider's ears as he sat, bridle reins in hand, looking back

over his shoulder. Then he spoke to Vixen, and the thoroughbred leaped forward into the night as if eager to do her part on this errand of mercy.

Those who remained picked up the wounded man and, supporting him as best they could, bore him toward the Barr home. Tess followed, leading Layton's pony, the bridle reins of the other animals being fastened to the horn of Seb's saddle.

"Where's your father, Tess?" asked West as they trudged forward.

"He—is asleep—I think." A slight pause. "He was taken ill—and—I did not arouse him. He is suffering with his heart."

She had begun hesitatingly, but the last sentence betrayed none of it.

"Too bad," responded West. "I wondered why your light was burning so late."

"He seemed all right when I left," observed Seb. "It must have been sudden."

"It was. Heart trouble gives but little warning, you know."

Dan was moaning, and the men gave their attention to efforts toward making him more comfortable, though it was but a rough litter

at best that they could give him. They proceeded as rapidly as possible, and in a short time came to the gate of the Barr yard. Tess dropped the bridle reins, knowing the pony would stand, and opened the gate. As she did so, the front door opened, and framed in its light they saw Coyote Barr step from the house. He was fully dressed, and as he saw the shadowy forms at the gate and heard the voices he sprang back into the doorway with no evidence of weakness, and as he turned to close the door the dull glint of a pistol barrel shone in the lamp light. Instantly Tess had run forward as she saw him step from the house.

"Father," she cried, "it is Tess!"

The door swung open again and the old man stood shading his eyes and peering out at the slowly advancing from the gate. The men with the burden heard him speak to her, and saw the girl dart into the room. She spoke rapidly, but her words did not reach the others. Barr nodded and went back to the door.

"Bring him right in, boys," he said. "I was startin' to hunt for Tess. She didn't wake

me when she left. She's a good girl, Tess is, an' she was afraid the excitement might affect my heart. But I'm better now."

He led the way to a couch, on which the unconscious man was placed. Sheets and quilts and pillows were brought down from the bedrooms above, and then while the girl busied herself in the kitchen heating water and preparing bandages, the men fashioned a bed for Dan and removed his clothing. Tess came in with water and bandages, and they washed the blood from his body and bandaged it as best they could to stop the bleeding. The bullet had gone entirely through his body, and it looked as though his life was fast ebbing away.

"Now's when we ought to have some whiskey," said West.

Barr shook his head.

"Not a drop about here," he said.

"Oh yes, there is. I have some." As he spoke, Layton ran up the stairs and soon returned with a flask. They forced some of the liquor down Dan's throat, and applied all of the restoratives the ranch house afforded, but though his eyes opened once or twice there was

no light of recognition in them, and the few words he muttered were unintelligible.

The girl's face was pale and heavy circles were showing under her eyes, but she sat by the couch and with deft fingers assisted in changing the bandages from time to time, and moistened Dan's feverish lips with a rag dipped in the cool water from the well. Her father sat in a corner of the room moodily watching the fight for a life, and speaking but little. Once or twice when Tess turned her eyes to him and asked him how he felt, he placed his hand to his heart and said that there was some pain there, but that he believed he was improving. Always as Seb moved about the room Barr's squinty eyes were on him.

There was but little that could be done now but await the coming of the doctor, and Layton, standing in the doorway, studying the groupings of the stars in the moonless sky, thought himself of his pony. He had as well unsaddle. Going out to where the animal stood with drooping head, he unfastened the bridle reins of the others from his saddle horn, tied them to the fence, and then led his own mount to the stable.

He had been shown where he would always find a lantern hanging in the stable, and after turning his pony into the building he groped his way to the lantern. Luckily, he still had a few matches left and in a moment he had the lantern wick blazing. Then he looked back into the stable and an exclamation of surprise came to his lips. Another horse, saddled and bridled, stood beside his own.

He went around to it and his amazement deepened when he observed that the animal's flanks were moist with sweat. It stood with head drooped low, as though weary, and here and there on its coat were marks as of the thongs of a quirt. He raised the saddle blanket and saw that the animal's back was steaming.

"That's queer," he muttered.

Pondering on the unexpected discovery, he turned to his own horse and pulled the saddle from its back and hooked one stirrup over a peg placed in the side of the stable for that purpose. He had just removed the bridle and was slipping the halter over the muzzle of the beast when a sound at the stable door startled him.

Snatching the lantern, he held it aloft, and in its faint glow he saw Coyote Barr at the stable door, his squinty eyes blinking at him in an unpleasant way.

CHAPTER XII

THE GRAY OF DAWN

FOR a moment the two men stood un-
speaking, facing each other in the lan-
tern's light. Barr stepped in and care-
fully pulled the door shut behind him.

"What the hell you doin' here?" he de-
manded gruffly.

"Unsaddling my cayuse," responded Seb.
"He's been standing out in front ever since we
brought Dan in."

He set the lantern down on the grain box
of the manger and buckled the halter on the
horse.

"Oh, I see now. The lantern blinded me
an' I couldn't see the horse." Barr clambered
over the manger and stood between Layton
and the horse with the sweat on its flanks.
"Maybe you'd better go back to the house and
help with Dan. I ain't no good at such work.
I'll put some hay in the manger."

"Whose horse is that?" Seb waved his

hand toward the animal he had found in the stable.

"It's—it's mine." Barr caught up the lantern and turned the light lower. "The wick was too high. I hate a smoky lantern," he added.

"Yours?" The lawyer stared at the other in surprise. "Why it's saddled and bridled!"

Barr held the lantern down by his side, thus throwing his own shadow on the horse.

"I come down to unsaddle," he replied. "I put the saddle on when I found Tess was missin' from the house, an'—"

"You were in the house when we came," Layton interrupted.

"Yes, I—went back to the house—after—my gun."

Barr made no move to unsaddle, and Seb after offering to assist and being refused, left the stable and went back to the house. He found Judge West standing in the yard and was told that Dan was showing signs of returning consciousness.

"Doc Lang ought to be gettin' here before long," West observed. "He's a hard rider, Doc is, an' don't generally lose much time."

"Is he much on surgery?"

West laughed lightly.

"Doc's what you might call a general purpose fellow. Don't know whether he ever saw a college or not, but he's knocked around over the ranges an' patched up cow-punchers until he's got right smart of skill fixin' bullet holes."

Tess came to the door to inquire if they had heard the doctor approaching. Dan appeared rational, she said, but had not tried to speak. She went back into the house, insisting that she was not weary and that she could arrange the bandages better than a man could. Seb's gaze followed her, and through the open door he could see her slender form, plainly gowned in some daintily flowered material that appeared cool and was in sharp contrast with the dark gloss of her hair. Stepping closer to the door, he studied her, dimly conscious that a new interest was manifesting itself. Her movements were graceful with an utter absence of self-consciousness, her head was well poised and her lips curved with the lure of healthy young womanhood. Layton turned away from the doorway, his pulse quickening.

"She's splendid!" he exclaimed.

West faced him, and tugged at his mustache a moment.

"Yes, Tess is a good girl," he replied. "She's not the same Tess she used to be in some ways, but she always was and always will be unaffected, sincere in all things, and with a mind as pure as a snow flake. Four years at school did wonders for her."

"And Dan said that Barr promised him that he could marry her."

Layton's tone was heavy with disgust. West paced slowly back and forth for a moment, and then stopped again beside the other.

"It does seem too bad. And yet—" He checked himself.

"And yet—what?"

"Nothing. It's no one's business but their own, I suppose."

"Was that what you were going to say?"

"Maybe not, but—listen!" The beat of hoofs was heard through the stillness of the night. "Doc's comin'!" he exclaimed. "Let's go into the house."

"I think I'll stay out here," responded Seb. "If I'm needed for anything I'll help, but I don't like to see any one suffer."

West entered the house, and Seb walked down to the gate. The thud of hoofs grew steadily louder, and the man at the gate real-

ized that West had spoken the truth when he said that Lang was a hard rider. Nearer and nearer sounded the galloping, and then out of the night two horsemen plunged into shadowy view and drew up at the gate with a jerk that caused the iron-shod hoofs to send up a cloud of dust as they slid forward.

"Yes, he's alive," Seb answered as the men sprang to the ground, a flood of questions on their lips.

The man he knew to be the doctor flung Vixen's bridle reins to the ranch hand and hurried up the little pathway to the house. Layton followed until the door was reached, and then he paused, and after a moment's deliberation turned and walked away from the door. Coyote Barr had returned from the stable and was standing in the center of the room, and the sight of him had awakened in the lawyer's mind the perplexities he had felt when he discovered the weary horse in the stable.

He dropped to the ground and stretched out on his back, his hands interlocked behind his head, and pondered over the problem. Light clouds had crept up from the horizon and were dappling the sky, but in the unclouded spaces

the stars shone with the brilliance always found in that latitude and at that altitude. But their scintillations seemed tantalizing him as he struggled with his problem. Barr had given no indication of a recent illness. He was vigorous and alert and plainly was in a passion at the moment of the meeting in the stable. Also it was a certainty that he had lied regarding having saddled the horse to search for Tess. The animal's condition proved this.

A sharp cry of pain came from the house, probably as a result of the physician's work, for it was not likely that the range-riding doctor would be o'er gentle in his probings and bandaging. Seb arose quickly to his feet and walked down to the road, where the moans of the wounded man would not reach him. On many gridirons he had stood by unmoved while surgeons gave first aid to battered flesh and broken bones, but the lust of battle was in his blood at those moments, and the exclamations of pain from the injured always came through clenched teeth while the eyes of the sufferers still blazed with the spirit of the struggle. Tonight it was different. A man but half rational was suffering tortures, and with no pride of class, no yelling, pennant-waving cohorts to

sustain and encourage him in his agony. It was very different, and it awakened something new in the heart and soul of Seb Layton.

"Poor devil!" he exclaimed, softly. "It would make a thoroughbred cry out, I suspect—and Dan isn't just that."

It had never been his way to take much of the suffering of others—mental or physical—to himself, but the trembling wail of the stricken broncho rider had touched where nothing else had touched since the day he had last stood beside a lonely grave down by the flower-studded banks of the Columbia, and something was warming that in Seb Layton which was not of flesh, blood, nor bone. He glanced back toward the house, and could one have looked into his eyes it would have been seen that the frost was no longer there.

Presently West came out, mopping the perspiration from his face.

"Doc says he'll make it," he said. "The bullet went through the—the—well, something with a big long name—but Lang says it missed a vital spot. If he don't take blood poisoning he'll be all right, but he's fought so much booze that he ain't fit as you or I would be to put up a fight."

Possibly Layton's face flushed somewhat at something in West's words, but the night kept the secret.

"Another temperance lecture." Seb gave a mirthless laugh. "But has Dan said anything yet?"

"He's conscious now an' talks a little. But he don't know much to tell. He was on his way back from the mill when he broke a singletree. He pulled the harness from one horse and after tying the others to the wagon started on home to get a new singletree. He heard some one call to him from the side of the road, and stopped.

"*'Klahowyou,'* the fellow called, and Dan returned the greeting.

"*'Copa mika, Dan?'* the man said—or Dan thought he said that. He might have said 'Sam' instead of 'Dan.' But Johns, thinking it was some neighbor just foolin' replied that it was.

"*'Nawitka,'* he called, and then he saw a flash of fire, but he doesn't know anything more until he woke up in there a while ago with Doc Lang pumpin' him full of something to keep his heart a goin'."

"Then it was an Indian who shot him, was it?"

"Can't tell nothin' about it," replied West. "Lots of white men around here sling that jargon about as much as the *siwashes* do. That's no sign. The devil might have used it on purpose. You're a lawyer, they say, an' of course you can see that as easy as I can."

"Yes, you're right about it," admitted Seb.

"I suppose someone ought to look after his team. Of course the horse he was riding ran on home. It's the one you heard running, after the shot was fired. In the morning I'll take a singletree and bring his wagon in."

They had walked back toward the house, and paused now, near the door.

"I'm going in and help look after him," said Layton.

West turned his face toward the east and scanned the horizon. Summer nights are short in the Northwest, and now the first pallor of the coming day was visible along the hill-tops, and the faint breeze that always precedes the Palouse dawn was rustling the leaves of the cottonwoods and bringing with it the resinous breath of the pines.

"Well, if you're going in to help, I might as

well go home," observed West. "Mother will be over in the morning. She never set any great store on Dan, but—well, he's human, and that's enough for mother. She figures that the rest is the Lord's business, and I calculate that she's right, don't you, Mr. Layton?"

Once more Seb felt something tingling in his cheeks and he knew that they were red. The simple directness of West's confidence in an Almighty God was a new note in Layton's life, and for a flash he felt the cramp of his soul, the narrow selfishness that he had looked upon as being stalwart independence. He had given to the poor, he had helped the sick, the halt and the blind, and he had believed that his life was on a broad plane, but here was a man who had lived close to the throbbing heart of life, who had known its severest toils and tests, and who without thought of theology or creed had sent a flash of something new into this chrysalis, placing a hint of life where its quickening had not, for years, been felt. It all came in a breath, the fever in his cheeks, the glimpse of something new and strange, and he turned to watch the lines of orange creeping higher and higher into the sky where it came down to meet the hills. Even in the subtle

dawn there was a magnificent mystery that fed this new germ dropped all unthinkingly into his soul.

"I—don't know, Mr. West," he replied, slowly, his eyes still studying that marvelous transformation in the east. "I don't believe I ever thought on the question before."

"I understand, my boy. You are young, and youth is—is—let's see, what's the word I want? Oh, yes, 'heedless.'"

Layton turned to the open door and glanced in. A low moan had come to his ears, and he saw Tess Barr hurrying across the room, a glass of water in her hand.

"Perhaps you mean 'selfish,' Mr. West," he answered, abstractedly.

"No, I found the right word. But maybe they need you in there, so I'll hit the road. Probably Miss Nelson will come over, too. She's a fine girl. Good-night—if it's proper to say it at dawn."

He was turning away when Layton's hand was suddenly outstretched.

"Good-night," he said. "I'm glad I have had a chance to meet you."

CHAPTER XIII

"PLEASE GO BACK"

HE watched West striding away in the drab of the waning night, and the hoof beats of the rancher's horse were sounding in the road before Layton faced about and entered the house.

Coyote Barr was asleep in one corner of the room, his chin resting on his chest; beside the couch where Dan lay, Dr. Lang and Tess were seated, the physician yawning and rubbing his eyes, the girl anxiously watching every feverish motion of the wounded man. As Seb entered, Tess introduced the two men and explained that Layton was a lawyer from Spokane.

"What do you think of him?" asked Layton, looking down at Dan.

"Well, I don't reckon he'll cash in this time," was the response. "When he comes out of this little sleep he'll be stronger." He hooked one thumb in the armhole of his vest and tilted his head with an air of wisdom. Then he

turned his eyes toward the girl. "Tess, there, has been a mighty good hand in this round-up."

There was but little to be done for the patient, and after some discussion Tess was induced to go up stairs and lie down, leaving Dan in the care of the men. Layton's eyes followed her as she left the room, and when she was gone he was dimly conscious that his vigil was to be a weary one. He glanced toward the stairway, vaguely hoping that she would return for a moment, but a few moments later he heard her moving about up stairs and then all was quiet. He had turned to the wounded man once more, but it is doubtful if he saw the pallid face before his eyes. His imagination was drawing for him the picture of a slender form stretched out on the bed above, and of a softly rounded cheek resting on a pillow. His pulse was beating faster, and something was warming his blood, but when he realized it he bit at his lip in the sudden and unusual sense of shame that came to him.

A snore from the sleeping Barr drew his attention, and then he saw that Lang was regarding the rancher with a trace of contempt in his face.

"How in the hell can he be the daddy of a girl like her?" he snorted.

Seb shook his head.

"It's one of life's mysteries, but I've seen some beautiful flowers come up out of foul ground."

"Humph! I reckon so. But say, I suppose you wouldn't mind if I took a pull at that flask of yours, would you? He don't need it right now—and I do."

He filled the tiny cup that screwed over the neck of the flask and then drained it. The odor of the liquor was strong in Layton's nostrils, and he, too, filled and emptied the cup.

"Besides, she's going to marry Dan Johns," remarked Layton, somewhat irrelevantly, and smiling as he spoke.

"Let's pull that bandage off for a few minutes and she won't!"

The doctor looked into Seb's eyes and then reached slowly toward the man on the couch, but Layton's hand shot out and clutched the other's wrist.

"By God, I believe you would do it!" he exclaimed, and drops of perspiration came out on his forehead.

Lang laughed harshly as he withdrew his hand.

"Do it? Of course. He'd die easy. If we don't, she'll die hard. You don't look squeamish to me, but it's all right. Maybe they'll raise a fine brood."

The conversation lagged. Lang took the wounded man's wrist and held it while he studied his watch, after which he remarked that Johns was doing well. A rooster, somewhere out in the yard, crowed noisily, and from far across the hills his challenge was taken up by others. The breeze slipped in at the window and door and the lamplight flickered in its sweep; through the open door the fences and trees and ridges showed their outlines in the coming day, heavy traceries on a gray pall. The doctor stood in the doorway and stretched out his arms as he yawned. Consulting his watch, he said he might as well go home, as there was not much to do now but take care of the patient. He laid out the stimulants and other medicines, gave the necessary directions, and then rebuckled the straps of his medicine and instrument case. At the door he paused, and his glance shot first to the still sleeping rancher and then to the face of the man on the

couch, after which he looked steadily into Layton's eyes.

"If that bandage slips for ten minutes—." He paused. "They slip some times, and no one ain't to blame! It's better to die in ten minutes than to be ten years doin' it! Looks like it might rain to-day."

He went away without waiting to hear the words that came to Layton's lips. The light of day brightened the world gradually, and a thin veil of clouds unrolled itself in the sky, bringing with it a cool breath that was refreshing. Dan awoke and the light of recognition was in his eyes.

"I ain't dead, am I?" He grinned in a ghastly way.

"No, you are not dead, and you are not going to die from this. But I've been waiting for you to wake up so I could give you this." Layton picked up a powder and a glass of water, and, with a faint protest, Dan took it.

Coyote Barr awakened and stared stupidly about. Then he seemed to grasp the situation and came forward.

"How you feelin', Dan?" he asked, running his fingers aimlessly through his bushy hair.

Johns gazed at him in silence for half of a minute.

"I ain't carin' to ride the pinto," he whispered.

Weakness closed his eyes, and soon he was sleeping again. The old man stood in the doorway, vigorously scratching his head and watching the light clouds scud across the heavens. Finally he announced that he would go look after the stock, and left the house. In all of Layton's life he had never stood almost in the presence of death, with the exception of the night when his mother's life slipped out into the great mystery, and now as he sat alone by the wounded broncho rider in the dullness of early morning he was awed, and his thoughts rambled at strange tangents. Once Dan in a bit of feverishness plucked aimlessly at the bandage, but quickly the watcher drew the hand away.

"Maybe it would be better—but that's not my business." He wiped a few drops of perspiration from his brow again. "Judge West says it's the Lord's."

The old sarcastic smile flashed on his lips as he muttered the words, and then he reached for the flask and had unscrewed the top when he

heard a step behind him, and, turning, he saw Tess. With a swift motion, he dropped the flask into his side pocket.

"He's improving," he said, hastily.

"It is good of you to sit up and nurse him," she answered, smiling.

"He would do it for me," he said rather haltingly. "We have to help each other in this world, you know."

He was looking into her face as he spoke. Her short rest had brought the warmth of color back to her cheeks; her eyes were lustrous as when he first had seen her, and her lips were as scarlet as the poppy. He felt the inspiration of her presence as an uplift, and his speech was ended with a flash of enthusiasm that caused her to glance at him in surprise.

"Pardon me, but have you been converted?"

The cheeks dimpled slightly, and a glimmer of mischief showed in her eyes.

"Converted?" He stared blankly at her.

"Did you not tell me that you believed in letting the other fellow do the moaning?"

"Well, maybe I did, and I'm not ready to say I was wrong. But this is different. I don't like suffering."

"I know it. Dan told me you hired him to

go out after a wounded duck just so you could end its misery. Then you refused to keep it, but buried it under some rocks."

She bent low over Dan and straightened the quilt that covered him.

"Foolish, wasn't it? But I haven't been hunting since."

"Not foolish, but odd. You don't impress one in just that way."

He noticed that the hand that drew the quilt into position was shapely, though browned by work and exposure to the summer's sun.

"How do you explain this affair?" he asked, after a few moments' silence.

"I can't explain it. Some awful mystery is back of it." She straightened up and her eyes met his. "When do you return to Spokane, Mr. Layton?"

He made no effort to conceal his amazement.

"Return to Spokane?" he asked. "Why, I came to remain four or five weeks."

"Yes. That is what you said. But that was before—that was—Oh, what is the use of my stammering? I want you to go back to Spokane at once."

"Miss Barr." He arose and stood before her. "I suppose you have some good reason

for your words, but I am not going. I'll not stammer, either. Something mysterious is going on—but it will take more than a ball of fire in the sky—"

"You saw it?" she whispered. "You saw it?"

He nodded.

"I did. I saw the fire rising above the valley, and on Eagle Butte I saw a column of flame."

She clenched her hands, and the color faded from her cheeks.

"Mr. Layton, you did me a service once—in a hotel, when you stepped in front of a man." Her voice dropped. "Now let me return the service. Please return to Spokane."

For a few breaths he stood facing her, and then he glanced down at Dan.

"And you are to be his wife!" he said, rudely.

The red flamed back to her cheeks and dyed her throat with its wave. But it remained only a moment, and then it receded, leaving only a spot burning at each temple.

"Yes," she answered, looking at him steadily. "I am going to marry him as soon as he gets well."

Her lips were pressed into a straight line,

and there was no wavering in her eyes. He turned away and stood in the doorway, leaning against its casing. Day was fully come, and a purple glow in the east showed where the sun was trying to shine through the cloud mass.

The weariness that came from a sleepless night following a day of hard work was forcing its claims upon him, and when he slowly walked back into the room once more he was startled by the glimpse of a haggard face that the mirror gave him. Barr came back from the stables and told him to go to bed and he and Tess would care for Dan. The girl urged the same thing, saying that she was sure that someone would be over from the Nelson ranch early in the morning. Besides, there were the other ranchers of the neighborhood. News of the shooting was certain to flash its mysterious way through the community, and hearts beat warmly and sympathetically in the Palouse, so that long before noon the Barr ranch would be visited by many ready to sacrifice their personal conveniences in the effort to aid a sufferer.

He went upstairs, and as he did so he glanced quickly back and trapped the girl's eyes on him, and something in her look puzzled him. He undressed and threw himself on the bed,

but it was long before sleep came to steal the fatigue from his body and the uncertainties from his mind.

"Confound you, Seb, what's come over you?" he muttered. "Jose would call on the saints, could he see you flouncing around this way, and Florence would—well, I suppose she would light a cigarette and order wine from Rietz-miller. He knows the brand."

Some of his old humor flashed into his musings, and, with his eyes tight shut in a vain effort to sleep, he smiled. Cigarettes and wine! He opened his eyes, and through the window he saw the pine trees on the bluffs, and suddenly a passionate longing for the other scenes swept over him. After all, Florence Benton was his true mate, and it was foolish of him to leave her as he had. Even this short-stay among the hills had brought to him as never before the truth of the situation. His life demanded the things that had always made up that life, and Florence Benton represented those qualities. While he was out in the calmness of the night, knowing that death was hovering over the stricken man on the couch, the mystery of life had brought a strange hypnotism with it, an enchantment that had faded

with the break of day, leaving him able to judge himself and his relation to life clearly and without illusions.

Dan Johns probably would live—or he might die. After all, what mattered it to him? It was a problem for the girl who hovered beside him, watching, watching every motion. Like a fool, he had permitted himself to be drawn into their affairs to a degree. But it would end. Dan Johns was low down on the human scale. West had said that Dan was a human being and that the rest was the Lord's business. Why not let the Lord take care of His business?

Reaching over to his coat he drew out the flask, but after holding it in his hands for a moment he tucked it back into his pocket.

"It's a weak man who takes a drink every time he finds a bump in the road," he said. "Judge West would leave it to the Lord, I suppose. But I can't. I never learned to pray."

CHAPTER XIV

THE CHRYSALIS

JUDGE WEST had prophesied correctly when he advanced the opinion that "mother and Frances" would be at the Barr ranch early. Mrs. West had passed the day when the saddle held lure for her, and so her husband put two horses to the family buggy and she and Frances drove to the humble home.

The girl was nervous after a night in which she had known but little sleep. And even in the brief periods in which she had slumbered, distorted visions came to her and stole from her sleep all that would refresh. She lived again moments of a night when she waltzed with a man at whom others looked askance, but whose gray eyes never faltered when they looked into her own and claimed the dance; and then in a twinkling the music stilled and she found herself riding along a dark road with abrupt hills frowning upon her, and in her ears a man was

speaking words that caused her to hate him. Then some monster that breathed flame sprang into view on a distant hill and tossed into the sky a ball of fire that rose until it burned the stars from their settings and set the heavens ablaze with crackling flames.

Once she started from her sleep with a half-smothered scream, and found herself sitting erect in her bed, staring wildly about her in the darkness. Never was dawn more welcome than that which slowly unfolded itself to her burning eyes that morning, and long before the sun had reddened the tops of the pine trees she had slipped out of the house and was rambling about the yard, and always she would find that her steps had led her to the gate, where she would stand thoughtfully gazing down the road.

Frances had been at Barr's two hours before she voiced the question that had been in her mind from the moment she had been greeted by Tess.

"Where is Mr. Layton?"

Dan was rallying nicely, and as constant attention was not demanded, the two girls had stepped out of the house and were standing in its shade.

"He's asleep," replied Tess. "It was daylight when he went to bed. He was worn out, although he is a strong man."

"Yes, he is a strong man." Frances tapped the ground nervously with the toe of one glossy slipper. "It's too bad he isn't—different."

"Different?" There was a note of surprise in the word. "Of course you have known him for some time, while I scarcely know him."

"And as I do know him, I would suggest that you will not be benefited by knowing him better than you do."

Tess turned a surprised look on her companion, and then something sent the blood surging into her oval cheeks.

"I suppose I—understand," she said, slowly. "But why do you say this to me?"

"Frankly, I do not know, Tess. I suppose it is because I am nervous and garrulous this morning. I am ashamed of my words, but I have heard so many warnings regarding Seb Layton that I caught the habit." She laughed merrily, and the blush receded from the other's cheeks. "What is he doing down in the Parlouse?"

The smile that had crept to Tess's lips died, and an uneasy look came into her eyes.

"I cannot say. Business, he says, and he said something to father about it being connected with the Northwestern line that is coming down through this section."

"The Northwestern? Why, that is my father's road! What has he to do with it?"

Tess glanced back toward the house, and when she spoke her voice was low.

"I don't know. Maybe it isn't that, after all. But he ought to go back to Spokane."

"Back? Why?"

"I can't explain, but I am sure there is some—danger—here for him. I urged him to go, but he says he will not."

"Nor will he if you dangle a danger in front of him. He'll stay for the sake of being killed facing the danger. That's foolish—but it's Seb Layton."

Mrs. West came to the door and inquired of Tess concerning the medicine, and the subject of Layton was dropped. It was near noon when Frances and Mrs. West drove away from the place, leaving Dan cheerful in the philosophy of the hills that teaches man to make the best of whatever situation may arise. And it was more than an hour after their departure before Seb awoke.

Coyote Barr kept close to the house all day, and in the afternoon when others of the neighborhood came to the place to learn about Dan and to offer assistance, he made a pretense of hospitality, but Tess, always watchful, would quickly take up the thread and do it so adroitly that the visitor did not suspect that the fresh-faced girl was playing desperate diplomacy.

Layton did not fare forth that day on his mission, but in the late afternoon sat beside the wounded man and questioned him skilfully concerning the events immediately surrounding the shooting, though his skill brought no desired results. Dan either knew no more than he had told, or else he had told all that could be drawn from him. The doctor came, and after his examination said that Dan undoubtedly would recover rapidly. The broncho rider had an iron constitution that would support him.

The men of the community freely offered and as freely gave their help, and the watches were arranged for the days and nights so that no one suffered a hardship. Thus the care of the patient settled down into a routine. Seb took his turn in caring for Dan, but he had been assigned an early portion of the night,

being a stranger, and each morning after breakfast he mounted his horse and rode away to the southward. Every other day he rode to Pineville, a tiny village nestling on the bank of Pine Creek, and received letters from Garrison, the mail being brought out from Whitman in the saddlebags of a "star route" rider, and each night after sitting up with Dan until close to midnight, he wrote many pages to Garrison, and carefully read the papers before going to bed.

The placing of Joseph Bronson in the Falls City Bank as cashier was duly announced to the world by the press, and Bronson's picture was given two columns of width and was flanked by marginal sketches of a cashier's cage, stacks of gold, bank checks, etc., supposed by the editorial mind to lend interest to the picture of the sturdy young man who had been honored by the appointment. Layton had learned some time previous to this that Bronson was in Spokane and that he was to go into the bank. He had not been surprised at learning of Bronson's presence in Spokane. He had never forgotten that in those closing days of college Joe Bronson was popularly conceded to be the most likely candidate for the

favours of Miss Frances Nelson, a beauty even in her girlhood. That the young millionaire should follow the girl around the globe was no surprise to him. He knew Bronson too well.

Frances made daily visits to the Barr ranch, riding Vixen when she went alone, and submitting uncomplainingly to the jolting of the steel-tired buggy over the rough road when Mrs. West accompanied her. Tess remained close to what she declared to be her post of duty, but occasionally when Frances came on Vixen, Tess would leave the wounded man in the other's care for a short time while she enjoyed a gallop across the hills.

It was while she was on one of these mid-afternoon outings that Layton, riding homeward hours before his accustomed time, surprised her. She had fastened Vixen's bridle reins to a tree limb while she clambered up the grassy slope to gather the wild flowers she always kept beside Dan's couch, and with her lap filled with the brilliant and fragrant flowers she was seated where the shadows of an overhanging pine protected her from the sun. She was not inspecting the flowers, she was not heeding the impatient pawing of the thoroughbred beside the road below her, but

her hands were resting idly among the bloom, and she was gazing in abstraction at fleecy clouds that seemed to be draping with ever-changing beauty the crests of distant peaks. Below, the road wound around a sharp bluff and was lost to sight for some distance, only to reappear farther on as it curved its way back and dipped still lower into the little valley. Up this road came a horseman, riding slowly, and his quick eyes, which, lately, had carefully searched every visible bit of territory bordering the roads he traveled, instantly caught the picture as he came into view.

"Tess!" he exclaimed.

That she had not noticed his approach was evident, and the rider pulled his horse to the side of the road where the ground was softer and hoof beats were muffled. Then the road took him to where he could no longer see her, but when his pony had toiled up the grade and rounded the bluff close to where Vixen was tied the man saw that the girl had not moved. As he sprang from the saddle her reverie was broken and she turned her startled face toward him and gathered the flowers up into her arms.

"Don't be frightened," he called, dropping

the reins to the ground and starting up the slope. "I'm not a brigand."

But she had come to her feet and stood looking at him in surprise, the flowers winnowing through her arms and splashing the hillside at her feet with color.

"Why, I am not frightened," she replied, a smile coming to her lips. "I am just—just—"

"Vexed?" he asked.

"No, I believe 'surprised' was what I meant to say. Why should I be vexed?"

She looked up into his face with eyes in which there was no guile, and he quickly turned away and began picking up the flowers.

"Oh, I don't know why, but you have avoided me lately, for some reason." He laughed lightly and added: "It's all right, though. I'm used to it."

He dropped the flowers into her arms, all but one, which he retained and toyed with.

"Won't you sit down again?" he asked. "I think I should like to talk to you."

There was an instant's hesitation, and then she sank down on the grassy slope and tumbled the flowers into her lap again.

"It is nice to be asked to do what one wishes

to do," she answered, laughing. "I ought to go back home, I suppose, but I was enjoying myself here so much until—"

She paused, and her cheeks reddened slightly.

"Until I came," he added.

"Yes, that is exactly what I was going to say. It sounds rude, but I do not mean it in that way. This has been my favorite spot for years, Mr. Layton. It is my castle of dreams. The rocky bluffs, with occasional grassy spots like these, the towering pines with their constant whispering, the snow-capped peaks of the Cœur d'Alenes, the grain-yellowed slopes of the Palouse, visible here and there, the wild flowers at my feet, and God and His sky above me—it is where I come to dream."

He saw her eyes brighten, the glow in her cheeks deepened, and something set his pulse to dancing.

"I understand," he answered. "I had forgotten for a good many years, but I remember now that when I was a boy I used to have a favorite nook to which I would go and plan my future. That was down by the Columbia. I could see the river, and I used to imagine the

marvelous things I would do when I became a man. I would go away on a ship and be an explorer, and some day I would return and build a grand home for myself and build homes for many poor people, and people would wave their handkerchiefs when I passed and tell how glad they were to see me home."

"And it never came to pass."

He shook his head, and stared at the flower he held.

"No. I dug two graves where I had dreamed of enjoying glory. And then I forgot all my dreams, and I haven't cared whether people waved handkerchiefs or clubs." Another short laugh. "The clubs have predominated. Strange, isn't it, that I had forgotten all those foolish dreams until to-day?"

"Not strange, but unfortunate. Noble dreams keep one close to God, don't you think?"

"I suppose so." He twirled the flower aimlessly. Then he looked straight into her eyes. "Do you really believe there is a God?" he asked.

There was a gasp of surprise from the girl, and her eyes widened.

"Certainly. And so do you." The answer

came calmly. "You know it now. You have never forgotten it since you dug two graves."

He stared at her in astonishment.

"You are wrong there. I forgot God while those graves were being filled."

"And have you been a success since then?"

"Oh, I've had a pretty good time in this world," he said, rather resentfully. "And I am not asking any favors of anybody."

"Are you happy in your selfishness?"

The color showed in his cheeks, and the flower became pulp in his clenched hand.

"Selfishness? Is that what you call it? I have looked out for number one, and the slate is clean. I don't owe anyone for favors, I tell you."

"I know you did, Mr. Layton. You told me almost as much the night we met, and your selfishness surprised me then. You cannot live your best that way. You must take the kindness and forbearance of your fellowmen into your heart, and you must give as much of it as you receive. A chrysalis is an ugly thing, but it contains possibilities that are beautiful. Maybe your heart has been a chrysalis."

"That's orthodox, I suppose, but it is ridicu-

lous in real life. This thing of loving your enemies makes you a door mat for their feet. Your God don't come down and confound them! Love them and forbear and they cackle while you are praying."

"Do you ever pray, Mr. Layton?"

He glanced up at her, but the old steadiness deserted his eyes, and they shifted to the pulp of the crushed flower he held in his hand. He flung it from him.

"No, I don't," he replied, crisply. "I suppose it is all right for women and children, but a man has got to be a hater and a fighter to win."

She gathered up her flowers and arose to her feet. A word of protest came to his lips, but he did not give it voice.

"Sometimes the chrysalis becomes so chilled that it never brings forth anything but a cold, dry dust," she said, as he walked beside her down the slope.

The ride to the Barr place was not in dismal silence. The man chose to drop the subject they had been discussing, but a new admiration for this slender girl-woman was awakening in his heart. That first morning when he had ridden away from the house he had laughed to

himself in his self-assurance that she would be a pleasant toy with which to dally during his stay in the Palouse, but he had abandoned the idea. Her life's creed was simplicity itself, and to her hypocrisy was unknown. During the days he had been in the community he had ridden with her, walked with her, and fenced with her as he had on this afternoon, and always he had found her devoid of deceit, guiltless of affectation, and with a heart as warm as the sunshine that lay on the hills. And often he had looked at Dan as he lay fighting for life and wondered if, after all, the physician had not been right in saying that it would be better to let him die in ten minutes than to kill her by the year.

The afternoon was pleasant, and the two chatted merrily as they rode, for Layton's spirits had risen under the charm of her presence, and he found himself exerting his powers to cause her to forget the drab of his nature that he had shown her on the hillside. And it seemed that she forgot, for her laugh rang gayly, and the bloom of the wild flowers was in her cheeks. She rode well, Seb noticed, and even Vixen's fiery impatience could not bring her annoyance. At the gate he sprang from

his saddle and lifted her lightly to the ground, after which he mounted again and galloped away toward Whitman, a curious feeling of exultation thrilling him.

His horse was fresh and he rode into the little town in good time and made his way to the telegraph office, where he filed a message addressed to Granville Garrison. It read:

"Trouble brewing among the men. Look for outbreak soon. Will be up in a few days."

CHAPTER XV

"A FEW SCRATCHES LEFT"

THE last vestige of daylight was merging into the July night when Layton left the telegraph office and jogged his cayuse slowly back through the main street of the town. The sound of an organ came to him from the open windows of a second story hall, and a box sign in front, lighted by a coal oil lamp, informed him that it was a Good Templars Lodge. A number of young people crowded about the windows, laughing and chatting merrily, and the lawyer drew his horse to one side of the street and paused a moment to stare up at the scene. Then he heard the tramp of marching feet in the hall, and the words of an old song came to him, full-throated:

"I'm a jolly, jolly miller and I live by myself,
All my bread and cheese I lay upon the shelf;
With a hand in the hopper and another in the sack —
Gents step forward and the ladies fall back."

Layton, lolling lazily in his saddle, smiled and drew indolently at a cigar he had lighted. The town loafers were assembling on boxes in front of a grocery store close to where he had paused, but he gave them no heed. Occasionally he caught bits of their conversation and knew that they were jesting about the happy crowd in the Good Templars hall, but he did not join the jesters. Instead, he smoked in silence and listened. There was something about the care-free gayety across the street that appealed to him. He had been sombre and grave of late instead of jovial, as was his nature. Tragedy had crept into his life down here in the hills, and something had turned his thoughts into different channels than had been customary with him. But now he felt the call of youth, and he turned eagerly from the drab that had stolen the color from his life.

The singing ceased and the blinds were lowered, but he sat there, his elbow on the saddle horn, studying the glowing coal on his cigar. Finally he rode slowly down the street and drew rein in front of the saloon. In front of the place were a number of the Hungarian graders employed on the Northwestern line, while loud voices were heard in the saloon.

But Seb Layton was not in a mood to draw social lines very sharply, so he dropped the reins and threw himself from the saddle. A sudden hush fell as he stepped up onto the walk, but as the feeble light of the saloon lamps revealed him to them, the men turned from him and continued their jabbering. In the saloon the air was heavy with the fumes of cheap whiskey and cheaper tobacco, and the room was filled with black-haired, dark-skinned men who spoke the tongue of those who chattered without.

"Graders," he muttered, making his way to the bar. "If they get drunk, hell will pop in Whitman!"

He lingered over his liquor and watched the scene rather curiously, but he could make nothing of it. Not a word of the language did he understand. It was also evident that those of the motley crowd were greatly interested in him, for many glances were given him.

"What's it all about?" he asked the bartender, who paused a moment near him.

The man shook his head.

"Don't know," he said. "It's part of that traction gang, and they're gettin' ugly. If there's any women on the streets to-night

they'd better hit the trail for home. I ain't movin' far from a gun, myself."

He turned and glanced at the back bar, where a heavy six shooter rested.

"Any special occasion for their being in to-night?"

"Nothing except Saturday night, that I know of. They're in every Saturday night raisin' the devil, but they're worse to-night."

Seb left the place and went out onto the street. The crowd of foreigners seemed to be increasing, and they were shuffling up and down the street, talking loudly. He allowed his horse to stand where it was, and strolled along a short distance, watching the human storm gathering. There was something in the inflamed passions of men that struck just enough of a response in his bosom to arouse his keenest interest. He was standing in the light of a big lamp suspended in the doorway of a general store when he saw a carriage coming down the street, but he gave it no more than a glance, and was surprised when it stopped in front of the store and a voice hailed him.

"Hello, Mr. Layton!"

The light was not good where the carriage

stood, but as Seb stepped to the edge of the walk he saw Judge West holding the lines and leaning toward him. In the seat behind him sat Frances Nelson.

"The last people I expected to see here to-night," responded Layton, going out to the carriage. "Miss Nelson, I thought you were at Barr's."

She laughed as she extended a dainty gloved hand, and there was the music of red-blooded youth in her voice.

"I was," she replied, "but I left as you brought Tess home, and—"

"I think she took me home," he broke in. "My recollection is that I was in no hurry to leave the wild flowers."

"And congenial company," suggested West.

"Well—yes. Miss Tess is nice."

There was a faint hint of embarrassment in Layton's tone, a note that seldom was heard in his voice, for always he had been supremely confident of himself.

"She is splendid!" exclaimed Frances. "But I was trying to tell you that as soon as you brought her home—or she brought you—I left. Had you taken the trouble to glance backward

you would have seen Vixen and me half a mile behind you."

"I don't believe I looked back once. I was thinking deeply."

"Quite natural," laughed West.

"Of Tess?" Frances leaned toward the lawyer, and in her tone was a hint of anxiety. "Please be—don't make sport of her, Mr. Layton. She's as sweet as a wild rose, and as free from the world's guile."

"God's grace and purity are in her heart," said West. "But Mr. Layton will not bring her a heart-ache."

"Not purposely," the girl answered, quickly, and had her face not been in the shadow the color would have been seen to be deepening in her cheeks. "But she has lived out of the world and might misinterpret—"

"I understand you thoroughly," responded Seb, and a smile played about his lips. "And I assure you that you need not fear. Miss Tess seems to be a very good judge of human nature. She doesn't misinterpret anything. I rather think that I wish she were less clear in her analyses."

West laughed in his good-natured way.

"Layton, I'm out of my youth, but I haven't lost interest in that period of life, and I believe I know what you mean. Mother sometimes punctures my vanity. It's a sly way they have, my boy, and they never get over it."

"She pried into a chrysalis and found dust. That's the reason I was thinking so deeply and gave no heed to anything behind me—nor beside me, nor in front of me, for that matter. It was a bit rash, too, for—well, these hills are not always as peaceful as they look."

"No, they ain't." West paused to watch a crowd of graders roistering on the walk. "Ever since Dan Johns was shot I've felt that there was something brewin'. I don't know what it is, but I'm more careful than I used to be. I tried to persuade Frances not to come in this evening, but you can't make a girl listen to you when you're talkin' for her good."

He chuckled as he finished, and there was no sting to his words.

"Father is coming down from Spokane on the eight-thirty train and we're to meet him," the girl explained.

"Ever notice how forgetful a girl is, Layton?" asked the rancher. "Now Frances forgot slick and clean to mention that her pa

wasn't comin' alone. Mr. Joe Bronson's comin' along just for a breath of air over Sunday."

"No, I didn't forget," she answered, and the lawyer caught her embarrassment, "but I didn't suppose that Mr. Layton was interested in that point."

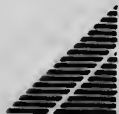
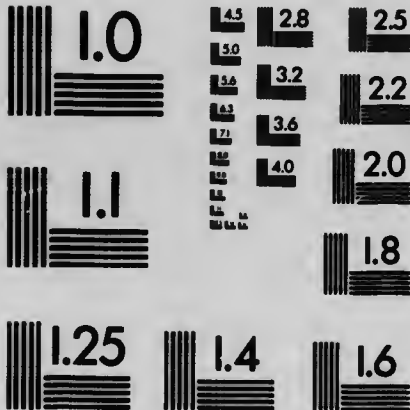
"No apologies due," responded Seb. "But I heard the whistle just now, and I suspect I had better let you drive on to the depot."

Again the sound of the whistle came floating up through the little valley, and West, after a few hasty words, drove away. Layton returned to the walk and watched the carousing graders. Their numbers had doubled by this time, and their dark faces appeared more evil than ever. How they made their way to the town from the camps he did not know, but it is probable that the majority of them walked, taking short cuts across the hills. After their debauch they would return the same way, and pigs and chickens along their route would disappear. The lodge meeting adjourned, and a crowd of young people came down the stairway, but they did not linger on the streets. The swarm of drunken, jabbering beasts warned against that.



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He heard the train puffing its way out of the little town, and, realizing that West and his party soon would pass, he entered one of the general stores and purchased a cigar. Then he stood leaning against the counter, wishing to give the Nelsons time to pass before he returned to the street. He had stood there but a few minutes when he was surprised to see Judge West and Frances Nelson enter.

"They didn't come," said West, noting Layton's glance. "But I lost a clip off a single-tree and I've got to get it fixed before we start home, and as I saw you in here I brought Frances in for you to take care of for a while. I know you'll do it."

"Yes, here's a child for you to care for, Mr. Layton." There was resentment in the girl's tone. "Judge West is positively domineering at times." She turned to the rancher. "Hadn't you better buy me a stick of candy to keep me from crying while you are gone?"

The usual smile was absent from West's face, and when he spoke his eyes were on Layton instead of the girl.

"These graders are in an ugly mood tonight," he said. "I've seen them drunk before, but never in just their present temper. I

couldn't leave you alone, Frances, and I couldn't take you where I'll have to go."

"Oh, the graders!" She stamped her foot slightly in a sudden burst of vexation. "A crowd of jabbering Hungarians! They may fight among themselves, but nothing more."

"Well, if Judge West won't buy you the candy I will to keep you from being naughty." Seb laughed, and his good-humor was infectious, for the girl's look softened. "Go ahead, Mr. West," he added, "I don't think the Huns will bother her much."

The rancher nodded and withdrew. Seb shoved a convenient soap box toward the girl.

"Won't you sit down, little girl?" he asked, jestingly.

"No, I won't," she replied with severity, but a merry light was dancing in her eyes. "I'm going to shop."

He opened his eyes wide.

"At this hour?"

"The stores are open."

"Oh, certainly. That is, some are. Some have closed because of the Huns."

"Very well. We will hunt out the ones that are open. I am desperately in need of—of—some gloves—and—handkerchiefs."

She floundered in the enumeration of her needs, and the man recognized that the shopping was merely an expression of pique, probably due more directly to her disappointment at the non-arrival of her father and Bronson than to West's action in leaving her while he went to have the carriage fixed.

"Those gloves really are shabby," Seb answered, gravely scrutinizing the immaculate kids that graced her hands and arms. "Probably we can find them back at this other counter."

He turned toward the rear of the store, but she stopped him.

"I won't trade here," she said. "I don't like their stock."

A maudlin chorus arose from without, and a crowd of drunken roughs stopped in front of the door and looked in. Their eyes fell on the girl, and instantly the song hushed and they began talking loudly, occasionally nodding boldly toward her, and laughing boisterously. Frances turned her back toward the door and pretended not to have seen, but a tell-tale wave of red was creeping up from her throat into her cheeks.

Layton drew on his cigar and then sen

series of smoke rings floating slowly upward.

"I beg pardon," he said. "According to the latest book on 'How to Behave,' it isn't just the thing to smoke in the presence of a lady. But I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind."

"I don't. You may smoke; that is, if you take me shopping. Everybody smokes in these stores."

"So I had noticed. If the city stores would adopt the plan they would have better luck getting men into their places. Now that calico yonder on the top shelf may gather an odor of tobacco, but it will keep moth away, and, besides—"

"But my shopping! Are you coming?"

She turned toward the door, but he laid his hand lightly on her arm.

"I've tried to jest you out of the notion," he said, earnestly. "Now let me frankly advise that you postpone your shopping until Monday—or some other day. The street isn't a parlor to-night."

She hesitated, and shot a glance toward the doorway. The Huns had passed on. She turned again to Layton.

"After all, are you a house cat, Mr. Layton, taking fright whenever a poodle barks?"

Her words stung, and he stood erect before her, looking down into her face. Her cheeks showed a tint of red, and her lips were rather tightly pressed. For a moment he did not answer, but stood fighting a mental battle. He knew that he ought not yield to her caprice, but the lamplight was glinting in her brown hair that fluffed out beneath her white sailor in a most bewitching manner, and her white tailored suit gave to her a subtle charm that warmed the Viking blood of the man. When youth and strength stand in the presence of such a challenge, prudence falls to the ground.

He turned and called back to the clerk, busy in the rear of the store:

"If Judge West comes in, please tell him that Miss Nelson will return soon."

Then they stepped out onto the street. As Layton had said, some of the business houses were closed and dark, but here and there along the street could be seen stores whose proprietors had braved the possible tragedies. Leaning against buildings, squatting on the edge of the walk, standing in noisy groups, or staggering along the board walk, were crowds of drunken graders, their evil passions inflamed

by the liquor they had poured down their throats.

As they reached the walk, Frances paused, dismayed at the beastliness of it all, and had her companion again protested she would gladly have returned to the shelter of the store to await the carriage, but Seb had no intention of protesting. It had occurred to him that there would be something of pleasure in seeing one bearing the name of Nelson humiliated. He had given her her chance, had urged her to refrain from her folly, and had been rewarded by a taunt of implied cowardice.

"Which way?" he asked, briefly.

She looked into his face, hesitated, and then waved her hand, scarcely aware of which direction she indicated.

"This way," she replied, desperately.

He swung into step beside her, and they walked up the street toward where the saloon was receiving drunken men and sending out others still drunker. The sign that usually extended out over the walk and blinked its rude letters at the passers-by gave forth no light now, and as they approached Seb saw that a brick had crashed into it, demolishing it and

leaving only a mass of splintered wood and a canvas suspended in the air, with a litter of broken glass on the walk beneath telling of the fate of the lamp that had illuminated the sign.

"That looks like Mr. Barr's pony—the one you ride," remarked the girl, looking at the animal standing before the saloon.

Seb had forgotten all about the horse for the time being, and now the red came to his own cheeks.

"You have good eyes," he answered. "It is the one I ride."

She glanced quickly up into his face.

"Why, how came it here?"

"I am sorry you asked, but I'll tell you. I left it there."

She did not reply, but quickened her steps as a group came howling and singing from the little grog shop. Coarse remarks from the few English-speaking rowdies came to her ears, but Layton said nothing and did nothing but hurry along beside the girl.

"Here's a store!" she exclaimed, and darted into a doorway.

However, the long shelves filled with hardware and the counters piled with nail kegs

showed at a glance that she had made a mistake.

"I believe it is the last store open up this way, too," drawled Layton, with grim enjoyment.

"Yes, we must go back." She started down the street, and without a word he accompanied her. "Aren't you afraid some one will steal your horse?" she asked.

"Not a bit. They might steal my watch or my money—but horse-stealing is serious business in this country."

They had almost reached the store where West had left them when half a dozen of the Hungarians came along the walk toward them. Their bloodshot eyes fell on the girl, and one said something to the others that caused a general laugh, and they stopped. Seb quickly stepped between the girl and the men and they attempted to circle around the Huns, but there was a quick rush, and a scream broke from her lips as one of the fellows clutched her.

But the Hun's hands had scarcely touched her until Layton swung his clenched fist full on the fellow's jaw and the grader crashed backward among his fellows and then fell limply to the walk. In that same instant a terrific

blow straight from the shoulder sent another staggering against the wall, there was a chorus of cries in a foreign tongue, a babble of responses, a rush of feet, and in a moment Seb found himself hemmed in by a score of as dirty villains as ever slit a throat. The building was at his back, and the girl crouched at his side, sobbing.

"Brace up!" he said, tersely, and not very politely. "The house cat has a few scratches left for these fellows!"

He edged slowly along the building, and the crowd gave way for a moment. Then the rascals seemed to take courage and there was no more yielding.

"I've got to fight," he whispered. "And I had better start it. If I don't they'll best me!"

"Maybe they'll go away," she said.

"Humph! Not with you in sight!" He heard her gasp. "I beg pardon. That was rough, but I didn't mean it to . . . I didn't have time to select my words. I'll knock a few of these fellows down and maybe you can slip through to the store."

"And you?"

"I'll keep them back. Are you ready?"

"Yes, I suppose so." She saw him crouch

ready for the attack. "Wait! Wait! Look!" she cried.

Three glaring lights shot around a corner a short distance away, and bore down upon them. The shouting, jabbering, gesticulating mob of Hungarians that had been held in temporary check by the exhibition they had had of Layton's fighting qualities now paused another moment to stare at this apparition that sped noiselessly through the night.

"An automobile!" whispered Seb.

Honk! Honk! Honk! The hoarse blast came to them like a cry of encouragement, and the sweep of the headlight now fell on the outer edge of the crowd.

Honk! Honk! Again came the cheering bellow.

"That's father's car!" cried Frances. "I know the tone!"

CHAPTER XVI

"LAYTON—OF YALE"

A SICKENING "sput!" of flesh crashing against flesh sounded almost with Frances Nelson's last word, and in an instant the sidewalk was a hell of human frenzy in which bodies writhed and swayed and fell and were trampled upon by shouting, cursing men; and there was the dull "sput!" "sput!" of blows driven with all of the force of muscles of steel and the lust of battle, and intermingled with it were heavy groans and sharp screams of pain.

Layton had turned his staring eyes from the oncoming touring car in time to see a Hun spring forward from the crowd with his arms outstretched to clutch the girl, but his hands did not reach her. Swinging his body on the balls of his feet, Seb drove his clenched fist straight for the jugular and the grader crashed heavily to the walk, but his downfall brought on the assault. Layton heard the girl scream as

they closed on him, and then he received a crushing blow, but the building at his back stayed his fall, and as he straightened and flung the pack from him he saw the glare of the car's headlights as it swerved toward the walk and bore down upon the inferno, the honking of the horn coming to them as the bugle notes of a charging squadron.

He was dimly aware that he had gotten the girl behind him once more, but a ball of blood was in his eyes, and he tore desperately at the hands that clutched at his throat; then with heavy boot, and with knuckles that were bruised and bleeding, he fought himself clear for an instant.

"Father! Joe!"

Frances's words were lost in the unintelligible outcries of the Hungarian rabble, but Layton heard a shout from the car. Catching his breath, he bellowed:

"Eighteen—five—sixty-two!"

It was Bronson's old signal at Yale when the captain was calling on him to smash through tackle, and Layton knew that if Frances's cry had failed to reach the car, Joe Bronson would respond to his old signal and ask questions later.

"O op! O op! Parabalou! Yale!"

Seb Layton laughed, laughed wildly as a demon might laugh when it harks to the wails of the damned. It had been long since that old battle yell had sounded in his ears, and now as the war cry of other days rang clear and strong, he swept his sleeve across his eyes and cleared them of blood and perspiration. The car was just stopping at the edge of the walk and he saw a stalwart figure leaping straight for the black mass that separated them.

O op! O op! Parabalou! Yale!

As the slogan burst in reply from lips that spat blood with the cheer, Layton hurled himself forward with tigerish fury and struck right and left, struck and cursed and laughed! The amazed Huns had turned to meet the attack of Bronson, but the signal had fired his blood, and, unaware of who the man was that had voiced it, Bronson fought as he had never before battled in response to the mystical numbers, and then with Layton plunging into the fray again, the graders turned from the raging Americans and fled from the scene.

As the Huns took to their heels Joe Bronson and Layton stood face to face, and, breathing

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"EIGHTEEN-FIVE-SIXTY-TWO!" — Page 267.

laboredly, Seb paused and held out his hand. In the dim light from the store window he was scarcely recognizable in his present plight. Bronson reached for the outstretched hand, but his gaze passed Layton and discovered Frances standing near the building, a most forlorn appearing creature. With a gasp he sprang to her as she essayed to step forward.

"My God, Frances!"

"Yes—yes—Joe!" she faltered. "I'm so glad—you came!" There was a break in her voice, but with a manifest effort she regained her control. "In fact, I think Mr. Layton is glad, too!"

And then Nature demanded her due and received it in a flood of hot tears and choking sobs that grew into occasional flashes of hysterical laughter. Seb had paused to glance at the automobile, from which Warren Nelson was scrambling, and then he had turned as Frances spoke.

"Seb Layton!"

Bronson's exclamation was that of surprise as he and the lawyer looked into each other's eyes. Layton's hat was gone, his face was streaked with blood, and his collar had been

torn from his throat, leaving his shirt in shreds that revealed the strong chest still laboredly pumping breath into his lungs.

"Thanks for responding to the 'eighteen—five—sixty-two' signal, Bronson," he answered, a shadow of a smile on his ghastly face. "And Miss Nelson is right. I am mighty glad to see you."

Warren Nelson strode forward, and in a moment Frances was in his arms. The banker looked at her torn clothing, her hair tumbling about her face, and then at the man who was endeavoring to remove the blood from his face with a handkerchief.

"I don't understand this, sir!" Nelson exclaimed, rather pompously.

The ridiculousness of the words and tone appealed to Layton's humor even in that moment, and he laughed outright, laughed with the clear ring of sanity once more, though perhaps the relief from the high nervous tension put a slightly quavering tone in his voice as he answered:

"I am not exactly in a mood for explanations just now." He walked over to the edge of the walk and picked up his crumpled, dirty hat, and began whipping it across his thigh to knock

the dust from it. "I think all hands have had enough, though. In fact, this eye of mine hurts. I got a nasty smash there and it laid the brow open." He felt of the wound very carefully. "I saw the fellow who did it, though, and I think he will live on a soup diet for a while. And the next time I meet him—"

He paused and they saw his lips tighten until there were queer little puckers at the corners of his mouth.

"It was my fault," said Frances to her father. "I was vexed because you did not come on the train, and I was horrid. I'll explain it to you later, father." She stepped toward Seb. "I'm sorry, Mr. Layton. That sounds weak, but it means much. Father, this is Mr. Layton, who was Mr. Bronson's roommate at college. You know your duty toward him."

Nelson's mouth opened slowly and his jaw sagged as he stood staring at Layton. There was a breath of silence, Bronson standing stiffly erect, his face pale with the stress of the moment, and Frances's hand was half outstretched toward her father, whose jaw slowly raised, and then he swallowed once or twice before his voice came to him.

"Layton—of Yale!" he mumbled.

The few people who had remained about the stores were beginning to crowd around the party, and inquisitive ones were staring rudely at the girl, who was endeavoring to tuck her brown hair into a more becoming arrangement, while Seb's swollen eye and blood-smeared visage were objects of intense interest.

"Yes, Seb Layton," responded the lawyer, and then, realizing that unpleasant things might develop in the presence of these gaping idlers unless he turned the channel of events, he added: "If you don't mind, I'll withdraw for repairs."

He bowed, and without giving time for a reply, turned away. The hotel was close at hand, and he sought it as the place most likely to offer him the water, towels, and other things of which he was in such sore need. He found the landlord all politeness and courtesy, and evidently possessed of the opinion that the battered stranger was honoring the hostelry by seeking its conveniences. Layton was given a room, supplied with hot water and towels, and linen for bandages if needed, and a boy was sent across to a store to purchase a new collar for him. Seb could not repress a grim smile as he surveyed himself in the mirror. Then he

threw off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and began removing the marks of battle.

His brow was cut and swollen, but after the wound had been carefully bathed with hot water, he was pleased to note that the swelling was considerably reduced, and he was able to draw the edges of the cut together with a strip of courtplaster the willing host produced. His wrists were sore from many blows they had guarded from his face, and here and there a knuckle was bleeding, but there is much of magic in hot water, and when he had finished his ablutions and had buttoned the new collar to his torn shirt he presented a very satisfactory appearance.

"Your friends are waiting for you in the parlor, sir," said the landlord, as Seb finished.

This was unexpected, and for a moment he hesitated, and then with a short laugh as he took a final survey of himself in the mirror, he followed the landlord down the hall to the hotel parlor, where he found Frances Nelson, Warren Nelson, Joe Bronson and Judge West.

"Very kind of you to call," he observed, bowing. "Sorry if I have kept you waiting with my primping."

The hotel-keeper laughed and West chuckled

a little, but the others did not. Warren Nelson's face was red with embarrassment. Frances stood nervously clasping and unclasping her gloved hands, her face pale; Joe Bronson was stiffly erect, his hands jammed into the pockets of his coat, his face betraying the struggle he was making to appear unconcerned. In the hush that followed his chaffing words, Layton's eyes flashed quickly from one to another, and the old chill crept into them. Warren Nelson coughed, and fingered his watch fob.

"We didn't want to leave until I had thanked you," he said. "Frances has explained. I want you to know we recognize a brave man when we meet him, sir."

"Thank you." Layton inclined his head in a slight acknowledgment.

"You put up a great fight," said Bronson, much as if he were reading the lines from a printed page.

"You were in a splendid position to judge," returned Layton. "The compliment is appreciated—and returned."

"Mr. Layton, it was magnificent!"

Frances's words came haltingly, but there was no ice in her tone. He bowed to her.

"But, after all, you did not get your gloves," he replied, smiling.

West came forward and laid his hand on Layton's shoulder.

"I want you to ride in the carriage with me," he said. "The others are going in the automobile. I'd rather take it slow, any way, and I'd like to be friends with you."

The chill died out of Layton's eyes, and as West linked arms with him, he turned and led the way down the stairs, fully aware that the others were wondering how best to depart graciously from the room. As he reached the office he stepped aside to let them pass.

"Good-night," he said, cheerfully, and they made the same reply.

At the office door Bronson paused, then wheeled and reached out his hand.

"Seb," he exclaimed warmly, "you're a man!"

For a moment the two stood with hands gripping, each looking straight into the other's eyes. A wave of red came to Layton's cheeks.

"The vote isn't unanimous, Joe," he responded, and his voice sounded deep in his throat. "But it's good to hear you say it,

and—" he swallowed vigorously, "—I'm glad you hadn't forgotten that old 'through tackle' signal. Good-night, Joe."

Nelson was driving the car himself that night. Motoring was one of his very few fads, and one which he always indulged when running down to his Palouse ranch. So he took his place at the steering wheel while Bronson helped Frances into the rear seat and dropped down beside her. Then the car glided away into the night, and a few minutes later as West and Layton got into the carriage they saw the lights of the touring car as it followed the winding road high up toward the summit of the divide.

Bronson avoided discussing the affray, but talked volubly of affairs "in town," meaning Spokane. He gave his companion the latest gossip of society, though he had never been given to small talk of this sort, descanted enthusiastically on plans then making for another run out toward the Cœur d'Alenes, and urged that she return to town long enough to participate in that event, at least.

To all of this Frances replied briefly, and sat silent while he rattled on in a way that was uncommon to him. But finally he yielded to the

strain of keeping up a one-sided conversation, and lapsed into a somewhat moody silence. She was leaning back in the cushions, and as he glanced at her he could dimly see the outlines of her face, and he saw that it was turned from him, as if she were gazing abstractedly at the hills which rose and fell in a ghostly way as the car sped down into the valleys or, with rapidly chugging engines, swept up the steeps.

"Joe," she said, at last, and turning to him as though continuing a discussion, "I was right about it. He isn't a house cat at all."

CHAPTER XVII

TWO PATHWAYS

AFTER breakfast Dan Johns announced his intention of observing Sunday by sitting up, and was humored by being propped up with pillows and cushions. His iron constitution was rapidly giving him back his strength, and he required but little nursing now. Doubtless had he been a millionaire he would have had a retinue of trained nurses and there would have been daily consultations of eminent physicians, but, being nothing more than a broncho rider, he drank plenty of whiskey and swore roundly when the doctor, who rode to the place once a day, took a drink, also.

Seb Layton was stiff and sore, but heroic treatment of his battered face, both in Whiteman and after reaching the ranch house the night before, had removed practically all of the swelling and left but slight discolorations. Cleanly shaven and with fresh courtplaster

over his eye, he gave but few evidences of the struggle with the Huns.

"Goin' to a weddin'?" asked Dan when Layton came down attired with more care than he had shown lately.

"No—to church."

"Church!" Dan stared in amazement, and Coyote Barr, who sat in the doorway smoking a pipe, turned and stared, also. "What are you thinkin' of?"

"I've simply decided to go. That's all. Judge West said there was a church a mile or two from here. I'm going."

"Huh!" Coyote Barr blew a cloud of smoke and grunted. "You're as big a damned fool as Tess, though I didn't think it possible."

Seb looked at him in disgust, but the squinty eyes did not falter.

"You seem very proud and fond of your daughter."

There was no mistaking the sarcasm, and Barr grunted again.

"Of my—!" He tucked the tobacco into the bowl of his pipe with a heavily knuckled finger. "Well, there ain't no sense in her bein' a damned fool. That's what she got at school! Huh!"

Again the smoke rolled out in a cloud, and he turned his eyes once more to the hills.

"She lacks a hell of a lot o' bein' the same girl she was before you sent her away," grumbled Dan. "But I reckon if you hadn't took that idiot notion she wouldn't 'a' gone *loco*."

"You don't know nothin' about a father's love, Dan," Barr chuckled in a rasping way. "It's some natural for a girl to be a fool about God an' angels, an' such sugar-teat stuff, but a man—Hell!"

Something in Layton's nature revolted. The defense of a religion was new for him, but a flood of words—not altogether pious, be it confessed—was crowding to his lips when the faint rustle of skirts was heard and he checked his reply as Tess entered the room from the stairway.

Her raven hair was dressed in the fashion, her cheeks showed the tint of the rose, and beneath the brows that Nature had penciled with inimitable art her eyes looked out at the world with the glow of sleeping flames. She was dressed all in white and wore a modest hat with a simple garland of roses. Seb caught his breath sharply as she smiled at him.

"Too bad one cannot take a street car right to the church door," she said.

"When the wild flowers are blooming on the hills, and every breath is a blessing?"

He saw surprise flash into her eyes as she looked up quickly from the medicine she was preparing for Dan. Her father took the pipe from between his lips.

"He's joined the *klootchmen*," he said, sarcastically. "We'll have prayer meetin's here next, Dan."

"I'll lead the meetin' if we do," growled the wounded man. "I'm thinkin' we'd better have a weddin' before long."

The red of the poppy burned in the girl's cheeks, and she turned hastily and fumbled with some medicines on a near-by table. Then she faced Layton again.

"You don't mean—?" She paused inquiringly.

"That I'm going to church—yes. Of course—"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried.

"Tess—"

Coyote Barr arose quickly to his feet, his pipe in hand, and wheeled toward her. His

voice was harsh with anger. She stepped forward and met his eyes fairly, though a pallor showed in her cheeks. Seb saw her hands clenching, and there was a hint of pride in the poise of her head.

"What is it, father?" she asked.

There was a suspicion of a purr in her soft voice, a purr that challenged. The rancher stood mute for a breath, his eyes looking into hers, and then he slowly turned away and sat down again.

"Nothin'—go on!" he muttered.

"By George, there's mettle!" flashed through Layton's mind. "That puts my Hun rough-and-tumble stunt in the amateur class!" Aloud he said: "With your permission," and caught step with her as she left the house and walked down the path to the gate.

"You won't take offense if I say I'm surprised, will you?" she asked.

"Because I asked to walk with you?"

"No, no," and she laughed outright. "You know I didn't mean that. Why shouldn't you walk with me when we are both going to the same place?"

"No reason at all, but I thought you might fear the tongues."

Above the dusty road the heat rays were frolicking in the mid-summer sun, and here and there the hillsides were beginning to show patches of brown. He took her parasol and shaded her from the sun as they followed the road, keeping at the side where the grass offered easy walking.

"I never think of tongues, Mr. Layton. If I did I fear I would soon find myself dodging and cringing and making myself miserable trying to live false to truth. Guarding is pretty close to deception, isn't it? And deception leads—Oh, farther and farther away from the best in life."

They walked a short distance in silence. She had given him a problem, and its solution was leading him into realms new to him.

"After all," he answered, "our codes are very similar, though they have led us in different paths. I have credited myself with the satisfying grace that I have followed truth; I have hated hypocrisy, and have suffered—well, quite a little—because I have not worn a mask. It is strange."

"No, it isn't. Can't you see where the trouble lies? I know you will see it when you think."

"I hope I will," he responded, and his tone was earnest. "It is only lately that I have felt that there was any trouble to it, but my thoughts have slipped into queer channels occasionally."

"Evidence enough that you will discover where the fault lies. The only danger is that you will try to soothe your vexations away."

He looked down at her in surprise.

"Who taught you such philosophy?"

"Why—why—" She hesitated. "I don't think I was taught that. I just know it to be so."

"So do I, as a sensible man. So if keeping myself vexed will explain why truth leads me one way and you another, I'll promise to remain in torment."

He spoke lightly, but she knew that he was not veiling a sneer.

"Mr. Layton, did you ever read about the wise men of Indostan who went to see the elephant?"

"Of course," he laughed. "The blind men who argued about what an elephant was like."

"Yes. One felt of its leg and said it was like a tree; another rubbed his hands over the

beast's broad side and declared that it was plain that the elephant was like a wall. Well—."

"Each had the truth, didn't he? You and I have been examining different portions of the elephant."

She paused and faced him, and then slowly placed her hand over one of her eyes.

"Do this," she said. "Cover your right eye and look straight ahead, as I am doing. Now you can see a road leading down into that gloomy gulch on our left, and if you kept your eye covered you probably would follow that road, believing that it was the best there was. Now cover your left eye and look about with your right—or open both of them. That gulch road is not visible with your left eye shut, but up here on the side of the hill is a pathway bordered with flowers, and it leads upward, always upward, to the top of the hills, and you know that up there the air is pure and sweet, and you are content. If you leave both eyes open you see both roads—but you will follow the one up the heights."

Her cheeks were glowing again and in her eyes he saw a sparkle like that of stars in a

cloudless night. Her lips were half parted as she paused, eager for him to catch the broad lesson she was teaching.

"It's simple, isn't it?" he asked, scarcely conscious of his words, for something had set his heart to pumping the blood through his veins in a wild sweep that thickened his voice. "I have had one eye covered and have been following the road into the gulch, while you have kept the other eye covered and have followed the path up the heights—up the heights to where the flowers bloom and the air is pure!"

"No, I took my hand away from my left eye long ago," she answered, and the words were low spoken. "I have looked down at the gulch road—but I could see them both, and I want the one on the hills."

They walked on in silence, until she turned and followed a dimly marked road that led up through a field of half-ripened wheat, but the curse of the Northwest, a fence of barbed wire, obstructed the road.

"This road will save us half a mile," she said.

Embarrassment showed in his face as she paused at the fence.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "You cannot crawl through this fence—nor over it."

To his surprise she laughed.

"Can it be possible that you have not made the acquaintance of these Palouse gates?"

"Gates?" He glanced along the fence.

"Yes, gates. Don't you see those loops of wire over that small post yonder, holding it to the heavier post? That's the 'latch.'"

In a twinkling it was plain, and, raising the upper loop with his hands, he lifted the small post from the lower loop and dragged the span of wires aside, leaving her an unobstructed way. Then a moment sufficed to close the queer gate, and to all but the experienced one the fence appeared to be unbroken.

"I've been wondering how it happened that so many roads had been recently closed by fences," he remarked.

"I can easily believe that, for the Palouse is full of just such roads and gates."

They walked down the slope of a hill, and spread out before them was a beautiful valley bearing a sparse growth of tall pines, with rocky buttes rising abruptly here and there, and with other bluffs and other pines marking the distant boundaries of the valley. Layton finally paused and looked about him—looked ahead and on all sides.

"This must be the wrong road, after all," he said. "There isn't a church nor any other house within sight, and we can see for miles."

Again the girl laughed.

"You are surely a tenderfoot," she said, "if I may use the speech of the hills. Why, you can throw a stone onto the church from where you stand."

He looked at her incredulously.

"It would take a better sling than David used," he replied.

"In fifty feet you will change your mind. Come."

She walked on, and he kept by her side. A moment later an exclamation of surprise came to his lips. The hill had dipped suddenly, and, nestling beside it, he saw the small frame church, with a number of saddle horses and a few "hack" horses tied to convenient trees and posts. From where he had first stood the road seemed to go straight ahead down into the valley of the pines and buttes, but now he could see that it swerved sharply and zigzagged down to the church. The angle had been deceptive, and the point seemingly reached by the hill's base, as viewed from his first position, was really a quarter of a mile

away from the church and the road that lay before it.

No stranger ever footed it across the Palouse hills without experiencing just such a surprise as came to Seb Layton, a feeling one moment of being in a solitude of pine trees and rocks, with the entire country visible for miles, and the next moment finding that a ranch house was within an easy throw of a stone.

In front of the little church stood Judge West, his clothes showing the wear of frequent and heavy brushings. A white shirt and turn-down collar bore wrinkles caused by the iron wielded by his wife, who now was just inside the church talking to several women from the Pineville neighborhood. There was no attempt at ceremony. It was not quite time for the service, and such moments were always used for reunions. West reached out his hand to Seb.

"I knew you would keep your promise to come," he said, and nodded a greeting to Tess as he spoke. "Mother, I want to introduce my new friend, Mr. Seb Layton, of Spokane."

Mrs. West came out to the group and shook hands with Layton.

"Tom said he'd invited you to come an' he

was sure you would, because you had promised him." She released his hand, and, putting her arm around the girl's shoulder, kissed her in a gentle way. "You know Tom thinks that he is a great judge of human nature," she added, speaking to Tess.

"I am glad if I have not disappointed him," said Seb, though the words sounded rather stiff to him.

"Oh, he would not have lost faith in you if you had not come this morning," said Mrs. West, smiling. "He would have insisted that you were sick or something."

"That's a broad charity," said Seb.

"I don't know," she replied. "I hadn't thought of it in that way. It's just Tom."

"Well, I knew when I felt Layton's palm that he would keep his word. No untruthful man shakes hands like he does."

A strange diffidence came over the lawyer, and he found the perspiration breaking out on his brow.

"Where is Frances?" asked Tess, turning to Mrs. West.

"The poor girl is half sick this morning. That affair in town last night left her nervous, and she didn't sleep well."

They went into the church and found seats on the plain benches. A venerable patriarch conducted the service, his grammar faulty, but with his soul inspired. Seb sat beside Tess and listened as her soft voice rose in sacred song. There were others singing, but he gave them no heed. He was staring straight ahead with eyes that saw little; his thoughts were racing here and there, back through the years; they had seemed glittering, but now something had torn the tinsel from them, leaving them dark and hideous; but a voice was in his ears, singing, singing, though one instant the voice brightened the pall and the next moment deepened its gloom. He was wondering, as many other men have come to wonder, if those other things that he had clutched were worth while, and he knew, as many other men have come to know, that they were not.

"O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself."

The words of the singers had ceased, and the heavy, halting voice of the patriarch was reading the words of a psalm. Seb turned his stare from the wall of the church and glanced almost timidly at the girl beside him. Her

skirt had fluffed out as she sat down, and one fold of spotless white was against his knee.

*"Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest
O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law."*

The girl's eyes were on the preacher, and Seb saw her long lashes rise and fall as she listened to the gospel.

The minister's words trailed off into a meaningless droning for Seb, for something in his soul was crying. Through the open window came the fragrance of wild flowers, and a gust of wind eddying through the church in a glee dance caught up a wisp of hair as soft and silky as the web of midnight and brushed it against his cheek. Slender fingers quickly tucked back the truant tress, but the cheek it had swept glowed hot where it had touched.

*"When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy,
O Lord, held me up."*

He heard some further words, though they were a jumble, but he saw the head of Tess Barr drop as a voice arose in prayer, and, hesitatingly, half ashamed, he also bowed, and a quiet peace stole into his soul. But that fold of white still lay like a caress against his knee, and he sat unmoving through the service lest the bond be broken. It was a symbol of purity

his life had not known for weary years, and now in its unconscious innocence he held it sacred.

"And now may the grace and the peace of Almighty God, who doeth all things for the best, be with you and keep you. Amen."

He shook hands with the many whom West called to meet him, but at last it was ended and he was walking homeward with Tess.

"Did you enjoy the service?" she asked. "Of course it was humble, and not what you have been used to."

He looked down at her, but quickly his eyes turned to the hills.

"No, it wasn't just what I have been used to," he replied, slowly. "But it was the most glorious hour I have ever known."

A happy light flamed in her dark eyes, but she did not look at him, nor speak for a full minute.

"Mr. Layton," she said, "are you aware that you are holding that parasol on your left side, while I am on your right side?"

CHAPTER XVIII

STANDING ON HIS GRAVE

THEY again followed the road that led through the ripening wheat on the hill, where the yellowing grain nodded to the wind's whispered secrets, and the man looked down into the valleys, but they were gray and dreary no longer; beside the road wild flowers lifted heads here and there; as the man and the passed, the hem of her skirt brushed the bolder ones that leaned out to obstruct her way, and the man looked back to see their faces all scarlet, and he felt their color stealing into his own cheeks. Impulsively, he stooped and plucked several of the brilliant blooms.

"May I?" he asked.

In his eyes she read his wish, and without a word she inclined her head slightly while he with trembling fingers tucked the flowers amid the glossy masses of her hair. Then they walked on, and the breath of the man came la-

boredly, though he had with less panting torn his way through lines of trained athletes. He unlooped the queer gate at the fence and dragged the wires far aside for her.

"It is nice to have some one to do those things," she said. "I dislike barbed wire."

"Yes, you shouldn't touch it," he answered, rather jerkily. "You—you might wound your hands."

She laughed, and in her voice he heard the piping of a new music.

"Why, I have handled those wire gates all of my life."

"Oh, of course, but—I am sorry you have to."

It was the speech of a boy, and he knew it. It meant nothing, but was a mere string of words. He searched his brain for something that had sparkle and life to it, but the words eluded him. She was bored by his dullness without a doubt, for she made no answer to his remark, but walked silently by his side. He stole a quick glance at her face, and saw that her gaze was on the distant ridges, where a haze of blue curtained the mountains.

When they came in sight of the house they saw a maroon touring car standing by the gate,

and they knew that some of the Nelson party had called. When they opened the gate and went up toward the house they were surprised to see Judge West step out.

"Didn't expect to see me, did you?" he laughed. "On our way home we met Mr. Nelson, Mr. Bronson and Frances in the automobile, and they insisted on me coming with them. Mother went on home to get dinner."

"I am glad they came," said Tess. "The spin will do Frances good."

When they entered the house Warren Nelson shook hands with Tess and bowed to Seb.

"I am glad you are not suffering from your adventure," he said.

"But few ill effects remain, and a day or two will remove them."

"Mr. Layton ought not to mind a bruised eye," laughed Tess, turning from her introduction to Bronson. "I understand he used to play football."

A strained silence fell, and Tess with quick intuition, read much in the stiff dignity of Warren Nelson, the flushed face of Bronson, and the pale cheeks of Frances. She turned her eyes to Seb, and he saw her bewilderment.

"That is the truth," he said, calmly. "I did

play half-back, and I have come out of many games much worse than I came out of that fracas in Whitman."

"Reckon there'll be more temperance than ever around the Bolton House," said Dan, "an' the W. C. T. U. will swear that the pinto an' me started it by huckin' into that meetin'."

Warren Nelson exhibited a sudden interest in the crops, and Coyote Barr, who had sat in a corner, speaking few words, led him away to inspect the growing wheat. Bronson and Layton found themselves together in the yard.

"Seb, you're a puzzle to me!" exclaimed Joe, after a moment of awkward silence.

"I suppose that's true. Let it go at that."

"But I don't want to. I've been hearing of you in Spokane—"

"And I have been hearing of you, Joe. Probably you didn't like what you heard about me any better than I liked what I heard of you, so it's an even break. Let's not discuss it."

Bronson's face had grown red at the words.

"Yes," he persisted, "let's have it out. You went into a cocoon five years ago—after that Thanksgiving game—and now I'd like to crack that shell for your sake."

The color receded from Layton's cheeks,

and his lips grew tight as he stood, hands in his pockets, looking at the other.

"Cocoon?" He turned his eyes away and nodded slowly, as if weighing the word. "Maybe the shell has already been cracked," he added slowly.

Bronson stared at him for a few breaths. Then he asked, abruptly:

"A girl?"

Frances came to the door and inquired when they would start home.

"Yes, a girl," answered Seb, when she had gone back into the house.

Joe reached down and plucked a grass blade, which he slowly tore into bits.

"It's strange what they can do," he said. "They can take a fellow down into—into—"

"The gulch road," added Seb.

Bronson nodded.

"Yes, down the gulch road, or, if they are the right sort, they can lead him up to—"

"The heights."

Joe flung the bits of grass from him.

"You have the right words on your tongue, Seb. I believe the cocoon has been cracked. When will you return to Spokane?"

"I don't know. Soon, however."

That both felt constraint was evident, and each knew that the other had it in mind to broach subjects that might sweep clouds into the sky once more. So they strolled about the yard, their conversation fitful and formal.

"Of course you know I am in the Falls City Bank," Bronson finally said.

"Of course. I saw your picture in the papers. Did Nelson invite you?"

"Well, yes. I suppose you would call it that. I wanted to be given a chance to do something besides rambling around over the world, and he made me cashier."

"A very responsible place."

"It's easier than I expected. In fact, I am not much more than a figurehead. Thompson, the assistant cashier, looks after the details. You see, it's a good chance for me. I'm twenty-eight, and I ought to know more about business than I do, but I've been an idler and left it all to my lawyers."

Layton stood kicking a small furrow in the ground with the toe of his shoe.

"Of course, this is a good chance, then. But as a lawyer I would advise you to dig into the bank's affairs and see that all of—Thompson's—affairs are regular."

"Thompson? Why, he's as steady as clock work and reliable as the Sphinx." Bronson laughed. "Is that a faulty comparison?"

"How is the Nonesuch?" asked Seb, ignoring the other's remark.

"Why—it seems to be in splendid condition. Nelson has explained it to me several times, but it's an awful bore to fill one's mind full of such details. I'm going to master it, though, in time. But since I have been in Spokane I haven't had much time. Before I went into the bank I was in a whirl of social nonsense, and since going into the bank I've been busy and away from town much of the time."

"Away from town?" Layton looked up in surprise.

"Yes, down to Walla Walla, and over to Portland. Mr. Nelson asked me to go for him, and I went because it gave me business experience. That's one reason I haven't had a chance to master the details Thompson is handling, nor to examine the Nonesuch. You know that I took mining engineering for the pure love of it, but I never acquired a taste for the bothersome stock certificates, and all that sort of stuff. Besides—"

Bronson paused and reddened slightly. Seb looked at him inquiringly.

"And, besides—?" he suggested.

"Well, the truth is, the Nonesuch belongs to Frances, and I—well, I hate to—"

"You hate to pry into her business affairs very closely."

"That's my confession, Seb. Don't you see how it is?"

A faint smile played about Layton's lips, and there was an odd look in his gray eyes.

"Yes, I see how it is, Joe. And are you taking part in politics, too?"

Bronson hesitated.

"I can't say that I have, but I do not say that I will not. It's according to what that man Garrison does. You're in with him, Layton, and I know it, and we might as well understand each other. I'm against Garrison for the Senate. He can't possibly land anything bigger than that. This talk about a coast man for the Presidency is rot. It's still a pretty hard job for the rest of the country to look across the Rocky Mountains."

"I believe that myself. Garrison will never last beyond the first ballot in the national con-

vention. But he'll go back to the Senate."

"I think not."

"Your privilege, of course. But Nelson will not defeat him. Make up your mind to that, Joe." A sudden passion flamed into his words. "Nelson is dead, politically. Damn him, I killed him five years ago, and there will be no resurrection! I'm standing on his grave!"

His hands clenched, and the old glitter was in his eyes. The dull flush of anger showed in Bronson's cheeks.

"Still boasting of treachery?" he asked, his voice heavy. "And still standing on his grave! That cocoon may be cracked—and by a girl—but God pity the girl who peeps inside of it! I've decided a point, Layton. I'm going into politics, and—"

"We're ready, Mr. Bronson!"

The two men wheeled and saw Frances Nelson standing at the corner of the house. Without a word, they joined the party starting for the automobile.

"Why, how red your faces are!" exclaimed Tess. "The sun is very hot to-day."

"Yes—very," added Frances, but with a sudden suspicion she shot swift looks at the two

men, and something she saw in their faces confirmed her thought. Stepping to Layton, she said in a voice that all could hear: "Mr. Layton, I'll be returning to town soon, and I will be pleased to have you call on us."

She turned her head slightly and flashed an indignant look toward Bronson, who was frowning darkly. Nelson was walking ahead with West, but as he heard the words he paused, half turned, and then faced to the front once more and resumed his conversation.

"I have decided to return to Spokane tomorrow," replied Seb. "And it will be a pleasure to accept the invitation."

As the touring car glided away, Layton's eyes met Bronson's squarely, and then with a smile he turned his gaze to Frances and lifted his hat as she caught his look. Then the car sped down the road and flitted from sight beyond a hill.

"Are you going to-morrow?" asked Tess, as they returned to the house.

"I made the decision ten minutes ago," he answered. "Besides, you urged me to leave."

"True. And I am glad you are going. I am afraid—" She paused.

"Afraid of what? That ball of fire in the sky?"

He heard her catch her breath with a quick gasp, and as he looked at her he saw that her cheeks were like marble.

"Yes, I am!" she exclaimed. "It—it always means trouble. You don't understand, but please believe me."

He saw her dark lashes tremble, and a faint quiver of her lips betrayed a weakness she battled to hide. They had turned aside from the path and were close to the rose bush that brightened the yard with its flowers. A flood of something swept out from his heart, and he obeyed its sweep. His arms went about her, and the slender form was drawn to him in a close embrace.

"Tess!" he whispered, hoarsely. "Tess, I want—"

For the briefest instant his cheek had felt the velvet of hers, and the warmth of her breath had touched his lips, but with a quick motion she flung his arms aside and sprang from him.

"No, no—no!" she panted. "Don't touch me that way! I—you make me ashamed—ashamed!"

A dull pain seemed stabbing him as he looked at her now, her cheeks flaming like poppies and her lustrous eyes glowing with fires that long had smouldered.

"Ashamed?" he replied, his voice husky. "Don't tell me that, Tess! I am going away from here and I want you to go with me as my wife! My God! girl, can't you see I love you? Can't you see that I want you—you of all the world?"

"I believe you—yes." Her look clung to his, and the fire still flamed. "I believe you—now. At first—but no matter. The result is the same."

Her voice was calm and even now, though her words came slowly, as though she were weighing each carefully before uttering it. The man felt the shock of a great surprise, and with it was a twinge of wounded vanity. He had not doubted the result. True, his action and words had come on the sweep of impulse, but during the days he had been near her he had often planned to offer her a love—not what he had now offered, but the kind of a love her beauty had first aroused in his selfish heart—and never had it occurred to him that she would repulse him. As a man of the world, he

believed he knew how best to mould a will to one's liking, and yet, as he stood now, defeated it occurred to him that he had not used the arts of a man of the world. He had forgotten the lower in the higher and had spun no web, had piped no seductive chant, had done nothing but learn to love her with an ardor that found its expression just as the love of the humblest and the most unlearned in the wiles and guile of the world have expressed their love since the dawn of time.

It had all come to naught, and the shock of it numbed him for the instant.

"Why should it be the same?" he asked, in a dull way.

She turned as if to go, and made a gesture toward the house.

"Have you forgotten—Dan?" she asked, her voice low.

"*Dan!*" He flung out his arms with a sudden incredulity. "It can't be that you intend to marry him!"

"Why not? He—"

"Why not?" he gasped. "Because you do not love him. Don't go on with this farce, Tess!"

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Her gaze met his again unswervingly.

"You seem to think that one is bound to love you if you will it, Mr. Layton."

There was a sarcasm in her tone that stung him.

"No, no! I don't think I mean that! But—Dan!"

"He is of the hills—one of my own people! Why not Dan?"

His hands dropped to his sides, and he shook his head slowly.

"It is useless, I know, to discuss it further, but—it is hard to contemplate you mating with all that you are not!"

The red that had suffused her cheeks had disappeared in a gray pallor.

"You are insulting, but you do not mean it as such, I am certain."

"Insulting? No—I beg your pardon. I—Oh, great God, Tess!"

He clasped his hands until the veins stood out on his wrists in heavy blue cords.

"Since when have you been calling on God?" she asked. "You told me you had forgotten that there was a God."

"I did forget! I dug two graves and then

turned my back on God, but—Oh, I don't know, so I can't explain! I'm going in, now to pack up."

He turned away and left her standing there unspeaking. In his room he gathered up his belongings and prepared for his return to Spokane. Then he took up his pipe and filled it, and the odor of burning tobacco floated out of the open window.

Coyote Barr was unusually glum that afternoon, but he seemed strangely ill at ease, frequently going to the fence and gazing up and down the road, and often Seb found him in whispered conversations with Dan. Heavy clouds gathered on the horizon at sundown, and with the fall of night came a dash of rain and a sweep of wind that wailed through the pines and shook the frail ranch house in its clutch. Barr sat in the kitchen puffing at his pipe until Layton announced his intention of going to bed.

Dan had so far recovered that it was no longer necessary to sit up with him, but Barr always made a bed on the floor and slept in the same room. Seb sat for a long time, listening to the wind and rain and watching the play of the lightning, and as he sat there, the low

growl of the thunder reminded him in an odd way of the heavy voice of a patriarch, and again there came to him the words:

"Blessed is the man whom thou chasteneth, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law!"

He blew out the light and went to bed, but sleep was tardy, and, wide awake, he lay staring at the ceiling.

"When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up."

He closed his eyes, and something was mumbled, hesitatingly, by his lips. He heard a light step in the hallway and knew that Tess was going to her room. Then the wind whined again and the lightning flashed in the sky that bent over the hills.

Once or twice he awakened and found that the storm had lessened, though the rain still fell, but near morning the tempest freshened again and the wind rattled his window so fiercely that he awoke. Finding that the rattling of the loose sash continued, he arose and stuffed a handkerchief into the crack to hold the sash solid. This done, he was standing, waiting to note the success of his makeshift, when the hills were again lighted by the electric fires.

With a sharp intaking of the breath, he stumbled closer to the window and peered out into the storm again, impatiently waiting for another lightning flash.

"I can't be mistaken," he muttered. "No—there!"

Again the lightning blazed, and in its flash his staring eyes saw a man leading a horse into the stable. It was some minutes before the lightning gleamed again, but it brought no revelation. Nor did the succeeding ones reveal any sign of life about the stable. He sat down on the side of the bed and studied, but no explanation came to his mind. He remembered the sweating horse he had found saddled in the stable the night Dan was shot. Could the two incidents be connected?

A moment later he sank softly to the floor and lay with his ear to the carpet. He was certain that he had heard a door close and the sound of voices. Yes, the faint murmur of low-spoken words came to him now through the flimsy floor. After listening for a while, he arose, slipped his trousers on, and, clutching his revolver, he felt his way to the bedroom door, which he opened noiselessly. The hall-

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way was dark and silent, and on tiptoe he stole to the head of the stairs.

The murmur of voices came up from below, and he resolved on an attempt to solve the mystery. Cautiously he stepped down, but on the second step he paused and whirled with leveled pistol, for a faint click had sounded somewhere in the darkness behind him.

He sprang back to the top of the stairs, his teeth hard set, and at the same instant the door of Tess Barr's room swung open and she stepped out into the hall, holding aloft a lighted lamp, its feeble rays giving her a wraith-like appearance in her long, clinging robe of white.

There was a stifled cry of alarm from the girl, and a mutter of astonishment from the man as he quickly lowered his weapon. In the lamp light they stood staring into each other's eyes.

"I thought so!" she exclaimed.

"Why are you here, Tess?" he queried in a low tone.

"To see if you were here," she responded. "You were going down stairs—or have you been down?"

Her voice was guarded, but even in her

caution the coldness of metal was in the tone.

"No, I was just going," he said. "I—"

"Oh, I knew it—I knew it!" The word came in a quavering sob. "And you are armed!" With a quick motion she placed the lamp on the stand and darted to his side. "For the love of God, don't go down!" she pleaded. "Go back to your room—and don't leave it before morning. You will do this for me—you will—you will! You swore you loved me. Then be generous—you can't love without being generous!—and promise me!"

He saw her shoulders tremble, and knew that she was weeping, though she stifled her sobs. In her agony of mind she gave no heed that she was in her night robe, that her hair was falling about her shoulders unrestrained, though the dishabille gave her a new beauty. He slipped the revolver into his pocket.

"Tess," he whispered, and the nails of his fingers cut into his palms. "I don't want you to cry. Listen to me, dear: I will give you the promise! I love you, and I promise, Tess, I promise!"

"You are generous!" Her hands were clasped and her voice was not steady. "You

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are gencrous," she repeated, her head drooping.

A moment he stood looking at her, his blood rivulets of fire. Then he turned and walked to his room.

"Good-night, Tess!" he said, hoarsely.

"Good-night!" she whispered.

He closed the door and sat with his back to it until the dawn, gray and dull, crept in at his window, and he looked out at a world of soggy, tumbled hills arched by a drab sky that dripped unceasingly.

CHAPTER XIX

ARRANGING TO COLLECT

JOSE was very happy that Monday morning when he received Seb's telegram announcing that he would be home on the evening train. With rare thoughtfulness, he hastened to a florist's and purchased a bouquet of mammoth red roses, which he paid for out of his own scanty funds, and then hurried back to the lawyer's apartments and completed his preparations for the reception of the man he worshiped in his simple way.

Every bit of silver, every article of cut glass received an extra polish; the rugs were thrashed vigorously on the back roof; he crawled about the rooms on hands and knees, peering into nooks and crannies in search of molecules of dust; he telephoned sundry orders to the grocer, the baker, and, after careful deliberation, to Rietzmillers. It was a busy afternoon for the Mexican, for he had conceived a happy plan, and it required much work

to complete the details, but when six o'clock arrived Jose was nervously joyous, for all was well. He was at the depot when the train rolled under the shed, and waved his hand in a frantic welcome when he saw Layton descending the car steps.

"No, no, Señor Seb, no café this evening," he remonstrated when Layton, after the greetings, had suggested that they dine before going home. "I have—but wait until you get home." He laughed and nodded his head. "You have been in the wilderness; you must come home now."

He laughed again in his boyish way and Layton, smiling at the Mexican's enthusiasm, permitted himself to be led to a car, and soon the two were rattling toward the bachelor apartments the lawyer called home. The clang of the trolley gong sounded as a welcome back from a life which was very different from that to which he was returning; the shrill cries of the newsboys were piping at the corners, and occasionally one of the Arabs would make a dash for the car, look in, shout his plaintive offering and then spring from the speeding car and board one going in the opposite direction; automobiles whizzed by with hoarse honks; on

the sidewalk wandering minstrels with violins and harp alternately played and collected.

"By George, it's nice to get back here, Jose!" laughed Seb. "I've had some curious dreams—they must be dreams; they don't seem real, just now—but I'm waking up, all right, Jose." A sudden flash of memory brought the faint scent of a rose bush and the vision of a girl who stood beside it, a girl with eyes in whose depths flames slumbered, and whose lips were as the poppy. "I didn't come home a day too soon, though, Jose," he added in a lower tone.

"The days have been long, Señor Seb," responded Jose, simply, entirely misconstruing Layton's thought. But he could not know of the rose bush and the girl.

And Seb, too, forgot her at once. Or he thought he did. She did not fit into the present at all well, but now and then he found himself picking out this or that one on the street and comparing her with Tess Barr. Then he would forget once more and rejoice that he was back into the world that throbbed.

When they left the car Jose took the traveling case and led the way to the house. Seb called to him once or twice, but Jose only looked back and laughed nervously and hurried on

ahead. Layton was at his heels, though, when the Mexican threw open the door of the little reception room, and Seb paused with an exclamation, for ranged about the room were five young men in evening dress, all smiling, and each holding in upraised hand a slender-stemmed glass containing something that sparkled.

"Welcome home from the hills!" they chorused as he stepped into the room. "Here's how!"

As they spoke every glass went to lip, and the contents were drained, while he stood before them laughing. Then he reached for the hand nearest him.

"Ned Wyer!" he exclaimed. "It's jolly of you—and the other boys," he added, clasping hands with another.

"It was that precious Jose," responded Wyer. "He's been moping during the weeks of your absence, and so he called me up and asked me to invite a few of the boys you like to welcome you home."

Seb turned and saw Jose standing in the doorway, his dark face aglow with pleasure. Layton started toward him, but a mist suddenly blurred the Mexican's eyes and he turned and

fled. Wyer took Layton by the arm and led him to a sallow-cheeked man who stood in the background.

"I want to introduce my friend, Thompson," said Wyer. "He's with the Falls City Bank, you know, but he says he has never met you."

"No, we have never met," assented Layton, taking the bony, clammy hand Thompson extended.

"I have heard much of Mr. Layton," said Thompson, suavely.

"Have you?" Layton laughed. "Please do not repeat it, even if there are no ladies present."

"The ladies will come later—after the Gaiety completes its 'refined vaudeville' program. The carriages will be there—now, never mind, Seb, I have arranged it all."

Layton had broken in with an exclamation of protest that was misconstrued by Wyer.

"They're a radiant bunch, too," declared a young man with a pate rapidly growing bald, and whose red eyes were some evidence of his knowledge of the facts in the case. He took off his eye-glasses and twirled them by the silk cord. "Right here and now, though, I want

to notify all of you fellows that Juanita, the Spanish toe-dancer, is my especial claim. I sent her a bunch of roses this afternoon."

"Good Lord, Ned, there mustn't be any orgie here!" groaned Seb, turning to Wyer.

"Why, certainly not. Just a few of the live ones in to help keep things gay. There will be no dancing on the table, nor anything of that kind. But Jose left it to me, and I knew your weakness—you Puritan."

Wyer flung his arm about Layton's shoulder in an affectionate way and laughed heartily.

"My weakness? You choose your words well, Ned. No wonder you are a political power and the State chairman."

Seb joined in the laugh and then after a few moments of quip and jest with the party, he asked to be excused long enough to get into other attire.

"If you don't mind, I'll go with you," said Wyer. "I want to talk to you a few moments."

"Of course—I may need you to chase collar buttons under the dresser. Nothing ever gets away from you, they say. The rest of you fellows whoop it up as you choose. There are cigars in that other room—and you seem to

have already found other things. The piano, there, is actually in tune. Billy Norton, the piano is where you shine. Call in Jose. He sings some perfectly marvelous love songs in Spanish. Ask him for '*Tormento de Amor*.' Come on, Ned."

They left the laughing, chatting group and went to Layton's bedroom, where Seb threw off his clothing, and Wyer smoked a cigarette while the other took a hasty plunge in the bath tub. Then Layton began hurrying into his evening clothes.

"I suppose you were surprised to find Thompson here," suggested Wyer.

"Frankly, I was. But any one you invite to my den is welcome. You know that."

Wyer blew a smoke ring, and then nodded.

"Yes, I know it. That's one reason I brought Thompson. I knew you would stand for anything I did, even if you do hate Nelson. I took advantage of your hospitality, Seb, to play a little politics. There's my confession."

"No explanation required, though if it concerns Nelson and Thompson I confess that I am wildly curious."

"I thought so." Wyer drew at the cigarette a moment. "Nelson is fighting the regulars—

the organization, you know. He's after Garrison, and the organization is backing Garrison. There are certain reasons why it is advisable to send him back to the Senate. Of course, he has dreams of bigger game—but he'll wake up after a while and discover that his pipe is out."

"Yes, I know something of his hopes, but I know enough of him to feel that it would be a calamity should he become President."

Wyer sat silent for a moment, apparently in deep thought.

"Well," he said, at last. "As for that, Garrison would do as well as any one. He's a capable man, all right. Of course, being acquainted with him, you know all of the spots and flaws, while the rest of the country regards Granville Garrison as an irreproachable being, a man of great learning, of broad citizenship—and all of that. These virtues you attribute to some other man—some one whom you do not know. But the chances are that those who know him best see in him the same faults you see in Garrison. My boy, so-called great men are merely clay—just the same as you and I. They have been sired by men and mothered by women. Why, even I am placed upon a ped-

estal by hundreds, just because adroit wire-pulling and a chain of circumstances have made me State chairman and State boss. And yet—(he blew two smoke wreaths)—I have a notion to enter the lists against Norton for Juanita's favors this night. She—ah-h, listen!"

The tinkle of the piano had been heard, and now a man's voice arose in a plaintive Spanish love song:

*"Tormento de amor, passion que devora,
Tu marchi traves la fuente de mi vida!"*

"That's Jose," said Seb. "Take care that he doesn't capture the charming señorita."

"By George, I'd like to have him teach me that song," laughed Wyer.

"Nelson's out of town."

Layton spoke rather suggestively as the other sat listening to the song.

"I know it. That's the reason I brought Thompson." Wyer arose and went to Layton's side. "Seb," he said, almost in a whisper, "the Falls City Bank is a damned fraud!"

In spite of the fact that the lawyer had suspected this of late, the declaration startled him, and the fact showed in his face.

"I'm sure of it," vowed Wyer, notir his

companion's surprise. "Warren Nelson is playing a desperate game of finance, and there's going to be a crash there that will sweep away the life's savings of hundreds of people in this community."

"I—I look surprised, I suppose," stammered Layton, "but I'm not, except that you should know this. I've been digging into Nelson's affairs, and I believe he is walking on a crust. He has got Joe Bronson, a millionaire, for cashier now—"

"But this Bronson is a dupe of the wily old Nelson," broke in Wyer. "I have met Bronson—made it my business to, you know—and he's being duped. Devil of a good fellow, too, Bronson is, but he has never done anything but ramble around and spend money, and Nelson has him fooled. Besides, he's in love with Nelson's daughter."

Seb sat down to put on his shoes, and now with one on his foot and the other in his hand, he looked up at Wyer.

"That last is enough to make a fool of a sane man, isn't it, Ned?"

"Oh, I don't know," Wyer laughed. "I'm a bachelor, of course, but I have frequent attacks. I fall in love hard enough, the good

Lord knows, but I always remember, just in time to keep from proposing, that in all probability I'll be just as desperately in love with some other girl two months later. And I generally am."

"Tormento de amor, passion que devora."

He sang the words awkwardly. "I don't know the meaning of a blessed word of that, but it sounds like a fellow swearing his love. No, Bronson's a good fellow, and the soul of honor, but he's in love."

"And so Thompson is the automaton that does Nelson's bidding while Bronson sighs at Frances Nelson's feet and unconsciously dazzles the public because of the fact that he is a millionaire."

Wyer nodded.

"Precisely. But I knew Thompson before Nelson did. To-night both Nelson and Bronson are absent from the city; Thompson's family has gone east; his conscience has been troubling him recently—never mind how I know it; I have been after this Nelson via Thompson, and I know." He again walked to Seb, and, bending down, said: "Thompson is my game to-night!"

Layton looked up into the other's face, and indecision shone in his eyes. Then he dropped his gaze to the floor and stamped his foot, as though his shoe were uncomfortable.

"I suppose that is the reason you did not bring Senator Garrison. Or would he condescend to visit my humble apartments?"

He laughed shortly, and there was no mirth in the laugh. Wyer tossed the cigarette stub into an ash tray.

"Garrison would be glad to come, and you know it. Maybe he doesn't care a damn about you personally, but you are valuable to him, and he's too good a politician to drop a single wire. That's one reason—and it's plenty. But he is not in town, anyway."

"Not in town?" asked Layton in surprise.

"No. He left Saturday evening." He looked quizzically at Seb. "Campaigning a little, you know." Another slight pause. Then he flung out his arms and shook his head. "There's another sample of common clay beneath a halo. It will cost the organization a mighty useful Senator if he doesn't cut loose from her. She—but it's useless. The crash is bound to come some time, but I hope we can stave it off for a while."

Seb arose and stared at Wyer in astonishment.

"'She'?"

The question was plain.

"Why, haven't you heard?" asked Wyer.

"No—nothing of that kind. But let it go, Ned. I'm not a muck-raker."

Wyer smiled broadly.

"I know you are not. It's a good place for you—and perhaps me—to flash the Golden Rule, isn't it? It's scandal, Seb, and it doesn't belong in either of our categories of faults. I don't care anything about Garrison's business, so far as he is concerned, but it is going to smash the organization, and the organization is what I am fighting for. He was named as co-respondent at the divorce trial, and it cost him a pretty penny to hush it. And now—"

"The liaison continues. Shocking!"

There was mockery in Layton's tone, but Wyer only shrugged his shoulders.

"But Thompson?" asked Seb. "This bank deal means ruin to him, doesn't it? And he has an invalid wife, too, and children." He turned toward Wyer. "Prison for Thompson, death for his frail wife, and disgrace for his children! God! It's a price!"

"Well, we didn't incur the debt, did we?"

"No." Seb leaned against the dresser, his hands jammed into his pockets. His gaze was on the floor. "No," he repeated, his voice low, "we are simply arranging to collect."

The tinkle of the piano came to them again, and Wyer turned to the door.

"I'll join the bunch," he said, unsmiling.

Layton remained leaning against the dresser, his hands still deep in his pockets, and gradually a furrow showed between his eyes. Finally he straightened up and walked slowly to his suit-case. Opening it, he took therefrom a package of papers, glanced through them quickly, and then went to a small safe in one corner of the room, in which he placed the papers, and gave the combination a whirl after closing the safe door.

"We simply collect," he muttered.

It was a merry company he found a few minutes later when he appeared in immaculate evening dress, and at once he threw himself into the soul of the gayety. It was arranged that the supper should be postponed until the arrival of those who were for the time being engaged in presenting "refined vaudeville" to an indifferent public.

"They always have elephantine appetites," remarked Wyer, "so we may as well feed them good and heavy. Maybe they can't drink as much if we stuff them full of wild goose and lobster."

"Wild goose!" exclaimed Seb.

"Yes. This is a real, for-sure feed. Billy Norton actually bagged half a dozen last week while he was over in Idaho, and he's been keeping them in cold storage waiting for something to turn up. When he heard you were coming home, he insisted on providing wild goose for this feed, and Jose is fixing them. I suppose he'll garnish them with red pepper and garlic, but that ought to make a hit with Juanita."

The order to Rietzmillers had been a generous one, and by the time the trio arrived from the Gaiety, half a dozen gentlemen in spike-tailed coats were singing boisterously in as many different keys, while Billy Norton, he of the bald pate and eye-glasses, beat enthusiastically upon the keys of the piano. In the midst of this, Jose suddenly struck a string of Chinese chimes suspended near the doorway, and called:

"La señoritas!"

For an instant a hush fell, as the singers

turned and blinked at the brilliantly gowned ones fresh from the halls of "refined vaudeville." The doorway seemed a mass of dancing plumes as the enormous picture hats were bobbed here and there by the human birds of paradise, and beneath the plumes and gay chiffon, penciled eyebrows arched and startlingly red lips curved into smiles. On their cheeks were blushes that naught but soap and water could remove.

"Good Lord," whispered Wyer in that instant of pause: "It looks like a band of hostiles on the warpath!"

The next moment there was a rush of masculine feet, and six men led three women into the room, each clutching at a hand and begging them of the scarlet lips and perpetual blushes to take off their hats and be comfortable. Billy Norton had flung himself at a petite brunette whose coal black hair was adorned with a tip-tilted creation of maroon, and who wore a lavender gown, in the bodice of which was a cluster of blood red roses. But he was too late. Wyer and the now hilarious Thompson closed about her and led her away, while Billy struggled in the crush, and finally seized the hand of a blonde who wore baby blue and a

smile that if seen across the footlights probably would have carried the effect of innocence, but which was as a yawning sepulchre when viewed at arm's length.

As the beings of the spike-tailed coats led the beings of the picture hats into the room, she of the lavender and maroon caught the eye of Norton. Instantly Billy waved his hand frantically.

"Juanita! Juanita!" he shouted. "*Buenos noches!*"

"*Buenos tardes!* you chump!" laughed Seb in Billy's ear. "You bade her good-night."

"Thunder! I didn't mean that!" exclaimed the dismayed Norton, dropping the blonde and turning to Layton. "Quick, give me some of that lingo and I'll hand it to her!"

"Try, '*Como esta usted.*' That means, 'How are you?' "

"Not very poetical, is it, Seb? It doesn't sound like moonlight and guitars."

But Layton had passed on to join the others, who were now in one large group, and Norton quickly did likewise. Juanita was the center of the group, and presently Billy squirmed his way to her side.

"*Como esta usted?*" he said, jerkily.

She laughed at him and boxed his ears with a light tap.

"Ain't this Mr. Norton?" she asked. "I was dead sure it was, though I ain't never seen you except over the footlights, and you wasn't togged out like this down at the Gaiety."

"*Si, señorita,*" he answered dazedly. Then a frown settled on his face. "Aren't you Spanish, after all?" he blurted.

Again she laughed, and Norton swore savagely under his breath.

"Not on your life, I ain't," she replied. "Don't pass me the tamales, Billy dear. They told me your name was Billy."

"The devil they did! Who did?"

"The bunch down at the theater when I showed 'em my roses. 'Juanita' is hot stuff on the program, though, ain't it?"

Norton growled something in reply, but it was lost in a shout of laughter as he turned and began his attentions to the girl in baby blue.

It was not long until Jose summoned them to the dining-room, and arm in arm they marched in, each representative of "refined vaudeville" with a courtier on either side of

her. The sight of the roast goose resting amid the splendor of the table decorations aroused a memory in the mind of Wyer and he began to sing. The others caught the spirit, and, circling around the table, they roared out an old nursery song:

"Go tell Aunt Rhoda,
Go tell Aunt Rhoda,
Go tell Aunt Rhoda,
Her old gray goose is dead!"

Wyer caught Seb's eye and smiled in a satisfied way as he gave a slight nod toward Thompson, who, with his sallow cheeks marvelously ruddy, was bending close to Juanita and singing with all of his might:

"The one she'd been saving,
The one she'd been saving,
The one she'd been saving
To make a feather bed!"

With a burst of laughter the song ended, and the company sat down. Glasses were filled, and Wyer made a speech, welcoming Layton back to Spokane, to which Seb replied that it was good to be back. Then he took up the carving set.

"This is just a family affair, remember," he said, "and each has the right to file his claim for whatever portion he desires."

The supper proceeded, until Billy Norton mounted his chair and announced his intention of singing a song.

"Sing it in Spanish," suggested Wyer.

"Knocker!" growled Norton and hopped down from the chair in a flash of anger.

"Gentlemen, I want to give a toast," cried Thompson, rising to his feet. "Here's to Juanita, the fairest rose that ever bloomed in Spain—"

"Rats!" said Norton.

"—that ever bloomed in Spain," repeated Thompson. "And the—"

"Señor Thompson is wanted at the telephone!" called Jose from the doorway.

The assistant cashier hesitated, with glass upraised, and then placing it on the table, he excused himself and lurched unsteadily from the room. His excuses could have been spared, however, for, with the exception of Seb and Wyer, it is doubtful if any of the group gave him a thought.

A few minutes later Thompson came back into the room. The flush was gone from his

checks, but a wild light was in his eyes. He signaled Wyer and tapped Seb on the shoulder, and they followed him into another room.

"I have to leave," he said. "There's hell in banking circles!"

"What is it, Thompson?" asked Wyer, eagerly.

The assistant cashier shook his head, while he clasped and unclasped his hands nervously.

"I don't know. There's to be a meeting at midnight. Something has crashed in New York, and there'll be the devil to pay to-morrow. They got the dispatch an hour ago and have been trying to locate me. Nelson's out of town, you know."

He called a cab, after which, pale of cheek and fiery of eye, he reached out to shake hands, and once more his palm was clammy. Then he went down the stairs and out into the night.

CHAPTER XX

MORE THAN THE FLOWERS

MIDNIGHT was a fast fading memory when Layton became aware that the party had dwindled to three—Juanita, Wyer, and himself. They had sung, quip and jest had played like the darting of lightning, Juanita had danced many times—once a marvelous performance of the fandango while Jose clicked a set of treasured castanets, and had shouted his delight, only to fling his castanets into a corner and take himself from the room in a fury of disgust when she replied in the patois of the gutter.

One by one they had shaken Seb's hand and slipped away, until he now awakened to the fact that only Wyer and the dancer remained with him. She had been very entertaining in her way; her physical charms were many, and she had a certain lively wit that interested. Scarcely aware of the fact, he had been tête-à-tête with her for much of the last hour, and the

departing ones had slipped out of the door with knowing nods and merry chuckles.

"Don't forget that the first show is at two this afternoon," whispered the girl in baby blue in Juanita's ear, and then ran laughing to where Billy Norton stood singing in a thick voice to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne":

"We're here because we're here because
We're here because we're here!"

Presently Seb observed Wyer approaching, hat and stick in hand.

"Good night, Seb," said Wyer. "Go away again soon, won't you, so you can come back again."

Layton reached out his hand, but suddenly jerked it back and glanced quickly about the rooms. Juanita was lolling indolently among the cushions of a divan and blowing cigarette smoke from between her crimson lips. Her eyes met his for an instant, and then the lashes drooped languorously and veiled the dilated pupils.

"Wait a moment, Ned," said Layton, and looked at the girl. "Juanita is going as soon as she finishes her cigarette. Won't you see her to a carriage?"

His voice was very calm and even, but as he turned and caught Wyer's look of astonishment, he smiled, and there was something of weariness in the curve of his lips, and a shadow flitted across his eyes. Juanita hurled the freshly lighted cigarette from her and sprang to her feet, her cheeks flaming still redder with anger.

"I'm ordered out, am I?" she exclaimed, and wheeled to Wyer. "Stand guard over the saint while I get my hat! Call a carriage, will you?"

"Mine is waiting for me," said Wyer. "I will put you into it. It can return for me. Mr. Layton will bear with me that long."

"Well, put him to bed before you leave, and be sure to tuck the covers around him nicely!" she sneered, snatching up her hat and jabbing viciously with its long pins.

Layton drew a bill from his pocket and handed it to her.

"We owe you that for your dancing. It was superb," he said.

She took the money, glanced at it, and then tucked it into her bosom.

"No, you needn't come," she said, as Wyer

stepped to her side. "I can find the cab myself."

The two men bowed, there was a flash of red and lavender under the hall light, and she was gone, leaving Wyer and Layton looking at each other half smiling.

"What's the answer, Seb?" asked Wyer, dropping into a chair and sprawling himself in the ungraceful way men have when seeking perfect ease.

"You mean—?"

Layton did not complete the sentence, but stooped and picked up Juanita's discarded cigarette and tossed it into an ash tray.

"Of course I do," responded the State chairman. "She's not Spanish, and her grammar is pigeon-toed—but she's a beauty, just the same. What color is your blood?"

Seb sat down on the divan and thrust the pillows aside, after which he tossed a cigar to Wyer and lighted one himself.

"My blood?" He studied the glowing end of the cigar. "The last time I saw it, it was smeared over my face, and it was good and red." He put the cigar to his lips and drew on it meditatively. "Do this, Ned." He placed one hand over his left eye, and Wyer,

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"STAND GUARD OVER THE SAINT WHILE I GET MY HAT!"
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wonderingly, did the same. "You can see one or two pictures on the wall now, and, without any contrast, they appear very attractive. Now take your hand away. Ah, I thought so. You are admiring this handsome painting now. But you couldn't see it before, could you?"

Wyer arose to his feet and stood anxiously studying the face of his friend a moment.

"I think you had better go to bed, Seb," he said, gravely. "The wine has gotten you to talking loony."

Layton laughed.

"Has it? Two small glasses—"

"Do you mean that was all you—"

"As I was saying," Seb interrupted, "two small glasses never before made me loony."

"Two! Well—say, you're Seb Layton, aren't you?"

The politician scanned the face of the lawyer closely, as though a doubt had come to his mind.

"Let's not spar any longer," said Layton. "I'm neither drunk nor crazy, and it isn't worth while to dig up any other theories. How did you make out with Thompson? I noticed that you clung to him all evening."

"You bet I did." Wyer seated himself, and

a satisfied smile came to his lips. "And he talked, too—in drunken parables that were as plain as a First Reader lesson. I kept sober, myself."

"How about this midnight conference of bankers?"

"I don't know, but I imagine that there has been a lot of wild-catting done by all of them, and they have heard the trumpet sound for the day of judgment. This was a wild day on Wall Street, you know."

Layton shook his head.

"No, I don't know. I haven't seen a paper for three days."

"Well, I'm not onto all of the curves of high finance, but it seems that several million barrels of water were squeezed out of Amalgamated Something-or-Other, or Consolidated This-or-That. Any way, stocks went to smash, and the evening papers say that the Street was almost in a panic at the close of business, and that several banking institutions were in danger of being driven to the wall by the unexpected squeeze."

"No wonder Thompson's eyes were wild when he left."

A cunning smile played about Wyer's lips.

"I should say not. There are breakers ahead for all of them, and the Falls City gang is in a hell of a fix if I'm any judge! You'll hear of Nelson blowing his brains out—mark the prophecy!"

Layton straightened up in his chair, his cheeks suddenly grown ashen, while a strange flame seemed to be playing in his eyes.

"Do you believe that?" he asked, huskily. "Will he suicide?"

"It's a way those chaps have. They play fast and loose with other people's money until they are cornered, and then they try powder and lead."

Seb arose to his feet and paced the room for a moment, Wyer watching him curiously.

"Powder and lead!" muttered the lawyer, half audibly. "Powder and lead—and a hole in the temple!" He laughed harshly, and there was that in his tone that caused Wyer to study his face more closely, while a strange misgiving stole to the politician's mind. Layton stopped in front of the State chairman and his eyes blazed into those before him. "A hole in the temple—ay, a pretty thing it would be,

Ned, speckled with powder, and shaded from a deep purple to a gruesome black where the blood oozed!"

"For God's sake, Seb, what ails you?" A cold sweat broke out on Wyer's brow as he sprang to his feet. "Your nerves are bad. Go to bed, won't you? I will stay here with you to-night."

Again the harsh laugh came from Layton's lips, as he waved his hand toward a chair, and sat down again, himself.

"I'm sorry to worry you, old fellow. I know you think I'm *locoed*, but—Oh, it's simply because you don't understand. Sit down. I want more about Nelson."

"Well, he's been playing the bank for himself, to be brief. Let's go to bed."

"Nixy. You don't stay here. Why, you blessed old granny, you'd be feeling my pulse and studying my eye pupils every half hour to see if my brain was becoming normal. As I get it from Garrison, Nelson is selling the bonds of his private enterprises to the Falls City Bank."

"Exactly. He approves the bonds, directs Thompson to draw the checks to a fictitious party, and then Nelson checks against the

straw man's account. It's delightfully simple—as long as the skies are serene."

"Which they have been, but no longer are."

Wyer made a gesture indicative of indifference.

"Be honest and you'll be happy," he paraphrased. "He has had his dance. The collectors are coming his way now."

"Meaning Garrison, and you, and me."

"What the devil is wrong with you to-night, Layton? I never knew you to be chicken-hearted before. You've been a hater—but you have lost your sand somehow." Wyer smote his knee with his fist. "No, we're not the collectors that you are moaning about. We didn't smash things in Wall Street, did we? That's what has given hell a holiday."

"But Wall Street doesn't know about Nelson's juggling. Only we—Garrison, you, and I—know that. So far as Wall Street is concerned, the Falls City Bank has as good a fighting chance as the others."

"Of course. But we've got to down Nelson! He's got a strong hold on popularity, and he'll beat Garrison and tear the organization to flinders if we don't give him the ax. And here's where he gets it, I tell you!"

The jovial Wyer seemed to have disappeared, and in his chair sat the man who had dominated State politics for several years, the boss, the State chairman, his chin thrust forward aggressively, his mouth a straight line. But he was not dealing with a spoilsman nor with a schoolboy. The call to battle had ever been as music in the ears of the aggressive Layton.

"I suppose that's a challenge for a test of strength between you and me, is it?" Seb Layton's eyes were as steady as the sphinx, and as cold as the frost on a window pane. "Very well. I don't care a damn about your machine, Wyer!"

For an instant there was silence. Then the State chairman leaned back and laughed with a softer note.

"There's no sense in our quarreling. You'll see it all right when you get a good sleep. Something's got into your system down in the hills."

"Maybe you're right. Perhaps something did get into my system down in the hills. I recommend the Palouse if you will take a vacation yourself."

"None for me. But I'm going now. I'll

talk Nelson to you to-morrow—or to-day, for it's getting gray in the east. But don't be a fool, Seb. Nelson is a rascal, and you know it. He has juggled the people's money with his toy bank—and he has robbed them with this fake Nonesuch mine."

There was a slight movement of the silken draperies at the entrance of the dining-room. Layton saw it, and half started to his feet, but quickly dropped back into his seat, his eyes watching the curtain narrowly.

"I never was enthusiastic over the Nonesuch, myself," he said, still with his gaze on the now motionless folds of silk.

"Bah!" snorted Wyer. "I have had the Nonesuch investigated, and it's a rotten, robbing swindle—. What's wrong?"

With a spring, Layton had made for the curtains, and almost as Wyer's last words sounded, Seb had clutched the draperies and jerked them aside. At that instant, a lithe, brown-skinned figure collided with his body, and two glasses on a tray were sent spinning, their contents drenching both of them.

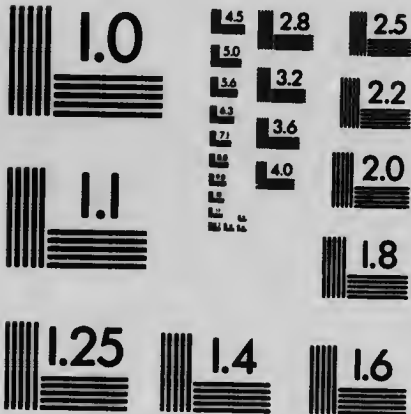
"*Jose!*" exclaimed Seb, sternly.

"*Santa Maria*, Señor Seb, you have spilled the mint I was bringing!"



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The Mexican's face was like chalk, though his black eyes were as miniature volcano craters. Layton caught him by the shoulder and wheeled him face to face with himself, but the Mexican looked at the floor while he held the silver tray with a clutch that raised the muscles of his wrist.

"Never mind the mint, Jose. You may go!"

Jose hesitated for the space of a breath, then snatched up his glasses and vanished with the stealthy tread of a panther.

"What caused that wild leap?" queried Wyer.

"Oh, I heard Jose coming and I got a foolish idea. That's all. I had some creepy experiences down in the Palouse, and they got on my nerves, I suppose."

"Something has gotten on your nerves, that's sure. I'm blessed if I heard that little savage coming. The hills must have helped your ears." He laughed in his old way and arose. "I think I hear my carriage below, so I'll go. I hope Juanita didn't set a spring gun for me."

After Wyer had gone, Layton turned out the lights and went to his bedroom. The recent rains had again swollen the river, and its turbulent sweep brought the voice of the falls

to him now as he stood at his window, gazing out at the stars that shone brightly through the first faint pallor the coming dawn had given the night.

"Nature isn't God, after all," he said, reflectively. "The falls roar just as they always do when the waters are high, and the stars shine just as brightly. There is no sympathy in either. And to-day the birds will sing just as carelessly, the flowers will bloom just the same whether man is happy or man is sorrowing. Nature doesn't care. A fellow has got to have something beyond that, something with sympathy in it!"

He turned away and threw off his coat and removed his collar, but the voice of the falls called, and he again stood at the window.

"Wyer said something had gotten into my system down in the hills. I tried to remember some of those things that preacher said, but I couldn't. Wyer wouldn't understand, anyway, without Tess."

Another period of silent staring out into the night. Then he went to a trunk, and from its depths took a Bible. He sat down and mused over the inscription on the flyleaf:

"To Seb, from mother."

A blur came before his eyes, and the letters seemed swimming in mist.

"From mother." He whispered the words. "She fell asleep with her hand in mine—and I have said that Nature is all! That means that she who wrote those words is nothing but dust. It isn't true—I know it isn't. She was more than the flowers or the trees. She went from me, but she left me this—and I have hidden it away. I wonder if she knows that I hid it—and that I have taken it up at last!" He stared at the book and fingered the pages, but always he turned back to those words on the flyleaf. "At last," he repeated.

There was a tap at the door and in response to his call, Jose entered. The Mexican's cheeks had regained their color, but the fiery gleam still showed in his eyes.

"Señor Seb, is anything wanted?"

"No. You may go to bed. I will in a moment."

The youth bowed.

"*Buenos noches*," he said, and turned away.

"Jose!"

The Mexican paused, and hesitatingly faced Layton. The word, quietly spoken as it had

MORE THAN THE FLOWERS

been, had carried much to the youth's intuition.

"Señor?" he queried.

Seb sat studying the other's face for a moment, and noted his uneasiness of manner.

"Jose, you were listening behind that curtain!"

The red flooded the Mexican's swarthy cheeks.

"I was bringing the mint, Señor Seb, and stopped just a moment to arrange the glasses."

"You are lying, Jose. That's the first lie you ever told me, too, isn't it?"

A moment the youth hesitated, and then with a sob, he threw himself at Layton's feet and clasped him about the knees.

"Si, si, by the Cross, it is the first lie!" he cried. "I heard him speak of Señor Nelson, and I listened. You know why. The None-such! And Señor Wyer said—Oh, you know—you know!"

Layton laid his hand on the Mexican's shoulder and patted it in a friendly way.

"Yes, I know, Jose. I'll not scold. It's not scolding we need in this world, Jose; it's sympathy. Now go to bed. You needn't call me. I'm tired, and will sleep late. *Buenos noches!*"

Jose arose slowly to his feet, and stood looking into Layton's face, adoration showing in his own eyes.

"*Buenos noches!*" he said, and left the room.

Layton's eyes again dropped to the book he held in his hand.

"It was the Ninety-fourth Psalm that he read," he said, and turned the pages until he came to the Psalm, which he read through. Then he glanced through it again. "I'll not hide it again," he said.

"*When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.*"

"That's better than the fragrance of flowers or the voice of a river," he mused. "Tess said something about a chrysalis, and—." He did not finish, but sat for a long time engrossed with the images his fancy gave him.

At last he arose and prepared for bed. He was about to turn out the light, when he noticed a patent leather slipper resting on the mantel. It was very dainty and pretty, but he frowned as he walked over and took it in his hands. On the inside he saw, "F. B." in red silk. Turning, he tossed it into the waste basket, after which he snapped out the lights and sought slumber.

CHAPTER XXI

A WOMAN'S FOOL

IT was early in the day—a day that American bankers will not soon forget—that Warren Nelson's great touring car left Judge West's home down in the Palouse hills, and whirled away in a mad dash for Spokane. A boy had galloped out from Whitman bearing a telegram that should have reached the financier the night before.

In the driver's seat sat Nelson, his face as gray as his mustache, but his jaws were hard set, and the car was sent plunging along the uneven road, up hills and down into the valleys, with all of the reckless speed its engines could develop. In the seat behind Nelson were Joe Bronson and Frances, for the girl had read the alarm in her father's face and had insisted on returning to the city with him.

With the siren bellowing its warning, the car had swept across the Pine Creek bridge, turned into the main street of Whitman with a speed

that sent the car skidding in a terrifying way, and then, having clung to the road in some marvelous manner, it flashed through the village with the speed of an express train, narrowly escaping collisions with vehicles, and while those of the town were still shouting in alarm the flying automobile was climbing the hill to the north of the town; the sunlight glinted on it an instant, and then it sped down into the little valley and went springing and lurching and whirring on its way, the siren crying its alarm and demand for the right of way.

Once Bronson arose and leaned toward Nelson to expostulate, but Frances clutched him by the arm and drew him back.

"All right, we'll die together!"

She smiled at his words and a tint of red showed in her cheeks that had been bloodless. But the man who crouched over the steering wheel seemed not of blood and flesh; he might have been carved of marble or fashioned of steel. He spoke no word; he gave no sign; for no instant did his eyes falter from the roadway that lay ahead one breath and shot beneath the car the next. The hand of the gauge told off the miles with a rapid sweep,

and at last the outer limits of Spokane were sighted. Then Nelson spoke.

"The time, Bronson?" he shouted, his gaze still on the road.

Joe took out his watch and, leaning forward, held the dial before the banker. A nod was the reply, and Bronson replaced the watch. Scarcely had he done so than there was a report like the sound of a rifle shot, and one of the rear wheels began pounding and grating over the hard road.

"A punctured tire!" yelled Joe, but Nelson gave no heed.

Scattered houses appeared here and there and the road became a long, irregular street, but with hoarse bellowings the car tore onward, the crippled wheel jarring in an ominous way at every uneven spot. Quickly the panorama whirling by them brought closer and larger clusters of dwellings and then one hand shifted from the steering wheel to the throttle, the car being now so far into the city that a more moderate speed was a necessity, but still they dashed on at a pace that carried a constant threat of tragedy. Deeper and deeper into the city they sped, and slower and slower the car was driven, but even the last few blocks were

reeled off at a speed that caused policemen to shout and others to pause and stare at the reckless flight. With a sweep, the car drew up in front of the Falls City Bank, and Nelson, pallid of face, stepped to the curb.

"What time is it, Joe?" he asked, hoarsely.

"Five minutes after nine, and—"

"Take Frances home and then come to the bank."

"Hadn't I better call a carriage for her and stay here?"

Nelson shook his head.

"No. Take her home. You'll be back in time."

He turned and walked toward the door, but his steps were unsteady. Bronson drew out his handkerchief and mopped the cold perspiration that was standing out on his brow. He took the driver's seat, but in doing so he found that his legs were awfully weak and his hands unsteady. Frances had collapsed and was huddled down in the seat, pale and battling with nervous sobs. Joe tried to speak to her, but his throat had grown suddenly dry, and his words were broken gasps. Then he faced to the front and drove slowly down Riverside Avenue.

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It was ten o'clock when Seb Layton awakened. He found that Jose had placed the morning paper by his bedside, and with unusual eagerness he scanned the headlines. That which he sought was easily found, and he read of the wild day Wall Street had experienced on Monday; how the crash had come with a suddenness that had dazed even the veterans of the street; stocks had dropped like lead, and a lot of hungry speculators had seized the opportunity to attack and hammer the market until all stocks were wavering before the panic that had come from a clear financial sky, and only the arrival of the hour for the regular closing of business had saved the Street from the greatest crash and demoralization in its history. After this respite had come there had been a general rallying of all forces, and a note of optimism was now noticeable, said the New York dispatch. The kings of finance had carefully searched the bushes and found that the panic had been without cause, that they had been demoralized by a bugaboo. It was expected that the market would open firm on Tuesday morning, and all securities advance rapidly. It would be as the raiders had planned, but they had been successful in ham-

mering prices down; now they could not be prevented from reaping their harvest when prices rebounded to normal.

Layton yawned and threw the paper aside. Then he touched a bell and Jose came in.

"Toast and eggs and a cup of strong tea, Jose," he said. After which he arose and dressed.

After breakfast he telephoned Garrison's office, but he was told that the Senator had not yet returned to the city. He went down to his office and threw up the windows. The place was fresh and free from dust; Jose had seen to that during Layton's absence. Unlocking the drawers of his desk, he whistled cheerily as he rummaged through various papers and looked them over, but the whistle died on his lips as he found a dainty envelope among the papers he had filed away, and for a full minute he sat looking at the envelope thoughtfully. He knew what its enclosure was, but finally he drew out the folded paper and glanced at the words penned in that peculiar feminine scrawl that is supposed to be the stamp of aristocracy. Then he struck a match and touched it to the paper, and, in turn, lighted his cigar from the burning note.

"'Ashes to ashes,'" he laughed. "And from this funeral pyre may there be no resurrection."

He watched the paper burn until there was barely a finger hold left. Then he threw it on the floor and stepped on it.

"The eternal present is the time to do things," he said. "I'll arrange to end this miserable affair."

Pulling his desk 'phone to him, he took down the receiver and made his call.

"Hello, Susan, this is Layton. Call Mrs. Benton, please." There was a moment of silence on his part while the receiver squeaked with the reply. "Not home? Um-m, left Saturday evening, eh? All right."

He hung the receiver back on its prongs, and was again interesting himself with his papers when he heard a tap at his open door and looked around to see Wyer standing there, cleanly shaven and looking fresh and composed. The State chairman came in at Layton's call and sat down.

"The financial skies are clearing, the papers state," said Layton, after a brief interval of rather awkward silence.

"Yes, the papers are fighting hard to stem

the torrent. They're a loyal bunch, all right. A few selfish ones in the newspaper world could precipitate a devil of a mess just now. They have been loyal, but it can't be smothered entirely."

"Can't be smothered? Ned, I haven't probed the thing like you have, and I have been down in the hills. Now tell me what is what."

"Well, the Street made a brave start this morning, but two of New York's biggest banks closed their doors at noon—there's four hours' difference in our time, you know—and the panic is on!"

Layton sat dumb for a few moments, a myriad of thoughts flashing through his brain.

"And of course that will hit Spokane. Confidence will be lost and—"

"That's all there is to it. There'll be just as much money here as there was, but nobody can tell what will happen next. The State headquarters got a long telegram. New York is crazy with rumors of coming failures, runs have started on the banks, and there is the devil to pay. The papers will have to handle it, of course."

"Of course."

Layton turned and looked out the window, but he did not see the buildings opposite. He saw a little frame church under the brow of a hill, and saw a patriarch in humble garb standing with uplifted hand while he read from a worn Bible:

"O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth."

"Of course," he repeated, turning again to Wyer. "The papers will have to handle it now—and we'll hear something drop."

Wyer nodded.

"And Nelson will be under it when it drops," he said, grimly. "If that confounded Garrison will only get back. Damn a politician who is fool enough to get mixed up with a woman! Garrison has been trying to trap Nelson with her, but I told him to cut that out. We've got Nelson without her help."

Layton arose and walked hastily to the window and stared down at the walk, but the move was intended simply to mask the sudden flood of suspicion that shot to his brain.

"Excuse me," he said, returning to his chair and turning a calm face to Wyer. "I thought I saw a fellow down there I have been watch-

ing for. This woman had Nelson 'landed' to a degree, at least, didn't she? For instance, a little supper out at a road house. What know you of that, Ned?"

He studied Wyer's face closely as he spoke.

"Oh, they were there, all right—and other places, too, but Nelson is a close-mouthed old devil, and she didn't worm much out of him."

Seb sat for a few moments without speaking, but the tapping of his finger against his cheek evidenced his mental activity. Finally he turned and faced Wyer squarely.

"Ned," he said, earnestly, "why didn't you tell me of this before? You know—I suppose everybody knows—that I have been wearing the cap and bells for her lately. And I never knew that I was just a common fool."

"Lord, Seb," gasped Wyer. "I thought that you knew! But last night I found that you didn't. I didn't like to spoil the night by telling you then, so I came to-day for that purpose. I'm glad you have seen the light."

"Yes, yes, Ned, I know how it is. A woman's fool is always the last to know. His friends think he is wise, and so they do not interfere lest the fool think them meddlers."

His enemies laugh and keep quiet for fear the show will end!"

His voice was heavy with bitterness, and Wyer reached out and laid a hand on his knee.

"Does it hurt, Seb?" he asked, softly. "I'm not blaming you. I have been too many different kinds of a fool, myself, for that."

The meek admission brought a full-throated laugh to Layton's lips.

"Hurt? No—and yes. No, so far as any bond between Florence Benton and myself is concerned; yes, when I think that I have been a monkey on a stick. See that charred paper?" He kicked the tiny fragment toward Wyer. "I finished the burial service just before you came in."

The State chairman glanced at his watch and arose.

"I have business on hand, but I wanted you to know the truth. Frankly, I despise Garrison and this mistress of his, but the organization needs him—and it needs him badly today. I hope they'll get back before evening."

He went away, and for a time Layton paced the office, his brow knit, but gradually the frown disappeared and a warm light shone in

his eyes. Finally he seated himself at his desk and attacked a pile of papers, and as he worked his whistle rang as cheerily as a schoolboy's. At one o'clock he closed the office and sought a café for lunch, and ate it with the noon edition of the *Journal* propped up before him. Wyer was right. The press had handled the story of the unaccountable panic in Wall Street, and the dispatches now were as gloomy as the morning ones had been optimistic.

Instead of returning to the office, after leaving the café, he went home. His rooms were silent and Jose could not be found. Layton went direct to the safe in his sleeping room and took from it the papers he had placed there the evening before, after which he left the apartments, and the same cheery whistle was on his lips. On the street he met men with the noon edition clutched in their hands as they hurried along with tense, drawn features; on the corners groups stood listening while one read the dispatches from New York. Even the cries of the newsboys seemed to bear a more plaintive note, a note that smacked of gloom and despair. He passed a National bank, and glancing in, he saw that the lobby was filled

with people crowding their way toward the paying teller's window.

"Nothing can stop it now!" he exclaimed, and hurried on.

He turned into the Falls City Bank, and found its lobby also filled with men and women, each struggling to get to the paying teller's window. A line had been formed, but many brawls were taking place because of the efforts of the frantic depositors to be first to the window. The paying teller was consuming an annoying amount of time with each depositor, quibbling, discussing, inspecting—anything that could possibly be used as an excuse to gain time, while he frequently glanced at the mammoth clock whose hands were all too slowly creeping toward the hour for closing. Turning down a corridor, Seb paused at a door marked, "President." An office boy in uniform lounged on an upholstered divan beside the door.

"Mr. Nelson is busy just now," said the boy.

"Well, take my card in and tell him—"

He paused, for from the room beyond there came sounds of a struggle, a crash as some heavy article of furniture was overturned, a

man's hoarse shout of alarm, and a cry of rage in a voice of higher pitch; an incoherent jumble of words.

Seb sprang past the boy and seized the knob, but the door was locked. Without an instant's hesitation, he threw his shoulder against it, the lock was torn from its place, and he staggered and almost went to his knees in the room with the force of his assault. But as the door had yielded he saw that which he knew he would see, Warren Nelson and Jose in a desperate struggle, a blade flashing in the hand of the Mexican, while the banker fought desperately to retain his clutch on Jose's wrist.

Recovering himself, Seb sprang at Jose, jerked him from Nelson's hold and flung him crashing into a corner, the dagger dropping from his hand. Layton kicked the weapon across the room.

"You savage!" he gasped.

Nelson had fallen back into a chair and was shrieking for the police. Jose arose to his knees.

"Santa Maria!" he cried. "Señor Seb, he rob me—he take my money for Nonesuch stock—he rob—"

"Never mind!" Layton slammed the door shut and placed a chair against it. "You must *vamos!* Here!"

He seized the screen and tore it from the window; then he jerked out his purse and threw it to the Mexican.

"*Vamos!*" he exclaimed again.

Jose snatched the purse and then sprang to the window.

"*A dios, Señor Seb!*" he said, softly, and then vaulted lightly through the window and was gone.

Nelson had struggled to his feet, but Seb pushed him back.

"You're helping a murderous devil escape!" cried the banker.

"I hope so," was the reply. "You made him a murderer in heart."

A policeman shoved his way into the room. Seb waved his hand toward the window.

"He went out that way!" he prompted. "He was a crazy Italian!"

The officer looked at Nelson, who nodded weakly, and muttered something the policeman did not hear, for he had rushed to the window. Seb leaned over Nelson.

"Send them away!" he said, sharply. "I have come to help you weather this thing! Send them away!"

The financier stared up into his face in amazement. His own cheeks were deathly white, and his hands were jerking convulsively. The officer turned to Nelson.

"Put them out!" said the banker, waving his hand toward the throng that had crowded in. "Come in, Joe!" he added, calling to Bronson, who was fighting his way through the crowd. Behind him came Frances.

"All right," said Layton. "Let them come in if you say so."

The policeman hustled the idlers out of the room and Nelson tottered forward to meet his daughter and Bronson. Seb glanced about the room. The president's desk had been wrecked in the struggle, and one drawer had been jerked out and was lying on the floor amid a litter of papers. Instinctively, Layton stooped to gather them up while Nelson was embracing Frances. Amid the litter an up-turned photograph caught his eye.

"Tess!" He snatched up the picture. The action was unseen, and he dropped it into his pocket.

Bronson came up to him and looked into his face.

"I don't like to believe that you were in this, Seb," he said, gravely. "But I don't understand your being here just at this time."

Layton's eyes met the other's for a moment, and a flash of anger shone in them, but it quickly faded.

"Well, I can't blame you, I suppose," he admitted. "But please examine these papers."

He took the package from his pocket and laid them on the disordered desk, and Nelson and Bronson glanced at them.

"Good God! Transfers of mortgages on the Northwestern right-of-way!" Nelson held one of the papers in his shaking hand. "Transferred to Granville Garrison!"

He tore the paper in two, but Bronson seized his hands and took the pieces from him.

"Not that, Mr. Nelson," he said, his face almost as pale as the banker's. "We've got to fight on the square if I'm in it!"

Layton had made no move to restrain Nelson, but laughed with a bit of mockery when the financier tore the mortgage in two. He

turned to Bronson as the latter took the paper from Nelson.

"Joe," said Seb, looking at the other approvingly. "You always were a man. I think this bank needs you."

"Thanks. I wish I could compliment you. But those papers ruin the Falls City Bank."

There was a moan from Frances, who had stood silently by, and she collapsed into a chair, burying her face in her arms on a table. Layton glanced at her.

"Do they? Why?" he asked.

"Because Garrison will find a way now to throw the road into the hands of a receiver, and this bank holds its bonds, as you know. I have been out to rally the bankers to our help. To-morrow all will adopt a limited payment rule with clearing house certificates. The Northwestern bonds were part of our securities, and I have prepared to turn in half a million of my own stocks as securities. The banks must stand together to prevent the run to-morrow. If Garrison shows these, the clearing house will reject the Northwestern bonds. You have finished Nelson, and that is what you've been after for years!"

He spoke in a dull, apathetic manner, and Nelson stood leaning against the desk, his body swaying slightly. Frances raised her head and regarded Layton with silent contempt. A faint flush of red was showing in the lawyer's cheeks.

"You are right," he answered. "I have been after Nelson for years, and I fully understand what those transfers mean. The run will start in the morning. You and all of the rest are fighting to prevent it this afternoon. The other banks must agree to the clearing house plan to save you and themselves if you can produce the securities. If you cannot, down goes the Falls City Bank, and the others must fight for their lives." He paused and nodded again. "Yes, it is clear that Garrison will go back to the Senate!"

Frances arose to her feet.

"Mr. Layton," she said, slowly. "I never before begged for anything, but I am going to now. In the name of all I thought you were I am going to beg you to—"

"Please do not," he answered. "It is useless, for I have quite decided. Joe, please return the papers to me."

There was an instant's hesitation, a moment that was tense, and then Bronson reached out and handed the packet to him.

"You can fix the torn one," he said.

Layton held the papers for a few breaths and then he laid them in Nelson's hands.

"Burn them!" he exclaimed, huskily.

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CHAPTER XXII

MASTERING A SENATOR

LAYTON remained in his rooms that night, expecting that Jose would return, but at midnight the Mexican had not come, so Seb went to bed, leaving the door unlocked. His slumber was uneasy and at dawn he arose. Jose had not come. He breakfasted at a café, and listened indifferently to the wagging tongues that were busy with the news of the panic.

All banks opened on time, but the depositors waiting to draw out their balances were balked by the freshly printed placards hung over the paying tellers' windows announcing the agreement perfected at last night's conference of the bankers, an agreement that restricted the payments to a small sum, for which clearing house certificates were issued. Men with large deals half completed were frantic in their demands for cash with which to complete the transactions, but the bankers were obdurate.

The agreement once swept aside would have precipitated a run that would soon have exhausted the available cash in the vaults of the banks. Until the New York institutions released their clutch on currency, western banks were helpless.

Garrison had not yet returned, but Layton was informed at the Senator's office that he would be in town that evening.

"It's going to be a pleasant interview," muttered Layton, as he left the Eagle's Nest.

The day was a busy one for him. He called on other attorneys and held earnest consultations, and finally about the middle of the afternoon he turned his steps once more toward his office, and again he was whistling happily as if some weighty problem had been successfully met. Ahead of him he saw a familiar figure lurching unsteadily along the street. The man turned into a cheap saloon and Layton followed. The other was seated at a table with a glass before him, when the lawyer walked in and took a seat opposite him.

"How do you do, Mr. Barr?"

The rancher stared at him in surprise, the squinty eyes studying him closely.

"Huh! Didn't expect to see you here," he grunted.

"Nor did I expect to see you here. They told me you would keep your oath not to drink while that tree stood."

Coyote Barr grinned, and nodded tipsily.

"I sure did, too," he replied. "But after the weddin' I cut the damned tree down! Huh! Coyote Barr never broke no oath, you can bet—"

"The wedding?" Layton sprang to his feet and leaned across the table, his breath coming in sharp intakes. "The wedding?" he repeated.

"Sure! Tess and Dan—"

Layton clutched him by the shoulder and jerked him forward until their faces were close together.

"You don't mean that Tess and Dan are married!"

His words came with a snarl.

"The hell I don't!" Barr wrenched himself free from Layton's clutch. "Keep your cussed hands off me!"

Layton dropped his hands to the table, but stood staring down into the squinty eyes.

"When?" he asked.

"Yesterday noon. Then I cut that damne tree down an' left so they could honeymoon. I come to Spokane last night."

"And left your daughter with that brute?"

Barr blinked his squinty eyes at Layton a moment and then laughed in a maudlin way.

"Say, I didn't like you a cussed bit, but maybe I sized you up wrong." He turned and beckoned to the bartender. "Take a drink on the weddin' of my—my daughter."

"No, I have quit drinking!"

Layton dropped back into his chair. The rancher chuckled.

"Where's your tree?" he asked. He laughed again, and emptied his glass. "Say, that's funny—about my daughter." He rested his elbows on the table and blinked at the man before him. "I ain't the daddy of no *siwash*!"

Layton's hands clenched spasmodically and the color fled from his cheeks.

"Tess a *siwash*!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "You're a liar!"

For a moment the two looked into each other's eyes.

"I ain't got no gun," rasped Barr, "or I reckon you'd eat them words. Ain't she

siwash? Not full blood—nor quarter blood—but her mother was quarter blood *siwash* an' the rest Canadian!"

Seb reached a trembling hand toward the glass the bartender had filled, and raised it half way to his lips, and then lowered it to the table untouched.

"And her father?"

"Warren Nelson!"

The glass broke in Layton's clutch and the liquor that ran over the table was reddened with blood from his lacerated fingers, but he swept the broken glass aside and gave no heed to the blood.

"Sam Barr," he said, his tone low and deadly calm, "I haven't believed much in a hell, but there must be one, after all. There's got to be some place where you will be at home."

"I ain't lyin'," mumbled Barr. "How'd you reckon she got her schoolin'? Nelson paid the bill! He's always paid the bills, an' I'm goin' to make him *potlatch* some more *chickamin* to-day. I've took good care of his brat ever since me an' the old woman took her from the tepee over on the Nez Perces reservation after her ma died."

"Tess never knew?"

"She does now. I told her Monday."

"And she married Dan on Tuesday!"

The rancher nodded.

"Huh! You was raisin' hell about that wasn't you? Dan ain't no great shucks, but ain't he as good as she is?"

"God!" He swept his hand across his brow. "She may be part *siwash*, but she's as far from him as—." He did not finish the sentence, but arose slowly to his feet. "What's the use of talking with you?"

He turned and walked away, his steps unsteady, though no drop of liquor had touched his lips. Coyote Barr called to him, but he did not look back.

He went along the street, his eyes staring and without seeing those who tried to speak to him, and who, after he had passed, his feet dragging wearily, whispered one to another that Seb Layton was at his old habits once more. He knew that Barr had spoken the truth; that Tess was the daughter of Warren Nelson. Numerous trivialities were recalled that pointed to the fact.

In his office he dropped into a chair and wiped the perspiration from his brow. His legs were strangely weak, and when he took

out the keys to his desk his hand trembled so that he scarcely could unlock the drawer. But after he had drawn out the drawer he did not look into it. He avoided it with his eyes for a moment as if there were something there he dreaded to see. His chin sank to his hand, his elbow on the desk, and he sat staring at the wall.

The telephone at his elbow rang, but he gave it no heed. Again it rang, and the third time its insistent jangle sounded before he turned and took down the receiver.

"Well?" His voice was as dull as wood. "Oh, it's you, is it, Garrison? They told me you would not be in the city before evening. Yes, I know. Wyer's been trying to reach you with telegrams. He thinks he needs you." There was silence for some time, save the faint squeaking that told of a loud voice at the other end of the line. Then Layton answered: "I want to see you, myself. You can come here. I'll wait for you. It's important."

He hung up the receiver and then, hesitatingly, reached down into the drawer and drew out a photograph. Tapping his cheek in the old way, he sat looking at it, studying the

young face, the quaint dress, the lips that seemed ready to smile. He glanced at the back, and read the words: "*Meum et tuum.*" The faint tracings of some other letters were visible, though an effort had been made to erase them. Taking up a magnifying glass he scrutinized the letters closely and finally deciphered, "T. G. to W. N."

"'*Meum et tuum*'—'mine and thine,'" he said, softly. "No quarter blood *siwash* ever wrote those words. How like her mother was Tess is! No, no, 'T. G.' had not a drop of Indian blood in her veins."

He laid the picture down and stared at the wall once more, but again and again he took up the picture and studied it. Presently he snatched up the magnifying glass once more.

"You must have lost your brains, Layton," he muttered.

He chanced to notice that an effort had been made to remove some printed words from the bottom of the card, evidently the name of the photographer. For some minutes he studied it carefully, and letter by letter he traced the faintest outlines of one word, "Win . . . peg." A few other letters could be made out,

here and there, but nothing sufficient to form even the basis of a word.

"'Win . . . peg,' eh? That's easy. It's Winnipeg. 'T. G.' was a Canadian." He set the picture on his desk, arose and took up his hat. "I think Warren Nelson will make some explanations to me," he said, and his lips were pressed until the queer little puckers showed at the corners of his mouth.

But at the doorway he paused. Senator Garrison was coming down the hall from the elevator.

"Leaving?" queried Garrison. "You promised to wait."

He came forward and shook hands cordially. Layton turned back into his office and motioned to a chair.

"So I did," he answered, tersely. "But I forgot all about you."

Garrison removed his silk hat and picked up a palm leaf fan.

"Forgot me?" He laughed as he glanced sharply at his companion. "That's almost cool enough to make a fan unnecessary. Important business, I suppose."

"Very."

"Well, I know how that is, myself. I ought to have been back Monday, but I couldn't get here."

"No apologies necessary. I have seen the time when she wouldn't let me go just when I ought to have left. She will have her way sometimes, won't she?"

Garrison dropped the fan and leaned quickly toward Layton, but settled back in his chair.

"Are you drunk again?" he asked, with coarse bluntness.

"No, nor am I likely to ever be again. You have taken a woman off my hands; I can cut out the liquor, myself."

Garrison moistened his lips with his tongue.

"You're a fool!" he said, harshly.

"You may let the docket show that entry without protest," Seb chaffed. "That's a dainty little fad she has of marking her hosiery and—lingerie—with 'F. B.' in red silk, isn't it? Bah! I'm glad for my own peace of mind that I had come out of my cocoon and marked her off before I learned that you were paying Susan's wages—and the bills at Rietz-miller's."

"Let's talk business." Senator Garrison

straightened up in his chair. "Where are those transfers?"

"I don't know," was the calm answer. "I gave them to Nelson."

With a spring, Garrison was on his feet, but Layton had also leaped from his chair, and for an instant the two men stood eyeing each other, their breath coming sharply. Garrison's hands clenched, but there was something in the gray eyes before him that contained a warning.

"Sit down, Garrison!" commanded Layton, pointing to a chair, and the politician after a moment's hesitation obeyed.

For a few minutes the exchange between them was like the play of rapiers, and when it was finished Garrison lay back in his chair, his cheeks pallid, one arm hanging limply at his side as if touched by paralysis. His eyes roved restlessly as his thoughts flashed this way and that.

"I thought you were a hater!" he said.

"I was—but I took one hand from my eyes and saw the path that led up the heights."

"You're crazy, damn you! Your father went crazy, and—"

Seb made a quick gesture, and Garrison hushed.

"My father suicided—yes. You know why!"

"Of course. Warren Nelson tricked him into bankruptcy—"

"Almost," said Layton. "It proved to be not so bad as he thought."

"Anyway, he put a bullet through his temple! And you have tossed this damned Nelson a plank to keep him from drowning!"

Layton paced the length of the room.

"Florence Benton told you, didn't she?" he said. "That's how you chanced to pick me to help you. But I didn't do this other exactly for Nelson. There were others—the depositors, you know. I got my eyes open and saw that it would ruin them. Maybe the bank can weather the storm as it is. And it has a cashier who will hold it in the right channel after this."

Garrison smote the table with his fist.

"Well, Nelson can't run his cars on time. I have Hungarians among those graders that are stirring up riots, and the Northwestern will be the deadest proposition that ever tried to float securities. I'll—"

"You'll keep your mouth shut, that's what you'll do!" blazed Layton, leaning toward Garrison. "I am master of this thing, and you'll do as I say! As I say, understand! Nelson is down and out politically. He surrendered to me, and Bronson will hold him to it. You will go back to the Senate—provided you do as I say! That's as far as you will ever get, of course, and it's farther than you deserve. But you'll go to the Senate if the Falls City Bank pulls through this panic and the Northwestern road is built!"

Garrison came to his feet, and his heavy jaw protruded as it had so often done in other days.

"You try to dictate, do you?" he sneered. "Well, do you see that fly?" With a quick sweep of the hand he clutched the insect and then dropped its crushed body onto the floor. With a laugh he stepped on it. "I named it 'Seb Layton,'" he said.

"All right. It's war, then. Maybe Washington will elect Florence Benton's paramour to the Senate after I have finished stumping the State—but I don't think so. I'll brand you in every county in the State!"

"Blackmail now, is it?"

Seb arose slowly and faced Garrison, his eyes steady.

"Call it that! Call it anything you choose. I'm fighting for the people who have their savings in that bank—for a woman who will go to her grave of a broken heart if Thompson is sent to prison, as he will be if the bank fails. If it's blackmail, so be it. I have just found my conscience, and maybe it doesn't recognize technical terms, but it recognizes light from darkness! Good-day, Senator Garrison!"

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE BLOOD OF A SIWASH

GARRISON snatched up his hat and walking stick and strode to the door, but on the threshold he paused and turned. Layton still stood there, his lips taut, the play of flames in his gray eyes.

"The check book," said Garrison. "You have been spending our money."

Layton picked up the check book from his desk and handed it to the other.

"I forgot it," he answered. "Add up the stubs and you will find I have spent three thousand dollars in getting those transfers. I gave them away, and you will notice my personal check for the amount pinned to the last stub."

Garrison fingered the leaves of the book and drew out the check, which he studied for a while. Then he put it into his pocket.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Layton," he said.

Seb sat down and lighted a cigar.

"I believe I told Garrison one day that it

helped surprisingly to bite a cigar while you planned the other fellow's political obsequies." He laughed at the recollection, and drew the smoke in long, full whiffs.

Glancing at his watch, he arose hastily and left the office, and after gaining the street turned his steps toward the Falls City Bank, and now there was no unsteadiness in his stride, but he walked like a man whose brain was clear and whose purpose was definite. The bank had closed when he entered the building, but the boy took his card into the president's office.

"Mr. Nelson not in, but Mr. Bronson will see you," he said, on his return.

The lawyer nodded and entered the office. Joe Bronson clasped his hand in warm greeting, and Frances Nelson arose from a chair near the desk and came forward also.

"Will you shake hands with me, too?" she asked, smiling.

"With Joe's permission." But without waiting for the consent, he took the dainty pink and white hand she extended.

"Take both hands if you wish, Seb," answered Bronson. "And I have the right to

grant the privilege, too," he added, nodding sagely.

Seb looked down into the girl's face, and saw the red warm her cheeks.

"I wondered why you were here," he said to her. "But of course I understand now. Bless you, my children! That's the proper thing, isn't it?"

"I'm here because I can help my father and Joe," she replied. "One cannot trust strangers with bank secrets at this time."

She went back to her chair near the desk, and Bronson waved Layton to a chair.

"We're going to pull through, Seb," he said, earnestly. "That is, if Garrison and his crowd don't spring something more than we look for. We have loaned a little too heavily, but the other banks are standing by us. They have to for self-protection."

"I don't know about Garrison." Seb tapped his cheek reflectively, and Frances bent over some papers to hide her smile as she noted the old habit. "He made some strong threats—and I think I outlined some future events, myself."

"Then you have met him?"

Layton noted the eager interest in Bronson's tone, and a shadow of a smile played about his lips.

"Oh, yes. I have met him."

"What did he do?"

"Crushed a fly and named it 'Seb Layton.' " The smile grew into a chuckle. "But the fly hasn't been formally christened yet."

Frances looked at him thoughtfully.

"Senator Garrison is a man who wields a powerful influence," she said. "He may cause you, as well as the bank, trouble."

"A game is never lost until the referee blows his whistle on the last touchdown. Maybe they'll carry me off the field; maybe it will be Garrison. I'm going to leave Spokane after this campaign, anyway."

Bronson half started from his chair.

"Leave Spokane?" he asked.

"Yes. I have arranged to close my business here. I need a different atmosphere and I'm going—some place, I'm not sure where, but some place where I can have new pages before me without the old pictures haunting me. If Garrison fights, I'll stay and stump the State against him. If he surrenders—you know

the agreement. He can go back to the Senate."

"If he surrenders, the Falls City Bank can pull through. If not—" Bronson's shake of his head was full of meaning.

Layton arose.

"I wanted to see Mr. Nelson on some personal matters. I'll go now."

He turned toward the door, but Frances went to him and extended her hand once more.

"I knew the house cat theory was wrong," she said, smiling. "Come and see—us." The color again flooded her cheeks. "Good-bye."

"We'll break training and smoke," added Bronson, and Layton went away with something of peace in his heart.

The sun was hanging low in the west and the newsboys were piping their vesper cries on the streets. One of them thrust a paper before him and Seb took it mechanically and dropped a coin into the grimy hand. Then he walked on, the paper folded in his hands and unread. There were so many things racing through his mind.

He had given but little heed to directions, but when he aroused and looked about him

he saw that he was close to home, so he went on. At the top of the stairs he found the door unlocked, and when he opened it he saw Jose standing before him. With an exclamation of pleasure, he threw his arm about the youth's shoulders, and for a few moments their tongues wagged rapidly.

"Señor Seb, I was afraid of the police, but I wanted to come back for just one night."

"The police aren't after you, Jose. Nelson called them off. You must stay."

The Mexican shook his head.

"No, not for long, Señor Seb. I have been thinking of the Rio Grande, and I want to go back to the land of my people."

"Well, we can talk it over later. I'm going away, myself. I'll stay home this evening if there is anything in the house to eat."

Jose clapped his hands like a child.

"Si, si, it makes me glad for you to stay! Let me serve *la cena*."

After supper Layton sat in his bedroom and watched the stars come out in the cloudless sky. He chose to sit in this room because from its windows he could better hear the boom of the falls, faint as a whisper from out

of the infinite, but it had always been music to him.

Jose interrupted his musings by tapping on the door.

"A gentleman to see you, Señor."

Layton went into the reception room, where he found Ned Wyer, the State chairman, standing.

"No, no, I haven't time to sit down, Seb," Wyer answered after the greetings. "I come from Garrison."

"Is the christening of the fly to begin?"

Wyer looked at him blankly.

"I don't understand the fly business, but I bring to you Garrison's surrender."

Layton caught his lip between his teeth to stifle the exclamation of triumph.

"All right, Ned. I'm glad for all parties concerned. You know the terms. Nelson gives up the political fight, Garrison goes back to the Senate. Garrison—and his friends—also keep their hands off the Falls City Bank and the Northwestern road."

Wyer nodded slowly.

"Yes, I understand it all, except what has come over you. I don't understand that."

"I suppose not. And it wouldn't be worth while for me to try to explain."

"It's all right, Seb, so far as I am concerned. Nelson is out of the political game, and that's all I was after. Beyond that it was Garrison's personal fight." He hesitated, and then drew a slip of paper from his pocket. "Here's your check covering those transfers. Garrison sent it back."

"But his syndicate is out that much."

"Simply a campaign contribution. It was intended to put Nelson out, and it did, though in an unexpected way. Take your check. You have a right to it. They have not."

The electric bell whirred, and they heard Jose in conversation with some one. He came to the door and signaled Layton.

"A lady to see you," he said in a low tone.

"A lady? Not—?" He looked into Jose's eyes meaningly.

"Santa Maria, no! Not the Señora of the Slipper!"

"Show her in."

Wyer was waiting, and as Jose withdrew, the State chairman held out his hand.

"'Peace on earth,' " he quoted. "Good-night."

Layton stepped to the door with him, and then stopped, smothering an exclamation.

"Tess!" Instinctively he held out his hand as she entered the room.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "I hate you!"

Her cheeks were pale, except where anger had burned a small spot on each temple. In her eyes there was shadow, but it nor the pallor of her cheeks could steal from her that lithe grace so peculiarly hers, nor could the red of her lips be entirely hidden by emotion.

"Hate me?" he asked, his hand dropping by his side.

"Of course. You're a spy—Oh, they said you were, but I couldn't believe it! I couldn't! But I oughtn't to say this, for I came to beg for your help!"

He stood nonplussed for a moment, and then placed a chair for her.

"I am utterly bewildered," he said. "What do you mean by calling me a spy?"

"You came down into the Palouse to look for 'rustlers,' and—and—you found them! You played at love with me and called the sheriff's men into the hills! And you did your work well, for not one escaped except my—ex-

cept Sam Barr, and they arrested him this evening."

Layton had arisen to his feet.

"'Rustlers'? A sheriff's raid! God's love, Tess, do you think I was playing detective down there?"

"I know you were!" she cried. "Didn't I catch you at it? Weren't you watching, Sunday night, when—when—Sam Barr came in from his ride? I caught you slipping down the stairs when he and Dan were talking over the last shipment! You went back to your room, but you already knew enough. You knew that he was not at home when Dan was shot! You found his horse in the stable, still saddled. You—."

"Please hear me!" he exclaimed, for she was pouring out her denunciations almost hysterically. "I knew nothing of this until now. I saw the saddled horse, but did not understand. Neither did I know what was taking place below the night you caught me on the stairs."

"No matter. I came to beg you to help me—to do something for—my husband! They brought him up and put him in jail this evening. Won't you help him?"

Layton's nails were marking his palms, and his brain throbbed.

"Then it's true—you married Dan!"

"Tuesday noon. Yes."

Her words were almost in a whisper.

"I saw your fa—Sam Barr, to-day. I tried to think he was lying. You don't love Dan Johns! I know you don't! You can't! You are too far above—"

"No, no, don't say that!" she moaned. "You don't know! I—I am nobody, and—it was the only way. I tried to save my—father!"

He stepped toward her and stood looking down at her, as, in an outburst of anguish, she dropped her head into her hands. His mind, trained to reasoning, quickly grasped the truth.

"To close Dan's mouth against—your father—you married him! And Sam Barr urged you into it! And it was all for nothing; it did not save them!"

She was sobbing softly.

"It is just as well," she said. "I am nobody. I found out before the wedding! In my veins—Oh, God! What a mockery that I

should be educated in any degree! The squaw in her tepee is happier!"

"Tess!" he whispered.

He leaned forward, and took her hand, and the warmth of her palm caused the pulse to throb heavily in his wrists.

"Tess," he said again. "It's a mistake. You sacrificed in vain! I love you! You love me! I know you do! Out yonder the world is calling us! Out yonder the flowers are blooming for us! I love you—love you! Let me lead you! Will you go with me?"

She withdrew her hand and drew back from his arms.

"Don't say those things!" she answered. "You say you love me. Perhaps you do—but you wouldn't lead me God's way! You didn't mean it, I know, but don't you see it wouldn't be God's way? And—I am a squaw—a *squaw*!" She sprang to her feet and thrust out her arm. "Slash that wrist and the blood of a *siwash* will flow! In my old age I'll croon by the fire and chuckle over bright beads! When the herbs brew I'll mumble the charms the medicine men chant, and in the midnight the dogs will howl near my tepee! It's in my veins, and I can't drain them!" She clasped

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her hands until the muscles stood out on the slender wrists. "I didn't mean to say these things," she moaned, "but they were in my heart, and something—you—touched the heart, and they rushed out! Now let me go—let me go out to the streets, to the hovels! Let me huddle in the parks until the Indian's God comes up over the mountains to make it day!"

CHAPTER XXIV

"ONLY OURSELVES"

SHE went out into the night alone, refusing his escort, denying him even the poor privilege of going down to the street with her. He lighted a cigar and drew on it heavily, and as he smoked he paced the room, his nails furrowing his palms. Jose entered, and a cry of alarm came to the Mexican's lips.

"Señor Seb! You are sick!"

He darted to Layton's side and clasped his hand, but the other shook his head.

"Sick? No, no! I am well!"

"But your face, Señor—it is white, and—
and peculiar!"

"Perhaps I have smoked too much. You may go to bed, Jose. *Buenos noches!*"

Jose looked at him for a moment, and then went slowly to the door, where he again turned.

"*Buenos noches, señor mia,*" he said, softly.

Layton turned out the lights and went to his room, where he again sat by the window and

listened to the faint whispers from the falls. Above the distant mountains one star, swung low in the heavens, shone brighter than the others, and he watched it, watched it with a steady stare until the stub of his cigar scorched his lips. He flung the stub from him.

"It is life—as I have known it!" he muttered, turning to stare at the blackened tobacco roll. "It is life—and I have smoked it up—whiffed it away in fragrant haze. Now it scorches! But it was good! Some men dally with their cigars, and let the coal almost expire for lack of warm breath—but it was not my way! No, for me the coal ever glowed brightly, and if it gave to me good cheer, it gave no less to those about me. Only the stub remains now—and it is blackened and charred and unsightly; it holds no further cheer for me, nor for my friends, and so—!" He had risen and was standing close beside his bed, on which he had dropped the Bible. His eyes fell on it as he paused, and in a moment he had dropped to his knees, clasping it. "No, no!" he breathed. "I was wrong! I whiffed away the life that is past—but there is a better one! Am I to falter because Tess is not to walk by my side and lead me? Am I a weakling or a man?"

He took up the Bible; it came open at the psalm he had marked, and he read:

"Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law!"

He dropped the book, and knelt in silence for a time. Then his lips moved.

"God—somewhere there is a God, I know—teach me to pray!" His voice was hoarse and low. "I never tried before. I wish I had. But now, God—God of my mother—hear me and help me—no, help Tess! Oh, God, help Tess! Maybe I can fight alone! But she—God—you are the God of all bloods! Help her—and—and come close to me! Amen!"

He went to bed, but sleep did not come readily to him. Out there in the night Tess was alone, unsheltered. He arose often and stood at the window, listening, listening as if he expected some call to come to him from out of the night, but only the steady booming voice of the falls crept to his ears, and finally he slept, the name of Tess and his God on his lips in his last waking moment.

The hours plodded by and the dawn was yet young when his eyes opened, and then he lay waiting for the laggard world to awaken to

the new day. He heard the far-away whistle of a locomotive; he heard the heavy crunch of wheels as some freighter cracked his long whip and drove away in the morning's gray toward the mountains; a man passed, whistling merrily, glad to be returning home from a night's work, or with stout heart going forth to take up the toil of another day; in the stillness of the dawn he heard the complaining wheels of the first street car as it turned the corner not far away. Still he lay there waiting for the time to pass. Then the moment came when he heard Jose stir, and presently from beneath his half-closed lids he saw the Mexican thrust the curtains aside and peep in. Satisfied that Layton was sleeping, the youth glided in, placed a morning paper beside the bed, and then, looking down at the man on the bed, he made the sign of the Cross above him, and withdrew as silently as he had come.

Seb arose and dropped into an easy chair by the window, but the breath of the dawn is always crisp as it comes down from the Cœur d'Alenes, and he put on a dressing gown before he idly picked up the paper. The dispatches from New York predicted an early return of confidence; financial circles were in

less stress, and the clearing house and limited payment plan adopted by the banks throughout the country was proving a bulwark against which the waves of panic were dashing in vain. The President had announced the date for the sailing of the battleship fleet to the Pacific; a Russian general was being tried by court-martial for surrendering a fort without cause; a new lawyer had been selected to conduct the defense in a noted murder case in New York. Idly he glanced from headline to headline, until suddenly he clutched the paper tightly and read an article he had chanced upon. It was an account of the sheriff's raid into the Rock Lake country and the capture of the "rustlers."

The article told of the depredations committed by the gang during the past years, and how it finally had been determined to hunt them down and bring law and order to those hills. It was explained how the prisoners had been kept in the Whitman calaboose until the night before, while the posse was searching the hills for "Coyote" Barr, only to learn that he had been arrested last evening in Spokane. And then came this paragraph:

"Sam Barr, known among the hills as 'Coy-

ote,' has confessed. He it was who was the lookout and a secret agent for the rustlers. His home was at a natural gateway to the Rock Lake region, and, ever on the alert, he gave them warnings many times. A mysterious light was seen in the sky at times, and the residents of the hills marveled, but Coyote Barr has told the officers that hidden in a small attic of his house they will find a balloon with a large lantern attached, and to the balloon is fastened a ball of stout cord, with which he held the aerial signal apparatus captive and drew it back to earth after it had ascended and flashed its warning across the miles. The wick will burn but a short time and then is snuffed out by a simple bit of mechanism, after which the balloon would be drawn back to the ground and secreted. The signal would be answered by setting fire to a pine post on Eagle Butte."

When Jose looked in some minutes later, the tall figure in the dressing gown was walking the floor, his head lowered.

"All right, Jose, I'll be ready for breakfast soon," he responded to the Mexican's greetings.

When he left his apartments an hour later it

was with the air of a man in whose mind there is no uncertainty. He went direct to the office of the sheriff, and had a long interview with that official, discussing the rustlers' case exhaustively. From there he went to the jail.

"I want to see Dan Johns," he said to the turnkey, and produced an order from the sheriff.

"Johns ain't overly strong, and he's laying down in his cell. Maybe—"

"I'll go in to see him. I'm his lawyer."

"That's all right. The sheriff's order goes."

The jailer led him into the prison and down a corridor and finally paused before the open door of a small cell.

"Lawyer to see you, Johns," he called, and turned away. "Rap on the outer door when you want to get out," he added to Seb.

As Layton stepped into the cell he saw a man rise from the bunk, and recognized the broncho rider. Dan's face was sallow, but he handled himself with an ease that showed considerable strength.

"You!" cried Dan, sitting on the edge of his bunk. "I'd like to have you back in the hills. I'd—"

"Maybe the pleasure would be mutual," replied Layton, dryly. "Though I never have killed a man!"

"Who sent you here?"

"Tess. She thought me a traitor, but she asked me to help you. I think I would have done so without her asking, however."

Dan looked at him in some uncertainty.

"Tess!" he asked. Then he grinned. "She's my wife—"

"Never mind that. I know about it. I'm here to help you if I can, and if I can clear you—then what?"

The gray eyes were full on Dan, and the prisoner shrugged his shoulders uneasily.

"Me and my *klootchman* will go back to our hills an'—an' raise a family, I reckon."

The blood swept into Layton's cheeks and then slowly receded, leaving a gray pallor there.

"And you will be good to her? Answer that—will you be good to her?"

His voice had trembled with the first sentence, but it rolled out full and strong and tense at the close. Dan looked at him sullenly.

"What's it to you?" he growled. "She's my *klootchman*!"

"If you abuse her I'll—I'll kill you!" blazed Layton, his words coming crisp and sharp as the snap of electric sparks. He sprang to his feet and stood over Johns, his hands clenched. "I swear I'll kill you!" he exclaimed.

Dan edged along his bunk, watching Layton closely.

"I suppose you're wantin' to fool me an' send me to the pen so you can take Tess for your woman!" he snarled. "I know you, Seb Layton!"

"No. I intend to work hard to clear you. I did ask—but no matter. I was wrong. I'll not be again. And she'll not forget that she is your wife! Now we'll drop that and talk about your case."

It was noon when he left the jail and telephoned Jose that he would not be home to luncheon. As he passed along the streets he was always on the alert for a glimpse of Tess, but his watch was unrewarded. That afternoon he went back to the jail, and the turnkey told him that Dan's wife had been there but an hour before. The interview that afternoon

was less stormy than the one of the morning had been, and when Layton left it was with a few possibilities on which to build up a defense. The next day he was again back to see Dan, and that night he worked in his office until late.

On Saturday afternoon he stepped from the train in Whitman, and Judge West was waiting with the family carriage, a note from the lawyer having notified him that Layton was coming down into the Palouse to build up Dan's defense. They drove slowly up the street, and Seb found himself half wishing that he could again hear Dan's shrill cry as he sat a bucking broncho.

West did not seem anxious to do much talking, and Layton's mood was very similar, and so they drove away from the town and up the long grade to the top of the divide before the subject of the arrest of the rustlers was mentioned. Then West turned to his companion and remarked:

"I suppose he'll go to the pen sure, won't he?"

"Dan?"

A nod was the answer.

"I don't know what I can do for him until I look around down here. It's to be the effort of my life, Mr. West."

The rancher flicked the whip and remained silent for a moment.

"Maybe it would be just as well to let him go. Just as well for—her, I mean."

"But she is his wife, now."

"In name only." He caught Layton's quick look. "Dan was arrested within three hours after he was married."

Something hot warmed Layton's cheeks, and a peculiar elation thrilled his heart.

"She is standing by him loyally."

"Of course. That's Tess—God bless her! She's his wife, and she's loyal—but her lips haven't touched his. She's at my house now."

The cigar the lawyer was smoking dropped from his fingers, and, stooping over, he brushed the ashes from his clothing. The warmth was in his cheeks again.

"She came yesterday," continued West. "She had nowhere else to go. Mother was glad she came and so was I."

Layton turned and looked West in the face.

"She told me—." He paused. "How long have you known her?"

"Since Sam Barr and his wife took her—
from—the reservation."

"Good God! It's true, then!"

"Yes. I induced Nelson to educate her."

"I am not sure that you were kind."

"Neither am I. But I couldn't look ahead
and see all of this."

"Her mother?"

"Died when Tess was born, died in the hut
of one of the under-chiefs. Nelson married
a year afterward."

Layton made no reply, and the conversation
was but fitful and disconnected during the re-
mainder of the drive. Now and then from
some hill-top Seb could look across the miles
and see Steptoe Butte, the sentinel of the Pa-
louse, and he realized more and more that he
was back in her country, among her hills, view-
ing the scenes she had known from childhood.
Then they topped another small plateau and his
hands gripped the side of the seat, for close
at hand was the West home, and in the yard
was Tess. He knew that it was she at the first
swift glance.

As they drew up at the gate the girl came
running to meet them, and as Layton sprang to
the ground and raised his hat, a spot of red

burned in each of her cheeks, where before had been pallor. Then she turned to West.

"I have been looking for you," she said. "Come to the barn at once. There's an old Indian there—dying. We found him this afternoon. He crept in some time after you left."

West tied the horses and then they hurried around to the barn, where they found an emaciated form lying on the hay. A dirty flannel shirt and a ragged pair of overalls clothed him, but on his feet were frayed moccasins. His eyes opened as they bent over him.

"*Mamook klahowyum!*" he gasped.

"Take pity on you? Yes." West nodded.

"Can't we get a doctor for the poor wretch?" asked Layton.

"I have sent to Pineville for Dr. Lang," responded West. "I couldn't let him die without trying to help him. He's one of—my people."

Her voice broke, but she stood tearless, her face very white. Layton dropped his eyes and once more bent over the Indian, who was studying him closely. Suddenly the Indian stretched out his arms toward him.

"*Kloshe Boston man!*" he exclaimed. "*Kloshe sihks kopa siwash!*"

"The good friend of the Indian!" He stared at the dying man an instant, and then dropped his hand on the Indian's shoulder. "I know you now!" he exclaimed. "We met over in the Big Bend."

The beat of hoofs was heard, and in a few moments Dr. Lang sprang from his horse and hastened to the group. Only a moment he knelt over the Indian and then he arose and shook his head. The Indian was watching him closely.

"Me die?" he asked.

"Yes." The doctor glanced at the others. "No use to lie to him, is there?" he asked, a shade of compassion in his tone.

The Indian closed his eyes, and then a faint whisper came from his lips:

"Nesika klaksta mitlite kopa saghalie." The words died to an unintelligible mutter. West knelt and placed his ear close to the moving lips. *"Spose nesika mamook masahchie nika hyas solleks kopa klaska."*

West looked up in surprise.

"It's the Lord's prayer!" he exclaimed.

The Indian's eyes opened.

"Nawitka—me pray! Been—mission. Me die—klip sun—klatawa kopa Saghalie Tyee!"

"What does he say?" asked Seb.

"That he will die at sunset and go to God!"

The Indian beckoned to West, who bent low over him again to hear the whispered words. Then the rancher looked up.

"He wants to have a little talk with me," he said. "Maybe you'd better go to the house. I know him."

They turned to leave, but the dying man feebly raised one hand to Layton, and the lawyer took it.

"*Klahowya, sihks,*" came the whisper.

"Good-bye," responded Seb, and went away with Tess by his side.

The doctor had gone to his horse, and as he took up the trailing reins and threw them over the neck of the cayuse he whistled a few bars of "The Texas Ranger" as merrily as though he had not announced to a man his doom. Tess turned to Layton.

"I am very sorry for the accusations I made to you," she said, simply. "I have learned that I was wrong."

"Don't burden your mind with that." He stood looking down into her face; her eyes flashed to his for the briefest instant, and a tide of color suffused her cheeks; her lips trembled

slightly, but she turned and looked away across the hills, and gradually the pallor again came to her cheeks. "I am doing my best for Dan," he added, after the silence. "I am afraid I can do nothing for your—for Sam Barr."

"You have always been kind. Even that first night—in the hotel—you kept Dan from troubling me. And I have caused you much trouble."

"You have taught me many things. I am your debtor. Tess—Tess—God sent the world a blessing when He gave it you."

"No, no!" Her voice broke. "Don't forget the dying Indian—don't forget that I am of his people!"

"I don't care!" he cried. "God doesn't measure us that way. It's what we are that counts; not what we were born!"

"Perhaps you are right—that God doesn't measure us that way—but blood will demand its own, and it can't be cheated! It can't be cheated, I tell you!" The sob was in her voice once more. "In the hours of the night, alone with God and heredity, one hears a voice speaking from the veins, and feels the sweep of a river flowing from the arteries of a thousand generations. Youth may laugh at the sum-

mons and defy the red flood, but Youth only delays the payment Age is certain to make. God will understand—yes. But God isn't Anglo-Saxon! The blood-tide tears its prey from the house of flowers Youth has built, leaving there a desolate altar, before which broken-hearted beings occasionally return to pray!"

Her head dropped and she turned and walked slowly away, and he stood watching her until she entered the house.

"Layton!" West was hurrying toward him from the barn. "The *sivash* just died." He went up to Layton and led him toward the front gate. "I want to talk to you about Tess. The Indian told me. She was born in his hut. I knew that, for I recognized him as an under-chief of the Nez Perces. And, listen!" He glanced back toward the house. "Her mother was a Canadian!"

"Not an Indian?" Seb clutched West's arm. "Not a drop of *sivash*?"

"Not a drop. Nelson was taking her to Spokane that their child might be born there, but she was taken ill while they were crossing the reservation, and Nelson loved this sub-chief. They gave it out that she was quarter-

blood, and that satisfied the tribe. They were married there with the Indian ceremony. Of course, that doesn't count, but she's white."

"You will tell Tess at once?"

"Yes. This is the fellow who shot Dan. He told me he tried to kill Coyote Barr because Barr had not divided Nelson's hush money properly. Barr was out on the road that night with the rustlers, but the *siwash* got Dan by mistake."

A short time later West had despatched a courier to the Nez Perces reservation to notify the tribe of the death of the chief, for the Indian had begged that he might be buried by his tribe. Once or twice Seb had seen Tess moving about the house, and once he heard her laugh, and the music of it told him that her heart was light because her veins held no drop of Indian blood. But it was near sunset before they met, and the bloom in her cheeks told its own story.

From the window they saw a horseman coming down the road at a full gallop, the evening sun showing the dull yellow of his fringed shaps.

"It's Dr. Lang!" exclaimed Seb.

"He's been to Whitman. He said he would

stop on the way home and bring the mail."

"Judge West told me the good news." Seb turned away from the window.

"It is bad enough," she replied. "But—I smile when I look at my wrists." She brought her hand up and studied the veins. "I came from nowhere, but I am not a squaw! I shall not fear the call of my blood, for it will not lead me backward."

Dr. Lang's heavy tread sounded on the small porch, and they heard Judge West greet him.

"I could not believe—"

Layton paused, for Dr. Lang's deep voice had come to them from the yard.

"Dan Johns was killed trying to escape!"

There was a sharp cry from the girl, and Layton felt the blood leave his own cheeks.

"Here's a telegram for you," Lang was saying. "I reckon it will tell you. But I heard the news in Whitman."

Tess took a step toward the door, but staggered, and in a moment Layton had clasped her in his arms. For a few breaths she lay there, trembling. He bent down and kissed her.

"You must not!" she cried, struggling to

free herself, but his arms imprisoned her and his lips silenced further words of protest.

"Yes, I must, Tess!" he answered. "No one stands between us now, and I love you! You love me! I know it! The sacrifice is ended! I love you! It is enough!"

"But—Dan!" A slight shudder passed over her. "It is too soon. I gave myself to him!"

"You love me, Tess!"

His voice was masterful, and slowly she lifted her eyes to his, and they clung there, her heart throbbing faster.

"I gave myself to Dan!" she repeated, slowly.

"But God gave you to this man!" Judge West stood in the doorway, and close behind him was his wife, a smile on her lips. "I know you heard what Lang said," added West. "I don't think you owe anything more to duty, Tess. You have paid enough. Be happy now."

Tess had wrenched herself free from Layton's arms at the sound of West's voice, but her hand still rested in his. Mrs. West went forward and kissed her.

"Tom, I want you to help me in the kitchen," said the old lady, and led her husband from the room.

"You have brought me out of the chrysalis, Tess, and have shown me the pathway up the heights. Take my hand and lead me along that path."

She met his eyes for a moment, and wavered.

"But I came from nowhere!" she protested.

"And I have been traveling there," he answered. "If you are without the pale by birth, I am no less so through folly. Now we have only ourselves and God!"

He drew her toward him, and she did not resist. He saw her lips move, and he bent low to hear her words.

"I want nothing more—just you, Seb, and God!" she whispered.

The last rays of the setting sun spread a mantle of gold on the hills of the Palouse, and then it faded into dusk, but they gave it no heed, for into their hearts had come the dawn.

THE END

GLOSSARY OF "CHINOOK" EXPRESSIONS

- Klootchman* — Woman.
Hyu — Much; many.
Mowitsh — Deer.
Nika — I; my; mine.
Iskum — Get; take.
Tenas — Little; small.
Moosum — Sleep.
Siwash — Indian.
Wake — No; not.
Kumtuks — Understand; know.
Muckamuck — Food.
Potlatch — Give; a gift.
Chahko — Come.
Syah — Far; far off.
Klatawa — To go; travel.
Teawhit — Foot; the leg.
Kiuatan — Horse.
Nawitka — Yes.
Yahwa — Yonder.
Kloshe — Good.
Mamook — To do; denotes action.
Memaloost — Die; dead.
Boston — American.
Klahowya — How do you do? Good-bye.
Kopa — To; in; at; with; towards; of; about; concerning, etc.
Mika — You; yours.
Ikta — What.
Tumtum — Mind; thoughts; heart.
Chickamin — Money.
Klahouryum — Compassion, pity; wretched.
Nesika — Our.
Papa — Father.
Klaksta — Who.
Mithite — Stay; reside.
Saghalie — Up; above.
Spose — Suppose; if.
Masahchie — Ill.
Solleks — Anger; angry.
Klaska — They; thine; them.
Wauwau — Talk.
Sihks — Friend.
Klip — Deep; sunken.
Saghalie Tyee — God.
Tyee — A chief; one who is important.
Hye — Large; great.

Note — All words of the jargon are used in various ways, their use in connection with other words often giving them very different meanings.

