The WESTERN SCOUT

MARCHANT

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→ Prince Rupert, BC

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HITTING BLINDLY AT HIS HEAD AND FACE.

p. 47.

THE WESTERN SCOUT

By

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CONTENTS

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CHAPTER I

SIDE-TRACKED

REUBEN SHORE was back again three days after his formal eviction by the police, and patching up the shack, which he had built on squatted ground, opened a store there, lighting it at night with three flaring naphtha torches, that made quite an illumination in that part of the city which was outside the range of the electric lights.

But they had no use for squatters in Prince Rupert Town, and when Simon Bulkley came back from Vancouver City to find that the shack was still standing, he was about the maddest man on the Pacific coast.

"Didn't I say that the fellow was to be kicked out?" he roared, shaking his fist in the direction of the naphtha flares, which made a blur of yellowish red on the black darkness of the night.

"So he was kicked out, pard," replied Jimmy

Whitelock, who was deputy surveyor that year, and who often found it necessary to enforce order in his own person, and by the weight of his own fist. "I went with the police myself; we chucked him out, flung his goods across the boundary, and pulled the roof off the shack, but he was back again in less than a week, and we have been a jolly sight too busy to get a move on him since."

"Well, he will have to get to-morrow, or my name is not Simon Bulkley," said the big man who was surveyor, and who had sunk every dollar that he could lay hands upon in buying up building lots in the young city, which was so rapidly springing into being on the Pacific coast.

"What is the use of chucking a man out, who comes in again the minute that your back is turned?" queried Jimmy, in a peevish tone. "If you are so anxious to be quit of him, why not buy up that lot yourself, and done with it. You might do worse than start a store there on your own, there is plenty of trade down that way, for it is just in the track of the lumbermen coming from their camp to the town."

"I haven't got another dollar to put into land, and that is a fact," growled the surveyor, turning his pockets inside out, to show how empty they were.

"Same here. If there came a slump jes' now, I should go to the bottom bang, slap, like a dog with a stone tied to its neck," sighed Jimmy.

"I tell you what we can do!" exclaimed Simon, struck with a brilliant idea. "We can make some one else buy it, and see, there you are. Rube will have to quit, while the dignity and honour of this city will be maintained."

"Talk's cheap. But you've got to find some one with the cash to do it," said Jimmy.

"I can put my finger on the party, yes, that I can. It is a man from England, a new chum I guess, and he came up from Vancouver City with me, on the boat. I tried to sell him some of my lots, and of course I asked him top price, but I'll go and offer him this at a bargain. Come along, Jimmy, we'll go and hitch this business up without delay, and then out goes Rube, for we ain't going to have no squatters stealing building lots in this city while I'm surveyor, not if I know anything about it, that is." Simon swelled himself out as he spoke, for he was tremendously proud of his position as surveyor of the new young city, which was springing into being on the shores of the bay.

"Perhaps the fellow hasn't got any money," objected Jimmy, who was shy of facing strangers, unless they happened to be law-breakers, when he at once became as fearless as a lion.

"Oh, yes, he has, for I saw him handling a great roll of notes, on board the boat, besides he would not have come all this way to settle down, if he had not had a little cash to go on with," returned Simon, and then he dragged Jimmy off to see what they could do towards inducing the stranger to buy that particular lot, upon which it had pleased Reuben Shore to squat.

But there were so many building lots on sale in the city at that time that the new-comer was disposed to hesitate about purchasing a lot, which was being fairly thrust down his neck, and Simon Bulkley might have been unsuccessful after all in his endeavour to get a purchaser, if it had not been for

a chance remark which he let drop, and which attracted the notice of Mrs. Townsford, the pleasant little wife of the newly arrived Englishman.

"Bob, dear, don't you think that we had better take it, if there is a chance for a store?" she asked anxiously. "Just think what a good chance it would be for Elgar and me to have a store to run, to bring in a little money, if you happened to be away."

"Well, I don't mind saying that I will go down and have a look at it to-morrow, but further than that I will not go at this time of night," said Bob Townsford, who was a nervous-looking man of middle-age.

"Very good, but don't blame me, stranger, if you find that when you ring for your shaving water to-morrow morning your chance has gone, and Lot 926, Yokohama Street, has passed beyond your power of purchase for ever. We don't let the grass grow under our feet in this city," said Simon Bulkley, unable to repress this bit of bluff, although in the main he was well satisfied with having got so far on the way towards finding a purchaser for the land which he so much wanted to see sold.

Bob Townsford grinned at the mention of ringing for shaving water, for he, his wife, their three children, and a nephew, had as a lodging a miserable shack, which in England would be regarded as a fourth rate pigstye, but he only answered in the jerky fashion natural to him, "All right, if the deal is off I dare say that I shall manage to stand up under the disappointment. But we folks out from England are not always quite so green as we look, and we are not in the habit of purchasing land, without going through the trifling formality of inspecting it first."

"Of course not, of course not, and the sentiment does honour to your intelligence, sir," broke in Jimmy Whitelock hurriedly. He thought that he was saying something fine, and was mightily proud of it, although Simon gave him a poke in the ribs, as an intimation that he had better keep quiet, and leave the talking to other people.

"Now, I wonder why those two men are so anxious for me to buy up that particular lot?" said Bob Townsford, when his two visitors had at last taken themselves off, to the great relief of Mrs. Townsford, who wanted to put her children to bed.

"Where is the land, Uncle Bob?" demanded Elgar Hunt, coming out from behind the packing-case, whither he and his young cousins had retreated when the two strangers arrived, asking for a private interview.

"It is Lot 926, on Yokohama Street, but it is too late for you to find it to-night, boy, better get to your bed and have your sleep out, there is no sense in going to inspect land by candlelight," said Bob Townsford, with a mighty yawn.

But Mrs. Townsford had given her nephew a quick little nod, and Elgar knew instantly that she would like him to go and discover where that particular spot called Lot 926 was, without further delay.

"I saw where Yokohama Street had got to be, as we came up from the landing place; it won't take me many minutes to have a run round that way, and I may find out the reason why they are so anxious for you to have it," said Elgar, cheerfully, trying to look as if he were not dead beat, but was really needing fresh air and exercise.

"Off you go, then, but get back as quick as you

can," replied his uncle, who was really desirous of getting a little light on the mystery.

Elgar dodged out of the door, and scooting across the uneven piece of ground in front of the shack, got on to the boarded side-walk, which led out into Main Street, through which he would have to pass to reach the stumpy waste, which was labelled in big letters, Yokohama Street.

Although it was only six hours since he had come off the boat with the others, Elgar had already raced round the whole of the city, which was laid out into streets, squares, and business blocks, so he was not at a loss now, as an entire stranger would have been, when he darted out of well-lighted Main Street, and plunged among the stumps in the strip of wilderness, abounding in mudholes, partly dug foundations, and other pitfalls of a similar kind.

" Why that is the place, I do declare, and there is a store on it already ! " said Elgar to himself, with a low whistle of astonishment, as in the light of the naphtha flares he read the number 926 on the section post.

He had drawn back into the shadow to stand and study the situation for a few minutes, before he turned back to the shack which was home for the present. It had come home to him with the conviction of a certainty that there was something underneath the anxiety of his uncle's two visitors to find a purchaser for the particular lot, which already had a tenant, if not an owner.

He was still standing there, when the sound of a great commotion reached his ears from the brightly lighted store. Some one was quarrelling fiercely, and just as Elgar was thinking it might be safest to clear

out of the way, before the row spread to the outside, two men rushed out of the store, closely pursued by a third, the whole lot coming straight for the spot where Elgar was standing.

He slid swiftly behind a big stump, and crouching there, waited until the three should have passed, so that he could make his way back to Main Street, and the comparative safety of the electric lights.

But just as they reached the spot where he was crouching, the two who were being pursued turned upon the pursuer, attacking him so savagely, that in a minute the man was down, and being cruelly beaten by the two ruffians who had set upon him.

One half-second Elgar hesitated, for it was not his quarrel, then remembering that the duty of a scout was to help any one in trouble, he hurled himself into the fray with a tremendous shout, hitting, punching, and pulling at the two attackers, and by the sheer unexpectedness of his assault, striking panic into them.

"Police, police!" he yelled at the top of his voice, and all the while he was doing such deadly execution with the stick in his hand, on the heads and shoulders of the two men, that they presently fled from the attack as if the police were indeed at their heels.

But the man on the path lay so still that Elgar thought he must be dead.

Bending down over him, he tried to lift the head of the poor fellow, and was very much relieved to hear him groan.

"Are you hurt?" asked Elgar, and then was cross with himself for putting such a silly question, for if the man had not been rather badly knocked

about, it was not likely that he would have lain so quietly, or have groaned as if in pain.

"Hurt? I'm done for, side-tracked for good and all, the scamps!" ejaculated the injured man so fiercely that Elgar drew back under the impression that he was going to start reprisals on him.

"Can I help you back to your house, or would you rather that I called somebody?" If Elgar's tone was not too willing, he might surely be forgiven, for not one kindly word had he received as yet for his spirited interference, which, without doubt, had saved the man's life.

"There is no one to call, so it is you, or no help at all," growled the man, and then he got on to his feet with a good deal of help from Elgar, and stumbled slowly back to the store.

But he was groaning at every step, and walked with so much difficulty that it was plain he was rather badly hurt.

"Shall I go for the police? The brutes have knocked you about horribly," said the boy, with quivering indignation.

"The police? No, indeed, they'd be only too glad to find me in a hole. Just you help me inside my door, and then run away; I don't want no boys hanging about my place," answered the man in a snarling tone.

Elgar's indignation nearly choked him. What was the man made of, that he could not show even decent gratitude for the service rendered him?

But it is useless to expect more from a pig than a grunt, and if this man had no sense of thankfulness, it was of no use getting in a rage with him. So Elgar helped him carefully to the door of the

store, which was chiefly built from a wagon tilt and packing cases, and leaving him clinging to the frame of the door he was hurrying away, when his attention was caught by something lying on the inverted packing case, which did duty for a counter.

It was the strangest thing to see in such a place, for it was a lady's fan carved in ivory, of beautiful and exquisite workmanship, and in the centre was the portrait of a man.

"Didn't you hear me say that I could do without you now?" snarled the man, seeing the direction of Elgar's glance, then, moving with difficulty, he threw a dirty red handkerchief over the lovely ivory fan, and turned as if to hurry the boy away.

But Elgar was already picking his way between the stumps, and wishing he could find out where that wonderful fan had come from.

CHAPTER II

The Eviction of the Squatter

It was one of Simon Bulkley's men who, going to the store of Reuben Shore on the following morning, found the man so ill that he went off in all haste for the nearest doctor. And the doctor, acting on a hint given to him by the man, suggested at once that Reuben should be admitted to the hospital tent, which had been erected on the bluff to the west of the city.

Reuben said that he would not go, that he was too poor to pay for nursing and medicine, and that the only thing to be done was to stay where he was, and die when his time came.

But the doctor was young and very enthusiastic, so he declared hotly that in that glorious young city no useful lives were to be thrown away for the want of proper care, and he had Reuben put on an ambulance stretcher, and carried off to the hospital tent without loss of time.

After that things were easy, the store was swept off the face of the debateable ground without loss of time, and would have been looted straight away had not the police taken it under protection,

which made the process of stealing all that was worth carrying away, a longer process.

When Bob Townsford, accompanied by Elgar, went down to Yokohama Street to view the lot, there was hardly anything of Reuben Shore's store left on the ground, and Elgar rubbed his eyes in amazement, half-inclined to wonder at first if he had been dreaming over night, when he was struggling with Reuben Shore's two assailants.

Mr. Bulkley was on the ground, and soon came to speak to Bob Townsford, which left Elgar free to wander about as he chose, and he was stepping out the boundary line to see if the measurements given were correct, when he noticed the fragments of a cardboard box lying behind a stump.

He stooped to pick it up, and to his profound amazement found that it contained a part of that same beautiful ivory fan, which he had seen lying on Reuben Shore's counter the night before.

The portion had been broken right across the centre panel, but the damage had not touched the portrait of the man in the lower part of the panel, and which was painted on the ivory.

"Oh, what a pity!" muttered Elgar to himself, with instinctive regret for the ruin of a thing of beauty and value. His first idea was that some one had dropped the box containing the fan, as they were evicting the goods of the squatter, but a second glance told him that this could hardly be the case, as his find was on the opposite side of the lot, and could therefore not have been dropped by any official person, while if any pilferer had stolen a thing of so much value, they would have taken care not to damage it *en route*.

Moreover, the piece of cardboard box was soaked with wet, while the morning was brilliantly fine. It had been a fine night too, save for one heavy shower, which came on about half-an-hour after Elgar got home on the previous evening. He might not have remembered this so well, but for the fact of the rain coming in upon him as he lay on the shakedown which served him for a bed, under the shingle roof of his temporary home. He had got so wet from the downpour that his aunt had crawled up the ladder with her best umbrella, and he had gone to sleep under its shelter. But his uncle, who had had a very wakeful night, said that there had been no rain after that time, therefore the cardboard box had been dropped beside the stump within an hour of his leaving the old man, who had been so badly hurt.

It was altogether very puzzling, and just because it was so very mysterious Elgar decided that at present he would say nothing whatever about it, on the principle of the least said, soonest mended.

Elgar was of Scottish extraction on his father's side, which perhaps accounted for the element of caution in his character. He was old beyond his years too, but that was largely owing to all the sorrows and upheavals which had come into his life, and the necessity there was for him to be his aunt's right hand in most things. Bob Townsford, while the very kindest of husbands, and the most indulgent of fathers, was at the same time so very unpractical that it would have gone hard with the family had it not been for the wise endeavours of Mrs. Townsford, backed up by the active exertions of Elgar.

By doubling the sodden ruins of the box over the broken ivory with its painted portrait, Elgar was able

to slip it into the breast pocket of his jacket, and then he finished stepping out the boundary, and went back to his uncle, to find that the purchase was so far completed, that Bob Townsford had decided to buy, the deposit was just about to change hands, and the building of the store was to start that very afternoon.

"Then I guess that I have got to be busy," said Elgar, at which his uncle laughed, and asked him what he could find to do until the roof was on, unless indeed he were going to turn carpenter.

"If you are going to open a store I guess that you will want some customers, and the more we can get beforehand, the more we can make things hum when we do start," replied Elgar, with such an air of understanding what he was about, that his uncle took a sudden determination and replied:

"I tell you what it is, boy, you have got the head of a grown man on those young shoulders of yours, and so you shall have a man's privileges, so far as I can give them to you, and you shall start as a partner from the very beginning. We will open as Townsford & Hunt, general providers, and we will engage to supply everything, from herrings to false hair, and from cradles to coffins, we shall be able to make the thing boom at a fine rate you will see."

"I hope so," replied Elgar, rather dubiously. His experience had been that it was easier to make things boom in theory than in practice, and he mostly wanted some very firm ground upon which to rest his hopes.

"Well, how are you going to start getting customers?" asked his uncle, after a short pause given up to calculations on how many feet of lumber would

be required to make a shack of the size necessary for a store.

"Oh, I shall go round and see people, if there is a chance of doing them a good turn I shall do it; and then I can get some notice boards painted, and put our pair of wheels on one of the packing cases, to make a truck for carrying the goods out when we get them," said Elgar, and then he asked, "By the way, how are you going to get things? Have you ordered any up from Vancouver City, or from anywhere else?"

"There is nowhere else to order them from that I know of, unless we had them straight across from Japan. But I have not ordered any special line of goods, so we shall just have to sell our own private stores, until we can get a shipment up, though perhaps I can board the next vessel which comes up from Vancouver City, and see if there is anything which I can buy off-hand," replied his uncle.

"All right; well I'll start back, and tell Aunt Mary that the deal is done, and we are going to open the store the day after the shingles are on the roof," said Elgar. "Oh, I say, I shall enjoy earning money, and just won't I serve the customers with an air! It will be London and Winnipeg combined, and people will be tempted into buying more things, just because of my beautiful manners."

"But I'm afraid even good manners won't make them willing to pay more for the things," rejoined his uncle with a laugh, as he turned away in the direction of the land agent's office, while Elgar hurried home to tell his aunt Mary, that the business was fairly under way at last.

Things were hustled in the next few days. Materials were to be had almost for the asking, as wood

was so plentiful, and the saw mills were turning out planking faster than it could be carted away. It was labour which was so hard to get, and so expensive. But they did their very best, with such help as they could obtain. Bob Townsford worked like a day-labourer, while Elgar did his utmost too, and even Mrs. Townsford came down to Yokohama Street, bringing a hammer with her, and drove nails with the skill of an expert. The three little girls, Etta, May and Pinkie, ran errands, fetched, carried, and prepared food for the other workers, so that there was not one idle person, and the work went on apace.

In four days the roof was ready for the shingles. And on the fifth morning Elgar opened the store in the front room, which extended the whole length of the front of the building, while the back part was divided into two portions, for eating, and sleeping.

There was a flaming notice board outside, which set forth in big letters all the conveniences which would accrue to every one from the opening of the new store, and although the stock inside, was neither large nor varied, consisting mainly of bacon, beans, and a few articles of wearing apparel, the energy of the salesman was so great, that by lighting-up time, there was scarcely anything left to buy.

It was then that leaving the store a minute to take care of itself, Elgar came rushing in search of his aunt, begging to know if she had any more clothes which she could spare, for he had sold every garment in the store, and it was clothes which people seemed to be most keen upon buying.

"There are the children's Sunday frocks, but if you take them, the poor mites will have to go without until I can make some more," said Mrs. Townsford,

something between a laugh and a sob. There had been so many disappointments in her life, that the tremendous success heralding in this new venture, was more than she could take calmly at the first.

"Let me have the frocks by all means," said Elgar, with a chuckle. "Tell me the outside price which they cost you when they were new, and then if I trebled it you will be paid for the trouble of getting new ones, and the kiddies will have new clothes into the bargain. I've just sold my best clothes, and my top coat, and I haven't got a rag except what I stand up in. My word, but we are doing fine, and no mistake!"

"Oh, how could you sell your things, you silly boy, what will you do, if you get wet through?" cried his aunt.

"Run about until I get dry, I guess," replied Elgar calmly; and then he asked, in a wheedling tone, "I say, Aunt Mary, have you got any brooches, or earrings that you don't want? They would go like hot cakes, just now, and we'd find the money uncommon useful, I can tell you."

"I haven't got a thing left, except my wedding ring, and you would hardly expect me to part with that I suppose," replied Mrs. Townsford, laughing.

But even this Elgar took seriously, and remarked in a matter of fact tone, "I daresay it would fetch a good price, and it is not really necessary, because of course we all know that you are married."

"Well, I am not going to let you have it, so don't make any mistakes on that score," said Mrs. Townsford, with a laugh, and then she suddenly grew serious as she said, dropping her voice into a lower key, "but Elgar, though I have no trinkets left,

there are those left by your mother, which I have been keeping for you. I will unpack the box for you to see to-night after the store is closed, and then you shall decide whether you would like to keep any of the things, or to put them into the stock of the store."

"Can't I have them now?" asked Elgar, who was in the mood to sell anything and everything that he could get hold of.

"No, for I have to find them first, and even then, I would rather that you had a few hours to think about it, before you decide to sell any of the things, for although being a boy, of course you cannot wear the brooches, rings, and chains, still you may be sorry some day, if you go and dispose of them in a great hurry."

"I suppose you know best, Aunt Mary," said Elgar, with a sigh, "But give me the children's Sunday frocks, and I will try and treble the price. Something I must have to sell, or what is the use of opening a store?"

"What indeed?" said his aunt, with a smile and a sigh. Then she fetched the little garments, told Elgar what they had cost her in the first place, leaving it to him to make the best price he could, which he accordingly did. In less than an hour they were all sold, and great was the wailing and lamentation among the three little maidens, when they discovered that the Sunday frocks had gone beyond recall, they were not even consoled when Elgar promised that they should have sky blue frocks trimmed with pink ribbons, by the very next boat from Vancouver City.

But the store was prospering, and that was the main thing, the children would soon get over the loss of

their frocks, and Elgar would have all the more money to buy stock for the store.

He ought to have been attending school still, for his education was only scanty, but there was such urgent need of his help in the earning of the daily bread, that it was of no use to think of his attending school any longer.

Bob Townsford was keen on speculation, and he really cared very little for anything else, but he had the sense not to risk his all in that sort of enterprise, and so a certain amount of money had been sunk in the house, and the store, while he could use what was left as a basis for his speculative operations.

That night when the store was closed, the three little girls in bed, and Mr. Townsford still away on some errand of business, Mrs. Townsford brought a little wooden box from her bedroom, and set it on the kitchen table in front of Elgar, who was eating a very late supper.

"There are the things, dear. There is nothing there of much value I fear, for neither your mother, nor I had much money to invest in trinkets, but of course some of the things were valued on account of their associations."

"Thank you, aunt," said Elgar, and his face was very sober when he opened the box, for he could not remember his mother, or his father, and although he had never had to want for love, thanks to his aunt, yet all the same it was only natural that he should feel receiving these things, which his mother had treasured while in life.

Rings, chains, brooches, little lockets, a couple of silver bracelets, all of them old-fashioned, and a little tarnished, as such things would be from long neglect.

Elgar turned them over with reverent fingers, yet at the same time conscious of a wonder at the back of his mind, that any one should want to treasure things of this sort, when suddenly his hand fell on an object, which even to his ignorance seemed of more worth than all the other things put together. This was a heart-shaped locket in deep Californian gold, set round with emeralds, which flashed like green fire in the light of the kerosene lamp.

"Oh, I say!" he ejaculated admiringly, and his aunt, who was sewing on the other side of the table, looked across to see what it was which had attracted his admiration.

"That was your father's, and his father's before him," she said. "The Hunts had been great people at one time, or so your poor father was always saying, but that locket with the emeralds was the only visible sign of their greatness that I ever set eyes on."

"Does it open?" asked Elgar, who was casting careful glances all round the locket to see if he could find the hinge.

"I don't know, I never saw it open. I know that once or twice your mother wanted it to be sold, but your father said no. Even when he was dying, and could only speak with difficulty, he begged her never to part with the emerald locket, and she never did."

"I am glad of that," said Elgar simply, and then was conscious that his aunt was somehow vexed, and as he hated to give her pain, because she had been so good to him, and had loved him when there was no one else to care for him, he said no more, only he did not put the emerald locket back with the other things, instead, he slipped it into a tiny wash-leather bag, and slung it round his neck by a stout string.

That night when he was alone, and should by rights have been asleep, he sat up on the heap of shavings under the counter in the store, which at the present served him for a bedroom, and pulled the locket out of its bag, to inspect it once again.

It was strange what a fascination the thing had for him. He told himself that this was because it had belonged to his father, whom he had never known, but perhaps it was because his father had set such value on it, that even in deep poverty it was not to be parted with, which made Elgar feel that he must value it also.

Holding it close to the kerosene lamp, which was really much too near the shavings for safety, Elgar espied a hinge in the side of the locket, and a very little more prodding resulted in the locket coming open in his hand.

He had no idea what it was that he had expected to see, but he was certainly surprised to find on one side the portrait of a man whose face was vaguely familiar, and on the other a tiny full length picture of a lady holding a fan.

After all it was the sight of that fan in the lady's hand which gave him the clue to where he had seen the portrait of the man before, and rummaging in his pocket for the bit of carved ivory wrapped up in sodden cardboard, he drew it out, and compared the two.

Yes, strange as it seemed, the two were portraits of the same man, but who was the man ?

In his effort to puzzle the matter out to his own satisfaction, Elgar lifted his eyes to the window, and then was startled to find a face pressed against the glass, and staring in at the thing in his hand. It was a white face, the chin covered with a dark beard, that was the impression which he got, for at his startled exclamation, the intruder swiftly disappeared.

CHAPTER III

Caught Napping

Elgar promptly blew out his lamp,and then, creeping to the window, peered out into the dark night.

But there was nothing to be seen, he had scarcely expected that there would be. But he was shivering all over from the scare of seeing that face pressed so close against the window pane, and staring so fixedly at the thing in his hand. He stood at the window for a long time, straining his ears to catch the faintest sign of movement outside, and straining his eyes to see something in the dark.

Then he crept back to his bed again, and lay shivering with all sorts of fears, and fancies. It was a mysterious affair altogether. Why had Reuben Shore made a mystery of that fan, by covering it up, when he saw Elgar's eyes wandering in the direction of an object so unusual to find in a country store ? Then why had the fan been broken, and dropped among the stumps, and most important of all, what significance had it for any one ?

Questions such as these were sufficient to keep any one awake, but Elgar had worked so hard on the previous day, and he was growing so fast, too, while

half-an-hour of speculation made him so fearfully sleepy that the next thing he knew was his aunt calling to him that it was time to get up.

Things looked different in the morning, they mostly do, and what had been so mysterious over night, now resolved itself into a very commonplace affair indeed Someone had seen the costly fan lying on the counter of Reuben Shore as he had done, and tempted by its evident value, had tried to steal it; there had been a scuffle in which the fan had got broken, and Reuben so much knocked about, that it was necessary to take him to the hospital tent. Oh, it was a very plain sort of a story when worked out in the reasonable light of day, and Elgar laughed at himself, because of the shivering in which he had indulged over night. It was a good thing that no one else had seen how scared he was, or they might have dubbed him a coward, and that was what he called himself for the whole of that day, despising himself with so fierce a scorn, that it made his temper short where other people were concerned.

The next night he took care to show no light, when he went to his bed under the counter of the store, and a careful prowl round the place outside, had shown everything to be quite quiet, and so he deemed that he should have an undisturbed night, but in that he was doomed to be disappointed.

He was just dropping off to sleep when his quick ear caught the sound of scraping at the window by the door, and instantly he guessed what was going on. Some one was trying to scrape away the putty from the newly glazed window, to remove a pane of glass, and if that were done, a person with a long arm might easily slip the bolt back, and open the door.

Elgar tingled all over with something which was not fear, but a delightful sense of daring. He had got the store to protect, and he meant to do it. One way was to shout, and yell, wake his uncle and aunt, start the three little girls crying from fright, and give the would-be-thief plenty of time to decamp under shelter of the noise, but that was not the way that appealed to Elgar, who had been calling himself a coward all the day, and might well be reckoned one, if he roused the house every time that he heard a mouse scratching outside a cheese-tub.

There was a revolver kept in the store, and it was kept loaded too, for in a new settlement like that, where everything, law and order included was in a state of chaos, it behoved every tradesman to be prepared to act on the defensive should need arise.

Slipping noiselessly from his heap of shavings, Elgar groped in the dark for the revolver, and as his hand closed over it, a delightful sense of security came to him, for now he was at least on an equality with the man outside, who was still scraping vigorously, making as little noise as possible, but apparently finding more difficulty than he had expected. This was owing to a ruse of Elgar's, who finding on the previous day that the putty about the window glass would not set, had got some quick drying varnish, and mixing a liberal amount of rock-grit with it, had smeared the putty with it, the result being that already it was as hard as if it had been in place a week, while the grit might be trusted to spoil the edge of the best knife that was ever sharpened.

Creeping close to the door, Elgar crouched, and waited. He meant to shoot the man's hand, when it appeared through the opening in the window-pane.

That would be neither murder nor manslaughter, but at the same time might teach the thief a useful lesson as to the undesirablity of thieving. It would be the right hand too, and Elgar was thinking of how he would go to the police to-morrow, and would say to them, look out for a man with an injured right hand, and that is the thief, who tried to loot my uncle's store last night.

Ah, there it was! In his hurry he aimed the revolver a little too high, there was a crash of broken glass, a startled exclamation, and then the sound of hastily retreating footsteps, while from the next room his uncle was shouting to know what was the matter in the store.

Elgar was the most dreadfully mortified boy in all the new young city that night, because he had aimed at the burglar at such close quarters, and then had missed him, for he was sure that he had missed him, and now there would be no means of identifying him, while the pane of glass was smashed all to bits, and the other pane which the robber had removed was broken also.

For a wonder his uncle did not laugh at him though, and that was just a little balm to his soreness. There really had been some one trying to force an entrance, and Bob Townsford congratulated the boy on his promptness and pluck, at the same time promising to have a more secure fastening put on the door, the very next day.

This was being fixed in the middle of the morning, while Elgar was unpacking a lot of goods which had arrived from Vancouver City, consigned to a man who was dead before they could arrive, and whose heirs had been glad to hand them over to the

enterprising firm of Townsford & Hunt for a consideration.

The locksmith who was doing the work, being of a garrulous turn, was retailing various items of news while he chiselled, and screwed, and Elgar who was very busy, was giving only half attention to what was being said, when his notice was caught by a chance word, after which he listened with all his ears, though he kept his face carefully turned in another direction, fearful lest his looks might betray the absorbing interest which had taken possession of him.

" Mr. Bulkley is in a very bad way, I am afraid, and so sudden too—it shows how desperate unsafe it is for people to meddle in things, which they don't understand," said the locksmith, as he filed away at a screw with a horrid, raucous noise, well calculated to set any one's teeth on edge.

" What is the matter with him, he was all right yesterday ? " said Bob Townsford, in an interested tone. He could never quite understand Simon Bulkley's interest in him, a complete stranger, in the matter of helping him to a building lot, quite reasonably cheap, and so he was disposed to be rather flattered by it.

The locksmith's mouth was so full of screws, that he had to wait a moment before replying to get them out, then he said, " Mr. Bulkley was experimenting late last night, with some minerals, which had been brought down from Stevens Creek, when one of the lumps exploded in the assaying pan, and he was caught right in the face, and they say that he is badly damaged ; it is feared that the sight of one eye is gone, and his face is all torn up, as if it had been ploughed,

while bits of glass are stuck into him, as plentiful as pins in a pin cushion."

"Where did the glass come from, if he was busy with an assaying pan?" asked Elgar, in such a strained eager tone, that he was fairly frightened at the sound of it, while the locksmith looked at him in surprise, and his uncle gave him such a nudge, that he nearly toppled head first into the case which he was unpacking.

"I dunno, I'm sure. I expect he'd got some glass vessel standing near, perhaps he even poked a bit of glass into the pan to stir the melting metal; you never can tell what silly things people will do for want of thought. Simon Bulkley is terrible cute when it comes to making money, but it is mostly that sort who lose their heads over simple matters of taking care," said the locksmith, with another raucous scrape at his screw, which set Elgar's teeth on edge.

"A nasty sort of accident that, I think that I will look round that way, and see how he is getting on, it will seem neighbourly," said Bob Townsford, with a warning look at Elgar, and a slight shake of the head, behind the back of the locksmith, then he jammed his old hat firmer on his head, and went out of the door, taking the direction of Main Street.

Work was in full swing everywhere this morning. The new city had to be laid out in a manner befitting its future greatness, and blasting was in operation to clear away a great chunk of solid rock, where it was intended to build a magnificent block of shipping offices. Bob Townsford met an acquaintance just as he reached this place, and the two stood talking about a wonderful find of coal, which had been

reported by a prospector, only yesterday returned from the Hoosall River district. So eager were they in their discussion as to whether coal so far from the railway could possibly be worth the working, that neither of them took the slightest notice of the strident blast of a siren somewhere close at hand, or heeded the way in which men were running to cover, and backing horses away from the neighbourhood of the foundations, which were being dug for the shipping offices. Some one shouted in a warning fashion, but that even made no difference to the two men who were so busy wrangling on the best way to make a fortune.

Then a second blast rang out, there was a furious rush of the few remaining workmen from the danger area, a few seconds pause, followed by a violent trembling of the ground.

"Earthquake?" gasped Bob Townsford, turning pale.

"No, blasting; look out!" shrieked the other man, making a frantic dash along the street, as a tremendous bellowing roar filled the air with sound, and was accompanied by clouds of smoke, dust, and debris.

Bob Townsford started to run also, but he was not so nimble as his friend, nor yet so alert. He had not gone a dozen steps, before a huge rock fragment hurtling through the air, caught him by the side of the head, bowling him over into a heap of refuse, and leaving him senseless, while a shower of dust and stones pelted down upon him, half-covering him as he lay.

The locksmith had done his work, and gone, and Elgar was in a state of fuming impatience waiting his

uncle's return to know what really ailed Simon Bulkley.

It seemed fairly incredible that a big man like that, should have stooped to attempt a burglary, and the more he thought about it, the more impossible it seemed. And yet the coincidence was so remarkable, that it had to be taken notice of in some way. It was the part about the broken bits of glass stuck into the injured man, which haunted Elgar most, for no man in his senses would have any glass close at hand, when he was melting metal in an assaying pan, while the locksmith's suggestion that the victim used a piece of glass to stir the molten metal was too absurd for anything, and Elgar chuckled softly to himself as he thought about it.

But he was downright sorry that his suspicions should have fallen on Simon Bulkley, for it would be simply impossible for strangers, like themselves, to make out a case against a highly placed individual, like the surveyor. The police would laugh even the suggestion to scorn, and would most likely refuse to act upon it. Moreover, the intruder had taken nothing, but had only tried to effect an entrance. The more he thought about it, the more Elgar was disposed to regret his own hasty action in scaring the intruder away. If only he had waited until the burglar had got inside, and laid hands on some property, then there would have been a clear case against him, and something might have been done.

"But what in the world did he want to break in here for?" Elgar asked himself, for about the fortieth time, as he looked round the poor little store, with its scanty stock-in-trade.

Then he thought of the face at the window, on the

night before, and asked himself, was that Simon Bulkley? But rack his memory as he would, that was a question that he could not answer. His knowledge of Mr. Bulkley's features was by no means close, while he had been so surprised, and truth to tell, so scared by the apparition of the face at the window, that he had only a dim remembrance of it as a whole, and could not recall it in detail, except the one item of the fringe of black, or dark whiskers surrounding the chin, but then every third man in the city almost wore his whiskers like that if he shaved at all, so that did not count, save in the matter of making the affair more perplexing.

Then there was the other mystery, which Elgar had been wanting to question his aunt about. Who was the man whose portrait was in the locket set with emeralds, and who was the lady with the fan?

But with the three little girls round under her feet, Mrs. Townsford was not available for the close questioning to which Elgar longed to subject her, and so he had to swallow his impatience, and wait his opportunity.

Meanwhile the hours were passing on, and still Uncle Bob did not come back. Not that there was anything very astonishing in this, as he was very uncertain and erratic in his comings and goings, so much so that Mrs. Townsford never attempted the preparation of a midday meal; the children could have a piece of food in their hands as they ran about, she and Elgar could satisfy their hunger in the same way, and the plan had at least the advantage of saving work in the matter of dish washing. At night a plentiful hot supper was prepared, and breakfast was usually the remains of this over-night feast.

The string of customers continued steady all the afternoon, dropped to a trickle about the time that the women were cooking suppers for their husbands, then rose again to flood, as the lumbermen came from their camp to the town.

Elgar was dreadfully tired with his long day of work in the store, and he was disposed to be a little resentful that his uncle should go away so much, leaving the whole work of serving on his hands, especially in the unfinished state of the building, when things were all over the place, and it was almost one person's work to hunt round among the miscellaneous heaps on the floor to find the goods as they were required.

But the first duty of a scout was to do his part in the world without complaining, and the next was to help some one else, and if he did these things properly, Elgar knew that his complainings had not a leg to stand upon, so he swallowed his dissatisfaction and promised himself a run in the fresh air when closing time came.

The store was still thronged at quite a late hour in the evening, and Elgar was wondering how he would manage to get rid of the customers and get the place shut up, when a rough-looking man, who had a pronounced squint, hurried into the store and asked to see Mr. Townsford.

"He has not come in yet. Can I give him a message, or do anything for you?" asked Elgar, in his best business manner.

"I only want that old report of the last Commission to the Stikine. Mr. Townsford said this morning that he would put it out for me, and I could have it at once, but I was unfortunately

hindered, and could not get round for it before," said the man, who spoke in a cultured tone, despite his rough appearance.

" Uncle Bob has not been home since the morning, and I don't know anything about the report, but I will go and ask my aunt," said Elgar, and for the first time a misgiving about the length of his uncle's absence came into his mind.

" Not been home ? " exclaimed the man, in a puzzled tone. " Why he was coming straight home when we parted, for he said so. I hope he did not get a thump on the head when the explosion came."

" What explosion ? " demanded Elgar, while a cold chill crept down his back, for his uncle was the most unfortunate man, that he knew of for getting into danger, having accidents, and all that sort of thing.

The man detailed the experience of Bob Townsford and himself as they stood talking, heedless of the warning blast of the siren, and said that he had himself escaped without any damage, and supposed his companion to be equally fortunate.

Elgar groaned, and made a move towards the room behind the shop. " I must ask my aunt to catch hold here, while I go out and look for my uncle," he said.

" I'll go along and help you," replied the man with the squint, " I'm afraid that he must have got a thump on the head, and was taken to the hospital tent, without any of you folks being the wiser."

Elgar nodded, that was his own idea, only he had lacked the courage to put it into words.

CHAPTER IV

The Search

Mrs. Townsford had had to face so many situations of keen anxiety, and apprehension, that she was not so much upset by this new worry as a woman might have been, whose life had fallen in easier places.

So when Elgar told her that it seemed necessary for him to go round the town, making inquiries as to the whereabouts of his uncle, she came quietly out to the store, and in less than half-an-hour had disposed of all the customers, and shut the place up for the night. Then it was, the real trouble of the waiting had come. It was comparatively easy to say there was nothing much the matter, and to believe it, while the store was full of sympathetic customers, but when these had all gone, and the door was shut and locked, a whole host of fears sprang into existence, and she could hardly bear the quiet house, and the sight of the three little girls asleep in their bed.

Meanwhile, Elgar, accompanied by the rough man with the squint, whose name was Dick Blore, made their way to the hospital tent as fast as they could go, and put their question as to who had been brought

in that day. Elgar's idea was that his uncle might have been stunned, and not recovered consciousness, which would account for their not having received news of the disaster, if such there had been.

But at the tent they received their first disappointment, for they were told that no accident cases had been received for three days past, which was sufficiently wonderful in a place like Prince Rupert Town, where blasting was continually going on, and where people seemed absolutely careless about risking their lives in all sorts of ways.

"Where was the place that you parted from Uncle Bob?" asked Elgar curtly as they turned away from the enclosure in which stood the great white tent.

"Round at the side of the lot where Smith & Barnet's shipping offices are going up; but you could not exactly call it a parting, since he ran one way and I ran the other, sprinting for all we were worth, for though you may find it hard to believe, we had neither of us heard the siren giving warning for the blasting, and so we were taken quite unawares. I felt the ground begin to heave, and your uncle called out to know if it was earthquake, and then I sized up pretty sharp what it really was, and I went for all I was worth, and I guess that he did too."

"I don't, I know Uncle Bob's ways too well," replied Elgar, "I expect he stood still to see what was coming next, and then something came along, and knocked him down, and there he has lain ever since. Poor uncle!"

"I should just think he is 'poor uncle,' if he was soft enough to stand still, and wait while rocks whistled round his head on the off chance that they wouldn't hit him!" exclaimed Dick Blore, his tone

sarcastic, but an uneasy feeling at his heart, as he reflected that perhaps he ought to have gone back to see whether any harm had overtaken his companion.

"We must get lanterns, and start searching right away," said Elgar. He was not disposed to waste words in discussing his uncle with this stranger, but he had quite made up his mind what was the matter, and would not quit searching until he had poked his nose into every pile of rubbish within the danger area.

Lanterns were speedily forthcoming, and so were helpers, for people were genuinely sympathetic with each other, in a place where dangers crowded thick, and fast about the daily life.

For three hours they hunted and hunted, finding nothing. Then Elgar implored Dick Blore, who by this time seemed like an old friend, to go back to Yokohama Street and tell Mrs. Townsford what they were doing, for he guessed that she would be nearly worn out by worry at this time, while if there was still worse to come, it would be better for her to have some sort of preparation for the event.

It was while Dick was gone on this errand, that they stumbled on a clue, for a hat was found in a deep trench, and inside the lining was the name, R. Townsford; this was brought to Elgar, who speedily identified it as the hat which his uncle was wearing, when he went out to inquire as to the well-being of Simon Bulkley.

"Now we have some sort of a clue to work upon, though how a man could have been bowled over by a rock, and lie here for the rest of the day without anyone seeing him, is more than I can imagine,"

said a man, who had constituted himself the leader of the searchers. But the trouble was that the clue was a false one, inasmuch as in running Bob Townsford's hat must have fallen off his head, and been whirled by the wind for quite a considerable distance, finally being pulled up in a deep trench, which was only a few feet removed from a wide pool of water, and which in the course of the night's search, was thoroughly dragged by those in search of the missing man.

"Well, I came along here at least six times with a horse and wagon after the blasting yesterday, and I didn't find anything peculiar lying about," said another man of stolid appearance and heavy build.

"That ain't wonderful, Joe, since you wouldn't see your supper, not when it was set under your nose even, unless you was so downright ravenous hungry that you were about equal to eating the table," remarked a comrade, whereat the others laughed, but at the sound of their mirth, Elgar clenched his fists in a sudden rage at what he deemed their callousness.

"There is another trench over beyond this one, we could get at it easier if we had a plank to bridge this place," said the leader, who had not laughed, just because he was too busy planning his search campaign to have any time to spare for outside things.

"There are some planks over there," said Elgar, who was pressing close to his side. "I'll go and fetch one," and swinging his lantern to show the path, he ran along by the heaps of rubbish on the other side of the road, to where he had noticed some planks of wood lying, earlier in the search, and had not forgotten.

He was running along, and swinging his lantern, when his attention was caught by a boot protruding from a heap of rubbish awaiting removal, and in a moment he was on his knees, searching for the remainder of the figure of which the boot was the natural end.

"Here, hi, I've found him!" he yelled, and his voice, although he knew it not, was a wail of misery, for he never doubted but that it was a dead body upon which he had chanced so much by accident, when the search had been so long carried on, at the other part of the danger area.

There was a rush of men to the spot, and very speedily poor Bob Townsford was lifted out from under the rubbish, where he had lain so many hours, and where he might have lain until daylight, but for Elgar coming to find the plank with which to bridge the trench.

They thought at first that he was quite dead, but the doctor, who had been hastily summoned to the spot, declared that life was not extinct, though the sufferer must have succumbed, if he had lain there many more hours. There was a broken leg, severe concussion, many bruises, a couple of severe flesh wounds, and there might be internal injuries which could not be discovered yet, but there was life, and while that remained there was hope.

"Shall we take him to the hospital tent?" asked the leader of the search party, who was considerably crestfallen to find that he had been following a false trail for so long, and entailing so much worthless labour on himself and his mates.

Elgar hesitated, not knowing what to say, but Dick Blore, who had been talking to Mrs. Townsford, and

had heard what was in her mind, said "No," that the badly injured man was to be taken to his home, because his wife wished it.

"A good thing that he has got a home to be taken to, poor fellow," said the doctor, as he helped to put the damaged man on to a stretcher which had been hastily procured for the purpose. "We have quite enough folks in the hospital tent who have no home where they can be cared for."

Elgar hurried away to carry the news to his aunt, and to prepare her for the home-coming of his uncle, and as he made his way across main street, he saw the dawn beginning to break in the east, so a new day had begun, and the night was over, though he had had no rest.

There was no fuss or flurry from Mrs. Townsford when Elgar rushed indoors with the news that her husband had been found, and was being brought home. Instead, she quickly summed up the things that the doctor would require for his work, and started Elgar on getting them ready.

"The kitchen table will be wanted for the doctor to set the leg, just clear it off, will you, dear, and then hot water will be required, so the stove must be set going again, and the kettles filled up, so that they may boil by the time the doctor is ready for them. I am going to get the bed ready now, and then I shall be free to help the doctor when they get here," she said, with never a sign of breakdown.

But Elgar was dreadfully concerned on her behalf. "Isn't there some woman that I could fetch to help you, Aunt Mary?" he asked anxiously. "It doesn't seem right that you should have to wait on the doctor; it will be such ugly work anyway."

"I don't know any women, only that poor little Mrs. Jameson, who has so many babies, and I really could not ask her," replied his aunt, although she was conscious of a very great shrinking, at the mere thought of helping the doctor, when he set the broken leg of her husband.

"Then I shall help the doctor myself, and you can go and lie down on the bed with the kiddies," said Elgar stoutly. "I'm as good as a woman at some things, and what I don't know the doctor can tell me, and anyhow, I shan't faint."

"Is that a gentle hint that you think I should faint?" Mrs. Townsford asked, with a smile.

"I expect you would, women mostly do, they can't help it, for they are made that way," replied Elgar, with such an air of kindly toleration that his aunt laughed in spite of herself, and then as the tramp of men's feet sounded outside, she turned so ghastly white as to justify all that Elgar had said about women being given to fainting, because they could not help it.

"Here, you go and lie down a bit, I'll see to the men," he said urgently, fairly sweeping her off into the bedroom, and shutting the door upon her, before the little company of men with their ghastly burden arrived upon the scene.

Then Elgar was at the door to meet them, and suggested that the table would be a good place for placing the patient upon, until the poor man was ready to be laid in his bed, as the children were asleep in the bedroom, and it was not worth while to start them all off crying at once.

"I should think not indeed; we don't want noise of that sort to add to our other bothers," said the

doctor crisply, as he stepped to the side of the injured man, who had been laid on the table, and began to strip off his things. "But I shall want bandages, hot water, and various things; where is the woman of the house?"

"I fancy that you will have to do with me, until you are through with setting that leg," answered Elgar calmly, and trying not to feel sick at the sight of the ghastly flesh wounds which showed in all their ugliness, now that the doctor was stripping the torn garments away. "I'm about as good as a woman at waiting on people, and Aunt Mary isn't very strong, so I've shut her up in the bedroom until we are ready to carry him in there."

"A very good idea. I see that you have got your head screwed the right way on, young shaver," said the doctor with a kindly nod of his head. "Now then, some hot water, please, and an old sheet, if you have got one, to tear up for bandaging."

Elgar flew to obey, and then for the next three quarters of an hour he was kept actively on the move waiting upon the doctor. Dick Blore stayed to help too, but the other men had gone away when there was nothing more that they could do.

Bob Townsford was still unconscious when he was laid upon his bed, and Elgar had a dreadful fear lest he should slip out of life after all.

It was a long, hard day that followed, and he was so tired that he did not know what to do with himself, and he did not dare go to sleep in the store, lest he should not wake up if anyone came in, and in view of the many light-fingered folks who frequented this part of the town, it was never safe to turn one's back when the store door was open.

It was his cousin Etta, a thoughtful little maiden of eleven, who came to his rescue finally, and enabled him to get a little of the rest which he needed so badly.

"You lie down, and go to sleep, Elgar, and I will sit here in the store, and every time anyone comes in, I will wake you up," she said, coming into the store in the afternoon, and finding him with a wet towel bound round his head, to help him keep his attention on what he had to do.

"Do you think that you could?" he asked.

"Of course I could, never you fear, and I just hope that no one will come for an hour or so, and then you will get quite a nice sleep. Mother is lying down on the bed beside poor daddy, and May is looking after the two of them," said Etta, and then she stationed herself on a high stool behind the counter, and looked very important indeed, while Elgar tore the wet towel from his head, and rolled down on the heap of shavings where he slept at night.

But it seemed to him that he had only just begun to doze, although he had been to sleep a good hour, when he heard a shrill scream from Etta. He tried to wake up, but his slumber seemed like stiff bonds about his head, and he was still struggling in the endeavour to wake up, when he heard Etta cry out sharply, "No, no, you must not take that! Oh, Elgar, Elgar, wake up quick, quick!"

Her tone was so urgent that he struggled to his feet, not fully awake even now, yet understanding that she needed him, and trying his best not to fail her.

"Yes, yes, Etta, I am here, what is it that you want?" he began; then seeing that a burly ruffian

was striving to make off with something that the child was clinging to with all her might, he hurled himself straight at the fellow, hitting blindly at his head and face, by no means understanding what was wrong, but doing his best to help Etta keep possession of what she was holding so fast.

The fellow decamped in a great hurry then, and Elgar, who was waking up now, saw that it was a Chinaman, with a peculiarly ugly face, and a badly scarred upper lip.

"What was it that he was helping himself to, child?" asked Elgar drowsily, feeling that it would be wiser not to go to sleep at all, if waking up made him feel so bad.

"It was this, he took it out of your jacket pocket, and was making off with it. I screamed to you, and I kicked you, but you would not wake up, and so I had to run after him, and hang on tight, only he was so tremendously strong, that I was afraid every minute he would be gone before you woke up enough to tackle him. But when you did come you roared at him like a lion, and it was fine to see you pitch into him, and he about twice your size. Oh, you are a brave boy, Elgar!" cried Etta, in genuine and unqualified admiration.

But her praise brought no thrill of satisfaction to Elgar, it is even doubtful whether he took in the full sense of it, for the thing which she gave him, that the thievish fingers of the unknown Chinkie had fastened upon, was the little packet wrapped in soft brown paper, containing the fragment of the ivory fan with the portrait of the unknown man.

A queer, giddy sensation gripped Elgar then, and he leaned against the wall, wondering what there

could be in that seemingly unimportant fragment to make so many people anxious to retain it, and to get it in their possession.

First there had been Reuben Shore, who had plainly been attacked with it in his possession. Then there was the unknown man with the white face and fringe of dark whiskers, whom he had seen peering through the window at him. After this had come the mysterious burglar, at whom he had fired, and whose identity, if guessing were correct, added still further to the mystery. Now, on the top of all the others came this Chinaman, who doubtless, watching his opportunity, had swooped down upon the place in broad daylight, and would have succeeded in getting clear away with the fragment but for his little cousin's pluck and presence of mind.

"What is it, Elgar, money?" asked Etta, with a nod towards the parcel.

"No, but there may be money in it, and so I will take more care of it in future," he answered, as he cast about in his mind for some place of security in which to hide, not merely that, but his own emerald locket, which contained the companion portrait.

CHAPTER V

Reuben Shore's Message

It was astonishing how soon the little household in Yokohama street settled themselves into the new condition of things. Before a week had passed from the time of the accident, Elgar felt as if he had always been used to being the head of the business, and it seemed no trouble at all to comprise in his own person the offices of manager, errand boy, warehouseman, and outside messenger.

Bob Townsford did not recover consciousness until the third morning after the dawn in which he was brought home, and Mrs. Townsford found her hands very full indeed with the double work of nursing her husband, and caring for the household at the same time. Etta and May did their best to help her, and to keep the very irresponsible Miss Pinkie out of mischief, but the domestic burden was very heavy to bear at this particular time, and it would have been heavier but for the kindness of Dick Blore, who insisted on sitting up with the sick man every second night, because as he declared poor Bob's condition would never have been so bad, if it had not been for his own carelessness in not going to see if his

companion had got clear away from the results of the blasting.

As Elgar had to be away for a part of every day delivering goods, he had taken the precaution of shutting the store for two or three hours in the middle of the afternoon, when there was only a little business doing, for he could not risk having his little cousins frightened by any more encounters with thieving Chinamen, and it was quite out of the question for Mrs. Townsford to spare any time for the store.

He had shut the place up one afternoon, about ten days after his uncle's accident, and was dragging a heavy truck of goods up a little back trail to some huts on the cliff above the jetty, when he saw an old man sitting on a lump of lumber by the side of the trail, and at the second glance recognised him as Reuben Shore. Indeed it would be difficult not to recognise him, for even in that community of hard-working, hard-living, and in some instances almost desperate men, it would be unusual to find more than one man with such a seamed, lined, and almost venomous face as that which Reuben Shore presented to the public gaze.

Elgar was almost inclined to pass him by without speaking, but his scout duty insisted on courtesy to all men, especially the feeble and the old. So he eased his truck up as he approached, and lifting his cap, enquired if the old man were better.

"I'm well enough, and don't want none of your sass," grunted Reuben under the impression that he was being made fun of, and then Elgar, whose temper was by no means perfect, flew all to pieces, and forgot that he was a scout, pledged to courteous conduct and helpful ways.

"You might as well keep a civil tongue in your head, I should think. You would have been dead most likely by this time, if it hadn't been for me, and if this is the line you are going to take, I think the world would be a sweeter place at this minute if I had minded my own business instead of interfering in yours."

To his amazement, the old man became suddenly more amiable on being talked to in this fashion, which after all was perhaps the kind of treatment with which he was most familiar.

"Hoity toity, then, young feller, keep your hair on, or else you will be bald before you are twenty, and that would be a pity," said Reuben, with the nearest approach to a smile of which he was ever guilty. "So you are the young shaver what saved me from getting my head bashed in by those two ruffians who ran away with my money, in order to get me out of my entrenchments, so that they could knock me about. Well, they did not get all they wanted, or expected, not at that time at least, though I daresay they have helped themselves since. But I will be revenged on them before I've done, or my name is not Reuben Shore."

"I hope that you will soon be quite strong again; good afternoon," said Elgar, lifting his cap again, and preparing to move on. In his opinion the old man was a little touched in his head, and he did not care to linger longer talking to him.

"Here, wait a minute! What's your hurry? But there, young people have no sympathy with the old and the poor," whined Reuben, in a tone so melancholy that Elgar at once pulled up and asked how he could serve him.

"Do you happen to be going as far as Josh Browning's lumber camp?" asked the old man, with a wag of his head towards the thick forest inland from the harbour, where the axe of the lumberman was busy from dawn to dark.

"Yes, I'm going within half a mile of it; is there anything that I can do for you in that direction?" asked Elgar, thinking that in such a case he would have to walk uphill a little faster or else he would risk being late in getting home, for an extra mile on such a trail made a considerable difference in an afternoon's journey.

"I'd be glad if you can take a message for me," said the old fellow quietly, and with such an air of sense, that Elgar immediately called himself hard names for even thinking that there was anything wrong with the old man's head.

"What is the message, a letter?" asked Elgar.

"No, I'm not in the habit of giving myself away on paper, I leave that for other people," snarled Reuben, with a sudden lapse into ferocity; and then he said, striving to make his voice sound pleasanter, "I suppose that you can remember a message, can't you?"

"Just rather! You try me," and Elgar swelled visibly, thinking of his prowess in memory with regard to his business dealings.

"Well, then, you just go to Josh Browning's camp and find the cook, which won't be difficult, as he will be just in the thick of getting his supper under way, and you say to him that Reuben Shore wants the skunk smoked out to-morrow night."

"A skunk, is it? Oh, where? And do you suppose that the men will let me help?" demanded Elgar

eagerly, for he was very keen on sport, and he had read so much about the fun that might be got from smoking out a skunk, that he just yearned for a chance to catch on and help at the business.

"You can settle that with the men, only don't forget my message," said Reuben, turning away on his seat, as if quite tired of the subject, while Elgar started off up the long hill, walking now at a great pace, because he had already wasted quite five minutes in talking to Reuben Shore, and if he were going to spend all the extra time in toiling along to Josh Browning's camp, he would stand a chance of being very late home indeed, and might lose some of his regular customers in consequence.

Puff, puff, pant, pant, how frightfully heavy his barrow was that hot afternoon, for although autumn was coming on, and the long winter would soon be down upon them, in the middle of the day it was still as hot as summer. Elgar had taken off his coat, and hung it on the truck, while he puffed and panted his way along the rough trail.

It was the same coat from which the Chinaman had attempted to steal the fragment of ivory fan, but the little parcel was not in the pocket to-day, and so he did not mind what he did with his jacket. After much careful consideration, Elgar had hit upon the very safest hiding-place he could think of, for the fragment of that mysterious fan, and his own emerald locket, which seemed to be so strangely connected, by reason of their having the portrait of the same person in them. He had not told anyone of the place, and he did not mean to do so. But he was only waiting his opportunity to ask his Aunt Mary if she could tell him the name of the person

whose portrait seemed to be so much sought after.

He reached the place for which he was making, happily without mishap, and having completed his sales to his satisfaction, he turned his steps along the deeply scored trail which led to Josh Browning's lumber camp. When he reached it, his nearest way home would be, not back by the camp he had come, but by a very narrow trail down the side of a deep valley, which was the way in which the lumber men came to town, and which led straight down to Yokohama Street.

For this reason he did not leave his truck at the last hut, where he had business, but dragged it with him, for he remembered that by taking the narrow trail, he could get home much sooner, and so it was well worth while. There was another reason too for his taking it with him, one of his customers had failed to purchase as much as usual, and he had some flour, sugar, beans, and tea still left in the truck; if he could induce Josh Browning's cook to take these things, he would be so much the better off, and might even secure a permanent customer.

All sugar, tea, and things of that sort had to be brought by boat from Vancouver City, between five and six hundred miles away, and freightage cost so much that traders had to cut things exceedingly fine to get a profit that would pay them for their trouble.

Elgar was always on the look-out for fresh customers. It was his ambition to be able to order in large quantities, when freightage became proportionately cheaper. But so far, their capital had only

admitted of a very modest outlay. Still, so many things had such small beginnings that he did not despair of eventually having his own cargo boats, unless indeed by that time the railway had got through to Prince Rupert Town, in which case a wonderful impetus would be given to trade of all sorts.

Ah, there was the lumber camp right ahead of him, in a hollow of the hills, most cunningly placed to get all the advantage of shelter from the fiercest of the winds, and luckily there was the cook busily engaged in peeling potatoes outside the kitchen tent.

Elgar hurried his truck over the intervening space, and opened fire on the cook by asking him to buy the remainder of his goods.

This the cook was graciously pleased to do, and even lent an attentive ear to the boy, when he spoke modestly of the excellence of the new firm of Universal Providers, which had been opened in Yokohama Street.

"I'll tell the boss about it, boy, and if your terms are reasonable, why it is only fair that you should have a look in. We have four hundred men to feed every day, and their appetites ain't small, so there is good trade for some one," said the man, who seemed a friendly sort, although his face was scored and marked with lines of dissipation.

"There is another thing, and that is what really brought me up here to-day," said Elgar, when he had unloaded all the goods from his truck, and had received payment for the same. "I came across poor old Reuben Shore on my way up to the huts there above the jetty, and he asked me if I would bring a message here for you, that you would tell the others."

"Ah," said the cook sharply, "and what was the message?"

"The old man said: 'Tell him that Reuben Shore wants the skunk smoked out to-morrow night'—and oh, I say, if you are going to smoke it out to-morrow night, say, can't I come, and lend a hand? I'd be awful glad of a bit of fun, and I would be sure to be up here on time; you just try me," said Elgar eagerly, hardly able to refrain from a sort of war dance of delight at the mere prospect of such a chance.

But the man stared at him as if he did not understand, and then he said slowly, "Did Reuben Shore know who you are?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, but I expect he did. Anyhow he has cause to know me for I saved him from having his brains knocked out one night, a while back; he has never had the manners to say 'Thank you,' but I guess he feels grateful somewhere down underneath, and if he doesn't, why he ought to, that's all," said Elgar, not in any sense of boasting, but just to let the cook know what was the extent of his acquaintance with the bad-tempered old man, who had been twice evicted from ground upon which he had squatted, and who was probably meditating settling down in the same fashion somewhere else, at no distant date.

The cook stared at him for a minute, as if even now he could hardly understand, and then he burst into a great shout of laughter, which echoed over the woodlands, and must have reached right away to where the men were busy cutting, and piling lumber for the sawmills.

"What are you laughing at?" demanded Elgar

testily, having a shrewd suspicion that the fellow was laughing at him.

But the fellow fairly rocked with merriment, until feeling thoroughly offended, Elgar caught at the handle of the truck and started home in silent fury.

CHAPTER VI

Why the Cook Laughed

Elgar went home in a fine state of fume, if there was one thing that he hated more than another, it was being laughed at, and the cook's horrible merriment had pursued him until he was out of earshot. Even then the remembrance haunted him, making his ears burn and his cheeks blaze as he thought of the indignity to which he had been subjected.

He was not even mollified next morning, when a large order signed " Josh Browning," arrived at the store, which nearly cleared them out of canned goods, and took him nearly two hours to pack and despatch. His uncle was so much better that morning as to enable Mrs. Townsford to come into the store to serve the occasional customers, while Elgar worked away at the task of getting that big order filled. He seemed to hear all the time the ribald " Ha, ha, ha," of the cook pursuing him, while he weighed out currants, and raisins, and picked out packets of pepper, mustard, and other things mentioned in the long list, which should have made him so glad.

" Why, how empty the place looks ! " cried Mrs.

Townsford, when the things had gone. "What will you do, until the next boat comes in, Elgar?"

"I shall have to go to the warehouses and pay the warehouse price, which I don't like," replied Elgar, in a rueful tone, for his Scotch ancestry was showing in his business thrift, and he heartily disliked being compelled to pay a price which put a big profit into some one else's pocket, but left none for his own. Then he went on to speak of a plan which had occurred to him earlier that day, by which they might order bigger shipments and so get a lower rate of freightage. "I think that it would be a good thing if I went over to Eli Smart, at North Bank, and asked him if he would join us in ordering goods. He does much the same sort of trade that we do, and being on the other side of the city, we are not likely to cross each other's tracks. Don't you think that it would be a good plan, Aunt Mary?"

"Very good, dear, and I should certainly do it if I were you. But you will have to do it on your own, for it is hopeless to even think of mentioning business to your uncle these days, the least thing makes his temperature fly up, and we must not risk fever for him in his present condition," Mrs. Townsford said with a sigh.

"I should think not, and there is really no need to bother him, either," said Elgar. "I can go over to North Bank to-night after store is closed, and settle the matter, then the letter can go to-morrow, and we shall have the goods up by the next boat."

Mrs. Townsford nodded, and then hurried back to her husband's room, from which she had been absent for more than half-an-hour, leaving Etta in charge.

Bob Townsford did not make a good patient, he was

sensitive, nervous, and irritable, it was difficult to keep him quiet, and although he did not worry about the business, he troubled so much about everything else, that they had to form a sort of conspiracy to keep all mention from him of anything which in the remotest way might worry him.

Elgar closed the store to the minute that night, although to do so required some diplomacy and a little gentle hustling, for as was usual with stores in new centres of civilisation, his place was fast becoming a sort of evening lounge for a lot of men who had no other place in which to sit and gossip when their day's work was done.

Then he started on his walk to North Bank, which was round on the other side of the bay, and between three and four miles distant. There was brilliant electric light for most part of the way, though here and there occurred intervals of the blackest gloom, where Elgar could hardly see his hand when he held it up in front of his face.

But he had been that way several times before, and he had a sort of genius for finding his way through mazes of building lots, and over pitfalls in the shape of streets in the making, so in due course he arrived at North Bank, which was almost like a town in itself. To-night it was thronged and bustling, as if it were quite early in the evening instead of already within about an hour of midnight. But there was a saying in the city to the effect that North Bank never went to sleep, or if by any chance it took a doze it always slept with one eye open, so that it should never be caught napping.

The stores were all open, people crowded in and out, buying, talking, laughing, and making jokes,

looking as if they never got tired, and never felt even the slightest need of rest.

To-night there was more excitement than usual, for some prospectors had reached the place just about sundown, reporting great finds of silver in a chain of hills, name unknown, where they had spent the summer, and although the actual facts might pan out very different from the statements being at present made over drinks in the saloons, yet a thrill had gone through the place which had set every one talking, and stirred up a tremendous amount of excitement.

Elgar pushed and elbowed his way through the crowds in his anxiety to reach Eli Smart's place. But when he got there, to his surprise it was not shut but thronged to the door with buyers, loungers, and lookers-on, all of whom seemed to be talking at the tops of their voices as they were bundled hither and thither by people passing in and out.

Edging up into the crowd, Elgar was thinking rather dismally of how short his night's rest would have to be in consequence of this business trip to North Bank, when some words spoken by two men wedged close up to him arrested his attention, and at once he became very wide-awake and intensely alert.

"Sam didn't come over after all, then?" asked one man, who had a deep, thick voice, which, despite its volume, seemed to have no carrying power.

"No," replied his companion, in a tone little above a whisper, but which was clearly audible to Elgar, standing wedged close in behind him. "Old Reuben Shore sent a messenger up to Browning's camp yesterday, to say that he wanted the skunk smoked out

to-night, and Sam was one of the men in Reuben's pay, and so he had to go."

"It is sailing pretty close to the wind, to burn a man's place down over his head now-a-days, though, and the police get more lively every week. I should not care to be in Sam's shoes if the lot of them get caught," boomed the big man.

"They won't get caught, you trust them," said the other. "The job was planned for midnight, because the police would be very busy at that time, and a lot of the other fellows were going to help by kicking up no end of a row on Main Street, so that would hinder the police a good bit, and then this excitement up here would help too, for more police have been telephoned for, as the crowds seemed to be getting out of hand. Old Smart is as nervous as a cat, I can see. He is afraid that his place will be rushed presently, and he knows that about five minutes pitching in would wreck everything there is on the place. Oh, I say, it is as good as a theatre, and you don't have to pay for a seat, either!"

"No, but I don't know as I wouldn't sooner pay, and be able to sit down comfortable, seeing as I've been hard at work since dawn, and I'm not as young as I was twenty years ago," grumbled the big voice.

"Neither am I, come to that, but I'm spry enough to like a good lark, and I'd just like to have helped old Sam fire that shack to-night, only, unluckily for me, I'd business at this end of the town that wouldn't wait, so I had to come here instead," replied the thin voice in its penetrating half-whisper.

Elgar felt his hair stand straight up on end. So it was no mere skunk that was to be smoked out to-night, but some man who by chance had offended

that ugly-tempered old Reuben Shore, who could not be so poor as he looked, if he had the wherewithal to pay other people to do his dirty work. No wonder that Browning's cook had laughed at him for wanting to be allowed to share in the fun! Well, perhaps it would not be as much fun as they fancied, after all. For if he could only find out in which direction the smoking-out was to take place, it would not be his fault if he did not stop it, or at least have a try at it. Where was the sense in being a scout if he did not do his scout duty in this remote part of the Empire to which he had come?

It had been a horrible wrench to him to give up all the joys and excitements of a scout's life when he left England, and he had reflected ruefully that there would be no more joy of going into camp, of learning the arts of tracking, and spooring, and making deductions from the simplest of clues. He had enjoyed every bit of those hard-working holidays, and now the remembrance of them was stirring in him, and making him resolve to do his best here alone, where no one seemed to have any time to think or care about the importance of providing instruction or amusement for boys, and where nothing seemed of any value which did not represent hard cash. It was money, money, money, from morning to night, week in, week out, and he was counted the best man who succeeded in scraping together the biggest pile.

But how could he find out where the smoking-out was to take place, and how was he to get there in time, for it was nearly midnight already, and if it was far away there would be no time to give a warning, or even to help the poor people whose home was being

burned over their heads. The small voice said something in a whisper too low for even Elgar's straining ears to catch, and then the other man burst into a bellowing laugh, which grated most horribly on Elgar's nerves, keyed up as they were to the extreme pitch of endurance.

"Haw, haw, haw! Well, of all the jokes I ever heard, that takes the cake! To think of the young innocent, begging, pleading, and imploring to be allowed to help smoke out his own people. Great Scott! it is enough to make a fellow choke with laughing. Haw, haw, haw!"

A white light of understanding flooded the mind of Elgar. Oh, why had he been so dense? Who else but his Uncle Bob would be most likely to have encountered the venomous hate of Reuben Shore?

Flinging out his arms with a shrill cry, which burst from him although he was absolutely unconscious of it, Elgar literally fought his way out of the crowded store, intent on flying to the rescue, but just as he reached the door the clock at the back of the counter struck twelve, with noisy, jarring strokes.

CHAPTER VII

An Awkward Fix

Too late, too late !

Even if he ran every step of the way, it would take him nearly an hour to cross the city to Yokohama Street, and Elgar knew that he could not run in those dark parts of the road, intersected as it was with trenches, and pitfalls of all sorts.

He was ready to cast himself down on the ground in his awful despair and dismay, when suddenly right ahead of him he saw the gleam of an extra bright electric light, and then in a flash he remembered what it stood for. It was almost like a beacon, and it shone from the North Bank Police Barracks, and just as he remembered that, he remembered also that it was connected with all the other police offices in the city by telephone.

In an instant he was running. Sprinting along as he had surely never sprinted before. Although the light looked so bright, and near, it took him nearly ten minutes to reach it. Ten precious minutes ! And who could tell what might be happening away over on the other side of the city ?

He was nearly done when at last he reached the

open door, from which as well as from the window, a gleam of bright light was shining.

"Help—some—Yok—street!" he gasped, stumbling over a bench, or was it a chair? Then he pitched headlong to the floor, and lay for a moment unable to rise, because of the horrible thumping at his heart, which nearly choked him.

Then a strong hand gripped him, and hauled him on to his feet again, holding him there, while a voice said in his hearing, "The boy is in a fit, I expect; what else can you even look for, when youngsters of his age never go to bed at all?"

But Elgar had got his breath back, and squeezing one hand tightly down over his heart to keep it from thumping in such a horrid fashion, he managed to gasp out, "They are going to fire Uncle Bob's store over in Yokohama Street, that is off Main Street, at twelve o'clock to-night, and I have only just heard of it. Can you 'phone through for help? My uncle is in bed, with a broken leg, and there is only my aunt, and three little girls to do anything. I mean there is only my aunt, for the girls are too young to help."

"Where did you hear it?" began one officer, but Elgar waved his arms with such an air of appeal, that another man, also in uniform, who was in the office stepped at once to the telephone to ring up Main Street.

There was what seemed to be an interminable time of waiting, before he got through to the Main Street office, and all the while Elgar stood with his hands gripping a chair-back, and his eyes looking as if they would start out of his head. He heard the officer speaking into the receiver, but the words seemed to convey but little sense to him, and he was

still staring stupidly at the receiver, when the other man touched him on the arm, saying kindly:

"It is all right, shaver, they haven't started the smoking-out yet, and now they won't have much chance, not to-night at any rate. What was it that you heard, and where did you hear it?"

Still gripping the back of the chair, for the room seemed to have a shockingly bad habit of swinging round and round, Elgar told the story of his carrying a message from Reuben Shore to the cook at Josh Browning's lumber camp, about the smoking-out of a skunk, he described how he had asked to be allowed to join in the fun, and the laughing of the cook, which had offended him so desperately. Then he told how he had come to Eli Smart's store on a business errand, and heard two men talking, the one telling the other of what was to be done to-night, and how it was their laughing about his own request to join in the fun which had revealed to him what was really to the fore.

The man to whom he told his story made rapid notes in a well-thumbed notebook, and then proceeded to put sharp questions to Elgar.

"Who were the two men in the store? Would you be able to identify them again?"

"I didn't see their faces, but I should know their voices I think," he answered, feeling mad with himself because he had not managed to somehow get a view of the two men who talked, although it would have been a difficult feat, as he was so wedged in, and they were so much taller than himself.

"Humph, that is a poor sort of clue, because you see a person can alter his voice so much, and there is scarcely any chance of that sort of identification,

unless the individual is unconscious of being spied upon. By the way, why had this other man, Reuben Shore, a grudge against your uncle ? "

" Reuben Shore had squatted on the ground in Yokohama Street, which my uncle bought. But he was urged into the buying by Mr. Bulkley, who wanted to secure the eviction of Reuben Shore, so really the grudge of the old man ought to be against Mr. Bulkley," explained Elgar.

" Well, doubtless he has a grudge against him, only you know it is not always easy to pay debts of hate even just when they fall due," returned the officer, with a smile. " Besides Mr. Bulkley has already suffered some pretty rough handling, at the hands of some person or other at present unknown."

Elgar gave a little jump at this, and burst into an involuntary question. " But, please, sir, isn't it true then that Mr. Bulkley upset himself, I mean that he hurt himself, by an explosion, when he was testing some minerals ? "

The officer smiled, and because he was taken with the boy's keenly intelligent face and eager manner, he answered the question more fully than he would have done in an ordinary way. " I know that is what people are saying, but to any one who knows anything about minerals, or the way in which they are tested, that statement won't hold water for one moment, and most of us think that he must be shielding some one, as he will give no real information about the manner in which he got his hurt."

Elgar permitted himself a sudden gurgle of laughter. " Oh, I say, it can't be possible that he was the man whom I hurt ! " he exclaimed.

" What do you mean ? " demanded the officer,

speaking now with official curtness, while he looked keenly at the boy, as if to test the truth of any statement he might make.

Elgar told the story then, of how he had found some one trying to enter the door of the store, and intending to shoot at the intruder's hand, had held the revolver a little too high, and had broken the window, sending glass splinters flying in all directions, and doubtless he had wounded the unknown rather badly in the face in consequence.

" But Mr. Bulkley would not go round burgling stores like an ordinary dead-beat ; why, he is a well-to-do man ! " exclaimed the officer, in a tone which had a shocked ring.

" Then it must have been some one else, only it seemed queer that it should have happened on the same night that our store was attempted," said Elgar, wondering if he ought to say anything about the locket, which had belonged to his dead father, and the fan which had been in the possession of Reuben Shore, but decided to speak to his aunt about it before confiding the story to any one else.

" Yes, yes, of course it must have been some one else that attempted your store, and Mr. Bulkley getting hurt that night was of course a mere coincidence," said the other hastily, and then he became so absorbed, and seemed to be thinking very deeply, by the manner in which he was frowning, while Elgar, who just yearned to be on the road home to see for himself that everything was all right, fumed and fretted, wondering when he would be allowed to get away. Then finally becoming impatient, he asked outright if he might go.

" Why, yes, of course, lad, did you think that we

wanted to hold you in custody ? " asked the officer, with a smile, and then he suddenly became grave, while his hand dropped with a warning touch on Elgar's arm, as he said in a lower tone, " If I were you, I would not say much about that attempt on your store. We will have a look round, and see if we can find any one who has been wounded in the face. It ought to be fairly easy, too, for it is the sort of hurt rather difficult to hide, only the less said the better, you understand ? "

" Yes, sir, I understand," answered Elgar, in a solemn tone, though it was about all that he could do to keep from winking in the official face, just to show how very thoroughly he did understand.

Once outside the door of the barracks, he bolted like a rabbit straight along the dark road, which led from North Bank to the other side of the city. He went at such a rate that any one might well have thought that he was running away from justice, showing the police a clean pair of heels, in fact.

There was some one lingering in the shadows just beyond the brightly lighted door of the office, who had meant to intercept him when he came out, but he ran so fast that the watcher was left hopelessly in the rear, and although he panted along after the flying figure for some distance, finally gave up the unequal pursuit because it was plain that he had no chance at all of catching up with the fleet-footed runner.

On and on went Elgar, more intent on getting home soon than on the way he took to get there, and so in consequence in his hurry he took the wrong turning, which leading past a brightly lighted place of entertainment took him into a network of building lots beyond. He had not gone very far before he realised

that he was wrong, and turned to retrace his steps. But by this time the lights at the dance saloon were down, owing to the mad freak of one of the revellers, who had cut off the electric current, and so plunged the building into darkness.

Baffled, and entirely misled by this darkness, Elgar plunged ahead in a fresh direction, which of course was the wrong one, and running harder than ever, speedily found himself in a bush trail, which apparently led to nowhere in particular. Stumbling, groping, and floundering in the darkness, which seemed to grow every moment more dense, he found himself presently out on a windy headland. Eagerly he looked for the lights of the town, but could see only a faint reflection in the night sky, and that not sufficiently clear to let him know which way to take.

"I must do something, I must, I must!" he exclaimed through his set teeth. "Oh, whatever will poor Aunt Mary think of me? And she must want me so badly just now. I can't think how it is that I have got so mixed up. I never lost my way like this before!"

After much peering in the darkness about his feet, he thought that he detected a trail leading downward in front of him, in a direction which might stand for the town, and plunging into it he hurried on at top speed, for he must reach home somehow, and he determined that as soon as he saw the lights of the town again, he would steer straight for them, taking every obstacle as it came.

"Ah, what was that?" To his delight as the trail wound round a bend, he caught a glimpse of a light in front of him, and made for it as fast as he could go.

He was getting horribly tired, for after all there are

limits to most things, even to the staying power of a growing boy, who has been at work for a long hard day already. Elgar's legs would feel unsteady in spite of himself, there was a feeling of tightness about his head, as if it would burst, and he panted as he ran in a distressful fashion.

But he had plenty of pluck left, and clenching his fists hard, he set his teeth fiercely together, and plunged ahead. Then, suddenly, he never could understand how it was that he did not see what was in front of him, the ground dropped away from under his feet, he took one stride out into nothingness, and then down, down, down he went until he wondered when he was going to leave off falling. A horrid, sickening sensation it was, but he never really lost consciousness until he plunged right into a thicket of thorns, which nipped, tore, and scratched at him until from head to foot he was one long torture of pain.

He must have lost his senses then, for he did not seem to remember anything more until he became conscious that it was getting light, and that from head to foot he was caught and held in a thorny embrace from which he could not free himself.

He cried out with the torture of it, and then the sound of his own voice brought his courage back again.

" Well, it is an awkward fix, certainly, but I don't seem to be broken anywhere, so it might be worse," he muttered to himself, as with many oh's! and ah's ! he stretched out first one foot and then the other to see if he had still the use of those limbs, finding that he was apparently none the worse, bar scratches, his courage came back with a rush, and he made a bold bid for freedom, by wriggling fiercely to get clear of

the thorns, and it was then that the greatest disaster overtook him, for, after all, the thorns had saved him from something worse, so far, and when he wriggled himself free of them, he dropped down, down, down again, until he plumped into a muskeg

It was fortunate for him that it was morning, and that some one happened to be near, or it is certain that he must have been suffocated where he fell.

As it was, after what seemed to be a long period of awful dreams, which had no beginning and no end, Elgar opened his eyes again, and stared about him in bewildered surprise.

Where was he ? And what had happened to him ?

He was lying on some sort of a rough bed, there were smoke-blackened beams over his head, a window somewhere out of his range of vision, or was it an open door ? Anyhow the sun was shining in upon him, but when he tried to move, he could not, and the sharp exclamation of dismay which broke from him caused a little stir close by, and a man crossed the floor to bend over him.

Elgar was just opening his lips to ask what was the matter with him that he could not move, when a sudden recognition of the countenance bending over him flashed into his mind. It was the face of the man he had seen pressed against the window of the store that night, when he had been looking at the emerald locket and the broken fan.

CHAPTER VIII

The Mystery Grows

"Are you better?" asked the man, in a rough but not unkindly tone, and not waiting for a reply, he lifted Elgar's head, and gave him something to drink, something by the way which was incredibly nasty, and which ran through the boy with a hot, scorching glow, making his head swim, and his eyes run, and causing an overpowering drowsiness.

He must have slept for some hours after that, for when he awoke again, the sun was getting low, and a horrified wonder as to how they were getting on at home, took hold of Elgar.

Under the influence of it, he struggled to a sitting posture, and was relieved to find that his limbs seemed able to fulfil their usual functions, though his head felt stupid, and he was sore all over from the bruises and scratches, resulting from his double fall.

"Oh, be careful, or you will hurt yourself, please, please take care," said a sweet and winning voice at his elbow, and Elgar turned round in amazement to find a girl standing at his elbow. A girl whose frock was of poor materials, and much too scanty

for her, but whose face made him think of flowers, and all pleasant things.

"Why, where did you spring from?" he asked in surprise, surely wonder was to be piled on wonder, for the girl with her refined appearance looked strangely out of place in that poor shack, with its smoke-blackened beams, and its air of sordid poverty.

"I think that is a question which would much better come from me," said the girl, forcing a laugh, although her eyes were suspiciously red, as if she had been crying. "You take a header from the top of the bluff, in the early morning, and plump straight into the muskeg, and then when you are pulled out, you ask in surprise where I come from; although I have lived here for six months, and now may be regarded in the light of an old inhabitant."

"I beg your pardon," said Elgar, suddenly mindful of his manners, for the girl, although apparently younger than himself somehow impressed him as being decidedly his superior. "But I didn't see you when I first woke, only a man, and so I was surprised."

"I was here, but you did not see me, because I stood in the background," replied the girl, and then she burst out eagerly, "but I want to know how it was that you took that header over the bluff? Uncle Tim says that you did it on purpose, and that he should not have troubled to pull you out, if I had not been there to make him. Surely a boy as young as you would not try to take his own life, oh, I can't believe that you would do such a dreadful thing."

"Of course I should not, I'm too fond of being alive," said Elgar, with such evident sincerity that

the girl's face brightened instantly, and she looked downright pleased.

"Then I'll tell Uncle Tim that I was right, and he was wrong. He will be mad of course, or pretend he is, which is about the same thing. But seeing that you did not do it on purpose, pray why did you do it at all?"

"It was an accident," answered Elgar, and then he told her how he had lost his way in the night, and had wandered, and wandered, until finally he had fallen into some thorns, which after holding him until the morning, had finally dropped him into the muskeg, from which he supposed he had been rescued in an unconscious condition, as he remembered nothing about it.

"I should think that you were unconscious," she exclaimed, with a strong shudder, "Oh, I'll never forget what you looked like. I thought that you were dead, and you were smeared from head to foot in black mud, even your poor face was caked, and grimed with it. Uncle Tim washed you, and I washed your clothes, frightful work it was, and I don't know which of us had the worst of it."

"I'm very sorry, I hate to be a nuisance to anyone." said Elgar in an apologetic tone.

"Of course, all nice people hate to give trouble, but for all that, it sometimes has to be whether they like it or not. I have got your clothes as clean as I could, and they will be ready for you to-morrow morning," the girl answered, coming to sit down on a stool, near the bed where Elgar was lying, evidently with the intention of having a good long talk.

"I must get home before to-morrow morning. Why Aunt Mary will be nearly off her head with

worry about me, and besides there is the store, I'm a partner, you see, and my uncle is laid up with a broken leg, so most of the work comes to me," explained Elgar, unable to keep a note of importance out of his tone, for he did not choose for this girl to think he was merely an ordinary sort of a boy, who had his bread and cheese earned for him.

"Your aunt won't worry, for Uncle Tim has gone into the town, and he said that he would look your folks up, and tell them what had happened to you, and then they would know that you were all right." The girl's tone was soothing, and by her expression it was evident that she was very glad to have a companion for a few hours.

"But how did he know where I lived?" asked Elgar, and then stopped suddenly, as he remembered how he had recognised the man as the one who had stood with his face pressed against the store window.

The girl took no notice of his embarrassment, as she answered cheerfully, "Oh, I expect that he has seen you about the town now and then, or he might have even been in your store. But haven't you got a father and mother, that you live with your aunt and uncle? And are they your real relations, or only make-believe?"

"My mother was Aunt Mary's sister, so of course she is my real relation. I don't know whether you would call Uncle Bob a make-believe, because he is only her husband," said Elgar, as he leaned back on the bag stuffed with grass, which served him for a pillow. He was not altogether sorry that he could not get up, and start back for the town, there and then, for he was sore from head to foot, and it was a real luxury to lie still with nothing to do for a little while.

"Your aunt's husband would be your real relation, of course. What I mean by make-believe is when some one goes and calls himself your uncle, and you know very well that he is not the least little bit related to you," replied the girl, with a toss of her head, and a haughty stiffening of her supple figure. "Uncle Tim calls himself my uncle, but I am quite, quite sure that he is no relation to me at all."

"I should think not, indeed!" cried Elgar eagerly, and then wondered what she would think of him for being so sure about it, and of course he could not tell her how he had caught her supposed uncle prying into his own private concerns at dead of night.

She did not seem to notice his earnestness as being anything out of the common, and after a minute of silence, she spoke again. "Can you remember your mother, or your father? And were they Canadians, or English?"

"Scotch on my father's side, though my mother was an Englishwoman, like Aunt Mary. My name is Elgar Hunt, my father died when I was three years old, and my mother six weeks after."

"Elgar Hunt, did you say? Oh, how very funny, why it is the same as mine, for I am Edith Hunt!" she cried. "Wouldn't it be just lovely if we turned out to be relations?"

"I should just think it would," said Elgar, "but I am afraid it is too good to be true. Though it might be, for now I come to think of it, I know hardly anything about my father's family, except that they were a good bit higher in the social scale than my mother's people, although they were most dreadfully poor, but that made no difference to their pride,

except perhaps to make them harder and prouder," he answered bitterly.

"Hush, hush!" she said urgently. "Don't talk against your kin, most of whom perhaps are dead. I don't know who my relations were, but I respect them very sincerely, and I always try to do what I think would please them. It is very hard to have no people, at least, none that you know, so I envy you the nice Aunt Mary, of whom you seem so fond, and I wish, oh, how I wish that I had an Aunt Mary of my own!"

"Poor kiddie, I wish that you had. But oh, I say, don't cry, it makes me feel awful," burst out Elgar in consternation, as he saw the girl's eyes filling with tears.

"I didn't mean to, for of course it is silly to cry, and it does not do any good either. I haven't shed a tear for weeks and weeks, not even when Aunt Sally has what she calls corrected me, but I suppose that it is having you to talk to has made me silly."

"Who is Aunt Sally? Real, or make-believe?" asked Elgar, who was tremendously interested by this girl who had the same name as his own, but who knew nothing of her relations.

"Oh, she is make-believe too, even more so than Uncle Tim, for he is fairly kind to me on the whole, but Aunt Sally is just horrid!" cried the girl, clenching her small hands, while a spasm of fierce anger convulsed her face.

"Keep cool," adjured Elgar soothingly. Then he asked with a quiver of indignation in his tone, "What does she do, and where is she now?"

"Oh, she is a nurse, and she is very often away. I like it best when she isn't at home, because I can

never do anything to please her. She is always grumbling because my manners are not better, but how am I to help that, when I have no one to teach me ? " cried the girl hotly. " Just think for yourself how hard it must be. We came here in the spring, just after the snows had melted, I have not seen any one at all from the outside world, except that disagreeable old man, Reuben Shore."

" Do you know him ? " cried Elgar, in profound amazement, springing up in bed, but hurting himself so badly in the process that he sank back on the pillow with a groan.

" There, there, you must not excite yourself so badly, or you will get a fever, and then Aunt Sally will have to come home and nurse you, which she won't like unless you are able to pay well, ad you won't like it, either," said Edith, patting him on the arm in the same way she might have soothed a child.

" I want to know about Reuben Shore; do you know him well ? " demanded Elgar, who had had his breath pretty well taken away by this information.

" Yes, I suppose I do, that is I seem to have known him as long as I have known anyone," replied Edith dreamily. " Aunt Sally wanted me to call him grandfather at one time, but I told her that I drew a line at that, and she must make-believe that I was Uncle Tim's niece, so then Reuben Shore would be no real relation to me, as he is her father."

" He is a horrid old man ! " said Elgar, with so much vigour that Edith burst out laughing.

" So you know him too, do you ? I declare it is quite interesting. We have the same name, we know the same people, at least we have one acquaintance in common, and perhaps it may even turn out

that we have more. Oh, I should love to see your Aunt Mary, is she really nice ? " asked Edith, and now there was a wistful note in her tone, and her eyes had a look of longing in their dusky depths, which made Elgar feel downright bad.

" She is just ripping. And you had better come home with me, and be introduced to her. I will bring you back if you are afraid to come alone," replied Elgar.

" I should love to come, but I am afraid that Uncle Tim will not let me; he will never let me go anywhere. I heard him tell Aunt Sally once that I was of too much consequence to be allowed to run about like other people, but for my own part I fail to see where the consequence comes in." Edith tossed her head, as she spoke, and looked as if she expected her modest estimate of herself to be disputed at once.

" I should just think that you are of some consequence," broke in Elgar warmly. " I felt when I first saw you that you were a somebody, and now I shouldn't be a bit surprised to hear that you were a princess in disguise."

" Very much in disguise," laughed Edith. " Do you think that any ordinary princess would be willing to wear a frock like this ? "

" Oh, frocks don't matter, you are yourself whatever sort of clothes you may happen to have on. But I'm a scout, and I mean to rout out who your people are if I can. For there is no sense in being a scout if you don't do something worthy of the name."

" What is a scout ? " asked Edith.

" I wonder where you have lived not to know

that!" exclaimed Elgar. "The great scout movement was formed by Baden-Powell, the hero of Mafeking. Have you ever heard of him?"

Edith nodded, but made no other answer, and Elgar went on:

"It takes six boy scouts to make a patrol, and several patrols can join together to become a troop. When we become scouts we have to promise on our honour to do our duty to God, and the King, to always help anyone who is in need, and to obey the scout law. I belonged to the Black Bear Patrol when I was in England. I had passed ten tests in efficiency, and if we had stayed in England a few months longer, I might have got through far enough to have started a patrol of my own out here; as it is, I have to do my duty alone, and hope for something to turn up, which may be reported at head-quarters, and enable me to wear a badge, and then I shall start gathering a patrol of my own."

"What do you mean by something turning up?" asked Edith.

"I put it awkwardly, but then I mostly do. What I should have said was, if I could do something worth doing, help someone a great deal, or rectify some great abuse, I might be so favourably considered that I should get my medal, and then just wouldn't I go to work!" Elgar flung out his arms to imply the sort of activity in which he would indulge, but the action hurt his many skin wounds so much that the performance ended in a groan.

"Poor boy! Why won't you remember that you are a sort of invalid to-day, and so take a little care of yourself, until you are better, please," and Edith

drew the old rug closer up round his shoulders, patting him in a motherly fashion as she did so.

"Scouts don't take care of themselves, they look after other people," he said, with an air of disgust at his own stupidity. "If I had pitched over that point, or bluff, whatever it is, in helping someone else, I should not have cared so much, but to blunder over from my own stupidity is more than I can sit down under with any comfort."

"You are not asked to sit down under it; in fact I am not sure that you could sit for long. What you have to do is to lie still until you are rested, and your clothes have dried; and if you are not docile, I shall go out of doors, and leave you to yourself." As she spoke Edith moved away, as if with the intention of putting her threat into instant practice.

"Please, please don't go away; if you do, I think that I shall wrap myself up in this rug, and make my way over to Yokohama Street, or have a try at it. But if you stay and talk to me I will lie as quiet as a hibernating bear. Then you shall tell me all you know about your people, and if I can find them for you it may help me to get my medal, don't you see," he said coaxingly.

Edith came back then, and sat down again beside the bed. "There is so little to tell, at least that I know, although I daresay that Reuben Shore, Uncle Tim, or Aunt Sally could put you in possession of a good many helpful facts if they chose, which of course they would not do. I used to live with a lady in Montreal, who taught me with her own daughter, and was paid for doing it, although I have not the slightest notion who paid her. Reuben Shore used to come to the house pretty frequently to see his daughter Sally,

who was my nurse. Then Mrs. Grey and her daughter were both taken ill with scarlet fever, Sally and I were bundled out of the house into poor little lodgings, and when we had safelypassed our quarantine we came West to Calgary, where we stayed for many months. Sally married Tim Witham during that time, and then she said it would be best for me to call them aunt and uncle. I stuck out about it at first, but there was so much unpleasantness that for the sake of peace I finally gave in, and did as she wished."

"Why didn't you go back to Mrs. Grey?" asked Elgar.

Edith made a grimace. "That is just what I want to know, but I have never been able to find out. Sally, I beg her pardon, Aunt Sally, told me that they both died of scarlet fever. This, of course, may be true, but then on the other hand it may not. I wrote to Mrs. Grey once, while we were living at Calgary, but no answer came back, nor did my letter return to me through the Returned Letter Office—at least, I never had it. From Calgary we went to New Westminster, then we were in Seattle for a time, I hated that, although I liked living in Vancouver City. We were there all last winter, and I used to have lovely times. I went to a very good school, and I worked just as hard as I could work, for I guessed that it might be some time before I had such a chance of learning again. Then in the spring we came here, and here we have been ever since," said Edith, with a sigh, for the days had been miserably slow and dull, with no companions of a pleasant sort, and only a scanty supply of books.

"Have you no clue at all to where your people

came from, or any portraits of them ? " asked Elgar, frowning heavily, for surely no poor scout was ever faced by such a perplexing problem to unravel as this.

" I had a most lovely ivory fan, it was exquisitely carved, and in the middle of the panels there was a portrait of my grandfather, but that horrid old Reuben Shore took it away a few weeks ago, and I have never seen it since." Edith caught her breath as she spoke, for the loss of her one treasure upset her sorely.

Elgar was staring at her in wide-eyed amazement. Of all the mysterious and wonderful things that he had ever heard of this was the most strange and puzzling, especially when taken in conjunction with his own emerald locket, which contained the same portrait.

Then he plunged into the story of how he had seen the fan lying on the counter of Reuben Shore's old store, and was waxing incoherent in his desire to get it all told as quickly as possible, when Edith sprang up suddenly, with a sudden gesture to him to be quiet, and then the door opened, and a woman walked in.

CHAPTER IX

Elgar Learns the Family History

The woman in face and figure was so like old Reuben Shore, that Elgar would have been certain that she was Mrs. Witham, even if Edith had not hurriedly introduced her by saying:

"This is Aunt Sally, Elgar. I expect that she has come to see how bad you are. Aunt Sally, this is the boy whom we picked out of the muskeg this morning. His name is Elgar, and he lives with Mr. Townsford in Yokohama Street."

Elgar opened his mouth to add that he was one of the partners in that go-ahead firm of Townsford & Hunt, but Edith made an almost imperceptible movement of warning to him, and so he refrained, contenting himself with a military salute, which rather lacked impressiveness as he was lying in bed, but it was the best that he could do.

"Rather bashed up, are you?" asked Mrs. Witham, coming to stand by the bed, and staring down on Elgar as if she would look straight through him and out the other side, as he told Edith afterwards.

"I'm rather sore, but I expect that I shall be all right to-morrow," he answered, his voice sounding

waggly in spite of his endeavours to keep it steady, for somehow this fictitious aunt of Edith's filled him with a species of awe, which was first cousin to terror.

"I hope you will," she said, keeping her eyes fixed on him, while she felt his pulse, and then apparently satisfied with it, she made a rapid but thorough examination of his hurts, and told him that he would be right in no time, unless he got a touch of fever, and to ward off the danger of that she would give him a soothing draught, and then he must lie quiet, and go to sleep.

Elgar would have protested against the draught if he had dared, but with that terrible gaze upon him he was forced to be docile. It is not easy to rebel when one is on one's back in bed, so he gulped down the horrible concoction which she gave him.

Goodness, gracious, how nasty it was! He had hardly swallowed it, either, before the miserable little room with its smoke-blackened beams began to swing round, like a whirligig at a country fair, the furniture, such as it was, appeared to be standing on the ceiling, and Elgar clutched at the bedclothes to keep from being whirled up on to the ceiling too. Oh, his sensations were horrid, he had an indistinct recollection of Edith being hustled out of the room by her aunt, in order that he might be quiet and go to sleep, as if such a thing as sleep could be possible under the circumstances.

It must have been possible, however, for the next time Elgar opened his eyes to his amazement it was morning, the sun was shining broadly in at the open door, his garments, dry, and neatly folded were placed in a heap upon the bed, and at the table under the

window Tim Witham was sitting eating his breakfast of mush, cold bacon, and beans.

"Haven't I been to sleep for a good long time?" asked Elgar, who was very confused in his mind, and not able to remember clearly what happened just before he went to sleep.

"About fourteen hours, I suppose. Are you better?" asked Tim, in a rather muffled tone, owing to his mouth being quite full of mush, which made speaking difficult.

"I expect I am," said Elgar, struggling to a sitting posture, and feeling rather dismayed to find that he was so stiff he could hardly move. But move he must, somehow, and perhaps he would get on better after he had exerted himself a little, anyhow, he meant to try.

With slow, painful movements he got into his clothes, every square inch of him seemed to be bruised or scratched, and his garments were in a sorry plight from the close embrace of the thorns. But he was dressed at last, he had even, though with incredible difficulty, laced his boots, and now standing erect, he walked unsteadily across the room to where Tim sat stolidly eating at the table under the window.

"I'm very much obliged to you for all that you have done for me, and if you will please tell me how much I am in your debt, I will come over to-morrow and pay you if I can, unless you would rather take it out in goods," said Elgar, the trading instinct coming uppermost, as he thought how very much easier it would be to pay his indebtedness in bacon, butter, or beans than in hard cash.

Tim Witham grinned, then suddenly put his hand up to scratch his head in confusion, just as if he were

afraid of having betrayed himself in some way, and then he answered slowly. " Oh, a thing like that does not count. I pulled you out yesterday, it may be your turn to pull me out to-morrow or the day after. Have some breakfast, will you ? "

But Elgar was not hungry, indeed the very sight of food filled him with loathing, so he refused the proffered hospitality, and then in fear and trembling, for his courage was like water this morning, he asked a question which had been rankling in his mind ever since he had opened his eyes to find the face of Tim Witham peering down at him, when he first came to his senses after being pulled out of the muskeg.

" What was it that you wanted that night when you were staring in at the window of our store ? "

Tim fairly jumped, and a mouthful of mush, going the wrong way under the impetus of that unexpected start, he was so nearly choked, that Elgar, mindful of his scout-duty, which was to help all men, vigorously applied first-aid, by slapping him on the back.

" There is something wrong with me inside, I do believe, for when my wittles happen to go the wrong way, I do suffer something cruel, that I do. Now then, young Polly Pry, what was it that you were asking of me ? " said Tim, when coherent speech was once more possible to him. He tried very hard to look fierce, after the manner of Reuben Shore and Sally, but only succeeded in appearing more stupid than usual.

Elgar repeated his question, his own courage waxing stronger, as he read the confusion in the face of the other.

" If you don't want to be looked at, you should really have blinds or shutters to your chamber

windows," said Tim, with a silly laugh. "Besides store windows are made to be looked in, and how was I to know that it was not proper, when I saw a light there? You might have been showing a cheap line of goods that I wanted to buy, for all I knew to the contrary, so I thought I might as well have a look in. Any more questions, Polly?"

Elgar swallowed down the insult of being called Polly, because he wanted to know so badly, and he put his second question with almost as much trembling as his first. "Can you tell me who it was that I shot when he tried to unbolt the door? I must have hurt him shockingly, but I have never been able to find out whom I hurt."

"And if I were you I'd rest satisfied not to know, it ain't never wise to stir up a sleeping dog, and you may find yourself let in for heavy damages if you don't take care," said Tim, he had dropped his stupid air now, and was earnest, and eager in his warning to the boy, not to meddle further in the matter, which puzzled Elgar so much that he forgot to put any more questions to the man, who probably would not have answered them.

"May I say good-bye to your niece, and—and Mrs. Witham before I go? They were very kind to me yesterday," said Elgar, deeming it politic to bracket the two names, although in reality he had not the slightest desire to see Mrs. Witham, who inspired him with positive dislike and fear.

"They are gone out, and won't be home yet awhile," said Tim, with some confusion in his manner, which made Elgar decide pretty promptly that Edith had been taken out, in order that she should be away when he awoke.

"But I shall come over and see her," he muttered to himself, as supported by a stout stick, supplied by Tim, he took his way slowly along a narrow trail which wound under the bluff, and so into the town by the water's edge, or at least as near to the water's edge as the muskeg would allow of its going. At this part tall trees grew close down to the edge of the bay, and bending low, trailed their branches in the waters of the Pacific, but all about their roots was swamp, pure, and simple, with solid rock two or three feet down.

The pioneers who had come to plant the standard of civilization in the wilderness must have had a terrible time of it, as before they could land they had to literally hew their way through the thickets lining the shore, and then wade through a waist-high swamp to reach firm ground beyond.

But they were intrepid men, who had seen the possibilities of this magnificent bay, which would serve as a natural harbour for a vast fleet of ships, and so they had not been daunted at the difficulties which beset their way, and year by year the muskeg was being pushed further back, the mighty primeval forest was being thinned, and a city was springing up in the wilderness.

To Elgar's great disgust, he found himself as weak as water, and if it had not been for the stout staff with which Tim had provided him, he would have found it hard work to get home.

When at last he reached Yokohama Street he found Etta behind the counter, serving a customer with as much dignity and gravity as if she had been twenty at the very least.

At the sight of her cousin standing in the doorway

however, the customer was forgotten, her dignity went to the winds, and she fairly hurled herself upon Elgar, crying out joyfully, "Mother, mother, Elgar has come home; Elgar has come home."

Mrs. Townsford came running out then, to give him a welcome almost as boisterous as that of her daughter.

"Sorry that I could not get home yesterday, but I wasn't fit," said Elgar, who felt that some apology was necessary to his aunt, for having left her in the lurch in such a fashion.

"You poor dear boy, oh, you poor dear boy, how frightened I have been about you!" exclaimed Mrs. Townsford, drawing him into the room behind the store, and leaving Etta to get rid of the customer as best she could.

"I was afraid that you would be a bit worried, but Tim promised Edith that he would come, and tell you I was all right, I had an awkward fall over the bluff in the dark, and the wind was knocked out of me a little," he said, making as light as he could of the thing which had happened to him, because he would not put another worry into the kind heart of his aunt, if he could help it.

But her next words startled him, "Elgar, why did that man want the emerald locket, which I gave you of your poor mother's, and where have you hidden it? I could not find it, though I hunted all through your belongings, there was a broken part of an ivory fan that he wanted too, but I could not find that either. I told him that I did not believe you possessed such a thing, but he said that you had given him special orders to bring it, and that was all that he knew about it."

"It is pretty plain that Tim is not so stupid as he looks, but for once he did not get all that he wanted," chuckled Elgar, sinking on to a bench, because his limbs threatened to go on strike altogether, if he did not take care. "There is a good big mystery in this business, Aunt Mary, and I think that we are more mixed up in it, than we have any idea of. Have you got ten minutes to sit still, and let me tell you a story? Then when I have done, I shall want you to tell me one."

Mrs. Townsford stole across the room, and peeped in at the door of the room where her husband was lying, then shutting it softly, she came back to the side of her nephew.

"Now then for the story," she said softly, looking at him with such a loving pride that he guessed the police must have told her how hard he had striven to save their home from destruction, on the night when Reuben Shore's emissaries were ordered to smoke out the skunk.

As briefly as he could, he told her of his first introduction to Reuben Shore, and the sight he had had of the wonderful ivory fan, a part of which he had picked up the next day, between two stumps on the half-cleared building lot. "I didn't think much of the find, except that it was peculiar, and I was a bit curious, until you gave me that emerald locket, which had been my mother's and that you said my father would not have sold, even when they were in their deepest poverty," said Elgar. "But when I managed to get the locket open, and found inside the portrait of a man, which was identical with the one on the ivory fan, I began to think that there must be something in it. And I hid the pair of them, where no

chance burglar would be likely to find them. So you may guess how surprised I was when Edith Hunt told me that the picture on the fan was a portrait of her grandfather."

"Dear me, dear me!" cried Mrs. Townsford, in great surprise, "then Jamie must have married, and had a child after all!"

"Ah, do tell me your story quick, who was Jamie, and was he any relation to me, and I say, am I related to the man on the fan?" burst out Elgar, in a state of great excitement.

"It will have to be one thing at the time, and as I have not seen the portrait, and I never saw your grandfather, and I have only heard about the fan, it will have to be largely guess work, but I think that I can fill in the blanks, in quite a passable fashion," said Mrs. Townsford. "Was there anything particular about the painting of the lady, whose portrait you say is in the locket?"

"I didn't notice much about her, except that she was very much dressed up, and she had a fan in her hand, the same fan, I thought it might be, only I could not tell because of course the picture is so small, but if you will wait five minutes, I will go, and get the locket and the piece of fan, to show you," said Elgar, who was fairly quivering with excitement.

"No, no, leave the things where they are for the present," said his aunt, with a shiver. "The people are not known to me, so I can only make a guess at their identity. Your grandfather married a French wife, who had been a maid of honour to the Empress Eugenie, and the famous fan, with your grandfather's portrait painted on the ivory, was a gift from the poor sad Empress, when she was driven from her

imperial state, to seek a home in exile. There were three sons of that marriage, Fraser, the eldest, and then twin boys, Jamie, and Robert, who was your father. Fraser the eldest was a wild, bad man, who nearly wrecked the family fortunes by his mad plunging into debt. This so embittered your grandfather, that he was very harsh, and unkind to his younger sons. Jamie ran away from home when he was a boy of fifteen, but your own father bore with all there was to bear until his mother died, and on the day of her funeral, he left his home, and never entered it again, for the old man grew fiercer and fiercer by reason of his griefs, so it was more than flesh and blood could bear. But he had grown to man's estate without ever learning to work, or to earn his own living, so you may guess how hard life was for him poor man. Then your mother was not very practical either, so they were miserably poor, and although he was only a young man, and he had you his little son to hope and strive for, I think he had no heart to live, because he was so unfit for the struggles of life."

"Poor father!" said Elgar softly, and then he let his hand drop over his face for a long minute, he had never heard much about his father before, but he guessed that the poor man had somehow been a failure. Then he lifted his head, and shook it fiercely as if to rid himself of some oppressing weight, as he went on, "I'm grateful to you, Aunt Mary, that you brought me up to work, for certainly I can earn my living."

"Yes, indeed you can," replied his aunt warmly, "It is the difference between you and your father, that you, while only a boy, are doing a man's work,

while he when he became a man could only do the work of a boy, and even that was not done well."

"Why did you say that Edith could only be Jamie's child, why could she not have been Fraser's?" asked Elgar.

"Because your uncle Fraser, who married after his father died, and settled down to screw, and scrape, and make the best of what was left of the patrimony he had so nearly ruined, had no children at all, and when I wrote to him the year before we left England, asking him that he would help with your education, pointing out that in the course of nature, it was you who would succeed him, he sent me back the most dreadful letter, and said that you were much more likely to die in the workhouse, than to be the laird of Hunt's Crag, after him."

"Why didn't you tell me that?" asked Elgar reproachfully, "I have always wondered why you talked so little about my father's people, and I supposed that it must have been because you knew so little about them."

"I should have talked of them, if there had been anything pleasant to say," replied Mrs. Townsford, "but my intercourse with Hunt's Crag has been most unfortunate. I wrote for your poor mother, when your father died, to ask if any of the family would come to the funeral, that was before your grandfather died, and he sent a letter then which was too unpleasant to keep, and Fraser took no notice at all. Oh, I should like to see this girl, Edith, to ask her what she knows about her father, and where he lived."

"I don't think she knows much about her own people, she certainly does not know so much as you

have told me this morning," said Elgar, as he rose from his seat, and prepared to go into the store. "But if she is as you suppose the daughter of Uncle Jamie, and he was older than my father, don't you suppose that was why Uncle Fraser spoke of my being more likely to die in the workhouse than to be laird of Hunt's Crag?"

"If he knew of her existence, yes, but it is not clear that he did know. I must see that child, as soon as I can. Could you go over to-morrow, Elgar, and bring her here on a visit? You must insist on her coming, and take no denial, for surely I have as much right to her as those people with whom she lives," said Mrs. Townsford eagerly.

"I will go to-day if you like," replied Elgar.

"No, no, you are not fit for such a long walk again to-day, you shall go over bright, and early to-morrow," said Mrs. Townsford, and little guessed, that to-morrow would be too late.

CHAPTER X

FLOWN!

THERE was so much to do, and so many calls on Elgar's time, that he got no chance at all of further quiet talk with his aunt that day. He did not even know whether she was aware of the intended firing of the store on the previous night, but from her manner he rather thought not. She was so calm, and free from any sort of nervous tremours, that he marvelled as he watched her go about, and he thought what a wonderful woman she was. He chuckled a little over the impression she would be sure to make upon Edith, when to-morrow came.

The dosing which he had had on the previous evening at the hands of Mrs. Witham, made him feel weak and unfit for the whole of that day, and he was very glad to go to bed early that night. Comparatively early that is, but as the store was not closed until half-past eleven o'clock, there was not much chance of beauty sleep for Elgar.

He was out bright, and early next morning, and the first person he encountered was one of the mounted police, whom he knew slightly.

"Hullo, younker, are you the boy who hustled

things up from the North Bank Barracks three nights ago?" he asked.

Elgar saluted after approved scout fashion, which he deemed was the correct thing to do when dealing with official personages, and answered that he was the boy.

"Well, then, take a word of advice, and that is the next time you give us a warning to catch a rogue, please take care to give us a chance to do it. If you had warned us a couple of hours earlier, we might have nabbed him, but as it is, he has shown us a clean pair of heels."

"Whom do you mean, Reuben Shore?" asked Elgar, in a puzzled tone.

"Yes, Reuben Shore, as he seemed to be the moving spirit in the business, it was certainly wisdom to make sure of him first, but the wily old rogue has shown us a clean pair of heels, and we are left lamenting," said the policeman, who was of a humorous turn of mind, although it needed a very lively imagination to picture any one lamenting for Reuben Shore.

"What will you do now?" asked Elgar abruptly.

"Nothing at present, except keep an eye on Josh Browning's cook, who seems to be a fairly harmless sort, although, of course you never can tell. However, you warned us is time to save your old store, and that was the main thing, and now if I were you, I'd take out a fire insurance on the place," said the policeman.

"Just what I have done," replied Elgar, "but didn't you catch any one hanging about the place that night?"

"Not a creature, except a yellow dog with a kettle tied to its tail, the poor wretch kicked up a

row certainly, but it was not dangerous, so we cut the kettle adrift, and the beast went off rejoicing."

"Do you think that it was a false alarm then?" asked Elgar, deeply mortified at the thought of having been the victim of a stupid hoax.

"No, I don't, younker, and I guess if it hadn't been for you happening to go over to North Bank, and overhearing those fellows talking, there would have been a good-sized tragedy down here, for there was a mining fuse laid all round the building, connected up with blasting powder, and dynamite, it only wanted a lucifer match at the right end, and in ten minutes or so the place would have heaved up bodily, and there would not have been even a sporting chance for any one inside. We took the thing away, but it didn't seem worth while to say anything about it to Mrs. Townsford, and if you have got half-an-ounce of sense in your head, you won't either, for it would be a shame to give the poor lady a scare like that," there was a warning note in the policeman's tone, and Elgar nodded his head, as to imply that he would be discretion itself in the matter.

"What did you do with the fuse, and things?" he asked. His throat was dry, and his tongue parched from the fierceness of his excitement. He could not understand the bitter animosity, which Reuben Shore, or some one else, must have against his uncle to meditate a revenge so terrible.

"Took it back to where it belonged, it had been stolen from where they are blasting the foundations for Mr. Bulkley's business block, it was like that old Reuben Shore to steal even the things with which he meant to work another man harm. By the way, Mr. Bulkley has sent in his resignation, and we are to

have an election, how would you like to run for office?" asked the official, with a jolly laugh, unable to miss the opportunity for taking a rise out of Elgar, although he had a sincere admiration for the boy's pluck, and resource.

Elgar laughed too, no whit offended by the sly thrust, and answered, "Oh, I can't be bothered with running for office just now, you wait until I have made my pile, and then I will put up for that, and half-a-dozen other things; just now it takes all my time to rake in the dollars, don't you see?"

"Of course, of course, it does take time when you are making money so fast," said the man, with another jolly laugh, as he went his way. But although Elgar echoed the merriment, he was very thoughtful when the man had gone.

It was strange indeed that the fuse should have been stolen from Simon Bulkley's place, why had it not been taken from one of the other dozen or more of blasting outfits in the city?

Was it mere coincidence he wondered, or part of a deeper plot than he had ever imagined? Was Simon Bulkley himself the prime mover, and Reuben Shore only the agent and catspaw? But there was the known animosity of Simon Bulkley against Shore, which made it seem very improbable that they would work together in anything, so the more Elgar pondered the business, the more hopelessly bewildered he became, until finally he gave it up for a time, as being a nut too hard to crack.

Getting through his work with all possible despatch he installed Etta as deputy-storekeeper, and then set off on his walk to the little shack under the big bluff, to ask that Edith Hunt might come on a visit

to his mother. He had no very great hopes of succeeding in his mission, if Mrs. Witham chanced to be at home, but if it were only Tim with whom he had to deal, the case might be different, anyhow he meant to put up the best fight possible, even if he had to threaten an appeal to the police, and the consequent enquiries which would be made into their position of guardians to this girl, whose name was the same as his own.

Thinking busily, he went his way, and in due course arrived at the lonely little hut, which stood in the shelter of the bluff, and on the edge of the muskeg which stretched along the shore all round the bay, except in those parts where the hand of man had drained the age-old swamps, and turned the shore into sweet, and wholesome ground.

What a poor, mean little place it was! And what a wretched abode for a girl like Edith Hunt, whose whole appearance and manner bespoke such superior upbringing!

There was a look of desolation about the place, which was more marked than when he had seen it last. Then the door had been open, and smoke was coming from the chimney, which by the way was not a chimney at all, but only a bit of old stove-pipe poking through the rotting shingles of the roof.

Was it possible that Edith was not at home? At the bare thought of having his journey for nothing, a cold dismay crept into the heart of Elgar, and he quickened his steps almost to a run. But he might as well have gone at a crawl for all the difference it made. There was no one at home, there was no fire in the rusty old stove, and what is more all the small properties, which even the poorest may gather about

them had disappeared; plainly the Withams had done a flitting, and taken Edith with them. But whither?

Elgar stood in the midst of the rubbish, which had been left littering the floor of the one poor little living room, wondering where they had gone, and why, vainly wishing all the while that he had come back for Edith yesterday.

"But perhaps even that would have been too late, for maybe that Mrs. Witham took her away while I was asleep." he said to himself, and then he remembered that Mrs. Witham was the daughter of Reuben Shore, so what was more likely than that the two of them had set off with Edith, leaving Tim to follow, when he, Elgar, was disposed of.

"What a downright stupid I was to go away so meekly, why didn't I insist on seeing Edith, and kicking up a row if she were not forthcoming?" he asked himself, as with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, he stood surveying the dreary place, and trying to puzzle out how best to go to work to find Edith.

Then his hand encountered a stiff little piece of paper in his left-hand pocket, for which he could not account. He was very methodical as to how he used his pockets, and although he carried paper in his right-hand pockets, the left were never used for that purpose, so in some surprise he drew it out, to find that it was a short note, written on a bit of waste paper, which had apparently once been a legal document. The note was from Edith, who must have slipped it into the pocket of his jacket, when she put the dried garments on the bed, for his use when he awoke.

"DEAR ELGAR,—Aunt Sally is going to take me out for a walk this morning, and as such a thing has

never happened before, I should not be surprised if she forgets to bring me back. I don't want to be run away with to-day, although I would not have minded yesterday. I want to see your Aunt Mary and to find out whether she can help me to trace back to where I really belong. If I am not about when you get up and dress, will you please insist on seeing me, and tell uncle Tim if I am not produced, you will hand him over to the police, of whom he lives in wholesome awe. He has got only such a little pluck, that I think you will find it quite easy to scare him. It is Aunt Sally who has the courage, and she is a terror, I can tell you. Please, please do as I ask. Your affectionate cousin.

"EDITH HUNT."

Elgar fairly groaned when he had read this letter. Why, oh, why had Edith made the blunder of putting it into his left-hand pocket? And what would she think of him, because he had not stirred a finger for her?

"Fair stupid I must have been, and now poor girl, it is too late to help her!" he exclaimed, as he sank on to a rough wooden bench, with a shiver of dread going over him.

He still felt weak and ill from the dosing of Mrs. Witham, and that perhaps was the reason why his brains were so dull, and he seemed to have no sense at all, and no sharpness to help him in deciding, what it would be best to do next.

One thing was very certain, he could not go back home, and take up his daily task, as if nothing had happened. Whether Edith Hunt was his cousin or whether she was not, she was still some one who was

in trouble, and so it was his plain duty to do all that he could to help her.

He sat still for a long time, trying to decide what to do next, then some of the lessons he had learned of scouting in England came back to him, as he sat in his perplexity, and especially some words of his Patrol Leader's. "When beginning a search start with first causes. Don't go rushing here, and there looking for clues, which perhaps do not exist, but stand still, and use your common sense."

How was he to use his common sense in this case?

Round, and round, up, and down went the gaze of Elgar, until presently it was caught, and held by a footmark, the impress of a big boot, which had a patch on the sole, a three-corner patch moreover, which was beginning to peel away at one corner in a fashion, which must have been very uncomfortable to the wearer.

That was Tim Witham's boot most likely, and if he could track Tim, he might get some clue to where Mrs. Witham had taken Edith.

His depression vanished like magic. It was not hard work, or trouble that could daunt his spirits, he was only inclined for melancholy, when he did not know what work to do next. Round and round the house he followed the marks of the boot with the three-corner patch, then outside the house, and to and fro on the open space outside. What a lot of aimless wandering to and fro that big footmark appeared to have done! Then suddenly it occurred to Elgar that Tim was loading things, boxes, and bundles doubtless, which would account for his passing backwards and forwards so much. But what was he loading them on to? Ah, that was important,

and when he had discovered that, he would have found out a great deal.

Carefully he searched for wheelmarks, or the footprints of a horse, but neither did he find, and straightening his back after his long search, he stared about him, wondering what kind of a vehicle it could have been, on to which Tim had loaded his possessions.

"I've got it, he had a birch-bark!" shouted Elgar, in a voice which fetched an echo from the solitary heights of the great bluff, towering over his head, and then he started to follow a sharply defined furrow that meandered through the grass, and along by the edge of the muskeg.

For perhaps the eighth of a mile he followed the winding sinuous track, and then he came to a little creek which draining down through the loose rocks of the mighty bluff, made a channel for itself through the muskeg to the sea.

"A birch-bark it was, and this is where he took to the water!" muttered Elgar to himself, with a low whistle of intense satisfaction, because he had found out so much.

The water however showed no tracks, and as he had not the slightest idea in which direction Tim would steer his tiny craft, there was nothing for Elgar but to go back to the shack, and hunt among the rubbish which was left for some sort of a clue, or something from which he might at least draw a deduction, as to the destination of that birch-bark canoe, which had not been too heavily laden to admit of its being dragged so far. He guessed that Tim had only made the one journey either, for although he could see the prints of the boots going towards the

little creek, there were no marks turning the other way.

When he got back to the shack he first sat down, and re-read Edith's letter, thinking there might be something that he had over-looked.

It was all written on one side of the piece of paper, in very small writing packed close together, and folded on the outside, that is the writing was outside, but now Elgar turned the paper over, and found it was what it had at first appeared to be, an old legal document. This he studied very carefully, but could make no sense of it, as it had been torn across the middle, so the half of each line was missing, and what was left seemed a meaningless jumble of "Whereas, . . . wherefore," and he was just going to thrust it back into his pocket, when a word in the corner, where the paper had had a rip, caught his eye, and laying the corner carefully on his knee, he spread it out with his fingers, to try and get the whole of the word, or perhaps it was two words. The rent came at a most exasperating place, for what he read was this, Hun———rag, and he sat staring at it, wondering whether he dared believe that it should have been two words Hunt's Crag, in which case, most likely his aunt's guess was correct, and Edith was the child of his father's brother, and the next in succession to the family estates in Scotland.

"Oh, I say, it is downright jolly to think that she is my cousin really!" he exclaimed, putting the paper carefully in his pocket. Then down on his knees he went, and carefully turned over every bit of the rags and rubbish left over from that most disorderly housekeeping. It was not exactly a pleasant task, for some of the litter was very far from clean, but

Elgar had set his face to the task, and it would not be a little dirt, or even a lot of dirt, that would turn him from his purpose.

There were some strange things in his finds, he came across more fragments of legal-looking papers, all of which he carefully saved, although as he was pressed for time he did not stop to give them a very close inspection just then; there were scraps of damasks, and rich brocades, which were so different from anything which he ever had to handle in his work of keeping store that he guessed they must be costly stuffs, relics of some former greatness. He found also a bit of delicate ivory carving, which might have been a piece of the famous fan, although of this he could not be quite sure.

It was not until he had made a most thorough search of every bit of rubbish in the house, and had tramped round and round outside, to make sure nothing worth discovering had missed his eye, that he tore himself away from the place, and started to return.

Even then he kept turning round to look back as he went, and he had not got half a mile away before a sudden whim took him to clamber to the top of the bluff, and see the place from which he had fallen on that never-to-be-forgotten night.

"It will take time, but I'm here now, and I might as well see all that there is to see," he muttered to himself, after a moment of indecision, and then he started to climb the steep trail leading upwards to the top of the bluff. He went at such a rate that he was soon out of breath, and when at length he reached the top and saw the place from which he had slid down into the brambles, he shuddered anew at the

thought of the dreadful fate which might have been his, had it not been for those same brambles.

He was still lying on the ground and peering downwards, when he caught sight of something moving along the narrow trail leading to the shack.

What could it be ? Was it a man ? Was it Tim, come back for something which seemed worth removing, that rusty old stove, perhaps, though seeing how badly it was cracked, Elgar had his doubts about whether it would be worth the trouble of dragging along the edge of the muskeg to the little creek, whence open water might be gained ?

Ah, there was the something again, it was a man, and, yes, it was, it must be Tim, for the head which moved along the narrow trail, and which was all that he could see, was crowned with the shabby old green felt hat which Tim had been wearing yesterday. Then when he had seen so much, Elgar rose to his feet, and started running back to the shack as fast as he could go.

CHAPTER XI

Still Scouting

It is doubtful whether Elgar had ever run faster in his life than he ran that day on the way down from the bluff. He was going to catch Tim, and if necessary he was going to hand him over to the police. How he, a boy not yet full grown, was going to succeed in hauling a man over the two miles which lay between the shack and the nearest police barracks, he did not trouble to decide. The main thing was to catch him, afterwards he could settle what was the best thing to do with him.

Down, down, down; in the matters of comfort and safety Elgar thought he would rather climb up than run down, especially when his foot slipped, and he rolled down quite a considerable distance, bringing up finally in a bunch of crab-bushes, stunted and scraggy. But these were minor drawbacks, and would not count if only he could succeed in catching Tim and discovering where Mrs. Witham had taken Edith.

Then he heard smart blows with a hammer, and knew that he was in time. It was the old stove that Tim had come for, for he could hear the ring of the

hammer on iron, and, as far as he had seen, that was the only bit of iron left in the shack.

In at the door he rushed, not even stopping to fetch his breath, which was certainly unwise, and displayed an extreme lack of caution, for if he had no wind, how was he to be likely to successfully tackle Tim ?

The man was standing back to him, raining blows on the crazy old stove pipe, which was so badly rusted that it would not come apart, and Elgar, dashing in at the door, seized the fellow from behind, shouting in a jerky voice, " What have you done with Miss Edith Hunt ? Now then, fellow, out with it sharp, for I am not going to put up with any nonsense, and neither will the police, as you will very soon see for yourself——"

But the sentence was not completed, for it was the face of a stranger which was turned in amazed question to him.

" What now, youngster ? My word, but you have got your share of cheek, and your brother's too, I should say by the look of things ; and you need not punch quite so hard, seeing that it's my back, and not yours," said the man, in an aggrieved tone, thrusting one hand behind him to rub the part, which had suffered most severely from Elgar's onslaught.

" I beg your pardon, I thought that you were Tim Witham, I hope that I didn't really hurt you, though I should have been rather glad to have hurt him," said Elgar, who was bitterly disappointed at finding a stranger, where he had fully expected Tim.

" Well, I'm not exactly ' horse de come back', or whatever is the French for being knocked into the middle of next week ; still there was a deal of misplaced energy in them fists of yours, and if you'll take

a word of advice from me, you will look before you leap, next time, or in other words make sure who it is that you are going to knock about. I wouldn't have uttered a word of complaint, mind you, if it had been Tim, for you can't possibly have a bigger grudge against him than I have got myself. He sold me this old heap of scrap iron he did, and told me it was a good cooker, and I should have it cheap, because he had got to move in a hurry, and couldn't stop to take it with him. I guess he had to show a clean pair of heels to the police, or something of that sort, for he was always a shady customer. But I didn't think that he would have taken me in like this, seeing how often I have stood his friend. What do you want him for ? " the stranger asked abruptly.

Elgar hesitated a moment, not knowing the sort of man he might have to deal with, and then remembering that the more publicity there was, on his reason for wanting to overhaul the Withams, the more likely he was to achieve his purpose, he told the man how he had met Edith Hunt in the shack of the Withams, and from what his mother had since told him he had reason to believe that she was his cousin, but that when he came back to find her, it was only to find that she had been spirited away by the Withams, and that too late he had discovered the letter in his pocket which had been put there by Edith herself, begging that he would insist on seeing her, before he left the shack.

" Humph ! It looks queer, and it sounds like a story book," grunted the man, who seemed to be quite a decent sort, " I tell you what it is, youngster, you had better take that note to the police barracks, and they will do their best at finding the young lady.

You may take it from me that she is worth finding, or the Withams would not think that she was worth the trouble of hiding. Tim is a good-natured sort of idiot, with a little knave worked in at places, but Sally Witham is knave all through, and an uncommon clever knave at that. She calls herself a nurse, and I've heard that she is very good at it too, when she likes, which isn't always, and for my part, I'd rather have one that wasn't quite so clever, but who would do her duty all the time."

"You can't give me any idea where they have gone I suppose?" asked Elgar anxiously. "I've been scouting round most of the morning trying to find out how Tim went, and I discovered that he must have loaded all the things which he took away on a birch-bark, and then he dragged it along the edge of the muskeg, to the little creek that runs down by the side of the great bluff; unless, indeed, it was you who took the things that way, have you got a three-cornered patch on the sole of your shoe?"

"I should hope not, indeed, regular death traps them patches on soles are," replied the man, and then he held up his hobnailed boots for the inspection of Elgar, and said he must be real cute to have found out so much as that.

"I shan't rest until I have found my cousin, poor girl," said Elgar, between his set teeth, and then he bade the man good afternoon, and started back for the town.

He did not call at the police barracks as the man had advised, because he was anxious first of all to consult his aunt, and also to examine all those fragments of paper which he had retrieved from the rubbish left behind by Tim. He guessed that if it had

been Mrs. Witham who had cleared up the shack, all that rubbish would have been burned, but Tim was more easy going in his methods, and would not take more trouble than was absolutely necessary.

The store was full of customers when he reached Yokohama Street, and he had to start in and help his aunt and Etta to satisfy their wants, before he got a chance to talk about the subject nearest to his heart.

There was a rough man, who had prospector writ large all over him, who edged up to the counter, and asked Elgar in a low tone for speech with Reuben Shore.

"He does not have this store now," replied Elgar, looking intently at the man, because everything connected with Reuben Shore was of tremendous interest to him, and also because he was certain that he had heard the voice before, although he had no remembrance of the face.

"I guessed that much, by the look of the place, it don't seem much after Rube's style of trading, clean place, clean goods, correct change, and that sort of thing," said the stranger, with a laugh. "But you will know most likely where he is hanging out now, and it is important that I should get speech with him, as soon as possible."

Elgar shook his head, "No, we have not the least idea where he is now, and I am pretty sure that he has left the city, for a man who wants to see him pretty badly told me only this morning that the old fellow had really gone."

"I dare say," laughed the man, in an unconvinced fashion; "if Rube didn't want to see any one he would be certain to clear out, that goes without saying,

to any one who knows him as well as I do, for he is as slippery as an eel, and as sly as a fox. But look here, young man, you need not be afraid to trust me, for I'm one of the old lot, so speak out and tell me where I can get a sight of the old chap, for my business won't keep."

Elgar shook his head, more decidedly than before, and he eyed the man more keenly than ever, for he was beginning to connect the voice with a certain dark night in Yokohama Street, when he had been the unseen witness of a fierce quarrel between Reuben Shore and two men unknown; he was pretty sure by this time that this was one of those men, for although he might occasionally be mistaken in a face, it was rare indeed for him to be mistaken in a voice.

But the man simply would not believe that he was as ignorant on the matter as he declared himself to be.

"Look here, young man, I guess that you mean well by Rube, but there ain't no sense in carrying it too far. I don't want to do him any harm, in fact I want to give him a word of warning, and if I can't get at him, how am I to do it?" he asked. His tone now was fairly coaxing, and Elgar would have laughed if he had not been so intensely curious as to the business which there might be between the two, that no thought of merriment even entered his head.

"I can only say as I did before, that I do not know where the old man has gone, though some people think he is with his daughter, Mrs. Witham," he replied politely, and lowering his voice also, for it did not suit him that the other customers should hear what was being discussed.

"Sally gone too? Worse and worse. Has she taken the girl with her, do you know?" asked the

man, with such ill-concealed anxiety, that Elgar suddenly made up his mind to a bold move; here was plainly something to be discovered, and it could only be done by showing such knowledge as he had, which might entrap this stranger into giving him a little more.

"The old man had to get away in a hurry," he said, leaning forward, and speaking in a confidential tone, "and then Sally thought it was best to take the young lady away for a little while, because she was attracting more attention than was altogether desirable under the circumstances, you understand, they left Tim behind them to hang round for a day or two, and I am not quite sure whether he is clear away yet. If he should chance to come to see me, is there any message that I could give him from you? Or could you tell me where he could find you?"

"It ain't no use for me to leave an address, seeing I'm travelling most of the time, and my club don't undertake to forward mail matter," said the fellow, with a short laugh at his own poor little wit; "but if Tim happens along, you just tell him a cable reached Vancouver City last month, that Fraser was ill with an incurable disease, and the girl must be taken to Scotland immediate. Mind you tell him immediate, for it would be a downright catastrophe if he went and made a will in favour of the boy, after all the trouble we have had."

"You are right, it would be nothing short of disaster," replied Elgar, and try as he would, he could not help his lips twitching a little, as he thought how astonished the man before him would be to know to whom he was talking. Then he asked in a low tone, "What had I better do, supposing that Tim does not happen this way for a month or two?"

"Oh, bother, that is just what I can't tell you," said the fellow, in a worried tone. "Of course, I should have gone to Simon Bulkley in an ordinary way, but they tell me that he is so badly bashed up that he can't attend to business, and when I went up to Browning's lumber camp to see the cook, they told me that he had run away two days ago, so there was nothing for it but to come down here, and see if I could happen on any one that knew anything about it, and when I saw the way your face lit up at my mention of Reuben Shore, I guessed that you wasn't so green as you tried to make out."

"Still, you must admit that modesty is a virtue, and when one does not know, it is better to say so," replied Elgar, laughing a little at the obstinate manner in which the fellow had refused to believe his protestations of innocence of any knowledge of the movements of Reuben Shore.

The man laughed in a highly amused fashion, and half turning to take his departure, said as a parting shot, "Ah, you young ones are clever, I grant you, but you can't take in an old stager like me, who was telling rogues from honest men while you were lying in your cradle. Now don't you forget what I said, they must take the girl to Europe, as soon as possible, and tell them to be sure and take the fan with them, I know that Simon Bulkley has always wanted to get hold of it, but if they haven't got it with them, they might pretty nearly as well stop on this side of the Atlantic."

"I will be sure and not forget," said Elgar, with a nod, and then he turned to attend to the next person, a grubby little girl, who wanted molasses candy, but his head and his heart were in such a state of whirling

confusion that he weighed out a couple of ounces of stone brimstone, packed it in paper, and gave it to the child, never realizing what he had done, until the grubby small girl appeared again half-an-hour later, accompanied by an equally dirty, and much more voluble mother, who spent exactly fifteen minutes in telling Elgar what she thought of him, and what she would do to him, if only she had been a man instead of a highly strung and delicate female, and so on, while Elgar uttered apologies in an undertone, and a whole storeful of customers crowded round to see the fun, and stimulate the irate woman's eloquence by their comments.

However, the virago was exhausted at last, the child was made quite happy by a double portion of molasses candy, and the crowd of onlookers in the store had betaken themselves to some other place, where there was something to see, or something to hear, and Elgar was left in comparative quiet to answer the questioning of his aunt, as to why he had not brought Edith back with him.

But when she had heard all that he had to tell her, concerning his discoveries at the shack, and then the amazing communication made by the stranger who was so anxious to get speech with Reuben Shore, she looked very much troubled indeed.

" Elgar, what shall we do ? In any case we should have to search for this poor child, Edith, for her own sake, but in the light of what that man told you to-day, you will have to search for your cousin, as much for your own sake, as for hers, as your honour is involved. Oh dear, oh dear, why does information always seem to come too late to be of any use ? The boat for Vancouver City goes out to-morrow at noon,

and Edith ought to be on board, if she is to be got to Hunt's Crag in time to see her uncle alive."

"Now look here, Aunt Mary, it is of no use worrying yourself about this affair until your hair turns grey," said Elgar, leading poor harassed Mrs. Townsford into the next room, and putting her into the rocking-chair, which stood in the corner: "I'm afraid that there isn't much chance of finding Edith in time for to-morrow's boat, and if there were, I'm not sure that I should trust my cousin to go to Scotland in the control of such people as the Withams and Reuben Shore. There is no need to fret lest Uncle Fraser should go making a will in my favour, he is far more likely to make no will at all, in which case Edith will be all right, because she is the child of the elder twin, and if you worry until you are deaf and blind, you cannot make things different. I am going to search for Edith, never fear, and I will know no peace or rest until she is found."

"Good boy, I expected that you would say that!" exclaimed his aunt, smiling up at him, her eyes dimmed with tears, for he was as dear to her as if he had been her own son, instead of merely her nephew.

"How is Uncle Bob to-night?" asked Elgar, he had not seen much of his uncle all day, and he was anxious to divert his aunt's mind from dwelling too much on Edith's disappearance just then. For his own part he had not much fear that any harm would come to Edith at present, she was of too much consequence to the Withams for them to neglect her, or even to treat her unkindly.

"He is so much better, that the doctor talks of getting him a pair of crutches, and letting him get up next week; the idea of making people lie in bed for six

weeks with a broken leg seems to have gone quite out of fashion in these days, they sling the injured limb and get the patient up," replied his aunt, as she gently rocked to and fro, while Elgar sat on the corner of the table, and thought hard.

"Next week, did you say? Come now, that is downright jolly, for if he can only get up, and sit in the store, Etta can manage to serve for most of the day; what a good thing that it is school holiday just now, and with ordinary luck, I ought to be able to set off in search of this new cousin of mine," said Elgar, starting to swing his foot very slowly in time to the swaying of the rocking-chair.

"But where will you go to look for her, when you have not a notion of where she has been taken?" asked his aunt, in perplexity.

"I shall know where to look, when the time comes," said Elgar, nodding his head vigorously. "And until the time does come, it is just as well not to know, as there is the less danger of getting impatient, don't you see."

It was more than a week later, however, before Elgar was free to make any move towards active search, and then he had to go whether he would or no.

He had been down to the office of the shipping agent, to arrange for a shipment of goods from Vancouver City, and was coming back along Main Street, when he saw Jimmy Whitelock, who from being deputy surveyor, had already by common consent been chosen to fill the office of surveyor, left vacant by the resignation of Simon Bulkley.

Jimmy would probably know how Simon was progressing, and as Elgar was very anxious for news of the invalid, yet did not care to go to the house to

inquire, he set out to catch Jimmy who had always been friendly.

It so chanced that he heard all that he wanted to learn without asking a single question, for Jimmy had just come away from the house of the ex-surveyor, and was full of a private and particular grievance, so full indeed, that he must tell some one, and as Elgar chanced to be the first person to accost him, it was to Elgar that he told his story.

"Never once have I been admitted to the sick-room, since Bulkley had his accident," growled Jimmy. "When that Sally Witham was nursing him, I was not surprised, for she was a perfect dragon for keeping her patients shut away from every one, but since she went off in such a hurry to Kaien Island, nearly a fortnight ago, he has steadily refused to see me, just the same, and now to-day I am told that he is setting off to Kaien Island himself."

"Funny place for a convalescent, isn't it?" asked Elgar, forcing himself to speak in a careless tone.

"Funny? It is the rummiest thing I ever heard of!" spluttered Jimmy, little guessing that he had given Elgar the clue where next to carry his search.

CHAPTER XII

In Pursuit

Where was Kaien Island ?

That was the question which perplexed Elgar all the way back to Yokohama Street. It could not be far away, he guessed, although he did not remember having heard of it before.

But his uncle would most likely know, if not, he would hunt round the town for the information he wanted, and then he would start off on the very first moment that he could get away, for he was anxious to reach the place, wherever it might be, before Simon Bulkley could get there, and it was his determination to run away with his cousin, and bring her home to the care of Aunt Mary, whose heart was large enough to love and shelter the girl who had so few left to care for her.

He rushed in at the store door, very red in the face from heat and exertion, and he found his uncle seated at the desk making out lists of goods that would be required in the next shipment.

"It is all right, Uncle Bob, Jones & Carne will send up for the lists this evening, and we are to have the special rates next time, so we shall save nearly a

hundred dollars on the carriage alone," he panted, being pretty well winded from haste and excitement.

"Good boy, I thought that you would manage them," replied his uncle approvingly. "We can't afford to help them make their pile until we have made our own, so we might as well strike for low freightage, when there is any chance of getting it. But I don't fancy that you would have found matters quite so easy if it had not been for that new line having started running last month."

"It was that which did the trick," replied Elgar with a laugh, and then he asked anxiously, "Say, Uncle Bob, do you know where Kaien Island is?"

"I ought to, seeing that I had planned to go there this month, before I got fixed up with this broken leg," rejoined Mr. Townsford. "It lies in the mouth of the Skeena, about thirty miles from here. What do you want to know for?"

"Because I've got to get there just as quick as it can be managed," said Elgar, the desperate earnestness of his face giving him the look of an old man.

Mr. Townsford uttered a low whistle, and then asked, with a twinkle in his eye, "Stumbled on a bit of a clue, have you?"

"I think so," said Elgar gravely. "Jimmy Whitelock said just now that Sally Witham went to Kaien Island about a fortnight ago, and that Simon Bulkley is just about starting for the same place, and it has given me the feeling that I really want a little change myself, so if you don't mind, I'll take a short holiday on my own."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Mr. Townsford, the twinkle developing into a low rumbling laugh. "I hope that you will have a pleasant time, but if you

will take my advice, you will shove one of my revolvers into your pocket, and keep it handy, in case any one wants to practice shooting with you for a target. It is best to have first innings in a play of that sort."

"Thank you, I'll take the hint, only don't tell Aunt Mary, for I don't want to be responsible for her hair turning grey," replied Elgar, as he took the little weapon which his uncle held out to him, and stuffed it into his pocket.

"You had better take a bag of samples, and show the folks up there the class of goods supplied by Townsford & Hunt. It is as well to have a reason for going, and every bit of extra business helps in a new venture like ours," Mr. Townsford went on, and reaching out one of his long arms, he seized a bag, which he began stuffing with samples of tea, coffee, tobacco, black lead, canned goods, calicoes, candles, and everything else which at the moment occurred to him, while Elgar went indoors to tell his aunt that his marching orders had come, and he was off without a moment's delay.

He did not say it like that, for the three little girls were in the room, and to use his own expression, he was always mighty careful what he said in the hearing of a kid, so he merely remarked in a casual tone, "I'm going out to Kaien Island, it is about thirty miles from here. I'm taking samples, and Uncle Bob thinks that we can get a little trade up with the place perhaps, and if we only supply the traders, it will keep our freightage rates down, you know."

A light of understanding flashed into the face of Mrs. Townsford, and crossing the room with a swift step, she kissed him, saying softly, "God bless you, dear lad, and give you success."

Elgar walked down to the jetty with his bag of samples in his hand, and his aunt's blessing ringing in his ears. He had to take his chance of finding any sort of craft which might be starting for the river, but as scarcely a day passed without something in the boat line going from the city to the river, he felt pretty sure of starting on his journey before the day was much older.

By this time he knew his way about, and took the shortest means of finding out what he wanted to know.

A cattle boat had come down from Kitselas on the previous day, and was about to beat back up river, with just enough cargo to keep her from turning turtle as she entered the mouth of the great river, and Elgar got a passage in her at a price which accorded with the accommodation she could offer.

That is to say, he paid two dollars for the privilege of sitting on a most filthy deck, with the chance of finding a watery grave at any moment within the next three hours.

Life is full of uncertainties, however, so he took the risk, and watched the lumbering craft warp away from the jetty, and take her way across the bay which was one of the finest natural harbours of the world.

He was crouched in the lee of the deckhouse, for the wind was fresh, and there was no sense in being cold, when one might be warm, his nose was on a level with his knees, and he was feeling most beautifully drowsy, when a smart little steam launch used by the railway company puffed her noisy way across the bay, passing the cattle boat so close, that Elgar, whose sight was keen, saw a man sitting on a long

deck chair, wrapped in a big top coat, and with his face so bandaged that it was impossible to see more than his nose.

A shiver went all over him, and he dropped his head lower on his knees, for certainly he had no desire to be recognised by the man with the bandaged face, who, he was sure, must be Simon Bulkley on his way to Kaien Island.

But why was the ex-surveyor going there ?

Jimmy Whitelock had declared that it was the rummiest thing that he had ever heard of; but Elgar, who knew many things which Jimmy did not, could not help feeling that it was something to do with Edith Hunt, a something which boded no good to the girl whom he had discovered was his own near kin.

" I'm glad that I'm a scout," he muttered, clenching his hands tightly, as he sat huddled into an unrecognisable heap, but with all his sleepiness clean gone. " And it won't be my fault if Simon Bulkley does not find that I am even with him yet, and certainly if he means any ill towards Edith he has got me to reckon with. And I was one too many for him that time when he tried to burgle our store."

A gurgle of amusement broke from him at the thought of the reception he had given to the intruder that night, and then he remained crouched as he was, until the launch had puffed itself so far away that there could be no danger of recognition, even by the aid of a strong glass.

There was not much population on Kaien Island. A salmon cannery had been set up there, and there were two sawmills, so he had heard from the captain of the cattle boat, who, with one boy for crew, was

working the old tub back up river for the next shipment of cattle, which would be waiting for him at Kitselas.

Once out of the bay, and the wind freshened to a gale, the cattle boat lying high in the water rolled and rolled, as if every plunge would send her decks under water. The poor boy who had been shipped as crew had never been on a boat before, and he was lying in the stokehole, moaning and crying, believing that his last hour had come, while the captain rushed about trying to do three things at once, that is, he did his own work, and as much of the boy's as he could get time for, and put in every spare minute in kicking the boy, until that unfortunate youth must have been black and blue with bruises.

Elgar was not sick, indeed, he had never been seasick in his life, and so, although he had paid for his passage, he turned to and helped the captain out of sheer good will, and because it was his duty to spare that poor miserable boy a few kicks if he could.

Then the engine went wrong, and the captain, who was doing his own stoking between whiles, was sorely put to it to get the poor crazy old machine to treatment. They were being blown into the mouth of the river by this time, but although the wind was in their favour, they had a very strong current against them, which made progress slow, even after the engine had consented to fulfil its functions once more.

Night came on, and they were still beating up the wide mouth of the mighty Skeena, and Elgar was in a fever of impatience, as he thought of how the smart little steam launch must be forging ahead through the swirling brown waters of that tremendous current.

He tried to console himself that even if he had reached Kaien Island he could hardly begin his quest to-night, so he might as well be on board the cattle boat and save hotel bills, although he greatly doubted whether there was an hotel on Kaien Island. A saloon there might be, and sheds about the fish cannery. Then he wondered where Simon Bulkley would stay, and how long the ex-surveyor would remain on the island.

"If only I could have got through first!" he muttered, as he piled wood billets into the rusty old fire-box of the engine, for when darkness came, the captain had found it necessary to hand the task of firing over to him, as there was stern necessity for a sharp look-out to be kept, and the poor sea-sick crew lay a moaning heap of misery in the corner into which the captain had kicked him last.

It was a night that Elgar would remember as long as he lived. At first the long hours crept by as if they would never pass. He had no one to speak to, for the captain was at the helm, and the crew was asleep or unconscious. Then he grew so sleepy that he had to keep moving about to prevent himself falling asleep and forgetting his duties. It was in his wandering about the space under the deck where the engine was, that he came to the door opening at the stern to get a mouthful of fresh air, and to see what the night was like. Just then a terrific shouting arose near at hand, he heard the captain yelling back in response, there was a jarring sensation right through the boat, and he imagined that they had run aground, until a perfect chorus of shouting arose from close under their bows, and then he heard the captain screaming to him to stop the engine, as they were in collision.

At the mere mention of collision, the poor, sick and scared crew rushed shrieking on deck, although he had appeared too weak to stand on his feet for hours past, and the noise he made added to the uproar going on in the darkness at the bows, rendered it hopeless for Elgar to even attempt to hear any orders which the captain might issue.

He could not imagine what had happened, for their boat had ceased to roll; only there was a bobbing, shivering feel in the slight motion that suggested a shaking from something to which she had been fastened.

Elgar stood at the door of the engine shed, feeling about as badly scared as he had ever been in his life. He could swim a little, and he meant to make a bid for safety by jumping overboard if he felt the vessel beginning to settle, but all the while she kept afloat he had the sense to know that he was safest where he was, and he kept as quiet as possible, because there was no sense in wasting the strength which he might presently be wanting so badly, in flying about and screaming to no purpose whatever.

No more orders came to him from the captain, who appeared to be shouting himself hoarse to someone out of sight, and then presently Elgar heard a great bumping and thumping of bundles and boxes being dumped on the floor overhead, much trampling of feet, and many voices.

"People don't swarm on board a sinking ship, and they don't trouble about their belongings when they are escaping from great peril," he muttered to himself, with a long breath of relief, and then he turned back from the doorway, where he had stood ready to cast off his coat and jump for his life, should

need arise. He was bitterly cold, and it would not do to let the engine fire go out, as it certainly would do, if it were left much longer without attention.

He was poking more wood into the fire-box, when a man came fumbling his way down the steps, and groped his way into the engine house.

"Hullo, engineer, are you asleep, that you haven't heard the bell ringing full speed ahead?" asked the voice of a stranger, as a dark figure loomed up through the gloom and approached the fire.

"I didn't even know that there was a bell, and it is rather a stretch of imagination to call me engineer, when I don't know the names of anything about an engine," said Elgar, laughing at the absurdity of his position. "The captain showed me how to start her and stop her. He told me to keep the fire from going out, and that is about all I know."

"Well, it ain't much, but even the engine-men on the great liners had to begin like that," said the stranger, and then he stalked up to the crazy old mechanism, pulled at this handle and pushed at the other, peering here and there, with the aid of a torch which he had lighted at the flame of the burning billets.

"Who are you, anyhow, and how did you get aboard?" burst out Elgar, whose curiosity could endure the strain no longer.

The man laughed, and after a moment of concentrated attention on a valve which refused to work, he said good-humouredly, "You are a cool customer to have stuck down here by this crazy old machine while things were happening up yonder. Don't you know that if your side had been stove in, as ours was, the steam from this old concern would have made

you into cooked meat before you had had time to get up those stairs yonder ? "

" Oh, I went out and stood at the rail yonder, ready to take a header overboard if there seemed any danger of her going down," said Elgar. " But although she wobbled in a queer sort of way, there was no feel of sinking about her, so I thought I might as well keep dry as long as possible. Then when I heard people and boxes bumping on deck, I came back to the fire, for it didn't seem likely that there could be much danger when folks had time to think of their baggage."

" No, that is so," rejoined the stranger, who was still busy poking and prodding at the mechanism of the engine. " But it looked a near thing with us at first, when you ran into our stern, I can tell you, and the worst of it was that our rudder shaft was broken. We were trying to patch it up a bit, and we were rolling and pitching at the mercy of the current, with not so many lights showing as we ought to have had. Then when you came crashing in upon us, we naturally thought that it was about up with us, and most of us behaved accordingly."

" What boat ? " asked Elgar, beginning to understand the situation, for this was plainly the engineer of the craft they had run down, a man who understood his work, and meant to do it.

" The steam launch *Maple Leaf*, and we were bound from Prince Rupert to Kaien Island with supplies, and we've got a doctor with us for a girl that is pretty bad. That is why we have commandeered this old tub of yours to finish the journey, for it is a case of life and death, so they say, and Mr. Bulkley, who is bringing the doctor up, told us to spare no expense,

but to do our very best to get in as soon as possible. That is why I am coddling this old tin-kettle engine of yours. My word, what a heap of scrap iron it is to be sure ! " sighed the engineer.

" Do you know the name of the girl who is ill ? " asked Elgar, with a horrid fear coming up in his heart lest it should be Edith for whom the doctor was being brought up from the city.

" No, I only know that it is some one in whom Mr. Bulkley is interested. I hear that he even got up from his own bed to come when he heard that she was ill, so you may guess he has a pretty big stake in the concern. Ah, now we shall do. Stuff the wood in, boy, for we have got to move, I can tell you," went on the man, as the engine began to throb and jar, the wheels flew round, and the rolling began again, if possible, worse than ever.

It was on the tip of Elgar's tongue to say that he was a passenger, and that now there was a crew aboard the boat who were worthy the name, he was not going to fire, but the words were not uttered, for he bethought him that if he declared himself a passenger he might have to go up on deck, where he would encounter Simon Bulkley, and he was very anxious indeed that the ex-surveyor should not find out that he was on board, so guessing that his best chance of avoiding recognition lay in his remaining part of the working staff of the boat, he stuffed the wood into the fire-box as directed, fulfilling his part with so much promptness and despatch that the engineer offered to get him a berth on one of the railway company's launches, where the pay would be better, and the work easier, than on the cattle boats.

"I'm much obliged, and I'll see about it," answered Elgar. "I'm just beating up to the island now, and if I'm in want of a job afterwards, I'll be sure and let you know."

"Ah, you are not keen on it," laughed the engineer. "The fact is, there is more work in this part of the world than there are hands to do it, and that is why labour is at a premium, and folks can pick their jobs."

Again it was on the tip of Elgar's tongue to say that he had not picked his job that night, but again he refrained, and later on he was thankful indeed that he had been so discreet.

The boat drew in towards Kaien Island just as the first streaks of dawn began to show in the east, and directly the rope was flung round the jetty post Elgar contrived to be on deck, and he was in fact the first person to jump ashore, carrying his heavy bag in his hand.

Just then a woman pushed through the group of loungers, and Elgar dodged aside behind a very fat man, for the woman was Mrs. Witham, and she was plainly in an agitated frame of mind.

"Is there any chance of the doctor being on this boat?" she called shrilly, while Elgar felt a cold chill creep all over him.

"Yes, ma'am, he is here, though it is passing wonderful that he ain't at the bottom of the river instead," said a man who at this moment sprang ashore.

"Well, I'm afraid he might as well be there, for any good that he will be now. Six hours ago things were different, but while there is life there is hope, and we are bound to do all that we can," said Mrs. Witham curtly, and then the doctor springing ashore,

she hurried him off along the muddy trail to one of the houses standing at the back of the cannery, while Elgar hovered in the rear, filled with a horrible, unnameable dread.

The house stood alone, and was better equipped than its fellows. Slinking into a thicket of young spruce trees, Elgar watched patiently for developments.

He had not broken his fast since he left home yesterday, but he had forgotten his hunger in his overpowering anxiety.

It was nearly noon before the doctor came out again, and meeting a man at the gate, Elgar heard him say, " Yes, she is dead, poor child, but I could not have saved her if I had been sent for yesterday."

Dead ? And when he had seen her, Edith had been so full of joyous life ? Quite overcome by the tragic news, Elgar dropped face downwards on the grass among the young spruce trees, and lay there, too miserable for words.

CHAPTER XIII

A Surprise

How long he lay there in the wet grass Elgar never knew, but after a time he pulled himself together and rose to his feet, dreadfully ashamed of himself for having given way so badly. He called himself a coward and an idiot, with various other names equally uncalled for under the circumstances, and then, remembering that he had had no supper and no breakfast, he started out to find some place where a meal could be obtained.

When he had eaten a big breakfast he felt so much better that he was more than ever ashamed of his lapse into despair, and bestirred himself vigorously to do the work his uncle had laid out for him on the island, and most of the morning was spent in going from house to house, showing his samples, and asking for custom.

He was passing through a patch of thick cover which lay behind a hill to the left of the landing stage, when he heard a quick run of feet behind him, then his arm was seized, and a bright voice said in his ear, "I was sure that I could not be mistaken, and oh, how utterly delightful it is to see you here. Did

you come on purpose to find me, or was it just chance ? "

Elgar turned sharply, and then stood still in speechless amazement, for there at his side with her hand on his arm and her face looking up into his, stood Edith Hunt, whom all day long he had mourned as dead.

At first he thought he must be dreaming, he even put his hand up to his eyes to make sure that he was awake.

" I—I thought—I mean they said that you——" he began, but stopped abruptly, for it seemed so dreadful to tell her that he had believed that she was dead.

" Oh, poor boy, did you hear that Julia was dead, and think that it was I ? " she said, with a catch in her breath.

Elgar nodded, speak he could not, because of a most inconvenient lump in his throat, which threatened to choke him, or turn him silly like a girl.

Edith patted him on the arm in a sort of silent sympathy, which showed how much she appreciated the trouble which he had endured on her behalf.

Presently he growled in quite a fierce tone, " Who is Julia, and what made her die ? "

" She was Mr. Bulkley's daughter, he is a widower, you know, or perhaps you did not know. Julia was ten years old, but she had always been an invalid, she had a hump-back, and was lame, being always obliged to walk with a crutch. She has been living on Kaien Island all the summer, because the doctor thought this place was better for her than the city. But she was taken ill soon after we got up here, and Aunt Sally has nursed her all the time, then when

the poor little girl got worse, she sent for Mr. Bulkley, and the doctor, and they both came up this morning."

"I know, for I was on the boat, I mean our boat, an old cattle tub, ran into the steam launch that was bringing Mr. Bulkley and the doctor up here, and they had to transfer to our boat; they didn't see me, though, for I was firing, the proper boy being too sick and scared to do anything, except lie in a corner and groan," said Elgar, and then he told Edith of the delay in finding her letter, and how he had found out in such a strange manner that her uncle, Fraser Hunt, was ill, and that it was necessary for her to be taken to England, to make a good impression as soon as possible.

"I shall not go," replied Edith, in a mutinous tone.

"But you must, think what a difference it will make to you, if Uncle Fraser leaves his money to you," urged Elgar anxiously, although as a matter of fact the anxiety was because he did not at that moment see how the passage money for the long journey was to be realized, and he was not going to see his cousin handed over to the Withams again, if he could prevent it.

"I shall not go," repeated Edith, more firmly than before, "Uncle Fraser can leave his money to whom he pleases, or he can get better and enjoy it himself. I am not going to England, I am going to ask your Aunt Mary to let me live with her until I am old enough to fend for myself. I shan't be much expense, for I will eat only mush and beans, and I can do all sorts of work. Do you think that she will let me stay?"

"Of course she will, and be only too glad to have

you, but the question is whether these people will give you up," said Elgar, with an apprehensive look round, as if he expected to see the fierce face of Sally Witham, peering at him from between the closely growing spruce scrub.

"I am going to run away," rejoined Edith calmly. "I came out of the house for that purpose, and I left a note in Aunt Sally's pocket to say that I was off. I guess she will think that I left the island on that old cattle boat which brought Mr. Bulkley and the doctor up here, but I knew that was going up river, and I was not quite so foolish as to go further into the wilderness when it was your Aunt Mary that I wanted to reach. But listen, what is that?"

"A steamer's siren, there is a boat coming down," said Elgar, his excitement as great as hers, for it did not seem possible to him that she would be allowed to get away, without some attempt on the part of Sally Witham to stop her.

Edith caught at his hand, "Come along, we must run for it, those boats don't always stop, if there is no one on the landing stage to be taken off," she gasped, dragging him forward at a great pace, but taking care to go by a path which would not lead them past the little wooden house where Julia had died.

Elgar followed unquestioningly, although seeing the weight of the bag he had to carry, he had hard work to keep up with his cousin's flying feet.

It was half a mile or more to the landing stage, and when they got there it was entirely deserted save for an old grey donkey and a family of brown pigs, which last were taking a constitutional up and

down the boards of the rickety little stage, and grunting in great glee at their achievement.

"She is going by!" groaned Elgar in dismay, as the boat showed no signs of slewing in to the bank.

"No she isn't, not if I can stop her!" cried Edith, who knew the ways of the place so much better than he did, and rushing along the landing place, she dragged at a cord hanging from a flagstaff, which sent a tattered old flag flying up to the top of the pole.

This signal was answered by a blast from the vessel's siren, and immediately her nose swung round towards the bank.

"Ten minutes more, and we shall be off, but it is this sort of thing which gets on my nerves," said Edith, with an anxious glance over her shoulder, and a waggly gasp in her tone, that showed her to be really frightened at the bottom.

"Don't worry, I'll look after you," said Elgar, in a consoling tone. A minute before he had been feeling rather bad, because he was having to play second fiddle while Edith set the tune, but now that she was disposed to show the white feather he was only concerned to buck her courage up, and to take as much care of her as possible.

"I can't help it; oh, I feel dreadful, dreadful!" she cried, a sob catching at her throat. "Elgar, I can't bear it, if they come and catch me now, you don't know what it is!"

"Well, I can give a guess at it," he said gruffly; then as the boat bumped against the crazy wooden post, he said urgently, "jump quick, no need to stop for the rope."

With a spring Edith was on board, and the captain,

a dirty individual, who was smoking a short briar pipe, demanded in a casual tone, as Elgar came aboard in the same fashion, "Any more of you?"

"Not this trip," replied Elgar calmly, but as he spoke he gave Edith a warning push towards the shelter of a great stack of shingles which crowded the forward deck, and she, understanding that it would be as well to get out of sight, darted into the shelter of the deck-house, while Elgar bargained with the captain for their passage money.

"What is the matter with your sister?" asked the captain, with suspicion in his tone, as the boat swung out into the current again, and the strip of water between them and the bank was already too wide to bridge by jumping.

"She isn't my sister, but my cousin, and I guess she wants to see what sort of accommodation you have got to offer her," replied Elgar calmly, as he turned his back to the shore, for his quick eye had caught sight of a figure running towards the landing stage, and gesticulating to them to stop.

The captain rumbled out a slow, deep laugh, he too had his back to the bank, and so he did not see the person on shore who had by this time reached the landing stage, and was flinging his arms up wildly, in the hope of arresting attention. Being rather hard of hearing also, he did not hear the shouting, and Elgar was talking so loudly just in his ear, about the necessity for a wholesale firm like theirs to travel far and wide for custom, in these days of competition, that he never heard the shouting from the bank, which was rather mixed up with much squealing from some of the pigs that had apparently got into

difficulties, through trespassing on that wooden planking of the landing stage.

"Some boats won't draw in if there are only one or two passengers, but I always do it, I would rather draw in for one old sow, than miss my chance of a passenger or freight," said the captain, who was anxious to impress Elgar with his real benevolence, in stopping his boat for the sake of a mere boy and girl.

"Very much the best way, for if you never neglect the small, or unimportant things, why you are on hand for the big ones too," said Elgar, in loud didactic tones, as a faint "stop, stop," still sounded from behind.

"If I had had my rights I should have been a rich man by now, instead of only captain of a timber boat," yarned on the captain, who was a garrulous old fellow, and loved the sound of his own voice, more than any music in the world; "but I have always been misunderstood, sir, and in this world there is nothing harder to bear than that."

"That is so," remarked Elgar cheerfully, and then he asked an adroit question as to the character of the chronic misunderstanding, which had been the bane of the dirty man's life, and the bar to his prosperity, which started the old fellow off on a long-winded account of the cold shoulder he had received from various relatives who ought to have known better, and this led to another story about the short-sightedness of the steamship company in not giving him the command of a better boat. Elgar meanwhile listening with eager interest, and contriving by adroit questions in the right places to keep the stream of narrative from drying up, until the island was

dropping out of view behind them, when the old fellow remembered that he had several things to attend to, and ambled off to see about them.

Elgar had leisure then to look for Edith, who was sitting on a heap of firewood in the deckhouse, with her chin resting on her hands, and her attitude one of the deepest dejection.

"Sorry that I could not come to look for you before, but I had to keep the captain amused, for there was some one on the landing stage bawling to him to stop, and I was so afraid that he would hear; luckily those porkers made such a row, that they drowned the noise of the shouting, and then fortunately for us the old fellow is more than a little hard of hearing," said Elgar, wondering why she looked so miserable.

"Oh, was that why you did not come, I did not understand, and I have been feeling rather blue, for I wonder so much what Mrs. Townsford will think of me. It is dreadfully hard, Elgar, to have no people of one's own, but to have as it were to borrow the relations of someone else," Edith said, winking hard to keep down a tear, which threatened to escape and openly disgrace her.

"What nonsense you talk!" exclaimed Elgar, with more sincerity than politeness. "You have got me for a first cousin, then there is Uncle Fraser, though I can't say he is anything very great as a relation, at any rate you are welcome to my share of him. Then maybe your mother had some people of her own, only you don't know them yet, but it is only a matter of time, for I mean to get to the bottom of the whole business somehow, only it may take a little time. I wouldn't say Mrs. Townsford either,

it will make you feel much more at home to call her Aunt Mary straight off, and you simply can't help liking her."

"I dare say, but that is not the question, what is of most importance to me, is whether she will like me," said Edith, winking harder than ever.

"The fact is you are properly down in the dumps," said Elgar, who felt that he must turn consoler in good earnest, and then he asked, "I say, when did you have your breakfast this morning?"

"I haven't had any, I was too frightened about poor Julia, and then when they said that she was dead, I ran out of the house, for I simply could not stay there," she answered, with a shiver.

"Why, then, of course you must be nearly starved by this time, and that is what makes you feel so bad. I wonder what there is to eat on this old boat? Not much, I guess, for folks are supposed to bring their own provisions, I will go and see what I can find for you, as it will be another three hours at the very least before we reach the city."

Elgar hurried off as he spoke, to interview the captain, but without much success, for there was nothing eatable on board, saving some very mouldy ship biscuits. However, he got one of these for Edith, who sat munching it in great content, she having reached that pitch of hunger when almost any sort of food is welcome.

The journey back to Prince Rupert was performed without any incident worth mentioning, and the two travellers stepped ashore between nine and ten o'clock on a dark, wet night, both of them so tired they could hardly hold their heads up.

Elgar hurried Edith up through the muddle of the

harbour works, and by a short cut into Main Street, which was as brightly lighted, and as full of business, as if it had been early in the evening.

"Oh, how lovely!" she exclaimed, "I had no idea that it would look as fine as this at night, do let us stop and look at the stores."

"Better get along home, I'll bring you out to look at them to-morrow night, if I am not too busy," he answered, remembering how tired she was, and she yielded with a little grumbling protest, about not being able to do what she liked.

But at the door of the store in Yokohama Street, she hung back in a fit of sudden shyness. "Oh, Elgar, I can't face your Aunt Mary, suppose that she is not pleased to see me?"

"Come along, she wants you awfully," he said, in cheerful encouragement, seizing her by the hand to drag her in, for he was really afraid that she would slip away from him into the darkness, which was quite dense where the glare of the electric light did not come.

"Is that you, Elgar?" called the voice of Uncle Bob from inside the store, and then there came the tap, tap of a crutch across the floor. "Why boy, we were dreadfully afraid that something bad had befallen you, for we heard that there had been a collision up river, and rumour said that a boy was drowned."

"It was not I at any rate, nor did I hear anything of a boy going down," said Elgar, who was still vainly trying to induce Edith to enter the door, and wondering as a last resource he might not have to pick her up and carry her into the house. Then he raised his voice a little, and said, "I wish you would ask Aunt Mary to come out here, Uncle Bob, for I

have got Edith here, and she is afraid to come indoors."

The crutch tapped hastily towards the door. "Afraid, is she? poor little girl!" Mr. Townsford said kindly, "come in my dear, and I will take you in to see my wife, who is in bed, because she was so knocked over, through thinking that some harm had come to Elgar, and when you see her, you will know that there is no reason for you to be fearful about your welcome."

Edith yielded at once then, and when she was safely in the store, Elgar promptly locked and barred the door, it was earlier than their usual time for closing, but there were no customers in, and if any came along later they might just go away again.

Edith, led by Mr. Townsford, went timidly forward into the dimly lighted bedroom, and when an indistinct figure raised itself on the bed, and a voice kinder than she ever remembered hearing before, called to her to come, she bounded forward without hesitation, to nestle into the motherly arms of Mrs. Townsford.

"I didn't know that you would be like this, or I would not have been afraid!" she sobbed.

CHAPTER XIV

The Tidings By Mail

A FORTNIGHT passed without any happenings out of the ordinary. School had begun, and Edith Hunt attended daily, going with the three little Townsford girls. Simon Bulkley was not in the city, so said Jimmy Whitelock, but Elgar had twice seen Mrs. Witham passing to and fro, and had lifted his cap to her, being quite willing and ready to tell her what had become of Edith if she chose to question him on the subject.

She would not even acknowledge his salutation, however, always passing him with her head in the air, and so he decided that she was too angry to have anything to say to him.

Then came mail day, and the news it brought was so much out of the common that for a time it absorbed the thoughts of the entire household.

It was a letter from the lawyer of the Hunt family, and it was written to Mrs. Townsford as being the natural guardian of Elgar, only son of Robert Hunt, deceased, and it contained the really astonishing news that Hunt's Crag had lost its master, Fraser Hunt, who had left a will arranging for his property

being equally divided between the children of his twin brothers Robert and Jamie, or failing any children of either brother being still alive, it was to go intact to the son of his wife by a former marriage, Simon Bulkley, of Prince Rupert City, British Columbia.

"Now, that makes a good many things plain!" exclaimed Elgar, when he had read the lawyer's letter. "Of course if Simon Bulkley were related to Uncle Fraser, he would be keen on inheriting, or at any rate on getting the handling of the money into his own hands, but why didn't he tell us that he was related to Uncle Fraser?"

"Perhaps he did not think of your being related to that family of Hunts; it is a very common name, you know," said Mr. Townsford quietly. He was thinking how strange it would seem for Elgar to have even a little money of his own, after all the years in which the poor boy had been penniless and dependent on his friends.

"But, my dear, he must have known," put in Mrs. Townsford gently. "Don't you remember that Edith told Mrs. Witham that Elgar was her first cousin, and the woman was in Mr. Bulkley's house when Edith ran away and came to us. They know that she is here, and yet they have made no sign, which they most assuredly would have done if we had not had a really greater claim to the child than they had themselves."

Mr. Townsford shook his head in dubious fashion. "When you have folks to deal with who are not quite straight, you can never say for certain what they will, or will not do. It may have suited their purpose to leave Edith with us for a time, and so they have

taken no notice of her running away. But when this news reaches them, as I suppose it will by this mail, they may decide that it is time for them to get possession of her again, and I think the first thing we have got to do is to put that out of their power."

"Just what I think, too," said Mrs. Townsford, putting her arm round Edith, who looked a little scared, and drawing her closer.

"The question is, where shall we find proofs of Edith's identity as the child of Jamie Hunt? Most likely Mrs. Witham has got some proofs, she is too clever to neglect a thing like that, but then I'm also afraid that she is much too clever to give them up peaceably, now that they are wanted," said Elgar, who knew that the Withams must have expected to make money out of Edith, or they would never have kept her so carefully for all this long time. Then he remembered how some one, presumably Simon Bulkley, had tried to break into the store, most likely to steal the things—the emerald locket, and the fragment of the ivory fan which Tim had seen. Why had Simon Bulkley been so anxious to get these things into his own hands?

"The only thing that we can do is to write to the lawyer and tell him that we have with us the daughter of Jamie Hunt, and ask him to search for the necessary marriage certificate of her father and mother, her birth register, and the other proofs which will be required to make her heirship legally plain," said Mrs. Townsford, and to this her husband readily agreed.

"You will tell him that she had the fan which was stolen from her, won't you, Aunt Mary?" put in Elgar eagerly. "You can say, too, that I have

the emerald locket with the portraits inside, and that Edith is so much like Grandmother Hunt, that if only she were tricked out in the same sort of finery you would not know but what she was the original of the picture."

"What a delightful compliment!" exclaimed Edith, trying to look cheerful, although her face had been rather pinched and anxious as she listened to the discussion called out by the tidings which had come by the mail. "I think that Grandmother Hunt was a really beautiful woman, though I am afraid that she was rather vain."

"Most good-looking people are, so take care, Pussy, that you don't fall into the same weakness," said Mr. Townsford, as he playfully pinched Edith's ear, making her flush with pleasure right up to the roots of her hair at his words. Then he swung out of the room on his crutch to attend to a customer who had entered the store, but the others remained bent over the letter which was going to work such a change in the fortunes of two of them.

"The first thing that we must do is to write to the lawyer, and then we shall just have to wait quietly until we hear from him again," said Mrs. Townsford. But a thrill of anxiety shot into her heart as she glanced at Edith, and she wished that she were in England, or at least within reach of the railway, for in such a case, it seemed to her, that she would take care to put a considerable distance between Edith and the people who had formerly had her in their guardianship.

However, it was of no use to cherish fears of harm that might never come, and so she determined to keep her anxiety to herself, although she guessed

that Elgar, who was very quick to detect when she was worried, would soon suspect the cause.

"Shall we have to go to England, Elgar and I, and will you come too, Aunt Mary?" Edith asked a little wistfully. She supposed that if no other proofs of her identity were forthcoming, it would be quite sufficient for the lawyer to see her for him to be quite certain that she was really the daughter of Jamie Hunt, who was twin brother to Robert, the father of Elgar.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Townsford, shaking her head with a rather rueful smile "But if such a thing is necessary, then certainly I shall have to take your uncle and the three girls along too, for it will never do to leave my family behind me when I start globe-trotting."

"I don't want to go to England, not yet awhile at least. I would rather see this business on a firmer footing before I take a holiday of that sort, and I would a great deal rather earn money than have it come to me from somebody's will who hated me, as Uncle Fraser must have done," said Elgar, with a mutinous look. His dependence on his struggling aunt and uncle had been a very sore point with him all through his boyhood, and since he had heard of the way in which his uncle had refused to help him, and had declared that he should never inherit the family property, he had been more bitter than before, so that it was not possible to feel the least gratitude towards the man whose death was to prove a benefit to him.

"There is no reason why you should not go on earning money if you want to, that I can see," broke in Edith. "But I should think that you would be

very glad to know that there is a little money coming to you, so that you can make it easier for Aunt Mary, who has had to take care of you for so many years without being paid for it, that it is just lovely to think there will be some compensation coming to her now."

"Don't I know it," said Elgar in a low tone that was intensely bitter. "It has been because of what she has done for me without any pay that makes me willing to take the money at all, but it is of no use to even pretend that I am grateful to Uncle Fraser, horrid old man!"

"Hush, dear, hush, remember that he is dead!" said his aunt softly. And Elgar dropped into a shamed silence, for after all it was wrong to speak ill of the dead, who were beyond mere earthly judgment.

The excitements of that day were not over with the arrival of the mail, for towards evening who should come walking into the store but Simon Bulkley, asking to see Mrs. Townsford.

Elgar was out at the time, and Bob Townsford, swinging himself along on his crutches, ushered the visitor into the sitting-room behind the shop, where Mrs. Townsford was sewing, assisted more or less actively by Edith and the three little girls.

But at a nod from their mother the children scurried off to the sanctuary of the bedroom, followed by Edith, and the two were left alone, for Mr. Townsford had to go back to the store to attend to a customer, who was more than ordinarily exacting.

Simon Bulkley, whose face was still bandaged, plunged into his business without any beating about the bush.

"I have had a letter from my mother, Mrs. Fraser Hunt, of Hunt's Crag, saying that my step-father is dead, and she tells me that your nephew is heir to the estate, and that his presence will be required in Scotland, so as I am going home to see my mother, I came to see if you would like me to take the boy along with me," he said, while his gaze roamed restlessly over the homely room, but never once rested on the face of Mrs. Townsford, who for her part sat steadily looking at him.

"I think that you are under a slight misapprehension about the terms of the will," replied Mrs. Townsford quietly. "Elgar is only one of the heirs, the other being the child of Jamie Hunt. Elgar, you know, is the child of the younger twin, Robert."

"But Jamie was never married, or so I understood," said Simon Bulkley, and now there was a ring of embarrassment in his tone.

"I fancy that he was not only married, but that he left a daughter Edith, who was for some time in your house, under the care of Mrs. Witham," remarked Mrs. Townsford quietly.

"That girl? Oh, I know that she called herself Hunt, but it is a common enough name, and does not prove that she was Jamie Hunt's child, or indeed that he had one," he answered carelessly.

"I have no doubt about the matter myself, and I dare say that the proofs will be forthcoming when they are required," said Mrs. Townsford calmly. "Meanwhile I have written to the lawyer about Elgar, and I have also told him that I believe Edith is Jamie's child, and that I am taking care of her pending his instructions, which of course, cannot reach me for some weeks to come."

"Rather short-sighted of you, wasn't it, to say anything about the claim of the girl, when you are, upon your own showing, the natural guardian of the boy?" he asked, with a sneer.

"Is it ever short-sighted to do what is right?" demanded Mrs. Townsford, with such a flash in her eyes that he quailed before it, saying lamely enough:

"Of course not, and if the girl is really related to the Hunts, it is only fair that her claim should be recognized, but what I really meant was that it seemed a pity to start new theories with regard to the heirship, which may lead to litigation; you and I know what lawyers are, and how fond they are of running up big bills of costs. To my way of thinking, it would have been better to have let your nephew take the whole, and then if the girl were ever able to prove her claim, let her have something out of the estate afterwards," he went on, letting his shifty gaze drop for one moment on the face of Mrs. Townsford and then as hastily averting it again.

"But that would surely not have been possible?" she said in a bewildered fashion.

"I think that it might have been managed," he answered eagerly. "All that you have to do in the matter is to keep quiet about the existence of this girl, Edith Hunt, who appears to have sprung from no one knows whither, and, so far as I can see, has not a scrap of proof to substantiate her claim to be the daughter of Jamie, then the lawyers make due inquiries, and having satisfied themselves that only Robert left a child, why Elgar's claim to the property is acknowledged without any fuss, and the thing is done."

Mrs. Townsford looked genuinely troubled; she

had encountered a good many people in her life whose notions of right and wrong were more or less under a fog, but she had never before had any one deliberately suggest to her that she should commit a great wrong in order that some one under her care should profit a little. A storm of words rose in her throat, hot, indignant words, for she was more angry than she had ever been in her life before; but they were not spoken, for at that moment the door opened and Elgar came into the room.

As soon as he saw who it was that was talking to his aunt he was for beating a hasty retreat, muttering an apology for his intrusion, but she caught at his sleeve, and bade him stay.

"Elgar, this matter concerns you, and so you might as well stay, and hear all about it. Mr. Bulkley has called to know if he may take you to England, and I have told him that until we hear from your late uncle's lawyer, I would rather that you remained with us."

"Of course, Aunt Mary. Besides, where would be the sense in taking such a long, expensive journey, when perhaps my share from the estate would hardly pay the cost?" he said, putting his arm round her shoulders, because he found that she was trembling violently.

"That is not all," went on Mrs. Townsford, forcing herself to speak quietly, although she was almost over-mastered by indignation. "Mr. Bulkley thinks that it would be better not to mention the existence of your cousin Edith, for fear that it may be a costly business to seek out the proofs of her identity, thus impoverishing the estate for you."

"But it was not left to me, the letter said it was to

be divided between the descendants of the twin brothers, and failing them, to go to Mr. Bulkley," said Elgar, with a steady look at that gentleman, who grew every moment more ill at ease.

"The chance of my inheriting is too remote to be even considered," said Simon Bulkley, rising to take his leave, having had more than enough of cold water on his plans and projects. "I merely told your aunt that it seemed a pity the lawyers should waste a lot of the money, and very likely throw the whole business into Chancery, while they try to find out whether your Uncle Jamie really did leave an heir or heirs, whereas if you alone inherited the estate, it would be quite possible for you to give the girl her share, if ever she could prove that it was legally hers."

"Just so, and then if only I inherited, and some one knocked me on the head one of these dark nights, when I am out on business, why then, the estate would come straight to you, I suppose," said Elgar, with such ringing scorn in his tone that the man fairly quailed before him, although he tried to pass it off with bluster and abuse.

"Now then, boy, keep a civil tongue in your head, if you please, or it may be the worse for you. You are a deal too impudent for your station in life, even in a place like this, where Jack is as good as his master."

Elgar smiled, and there was not a trace of heat in his tone as he replied calmly: "Well, I suppose so far as social position goes, mine is as good as yours, if I am part owner of Hunt's Crag and the lands that go with it, so it is just as necessary for you to be civil to me, as for me to be civil to you."

But with an incoherent something by way of

farewell, Simon Bulkley was gone, and Mrs. Townsford clutching Elgar still more tightly, burst into a fit of nervous crying.

"Oh, Elgar, Elgar, he is a bad, unscrupulous man, I am sure of it, and I am afraid that harm will come to you at his hands. Oh, why did your Uncle Fraser leave such a stupid will? He had far better have let Mr. Bulkley share with you others, instead of inheriting only in the event of your dying without heirs," she sobbed.

"There, there, you will soon feel better now he is gone, the swine that he is!" said Elgar, keeping his tone steady, although his eyes were blazing with wrath. "Now then, Aunt Mary, you just buck up, and put a cheerful face on matters. If I were alone in the business, you might have cause to be afraid that Mr. Bulkley would be tempted to give me a tap on the head, in order to gain possession of Uncle Fraser's property, but there is Edith to reckon with, don't you see, and he will hardly have the nerve to tackle the two of us."

"Poor Edith! Her claim has got to be acknowledged, Elgar, if it costs every penny of the money to do it!" exclaimed Mrs. Townsford, with great energy.

"Of course," answered Elgar firmly. "I shan't take the old estate unless Edith gets her share, too. But it is silly talking about what we will, or will not do. Every one knows that British law is made to protect the interests of the weak, and helpless, so the lawyers will take jolly good care that Edith gets her innings. By the way, where is she?"

"In my bedroom, with Etta, May, and Pinkie, they had to go there when Mr. Bulkley came in,"

said Mrs. Townsford, wiping her eyes, and becoming her old serene self once more.

After this day of crowded interest, and great excitement, a couple of weeks went by without any happenings at all, beyond the usual routine of the busy hard-working life. Only Elgar went about his daily toil with a secret joy in his heart to think that he would soon be able to repay something of the debt which he owed to his aunt, for all the love and care that she had spent upon him, and he chaffed Edith about the motor car they would buy on the day after she was twenty-one, for by that time they would be free to do with the inheritance just what seemed to them best, or so at least he supposed.

Then he had to go on a journey up to Kaien Island, for the trade with that place had opened up in a really astonishing manner since his previous journey there, and as Uncle Bob was still too much of an invalid for the rough and tumble of life on the river boats, there was nothing for it but for Elgar to go, and do his best.

He was away two nights, because no boat came past the island on the day before, and although the success of his journey well repaid the expenditure in time, he chafed a great deal at his enforced length of absence from home.

Coming ashore directly the boat swung to her moorings, he hurried off to Yokohama Street as fast as he could go, for he guessed that they would be in a fine state about him, but directly he entered the store door he realized that something had happened.

The store looked as if it had not been tidied up since he went away three days ago, and Uncle Bob

was sitting behind the counter, with a face so drawn and troubled, that he called out in alarm.

"What is the matter, uncle, is—is any one ill?"

"Think that we are all ill, more or less," replied Mr. Townsford sadly, and then with a catch in his breath which sounded like a sob, he went on: "Edith has gone, she has been missing since the day before yesterday."

CHAPTER XV

Forced to be Generous

"Gone!" gasped Elgar, staring at Uncle Bob, as if he could not believe the evidence of his own ears.

"Yes, she has gone, and it has about bowled your aunt over, it is about as much as she can do to keep about," replied Mr. Townsford, "I can tell you that we have wanted you back every minute of the time, for I am too lame to be of any real use, and a woman cannot do much in a hunt of this sort."

"But I don't understand, how did Edith go?" asked Elgar blankly, for it had been a little private arrangement between his aunt and himself that Edith should not be permitted out alone until he returned from Kaien Island. Privately he had been afraid that Simon Bulkley would make some attempt to spirit Edith away, but he did not think that the man would attempt any extreme measures if Edith were never seen out alone.

"Edith and Etta went out to buy some fish the day before yesterday, and when they had been gone a long time, your aunt slipped on a coat and went after them, because she could not imagine why they were so long. She walked right down to the fish

quay, and then saw Etta standing blue with cold at the corner, waiting for Edith to come back. They had bought the fish, and were coming back, when a man called out to Edith that she had dropped her handkerchief round the corner by the cannery gate, and Edith ran back to fetch it, because she is so short of clothes, poor thing, that even a handkerchief counts. Etta waited and waited, afraid to go back to look for Edith, for fear lest she should miss her, if Edith came up the other way. Your aunt went right down the quay, asking every one she met if they had seen a girl down there, but no one seemed to know anything about it, and so when night came she was forced to give up the search, and that is all we know," explained Mr. Townsford.

"Do you think that she could have fallen over the side of the quay? There is no fence at that part," said Elgar, his face turning ghastly white, as he leaned against a sack of meal to steady himself, for he was conscious of suddenly feeling most disgustingly weak, and waggly.

Mr. Townsford shook his head. "No, because in that case she would have screamed, and Etta must have heard her, while the child sticks to it that she heard nothing at all, for the place was quite extraordinarily quiet just then. There was a policeman standing down at the other side of the cannery, and he declares that he must have heard if there had been anything to hear, besides there is another proof that she did not fall over, there had been a flur of snow that afternoon, nothing much, but enough to show footprints, and there were no footprints within two yards of the edge of the quay, right along in front of the cannery sheds."

"The police ought to find her, only the trouble is that they are so overworked already," Elgar answered heavily.

"They are, and the worst of it is that these disappearances are getting so common, three Chinamen last week dropped out, and never a trace left of their going," said his uncle.

"That does not matter so much, and perhaps the Chinkies found that it paid best to disappear," retorted Elgar. "But to think that Edith could be spirited away in broad daylight, right in the centre of the city as you may say, why, it is awful to think about!"

"Where are you going?" asked Mr. Townsford, as Elgar turned to leave the store again.

"I am going to have it out with Simon Bulkley," said the boy, between his set teeth, "he has got to make it pretty plain to me that he does not know anything about this business, or it is quite possible that he may see the inside of a prison before to-morrow morning."

"Your aunt has been to him, she is shrewder than most," said his uncle. "But the man vowed that he knew nothing about it, in fact he was downright upset when he heard that Edith was missing, and he said it was a horrible thing for any one to spirit a young girl away in that fashion."

"I dare say, in fact I can imagine just what he looked like when he said it, but I don't fancy that he will indulge in all that fine sort of talk when I have said a few things to him," rejoined Elgar bitterly, and again he was moving off, when his uncle begged him to come back for a moment.

"Go and see your aunt first, boy, she is more

troubled than I have ever seen her before, and the worst of it is that she blames herself so sorely in the matter, and down at the bottom. I think that she is afraid that you will blame her, too, although I am sure that no one could possibly have taken more loving care of any one than she has done of Edith."

"Poor Aunt Mary!" muttered Elgar, and then he dived through the doorway of the store which led to the living-room behind, where Etta and May were getting supper, and looking very subdued, with white faces and red eyes.

Elgar treated them with a sort of fatherly patronage most times, because he felt so much older, and more responsible than they, but he paused to pat Etta's shoulder in quite a brotherly, I'm-your-chum sort of style, as he went through the room. "Cheer up, old girl, we'll find her soon, don't you fret," he said, then knocked at the bedroom door, and entered.

Mrs. Townsford rose up at the sight of him, and held out her arms, "Oh, Elgar, Elgar, I have never wanted to see you so much, whatever shall we do?" she asked, with quivering lips.

"Well, the first thing that you have to do is to get better, and you had best be sharp about it," he answered. "And I am going off to see Mr. Bulkley and to tell him that he must at once offer a big reward for news of Edith, who has plainly been spirited away by that Witham lot."

"Do you think so?" cried Mrs. Townsford, a gleam of hope coming into her eyes. "Why, Elgar, if they have taken her, it will be to their interest to take care of her, and I have been so afraid that some harm would come to her, poor child."

"Then leave off being afraid," he answered

cheerily. "Can't you understand that they have got papers, proofs of identity, and so forth, and they want to make money out of it. Now what they will do is to hold that poor girl as hostage, until the lawyers offer a thumping big reward for the finding of her, and then they will come forward, produce the girl, and claim the money."

"Then what are you going to do?" asked his aunt eagerly. She had already thrown aside her languid air, and was prepared to bestir herself, now that the worst of her fear had been lifted from her.

"Oh, I am going to make Mr. Bulkley offer that reward," he answered, and there was a gleam of mischief in his eyes, despite the anxiety which racked his heart.

"You will never do it, dear, he is not fond of parting with his money, indeed he has speculated so rashly, that I am not very sure that he has much to spare," protested Mrs. Townsford.

"He will have to spare some for a reward any way, lest a worse thing happen to him," Elgar answered, with a smile, and then he went out of the room, passed through the living-room once more, and out through the store to the street.

Night was coming darkly down, for the days were drawing in very fast, and the long cold months of the northern winter were close upon them. It was freezing sharply as he hurried along Main Street to the house which Simon Bulkley had built for himself at the further end.

A Chinaman answered the door in response to his knock, and informed him that "Mistah Bulkley willee no see people's business no mores to-nighit."

"He will see me," replied Elgar, with great

decision. "Will you please tell him that Elgar Hunt wishes to see him?"

"Me goes, but it ain't for to be no good," retorted the Chinkie, with a solemn wag of his pigtail, and then he disappeared, leaving Elgar to cool his heels on the doorstep, returning after a good long spell to say that his master would see no one at all that night.

Elgar was getting desperate, and he was very angry, but he was not going to be beaten if he could help it, and so he handed the fellow a slip of paper which he had written, while he was waiting, saying very earnestly: "Will you please carry that paper to Mr. Bulkley, and tell him that I will wait five minutes longer; if he cannot see me by then, I shall know what to do in the matter?"

"Certingly, sir," gurgled the Chinkie, with a low bow, as his yellow fingers closed upon the coin which Elgar pressed upon him, and then he disappeared once more, but this time he was hardly more than a minute gone, and then he came hurrying back, to conduct Elgar into the presence of Simon Bulkley.

"Well, youngster, what bee have you got in your bonnet now?" demanded the ex-surveyor, with a black scowl at Elgar, who smiled serenely in return, feeling that at last he had really got the whip hand of Simon Bulkley now.

"I want you to help me find my cousin Edith Hunt, if you please, sir," he said in a cheerful matter of fact tone, although it may be that he quaked a little at his cheek in bluffing the great man.

"What next, I wonder? And how am I to set about this wild-goose chase, pray?" demanded Simon Bulkley, looking at the boy with what was

meant to be an expression of amazed tolerance, but in which there lurked a good deal of anxiety.

"I should think that the best thing that you can do will be to offer a reward of two hundred and fifty dollars for information which will lead to the finding of Edith Hunt, and the necessary proofs that she was the daughter of Jamie Hunt," said Elgar quietly.

"If I refuse to do this, what then?" hissed Simon Bulkley, whose face was the colour of ashes.

"I do not think that you will, sir, but if you do, I must go to the police, and lay my story before them, of how you first attempted to rob Reuben Shore of the famous fan, which has been in the Hunt family for many years. Then I should tell them how I found the most important piece of the broken fan, and was contrasting the portrait upon it, with the one in my own emerald locket, when I was spied upon by Tim Witham, who told you what he had seen. You may remember that the very next night you came in person to burgle the store, and I in trying to shoot your hand, as a warning to you against the danger of trying to steal what did not belong to you, made a mistake, and shot you in the face instead, branding you for life, for which I am sorry, although I would have been sorrier still if I had blinded you, in one or both eyes." Elgar's tone was very steady, and quiet, though indeed he needed all his courage to stand there without quailing, for Mr. Bulkley was not pleasant to look at just then.

"Who do you think would believe such a story as that?" asked the man, leaning forward to peer into the face of Elgar.

"A good many people, I expect, seeing the motive you had in trying to destroy any proofs of parentage

which Edith Hunt might possess," rejoined Elgar quietly. " It may be that even then you were aware, through your mother, of the trend of Uncle Fraser's will, and by wrecking such few relics as the poor girl had, you thought to destroy her chance of inheriting, then you would only have had one person, myself, to stand between you and this inheritance, which you seem to crave so much, and as boys are mostly careless, some accident might easily happen to me, when the course would be quite clear for you. Now sir, you know what sort of people these are, who live in the city, and if I tell them all these things, do you think that even a whole troop of mounted police could save you from their vengeance? They are rough and ready in their ways of doing things, and they would not stand very fine in their methods of avenging Edith Hunt."

" I don't know where the girl is, indeed I have not set eyes on her since the day——" but here Simon Bulkley broke off short, and it was Elgar who finished the sentence for him.

" Since the day your little daughter died on Kaien Island. No, I don't think that you do know where she is now. I believe that Sally Witham has stolen her away, in order that she may make money out of her, and that is why you must offer a reward for information about her, or—take the consequences."

Half-mechanically Simon Bulkley reached for pen and ink, then wrote a note to the chief of the police offering a reward of two hundred and fifty dollars for such information as would lead to the present discovery of Edith Hunt, and for proofs of her identity, as the daughter of Jamie Hunt, formerly of Hunt's Crag, Scotland.

"Will that suit your mightiness?" asked the man, with a sneer, as he passed the note over for Elgar to read.

"Yes, thank you, sir," replied Elgar politely, and then he asked, "Would you like me to take it round to the barracks or would you prefer to send it yourself?"

"I don't care, you can do what you like with it. Only remember boy, that sooner or later, you have got to pay for this night's work," said Simon Bulkley, in a tone so sinister that Elgar could not help a cold chill creeping down his back, although he was not going to let it be seen that he was daunted by any threats of future ill.

"Thank you, sir, I will take it along, then, and see that the notice is posted first thing to-morrow morning, delay is fatal in cases of this kind," he said, standing erect, and apparently fearless, before the man who had just threatened him.

CHAPTER XVI

False Clues

Great was the excitement in the city next morning when the police notice was posted round the town, and the tide of comment and question rose higher and higher with every hour that passed.

Speculation was rife as to who had offered the reward, and the police barrack was besieged by eager inquirers as to why the money had been offered. Fishing boats going out on the morning tide carried the news with them, to shout it to other boats which might be met on the fishing banks, trawlers beating down the coast towards Port Essington and the lonely canneries scattered further south carried the news with them, until it seemed as if the Pacific shore for a hundred miles or more was echoing the cry of: "Where is Edith Hunt?"

Then hurried messages came pouring into Prince Rupert, a girl answering her description was attending school at Rockville Point, fifty miles south of the city, and at almost the same moment a man came puffing into the office, to tell the man in charge that he had seen Edith Hunt outside a little shack at Albert Bay.

"If this sort of thing goes on much longer half the force stationed in the city will be on the sick list from overstrain," laughed one of the men to Elgar, who, as usual, had come round in the evening to see if the day had produced any news of a reliable sort.

"It is funny why Sally should be so quiet when there is a chance of making money; and if she had not got the girl with her she would most certainly have come forward to tell what she knew, for the sake of fingering at least a part of the reward," said one of the men, who knew Mrs. Witham fairly well.

"I expect that she is waiting until the reward is doubled, and then she will step forward and try to make us believe that she has only just heard that this girl, Edith Hunt, is on demand," said the man who had spoken first; and then he turned to see what was the business of a pinched little woman, wrapped in a heavily furred coat, who had just come in at the door and halted nervously in the background as if afraid.

"Good evening, madam, what can we do for you?" asked the man politely, while Elgar and the other man turned towards the stove, so that they might not appear to be prying into the business which had brought the frightened-looking little woman in the office.

"I want to know if any of that reward for the finding of Edith Hunt is to be paid on account?" she asked in a timorous voice, which matched the other part of her.

"How do you mean paid on account?" asked the man patiently, while Elgar stiffened into an attitude of intense listening.

"Why, like this, if I tell you what I believe has

become of her, will you give me, say, five dollars on account? It is not much, but it will make all the difference to me, and then when you have found the girl you can pay over the rest of the money," she said, in such a desperately earnest manner that Elgar's pulses beat a little quicker, for he could not help thinking that she really did know something about it.

"I am afraid that we cannot do that, because we have on an average about fifteen different clues a day, and so you see we should get the accounts rather muddled," said the man, with a smile of kindly toleration, for the little woman was so small and weary-looking that one could not really be impatient with her, however futile her reasoning might be.

"But you cannot expect me to give you information without being paid for it," she objected.

"If your information leads to the finding of Edith Hunt, you will of course be paid, not otherwise," said the man firmly.

"I saw Edith Hunt taken away," said the woman, and try as he would Elgar could not repress a little start, but the man who was interviewing the woman merely laughed.

"It would be more to the point if you could tell us where she was taken to," he said pleasantly.

"How can I tell you if I do not know?" she asked, in a querulous tone, and then she volunteered another bit of information: "It was a man who took her away, and I saw that same man in the street again to-night."

"What man was it, I mean what was his name?" burst out Elgar, forgetting etiquette and everything else in his eagerness to know who it was that had

taken Edith away; because all the time he had been so sure that it was a woman—Sally, indeed, and no other—with whom Edith had gone away.

"Gently there," said the man in a warning tone.

"Is it likely that I should tell you who the man is?" demanded the little woman, turning upon Elgar with quite a fierce air. "If I did the first thing that would happen would be that you or the man would walk off with the reward which by rights belongs to me."

"It does not belong to you until you have earned it, madam," corrected the official, in gentle reminder; but the woman stalked out of the office unappeased, and after one moment of waiting Elgar followed her, nodding to the two men as he went.

He took care not to leave the barracks by the same door as that through which she would pass, but, slipping out by a back way, he was lounging along the road a little further on when she came nervously tip-toeing out through the main entrance, and with many a backward look as if to see if she was being followed, she passed out to the lighted sidewalk, and went rapidly away in the direction of North Bank.

Elgar had not taken lessons in scouting for nothing, and understanding that his one chance of finding where she was going lay in her not knowing that she was being followed, he took good care that she should never once catch a glimpse of him as he glided along in the shadows behind her, where there were shadows, or lurked in the dim distance where the thoroughfare happened to be brightly lighted.

Then, presently, to his dismay, as they passed a picture palace, from whence a stream of people were pouring into the street, he lost her completely, and

although he doubled backwards and forwards not a glimpse of her could he get. Where could she have gone? Not into the picture palace surely? At any rate it might be worth having a look, so in at the door he darted, falling headlong into the arms of a stalwart attendant, who held him in a firm grip, saying quietly, "Not without paying, if you please."

"I don't want to see the pictures, I am shadowing a woman, police business," gasped Elgar, wriggling in the grasp of the Hercules, but finding himself about as powerless as a baby.

"Not without paying," said the giant once more, and seeing the hopelessness of getting in, Elgar turned his face to the street once more, for he had not a single cent piece in his pockets, and so he could not have gone in, if the scent had been ever so much hotter than it really was.

But it was destined that he should have yet another encounter that night, and as he was coming back along Main Street he collided with a man, in a dense throng in front of a saloon, and was just turning to apologize, when to his amazement he saw that the fellow was Tim Witham.

"You here?" he gasped, too bewildered at first to do what under the circumstances he ought to have done, that is, grip hold of Tim, and hang tight. As it was, the minute it took him to gather up his scattered senses served Tim to recover himself, and take to flight.

"Here, hi, stop, stop!" shouted Elgar, following in pursuit of Tim as hard as he could tear, and finding to his disgust that Tim's pace was faster than his own, which was something disgraceful to a scout, who ought to have been in better training.

One or two people paused to look after pursuer and pursued, but no one seemed stirred to any real interest, and Elgar had no breath left to spare for shouting for help.

Along one street went Tim, sprinting at such a pace that Elgar was left hopelessly in the rear, and would have certainly seen no more of his quarry that night had he not remembered a short-cut leading across a building lot, much encumbered with scaffold poles and stacks of timber. In among these darted Elgar, forced to go slower now, because of the darkness, but able by so doing to get his breath once more, which was a great comfort.

Ah, there was the street again! With a bound he cleared a great trench, which had been cut for basement purposes, and reaching the street beyond, he saw Tim speeding along just in front of him. Where could the fellow be going? This street, only half made as yet, was the end of the town in this direction, and at its further end stood forest, pure and simple, a vast stretch of tall trees, which stood up like a black wall in front of him. If Tim once reached that boundary of trees it would be all up with Elgar's chance of catching him that night.

"Stop, stop, I won't hurt you!" he yelled, which of course sounded rather funny, seeing that he was only a boy, and Tim was a man grown.

But it served, for Tim came to a sudden halt about three yards away from the trees, and there stood still, holding up his hand as a sign that the boy was to move not another step nearer.

"What do you want?" he demanded, in a surly tone, he was not fond of over much exertion as a rule,

and so he felt that he owed Elgar a grudge for making him move so fast that night.

"I want to know where Mrs. Witham has taken my cousin, Edith Hunt," said Elgar, panting but resolute.

A mocking laugh was the response to this. "How do you know that Mrs. Witham has taken her anywhere?" asked Tim, who still chuckled, as if the whole thing were a great joke.

"Because I am sure that Edith would not go with any one but Mrs. Witham, and you can't capture a girl, and carry her off by force in broad daylight in a British city, without some fuss being made," said Elgar, feeling that he was really a very good imitation of Sherlock Holmes in the matter of drawing deductions.

Tim laughed again, and in a most exasperating fashion too, which made Elgar long to fly at him, and get his revenge in some of the hardest hitting of which he was capable, although this was distinctly ungrateful, seeing that Tim had once saved his life by pulling him out of the muskeg.

"Are you going to tell me where my cousin has been taken? It is an easy way of earning two hundred and fifty dollars," said Elgar, descending to coaxing now, because he so badly wanted to know what he was sure Tim could tell him.

"Not enough; make it five hundred, and I will think it over," replied Tim, with another chuckle, and again Elgar yearned to hit him.

"I can't, for I haven't got the money, but at least you can tell me if she is well," said Elgar.

"Oh, she is all right, girls mostly are for the matter of that," replied Tim, in a casual tone; and

then, as if he had had enough of the interview, he moved a little nearer to that sombre belt of trees, saying, as he went, "Is there anything more that you want to know, shaver?"

"Yes, I want to know why you took her away?" shouted Elgar, for Tim was now on the verge of the tree belt.

"To make a few dollars by producing her at the proper time, and also to get her safely out of the way of Mr. Simon Bulkley, who would not be sorry to see something happen to her," retorted Tim, moving deeper into the shadows; and then, before he finally disappeared, he hurled a word of caution back at Elgar: "You would be wise not to trust him over much yourself, for remember what he stands to gain, if you two can only be got out of the way."

"Stop, stop, come back, I want you!" yelled Elgar, but he might as well have shouted to the wind, for now Tim had gone, and there was only the black wall of trees standing up between him and the information which he wanted so much.

Very slowly he turned his steps homeward; some comfort at least he could get out of the night's adventure, for he knew, or at least guessed that Edith was safe in the care of the Withams, and Tim had said that she was quite well.

But Mrs. Townsford was acutely depressed when she heard the story which Elgar had to tell, and there was a very anxious consultation in the little living-room behind the store that night after the three children had gone to bed.

"Until now, I have believed that the Withams were in league with Simon Bulkley to keep Edith out of the way, but now I don't know what to think,"

she said, sitting with her hands tightly clasped, and her face very pale.

"I think that they are standing out for the five hundred dollars, and we shall not see anything of Edith till they get it," said Mr. Townsford slowly, "and if it is true what they say about keeping her out of the way of Simon Bulkley, perhaps it is just as well that she should be missing just now, although the price for her board and lodging seems pretty stiff."

"I thought so myself, I mean I felt glad that the responsibility of taking care of her was off my hands just at present, but there is Elgar to be considered, and I do not feel as if I shall have an easy moment, when he is out of my sight now," replied Mrs. Townsford, catching her breath in a sob.

"Don't worry about me, I can take care of myself, and I have stood up to Mr. Bulkley before to-day," put in Elgar, greatly amused to think that his aunt should think that he wanted taking care of, when really it gave a sort of spice to the humdrum monotony of daily life, to know how much happier Simon Bulkley would be at this minute if he were safely out of the way for ever.

Mrs. Townsford shook her head, as she replied, "I think that I should be less afraid if you were more in fear of the man, because then I should feel that you would be on your guard against him."

"But Aunt Mary, what could he do? It is not the middle ages you know, and in this glorious twentieth century wicked relations cannot put their undesirable kin out of the way without considerable trouble to themselves. I don't think that Mr. Bulkley would care to risk his reputation on my account, and all for the sake of a poor little estate in

Scotland," said Elgar, in a cheery tone. He was not going to let his aunt worry if he could help it, although privately he admitted she might have some ground for her fears.

Mrs. Townsford admitted that she did not know what he could do, and decided that for the present it might be as well to keep her misgivings to herself. Therefore when three days later a man came into the store saying casually that he had seen Mrs. Witham and a girl of about twelve, or thirteen years, in a store at Hazelton, it never even occurred to her to enter a protest, when Elgar announced his intention of at once taking a journey up the Skeena, to see for himself if the information had any truth in it.

CHAPTER XVII

UNMASKED

No one could even guess how glad Elgar was for the chance of making active search for Edith. What had tried him so sorely ever since she had been missing, was being obliged to go about his work as if nothing had happened, instead of plunging into all sorts of places in the hope of finding her.

The very day in which that casual bit of information reached the store,a cable from the English lawyer to Mrs. Townsford, instructed that Edith Hunt should be taken before a magistrate, to tell her story, so that the authorities at home might know in which direction to look for proofs of her identity as the daughter of Fraser's brother Jamie.

"You must go, Elgar, and we will get on somehow without you, your aunt will help me in the store, and she will be at peace in her mind, when she knows that a few score miles separate you from Simon Bulkley," said Uncle Bob, as he and Elgar discussed the situation.

"It is all right about my going here and there in search of Edith, now, because the estate will bear the expense of course, but I should not have gone, if it

had had to come out of the family exchequer," replied Elgar.

"I guess there would have been money enough for what is wanted anyhow, there always has been," said Mr. Townsford easily. "Let me see, how far is it to Hazelton?

"A hundred and eighty miles more or less, I think. I must run down to the dock office, and see how soon there is a boat going all the way up, for it is of no use taking one of the little half-way craft which will leave me stranded high and dry at Kitselas, or some other place equally remote, and now the season is getting so far on, the boats do not go right up to Hazelton oftener than twice a week I think," said Elgar, and then he hurried away in the direction of the dock office.

He was fortunate enough to find a boat just about to set out for Hazelton; that is she expected to steam out of harbour at about four o'clock that afternoon, and having secured a passage upon her, he hurried back to make his preparations for the journey. He was thinking of how he had posted off up to Kaien Island, and had found Edith, and brought her home with him, and somehow he felt quite sure that he would be successful again this time, and then when the deposition had been sworn to before the magistrates, there would be little fear of the Withams running away with Edith again, because there would be no money to be made from so doing, and he guessed that it was the want of money, which all along had determined their conduct with regard to his cousin.

He put in a good day's work at the store, staying to do so many things which could not very well be left to any one else, that he very nearly lost his boat,

and only managed to be in time by running the whole distance to the jetty from which the up-river steamer was to start.

As he was rushing along, he almost collided with one of the police who had been really kind to him, through all the adventurous weeks that he had lived in the city.

"Hullo young 'un, whither away, have you been robbing a hen roost, or are you running to catch a train?" asked the official, who had a turn for humour.

"No need for hurry in catching trains until we get the rail within fifty miles of the city, and as for the hen roosts, that sort of thing does not appeal to me: they have an old saying in England that 'He who robs a hen roost, is apt to catch fleas,' which means I suppose that you may get more than you bargain for. But there is my boat, and if I don't make haste, I shall lose her," said Elgar, and then as he scuttled across the gangway only just in time, he called back to the man in uniform, "I have had sure word about my cousin to-day, and I am off up river to bring her home."

"I wonder now where he got his news from?" said the man, who was left on the shore, as the boat released from her moorings drew away from the shore. Then because he was possessed of quite his share of curiosity, and had moreover a very great liking for Elgar, he made it his business to happen round at the store that evening, when he had a short time off duty, to ask for news of Elgar.

Bob Townsford told them how news had reached them in a casual way that Mrs. Witham and Edith had been seen at Hazelton, and that Elgar had set

out to bring his cousin home, as they were anxious that her deposition before the magistrates should be made as soon as possible.

The man in uniform listened, nodded, and said very little, but when he left the store, instead of going off on his own business as he had intended, he set out to make a few careful enquiries about the present whereabouts of certain people, and when he had found out all that he wanted to know, he went back to barracks, and was shut up with his chief for quite a long time; after which the telegraph was set to work, and various code messages passed to and fro between Prince Rupert and Hazelton, and the other places at which the up river boat might stop.

Meanwhile, Elgar having boarded the boat just in time, took a few minutes to recover his breath, and then sought the shelter of the cabin, which was pretty well thronged with passengers, who had crowded in there because the night was very cold, and threatened to be rough as well.

The tossing they got when they left the shelter of the harbour, reminded Elgar of the experience he had that time when he went up to Kaien Island, in search of Edith, but then he had been the only passenger on board, and had been obliged to supplement the poor sea-sick crew.

They did things somewhat better on this boat, which was one of those regularly used in river-passenger-traffic; but even here there was much to be desired in the matters of convenience and comfort, while the distressing spectacle of other people's sufferings speedily became too bad for Elgar to endure.

Then he decided that even the cold outside would

be more endurable than the sights, sounds, and smells of the cabin, so working his way through the litter of helpless people strewing the floor, he made for the stairs which led to the upper deck.

It was very dark outside, and the first blast of wind nearly took him off his feet, and he caught at a stanchion to save himself from a fall. It was while he was clinging there, that two men very much muffled up, passed close to him, and he heard a familiar voice saying:

"Of course I shall be able to meet it, when it comes due, but the date is four weeks away yet."

It was the voice of Simon Bulkley, and as he recognised it a damp perspiration broke out upon Elgar, and a sudden conviction darted into his mind, that he had been trapped into this journey up river by a false message.

Then his common sense came to his rescue, and he asked himself what harm Simon Bulkley could work him on a crowded river boat. Such peril as was incident to the journey would be shared by them all, and he must take his chance with the others, but anything like foul play was surely not to be feared, when there were eyes in every place.

He did certainly think that it might be wise to go back to the cabin, but when he had groped his way to the door, and had taken one whiff of the foul air inside, he decided that the worst his enemy could do to him might be more bearable than being shut up in an atmosphere so thick that it might be cut with a knife, and a blunt one at that.

"I can find a corner where it is fairly light," he muttered to himself, then was instantly deeply

ashamed to find how his teeth were chattering, and not entirely from cold either.

" My word, what a baby I must be, and then to call myself a scout ! " he muttered, in withering scorn at his own faintheartedness, as he crept along the windy deck, wondering a little where the two men had disappeared to. It was strange that he had not seen them before, for he had been on board for about four hours now, and despite the darkness of the night, the boat was making good headway.

One thing was certain, Simon Bulkley had not been in the cabin, or Elgar must have seen him. It was quite possible, of course, that his presence on the boat might not be known to Mr. Bulkley.

Elgar knew that he had been the last person to come aboard, so there was no likelihood that he had been entrapped into making the journey, and those private qualms of his were cowardice pure and simple, something to be downright ashamed of.

Crouching behind two great bales of merchandise, which kept some of the worst of the wind away, Elgar called himself all the hard things that he could think of, and when he tired of that occupation, he remembered the words which he had heard Simon Bulkley utter, and sat idly speculating on them, for want of something better to do.

What was it that Mr. Bulkley would have to meet in four weeks ? Why of course he knew. It was public money that would have to be paid over, settlement day it was called, and Mr. Bulkley as promoter of several land-rings as they were called, would have to pay over large sums of money, which he had received from speculative buyers. The other man had plainly doubted whether he would be able

to pay, but if he did not, it would be because he had been speculating with money, which did not belong to him. Now in Prince Rupert no one fell in the social esteem who speculated with his own money and lost it all. Such a man was merely unfortunate, and his case to-day might well be the case of his neighbours to-morrow, since all were speculating more or less rashly.

But let a man be even suspected of plunging with money which was not his own, and then unless he was promptly able to deny the rumour, he would be outcast from society, a social pariah, and in plain speech a thief! No wonder that Simon Bulkley asserted so loudly that he would be able to pay. But would he?

Elgar remembered various things which he had heard concerning Mr. Bulkley's losses, and he knew that the man had most of his money locked up in land, which had not yielded what the Boom-promoters had promised. Prices still ruled high in some parts of the city, but there was no very great activity, nor would there be, until the completion of the great railway which was to come straight through from Winnipeg. And the question was whether Mr. Bulkley could hold out until then. If he could, it was pretty certain that he would be one of the richest men on the Pacific slope, a millionaire several times over. But if he could not hold out, which meant in other words if he could not pay over the money which other people had entrusted to him, then he would be ruined, and disgraced at the same time. It would be of no use for him to attempt to remain in the city, because no one would have business transactions with him, so he would have to sell at an

awful sacrifice and go anywhere, only it must be so far away that the story of his disgrace could not follow him.

But if it were not for Elgar Hunt, and in a lesser degree Edith Hunt also, Simon Bulkley would be the undisputed heir to the Hunt's Crag estate, and although this would be a mere drop in the bucket to a fully-fledged millionaire, it might easily spell all the difference between ruin and success to the man who was hard-pressed. If only Elgar and Edith were disposed of, he could borrow on his expectations, and so tide over the critical time, while every one said that the railway would be completed in the spring, so that the time to be tided over was now only a matter of months.

Elgar thought it all out, as he crouched there in the shelter of the great bales; and a feeling of pity for the speculator stole into his heart, for it must be awful to be within sight of success, and then to miss it by such a narrow margin. He meant to be rich himself some day, not merely well off, because of his share in his late uncle's estate, but wealthy from his own endeavours, the natural result of hard work and shrewd organisation, which after all is half the battle in the road to success. But he got such a sight into the necessity of absolute righteousness in business life, as he crouched that night in the cold, that he never forgot it, or was in any way tempted into shady commercial dealings.

The wind lulled as the night went on, and wrapped as he was in his rug, Elgar presently began to doze. Then he slipped lower down in the shelter of the big bales, and from merely dozing was soon fast asleep.

The night wore on, the boat became very quiet,

save for the noise of the machinery and the churning of the paddle-wheel. There were no people walking the deck now, most of them had forgotten their miseries in more or less uneasy slumber.

Then a cautious footstep crept towards the sheltered corner where Elgar lay sleeping. It was a man so wrapped up about face, and head, that nothing of him was visible save two gleaming eyes, scared and furtive they were, for it was a desperate deed to which the man had set himself that night.

There was no moon, but a few stars came out from the gloom shining frostily down on the great river, and the boat labouring and palpitating against the fierce current.

Suddenly the man paused, he had heard a footstep coming along the deck. One of the crew most likely, for no one else would be likely to be stirring at three o'clock in the morning, and a winter's morning too.

He crouched in the shadow of the great bales, until the person, whoever it was, had passed by, and as he crouched, he peered into the face of the sleeping boy. A violent shudder shook him, and once he half-turned as if repenting him of the thing which he had planned. Perhaps if his little daughter had lived, Simon Bulkley had never let his thoughts run on a crime so great, but she was dead, he had nothing in life to live for, save the pleasure of getting rich, and now ruin stared him in the face. Black ruin, and commercial disgrace, unless he could meet all the claims upon him, and settling day was only four weeks away!

The thought of the ruin hardened him, but for this boy, the ruin could be staved off, and a few months would see him a millionaire, for the girl did not count, as the people who had her in charge could be bought,

he was sure of it, and the judicious expenditure of a few thousands of dollars, might be safely trusted to settle the question of Edith Hunt's claim for ever.

No, it was only this boy, Elgar Hunt, whom he had to fear, and—but why waste time? The footsteps had died away, there was no sound at all, save the throbbing of the engine, and the weird howling of a wolf on the lonely bank of the river.

Stooping swiftly, the man who was so covered up, that it would be almost impossible for any one to identify him, picked Elgar up in his arms, and striding to the side of the boat dropped him over the side, and he sank into the water, with never a cry, nor a groan, and the labouring boat went on its way.

CHAPTER XVIII

Rescued

Elgar was dreaming that some one was in deadly peril, and that he was trying to get free to rescue them, only he could not get the folds of the rug unwound quickly enough. Oh, it was horrible, horrible, he must get free, he must! Making a mighty effort, he kicked out with all his might, and at that moment he plunged into water so cold that for a moment it took his breath away, and his senses too.

He was going down, down, down, would he never stop? Was it a bad dream, and if so where was he dreaming it?

Once more he struggled wildly, flinging his arms wide, and at that moment, gasping, and choking he rose to the surface, and dashing the water from his face, he tried to think where he was, and what had happened to him.

Then to his amazement, he heard a throbbing noise in the distance, and saw the tail lights of the boat ever so far away, he had to strike out vigorously then, to keep from sinking again, but he was so weighed down by his clothes, that it seemed only a question of moments before he went under once more.

But life was very sweet, and he must struggle for it, so putting out his utmost strength, he struggled and struggled, in the hope of reaching the shore, but despite his best efforts he would hardly have done it, but for the fact of punting into the limb of a tree, which was sailing down river on the current, and clutching at the slippery branches, Elgar clung for dear life, letting it carry him where it would.

So swift and strong was the current, that the tree travelled along at a great pace, then Elgar saw a bend looming up before him, and gathering up all his strength once more, he tried to steer the tree inshore, but failing to control it, because it was so heavy, and knowing that in any case he could not cling much longer, he flung himself clear of the drifting branches, and struck out with all his might for the shore. He reached it too, and never, never had he known a keener joy, than when he drew his benumbed limbs, in their clinging wet garments, out of the water and crawled on to the pebbly bit of under-bank.

He was ashore, he was ashore! There was firm ground under his feet, and the danger of drowning was past! He stamped, and he pranced, he walked up and down that little bit of firm ground, and tried with all his might to get a little warmth into his shivering limbs.

His beat was very much restricted, on one side of him, was the river on the other a bank so high that he would not dare to attempt climbing it in the dark, while behind him the bend of the shore made a sudden end to the little shelf upon which he had landed, and in front of him it was muskeg pure, and simple.

It was plain that he was caught in a trap, and he must stay there until morning light, however long

that might be. Then he bethought him of his watch, and pulling it out of his pocket, he saw that it had stopped at ten minutes past three, so that allowing for his having been in the water for another ten minutes, it could hardly be more than half-past three even now, and it would not be daylight for nearly another five hours, could he possibly hold out for so long ?

He must hold out. There was no question of giving up. He had escaped from the great peril of the river, and it would be a poor courage which would fail him now that the greatest danger was past, and only endurance remained.

" Only I must not let myself sit down, or I shall freeze to death in no time at all," he muttered, and then he set himself to the task of tramping up and down that narrow stretch of firm ground, and by the time he had done it five hundred times both ways, he found that he was actually dozing as he walked, and as this meant a grave danger of falling down, he cast about for fresh occupation, which would serve to keep him awake.

" I might carry stones, and throw them into the water," he said to himself, then amended this suggestion by determining to pitch them into the muskeg instead. The strip of shore was fairly littered with stones, as he knew to his cost, he having knocked his feet against them so many times in the course of his walking up and down. Every one of those stones he would plant in the muskeg, building them into a little path for his feet.

The stooping and lifting brought a fresh set of muscles into play, and he had not planted more than five hundred stones in the squelchy mud of the swamp which would not freeze, despite the frost in the air,

before he began to feel a glow of warmth stealing through him, the first bit of comfort that he had enjoyed, since his fall into the water.

"Ah! that is better! There is nothing like work for keeping a fellow warm," he said to himself, as he toiled to and fro laden with stones for his causeway.

Now it was exactly fifteen feet long, and he was wondering how much further he could carry it, for his stones were nearly all used up, when happening to glance over a clump of dried rushes which rattled in the wind, he was astonished to see a light shining at a little distance. At first he thought that it must be a Jack-o'-lantern, or Will-o'-the-wisp, such as are often seen in marshy places; but no, this light did not dance up and down, it was steady and bright, like a light shining from a window.

"And a lamp it is, hurrah!" he shouted, and was amazed to find that he had voice enough left to shout with. When he had first come ashore, between the terror and the cold, he had no more voice than an ordinary frog, and he had not tried shouting, because it seemed such waste effort, which although it would wear his strength, would certainly not keep him warm, and warmth had been the one thing for which he had striven so hard that long, long night.

"Here, hi, hullo!" he was shouting now at the top of his voice, for make some one hear he must, and for the next few minutes, he fetched so many echoes out of those banks, that he fairly jumped at the noise he made.

Then he saw the light which had been burning so steadily, flicker and move, as if some one were moving it; there was a brief pause, and then a voice shouted out of the darkness:

"What is the matter?"

"I am in trouble on a shelf of the river bank, I don't know which way to get off, I am wet through, and I have been here for hours; can you help me?" shouted Elgar, and try as he would he could not keep his voice from waggling a little.

"I'll be there in a few minutes," the voice shouted back, and then Elgar executed a sort of war dance of delight, which served the double purpose of keeping him warm, and of relieving his feelings, for he had never surely been so glad to hear the voice of a fellow creature before.

Presently, to his surprise, he saw the light moving high above him, and then it came bobbing down the side of the bank, which he had believed to be too steep to climb.

"So there is a path, I wish that I had known it," he said to himself; and then the voice called out to know where he was.

"I am here, here, here!" he shouted, dancing and stamping again, for despite his efforts he was so cold that he could have screamed with the torture of it.

The lantern was very near him now, and he could see the person who was carrying it coming slowly round an angle of the bank.

To his surprise he saw it was a woman, and an instant compunction seized him for having dragged a woman out into the keen cold of the night, or rather morning

"Stop, can't I reach you now, or is it all muskeg to the bottom of the bank?" he called, anxious to spare her as much trouble as he could.

"I must come a little lower for there is a bad bit at the bottom, and you have had quite enough to

bear, without finishing up in the swamp," said the woman in pleasant refined tones, and then she called out suddenly, "Why, you are in the swamp now, are you not; or what is it that you are standing upon?"

"Oh, I have made myself a little causeway, about fifteen feet long, like the Irish giant, Finn McColl, you know. I had to do something or I should have frozen to death, and I kept falling asleep when I walked to and fro," explained Elgar, who was inclined to be a little ashamed of his activity in building a causeway over the morass.

"Well, it is a good thing that you did employ yourself in such a fashion, for now you can get on to this path, and save yourself quite a long scramble over boulders. Can you reach to grip my hand?"

Elgar stretched out his arm to its greatest length, and just managed to touch the tips of the woman's hand.

"Now spring for it, but be careful," she said sharply, and at once Elgar sprang forward. But he was so stiff and numbed with cold that he blundered in his spring, and instead of landing on the firm ground at her side he fell in a heap in front of her, and all but dragged her down into the oozy mud of the swamp.

"Why, you are only a boy?" she exclaimed in amazement, as she dragged him on to the firm ground, and flashed her lantern in his face.

"I am very sorry, but I am going to be a man as soon as possible," replied Elgar, in such a fervent apology, that the woman laughed.

"I do not think that you will have to wait very long before you are a man, if courage and cheerfulness count," she answered, as she helped him to his

feet, and then led him up the winding path on to the top of the bank.

If it had been cold down on that little shelf by the river, where he was sheltered from the wind, it was very much keener on the high ground, where they felt the full force of the blast, and Elgar could hardly stand against it, while he shivered and his teeth chattered in a way that made him fairly ashamed of himself.

"It is not much further now," said the woman encouragingly, and then the path began to dip so suddenly that Elgar nearly lost his footing, and pitched forward upon her.

Down, down, down they went, then turning in at an open gate, passed along a smooth bit of pathway, and entered the door of a homely kitchen, where the red glow from a stove made a most comfortable warmth.

"Oh, a fire!" cried Elgar, with positive ecstasy in his voice.

"Yes, I got up quite early this morning, because I hoped that my husband might be home to breakfast, that is why I had a light for you to see so soon. If he had not been coming home to breakfast, I should not have troubled to stir until daylight, and then you might have had to wait nearly two hours longer, before anyone would have come to your rescue," replied the woman, as she bustled into the bedroom, and returned with some masculine clothing which she hung in front of the fire. "Here are some of my husband's clothes, make haste and change into them, while I get the bed ready for you, for you must be put to bed at once, or you will have rheumatic fever; you may not escape it even now, but we will do our best to stave it off."

Elgar began to wrench at his various buttons, but he would have been a long time at it if the woman had not stopped to take his boots off for him, and then having seen that his garments were in a fair way to slip off likewise, she hurried into the next room, while he stripped the wet things from his shivering limbs, and after a brisk rub with a warm towel, crept into the warm folds of the roomy woollen garments which the woman had provided for his use.

Then she came hurrying back again, and wrapping him in two or three blankets, made him sit close to the stove, while she made some broth hot in a saucepan.

"Now tell me, how did you get into such a place in the middle of the night?" she asked, bending forward to peer into the saucepan, and taking the opportunity to peer at Elgar at the same time.

"That is just what I can't understand," replied Elgar, spreading himself to the cheerful blaze, and feeling as if he could not get enough of it. "I was aboard the Hazelton boat, but the cabin was so full and so awfully stuffy that I couldn't stand it, and so I came outside and walked about, until I came upon a sheltered corner on the lee side of the boat, and there I lay down, all wrapped in my rug, and I suppose that I went to sleep, for I knew nothing more until I found myself sinking in the water, and oh, just wasn't it cold! Then when I came to the surface, I saw the lights of the boat ever so far away, and that is just everything that I know about it, although I never heard of anything queerer in my life."

"Nor I," said the woman, who was carefully pouring the broth into a basin, into which she had already put a generous slice of bread. "Anyone would

almost think that you must have walked in your sleep, and deliberately thrown yourself overboard."

"But I never have walked in my sleep that I know of," replied Elgar, with a shiver at the bare thought of such a thing.

"It is queer certainly, but we may know more about things when my husband comes home," remarked the woman. Then she made Elgar swallow every drop of that basin of broth, after which she hustled him off to bed, and brought a hot water bottle to keep him warm, heaping rugs and coverings upon him, until he declared that he should be smothered.

"No, you won't, but it is your only chance of escaping rheumatic fever after such a chill, to go to bed, and thoroughly perspire the cold out of you. I am going to give you some catnip tea, presently, it is not very nice, but it is wonderfully good for such cases as yours."

Elgar nodded in complete understanding of what the woman was saying, but he was getting too blissfully drowsy to want to talk much, and in two minutes he was asleep, and he had to be forcibly awakened to swallow some stuff which was very hot, and very nasty, but which sent a most delightful glow through his aching body, and then he plunged into deeper sleep.

It was dark when he awoke, and at first he supposed that daylight had not come yet, but a moment of reflection told him that he must have slept through all the short winter day, and that this was night come once more.

The door of the bedroom was slightly ajar, and a gleam of firelight strayed through. It was so

pleasant and homelike, and Elgar felt so thoroughly comfortable that he was dropping into slumber once more, when suddenly a man's voice broke in upon the quiet.

"I never saw such a scene, and I never want to again, Annie, the fellow reminded me of a wild animal at bay, and I can tell you that I was thankful that I was not single-handed at the job, for more than once I thought that the mob of excited passengers would have torn the poor wretch to pieces."

"I am awake, please, and I can hear what you are talking about," called Elgar, or at least he tried to call, but found to his surprise that he had no more voice than a raven.

However, he had contrived to make enough noise to attract attention. There was the sound of a chair pushed hastily back, then the door was thrust wider open, letting in a broad stream of lamplight and firelight, which was followed by the woman who had taken such care of him in the morning.

Close behind her came the man who had been speaking, a tall, broad-shouldered man in the uniform of the mounted police.

"Awake, are you? How do you feel now?" asked the woman kindly, and her hand dropped with a motherly touch upon Elgar's forehead, to see if he were feverish.

"I am hungry," said Elgar, the words dropping from him almost unconsciously.

The man burst into a great laugh. "Get the poor chap something to eat, Annie, he is evidently coming round finely, and that is a good thing for all concerned."

"I should like to get up, please," said Elgar,

wishing that his voice were not quite so thick, for it made talking something of an effort.

"Better not, laddie, you are safest where you are, until the morning, we don't want you down with fever, or bronchitis, you know, and my wife tells me that you had a pretty rough time of it last night, or rather early this morning," said the man kindly, and then he sat down upon the edge of Elgar's bed, while the woman went off to bring some food.

"Yes, it was a bit stiff while it lasted; but I wouldn't mind so much, if only I could know just how it all happened," said Elgar, in a worried tone. "Mrs.—Mrs—I mean your wife——"

"Mrs. Frith; my name is William Frith," put in the man quietly, thinking perhaps the boy had not been told the name of his hostess; which indeed he had not.

"Thank you," replied Elgar, grateful to have this small embarrassment settled for him so promptly. "Mrs. Frith suggested that I might have walked in my sleep, and thrown myself overboard, and I would give a good deal to know that it wasn't true, for it is horrid to feel that one cannot trust one's self to stay still while one is asleep."

The man looked at him, and hesitated a minute, then he said, "I wouldn't worry about it if I were you, for I happen to know that you certainly did not walk in your sleep last night. By the way, was there anyone on board who would have been likely to have done you an injury?"

Elgar started up in bed, but was gently put back upon the pillow. "Lie still, boy, there is no need to get excited," said Mr. Frith.

"There was one man on board, Simon Bulkley,

who does not like me, but I don't think that he would quite go to the length of throwing me overboard, although it would be a really happy thing for him, if something happened to me, at the present time," said Elgar, who was tremendously excited.

"So he appeared to think, and there was a man on board last night, who declares that he saw this person, Simon Bulkley, pick you up in his arms and throw you into the water," replied the man slowly.

CHAPTER XIX

What Mrs. Frith Knows

Elgar gave a low whistle of pure amazement, and was about to burst into excited questioning, when Mrs. Frith came back into the room with something, which smelled extremely good, in a basin; she brought a lamp also, which enabled Elgar to see plainly the face of the man who sat upon his bed.

"Why the fellow must have been clean crazed to have done such a thing, for it would be certain to come out at some time, and then he would be ruined!" exclaimed Elgar.

"Oh, William, you surely have not been exciting him by telling him that story?" cried Mrs. Frith reproachfully.

"I couldn't help it, Annie, and really I have not done more harm by telling him the truth than you did when you suggested that he might have thrown himself overboard in his sleep. Besides I may have to start before he wakes in the morning, and I shall be able to put some things straight, perhaps, if I know the truth all round," replied Mr. Frith, rising

from the bed to make room for his wife to approach with the tray.

"It won't hurt me to know, indeed it won't," burst in Elgar eagerly. "You see ever since Uncle Fraser Hunt died and left Hunt's Crag to Edith and me, or failing us, to his stepson, Simon Bulkley, Mr. Bulkley has hated me just like poison, for there was no question about my claim being proved, even though it may mean some trouble to establish the identity of Edith. Then I overheard a man talking to Simon Bulkley on board, the night before I went to sleep, and he was in some doubt whether Mr. Bulkley would be able to pay up, and I thought then how much easier he would find matters if only I were out of the way, as then he would have that Scotch estate to fall back upon, to help him through, if he is in a corner."

"Are you a Hunt, of Hunt's Crag?" burst out Mrs. Frith, in great excitement. "And is it possible that you know what has become of poor little Edith Hunt?" demanded Mrs. Frith, in great excitement, nearly dropping the tray, basin, and all, in her astonishment.

"I don't know where she is at this minute, except that the Withams have stolen her away, in the hope of getting a thumping big reward for producing her, and the proofs of her identity later on. But a man came into our store the other day and said that he had seen Edith. No, what he said was that he had seen Mrs. Witham coming out of a store in Hazelton, and there was a girl with her, so I was sure that it was Edith, and I was on my way up to Hazelton to find her and take her home," explained Elgar,

wondering mightily who this Mrs. Frith could be, that she seemed to know about Edith and about Hunt's Crag also.

"Who is Mrs. Witham? You can't surely mean Sally Shore?" said Mrs. Frith, who was all of a tremble, and had turned so white that she looked as if she were going to faint.

"Softly, Annie, softly, who is going in for exciting the patient now?" said the man gently, as he put out his hand and patted his wife on the arm.

"He is not a bit feverish, William, and it is so strange that he should be a Hunt, and stranger still, that he should know about poor little Edith," answered Mrs. Frith, her voice sounding as if she were going to cry.

"Fire ahead then, doubtless the air will be clearer when some of the mysteries are explained," said Mr. Frith, and then he sat down on the bed again, while Elgar between the mouthfuls of that most appetizing supper told Mrs. Frith how he had stumbled upon Edith Hunt in the shack of Tim Witham, and struck at first by her name, and then still further bewildered by finding that she was the owner of the ivory fan, he had discovered from his aunt, that Edith must have been the daughter of Jamie Hunt, his own father's twin brother. Then he told how he had run away with Edith from Kaien Island, and that she had shared his home, until after the news of Fraser Hunt's death had reached Prince Rupert, when she had mysteriously disappeared, stolen as he believed by the Withams, in the hope of making money from the reward which of course would be offered by the lawyers. Then he told them how he had made

Simon Bulkley offer a reward of two hundred and fifty dollars on his own account, upon which Mr. Frith burst into a shout of laughter, and leaned forward, patting Elgar on the shoulder.

"Bravo, boy, bravo! But honestly I don't wonder the fellow wanted to get you out of the way, if that is the way you treated him; why you must have been a downright terror to him."

"You say that your Uncle Fraser wrote such cruel letters to your aunt about you, but I am in a position to say that he never wrote one of them; they were the work of his wife, Mr. Bulkley's mother," put in Mrs. Frith quietly.

It was on the tip of Elgar's tongue to ask her how she knew this, but as it did not seem quite polite to call her knowledge into question, he let it pass, only his face was so full of the questions that he would not put into speech, that Mrs. Frith took pity on him, and hastened to explain how it was that she knew so much about the Hunt family.

"My first husband's name was Grey," she said, "and when my daughter was born, we were living in Montreal, and our next door neighbours were Jamie Hunt and his wife. Their baby was within a month of the same age as mine, which was a sort of bond between Mrs. Hunt and myself. Then she died, and Jamie asked me to take care of his baby for him, and for two years Jamie boarded with us, and during that time I heard the whole history of how he had run away from his family, and how homesick he was for Scotland still, although his pride would not let him go back, or even write to his people. Then one terrible day he and my husband both lost their lives

in a street accident, and I was left penniless with two children to care for—my own, and Jamie's little orphan girl."

"That was rough on you," said Elgar, feeling that he ought to say something, because Mrs. Frith had come to a sudden pause, as if her story were done, instead of being half-way through.

"It was rough on me, and then I wrote to Mr. Fraser Hunt, telling him of his brother's death, and that I intended sending the orphaned infant home to Hunt's Crag, to be brought up by her father's people, as her mother had no relatives at all. The reply to this was a cable bidding me keep the child until I heard further from Scotland, and promising that I should be repaid all my out-of-pocket expenses," went on Mrs. Frith, talking in the same tone in which she might have repeated a lesson. "But judge of my amazement, when instead of a letter, Mrs. Fraser Hunt herself appeared to settle the destiny of Jamie's baby. She was a hard and utterly selfish woman, and she seemed to have no scruples about letting me know it. She told me that Jamie's twin brother, Robert, had also died, leaving an orphan to be brought up on charity, and that she was not going to have Hunt's Crag turned into an orphan asylum if she could help it, because she had a son of her own, whom she hoped would inherit his stepfather's estate. I told her that I was very poor, and then she made me an offer to pay me enough to keep Edith in comfort until she was seventeen, by which time the child would be able to earn her own living, and would need no more help from her father's people. This money I understood was to be paid

out of her own pocket, and her husband was not to know anything about it. She ordered me to say nothing to her husband at any time about the child, nor was I to talk to Edith concerning her parentage. Then I found myself able to have a nurse to look after the children, and I engaged Sally Shore, whose father strangely enough proved to be a Scot, who had come from the next village to Hunt's Crag."

"That accounts for Reuben Shore knowing so much about the family, and also would be another reason why Simon Bulkley tried so hard to drive him from Prince Rupert City," said Elgar, who was now beginning to understand some of the mysteries which had puzzled him so much at first.

"Of course," replied Mrs. Frith, "and when you came on the scene, of course it still further complicated matters, because both of the men were playing for their own hand as it were, and Edith would have been only a puppet to be bought and sold, as neither of them would have had the slightest regard for her interest in the matter."

"Edith said that Sally told her you and your daughter both died of scarlet fever," broke in Elgar, after a minute's pause spent in carefully scraping up the basin.

"My little daughter died, and I was ill in hospital for three months," answered Mrs. Frith, her tone so sad that her husband reached forward to pat her on the shoulder in a sympathetic fashion. "Then when I came out, I found that Sally had disappeared with everything that she could lay hands upon. She had taken the child with her, and I had no clue at all to her whereabouts. I wrote at once to Mrs. Fraser

Hunt, telling her all that had happened, and asking her what I was to do. She wrote back to say that she had sent a whole year's pay for Edith, that the draft had been cashed, and so she supposed that the whole story must be a fabrication of mine. Of course I saw then what had happened, the draft must have come immediately after I and my child were taken ill, and Sally had taken the money for her own purposes, with as much of my property as she could get clear away with, but my position was very serious, for I was all but penniless. I had no money to make search for the child, indeed, I had to take a situation as cook in a boarding-house, just to keep myself from starvation, and there I stayed until Mr. Frith married me, and took me out of it. He is in the Mounted Police, and we have moved about almost continually, until three months ago, when we came up here from Edmonton. So it is not wonderful that Edith's letters have never reached me, indeed, it would have been very marvellous if they had done."

"Would you be able to prove the identity of Edith, as being the daughter of Jamie Hunt, by making a declaration before magistrates?" asked Elgar eagerly.

"Why, yes, of course; that is, I should know Edith, and she would know me, and for the rest, her birth was properly registered in the city of Montreal, so there will be not the slightest trouble about that, I am sure. But the part that worries me is, what motive Sally can have in not producing the child now, when she could have the two hundred and fifty dollars down, with practically no questions asked, I suppose," said Mrs. Frith.

"I should not worry about that, if I were you," said her husband. "Remember Mrs. Witham knows Simon Bulkley, and she may hope to get a better price from him for keeping quiet than she can get from the authorities by coming forward. But when she hears that Mr. Bulkley has been arrested for an attempt on the life of Elgar Hunt, she will realise that the game is up, you mark my words, we shall have her applying for the reward, which she may have on producing the girl, and the papers of identity will not matter either way, seeing that my wife can supply what information is needed."

"It sounds almost too good to be true," said Elgar, and then he was passive in the hands of his good host and hostess, when they insisted that he should be left to quiet sleep again. He did not know, of course, that his was the only bed in the house, and that their kindness to him meant that they had to spend the night sitting in chairs by the stove in the outer room. But in their place, he would have done the same, and at least they had the satisfaction of having done a good action, which is always a reward in itself.

When morning came Elgar was able to crawl from his bed, and dress himself, although he felt so weak and worthless that he was ready to despair at the thought of any exertion that day.

He found when he came to the outer room that Mr. Frith was away on duty, that news of his safety had been sent to Prince Rupert, and that Mr. Frith had left a message asking him to remain where he was for that day at least, as the authorities on the spot might wish to question him about his experiences on board the boat.

"But I wanted to be getting on up river to-day, for I'm dreadfully worried about Edith," said Elgar ruefully, when Mrs. Frith gave him her husband's message.

"My husband says that you had better leave the search alone for a few days, as matters may settle themselves more easily if they are left alone," replied Mrs. Frith, who was really glad to have some one to cheer her loneliness for a little while.

"I suppose that I shall have to, if that is the best thing to do, but it is desperately hard work to sit still with your hands before you, when all the time you are so anxious to be doing something," sighed Elgar, leaning back in the rocking chair, which stood by the stove, and looking so white and weary that Mrs. Frith laughed at the bare idea of his doing anything that day, except perhaps to feed the fire with the billets of wood which lay handy in the box behind the stove.

"It will not hurt you to stay quiet for one day, you are about as thin as a skeleton," she said, thinking that he must have seriously overworked himself.

"Oh, that is as it should be, if any one is burdened with flesh they cannot work properly," replied Elgar, and then he asked, "Do you know what they did with Mr. Bulkley when he was arrested?"

"They took him off the boat at Port Keith, and he was locked up in the barracks of the mounted police for the night, he is to be taken back to Prince Rupert City to-day, if a boat is sighted going down river," said Mrs. Frith. "A wired message to Port Keith ordered that the Hazelton boat should be signalled to stop at Port Keith, and one of the force told off to travel up to Hazelton, to see that no harm

came to a boy named Elgar Hunt, from Simon Bulkley, both passengers on the boat. This was of course a code message, and my husband was told off for the journey to Hazelton on board the boat with you and Mr. Bulkley. His Chief went on board with him, and they landed to find a lively scene; it seems that one of the passengers was standing in a sheltered place on deck when he saw a man very much wrapped up creep along the deck, stoop down, and pick up what was unmistakably a human body, and throw it overboard. This man went straight to the captain, and told him what he had seen, and he identified Simon Bulkley as the man who had done the deed. You were found to be missing, and when the boat came to her moorings by the Port Keith wharf, something like a free fight was taking place on the boat, the passengers wanting to treat Mr. Bulkley to a dose of his own medicine, the captain and crew trying to protect the miserable man, so that the law might deal with him. Of course the Chief promptly arrested him then, but it was a frightful business, for he fought and bit like a mad man, and the crew between protecting him from the violence of the passengers and helping the police to secure him, had about as lively a time as often comes on a river boat; however it was done at last, the man was carried ashore securely bound, and my husband was spared the journey to Hazelton, because of course there was no longer any need for his going."

"And then he came home to find me here; I should think that he must have been surprised," put in Elgar, who had listened to the story with eager interest.

"Yes, indeed he was surprised. Of course, directly he came, I rushed out at him with my news, telling him not to make any noise when he came in, because I did not want you to be awakened suddenly; and when he had heard my story he told me his, and it was while he was talking that you woke up," said Mrs. Frith.

"When will he be home again; Mr. Frith I mean?" asked Elgar.

"I hope he will be here by six o'clock to-night, but of course I never know, a man in his profession cannot keep regular hours, or say for a certainty that he will do this or that. But the Chief is a very considerate man, and if my husband has been sent away on any expedition which may take days, or even weeks as the case may be, he always sends me word so that I can then do as I like about staying here alone," Mrs. Frith replied; and then her work took her out of the house, so that Elgar was left alone for a time.

The house was so quiet, the stove was so warm, and he was so exceedingly comfortable, that he dropped asleep, and was dreaming blissfully, when the door was suddenly burst open, and a man darted in.

Elgar woke up with a jerk then, and opened his eyes to see Simon Bulkley standing at the other side of the table, staring at him, with an expression of frozen fear on his face.

"Why——" began Elgar, not in the least knowing what he was going to say, but he did not get beyond the first word, for with a hoarse cry, the man turned and fled out by the way he had come, leaving the door wide open behind him.

"Now what does that mean, I wonder?" said Elgar to himself, in profound astonishment, as he rose and slowly crossed the room to shut the door. "I thought that they had locked him up, it looks uncommonly as if he had done a jailbreak, unless indeed I have been dreaming it all; only one thing is very certain, and that is, I could not possibly have dreamed the door open."

It was nearly an hour later before Mrs. Frith came hurrying back, and then she was full of apologies for having left Elgar so long alone.

"My nearest neighbour lives across lots, inland from the river, and her baby has been taken ill, so I have been helping her with the poor mite, and we were so absorbed that I forgot all about you, then when the child got better, and the mother, she is quite a young woman, had got a little over her fright, I hurried away, and I do hope that you have not wanted anything."

"No thank you, I believe that I was asleep for a good bit, and I have been downright comfortable," replied Elgar, but he did not speak of that sudden appearance of the man, who was his enemy. For one thing he did not want to scare Mrs. Frith, by making her afraid to live in that lonely place, and for another he was willing to let Simon Bulkley get away so far as he was concerned. If he were asked, he would have to speak of course, but he was not obliged to put information in the way of the police.

Mr. Frith came home in the afternoon, but it was only to tell his wife that he was to start immediately for some place seventy miles away, and he would be

home again some time, perhaps the day after to-morrow, or not until next week.

"The Chief is in a fine rage this morning, I can tell you, for last night Simon Bulkley broke out, although he had been left in the inner cell, and though every available man has been scouring the country since dawn, they have not come upon a trace of him," said Mr. Frith, as he made hasty preparations for his journey, and then he told Elgar that the Chief wished him to report himself at the police barracks next morning at ten o'clock, when the question of the journey to Hazelton could be settled.

"I shall have to believe that I dreamed I saw Simon Bulkley, and the door must have come open of its own accord," whispered Elgar to himself, as he sat by the stove in the gloaming, while Mrs. Frith walked across the field towards the barracks with her husband.

CHAPTER XX

At Last

Simon Bulkley was not found, although a most vigorous search was instituted for him on both sides of the river, and after a time, the authorities declared that he must have been drowned in trying to get away.

Elgar went up to Hazelton, but although he remained there for more than a week, and knocked at the door of almost every house in the township, he failed to come across the remotest trace of Edith, or indeed of Sally Witham. If they had ever been there, they had gone away again, leaving no trace of their going.

In summer it would be easy enough to disappear from Hazelton, leaving no sign of one's whereabouts, for the town was the starting place whence teams of pack-horses, and strings of bush wagons set off for remote settlements, over rough forest trails, up bleak mountain passes, and through deep valleys to the very outposts of civilization, it was in fact a sort of jumping off place for any one who wanted to disappear from the busy haunts of men.

But the snow was so deep that no wagons could travel now, the mails were carried by dog team, or by handsledge, when they were carried at all, and the inhabitants of the town for the most part seemed to be taking holiday. The sun shone every day, and winter sports were going forward with great zest, and the fun was tremendous.

If only Elgar had been free from care, his time at Hazelton would have been a veritable picnic, but with the worry of Edith upon him, he could enjoy nothing at all, and only longed for his search to be over, so that he could get back to Prince Rupert City, where life was more strenuous, and it was possible to forget the most acute of one's worries in hard work.

He searched the town so thoroughly that not even the Indian cemetery to the east of Hazelton escaped a visitation from him, and when he had made up his mind that wherever his cousin might be, she was certainly not there, he took the next down river boat, and went home.

The long winter wore away without incident after that. Mrs. Frith herself wrote to the lawyer who was acting for the Hunts, and told him what she knew concerning the daughter of Jamie, telling him where he could find the registers of Jamie's marriage, and Edith's birth, and then things were at a standstill, where they remained until May in the following spring, when Elgar had to go on business to Port Essington, and there stumbled upon Reuben Shore dying in a lonely little shack outside the town.

The old man was in a condition of appalling poverty, lacking even the necessary food, and although Elgar had no reason to be in any way friendly

to him, he stayed to minister to the old man's necessities, mindful of his scout duty, which was to help whomsoever he found in need.

Two days he stayed with the old man, whose tide of life was almost at the ebb, and since even the hardest heart may soften, and grow gentle at the approach of death, a change for the better in the temper of the crusty old man, put into Elgar's hands the clue for which he had searched so long, and vainly.

"If I had been Sally, and Tim, I would have taken that two hundred and fifty dollars, while there was a chance of getting it without any awkward questions being asked," said Reuben, his grey face, and labouring breath showing how near he was to his end.

"Why didn't they take it?" asked Elgar.

"Because they knew that Simon Bulkley meant to wipe you out, if he could do it without being spotted, and then they knew that he would pay a jolly good price for having Edith's claim suppressed, don't you see, and so they stood out for as much as they could get, and it has ended in their getting nothing, and having the girl to keep all winter, into the bargain, and she has been a handful too, so Tim says, and the work they have had to keep her from running away has been something awful. It is hard on me too, for if they hadn't had to keep her, they could have spared a bit more for me perhaps, but a growing girl needs a shocking lot to eat, and so I have had to go short," grumbled the old man.

Elgar's breath came in lumpy gasps, his heart beat as if he had been running a race, and he was almost afraid to speak, lest the old man should

suppose that he was trying to ferret out the secret of Edith's hiding place.

But Reuben Shore was only about half-conscious, and although in a normal condition he had been so silent, and secretive, he had become with increasing mental weakness a most inveterate talker, and Elgar guessed that it only required a little patience, and sympathy to extract the necessary information.

"Sally was all for going back to Vancouver City, but Tim he wouldn't hear of it," the old man babbled on, while Elgar sat listening with breathless eagerness and thinking what a huge reward this doing of his scout duty would bring him, if it only gave him the clue to where Edith had been hidden so long.

"Tim was right too, he has got a head on his shoulders, though he is mostly lout to look at, and no match for my Sally in smartness, but oh, what a winter it has been, and they might surely have spared a little more food for the old man, even if they were a bit pinched themselves. But the girl must not be kept short, was always Sally's cry; and so I got left, don't you see—that is always the way, you get left when you are old, for no one cares."

The old man's tone was dreary, and his words bitter, then for a little while he seemed to sleep, while Elgar sat beside him, scarcely knowing how to curb his impatience, yet quite sure that the only way in which he could hope to learn the secret, was by appearing not to care in the least about it.

"Is there any one whom you would like to see, now that you are so ill?" asked Elgar presently, when his patient seemed to revive a little.

"A good many. For instance I'd like to see Simon

Bulkley, and to feel his slippery neck under my fingers, I guess that I would give him a twist that he would not soon forget, just to pay him out for all the bad turns he has done me, but you never can have all that you want in this world, and so I suppose that I will have to go without that satisfaction," replied the old man with a sigh of regret.

Elgar shivered, and seeing that the old man's mood was so bitter, he was for going, and leaving him to his fate, but when he made a move, Reuben stretched out an imploring arm.

" Say you'll stop a bit longer, it is awful lying here alone, and waiting for death to come. And you are a downright good sort. I don't remember that ever I came across a boy like you before, for you have always treated me decent, though goodness knows I've done you as many ill turns as I could, and I guess I should be like it again to-morrow, if I had got half a chance."

" I'll stay with you if it is any sort of a comfort to you, but look here, one good turns deserves another you know, so if I stay here with you through the night, will you tell me where I can find Edith Hunt, when the morning comes ? " asked Elgar.

The old man cackled in feeble amusement, then he said, " What do you suppose that Sally would say to me if I did such a thing ? Why it would be clean taking the bread out of her mouth, and it is little enough of anything but bread, and not enough of that which they have had this winter," and then he roamed off into delirious wanderings, which filled Elgar with awe, but never one word did the old fellow

utter, which gave the least clue to the hiding place of Edith.

Elgar never forgot the solemn awe which filled that night, the old man slept fitfully, and for the rest his mind wandered through the shady byeways of his dissipated life, some would have said that it was no fit place for a boy, but surely it would have been far worse, if Elgar had left the old man to die, uncared for, and alone. Towards the turn of the night the sufferer became quieter, and then sank by degrees into a peaceful sleep.

Elgar had determined that he would not close his eyes, but he was so very tired, that he was nodding before it even occurred to him that he was drowsy, and from simply dozing, he presently slipped into deeper slumber, from which he did not wake until the sun was high in the Heavens, and the birds were singing their loudest.

His first thought was for the sick man, and with keen self-reproach for having slept so long, he rose from the cramped position in which he had been sitting so long, and went across to the bed on which Reuben Shore lay so quietly.

But the old man had died in his sleep, and he had kept the secret of Edith's hiding place to the last.

A very bitter mood seized upon Elgar then, and he was tempted to wish that he had not been so careful to do his duty by the old man, for after all, what had he gained by it ?

He staggered to the door of the close little shack, and flinging it wide open, stood for a moment clinging to the door-frame. Then a light step came dancing

along the path to the door, but he was too miserable to even lift his head.

"Why—Elgar Hunt—is it really you, or am I dreaming?"

Elgar looked up then, and one glance being sufficient, he made a bound, which carried him to the side of Edith, then he gripped her arm, shaking her gently, as if to make sure that she was a reality, and not a thin unsubstantial ghost.

"To think that you should turn up here, just when I had about given up hope of ever getting to know where they had hidden you, it seems jolly well too good to be true!" he exclaimed.

But she pouted, and did not look too pleased, "If you had wanted to see me so badly, pray why did you not come before?" she asked, staring at him and thinking how worn he looked, just as if he had been ill. She was not very flourishing in appearance herself, being thin, and pale, and incredibly shabby.

"How could I come, when I did not know where you were?" he said, his tone growing stern now, for it seemed to him that she might somehow have tried to communicate with her friends who so badly wanted to know where she was hidden.

"Tim said that he told you where I was, and that he and Sally had lost the proofs of my identity, and so it would never be really known that I was a Hunt, of Hunt's Crag, in consequence of which, you would inherit all alone," she said, her poor little pride flaring up, as she faced him with flashing eyes, and a manner so haughty that he was instantly reminded of the picture of his beautiful grandmother in the emerald locket.

"A likely story that, and you must be in your dotage to believe it, Edith Hunt," he said, looking straight into her face, and laughing. "If only you knew of all the searching we have done on your behalf you would not be looking at me, as if you wanted to bite my head off. And as to the proofs of your identity, we have got all of them, for I stumbled upon your Mrs. Grey, last fall, only she is not Mrs. Grey now, but Mrs. Frith, and she wrote to the lawyer herself, and told him where he could find the registers of the marriage of your parents, and of your birth, and everything else that was needful; there has been nothing wanting but you, and now that I have happened upon you, it is all that I can do to keep from throwing up my hat, and yelling hurrah, at the top of my voice."

"Why don't you do it then?" she asked teasingly, although her eyes had grown suddenly dim, for she had thought some very hard, and uncharitable things concerning this cousin of hers, who was so willing to profit by her disasters, or so she had been told.

The laughter died out of Elgar's face, as he answered in a grave tone, "I shouldn't like to shout just here, and now, because the poor old man is lying there, dead, I was just going to find some woman to come, and do what is necessary, and then you came along."

"Do you mean Reuben Shore?" she asked, turning very pale. "Sally sent me along to see how he was, and if you had not been here, I should have just gone walking straight in."

"Never mind, I was here, and so you did not do

it," he answered soothingly, and then he stepped back to shut the door, after which he took her hand, and let her away to the nearest house, where a woman was found to go, and look after the dead.

Then he made Edith write a letter, saying that she was going to Prince Rupert City, in the care of her cousin. This letter was sent to Mrs. Witham by special messenger, then the two walked across the fields to Port Essington, and took the next boat for home, where Edith was received with such acclamations of joy, that she quite broke down under the warmth of her welcome.

All through the winter Sally Witham had steadily instilled into her the idea that Elgar and his relatives were rejoicing because her claim to be her father's daughter could not be legally proved, and Edith, who was tremendously proud, had resolved that she would starve rather than be dependent on people who did not want her. She had been inveigled away in the first place by Tim, who said that Sally was ill, and wanted to give her the papers of identification before she died.

"The Withams promptly disappeared after the meeting of Elgar and Edith, nor were they heard of again for years. Then it was in a police court case they figured, which resulted in their both going into a term of enforced retirement, which would give them leisure to reflect upon the fact that crooked ways do not lead up to solid prosperity.

To his great surprise, Elgar received a letter from his old patrol leader, saying that all his old company were proud of him, because of the manner in which he had done his scout duty all alone, and it had been

decided to give him a badge, and empower him to form a patrol in Prince Rupert City.

That letter brought more joy to Elgar than the news that he was in part his uncle's heir, and that summer he set to work to gather a patrol, to be drilled into scout discipline, and efficiency, and to be taught the first principles of scout law, which is to help the weak, and to do one's duty unflinchingly, and at all costs.

It was late in the fall, when he and his patrol had been camping on the hills north of the city, and were returning home laden like packhorses, that in traversing a narrow valley high up among the hills they came upon the body of a man, long since dead, crouching in a little cave, by the ashes of a fire. A hat lay beside the body, and there was a name in it, Simon Bulkley. It was supposed that the poor man must have died from starvation, almost in sight of the city where he had so much property, but from which his own evil deed in attempting the life of Elgar had shut him out.

The authorities in England very wisely decided to appoint Mrs. Townsford as Edith's guardian, until she should be twenty-one, and so she lived at Prince Rupert with the Townsfords, grumbling sometimes because Elgar was more interested in scout business than he was in her, but secretly feeling very proud of the cousin who had risked his life in searching for her, and had striven so hard, in the face of great difficulty, to establish her claim to family and kin of her own.

The firm of Townsford & Hunt flourished exceedingly, and there was no question of Elgar going home

to Scotland, to settle down to the idle life of a poor gentleman on his half of the inheritance; the active career of a business man in the young new west had too great a fascination for him, and he would never consent to be idle while there was work to be done, and he had the strength to do it. The joy of achievement was his, and he would not have changed his lot, even to be a crowned king.

THE END

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