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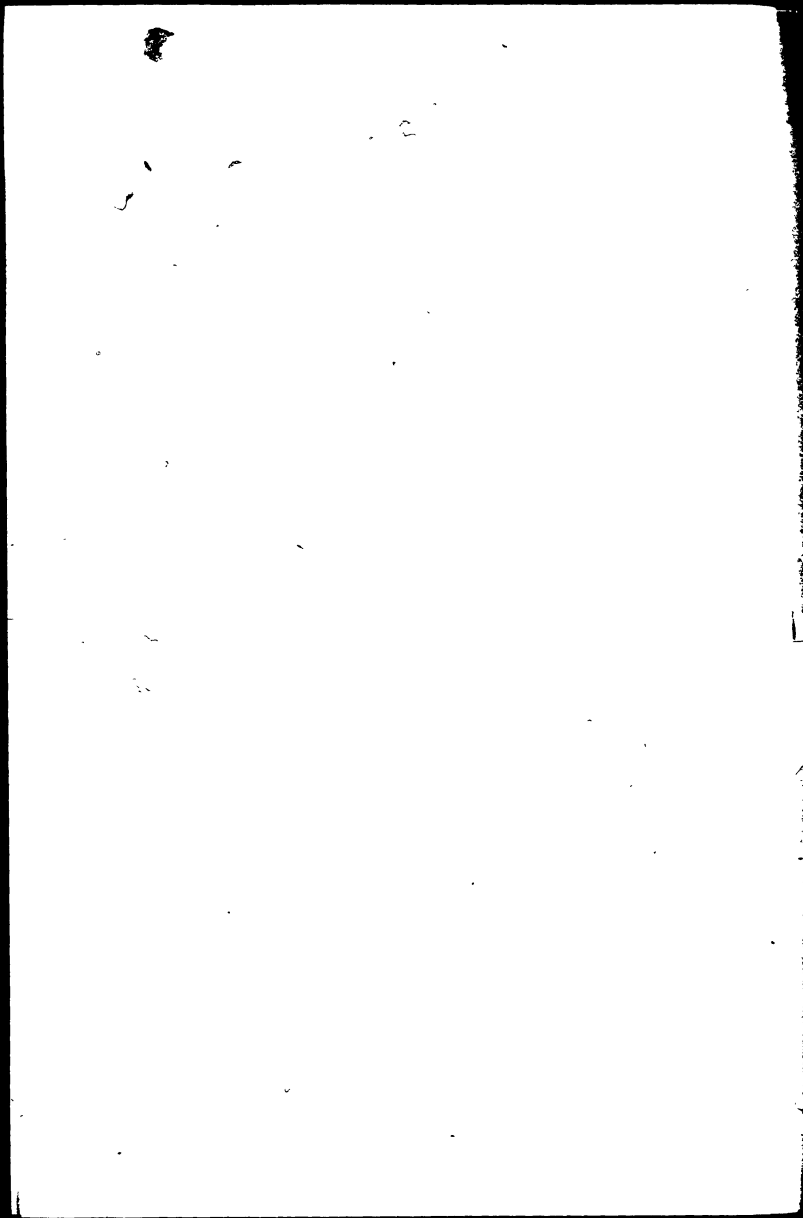
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THE MADONNA OF A DAY

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# THE MADONNA OF A DAY

*Countess Haly  
with love*

BY

L. DOUGALL

*Carrie*

AUTHOR OF THE MERMAID, THE ZEIT-GEIST, BEGGARS ALL, ETC.

"A water pure and saltless  
Has neither taste nor hue;  
A beauty that is faultless  
Is characterless too.  
Blest are the discontented!"



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1895

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# THE MADONNA OF A DAY.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE station of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the town of Vancouver is a rather handsome building. At its entrance, on a certain afternoon in late December, an omnibus from the principal hotel arrived with quite a crowd of people. Its occupants were nearly all men—young men; they were sitting upon one another's knees, and standing in the middle, for they filled it to overflowing. They were all laughing hilariously, and the person who was making them laugh was the younger of the only two women in the omnibus.

When the horses stopped, the men—some younger, some older—alighted without any abatement of their jovial state. Then they handed out the two women, and all the rugs and bags and umbrellas which belonged to them. It seemed that the women only were the travellers, for the men had no luggage.

The sky overhead was a dull soft grey; in the

street a layer of snow lay upon everything, but it was not deep, and the air was soft rather than cold. The two women stood together upon the pavement in front of the entrance. The older was tall, and very plainly dressed. She was clever, she was sad, she was not given to interfering with others—all this was written on her face; she had reached that maturity in which character and expression are fixed. The younger woman was a plump blithe creature; she would have been perfectly fresh and delightful if it had not been for a certain subtle spirit of unrest that peeped out, as it were, from behind her bright black eyes and from the corners of her red lips with hardening effect. She was young; as yet nothing was imprinted very clearly upon her face. She was dressed more richly than the other, but with sturdy good sense. She was as alert and alive to what was going on around her as a chicken when its wings are all fluffy with excitement. She looked upon herself as a person of great importance, and took a vivid interest in every one about her.

For the moment there happened to be no porter to unlade the trunks from the top of the omnibus.

“Now,” cried the young woman, “I’ll bet a dollar to each, that you men, with all your miraculous vows of everlasting friendship, won’t haul down the boxes and carry them in on your backs.” She raised her voice to a delighted scream. “On your

backs, my dear boys; I shan't lose my dollars on false pretences."

She escaped vulgarity. There was just enough of what was well-bred in accent and aspect to make her loudness an interesting eccentricity rather than a loathsome commonplace.

She gave way to immoderate and delighted laughter as the group of men charged upon the omnibus, and with unaccustomed awkwardness hauled and pulled at the boxes strapped upon it. "We shall be too late," said the older woman to the younger, speaking in a dry dissatisfied way.

"All right, my pet," was the answer; "I'll pay your hotel bill for the extra day." Then in exclamation, "Hang me if those fellows don't knock off one or two of their heads! Oh, what heavenly fun it would be to have to take one or two of them back to the hotel in an ambulance, and have to stop and nurse them!"

"Speak for yourself," said the other one, with an air aloof and placid.

- By this time such servants of the station as should have done the work were standing aside, grinning widely. The men who had taken down the boxes were wrestling, each to obtain a box or a part of a box on his own shoulders. The fact that it was in some cases difficult for two men to get under one box made some moments' delay.

The plump girl clapped her hands, and gave a little dance of hilarity.

“Run, my dear fellows, run! or we shall lose the train as sure as death.” She gave little shrieks of delighted laughter between her sentences. “And there’s that infernal checking business to be gone through.”

The men in rollicking procession ran into the station, the girl beside them breathless with glib comments, small bits of mild profanity, and the very freshest gayest laughter imaginable. Her companion followed, swift and sedate.

The train, about to start, shut in the long platform at one side. Its engine and carriages looked very large to eyes unaccustomed to American travel.

“Have mercy on us!” cried the girl. “What a huge way of spinning across the continent!”

The trunks having been checked, were carried on the backs of the hilarious cavaliers to the luggage car. Every one upon the platform or at the windows of the train was interested in the performance. The lively little lady who had instigated it stood at the steps of the drawing-room car into which she was about to enter, and clapped her hands, laughed and swore that it was the most amusing sight which she had ever witnessed. It was a piece of rather strong language she used this time; it came out evidently just to shock and interest two of the

men of her party who had by this time gained her side.

The ladies were helped to ascend into the car, all their friends accompanying them through its first narrow passage-way into its main portion. Most of the men were still boisterous; one or two had assumed a pensive expression by this time. This expression was the most pronounced in the case of a slight fellow with a light moustache, who was called by the ladies, "Charlie."

The girl patted Charlie upon the back.

"Cheer up, dear old boy," she cried. "It's enormously pretty to see you so down in the mouth, you know, but it's no go. Let us meet, part, and be merry, for to-morrow we die!—that, I think, comes out of the Vedas or some other ancient literature."

She was the central figure of the group; the older woman counted for very little, for though both in feature and figure she was much the handsomer, she was not happy, and the younger was radiantly happy. Happiness by its infection always attracts. Moreover, the younger was rich; her purse was full, a large diamond sparkled on her hand.

She had already taken out her purse with a demonstration of business. "I hope I have enough of these vile bits of green paper to pay you in single dollars," she cried.

The first man to whom she presented a bank-note put his hands behind his back. Her whole being was swiftly transformed into a very personification of petty indignation.

“What is this? What does it mean? Is it an insult?” Then she demanded of the others with flashing eyes, “What does he mean? Does he take me for a ‘young lady’? Does he imagine that, when I lose a bet, I would fail to hand over the coin like any *other man*?”

Her impetuosity was such that each man received his dollar. One of them, as spokesman for the rest, began to protest that they would each purchase a charm for their watch-chains, but she scornfully told him not to be a “blethering idiot.”

She was evidently a new variety of woman to most of these men. Hasty as the leavetaking was, they watched her up to the last moment with eyes greedy to drink in every one of her unexpected glances and words.

“Poor Charlie!” she cried, “but he’s my cousin, you know, and kin is kin all the world over. Come now, you must all go out, and I’ll give him a cousinly kiss behind the door.”

The small company of men left the train after it began to move; they jumped from it with the same boisterous hilarity, with the exception of Charlie, who, after having been patronizingly kissed, reached



the platform looking much depressed. The lively girl, who had driven them along the small corridor as if they had been a flock of sheep, stood upon the rear platform of the car waving her hands and shouting and laughing as long as communication was possible.

## CHAPTER II.

THE evening descended upon the train as it passed through plain and canyon on its way eastward, towards the great mountains. The land, the rocks, the broad placid surface of the valleys, were white with snow; only the tremulous lakes were grey; the tumultuous rivers still ran with dark grey stream, and the firs made dark the hillsides which they clothed. Night fell; snow blew against the windows of the cars; inside the palace sleeping-car the gorgeous lamps, inlaid woodwork, mirrors and bright curtains, were cheerful enough.

At one end of this car the two young women who had entered it at Vancouver were in talk with a fellow-traveller. The man was a missionary, but being a real person and not a play-actor, there was nothing very typical about him, nothing in his dress and manner that on the stage would have been recognized as denoting the species "missionary." He was a tall man, grey-haired, with a handsome clear-cut face; he looked as if he had his fair share of common-sense;

his dress was not more remarkable than is usually the case when travellers return to Western civilization after a long sojourn in the East.

The missionary bent forward, his hands upon his knees, a good-natured look of penetrating shrewdness upon his face. "Now I know," he said, "what you young ladies are doing. You have said to one another, 'There is an old fogey of a missionary; we will make up all sorts of stories, and amuse ourselves by shocking him.'"

The elder leaned back in her corner with a languid smile. "We are extremely sorry if you are shocked," she said; "it is the last thing that we desired." She looked out of the window at the darkness flecked with white.

The other made her disclaimer in the freshest, most good-natured fashion in the world. "You are entirely mistaken; we were saying that we thought that you were a rather jolly fellow, and we think so yet. We haven't told you anything but what was perfectly Biblical in the way of truth—or rather, much more truthful than what is Biblical, because we were dealing with facts; we've been 'speaking the truth in love,' I do assure you. We are women journalists. We are going round the world. You are very much behind the times if you think English girls over twenty-one need any one to take care of them. Why, you know, we have been in all sorts of

out-of-the way places. Of course it was often dangerous, but that made something to write to the papers about. I bought an enormously precious stone in the East. I carry it with me. I expect to be murdered for it before I get home—that will be the *dénoûment*." Her eyes sparkled with vivacity.

"And in London," said the missionary, "I gather that you live in 'chambers' all alone, and go about at night quite freely." There was a genial interest in his tone.

"Oh dear, yes; why should I not? The London police are quite efficient. I couldn't be murdered or anything. My friend here runs about Fleet Street at two and three o'clock in the morning, getting off telegrams to the provincial newspapers. I don't do that just because I don't happen to be in that line of work."

"Or rather, because you are too rich to need to do it." The elder woman made this dry comment.

"There is nothing that would amuse me more than to do that sort of thing."

"Therein you show a more debased taste than I, for I would not do it if it were not my daily bread."

"We used to think that our American women were more independent than the English," said the missionary. He continued to look at the young girl much as one would look at a pretty and interesting child.

“Oh dear, no; I consider your American women quite behind the age. Why, now, for instance, just yesterday at Vancouver I gave a little dinner in the hotel. Well, I had to do it in common honesty. I happened to have a cousin in Vancouver, and he had brought some of his friends to call. I had been there a week; they had treated me; I had, of course, to do something in return; but some Americans in the hotel were quite shocked. The hotel people were wonderfully decent about the dinner, and let me have it uncommonly cheap too. Waiters and hotel clerks are always tremendously nice to me. I don't know why it is, but I always find it that way. I showed the bill to one of the men, a very nice fellow that I had got to know quite well, and he said a man would never have got it so cheap.”

“What did you have for dinner?” asked the missionary, “and what was the price?”

She was not talking for effect; she was quite carried away with the interest of what she was relating. It is usually the thing we like to talk about that we can talk about best; she succeeded in absorbing his attention.

“Well, I'll tell you. There were eight of us—my friend here, my cousin Charlie, and five other men. I talked to them tremendously at the hotel beforehand, so that they really gave us everything very good—that is to say, good for Vancouver. We had

ten courses. Well, I didn't have champagne. Champagne is tremendously dear, you know, here, and not very good; but I had sherry and a very good Burgundy. Of course I didn't get cigarettes from the hotel; I always carry my own. But now, what do you think the bill, including the wine, came to?"

"I have no idea," said the missionary, quite truly.

"Only four pounds! I was quite taken aback when I saw it; but of course I paid it, and didn't ask any questions. I just smiled upon the clerk who took the money; but, as I say, I showed it to a friend afterward, and we chuckled over it together. I have often noticed that they favour me at hotels. I always make a point of talking in a friendly way to the clerks and the waiters; they like it, and it doesn't do me any harm."

"Now that I think of it," the missionary spoke meditatively, "I have seen your name in the papers. I have read a description of you."

She brightened visibly; an obvious thrill of pleasure went through her frame. "Oh, I dare say; I write a good deal, you know, in various journals, and several of my friends who do interviewing have threatened to publish a sketch of me. What was the name of the paper? When one is flying round the world one can't keep up to date with these things."

"I do not know that your friends have been so personal as you suppose. I merely meant that even

at a remote mission station I have read paragraphs concerning the 'New Woman.'"

She was disappointed, and she was still so young and full of life that she had not the heart to conceal it, but in a moment she took up the new theme with all her former zest.

"And being in a remote mission station, I suppose you believed the idiotic and transcendent rubbish that is written about her. Now, I'll tell you what it is, and you may believe me. I have been three years at Girton, and I've lived in town for a year or two, and I've travelled round the world, and I can assure you that the 'New Woman' is a pure myth. She is a ridiculous and horrid phantasm, evolved out of the brains of a few authors who did not know what else to interest the public with, and believed in only by the simple and credulous, who unfortunately, however, go to make up the greater portion of every community. Oh, she's been a great scare; I admit, but there's absolutely nothing in it."

"I beg your pardon," said the missionary. "I thought that I had classified you."

"Well, as you've come from the Pacific Ocean I won't be offended. I am not thin-skinned any way; I can always get on with a man who says what he thinks. I adore plain downright dealing."

"What are the mythical attributes?" he asked.

"The characteristics of the myth? Well, in the

first place, she has no principle. Now why, in the name of heaven, I ask you, should woman at the end of the nineteenth century be supposed to have less principle than she had in all the other centuries? She may live in a different way; she may be happy and live in a flat, and have a latchkey, instead of sitting snarling over the fire at her brother's wife who doesn't want her. She may earn her own living instead of insisting that some man should pay her bills. She may make good, downright honest friendships with men instead of merely flirting with them in a ballroom; and if she doesn't believe in religion she can stay at home from church instead of continuing to keep up a respectable sham. Do these things necessarily take away her principle? I tell you, the men and women that go about saying that a woman does not believe in anything because she does not believe in shamming, prove themselves to be far more unprincipled than the modern women I have met."

She was very young; she had her enthusiasms, and this was evidently one of them. She looked at the missionary with bright red cheeks, but she was not abusing him; she was rather appealing to him.

"All that may be quite true," said the missionary—"you have, as you say, a very fair right to judge; but why do you proclaim your opinion to me in the name of heaven? Why heaven?"

"Did I say in the name of heaven?" She



laughed. "Well, then in the name of the sky—it is all one to me—in the name of the blue distance, in the name of the ether, why should I be supposed to be unprincipled because I drink plenty of wine and smoke cigarettes? If you saw a man taking wine and smoking just as I do, would you argue that he would tell lies, and break vows, and be indifferent as to his personal dignity and moral worth? I suppose that if you are a rabid teetotaler and an anti-tobacco-nist you do argue that way, but the facts would not bear you out."

"I am not a tobacco-nist of any sort," said the missionary, smiling.

She laughed the blithest happiest laugh.

"Another characteristic of the myth," she said, "is that she has no heart; she does not care for the young or the aged. Now, do you suppose that evolution has suddenly come to a standstill, and that a new thing has been created? Heretofore women have always been known to be tender-hearted; men are supposed to have a soft corner in their hearts also: but now there is suddenly a break in all the laws of heredity, and a race of girls has sprung up that possesses none of the softer sentiments. Because they live in flats and have latchkeys, or do something else typical, whatever it may be, they are supposed to kick aside anything that is weak or ailing without the slightest compunction. What I want to know is,

where this race of women has come from. It is a very bad compliment to the very mothers who are weeping over the revolt of their daughters to suppose that their children have got made up in some way without any heart."

The missionary with strong sagacious face was still observing her benignly.

"I see"—he joined the points of his fingers together as he spoke—"you are not unprincipled, and you are not unfeeling."

"You have only my word for it," she laughed.

"I am old enough," said the missionary, "to know whom to believe. I believe you. I regret that in using the term I applied to you I should have appeared to make an accusation——"

"Oh! not at all; don't apologize. I always gird up my loins and experience a holy joy when I hear the 'New Woman' mentioned, for I love to defend my sex."

He made a courteous inclination of the head.

"What sort of joy?"

"Holy joy," she repeated boisterously.

"Your good principle and your good feeling we have admitted"—he was speaking in a pleasant argumentative way—"but why characterize your sentiments as holy?"

"Well, I think I had been using a Bible quotation"—she laughed—"and of course in your esti-

mation anything whatever connected with the Bible makes the word appropriate."

"Not in the least," he replied with unruffled courtesy; "for example, a man who takes his oath upon the Bible and perjures himself does not do a holy thing."

She laughed immensely at the retort, and liked him better for it.

She protested, "If you admit that I am affectionate and good-principled, I don't mind in the least what else you accuse me of. But now I want to get clearly into your mind the point that I make; I always instruct everybody on the subject. One hears about this 'new woman,' and the 'girl of the period,' and the '*fin de siècle* woman;' now I wish you to bear witness that I think I am as fair a specimen of the class abused as you can have. I am 'emancipated,' I am 'advanced,' in fact I am the 'new woman,' so far as she is not a myth. Of course there is no class of people, either men or women, that has not its black sheep, and its saints, too, for that matter. I don't claim to be either one or the other; I am simply an average specimen of the class of women that are often called 'fast.' Well, now, I maintain that I am just as sound in heart and morals as if I spent my life moping by a sitting-room fire. I can prove it to you, too."

She finished with a little nod of her head, and

paused a moment. There was a certain self-conscious twitching about the muscles of her youthful mouth which suggested that something interesting concerning herself was to be revealed. He continued to listen with the same benign look of keen observation.

"I don't mind telling you—in fact I've told people before; I don't see why I should mislead. Several years ago I fell very much in love myself. A very nice fellow used to come and see me sometimes; we neither of us intended it, and before we either of us knew what was up, we were both in love. It wasn't our fault; but there we were, you see. It was Nature that made the world, not we, and, as I understand it, you believe that the Almighty is at the back of Nature. Of course I don't know anything about that; Nature is enough for me: but, as I say, it wasn't our fault. Well, he was engaged to another girl before he ever saw me. What did we do? Did we act in an unprincipled manner? We agreed that she was weak and poor, and needed protection, and that he would be a rascal if he did not go on with the marriage. Well, now, I live in the same place as that man; I know quite well that his marriage to her has not altered the fact that he preferred me; but I never have any dealings with him except through his wife. I would not do such a shabby thing, and at the same time pretend to be a friend to her; but I know lots of women who would do it who look upon me as

quite an outcast from society. Now, I have an immense amount of affection for that man. I'd give all that I possess at any time to help him out of a difficulty; but I should not care for him at all—I should absolutely despise him, if he came philandering after me when his poor little affectionate wife is slaving all day over his dinner and his babies."

It is often difficult to estimate the pitch of one's own voice in the rattle of a train. She was perhaps not to be blamed if, in the interest of her theme, her voice was a little louder than was necessary; but the missionary looked round apprehensively to see if any of their fellow-travellers could have overheard.

"Now," she cried, "what do you think of that? Can you say that my conduct in the matter has not been perfectly 'womanly'?"

"You certainly acted on principle——" Instead of finishing, he obviously hesitated, then added, "Although you adore candour—I think that is all that I had better say."

"What else have you to say?" she asked with great curiosity.

He looked down at the points of his fingers, which, elbows on his knees, he was still carefully matching together.

"My idea of what is perfectly womanly is perhaps derived from a character who did not discuss the

deep things of her life, but pondered them in her heart." Then he looked up. "I am preaching to you, you see. I hope you will excuse my sermon."

"Oh, certainly"—with good nature. "I never go to hear sermons, so I should be thankful when they are given me without that effort."

"I thought perhaps your feelings would be hurt," he said.

She was quick enough to see that look and tone were meant to suggest that had she appreciated his meaning she would have felt offence. She hid this under an air of amused good nature.

"I have a holy horror of touchiness," she persisted.

He rose to say good night.

"An old man who has conceived a hearty respect for you would feel it an honour to shake hands," he said.

"Honest Injun? or is it sarcasm?"

In a moment his benign aspect answered for itself. She entered into the hand-shaking heartily.

"And yet," he said, "I think you had better not use the word 'holy' to describe your own emotions."

"Oh, really! upon my word! Why not?"

"It betrays a lack of literary perception. It is neither amusing nor appropriate."

### CHAPTER III.

"I DON'T see why you should trouble yourself to chatter to people who despise you, Polly," said the discontented journalist.

"Because I don't affect, like you, to be Shelley's Moon, and find no object in heaven or earth worthy my attention. Pessimism and despair may suit your style of beauty; it would look idiotic upon me."

"It is such a ghastly season of the year to be travelling. I think the Christmas holiday is the most odious of seasons in all parts of the world."

"I would rather spend Christmas Day in ten railway trains than at home, where one is expected to go to church, and visit the poor, and be bored."

"If it continues to snow in the mountains we may have to spend New Year's Day as well in this train, before we get to Montreal."

The other looked out of the window.

"It would be beastly cold to be turned out upon the snow somewhere among the Rockies," she said. "If it came to that it would remind me of a time

once when I was about fourteen and walked out of the house in winter in my sleep. How my father did row me about it the next day, to be sure! The old fellow seemed to think that I was responsible for my actions."

"How far did you go?"—with languid interest.

"Oh! not farther than halfway down our garden, happily. But I used frequently to find myself wandering about the passages, I was quite a crack somnambulist."

"I did not know that you had ever done anything so interesting. Have you outgrown the talent?"

"Rather!"—here a sudden thrilling laugh of great amusement—"or I should not have travelled round the world so easily. Hang it! what magnificent messes one could get one's self into that way."

They began now the process of what might be called undressing for the night, but what was in reality exchanging one set of outside wraps for another. When they had turned out of their own compartment to allow the beds to be made, the sad-eyed woman began unrolling a grey dressing-jacket. Little Miss Polly produced a bundle of blue silk, and began displaying it with a pride and satisfaction which rode roughshod over the other's indifference. She was a very natural girl, chubby, dimpled, and



fond of dress. Her name happened to be Mary Howard.

“Look here, this is that lovely thing I bought in Persia. I have dedicated it to night travelling; it will keep the dust out of one’s hair and clothes, you know, without giving one a stuffy feeling. Isn’t it a magnificent blue?”


“It is just yards and yards of stuff. There is no shape about it; how do you keep it on?”

“I am the shape; this is the drapery. I learned from the natives how to put it on. This is the formula: once over the head, twice round the neck, and then the long end loosely over your head and shoulders like a shawl. So!”

“Picturesque!”—critically—“but it’s not in character; you look something like a coloured image in a church.”

Mary Howard had a certain daintiness about her which was distinctly womanly. When she had wrapped herself in the blue silk veil, she took off her boots and put on warm woollen slippers of the same hue. This, of course, took place behind the heavy curtains that shut her off from the rest of the car. She stretched out her winsey skirts very straight and smooth as she lay upon the couch; then she drew up the blanket, leaned back upon the pillows, and went to sleep.

The train jolted on; every one else in the car



went to sleep, too, even the commercial travellers who sat up long in the smoking compartment so that the black porter was very sleepy indeed before he could settle himself for the night. The black porter sat on a stool in the little passage that led to the ladies' dressing-room; he leaned his head against the wall and slept as soundly as in a bed, because he was accustomed to it; the jolting of the car was to him a lullaby.

The train went in and out of the snowsheds in the Eagle Pass by which it was crossing the Gold Range. The sleeping travellers knew nothing of sheds and mountains, lakes and rivers. Long after midnight the train came to a place where the snow was so deep on certain curves that they had to go slowly. It was, perhaps, the slackening of speed which disturbed one sleeper in the palace car.

Mary Howard sat up in her berth, and with groping uncertain hands pushed down her blanket. She separated her curtains, slipped out, and stood alone in the narrow passage between the long rows of curtained berths. The eye of the shaded night-lamp looked down upon a little blue-draped figure shod in noiseless wool. Sleep had a softening effect on a face that, at its happiest, when awake, was gay rather than satisfied. She stood a moment at the entrance of the little passage in which the porter slept; she did not see him though her pretty eyes

were wide open, but no doubt she perceived him with the mysterious perception of the somnambulist, for she avoided brushing his knee with her petticoat, and he slept on.

At the end of the passage there were two doors, one opening into the dressing-room and one on to the rear platform of the car. A walled-in compartment shut out the view of what was passing here from any one inside the car; no one heard the heavy handle of the outer door turn, no one felt the breath of icy wind that rushed in at the transient opening. The girl stepped outside upon the platform, and shut the door behind her.

No doubt in her mind some dream was going forward; perhaps it was a reminiscence of past somnambulist adventures which she had that evening recalled; perhaps it was a vision of the "men friends" of Vancouver, to whom, upon this very platform, she had bidden farewell. Whatever the motive in the sleeping mind, she put her hand upon the rail, slowly descended the three steps of the carriage, and then stepped off into the winter night.

The train was going slowly; the girl fell four or five feet down a low embankment, and landed upon a bed of snow. This was her awakening; and shocked, terrified, unable to conceive what had befallen her, she lay for a minute gazing at the expanse of the starry heaven, at the shadowy mountains, at the glimmering

snow around her, at the receding lights of the rattling train. It was the sight of these lights moving in the distance that recalled her to reality. She rose up and shrieked; she shrieked wildly, madly, till the thunder of the train had died in the clear cold air.

She sank back upon the snow, and covered her face with her hands. Gradually it came to her mind what must have occurred. Her former sleep-walking experiences came to her aid; something in the sensations she was passing through recalled previous sensations, and gave the clue to what otherwise would have been inexplicable. Her first feeling of mad, panic-stricken anger against those on board the train passed away; no one was to blame, and yet the fact remained—the awful fact of her present situation.

Again she rose and looked about her; there was not in the snow-clad hills a single light to be seen. She climbed up to the track. The snow lay under the starlight unbroken, as far as she could see, except for the two dark lines of rails. It was too dark to see whither the curving road led in either direction. She could only discern the tops of the mountains as they showed against the starry sky, and the glimmering snow for a few feet immediately around her. In this small space she perceived that the side of the hill on which she had fallen rose abruptly, and that on the other side the embankment sloped some fifty feet to a

wide valley. In the valley she heard the sound of a rushing river.

She was not more adventurous or heroic than is the average woman. She had travelled far, it was true, but the dangers which, in her own version of her exploits, she had always vigorously triumphed over, had been chiefly imaginary; she had sufficient good sense to be inwardly conscious that it was so. Now, realizing that, unprotected as she was from the cold and unknown dangers, she might easily be out of reach of any succour, she perceived that no affectation of courage would avail her, that no glorious account which she might ever write of her own prowess would compensate for her present suffering.

What danger she might be in from bears or wolves, she did not know; the darkness became full of shadowy shapes and unimaginable terrors; but to remain still, lightly clad, in the winter night was certain death. She could walk nowhere but upon the line, shaven smooth by the engine's plough, for the snow had drifted a foot or eighteen inches deep upon the hillside. At first she hurt her small feet badly again and again, because she could not see the hard sleepers, but gradually she learnt to measure her pace to their distance, and then she got on better.

She often cast frightened glances behind, but in all the darkness there was nothing, neither sound, nor movement, nor shape—which increased her alarm.

When she had had time to discover that in the present solitude there was nothing to terrify, her fears began to centre about the settlement towards which she supposed herself to be going. How could she tell whether she would find friends or enemies in any house which she ventured to disturb? She remembered with relief that what money and valuables she had brought on her journey were secreted in the bosom of her dress. Some of her hardihood came back with the knowledge that she was not without that magic power which, so far, had always served her in every emergency. In imagination she began to conduct shrewd bargains with such settlers or Indians as she might be fortunate enough to meet. After that it occurred to her that wealth might prove her worst foe; how easy it would be in this region to put her poor little body out of sight to gain possession of a considerable sum of money. Yet she did not throw away the money; she had too great an idea of her own power of  *finesse* . She believed that in cleverness and knowledge of the world she could outwit even evil-minded folk. By that strange lapse of attention so often seen in those who take precautions, while thinking of her purse, she forgot the diamond ring upon her hand, the very diamond of whose dangerous value she had boasted to the missionary.

A vast sky of sparkling stars above, vast darkling

slopes of snow-clad peaks around—nothing else was there, but the black valley, the sound of the river, darkness, solitude, and one small girlish figure walking fast upon the curving iron road; it was very wonderful—the girl herself had enough poetic feeling to realize how wonderful it was.

She realized her picturesqueness; she did not realize what an air of gentleness and helplessness hung about her in contrast, as she now stood, to elements which she could not control. She had so lived that she had conceived of herself as an imperious and indomitable person, admirable because she willed it, not because of restraint. She hardly knew that she only lived by the favour of others and was in the depths of her own heart gentle and fearful.

She knew that here the trains only passed in each direction once a day. She knew that no train was due now until the next evening. Her only chance of life was to find some shelter. She walked a long way, and yet she saw no sign of house or footstep. The railroad had left the close proximity of the nearest slope, and was now crossing the mouth of a notch or gully.

At length there was some unevenness in the snow on either side of the narrow embankment on which she was walking. She discovered that at this point a sledge road crossed the line; the road was not much beaten, it was true—the ruts of the runners and the

prints of the horse's feet were cut deep into the snow; still, it was certain that here was a track to some dwelling. It struck her then to stoop down and feel inside the prints of the horse's hoofs, to discover if possible which way he had travelled. Her plump white fingers ached in contact with the snow. She tried a great many of the hoof-prints before she felt sure; but at length she satisfied herself that in following the track away from the river into a wide notch in the hills, she would be going in the right direction. In this notch there was the sound of a mountain stream; she saw no water in the darkness.

There was nothing for it now but to trudge on. On and on she went for an hour or more. At length she descried a glow in the distant darkness, that seemed to proceed from some artificial light; it did not look like a light in a window, yet a fire of some sort it certainly was. She never took her eyes off it as she walked; curiosity was holding the balance between hope and fear. The light flickered upon the black air, sometimes brighter, sometimes less bright. A low black object became apparent, outlined against it. When she came nearer, she saw fences by the roadside, and then what looked like several low sheds lying at different angles to one another. Beyond that, there were only the slopes of the notch, which here had a wide level bottom.



## CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Mary drew near the huts, her hopes were not raised by hearing uproarious bursts of revelry from the direction in which she saw the light of the fire. It was the shout of many voices singing at once, and laughing as they sang; they were all men's voices. The girl felt that now it would be necessary to take her life in her hand and demand shelter from the inhabitants, whoever they might be. She stood just inside the fence; a sudden feeling of faintness roused her to the necessity of keeping up her courage.

She went up to the nearest building, but saw no sign of light or movement within it. It was a dwelling apparently, and she had hoped that if the men were at some wild merry-making outside, she might find some woman within. She knocked, but there was no answer. She opened the door and ventured in; it was quite dark, and she was afraid to venture farther. The next shed that she came to was evidently a stable; she judged, from the sounds that she

heard, that there were both oxen and horses inside. She ventured nearer to the third building, behind which a company of men were evidently holding some sort of festival.

She remembered now at what time of the year she was travelling. A sudden hope sprang up in her mind that the revel might be held in honour of the festival of the Church; if so she might have nothing to fear. She did not believe in religion, but at this time she realized its use. It was this hope that inspired her with courage to follow the path round the last shed, and to take one step beyond the last shadowing wall, to see what was to be seen.

The sight that met her eye was indeed a festival in honour of Christmas, but not of that devout sort which would have rendered her fearless.

In the centre lay heaped the red logs of what had been a huge bonfire. Yellow flame still sometimes leaped from them, but a hot red glow was the principal part of the firelight. All around this, seated, some on logs, some upon the ground, were a company of about twelve men, dressed in the roughest fashion. With two exceptions they were not only hardened and wild-looking, but evidently of a low grade in the social scale. Of the two who as evidently did not belong to the same class, the more noticeable was apparently master of the place, or for the time being king of the revels. He sat upon a seat

somewhat raised above the others and at the side of the ring opposite to the snow-pile against which Mary stood. Her knowledge of the world was of such sort that she recognized the type to which his face belonged instantly. He was a man who had early worked his way through all the vices of society, and having graduated with the degree of outcast, had brought to the wild Western life an education which enabled him to develop its most dangerous elements. He had a handsome daring face, and wore a battered remnant of gentility in his haughty bearing.

The first moment that the young English woman stood among the snow-heaps in the darkling confines of the firelight was enough to give her a tolerably clear comprehension of the beings with whom she had to do. She had forgotten the diamond upon her hand; involuntarily the same hand stole to her breast to feel if the packet of money hidden there lay well concealed. Just one moment she hesitated, and then she would have turned and fled anywhere into the pitiless wilderness, but she had not the opportunity.

With a howl of terror, one of the roughest of the men threw down his cards and staggered to his feet. They all looked toward the figure at which he pointed.

Those who sat with their backs to her stumbled over each other in the panic of terror with which they turned and faced her.

They had all been drinking freely; the terror of more than one of them found vent in a groan or cry. The rougher men stood huddled together between her and the fire; the master of the carouse stood up in his place, staring with keen anxiety. Twice he passed his hands before his eyes; he desired to proclaim that he saw nothing, but he only continued to stare.

What courage the girl had had, and all her worldly shrewdness and bargaining spirit, forsook her, perhaps by very sympathy with the terror she inspired. Her heart so beat with the fear of what might happen when these men regained their courage that she was powerless to do other than simply stand motionless before them.

Then suddenly some of the foremost kneeled before her on the ground, and, with abject gestures, began to mutter to themselves, and to her, rhythmic sentences. The man who had first seen her, a big half-tipsy Celt, began in Irish accents to whine out the conclusion that he also had reached.

"It's the Howly Motherr herself! May the Saints presarve us! May Hiven have mercy on our sowls, for we need it this day. It's the Howly Motherr come to tell us what sinners we arr."

There she stood in the eternal sanctity of young and beautiful womanhood, her eyes wide and bright with piteous excitement, her rounded cheeks pallid

with fear. The winter wind moved lightly what folds of her blue veil were hanging loose from her head downward; the hand that had in reality been feeling for the safety of her purse seemed to be laid in saintly meekness upon her breast, and in the fire-light the diamond upon it flashed as the stars flashed in the black heaven above. Behind her, stretching into illimitable shadow, was the wilderness of mountain snow across which no earthly woman could have come alone, beside her the wall of the rude stable through which the movements of the oxen could be heard—and it was Christmas night.

Some dim dramatic notion of the meaning of the scene, of the character that had been thrust upon her, was not long in coming to the girl's quick mind. She did not at first grasp its full significance; she thought of it as the transient farce of a moment. The men at her feet, half drunk, were mastered by the superstitions of their class. She perceived that it was with their leader that she would have to do; he, hardened and reckless, was coming in a moment to kick aside the delusion with a sneer, so she thought.

He did come; he did kick aside something, but it was only the bodies of the kneeling men who were in his way. He strode up fiercely and stood before her; he bent his handsome, reckless, wicked face down to the level of hers, and stared hard.

She had never before experienced such a misery of fear and dislike, for she had never had cause; yet even in this moment, knowing that upon this man's pleasure hung her life, she did not betray her repulsion; she looked at him steadily; she tried to speak.

She made the motion of throat and lips that produces voice, but no voice came, only the faintest whisper that hardly reached her own ears. She realized now what that strange strained feeling in her throat had been as she had walked through the winter night: the intense cold had robbed her of the power of speech. She stood before her persecutor dumb.

Upon her art of argument and persuasion she had relied as the only weapon by which she could possibly save herself. Finding that she was unable to speak, losing at the same moment all hope, the pathos of her situation brought to her the sudden impulse to hide her face and weep bitterly. She overcame it with instinctive courage, but upon her face was written a mute appeal that no dramatic effort could have painted there.

The man who for a minute, with eyes that were bold enough, had inspected the youthful contour of the face, the rich veiling, the simplicity of her gown, suddenly, still staring at her, staggered backwards; even in the firelight the sudden pallor of his face, the haggard drawing of its lines, was visible.

On seeing that he had given way, the big Irishman threw himself with his face upon the ground, and cried like a boy who was being beaten, with mingled howls and exclamations. Three of the men slunk away one after the other round the other end of the shed; some still upon their knees continued to mumble prayers.

Grasping at the straw of her temporary safety, a longing that the delusion might continue found a place in her heart. She had no hope as yet that this might be possible. Although with little perception of the remote distance between her inmost self and the character she personated, she still felt too entirely removed from all that was religious and supernatural to perceive to the full the excuse for the men's delusion. She would not have scrupled to act the character chance had assigned to her if she had known how to do it or hoped to succeed, but because she feared to play a part, and because she abstained from natural emotion lest the spell should be broken, the men saw nothing but a silent gentle girl, and she perfectly fulfilled their ideal, such inarticulate undefined ideal as they had, of the Queen of Heaven.

The only man who, like the master of the company, bore signs of having lived once in civilization, gathered himself up now from the ground where all this time he had been sitting, and came forward. He was deformed and thereby dwarfed. He had a lean, nerv-

ous, cynical face. It seemed to her that his deformity might have made him interesting if he had not seemed so thoroughly a cad in spite of it. She feared him the more because of his ingrained caddishness. All this time he had been sitting staring, like the others, at the apparition of the blue-veiled woman; now he did not bestow further attention upon her appearance. He touched the arm of the man who had peered so rudely in her face.

"I thay, Hamilton, there muth be a cawiage or a cab at the fwont gate."

Hamilton turned upon him with upraised arm, as if he would have felled him with one blow; then, instantly changing, he gave a furtive look all round, as fearing he knew not what, and questioned the other's face with his eyes.

"Well, I thay, you might ath well come and thee —mutht have come here thome way, you know."

"By ——, shut up!" The ejaculation came from the other in muffled haste, and with it again a momentary raising of the powerful arm as if it twitched to take vengeance upon some one; and then, without another word or glance, without another instant's hesitation, he strode past the men, past the fireplace, round the other end of the shed where some of the men had already disappeared. There was purpose in his stride; the girl knew that he was acting upon the suggestion of the deformed dwarf who followed at his heels.



She was left now alone with the little group of men whose ignorant superstition had for the hour been changed by the sight of her into undoubting devotion — such devotion as they were capable of, which was manifested chiefly by the bringing forward of their own desires, for, under the impression that her stay with them must be very short, they had already begun to mingle audible petitions with the confused Aves and Paternosters, that she could neither hear nor understand. To her astonishment she heard herself besought to intercede for them. Accusing themselves wildly, they spoke to her as if she must be aware that they had killed certain of their enemies, and their desire to be forgiven in heaven was confused with bemoanings concerning a penalty to be paid on earth.

While these petitions swiftly proved to her the reality of the delusion which had occurred, she became too frightened by the nature of what she heard to think how best to turn the delusion to her own account. Even these men who believed in her divinity confessed themselves capable of violence and murder, and no doubt she had more to fear from those others who did not believe.

She dared not continue to stand where she was; her back was to the path by which she had come, for down that path assuredly the men who had gone away would soon return. Fearing that in the silent

snow they might steal upon her unawares, she herself turned and went slowly back to meet them.

There was a certain amount of dramatic instinct in the very blood of this modern girl. Too much afraid to play a part consciously, she yet was incapable, within hearing of the Aves, which were still repeated, of walking with her ordinary free and easy gait; she paced slowly, because she was afraid of what might await her at the other side, and the mien which she instinctively assumed was very dignified and very modest. Walking thus, with the Irish labourers following and still calling upon her in prayer, she came upon the open space between the sheds, in front of that first shed which seemed to be the dwelling-house.

Several of the men had been examining the road with a lantern. They were still standing outside the gate conversing with one another—not peacefully; there were signs of agitation and irritation in their tones and movements. The upshot of the colloquy was only an evident increase of perplexity and consternation in them all. The girl's mind was wide awake to what concerned her safety; she saw clearly that she must be at so great a distance from any other settlement or dwelling that the fact that they found no vehicle, or track of vehicle, made her appearance seem to them entirely inexplicable, if not supernatural. With this evidence of the isolation of her pres-

ent situation her heart sank ; she was tired, hungry, cold, ill, and in peril.

The man Hamilton came suddenly in from the gate ; some further thought of inquiry seemed to have occurred to him. With an evident effort of boldness, again he came quite near. He, too, knelt at her feet, laying the lantern upon the ground ; his object was not prayer, but the inspection of her foot-gear. When he had looked for a full minute at the dainty woollen slippers, snow-caked though they were, he rose and recoiled from her again. His companions came up, standing behind him ; the lantern remained upon the ground like a footlight ; they all looked at the weary girlish figure it displayed, at the face in its blue veil, at the white jewelled hands, at the simple petticoat trimmed with snow as with ermine edging, at the tiny bedraggled slippers and aching feet.

“She can't have travelled more than a mile at most, and kept them things on her feet.” The words came in a low cautious tone from one of the men at the back.

“She ain't no ghost,” whispered another.

The voice of an American came out upon the night air with startling clearness. “I'd be a deal less scared, for my part, of all the ghosts and spirits in creation, for they could have come here quite natural accordin' to their usual ways of going about. . But how this sweet blooming gal——”

Some one with a whispered volley of oaths silenced him.

Some one else instantly exclaimed, "Stop it! I'll be —— if I hear another word of —— language afore her."

The thrill of a new idea seemed suddenly to pass through this group of men who stood in the sceptical attitude toward the Madonna of their more ignorant fellows. There was an instant's hesitation, and then the dwarf took his hat off and held it in his hand; the others did the same thing, last of all the master of the place, Hamilton.

## CHAPTER V.

THE girl lay alone upon a small camp bed in the midst of the one long low room which constituted the whole interior of the dwelling-house. On either side of her was a row of similar camp beds; they were all empty. The room was hot, for a huge fire of logs had been made in the large iron stove; the room was dark, except for fitful gleams of flame light that struggled through the closed dampers. The windows, placed somewhat high in the wooden walls, were black as uncurtained glass is black when it has the darkest hour of night behind it. There was no sound but the soft noise of the fire which had ceased to crackle and the dull tramping of animals in their wooden stables. The stillness of snow was upon the land outside, the stillness of sleep upon the men who had gone to huddle among the straw in the warmth of the stalls.

The girl was not asleep; she lay motionless, afraid to rise and move about lest her movements might in some way be spied upon, and she might thereby en-

danger herself. She did not know who beside herself slept or woke; she did not know upon what terms she held her present safety; a slow fever from the chill through which she had passed was working through her veins, and the profound excitement of apprehension and anxious scheming kept the current of thought coursing within her brain.

There were minutes together wherein she could not make herself believe that she lay where she did lie, and in the heart of so strange a situation. Surely there was some mistake; she was such a commonplace person, well meaning too; why should this have befallen her? It was true that for years the main object of her existence had been to appear something other than commonplace, something much more daring than merely well-meaning. She had tried to dash into literature; she had dashed into foreign travel, merely because to be inconspicuous and ordinary had seemed intolerable; and yet now she found herself pleading these very attributes against the caprice of a too-cruel fate.

All the time she showed this much strength, physical and mental, that she lay still. She perceived that it was in order that she might rest that a dozen rude men had resigned house-room and comfort; it would be well, then, that she should satisfy their expectations and appear to rest. For her, in very truth, the night had a thousand eyes, for she had

no means of knowing where her enemies had bestowed themselves. Were they enemies? Were they friends? How could she tell? The thing which was eating into her heart with an ever-increasing wonder was the belief that even the cleverest and wickedest of them was under the glamour of a strange delusion about herself, and it was to this alone that she owed their neutrality, if not direct friendliness. Through the confusion of her thoughts she began to realize more and more clearly that that on which she relied for safety was her power to fall in, moment by moment, with the requirements of this delusion. This new character, indeed, seemed to wrap her round as a vesture, so vividly had it been impressed on her excited nerves as her only shield. What this character was she did not put to herself in words; she only felt intuitively the outward semblance of the graces which it implied. Her efforts to escape, then, must be in this guise.

So far she had arrived at some clearness of thought; now suddenly all her nerves vibrated to a slight sound, the creak that a footfall makes upon light, hard-frozen snow. She heard a hand laid almost noiselessly upon the latch from without; her pulses seemed to stop, and then move madly, and stop again.

The door silently opened, perhaps an inch or two;

she felt the cold air enter instantly, an invisible herald of what danger she could not guess.

Whoever was there it seemed would have entered, but another footfall, as quiet but much more hasty, was heard, and a slight scuffle, a low growl almost like that of two dogs. Out of the confused stealthy noises of this quarrel the girl began to hear the whispering of two voices, the door still standing ajar, the men as it seemed holding each other back upon the threshold. They were the voices of Hamilton and of the deformed cynical man who lisped.

The lisp struck her ear again as something peculiarly horrible, because, although evidently an actual impediment of speech, it had the sound of an affectation which, in the midst of such a life, would have denoted a character almost inhuman in its love of pretence.

The dwarf's voice came first. "You're a d— fool, Hamilton. I am only going to thee if the lady ith here."

"And why shouldn't she be there?" Hamilton's voice was tense, suggesting fierce feeling of more than one sort, but controlled to a fixed limit.

"If I could have theen the cawiage that bwought her here I'd have more idea why the thould wemain. How could I thleep for the devilith queerneth of it? If it ith devilith queer, why should we be a pair of foolth and give her time to be off again?" Then his



voice changed from weak remonstrance to that other more practical tone. "Hamilton, have a look at the divinity. If the'th vanished into thin air there'th no harm in going in; if the'th there, we can look at the fire and come out!"

The answer was in precisely the same tense voice. "Will you come back to the stable, or——"

It seemed as though neither of the men was aware that the door was ajar. Perhaps the dwarf had forgotten, and in the darkness Hamilton saw nothing. The logs in the stove had ceased to flicker.

The dwarf said, "If you like a pwetty girl to be left without a thpark of fire to cath her pwetty death of cold I won't quawel with you——" She lost some words here.

Among those that followed only a few phrases here and there were distinct. She heard the word "diamond." Then the dwarf's voice: "I'm dithint-wethted"—"you are king here——"—"could get Father Paul down from Cree thettlement"—"come here of her own accord—her own doing."

Hamilton's voice was more distinct: "What I say is, I'll have a look at her by daylight. When the sun's up we'll know whether it's angel or devil, or what it is." The tense voice changed to almost a reflective tone. "By Heaven, I wish I knew now which it is."

The dwarf's voice came again; the accent was

distinctly lower middle class. There was a sneer in it that made her sure that this man, at least, had no sense of honour. "'Pon my thoul, I'm conthumed with cuwiotlity to know if i'th vanithed into thin air or not—only hothpitable to put more wood on the fire."

With a smothered exclamation at finding the door open, they came in and crossed the floor on-tiptoe.

The girl had heard them coming; she had decided what to do. With hands pressed together upon her breast, as if her last waking motion had been prayer, she lay as it seemed in a sleep of childlike innocence.

When the men had come within a yard of her pallet bed they lit a bit of broken candle. The light revealed the room in all its coarse and even uncleanly detail. The other beds had clothes and blankets rudely strewn upon them. Under a table, boots, pipes, bottles, and such ugly articles, had been hastily hidden, and were still protruding from a cover too small for the heap. On one bed lay the young woman wrapped around in fine silk; her sleeping face and folded hands looked to the men's eyes like wax or tinted alabaster. More than that, in the face and the plump curves of the hands there was something other than mere beauty of form and colour—there was the woman's soul, as it seemed to them dependent upon their strength—innocent, trustful.

A minute passed, and then one of them went on

tiptoe to the stove, and renewed its fuel with a touch more deft and silent than would have appeared possible; then they went out again, and shut the door.

She could not hear now what they said to one another, but it seemed that they parted, for after she had heard one go to another shed, she heard the other begin to pace up and down before the door of the house. One of them had chosen to pace there as sentry; after a while she felt sure, from the length and strength of the step, that the sentry was Hamilton.

## CHAPTER VI.

IF it had not been for that slow pacing of the sentry's step Mary would have crept out in the darkness, and gone as she had come, in the madness of fear preferring the risk of dying in the wilderness of snow. As it was she lay still through the night, uncertain what to do. The first faint light began to glimmer in the windows, and still she heard the sentry's monotonous tread.

It was useless to think of eluding Hamilton's vigilance. Well, even then, was it not better to rise and essay to walk away, as if he were not there? If he detained her, at least they could not say that she remained of her own free will, and her mind caught at the knowledge that it must appear to them the more inexplicable if she should attempt to leave them without explanation, without means of travelling, and with the apparent trust that they would let her go unchallenged.

The night before, when they had given her the room to sleep in, they had also given her milk, and

of the remains which stood in a pail near the stove she again drank deeply.

She wrapped the blue folds of the veil more closely around her aching throat, but she did not fail to drape the loose end over her head with such imitation as she could hastily make from memory of the veils painters wrap about the head of the most divine of women. She was too pressed by stern necessity to give more than a dim passing thought to the sensation of farce, and yet, as far as she did recognize it, she did not hate it, but looked upon it as a sensation which in some future time of safety she could enjoy.

It was not yet daylight, only grey dawn upon the land of snow, when she quietly opened the door without any apparent fear, and stepped out towards the opening of the enclosure. She saw the man stop his walk and stare. She felt that some thanks for his hospitality would have been given by the ideal woman, but she knew not how to smile or wave her hand as such a woman might; she could only look at him with large, childlike, and unconscious eyes. This much she did, and went on down the path of snow.

The man, with a few sudden hasty steps, came up to her. She heard him close behind; it was all that she could do not to shrink from the touch which she expected, yet she did not shrink, and the touch did not come.

For a minute or more his footsteps followed hers.

Then, when she got outside a rude paling and turned upon the road by which she had come, it seemed that he had become convinced what it was she intended to do. He made past her, giving her a wide berth, but turned and stood in the road directly in her path.

"Where are you going?" asked Hamilton. The words came as if some torrent of feeling, dammed up, had found outlet.

She laid her hand upon her throat. It was an instinctive gesture, but having found it so successful the night before, there was something slightly more dramatic in her use of it now. She was afraid the man detected it, for he looked the more keenly at her. Then she pointed forward upon the road, and made a motion to move on.

"Do not go! Come back; we will give you warmth and food!" He spoke distinctly, as though to a foreigner; he spoke still as if the words were an outlet to strong feeling, but she could not tell whether the tone besought or commanded, or whether there was not in it perhaps a suggestion that for some reason he would feel relief if she went on her way.

After a moment's consideration she walked past him upon the light edge of the deeper snow, and, as if apparently forgetting his very existence, went on steadily.

He stood, she thought, watching her for some time; then he started to follow her and she heard his foot-

steps come near. Then, again, another thought came to him, for he went back, leaving her to go on alone and, as it seemed, free.

At first she was so absorbed in the fear that he might return that she did not for a long time take any notice of the features of the world, which every moment grew lighter and clearer.

Yet curiously enough, although she feared his return, the sense of freedom was in itself a sense of disappointment. The sudden loss of the excitement which his presence produced resulted in depression. With the effort of walking in the snow she began to feel her own feebleness, and before her lay—what?

She raised her head now and looked about her. From the declivity of the mountain notch down which she was walking she could see on either side only the slopes and cliffs which rose immediately about her. On her left a noisy stream was descending precipitous rocks. At its base there was a cutting in the ground, and an erection of wooden troughs, used, evidently, for mining purposes. On this side tall fir-trees were clinging to the steep, but the other slope of the notch was almost bare of trees, as was the level bottom, as if in time past some descending glacier had scraped the surface. Outside the notch lay a wide valley, the depth of which was bridged by her line of vision. All of its surface that she could see was clothed by forests of firs, dark, green, and cold. Beyond it snow-covered

mountains stood, range above range. So clear was the air that it did not seem to her that she had far to go to obtain a full view of the valley at the side of which the railway ran—it did indeed but appear a few minutes' walk, and yet when she had walked a mile it hardly seemed nearer.

She judged, from the apparent height of the distant mountains, that she could be at no great altitude. She had a sense of proximity to other mountains higher and nearer than those she saw. Perhaps she dimly remembered their outlines, seen in the darkness of the night before. At present her view was shut in.

The light snow gave more or less under her weary feet. The twilight of morning had brought such a dead and frost-bitten hue upon wold of snow and forest fir that her very soul felt chilled in correspondence with this strangely drear environment. The great excitement of the previous night, which had culminated in her escape, had its effect of reaction, now that all cause of excitement was absent for the moment, in a mood of hopelessness which she had never experienced before.

Following the one track which broke the surface of the snow, Mary came where the railway had been built across the front of the notch. When she stood upon its firm broad road, the sides of the notch no longer shut in her vision, and her eye swept eagerly the landscape.



Parallel with the railroad, but much deeper in the valley, ran a tumultuous river; its rapid current was dark as ink; its banks were deep curling drifts of snow, fringed at the water's edge with grotts and caves of ice and basalt-like formation of icicles. A wide area of rock, covered with snow and ice, here extended on either side of the river. The bare railway embankment rose sheer from these rocks, but on the other side the level of the valley was covered with an evergreen forest of gigantic trees. In the distance, to what seemed to her the south-west, this valley narrowed, conducting the river through a rocky gorge. This was the only gap in the ring of mountains, which, some nearer, some farther away, surrounded the whole scene. Directly opposite her to the south and south-east, hill above hill, peak above peak, range beyond range, stood cold and white. Where the river came from she could not tell, for mountains with wooded sides blocked the valley quite near her to the east. Considering the problem of the river, she at length turned her eyes from what had been before her, and lifted them to that part of the view immediately behind the side of the notch by which she had been walking. And then it seemed that all these other hills were standing in reverence, a little apart from a mountain peak that was monarch of them all. As her eye travelled up the snow-clad declivities of this high mountain, she felt her mind lifted into a different class of thoughts and sensations.

Why should earth have been so formed that a vast monument of such transcendent beauty should happen to stand here in this bleak chaotic place? Against the cold transparent blue of the northern sky, in which the stars of night had but lately died, its massive peak, a pyramid as it were of smaller peaks and ridges, stood white and glistening. Her eye began to examine curiously certain slopes of snow and ice some distance from its summit; they were such immense plains, and yet they were but an inch or two upon the surface of this glorious edifice of nature. These plains of uplifted snow grew brighter; there was nothing here of that dead tint of cold that lay on the surrounding hills; then she saw nature's smile, the golden sunshine, light up the mountain's peak and glittering heart.

She looked around once more. In the east the furthest hills were merely fringed with the same light, all else was dull and, by comparison, grey. She turned again to the vision that her heart loved; in some way it gladdened her and saddened her at once. It filled her with a strange excitement; its mere height seemed to reveal a depth within herself which she had never seen before.

What did it mean? She found herself struggling with the belief that it meant something to her, just as words spoken from another mind to hers would have had meaning.

She began to fight against this impression. She had seen mountains before; they had had no meaning for her. Scene after scene among the Alps occurred to her mind. The pure gracious outline of their heights had made no great impression upon her, yet now, as her memory dwelt upon them, she began to think they also had spoken. She had been deaf, but they had spoken; this mountain was now speaking, and she was awaking from her deafness.

She grew confused; she could not understand herself. Sometimes, not often, she had heard music which had given her a sense of heart-sick longing which was something akin to what she now felt. She had never had any other impulse than to extinguish such unreasoning emotion in herself by plunging into other interests. She looked about her now for some form of practical activity which would put an end to the strained exaltation of heart which almost frightened her.

The sledge track by which she had come crossed the railway and descended the embankment by a curve. The river was not very wide; a rough bridge of logs was built across it. The sledge track went on, and was lost to view in the opposite forest. Were the bridge and the road signs that more than one settlement must lie within reach? or had they been made by railway navvies, who, their work finished, could not be expected to remain in this inclement

region during the winter? Her only means of answering these questions was to follow the road and see whither it led.

Yet for a moment she lingered, turning again with the rebound of relief to the beauty of the mountain. She stood looking up, and again while she so looked her mind was lifted out of the immediate details of her own peril. Above the tree-line the snows and icy crags rose slope above slope, blue at first and cold, then white and dazzling, all the lines and curves reaching upward. It did not make her sad; it made her joyful. The mountain's word was like a new music, not the tender strains that had heretofore been the only music that had appealed to her, making her sad, but a severe grand strain, to which before this she had been deaf, which she did not even now understand; but she knew this much, that it was full of joy.

She must go, she dared not linger, and the sense of the vast joy of which the mountain was singing made her stronger. She crossed the railway and went down to the river. She ran across the bridge of logs, fearful lest the glimpses of the black swirling water seen between their cracks should make her balance unsteady. She passed on where the track was uneven among the rocks of the river bank. The shades of the forest were very dark. It seemed to her that it might be a covert for beasts or savage

men. She had hastened, so that it had taken her but a few minutes to reach the confines of its massive aisles.

She turned again and looked at the mountain, as the Greeks represent their dying ones to have looked at the sun before entering the shadow of the other world. The light was beginning to touch the tops of the other hills; they too, pure and white, pointed upwards, and the great peak rose colossal and glittering, as it seemed, into the very sky.

The meaning came to her now—a flash of thought that seemed like sunrise in her soul. The mountain sang of an inspiration toward an impossible perfection, the struggle for which was the joy, the only joy, of the universe.

This meaning came to her in knowledge which ignored the use of words, because it transcended them. The strange thing was that to this sincere good-natured little woman the mountain's music told of an ideal that was to her absolutely new.

She had striven with pertinacity for what had seemed to her noblest in life, yet now she saw herself as a child, who with innocent unconsciousness has been enjoying a play in a dirty place, will sometimes suddenly perceive the filthiness of its raiment when it rises to meet its mother's embrace. Ah, if the past had only been a striving for something absolutely noble! It seemed to her that all her ideals had been

relative, only comparatively good. She was surrounded by unknown perils; she might not live much longer, and the past, even the noblest of it, seemed sordid and trivial.

It is always to be observed that when human skill tries to deal with human penitence, it does so by painting the sin blacker and again more black, and endeavouring to increase the tears of the soul. When we come near to God, Controller of forces physical and spiritual, of the tempest, of incarnate devils, and of the springs of a woman's heart, it is never so. Penitence is met with instant encouragement. There is no accusation; there is the wisdom that is given without upbraiding; there is the command of perfect hope—"Go, sin no more."

As the girl turned into the dark pathway of the forest, it occurred to her as a strange reminiscence that heretofore her highest ambition had been to be true to herself, to develop her own life to its utmost as to pleasure and utility. Now that for some moments she had worshipped something—she knew not what—she felt with a new hope that she would aspire to a standard other than this and higher. In the hour of penitence we have a very clear insight into reality, but that which we see instinctively cannot quickly be translated into reasoned thought, and is still more slow in finding its expression in action.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE trees of this forest were of a giant race; their great trunks arose in dense shade from the ground. There was no underbrush, but in the case of the cedars, their branches, when they could obtain room, dipped almost to the ground, outspreading in curving fans. The upper branches were so high that Mary could not easily look at them; they seemed to be disposed in and out of one another in immense shelves of shade, rising layer above layer. It was with the trunks, and with the ground beneath them, that her eye grew more familiar. The cedars and the firs had dull red tints upon them. Sometimes a branch, or a whole tree, of cedar was dead, and had turned the dull hue of red that one sees in dead bracken. The ground was covered with snow that had powdered through the branches. It did not look like the outer snow; its crystals told the tale of its sifting. Covered by it lay the forms of huge moss-grown logs, lying often under the very roots of the trees now standing. The living trees had been sown upon their fallen progenitors.

Through this forest a little road ran, so narrow by comparison with the height of its arching roof that it seemed as if it were the diligence of pigmies that had removed all obstacles from it. The snow-carpet here was marked with the track of the horse and sledge, just as in the open; but these tracks now seemed almost such as a little bird might have made, so dwarfed did any sign of human life appear. It seemed to Mary that the trees looked down upon her, and saw a little creature dressed in clinging skirts, travelling as fast as her strength would permit—slowly at that—and that they spoke to one another, saying how weak and insignificant she was, and that she was going forward amid great dangers, and that, unless there was a God in the world, she had no one to protect her.

There had always been some poetic sense within her, and being thus cast, with fever in her blood, into the arms of so strange a phase of nature, this part of her spoke loud for the first time. It was not for long. It is not according to the law which growth of character obeys that new thoughts, new feelings, spiritual or poetical, should abide with us. It is not until they are old thoughts, old feelings, that they abide. Our first glimpses of them are very transient: their impress remains, but they pass as if they had left no impress, and the laws which govern circumstance no sooner touch us into finer feeling than they



jostle us with that which is most mundane. There is evidently something wholesome in the transition.

It was not long before Mary began to feel that physical ill was fastening upon her. Her head throbbed: she felt that, in spite of the cold air, her cheeks were burning; she felt the lassitude of illness in every limb.

This was before she had walked very far, and she supposed that her life depended upon her going much further. The grey and red squirrels that leapt among the branches, the crows cawing in gaps that opened to the sky far above her head, might live in the forest, but she could not.

To her great relief she began to see signs of an opening in the trees; there was light farther on, and soon she could discern, through the long avenue which the road made, an arch which appeared to be the end of the wood.

It was just when she had seen this that she began to hear a sound behind her. Gradually she distinguished the jingling sound made by the harness of a horse attached to a sledge. Her first impulse was to stop and lean against a tree, waiting to implore the friendly aid of whoever might be driving that way. Then came the swift and painful recollection that that road led only from the house which she had left.

Incapable of moving faster, she pressed steadily on towards the opening of the forest. There must

be some house in the clearing; she was filled with a frantic desire to reach it before the sledge from the farm in the notch could come near her. Yet as in a dream, her feet were heavy, and would only move slowly. The road curved behind her, so that she could not see the sledge, but in the dense stillness she could hear the horse's hoofs in the snow.

The sledge came on at the steady natural pace of the horse, apparently without interference from the driver. Mary gained the edge of the wood, and still the sledge was behind her.

Before her was a large clearing. The trees, probably a special sort of timber, had evidently been felled and used for some purpose such as the building of the railway. There was the sound to one side of a stream rushing, and in the same direction several log houses and wooden sheds. There was no fence or enclosure of any kind. The road led on to the huts. Mary went towards them without a moment's hesitation. She felt certain that in some one of them there must be a kindly woman to whom she could tell her story, and yet they looked strangely desolate.

Before she reached the huts, the horse which was drawing the sledge came up close behind her on the narrow track. It slackened speed and followed her: she heard no voice. She stood aside in the snow: she looked at the sledge. So strange was her mood and the circumstance, that to be calm was little effort

to her. Across the sledge and beyond the wood she saw the mountains and the majestic glittering peak. The sense of exaltation this brought her, the fever that was upon her, and the instinctive self-effacement which her late acting had taught her, joined together to give the rounded outline of her girlish face an almost unearthly grace.

The one man who stood upon the sledge had no demonstrative nature, and yet he looked upon her with renewed bewilderment. The man was Hamilton. He stood upright upon the low, flat, unpainted sledge, holding the reins of the small shaggy horse which he drove. The horse had been checked by a touch when Mary had swerved aside. Horse and man stood motionless, and even the beast turned its head and looked her full in the face.

The girl had counted upon the sledge passing while she paused; moment by moment passed, and she saw no ending to this silent interview.

At last the man said, "Where are you going? Why did you leave me?" His was not merely a daring and imperious face, but it was a bad face, although just now there was no thought or feeling expressed there that a good man might not have thought and felt. In spite of himself, his voice trembled as a true lover's might. He seemed surprised by this, knit his brows and stopped speaking. Then he said again, "I only let you go away in order that I might tell the

boys that you were gone. I knew that I could follow you wherever you went. I saw the track of your feet upon the road. There is no place anywhere in this region where I cannot follow you." When he spoke of his fellows, his tone had for the moment been haughty, but for the rest it was mild, with an effort at pleasing.

She did not speak to him ; she could not, even if she had desired. As it seemed that he would not pass her, she quietly went on before the horse to the log houses.

She was considering in her mind why it was that she could not get out of his power. Did he know that these houses were empty, or that the people in them were powerless to protect her ? Surely not, for she saw smoke issuing from the chimneys, and she heard the sound of a good many voices within.

When they reached a space that was cleared of snow in front of the principal log building, Hamilton left his sledge and came up beside her, looking at her progress in the direction of the door with great curiosity.

"Why are you going in here?" he asked. "Where have you come from? What errand can you have here?"

It seemed as if he spoke by way of relief to his own mind, for he had apparently ceased to expect her to answer.

His tone inspired her with greater curiosity as to what she should see within, but not with greater hope. She knocked at the door, and he stood aside watching her keenly.

The sound of voices within continued monotonously, but in a minute the door was opened. In the minute that she had been kept waiting the continued gaze of Hamilton's eyes had become so repulsive to her that in sheer fear of him she stepped across the threshold as soon as the door gave to her gentle pressure.

The scene she saw seemed at first like the passing dream of a fevered brain. The interior, dark by reason of frost upon the small window-panes, was furnished in a manner far more rude and foreign than the house from which she had come, and in it sat a large circle of men—grotesque, ugly figures; most of them were squatting in a circle round a low table, playing at some game with dice. When her thought cleared after a moment, she perceived they were Chinamen.

It seemed that, in their taciturn indifference, they had not proposed to turn from their game because their door had been opened to admit a stranger, but after a moment some quiet word or sign seemed to pass from one to another. They turned, they looked, they rose and stood about her. The best evidence of their surprise was perhaps that they did not ask

why she had come. There was a minute's silence while they crowded behind one another to look at her more closely. Then they grinned at her, making, as it seemed to her, horrid grimaces; yet perhaps it was a natural smile of welcome to a vision which in the foul reek and gloom of this hut seemed more than ever beautiful and pure.

Sickened as she was by the smoke and smell and her loathing of the men, whose grins appeared to her insulting, she still searched with her eyes every corner of the dark interior, for the impulse was strong upon her to look for the friendly face of some woman; but none was to be seen. She remembered now that she had heard that Chinese navvies had been employed upon the roads in this country. She knew enough to know that the Chinese do not take their women with them to foreign lands. A moment's thought told her that here for her there was no hope.

She became conscious that Hamilton was standing in the doorway behind her, that the Chinamen were beginning to look to him as the one apparently who knew the answer to the riddle of her presence. She shook her head, as if to show that she had missed her way, and went out again into the bleak air of the morning.

Her heart so sank with the disappointment that she could have wept, although she was not a woman

given to tears. Where could she go now? She lifted up her eyes and looked. On all sides of the clearing was the forest; on all sides of the forest, the mountains. The grey cold as of the unborn day was still upon all the valley and the eastern heights. The only sight that brought her the slightest comfort was the golden glory of the peaks upon the other side, the highest mountain rising among them; but the thought of hope and light which they forced upon her was not of an earthly and temporal sort; it merely lay passive in her mind together with the realization of her present hapless case.

While she had stopped bewildered, all the Chinamen from the hut and from the log houses came out, and now they stood around her again. There was no awe upon their faces; they grinned; they talked to one another. No doubt to them, in the midst of a foreign land, her advent and appearance did not seem beyond the range of explicable things. They were interested and curious. They seemed to know Hamilton well, and spoke to him; but he did not answer, only continued to look with interested curiosity to see what dealings she might have with them, or they with her.

A minute more and the Chinamen had arrived at an explanation. Their English was meagre, but with polite laughter they spoke enough of it to make their thought clear.

"Hamilton getee wiffee. Him showee wiffee."

Hysterical laughter fought within her with the desire for tears. She betrayed neither, but the self-repression resulted in a trembling of her whole frame, so that she felt that she was on the verge of some pitiful attack of extreme weakness. Looking as though she had not understood, she walked feebly away by the only road.

She heard Hamilton's word of command to his horse. The sound of hoofs in the snow and the jingling of the harness followed close behind her.



## CHAPTER VIII.

MARY began to wonder to herself how it would have been with her if she had entered the settlement of the Chinese navvies without Hamilton for her guard. She thought of her money and the jewel that now also lay in her bosom. An awful picture of her own murdered body being hidden in the ground by these grinning heathen rose before her fevered brain. In this last adventure she was forced to believe that this man Hamilton had proved a friend.

He must needs yet prove a friend to her if there was to be any peaceful ending to her present state of wretchedness, for, as she came again to the place where the only track upon the snow turned back towards the forest, she realized that there was no other human dwelling within her reach, and her strength had wholly failed her.

Her mind still grasped the idea that perfect nobleness of character would alone be sacred to this man, and that perfect nobility implied the power to trust. She had never been taught this, and yet she assumed

it. Strong she could not appear, or free from the petty ills of disease and helplessness, but it was possible to appear to trust absolutely all the good that was in him; and whatever betided, it might be possible to endure without betraying impatience or any weak apprehension. She had but a moment in which to act; her limbs were failing beneath her, her brain was almost incapable of thought.

She turned, and again made room for the horse to pass. She made a gesture that she required to rest upon the sledge.

The man had made his own provision for this. A bundle that was lying before him upon the bare sledge proved to contain such pillows and blankets as he might have taken from his own bed. The sledge was a small level platform, except that, in front, where it might need to breast the snow, it inclined upward. Upon the incline he bestowed the pillows with hasty action. She rested upon the blanket, and was thankful to lay her head down upon the pillows, although they were but sacks of straw. The moment she laid down her head she seemed to lose the power to raise it again. He covered her with the bearskin in which the bundle had been rolled. He stood as he had stood before, upright at the back of the sledge, and drove on. In this way they went back through that part of the forest through which they had come.

She knew that her strength had gone, that she was the prey of some acute illness produced by the chill of the preceding night. She tried to think what she ought to do next, while she retained the power to think.

Her mind with eagerness considered the occupants of the railway carriage out of which she had fallen about eight hours before. It was now at such an hour of the morning that her fellow-travellers might be rising from their berths. She wondered how long they would leave hers close curtained, supposing her to be sleeping late. It was clear that no one had known of her misadventure at the time it took place. How then would they know it at all until they sought for her within those curtains? When they did know her gone, what would they think? What would they do? She wished now that her own travelling companion had been a more affectionate, a more unselfish, woman. She had never missed these qualities in her before. She had been content that her woman friends should be clever and self-contained. She wondered now how much her late companion would bestir herself. She found that she could not easily fancy her greatly solicitous or perturbed.

It would be impossible for those in the train to know when or where she had left it, or whether or not she had left it of her own accord at one of the

several night stations. Under these circumstances it was vain to hope that the place in which she now was would be the place chosen for immediate search. No doubt her disappearance would be telegraphed to the different stations along the line; if she could reach a station she would be safe, but she had seen no road that ran parallel with the railway, and she was convinced that there was no station within reasonable reach, because her appearance had appeared marvelous.

There were minutes when her bodily state seemed to numb the natural feeling of anxiety. She lay, her cheek upon the pillow provided, and watched the huge trunks of the forest trees as they glided past her. She was interested to see the effect of the increasing light in the great gloomy aisles of their shade; for the shade was less now than it had been, in token that the rays of the sun were descending the nearer hills.

Was she losing her reason to be thus idly thinking of the beauty of this forest? With an effort she brought her mind back to the question of whither she was being taken, and for what end. She felt the little packet of gross worldly wealth lying heavy upon her breast. Would the man beside her be influenced by the offer of a bribe or payment, or would it be safer not to let him know that she had money?

She turned herself slightly so that she could look up in his face. It was there that she must read her

immediate future. It was partly because of the fever which gave her a strange sense of unreality, that she was able to lie quietly and look up at him as a child would have done.

For a moment he returned her look with an effort to appear at ease; then he lifted his eyes to the level of his horse, made some sounds which belong to the driver's language, made a feint of rearranging his reins and whip, and, relapsing into steady self-control, continued to look at the road in front and drove on steadily.

Inwardly the girl had a giddy sensation that it was all passing delusion. As in a dream, she had the curious double existence of actor and spectator at once; she being in spirit, somewhere apart from the sledge, saw herself as she lay apparently at ease under the bear robe; she saw the upper edge of the fur rise and fall with the movement of her breath; she saw the folds of delicate azure swathed about her head and shoulders; she saw her own face, and marvelled at its beauty and sweetness in comparison with the huge roughness of nature and the uncouth roughness of humanity in all that place. She saw the man standing almost like a statue behind her. He was dressed in old and ragged furs; the long smooth fur of raccoon was his cap, his coat the ancient hide of a buffalo, legs and feet were encased in moccasin and bound with thongs of the same. An untidy dress it was, hardly clean. The

man within it had a fine haughty bearing, and the face that looked out from under the cap would have been very handsome had it not been for the subtle mark that vice had set upon the features. It was a face that showed not only the power to control others, but the power of self control, yet not for any good end. Comparatively young, and as it seemed now in health, he looked as if he had worked through all dissipations, and regained health only by change of vices. His expression was not alone reckless, but bore the creeping shadow of low brutality and cunning which the hardening habits of wickedness involve. In this curious survey, she looked also at the shaggy horse. Its humble toilsome manner of trotting on suggested fear. She saw that, slight as Hamilton's motion in driving was, it was a cruel twitch which he often gave to the creature's mouth. Then she looked again at the gigantic forest, filled, as it seemed to her, with mysterious depths and shades in which unknown crimes could be prolonged and then buried. The narrow road led through its heart like a silver thread. On and on over this road they went, the pony, the rude wooden sledge carrying the recumbent and hapless lady, and the man standing statue-like, looking before him with hard-set enigmatical gaze. She seemed to stand aside and see it.

At length they came out from under the trees: the girl felt that some spell was broken. She was in

command of her mind once more, feeble, suffering, but still intelligent, and the light of morning was on the hills. She heard the river rushing through the icy grotts that were its bank. She felt the sledge upon the rocks and then upon the bridge.

The pony began to ascend the steep side of the railway embankment. Mary thought of the next thing she must do. When the sledge had balanced itself upon the level of the track, she rose up, signing Hamilton to stop.

It seemed to her that he had checked the horse of his own accord, for it had stopped without so much as crossing the railway. Perhaps there was hesitation in his mind as to which road he would take.

She slipped off the sledge, bracing herself to the effort of standing. She essayed to speak, but the cold had taken so strange a hold of the vocal chords that the lowest whisper still died upon her lips.

He came nearer, bending his head to listen, courteously enough, but she felt that if this were the result of her effort to speak she would make no further effort. The intense curiosity written upon his face appeared less respectful than his former hard-set expression. Yet, after all, it was a glimpse to her of the main attitude of his mind at this point. She saw that within it curiosity and indecision held sway.

She took the handle of the whip out of his hand,

and traced upon the snow two words: "Station where?"

His eyes had followed her lines. When she had finished he gave her such a look of bold piercing inquiry as last night he had bestowed upon her before he fell back in dismay. He even tried a smile, as if of mutual intelligence, but when she still looked grave, innocent, pleading, something of the former effect was produced, for he drew back disconcerted. He made as if to take the whip to write, but then, to test her hearing first, he said, "You are eight miles from Red Keil, the nearest station. There is no road in this heavy snow."

She answered as if she had believed, although she knew that he might have lied. She again wrote upon the snow—

"I fell from the train last night. Can you stop the night train for me?"

"I don't know how you could have fallen from the cars, but, since you tell me you did—" (here a slight, as it seemed mocking, bow) "of course I believe you. As to stopping the train, it's impossible here—the driver would not have time to slow before he was round the next curve. The train going west passes after ten at night, and the other after midnight."

She did not believe that the train could not be stopped, but she saw that nothing but artificial light



would serve as a signal of distress. She could not procure this alone; and then there was the intervening time.

While she paused, Hamilton spoke again. What he said was, "Last night you wore a diamond upon your hand; why have you taken it off?"

Now, in the night time, when she had remembered she was wearing this ring, she had taken it off, and put it in the silken purse that contained her money. The fact that he asked this question, which seemed to her full of rude greed and suspicion, filled her with fear that he did not believe that she had fallen by accident, or that she was there by reason of misfortune. She looked at the snow, firm-packed and smooth-shaven by the plough of the engine between the iron rails; her footsteps of last night were hardly noticeable upon it. She showed them to him, feeling helplessly that they did not prove much.

She realized now that during the long drive she had become chilled, nay, she felt that her feet and hands might freeze as she stood. Surely this, if nothing else, was a mortal danger. She summoned all the strength that remained, and wrote hastily upon the white surface at her feet—

"For God's sake take me where some good woman lives. You will be——"

She was going to say "rewarded," but she re-

remembered that that too had a hollow worldly sound that would, as it were, tarnish the white vestment in which she was wrapped. So she wrote—"glad afterwards."

"Very sorry to disoblige you," he said, "but there is not any of that commodity within reach, present company always excepted; but I'll do what I can for you. I am going up a road here on business, and if you stay on the sledge none of the boys will know where you are. If you attempt to go anywhere by yourself they will see the trail, and I won't be answerable for the consequences. They're a low set at this digging."

Then she felt his arm supporting her, and she had not the power to shrink from it. With his help she crept back upon the sledge.

## CHAPTER IX.

HAMILTON began giving commands to his horse in a tone low but savage. He jerked its head brutally. The sledge was drawn across the rails, and turned toward the rocky and tree-clad side of the notch. There was, it was true, only one track in the snow, but beneath the snow, which lay about seven inches in depth, there was evidently another road with which the horse and man were both familiar. Diverging at right angles from the former track, they began to ascend almost at once. Hamilton plodded by the horse's head. It soon appeared, by the sound, that as they climbed they approached the torrent that descended the hillside, although their path had avoided the quarry or digging at its base.

The jolting of the sledge on the rocky road caused Mary such acute pain in head and back that she was forced to lie still upon her place of rest; but her mind was filled with a rush of new alarms. Where, in this almost inaccessible home of the spirits of the forest, could he possibly be taking her?

Where the road led beneath high trees and between enormous rocks, she could see its outline running on in front, constantly rising; then it was lost to sight by turning. It required in her the utmost effort of faith in the sanity of the man who was driving to believe that there could be any shelter-towards which they were now going; yet if he were not mad he must have chosen this difficult path because of some such shelter.

Of one thing she was now convinced, that her best chance of life lay in crouching under the cover he had provided and accepting what shelter he was about to offer. Shelter she must have till night came. Giddy and shivering and in acute pain, she lay back, only able to keep her eyes open and listlessly note the trees and the snow-covered rocks as they crept past them; and now and then her glance rested upon glimpses of the torrent as it leaped, above and beneath, among vast palaces of icicles.

She became conscious at last that some ameliorating influence was making impression upon her and upon the locality around. She did not know at first what it was, but she felt more hopeful; the whole scene was less cold and dreary. The waterfall, when she saw it, so dazzled her aching eyes that she must turn away; then she knew that they had met the sunrise upon the hill.

Shortly after this she began to perceive that the snow around was not unbroken, that other paths had been trodden here and there. She heard the sound of an axe chopping and she gathered all her faculties together in hope, raising herself to a sitting posture, looking and listening.

A very old man—who had been felling trees—came and stood at the side of the sledge. He might easily have been a spirit of the mountain or of the forest; old and bowed and unkempt he looked, and yet withal very strong and sinewy. He wore a red shirt—or, it seemed, several red shirts—above his buckskin trousers. He stood and looked at the visitors with clear, healthy blue eyes from under bushy eyebrows.

Almost at once another old man appeared, younger perhaps by ten years and of a different type of manhood, but still old, long-bearded, long-haired, and dressed much in the same way as his fellow. He, too, came and stood and looked.

Hamilton stopped the sledge. Standing before the two old men, he looked like the very personification of the strength and force of manhood in its prime. Around them stood giant fir trees; logs lay on the white ground. The air was full of the sound of the stream falling.

“I am going on up to Wilson’s.” This was what Hamilton said.

The older man looked at Mary. At last one of them said slowly—

“What d’you want there?”

They both continued to look at Mary. Hamilton said:

“I want the shacks you’re living in. You can turn into the other.” It seemed from his voice as if he were granting a permission.

The old man who had first come in sight now hazarded a question—

“Where’d you get the leddy?”

The answer came as if to utter it with emphasis was a relief to Hamilton. “Blest if I know.”

There came what might have been a smile in this old man’s bright blue eyes, from which the lower eyelids fell with a slight enlarging droop, as is often the case in age. There was no sign of the smile in the long bushy hair that covered his mouth; he only said, in clear high tones—

“Then I’ll be bound yer don’t know, Mr. Hamilton.”

Hamilton expressed no interest in this criticism of his character. He spoke with hard command in his voice—

“See here, the lady’s in my care. She’s ill; I’m going to take her up to Wilson’s to get well. At least, she’ll have the sun on her there, instead of the infernal shadow half the day. Now listen! The

boys up at my place don't know where the lady is, and I don't want them to know. D'you understand?"

"Amen," replied the blue-eyed old man glibly, in the same high clear tone. The clearness of his tone seemed in some way related to the clearness of his blue eyes.

Both men seemed, in their aged way, to take the stand of artists in regard to life, for although they looked with steady interest at the man and girl, especially at the latter, they did not appear to form any opinion as to what ought or ought not to be done with her. There was no hint of any moral obligation, of any possibility of the passions of indignation or praise, in their aged faces. The girl, looking at them with the quickness of fevered vision, perceived that appeal was useless. Even if they had had the power to take her from Hamilton's custody, it did not appear to her that they would trouble themselves to supply her needs or to save her life. She began to perceive now that what she required of other human beings was not only that they should not molest her, but that they should bestir themselves to save her life. These old men would not do this. Perhaps Hamilton would.

With the jerk which the sledge made when it began to move forward, her head fell again upon the pillow. Again the road wound up the southern end

of the hill ; again she watched the ice-bound rocks and still undulations of the snow with aching eyes. Concerning the place whither she was going all she knew was that Hamilton had said there was no woman there ; her longing to see the face of some commonplace worthy woman was so great that she would have exchanged all her worldly wealth for the privilege.

She thought a little about herself, the self who had always been business-like, quick of resource, able to arrange and command, to bend men and circumstances to her will. She had a sense almost of imbecility in being in a position where her usual resources were, as it were, a minus quantity, for any display of lively understanding would only sharpen this man's wits and harden his heart.

For about half an hour longer she was drawn slowly up the mountain-side in the brilliant sunshine. There was only a gigantic fir tree here and there to cast its shadow. At length they came out upon the side of a small plain ; from this opening the mountains to the east were seen. They went on skirting the edge of the small plateau, and came where the sound of the torrent was very loud ; just above them the water leaped from a ledge of snow and ice, and fell upon a cone of ice far below. Close by this leap of the water stood three small log huts. She saw against the clear blue of the sky that there was smoke rising from one chimney. She looked around and saw the snow trod-



den. She understood that this was the home of the two old men. 'It was like a wild strange dream.

She lifted her head restlessly from her pillow; now she laid it back; what use was there in lifting it?

With Hamilton there was not a moment's inactivity. He threw his whole weight against the door of the best hut, and having cast it open, he went to another and opened that likewise. From this he reappeared with a large armful of wood cut small, and entered the first door. She saw him come out again and knock the snow from standing piles of logs broken into smaller and larger sizes. Great armfuls of these he also carried into the hut. He was making a large fire for her.

She rose, tottering with weakness and cold, and made her way through the door. The place was one long-shaped room with a door and two windows. There was little furniture; the chimney was built of rough stones, making a large-open fireplace at one end.

In front of this Hamilton dragged a huge sack of straw which had evidently been a bed. — She was thankful to see that he covered it with the bearskins which had already covered her. He brought in her pillows and blanket. He said he supposed she could take care of herself, and left her, shutting the door.

## CHAPTER X.

MARY grew warm, basking beside the liberal fire. There was no longer doubt about her illness ; the pains in back, limbs, and head, and, above all, in her throat, were acute ; her fever was high. She wondered how long she was doomed to remain in this shelter. She tossed, aching, and thought of the night trains, realizing that she was powerless to reach the railway. Without Hamilton's help the attempt would surely be futile ; even with his help the exposure promised death more surely than any other result.

Hamilton came in again, and brought her something to eat. He went about the room, taking the personal possessions of the old men out to one of the other huts. He left her such things as were necessary. One of the windows was in the far end of the hut opposite the fire ; from this he took out the frame bodily, casting such rubbish as he found apparently into the very foam of the waterfall, for at the moment the roar was loud. On the whole, he left her room in pretty good order, aired and warm.

If the sun rose early upon this southern slope of the hill, it also set early. The windows of the room in which she lay were only semi-transparent, because of dirt and frost; yet even through them, in her sensitive state, she was aware when the shadow of the higher portion of the hill crept over the clearing. She thought that it might be about three in the afternoon; at dusk she looked out and saw that light snow was falling. She heard the old men return from their work, and after that Hamilton's foot came again to her door.

She listened breathless. It seemed that he too listened for a few moments; then he knocked, gently enough.

In his left arm was a pile of logs cut for the fire; with his right hand he lifted a dish which he had set down for a moment upon the threshold. When he had put the latter beside her upon the floor, he made up the fire very carefully, putting upon it what seemed to her an enormous quantity of fuel, but disposing the ashes of the former fuel in a careful manner round the back and sides of the pile by way, as it seemed, of keeping it from burning too quickly. She watched him as a child watches the maid build its nursery fire; it was a relief to her nerves to have something to watch.

When ready to go, he turned to her for the first time; his face and voice had the same constrained

enigmatical expression which he had used to her in the morning when his attempts at familiarity had failed.

"Is there anything else?" he asked.

He gave her a somewhat soiled bit of paper and a short pencil. She wrote—

"Please try to stop one of the trains, and tell the guard to let my friends know."

"Very sorry"—there was little of excuse in his voice—"but in that matter it is impossible to oblige you."

His next action was so singular that she was filled with a sudden dread. He took a knife out of his pocket, and gently, even respectfully, moving the folds of her blue veil until he found the outer edge of it, he deliberately cut a piece several inches in length across the whole width.

He had come into the room without a hat on; it was the first time she had seen him without a hat; it struck her now that it was almost like seeing a new person, although the character written in the face remained unchanged. His hair was longer than it is the habit of men to wear hair in civilized regions; it was so abundant round his forehead that it made her think involuntarily what a handsome boy he must have been in those early days when a child is just beginning to look manly and the mother still allows the curls to grow. She felt a sensation of sorrow for

that mother, whoever she might have been, for the son, although at this moment his action was gentle, had long since ceased to be gentle at heart.

It was her condition of fever which caused this reverie to work itself through her brain; it probably passed in the flash of a moment as dreams do, but it seemed to her a long time that he was sawing through the veil's end, which he had gathered together and was holding stretched out between two fingers. She was exceedingly frightened.

It must have been very early in the evening that the men seemed to retire for the night; almost as soon as it became dark she ceased to hear their voices or any movement. Previous to that she had heard some slight sounds, even when they were within the other huts and the doors were shut. She perceived that her fire was expected to last until morning—that she was to receive no further attention. In the morning she must, of course, either leave that place or find some means of communicating with her friends, but in the meantime there were full twelve hours in which to gather strength.

By the light of the fire she now lifted the cover of the basin which Hamilton had placed beside her, and, upon examination, discovered it to contain a palatable preparation of apples, which had apparently been dried and then cooked with water. The fruit was grateful to her.

After that she supposed that she must have fallen into a heavy sleep, for she was conscious that some hours had elapsed without much restlessness when she became aware that there were quiet footsteps and low voices to be heard outside.

It was not morning; she did not believe that it was past midnight. She listened, filled with anxiety, supposing that whoever had arrived at this out-of-the-way place would soon make known their presence by knocking or calling. She had an idea of some arrival, gathered probably from the sound of horses' feet and sledge-runners recognized more or less distinctly among the subdued movements made by men. For one long minute she strained her sense of hearing. Unable to endure suspense, she rose and crept with silent steps to the near window, keeping well to the side lest her figure should be seen against the firelight.

She saw the forms of three men, a horse and a sledge; it seemed to her just such a horse and sledge as she had travelled with in the morning. A wild hope filled her mind that it was some party of friends or railway officials searching for her; for a moment in her hope she put out her hand to tap on the window; then fear restrained her. What immediately astonished her was that the party which she supposed just to have alighted from the conveyance now stepped upon it and drove away. There was no

jingling to the horse's harness, as there always had been with any other sledge which she had seen driven in Canada, and, that being absent, the horse and sledge made almost no sound as they moved. The men were silent; they drove off by the edge of the small plateau. She could not see far; there was light, dry snow falling through the air.

Was this lonely place haunted? Was this a vision of spectres which she had seen, which she could still see, moving in the glimmering night?

Then the meaning flashed upon her. The men were the two old men who lived in this place and Hamilton. They had removed the noisy part of the harness; they had gone away and left her in this horribly lonely place; they had gone by stealth, so that she might not know of their going.

She sprang to the door, and with all the strength of fierce impulse tried to raise the latch or to break it open. The door did not even shake much under her strongest attempt; certainly no noise of her effort could have resounded across the plain to the receding sledge. She became convinced that the latch of the door had been fastened upon the outside.

## CHAPTER XI.

SUFFERING now from acuter pains brought on by her sudden action, she went back to the bed, having just enough care for her self-preservation to wrap herself in its coverings. For some reason it appeared to her a more awful thing to be entirely alone in this remote trio of human habitations among the white glimmering hills than it had been to be entirely alone without shelter on track or road the preceding night. Her illness had done much to weaken her nerve. For a while she kept incessant watch upon all the dark corners of the room, and lay absolutely still, as if the slightest rustle might irritate some unknown enemy into action.

After a few minutes of this intense watching of the room, she became aware of something which she had not perceived before. This was that all the light in the room was not produced by the glow and flicker of the fire; some of it came from the small window in the opposite gable, and this light was of a paler colour than the firelight, yet it was not white,



like the beams of moon or star. She was the more sure that it was really there, and no invention of her fancy, because she frequently saw quiverings across the pallid glow from the window which did not correspond to any flickering of the fire.

It gradually became to her a necessity to rise again and creep to this further window. She could not make herself believe that the light that came through it was the light of any fire; but if there was such fire, it behoved her to examine it as far as possible. All fears came trooping to paint pictures upon the sensitive screen that hangs before the eye of the mind.

When she had tottered across the half-darkened room, and approached the further window, it was neither the fire of deliberate incendiary nor the approaching torches of warlike Indians which she saw. At first, mind and eyes confused by a sight entirely strange, she could hardly tell what she saw.

The hut was upon the extreme edge of the plateau, and this window looked down into the gully of the waterfall. She had known that this waterfall was near from its continuous sound; now she saw it leaping apparently from a rock which rose behind the hut on to the first ledge of the gully some fifty feet below, leaping, a white wild formless thing of spray and foam, into a wonderful tunnel built in a solid arch of ice, but adorned with ornament above ornament of delicate icicles.

The very sides of the gully, huge rocks, bending reeds of brambles and shrubs, grotesque forms of tree roots, all covered with ice and snow, were so coated and bedizened by the frozen spray that they too seemed a part of the wonderful architecture of this ornamental bridge of ice under which the stream descended.

Now, the strange thing was, that whereas when she had looked out of the front window of the hut her eyes had been just able to distinguish objects in the glimmering night, looking down upon the waterfall she could see the detail of its wonderful beauty clearly. She could see, too, the small snowflakes falling, melting in the water.

The light by which she saw it all was the same as that which had quivered upon her window. For perhaps a full minute the lonely girl had looked down upon the scene; now she shrank back into the nearest dark corner, trembling, if not with fear, with sudden excitement that was akin to fear. The light proceeded from a certain graceful moving form of light which seemed to stand upon the other side of the stream, near the base of the waterfall. The form had the height of a human figure, and it either had the same contour, or the eye easily supplied the faint outline of such figure veiled, as it seemed, in a falling veil of light.

Mary stepped out again from the shadow of her


casement. She had forgotten her pain; excitement had cancelled weakness. While this unearthly seeming light fell upon her face, she felt that some spirit within this form was looking at her. The figure of light not only fulfilled her highest ideal of what a spiritual appearance might be, but transcended it.

The form standing in the same place moved; it seemed to Mary that it beckoned her, for the veil of light moved as above arms that beckoned. She did not know what to think: thought being in abeyance, emotion was in abeyance too.

As she waited she heard a great sound—a distant rushing that echoed louder and louder. It was the passing of one of the trains. She was spellbound, startled to hear the vibration of so many echoes; then the sound died. She stood alone, more lonesome than before, above the frost-bound gully.

A new thought and sensation came to her; the thought and sensation were of pure joy in the beauty of what she saw, apart from any relation of the sight to her own welfare. In her childhood she had read the story of Undine. A wave of thought bearing the image and the sentiments of the story surged now into her mind; with it she had again the power of a little child to enter into the region in which self-interest is not.

For a moment or two she saw in the wild and hoary waterfall the Spirit of the Mountain, strong,



incapable of exhaustion, yet with a heart that had its own longings for love and friendliness. The waterfall became a person to her; the form of light, too, was a person—the Spirit of Spring, perhaps, come from warm and sunshiny glades in distant lands to spend the night in companionship with this her ancient lover. These two rejoiced, as it seemed, in the presence of the other without need of embrace or outward sign of converse, unless it was when the Spirit of Light moved her veiled arms, and the waterfall in her quivering beam seemed to leap the faster.

Mary felt strongly the poetical influence of this interpretation of the scene. There was another thought in her mind also, in direct opposition to the first—the thought of impatient scorn of dreaming, the *cui bono* of restless worldliness which, in the years that had passed since the childish days in which she had rejoiced over Undine, had become habitual to her; yet for the time the other influence, the reflex of the fresh mental impulses of her childhood, was the stronger. With the awakening of the more spiritual part of her mind had begun a new contention of the higher and lower within her. Now, and in the days that followed, the two tendencies sometimes unconsciously mingled and sometimes consciously fought. She was not again simply a worldly woman.

She knew now that if she cared for her life at all,

she must lie still in all the warmth which she could gather from her bed. As she lay there, the thing that remained most strongly with her was a comforting pleasure in thinking over and over again the mere beauty of the scene she had last gazed at. It was, in sort, a physical salvation that she had something in her which responded to that appeal which nature is always making to the human mind to find rest in the contemplation of her loveliness. Those things within her which she least recognized and least valued had risen and saved her from prolonged torture of just anxiety.

Our help comes not from without, but wells up from the depth within us. Beneath that depth what is there? It was said by one of old that underneath the soul is the hand of God.

## CHAPTER XII.

WHEN the morning light was clear upon the window-pane, the sick girl heard again the sounds of travellers near the house. She rose again, to be able to see out of the front window.

The sight she saw had something of the appearance of a small triumphal procession. First came the oldest man, he of the clear blue eyes, leading a cow; the other old man and Hamilton came one behind the other, each mounted on a pony, and each carrying part of the carcase of an ox. It was now apparent that this expedition of night and darkness had been for purposes of forage. It was a great relief for her to see that it had this peaceful meaning—peaceful if stealthy.

It was a source of real comfort to her that these men had come back. Uncouth, wicked men as they appeared to be, still, in the hope that they intended to guard her, she felt herself safer than when wholly unprotected. With the relaxation of this relief, utter exhaustion of nerve and muscle came upon her. It

was with the feeblest degree of interest that she watched Hamilton enter and make up the fire. He brought warm milk to her; he even put his hand under her head and caused her to drink it. He went out as before, shutting the door, and she remained alone until the short day began again to wane. By this time she began to suspect that he had mixed some anti-febrine draught with the milk, for she had been able to lie more quiet, and she experienced some relief from pain and fever. She was even able to rise and arrange her bed afresh.

Listless, weak as she was the whole day, she still grew more and more satisfied that she had been placed in such circumstances as gave her a fair chance of comfortable recovery.

Hamilton again paid his evening visit. He made the fire as before with great and small logs, heaped with ashes; he put milk and cooked apples beside her. He did not again attempt to help her drink the milk; instead, he touched her wrist lightly for a moment with his middle finger. So far it seemed that he would do no more for her than was necessary; his manner expressed a certain discomfort in her presence.

It is always the unexpected that happens. She was not aware that she had recovered a partial use of her voice; she had not dreamed of using it without deliberate forethought; yet now, when she saw him

turn towards the door, she thought of the possibility that he and the other men might again leave the place, and of the unexplained luminous spectre whose light had shone upon the end window. Fear and curiosity suddenly produced in her whispered questions. She could not do more than whisper.

“Are you all going away again to-night?”

He turned instantly and faced her. She did not like to see that he grew visibly more at ease in her presence. He did not answer at once; he seemed to be considering her in the new character of a lady capable of speech.

“Who are you?” he asked.

She felt the imperious right of weakness, and also of her ladyhood, to have her own question answered and leave his until to-morrow if she chose; then she remembered her *rôle* of dignified simplicity in which capriciousness had no part.

He seemed to grow more and more pleased with the sentiment she had expressed. The natural man in him expanded perceptibly. He sat down on a box.

“I’ve taken a good deal of trouble to hide you here and keep you safe,” he explained. “Stray women wandering round loose, with diamond rings about them, are not the sort of cattle that are easiest to take care of in a place like this. As I’m not under the impression that you fell from the sky, I suppose that you must have got off the train in some way;



the question that is naturally in my mind is, whether you've got your wits or not, and if you have, what you did it for."

He stopped as abruptly as he had begun. The words, "hide you here," gave her information, and of a sort she did not like. She was hidden, then; no help could come to her from a community which did not know that she was here. She looked up at him with quiet eyes; within she was reading his face, and saying to herself that there was no feminine art that he did not know by heart and despise, except just this one which she used—that of appearing perfectly good.

"My name is Mary Howard," she whispered.

He made a slight bow, which had some semblance of respect, except that with it there was a certain cynical raising of the eyebrows; it suggested that he, too, was on the defensive, determined not to be duped.

"Now, look here," he said again; "we shall get on much better if you tell me just the plain unvarnished truth. You look to me as if you had your wits. I took the trouble yesterday to follow the track you made before along the line; it looked uncommonly as if you had jumped from the train. Now, if you wanted to put an end to your pretty little self—some girls do, you know, when they get into a mess—just give me the tip, and your friends and lovers can weep for a year without ever knowing

that you are alive. I suppose that's the sort of fuss a woman wants to make when she tries to do for herself."

His new familiarity was intolerable. She did what she could to reproduce in him his former constraint.

She raised her head in piteous indignation.

"I fell," she whispered. "I must have walked in my sleep off the train."

The wish being father to the thought, he favoured his first theory more.

"It's not just a very likely story; it will be better for you in the end if you tell me the truth. Come, now, I can sympathize with you; I've often thought that a header into the tomb would be a pleasant variety. You thought you'd put an end to yourself—now, didn't you? But the snow was soft, and it didn't hurt much, and it sounds more artistic to say you fell."

"I did not try to kill myself; it would be wrong." She threw all the earnestness she could into the low whisper.

"Wrong?"—a cynical lift of the brows—"why wrong?"

"It says so in the Bible."

It was curious that, as she tried to raise herself in his eyes, she involuntarily fell back upon associations which she herself really despised.

He drew his under lip partly under the upper teeth. She saw his teeth as he did it; they were dark and decayed. He looked at her keenly; it seemed that he did not know how to adapt himself to an element which he could not estimate.

"As soon as I am well I must go to the nearest station," she whispered. "I must telegraph. The missionaries I was travelling with will be searching the country."

"Missionaries?" he said.

"I was travelling, you know, from China. A missionary was taking care of me."

"What is a missionary?" he asked, pretending that the word was unknown to him.

She also pretended to mistake his precise meaning. "Mr. Burland belongs to the China Inland Mission, you know."

"'Pon my word, no, I don't know." In a moment he added, "You've talked enough for to-night. I'm the doctor. You'll be having consumption if you don't look after yourself."

The excitement of talking made her rash. She judged that to blend what she had just said into the trustfulness she assumed would be no loss to her.

"Don't leave the place with no one to take care of me," she pleaded. "I was so frightened when I heard you all go away last night."

He gave her another searching look before he answered.

"You've got sharp ears," he said, "but you're quite right; we had to go to get meat and milk for you to live on, little lady. We had to take them at night, in case the fellows should get to know where you are; but—I won't go away again if you like me to take care of you."

"You are so good! When I go away I will give you the ring to pay for the milk and meat. It was my mother's, and she is dead; but I know that she would like me to give it to you, because you have saved me."

At last for one moment she saw something in his face which she felt to be a genuine emotion of self-distrust and compunction; it was lost in that hard look of self-suppression which he now resumed.

"What is that beautiful white thing that shines on my window?" she asked.

"It is the angel of your mother come to take care of you," he said. There was the coldest sarcasm under the words, but it seemed that he had not meant that that should be apparent to her.

He left her, shutting the door for the night. She lay wondering whether his sarcasm had been directed at her hapless plight or at his own perplexity.

### CHAPTER XIII.

SHE passed her wakeful hours in considering what was new to her in the knowledge of her situation, and also what was still unexplained.

When darkness came she saw the strange light again upon the further window. She could not resist crossing the room just once to see if the sight had in any way changed since the previous night. It had not changed. The luminous form, like a veiled half-transparent human figure, still stood upon the rock at the foot of the waterfall. In its light the water leaped and foamed, and all the million icicles upon snow-covered rock, root and shrub, glistened, not with a bright sparkling, rather with a pearly glow.

Mary went back to bed with the vision in her mind as before. It formed the only pleasant subject for her mind's eye; its strangeness had no longer any fears for her. To-night she heard the train pass with the mighty rush of echoes, not once, but twice. It was maddening to hear the sound and be cut off from the world. She considered Hamilton's sarcastic

explanation of the curious natural phenomenon. She augured little good from the fact that he could jest about a dead mother, whose mention a moment before had moved him to some compunction. Her mother was not dead, but that did not matter to her much. The first dim stirring of her soul within her had not as yet changed her habits of practical thought in the slightest. She only felt some anxiety as to how she could make out a more particular tale of her immediate past, and the present condition of her friends, consistent with her boasted connection with missionaries. All that came to her in the way of objection to this lying was the wish it had not been necessary, and a half-formed wonder as to how it was that she came persistently to deem it her source of safety.

The next day, when Hamilton came for his morning work at the fire, she told him she felt better, and asked him when he would be able to take her to the nearest station. She was up, sitting feebly upon a chair.

Hamilton, who was at the time kneeling before the fireplace arranging the logs, turned his head and stared at her, as his habit was, before he spoke.

“You couldn't have got off the train during this snow anywhere along the line where it is so bad getting at a station; there's no road but the line, and

open bridges on it either way, so that a horse can't go over them."

"Couldn't any one walk along the line and tell them I am here?"

"I am a good walker," he said, "and have a steady head for bridges; if I took about eight hours to go and come, I might manage it."

"Will you go?"

"No, and for that you may thank me; if those boys down at the digging, or the heathens on the other side of the river, got wind that I was on the track and you were here, where would you and your diamond ring be?" He turned his face as he finished speaking, with a smile that was meant to appear kind. "Where would you be then, eh?"

She did not believe that the situation was just as he painted it, but of this she gave no sign.

Before he went out he stood and looked at her again. He spoke in a somewhat injured and self-vaunting tone.

"I've taken a whole lot of pains to conceal your whereabouts, and set those fellows on the wrong track. I'm loitering here in a beastly dull place just in order to knock any fellow down who might happen to find you were here. It's all I can do at present. You'd better lie down and get yourself well; you're not fit to hold your head up."

"It is very kind of you," she said. She had an

idea that good people were apt to be credulous of good in others.

— Although she had never put to herself the proposition abstractly, as a matter of practical experience she was aware that charity does not easily suppose itself impugned, and does not vaunt itself. - Charity, then, was clearly not the source of Hamilton's course of action towards her.

One thing that Hamilton said appeared to be true enough, and that was that there was nothing for her to do at present but to gain strength as quickly as she could. That day and the night passed with no change in her situation, except that she did gather strength.

The next morning, about eleven o'clock, she was roused by hearing the sound of a voice that she had not heard for some days, accosting Hamilton. The advent of any new-comer must produce in her instant excitement, both of fear and hope. Without delay she crept from her bed and approached, not the window, but the crack of the door. She had heard the voice before; in a moment she recognized it; it was the voice of the small deformed cynical man whom she had seen with the other men upon the first night.

The dwarf, she believed, inherited none of those traditions of honour to which to some extent she trusted in her dealings with Hamilton. His



accent was distinctly vulgar; his voice was bland and disagreeable; his lisp again struck her as more horrible, in the wild untrammelled life he was leading, than any other defect of speech could have been.

"How'th Beauty? Come to pay a call on her."

Hamilton's reply was a suggestion that the dwarf should pay a call on the infernal regions instead. It was delivered with a sharpness that proved they had not hitherto been in league.

"Thankth awfully. Pwefer calling on Beauty inththead. Where'th the dwawing-woom?"

She took one glance from her window, and retreated. Hamilton, in his ragged fur coat and mocasin leggings, was lounging in the bright sunshine near the door of her hut. He seemed to have come near that door at the other's approach; the small deformed man was paying his visit with every outward appearance of social urbanity. They were both smoking pipes. The snow was sparkling on all sides; the sun was shining very brightly upon the peaceful rural scene. She felt, in a wild impatience, that it was an evil law which caused the sun to shine so brightly upon the unjust.

"See here," said Hamilton; "she's ill: it's diphtheria."

"Oh no;" the cynic spoke with cheerful assur-

ance. "Beauty hath not got diphtheria. Poor Beauty! Tell uth a better tale than that."

Hamilton swore at him in round terms. "Think I don't know diphtheria?" he asked. "Call it what you like when a woman's got a throat all covered with white spots run together, and lips that are black with fever—it doesn't matter much what name you give it; it's pretty dangerous dealing with diseased cattle—that's all I know."

The dwarf gave a low whistle; his serene belief that Hamilton was lying appeared to be disturbed.

As for the girl leaning against the door inside, her heart quaked under this graphic description of her illness. Was it true? She had no looking-glass; she could not at the moment remember any fact that would contradict his statement. She began to feel more ill out of fear at the fateful name given to her disease.

"Not fatal, I thuppothe?" said the dwarf.

"If she doesn't have a relapse, I think she'll go on well enough. Whether I'll catch the devil of a disease and go to the dogs with it or not, I can't just at this present moment inform you, although I have no doubt you'd like to know."

"Been kithing her?" asked the cynic, in a tone of commiseration.

Hamilton's voice had been gradually assuming a less hostile tone, and it appeared now that he de-

terminated, either to take the other into his confidence, or to appear to do so.

“Look here, what’s doing at the Flume? How came you here?”

“The wortht of it ith there’th nothing doing, ath you might know; devilith lot of thnow, devilith cold, and me come thix thouthand milth to live with old fwiend! Beauty dethendth one evening in the thape of an ünthel, vanitheth quite in good thtyle *quâ* anthel, old fwiend ith known to wun aftah; thome dayth aftah ith found living in wuwal thecluthion with Beauty.”

“How did the poor devils down there take the vanishing business?”

“According to the thpethial biath of ewry devil; main point ith, they think you’ve made off to West Kiel, or, at Beauty’th inthtigation, been taken bodily into the thky or the lower wegionth.”

“And the cow and the beef?”

“Ha! you’ve got them, have you? Wewy clever, muth thay! We’ve all been down and whacked the pig-tailed heathen for the depwedathion.”

Hamilton laughed—it was a cruel laugh; then he sneered, “*You* did a lot of the fighting.”

“Only held the thmalleth Johnny by hith pig-tail, while the Yankee whacked him. You thee,” said the dwarf, “they made out you’d gone th’other way, for they found bith of Beauty’th veil for a mile along the twack. No twail either way, becauth thnow wath fall-

ing : but bith of Beauty'th veil on wocks and twees—  
pwetty devithe that ! Had doubth in my mind about  
it. Didn't make any wemark ; thought I'd not wound  
on a thum when I'd come thix thouthand milth to  
thee him."

There was a silence between the men ; they were  
both smoking. The girl continued to lean against the  
inside of the door. It came to her as a curious recol-  
lection, that in any other situation than her present  
miserable one she would not have judged these two  
men hardly ; she would have thought them rather  
valiant and pleasant knaves. In her modern width of  
thought she had always supposed herself to despise  
the mind which, from some petty personal circum-  
stance, should have its eyes closed to an all-round, well-  
proportioned view of men and things. It appeared to  
her that, to be consistent, she ought to despise herself  
now for the rage of indignation that lay under hard  
control within her.

The dwarf was the first to speak. " Well, what'th  
the game ? Got the athe of twumph ; but the athe  
of twumph ithn't the whole game."

Here Hamilton broke in suddenly ; he seemed to  
rise and go nearer the dwarf. His voice assumed a  
certain genuineness of tone, a business-like quality ; it  
seemed as if he had suddenly resolved on actually tak-  
ing counsel. She could not hear all the words ; under  
ordinary circumstances she would not have heard any,

but the whole force of her nature was turned at that moment into a determination to hear. She hardly breathed; she held her ear close against the crack of the door.

"I tell you there's money behind her. Diamonds like that don't grow on bushes."

The dwarf did not take much pains to subdue his voice. It was never loud, but it had a penetrating quality. "Wath going to obtherve that Beauty mutht have fwiends."

"Naturally, I suppose she has. Most women with pretty eyes and diamond rings have an infernal lot of friends. Says they're missionaries. I'll be —— if they are all missionaries, and she with a ring like that. Whoever they are, it's they who keep the tin. It's not likely she has it in her pocket"—with sarcasm.

The dwarf gave a prolonged note of exclamation, indicative of the sentiment that the matter was more complicated than he had supposed.

"Can't you stop acting the idiot, and use your wits?"

"Pothe ath hewo; win Beauty'th heart."

"I'm not such a fool as to trust to her heart. Any way, I don't know that she's the sort that would catch on."

The dwarf appeared to enjoy this last confession—

"Pwoor devil! twied to make love even though

Beauty had diphthewia. Beauty dithdainful. Poor devil wepulthed."

"I have not tried. She's pious."

"Poor Beauty! difthwetic and piouth! Poor devil, got hith handth full."

"Hang the diphtheria! She's no more got diphtheria than I have." There was a pause. Hamilton kicked the snow; then he burst out—"Twas you suggested the priest at the Crees. I sent the old man to him."

"Ith poor piouth Beauty a thimpleteon?" The cynic evidently thought that this question was apposite.

"She's got more wits than will be at all convenient, but I'll be hanged if——" He spoke now so fast and incoherently, and with such irritation in his whole voice and manner, that, to her dismay, she found that she could understand nothing more except a word or two at the conclusion—"friends turn up a straight tale to tell—couldn't have done more than we've done."

The cynic was not made incoherent by any gust of emotion.

"The very thoul of honour!" he said.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THEY were gone. Mary stood alone. She had retreated a few paces from the door. She looked about the log hut with desperate glance; she clenched her hands, she stamped her foot, feeling the absolute need for some expression for the passion of anger which had arisen, yet she felt that the very expression which she made use of mocked her, because she had so often used the same outward signs to express small half-simulated tempests of wrath which bore no relation of likeness to the misery of deep anger which was now forced upon her.

She felt that if she could have murdered these two men she would have done it gladly. She experienced a positive feeling of physical nausea at the remembrance of the way in which they had spoken about her, and yet she could not cut them off in her mind by drawing any clear line between them and other men, whose scheming about her, and familiarity towards her, gave her good reason to suppose that they had talked of her lightly enough in

her absence. These men were much worse, but they were not wholly different, and, curiously enough, it was this undefined likeness which lent the bitterest irritation to her wounded spirit.

The men who were her friends in varying degrees were good-hearted and clever; she was not the least sorry that she had associated with them in frank unaffected comradeship. At this moment she longed for their companionship and protection as a homesick child longs for home. Her way with them had been much better than the old-fashioned ways of stilted conventionality, more wholesome for her, more wholesome for them; she was sure of that. She had everywhere found many friends among men, and she was quite conscious that they had most of them wanted to make love to her, and also that it was her money, and the free way in which she spent it, that had formed a large part of the attraction. She found no fault with this at all; it was natural, and what is natural is right; but now that she was confronted with a hideous caricature of what she approved, she felt such anger that no revenge at that moment would have seemed to her excessive. She had no means of revenge; she had not even means of escape.

An hour afterwards the two men came to see her. After a warning knock, Hamilton looked in.

"Well enough to see visitors?" he asked cheer-



fully. "Got a friend here would like to make your acquaintance."

"Has he come from some civilized place?" she asked. "Will he take back a message from me to my friends?"

"It's hard of you to be so down on us, to want to get off so quick again, Miss Howard." As Hamilton said this he gave her what was meant to be a sweet smile.

When the dwarf came in he echoed the same sentiment.

"My friend Hamilton is a thorough gentleman, Miss Howard, a thorough gentleman, I assure you."

They both sat down at some distance from her. The result of their counsel was this amicable call. Inwardly she laughed; if the laughter was bitter it was at least of genuine amusement. After three days of solitude the excitement of this encounter was a strong stimulant; she was too weak for it; it was like drinking wine when faint for lack of food; it went to her head. It was true that she bent her energies to walk steadily over any pitfall, but she did not walk so steadily as she would have done without the intoxicant.

"It's hard upon us you should always be thinking about going. You are not well enough to yet, and, upon my word, it's hard on us to think of losing the honour of looking after you"—this was Hamilton.

"Besides, 'pon my soul and honour, there isn't any way for you to get out till the snow goes. There's a bridge on the line that you couldn't keep your head to walk over—about two hundred feet of perpendicular space between each cross log; and as to the road, since this last snowstorm there are drifts six feet deep, 'pon my honour. Awfully sorry to keep you here against your will, but it's what you might call Providence that is doing it."

After all, she had no reason to know that it was not true.

He went on a little more hastily, as if anxious to avert the grief she might naturally feel at his statement so far.

"It may seem hard upon you, but really we'll be stunningly good to you. It's not half a bad life, Miss Howard; 'pon my word, it isn't. You've not a notion, for instance, what a fine climate it is. You'd be quite queen of us all here if you could think of staying with us now." The "now" was used as a tentative word, not as an adverb of time.

"Beauty and talent and piety would theore twemendouthly in a plathe like thith."

She was getting so angry she could not contain herself. She stood up and faced them both with flashing eyes, and lips drawn tense with nervous excitement.

"How dare you? Do you call yourselves gentle-

men? Do you call yourselves men? Do you mean to say that if one of you were in need of help you couldn't stop the train or get to the station? Do one of those things for me now, and I will believe that you are trying to help me."

Her voice quivered and failed. She felt instinctively that the calm and outwardly kind remonstrance which they both addressed to her was the worst indication of the condition of their wills towards her. Her wrath was an expected thing, therefore it did not move them; it was part of their plan.

They continued to go on explaining to her, in rough, terse phrases, what a jovial life they led, and what a high position any beautiful and pious woman who should join them in it would have. With phrases gathered from such literature as happened to have found its way into their memories, they drew a picture of what she might become, which was a queer mixture of a local divinity and a popular barmaid. She had time to school herself; anger would not serve her. She had not yet tried genial management.

She forgot her artificial dignity of demeanor.

"Look here; is there any one here who will stop the train for me to-night for money, and how much will he ask? I will give my word that he shall have what he asks as soon as I get to my friends."

They told her, with protestations, that if it was possible to stop the train they would not ask for

money, but they hoped she would consider the pain it would give them to part with her. This pain was supposed to be principally suffered by Hamilton. The dwarf depicted his friend's sufferings in such a case quite graphically. He said that blight and mildew would fall upon his heart.

The interview lasted some time longer. She became aware that the men, while they were improving their time by arguing with her, were in a restless state, as if waiting for something to happen. This, considering the surroundings of the place, seemed so very strange, that it aroused fresh apprehension in her mind.

At length there was a sound as of some one travelling up the hill. No sooner had it fallen upon their ears than the two-men, so oddly dissimilar in size and shape, began to bow themselves out of the room with as much haste as was consistent with their notion of what would be agreeable to her.

She let them go without a word; she was filled with a wonder to know what it might all mean.

Some horses were certainly coming up the winding road of the gully. The sound of voices shouting to announce an arrival was heard. Mary stood at the window.

It flashed across her mind now, for the first time, that since the previous morning she had not seen the blue-eyed old man. The gait with which Hamilton

and the dwarf walked away suggested that the arrival was expected by them, and, if so, they must assuredly have sent some one out as messenger.

Riding over the edge of the plain from the mountain road a small cavalcade appeared—three persons on horseback—and two of them kept up a strange foreign-sounding succession of shouts or singing, as if it was their habitual manner of announcing their existence to the surrounding air.

About halfway along the road which skirted the edge of the plateau the two men who were walking met the three who were riding. They all came on together.

When they came nearer she perceived that the blue-eyed old man was one of the riders. At this her heart sank very much. The strangers, then, had been sent for by Hamilton; they were not her friends.

The man who rode first at the head of the party wore long hair falling under his fur cap; he also wore a long black cloak. She could not think, at first, what this long black garment reminded her of, for it was certainly very different from anything else she had seen in these wilds. The man who rode immediately behind him was dressed more after the manner of the other men, but with a distinctly less civilized suggestion about his clothes.

They all came nearer, came into what might be called the yard in front of the three huts. When the

large black-coated man got down from his pony, she saw that his clothes, ill-fitting and grotesque in their adaptation to the needs of the place and season, still bore enough evidence of clerical cut to mark the man as a priest. She remembered suddenly that twice in the conversations of Hamilton and the cynic she had overheard a reference to a certain "Father" who lived at a settlement of Cree Indians. The reference at both times had had a certain relation to herself.

She perceived that both Hamilton and the dwarf paid a bland deferential attention to the priest. They appeared to be making the most courteous offers of rest and refreshment; they were quite assiduous in their attention to him, the pony, and a bundle he had brought upon it which appeared to be his luggage. The priest, who took a sincere interest in the disposal of his luggage, looked up once at her window before he went into the huts. He looked as if he expected her to make some sign of greeting, but, after he had contemplated her immobile face for a moment, he took off his hat. His head was bald; it had a dome-like top, and the brow was narrow. His face, although it indicated good living, was not sensuous. The other stranger was a tall, lithe, sinewy man, with a dark complexion; probably he was, in part at least, an Indian.

When they had all entered the other hut she continued to stand looking out. Excitement was giving

her back her strength. Beyond the foreground of the plateau was a gulf of air; beyond that, the wonderful slopes and peaks of the sunlit mountains. The high mountain, in which in some strange way she had learnt to feel a sense of property, was in sight, towering against the blue. It was the first time since being imprisoned in this room that she had dared to stand at the window in daylight long enough to drink in any thought or sentiment from the landscape. Now she felt again that there was something in this spectacle which drew her, as it were, from transient things to some eternal point of vantage from which the things of life took on a proportion and relation other than that in which she had been accustomed to view them. It was not that the things of life seemed less important as seen from the heights of the sublime—not less, but more important, infinitely more; but, the stress, the importance, adhered to those of them which before had appeared insignificant, and the things which before had seemed to her important dwindled into nothingness. Mary turned away restlessly; she felt that she had been entrapped for a second time into thoughts which she had least need of just then. She needed all her practical faculties, all her earthly sense; in the rest of her life she might have leisure for spiritual consideration, but not now.

For an hour or more she had perceived a very savoury smell of cooking from the men's hut, and

she now supposed that some sort of a feast was going forward.

Sick with the odour of a meal which she knew to be the sign and seal of some paction inimical to herself, she walked restlessly from the window through which the mountain cast its spell, to the further window through which, so far, she had only stood to gaze at night. She looked down into the gully fraught with its fairy palace of delicate device. The waterfall in the daylight was tinged with grey, because of the floating ice particles; the ethereal flame could just be seen, and no more, as the ghost of a new moon can just be seen in the daylight. She could see now down the line of the gully to the valley of the notch below. It encouraged her that in the daylight she could see the huts and the sluice troughs of the digging clearly; they did not seem so very far away in the clear air. She could even see men moving about them.

This window looked upon the blind wall of the hut where the men were eating, upon the gully of the stream and the valley. She wondered if it might not at this moment be wisest to swing herself down upon the beautiful but cruelly sharp masses of icicles, and, creeping from one icy rock to another, gain the road, and fly again to the men in the notch below for protection. Nothing but the fearful danger to life and limb, the certain laceration of hands and feet



which such a descent would involve, kept her from this instant flight. The thought of the homage which the rough men in those distant huts had paid her was so welcome, so inexpressibly sweet and welcome to her heart after the rude familiarities of the morning, that she would gladly go through much misery to seek it.

In her idleness she fell again into transient reflection. The superstition of these men, because it had saved her, and she believed it might again save her, had a beauty for her. She began to search for the cause of this beauty. It did not accrue to the superstition solely on account of her own petty individual convenience; she felt that to look at anything in that light showed a lack of culture. For some moments her thoughts pursued hard after the ideal lying behind the belief.

She turned restlessly away from that window also; she had an odd feeling that the mountain, its sublime purity and its power to wield a spell, had come round to that western side within her view again.

It seemed that after the men's meal had come some form of siesta, for an hour passed and still she heard no further sound. She was idle, she was weary, and she grew more and more reasonably alarmed for herself, having time to realize that some serious purpose must be entertained with regard to her.

She now took the packet of valuables from her bosom to consider its contents and conceal them more carefully. The purse of money and the diamond had been loosely rolled with such treasures as she had thrust into her dress in the sleeping-car, supposing them to be safer than in her berth. The chief of these was a silver cigarette-case. She handled it for a moment as if it were a curiosity, it seemed so long since she had last seen it. Then she found herself looking hastily through the windows to make sure that no one was spying upon her. She wanted to smoke a cigarette; it seemed exactly what she wanted most in this terrible hour of waiting. Instead of doing so, she wrapped up the case most carefully, and concealed it in the inmost recesses of her gown, not even risking it with the other things which she thought might be demanded from her. It was two hours before she heard the door of the other hut open and the men emerge. They did not loiter; they came straight toward her door. When they saw her at the window they all took off their hats. This studied politeness seemed like the opening of some new relationship with her.

## CHAPTER XV.

HAMILTON came in for a minute by himself, leaving the others standing outside. She faced him with a full keen look. He looked at her also, but as if he made an effort and would rather have looked away.

"I am glad to be able to tell you that we have been able to fetch a friend for you. He's a missionary, and has come a long way to consult what will be best to do for you."

"I feel much better to-day," she replied. "I shall be quite strong enough to-morrow morning to ride or drive to Red Keil." She wished to show that she saw no need for the priest or for the discussion.

When he had shifted his feet he said, "We thought that you would rather have the priest here. He can hear all that we say and all that you say, you know. You'll feel more confidence in him, naturally, than in us rough fellows. I've tried, of course, to be kind to you as far as I could, but you naturally don't put much faith in me." He gave a slight deprecating smile.

The evident fact that behind his words another purpose was engrossing his mind caused her in a flash to divine that purpose. Her blood ran slow and cold. This man, on whose notions of honour she had so far depended, had brought the priest to try and force a marriage upon her. Then, with the rushing reaction of her pulses, she knew the necessity of concealing her terror. She knew, too, what she must do—the only course she could take which might save her.

She took his last words simply as if he meant them. She answered with an accent of surprise.

“Why do you think I do not trust you? I have trusted you entirely; you have been so kind. I trust you more than I do the priest or the little man.” She supposed that her fate hung absolutely upon the motion of this man’s will; only to see him among other men was to know that his will would be law. Therefore she repeated, “It is you I trust.” She knew that these words were more unwelcome to him than any other she could have used.

Unwelcome, yet he pretended that they were very welcome.

“I am deucedly glad that you trust me.” He looked at her, as it seemed, with gratitude and protective kindness in his hard face. “It’s better for you that the priest should be here. You don’t know much of the world.” He said this with evident belief in his tone.

A hysterical laugh swelled her bosom. He was the first man who for a good many years had told her that she did not know the world, she who prided herself on knowing it.

To her surprise, Hamilton, with the stiff politeness of an old minuet-dancer, just took her hand and respectfully led her to a seat at one side of the room. The courtesy was exaggerated. The act was significant. It was the beginning of a ceremony.

A minute more and Hamilton had brought in the other men. They each bowed to her with outward deference, each in his own way staring at her with furtive curiosity. Hamilton found seats for the priest and the dwarf; he placed them on the other side of the room, so that there remained a wide space between the girl and her visitors. The blue-eyed old man and the half-breed stood behind the priest; the other old man did not come in. Hamilton stood at one end of the group nearer to Mary.

The priest cleared his throat. He had been regarding her all the time from under his shaggy eyebrows. He seemed to expect that his smallest word would be of vast importance.

"I hope that mademoiselle finds herself a leetle better."

He was evidently French, but she did not take the trouble to offer to speak French to him. She thanked him, explaining concisely that she had felt

extremely ill, but that to-morrow she would be strong enough to go as far as the nearest station of the railway.

The priest cleared his throat again. Except for that he sat immobile.

“Ah, I regret to tell you that there is for that two difficulties.” He looked at her with an air of commiseration, and then he looked indolently at Hamilton, as if he did not wish to take the trouble of explaining further.

In a minute Hamilton began to talk; he had evidently conned his speech.

“Father Paul says there are difficulties in the way of your leaving this place at the present time. You see there's been what's commonly called a big row between the fellows at the Flume and the heathen Johnnies that you honoured with a visit the day before yesterday. There's a deuced lot of bad blood between them, and the only thing they've got clear in all their stupid heads is that you are at the bottom of it; so they've all taken to taking your name in vain, and falling upon one another, tooth and nail, because they can't all agree. Some at the Flume say that you are an angel.” He made her a low bow with what was meant to be an admiring smile. “That, of course, being the fact, it's odd that any one should give the lie to it; but the wicked Chinamen say you are a witch, and that you spirited

away a live cow and a dead ox—strange fancy that, isn't it? Some of our men, again, give you a character by no means so exalted as either of those. It's got about among them all that you've got a big diamond—one that would make the fortune of half a dozen men—which of course is not true; the stone you have is not worth very much."

His voice dropped here. He stopped as if there was nothing more to say at the moment, no doubt to give her time to betray what emotion she felt.

She had risen, and stood up before them, clasping and unclasping her hands, not with an appearance of weakness but of pent-up strength.

"I do not understand," she said. "What more have you to tell?"

Hamilton put on an appearance of kindly embarrassment.

"My friend Hamilton," said the dwarf, "wanth the moth beautiful of young ladieth to give him leave to knock thothe fellowth down who thay that the moth beautiful of young ladieth ithn't an angel."

"Mademoiselle will comprehend that there is no law—that the snow is deep." The words came in a deep slow voice from the immobile priest.

Hamilton began again in the same kindly explanatory way; he was evidently making an immense effort to use language not profane.

“The Chinamen have said it already. They have sworn that when you visited them you were my wife. They have been assaulted and beaten by our men because of the theft of the cow and the beef. They would not dare to touch my wife, or to speak against her; but they told the priest as he came past—they said that if you were not my wife they would have revenge. ‘Revenge,’ I think, is the best term for what they threatened; if I told you their threats, your hair would turn grey—it would be a pity to turn such pretty hair grey.”

“The colour of Beauty’s hair must be preserved,” murmured the dwarf.

“Mademoiselle will understand that to each place is its own code of honour. A man’s wife she is what you call *sacrée*; but a woman who is no man’s wife, ah, it is for the holy saints to help her!”

She looked about upon them with a sweeping glance. It was growing dusk; the twilight and the firelight mingled upon the log walls, upon the rude wooden furniture, upon the straw bed on which she had tossed during the three previous days, upon the little company of uncouth men arrayed before her. There was light enough to see their faces clearly enough—the thin sardonic face of the dwarf filled with suffering and bitterness, the dome-like head and fanatical face of the priest, the blue eyes of the old man, the brown passive features of the Indian, and



Hamilton standing beside them like one of Nature's princes, and haughty, clever as one of the fallen angels.

She let them see the swelling of her bosom, the strength of the passion which she could keep under control.

"Gentleman, I do not understand you. What is this talk about a wife? It is nothing to me that a few poor Chinamen made a silly mistake. I do not understand you at all."

"Take a seat," said Hamilton. "Don't be frightened. We'll lay our lives upon it that we'll protect you, Miss Howard."

She moved further away from them, standing, as it were, at bay.

"I've kept you snug and safe so far," said Hamilton. "You see, I was sharp enough to hide you here before they were on your track. D'you know what's kept you safe these three days? Nothing more nor less than that this place gets the name of being a trifle ghostly. You see, there's coal somewhere half a mile underneath, and the gas escapes through that fissure by the stream, where you see the light. It makes a vile smell if it's not kept burning; and those born asses below think that the flame is not quite what it should be. So this is the last place they'd look for us; but, of course, they're not such idiots as to keep off much longer."

"I am not afraid," she said; "at least, I am not afraid of any one but the Chinese. There is not one of the men whom I saw the other night who would hurt an innocent defenceless girl who appeals to him for protection." She spoke out fearlessly; she had drawn herself up to her full height.

"I wish it were as you think," said Hamilton, gloomily. He looked down at his feet.

The dwarf sighed audibly.

The priest, speaking his periodical remarks, reminded her of an automaton that was wound up.

"Mademoiselle will see that these gentlemen, so good to have saved her life, could not tell a lie."

"What then?" she asked solemnly. "If it is as you say, what then?"

"I told you that those low devils at the Flume had two minds," said Hamilton. "But look you, one's as bad as the other for you; for the grovelling creatures who are looking for you to pray to you, when they find you're a mere woman, will turn all the more nasty for that pleasant little surprise; and as to the others"— He shrugged his shoulders, studiously looking away as if not wishing to offend her.

"My fwiend Hamilton hath ektherted himthelf, hath defended Beauty'th hut at the withk of hith life until our old fwiend here could bwing the pwietht. Old fwiend hath climbed the mountainth and bought the pwietht fwom another valley. Conduct

of both moht hewoic. Beauty, by cunning and cauwage ith pwetherved tho far. It now only wemainth for Beauty to thave herthelf. Harđ on Beauty, no doubt, but nethethlawy."

The priest now gave a wooden smile, as if for that, too, he had been wound up. He addressed the wooden smile directly to her; she felt that an image had leered upon her.

"Mademoiselle will see that this gentleman has ze desire to make laughter. To have so good and so handsome a husband will be pleasurable to mademoiselle."

She let her accents tremble through the room, broken and frightened.

"I do not understand. Oh! what is it you are trying to say to me?"

It seemed that Hamilton had done with his efforts at extreme politeness.

"Well, just this; these fellows may come here to-night, or they may come to-morrow morning. It may be the heathen devils, or it may be the miners, that come first. Whichever it is, there's more of them than of us, and they'll-kick us out without saying, 'If you please.' You see, they wouldn't allow that any of us had any right to stand between you and them, as things are now. You've got to get married; you've got to marry one of us. That's a thing that's understood hereabout. A man has a right to a wife if he

chooses to feed her and keep her. Public opinion backs him up in it, you see. Not one of them will dare to touch you and your diamond when the priest has had out his book. It may be hard on you, as my friend here remarks; but it's the only way of saving yourself, and the quicker it's done the better."

Finding the need of some fierce action at the end of this speech, he strode across to the fireplace and gave the logs a kick. The whole room was brightly illuminated by the blaze.

Mary had retreated to the wall. She stood before them speechless, her hands clasped upon her breast, staring with frightened eyes.

"My fwiend Hamilton generwothly givth Beauty her choith," said the dwarf.

The priest spoke. "Mademoiselle will see that this gentleman, so good and kind, is very modest. He offers to mademoiselle most nobly his name and protection; yet he would not make much of this kindness. He says to mademoiselle, 'Choose.' Ah, he is teemid!"

It seemed that, though all the plot had turned upon it, Hamilton could not refrain from a short harsh laugh at this representation of himself. When he had given vent to it he turned to Mary.

"In short, my dear, so far from sacrificing myself, I shall take great pleasure in annexing you. But I don't expect that to stand for a row of pins in your

eyes. The point is, that you have *no* choice. These villains may come on us any hour, and we're none of us going to die like dogs fighting for you, when we can settle the whole matter by a simple little ceremony." He had said this standing looking into her face, very much as he had peered into it the first night. Now, without gaining any satisfaction from her white downcast features, he turned suddenly. "Bring on your book," he said to the priest.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

MARY saw that the men were beginning to form themselves in a group near her. She was willing to appear for the moment speechless with consternation, and she was in very truth speechless, not knowing how to control her voice and manner for the rôle which art taught her to play. There was a minute's dispute among them ; it gave her respite.

Her mind surveyed like a flash the surrounding scenery as she had seen it that afternoon—the glory of the ice mountains, the snow-muffled solitude of the hill on which she was, the apparent peace of the valley. She could not tell how far these men had lied to her ; that they had lied was evident ; it was a plot, but truth might lie behind. She herself had overheard the Chinaman call her this man's wife, and she had heard the dwarf tell of the battle that ensued upon Hamilton's robbery. Yet her heart threw in its lot eagerly with the unknown danger. It was the known peril which she must fight.

Her lack of high perception made it impossible

for her to act the part she desired perfectly, but she acted well enough for her audience. She found the pose of the head which she desired. She stood before them shrinking yet calm, with swelling bosom, but with steadfast mien. She lifted her controversy with them into a region above the mere question of whether she would or would not do their bidding.

"Gentlemen, I am willing to believe that you mean kindly to me. I am thankful for the protection you have afforded me so far. If you think that my remaining here longer will bring danger upon you, I will go away now, alone. I am not afraid, however great the dangers may be. God will protect me. This marriage which you suggest"—her voice choked her for a moment, the very word "marriage" was so odious—"is quite impossible. It would be no marriage. I have been taught to believe that a marriage must be solemnized in church, and by a priest of my own religion. While I claim protection from Heaven I cannot do what is wrong."

The men had looked at her, and listened.

"You know, my dear young lady," said Hamilton, "that is very pretty talk; but it won't save you, and it won't save us from being kicked on your account if we go on trying to take care of you as matters stand."

She overacted her part, but they did not see it. "Ah, do not speak to me that way," she said. "I

am so young; I am so weak; I am so defenceless. Do you think that any good will ever come to any of you again if you force me to do what I know to be wrong?"

She had a sense that all the men except Hamilton and the priest were now beginning to enjoy themselves. They had expected a dramatic scene, and so far had been disappointed. Hamilton and the priest, then, were the only responsible agents, for in them irritation at the delay was visible.

"We marked before, it comth hawd on Beauty," said the dwarf.

Hamilton jostled him with a muttered exclamation.

"It's all very well"—he spoke in tones of injury—"to ask us not to speak to you that way; but when a man's got his leg smashed it has to be cut off to save his life. If he cries out that it's cruel, that doesn't make it cruel."

"Mademoiselle will see that that which I can do to marry is according to the law of this country. Afterwards, monsieur will no doubt take madame to another place, where madame can again be married according to her own Church, if she will. *Voilà!* what more can mademoiselle desire."

For a moment her brain seemed to whirl; the sense of danger was subservient to the sense of the ludicrous. She did not betray it; it was replaced in



a moment by a torrent of anger which she could not control; her real self came forward:

"Cowards! Villains!" she cried, her eyes glaring upon them, her little figure braced against the wall. "You have set a plot, thinking to dupe an ignorant woman. You may kill me here as I stand—I am in your power; but you will never succeed in anything except in killing me, or letting me go free."

She had again the misery of seeing that this outburst seemed to relieve them; it was what they expected. The nervous tension in the room was less.

"I dare say," said Hamilton, "that if you've anything more of that sort to say you'd better say it. It will do you good, my dear, and you'll feel better."

"Quite like the thort of thingth they thay in bookth."

"If mademoiselle would weep," said the priest, "mademoiselle would recover herself. She would then see the injustice she does to a gentleman so good and kind."

She could have gnashed at them with her pretty teeth; she could have shaken her small fist in their faces. She did not do so, because she had the quickness to see the futility of her wrath. There was a pause, they waiting for those methods for relieving herself which they had commended to her attention, she rousing in herself all the self-control which she could muster.

Again remembering her acting, she folded her hands, and looked at them with white, quivering face.

"Gentlemen, I was angry. Perhaps I had reason, but it was childlike and foolish. I am very much frightened of you. I am afraid you are not honest; if you are, have the kindness to let me go away alone. I will find my way to some one who will protect me. I am not afraid to go out alone, because I am not afraid to die; whether I live or die God will protect me."

She spoke the words with pathos and earnestness, but exactly as she would have spoken her part in any play that contained such words. Of their meaning with regard to herself just then she cared nothing.

The men were evidently annoyed at the change.

"Look here," said Hamilton, "that sort of rot doesn't go for anything, you know; it's just a question of how long you keep us standing here waiting."

"I do not believe that you can intend to hurt me," she said. "I am alone and, as you say, an ignorant girl. I am sure"—she looked at Hamilton—"yes, I am sure you only wish to protect me; but the way that you have chosen I cannot possibly accept. It would not be right for me, knowing what I do about the sacredness of marriage. I cannot do what is wrong."

"Here's the priest come all the way over the

mountain to tell you that it's right." Hamilton kicked his foot impatiently.

She looked at the priest, and shook her head; she looked at Hamilton.

"I cannot trust the priest as much as I trust you. He is not a priest of my Church, and perhaps he has lived so long among the Indians that he has forgotten what would be right for a Christian girl to do."

There was something in the last phrase which seemed to put them at a loss for a word. She went on—

"You are an Englishman; you have had a mother; you have perhaps had sisters. If I were a sister of yours, would you urge me to such a marriage?"

"A man doesn't usually hanker after marrying his own sister," Hamilton laughed coarsely, evading her question with the jest.

The little cackle of disagreeable laughter that went through the group stimulated her into the true artistic passion of the actress. She was, for the hour, the character which she assumed. If excitement made her too voluble, if she slipped sometimes by use of stock phrases into false sentiment, she was still in the main inspired by such great thoughts as were familiar to her by reason of Christian inheritance.

“See!”—she held out small, soft hands—“see how weak I am! You can quite easily murder me, and hide my body where no one in the world will ever find it, and steal from me the jewel that I carry, the only thing that I possess which is of any worth. But when you have done it, what then? There is a God in heaven. Ah! *I* would have no wish that vengeance should come upon you because of this crime; but *God* has said that He will protect the innocent and punish the guilty. Look you, gentlemen, if God does not do it just as we think He might, it is because He does it more perfectly than we can conceive. He may let you kill me; but what then? It would only be to give me the joy of heaven more quickly, and to give you more quickly the pain of hell; for do you think He would let you forget it? The memory of my death would come to you in your dreams; you would think you saw my dead body walking beside you in your waking hours; you would drink hard to drown the thought, and in that way you would soon kill yourselves. Think, then, that the dying hour must come to each of you! Think of that hour now! If you commit this crime, there is not one of you will be innocent; and, when you die, it will stand between you and any hope of heaven.”

She had spoken gently, almost tenderly, but she had spoken fast. They had let her speak; they had

listened, and, although they affected to deride, she had the first intoxicating sip of the actor's power.

"We're not going to murder you"—Hamilton gave another short laugh—"we're trying to save you from being murdered, my dear."

The priest shook his book, shook his head, shook himself. "*Qu'elle est bête,*" he muttered between his teeth; then aloud, "*Mais, mademoiselle*——"

"Beauty makth a mithtake," put in the dwarf. "My fwiend Hamilton ith pothing ath hewo, not ath murdewer. Thlight mithtake that; eathily wectified."

She fixed large mournful eyes full upon those of the dwarf. The torrent of her swift sad words was addressed to him before he could interrupt.

"You, because you have suffered yourself, you think to spend your life making sport of the sufferings of others! Does it make your own pain less to make mine more? May God forgive you! Yet surely in your heart there is something better. You have a greater chance to be good than the rest of us, because, with your pain and weakness, if you were kind and good it would stand for so much in God's sight; but for you to be spiteful and cruel is so easy that it won't count for much any way. Heaven, I suppose, will forgive your littleness of mind, and I forgive you, I only pity you. Ah, there are good women in the world who, if you would only let them, would fill your life with all the comforts that love could devise.

You have been a wicked man, and so no good woman has had the chance to care for you, but for the sake of the love you might have had, have pity upon me now. Do not add to my misery by your gibes."

The dwarf had stared back at her, but the expression of his eyes had changed from sardonic rudeness to fascinated surprise. He began to murmur toward the end that "Beauty made a mithtake." The words were mechanical; he began, as it seemed, to dwell upon some new notion concerning her.

Hamilton had listened and watched with interest.

"I am very glad that you can set him down," he said. "You'll be queen of us all here, my dear, when you can find time to let the priest read his service; we'll let you preach to us all day. Think what a missionary you will be!"

She turned upon him, not fiercely, but solemnly.

"I will never marry you, because it would be wrong. I have been taught that it is wicked to marry for convenience. God does not ask me to do what is wrong. I will not stay in this place, even with the hope of doing you good. I am too young and ignorant and foolish to know how to teach you. You think that you could keep me here alive and against my will. You could not, for God would certainly save me to that extent; He would give me courage to die. You are not an ignorant man; you know what the power of faith is; you know that weak women and children

have endured all sorts of martyrdom rather than disobey God. Look you; I, a weak, defenceless girl, have this faith, and it is stronger than your will and stronger than your physical strength."

For the first time there was irresolution in his keen eye. That which she had said had appealed to his reason. He was aware that there was such a thing in the world as fanaticism which no man could master; besides that, the exaltation of her mood repelled him where a more common form of opposition would have only stimulated him to proceed.

The priest showed himself least sensitive to this big word "God," which she was using as her weapon.

"Mademoiselle will call to mind that monsieur only desires by this leetle service which I can say to gain the right to defend madame. *Voilà!* mademoiselle no doubt works off the pain of it by these strong words, but at any moment the enemies of mademoiselle may arrive. *Voilà!*"

She turned upon the priest now. "When you came first to be missionary here, were you a good man? Is it by living this wild life, finding that you must make some compromise with the ignorance about you, that you have fallen so low as this? Or did you come here because you had such a twisted mind that honest men in towns would not respect you? It is a terrible thing to be calling yourself God's priest, and lending yourself a tool to men who do not obey God.

Have you not enough to answer for in the day of judgment without adding this crime against me to the list of your sins?"

A slight uneasy laugh went round among the other men. In the midst of the discomfort which was growing upon them, it was evidently satisfaction to hear her rail at the priest.

She answered the laugh as if it had been a taunt to herself. She let her voice rise high in pathos, and grow strong with passionate purpose. "I am sorry for you all. I thought that you were brave, but I find that you are only brave enough to come all together, and put to shame one weak defenceless girl. You are not, according to your own account, brave enough to face her enemies for her, and you have not courage enough to deny yourselves the pleasure of trying to dupe her ignorance and triumph over her weakness. Yet, listen now, even though you have shown yourselves to be entirely cruel and cowardly, I believe that you have done it because you live such hard lives that you have never thought how much better it would be to be noble and good. You have all got it in you to be kind and brave if you will; I ask you for the sake of a poor girl, who has nothing in her heart towards you but kindness, to think if the thing you are trying to do is worth selling your souls for. But whether you persist, or whether you give up this attempt, I for my part will



do only what I know to be right; I am weak, but God is not weak. If you save me now, you will put yourselves on God's side, and He will save you in some time of trouble: if you will not save me, I will *never, never* consent to what you ask of me; and sometime God will repay to you far greater misery for this than you can inflict upon me, for all that you can do to me is take my life here and let me go more quickly to another world, which is better than this." She looked round upon them all with flashing eyes. "I will never yield to you. God's strength is with me. I will *never* yield."

Hamilton gave that jerk of knee and foot which more than once before he had given in angry irritation. He muttered angrily to the other men. "I'm not such a d—d ass as——" (She lost some of his angry words.) "Preaching and praying idiot!" With that he gave his leg another impatient jerk, and, turning, strode toward the door. Half way there, he turned back and spoke to her sneeringly. "You needn't distress yourself, my dear, any more about us to-night; we'll leave you for a bit to think it over."

The priest had come up beside him, and, like a man half beside himself with snarling ill temper, Hamilton suddenly began a low violent altercation, of which she could only hear a few expletives. Thus talking, they went out together, and in a few seconds,

with the awkwardness common to minor characters upon the stage, the other men went out also.

The door had not shut after them, she had no time to draw one breath of relief, when the dwarf came into the room again and stood looking at her.

Night had wholly curtained the windows, but the logs still blazed brightly; only the further part of the room was obscure, pulsing with the pale gas-light from without. The dwarf stood in the full firelight. Above his broad shoulders his thin cynical face was bent forward the better to stare at her. The girl stood yet holding herself in the pose of pathetic defiance; worked up with the intense excitement of her acting, the mood had not yet relaxed its dominion over her.

The dwarf looked searchingly at her for the space of about a minute; then he limped out again. This time he shut the door quietly after him.

In a minute or two she heard Hamilton, while talking noisily to his friends, come, and with loud strokes of a hammer, drive a nail or bolt into the fastening of the door upon the outside. She knew that he meant to make her prison sure.

## CHAPTER XVII.

MARY was possessed by intense excitement. For some time she hardly knew what she thought or where she was.

Words began to well up within her mind; her lips formed them, but she made no sound.

"I have vanquished them; I have done it by the mere genius of my acting. I have been more than an actor; I have been the author of the piece as I spoke it. What high-flown language I treated them to! It was poetry! If I get out of this I shall know what my real calling in life is."

Her head swam then with vision upon vision of her pretty little self swaying the hearts of thousands upon the stage. This brilliant involuntary day-dream was fitfully mixed with ejaculations concerning the present circumstances and memories of the last hour, which presented themselves one by one because she had been too overwrought to grasp all the details at once.

All this time she stood as they had left her, lean-

ing back against the log wall, her breast heaving with excitement, alone in the firelight; she was unconscious of fatigue, unconscious almost of any bodily sensation.

Gradually her pulses beat more slowly; gradually the whirl of thought in her brain was less swift, more rational. In the transition she walked about the room, at one moment imagining herself a tragedy queen, at another wondering when would come her next contest with her enemies. For some time she felt secure in her recently acquired power; she could master them always, because she had once obtained the mastery. Then, at last, fear found place in her heart once more. She saw herself and her surroundings in the light of truth, without the glamour that the wine of excitement gives. After that again came depression, when her plight appeared more hopeless than an hour before it had seemed triumphant.

The men had all gone within another hut; now and then she heard boisterous laughter, now and then loud debate. She softly tried her own door; it was, as she had supposed, barred more strongly than ever. She tried the window that gave upon the front; only four small panes of very thick glass it contained, the cross bars strong almost as the heavy casement; without an axe or some such noisy implement she could not possibly have opened it. She went back then, and looked down into the foaming waterfall, upon

the natural jet of burning gas, and upon the precipice of jagged ice on which her hut abutted. This window she could open; it was, in fact, used as an outlet for ashes, rubbish, or whatever else might be cast out into the stream; the water swept all such refuse sheer down under the bridge of ice it had heaped for itself below. The girl stood leaning, looking at the water, looking at the spirit-like form of the gas flame, through the glass. Her resolution was taken; if the men went to sleep without disturbing her again, she knew what she would do. She saw a new way by which to find egress from this window; perilous it was, and yet more possible than descent into the gully of ice.

The hours passed, and at last it seemed that the men did indeed sleep. They had not built up her fire as on previous nights; no ashes had been put on to quench the flames, but no fuel either. The logs that were there still glowed brightly, but they would not last till morning. She was glad of the light at the time, and content that the room in the morning hours should be cold.

She took a last look at this interior. The days and nights which she had lived there had seemed so great a portion of her lifetime that she felt that some transition from youth to age had been passed therein.

The foundation of the hut, a platform of stones loosely mortared, extended from six to ten inches be-

yond the log wall upon the outside. Climbing out of the window, she stood upon this ledge, looking down upon the luminous precipice of ice and water over which she hung. It was easy so to stand while she had one arm within the window ledge by which to hold herself upright. She looked at the ever-moving wall of water, at the flickering spectre of burning gas, and, turning away lest her eyes should grow dizzy, she started upon the short journey that might, for all she knew, bridge for her the space between life and death.

The end of her own hut formed an angle with the long side of the men's hut; there was no space between them, but the jutting ledge of the foundation continued along both walls; her soft bedroom slippers helped her feet to cling to the stones. She had provided herself with an iron fork which she found in the hut; she had bent its prongs upon the hearth-stone; it formed what might be called a toy grappling-hook, and, holding by it to the wooden logs, it served to steady, although not to support, her trembling steps.

In this way, not daring once to look down, she crept along the outer wall of the hut in which the men were sleeping. She felt herself to be indeed a timid dependent creature while she made her slow progress, hardly breathing with terror lest the shuffling sound she made should arouse the sleepers. She

could not hear them breathing because of the sound of the waterfall.

It was only surmise that when she got to this next corner the ledge on which she was walking would continue until she could stand on level ground. Her head swam with hope and fear before she could see round the corner. Then she saw that it was even better than she had believed; the edge of the snowy plain met her here, level and firm. With noiseless foot she tripped to the front of the huts, and for a moment looked at them in the grey night. She saw the fire flickering behind the small window which for the last three days she had called her own. She scrutinized the dark walls of the other huts with keenest apprehension; in one the men, in the other the horses, were asleep. She thanked fate that no dog was kept in the place, and having paid this duty of momentary inspection and thought, she turned and sped along the silent road.

After her awful journey between wall and precipice, the road of soft snow seemed easy walking; after her former fear, her hope now rose again to an exhilarating pitch; after drinking deep of the stimulant of danger, she had now no sense at all of the bodily weakness and pain that still, as a matter of cruel fact, dogged her footsteps.

When she came to the edge of the plateau, the road became precipitous and winding, huge rocks and

trees forcing it to curve this way and that, now shutting her in, now giving vast sweep of sight into the blackness of the valley of the river, or sometimes into the shadowy snow-plains of the notch, with the sound and dim outline of the torrent at her feet. At every turn she looked up and caught a glimpse of the flaming gas spectre. Afar and dim in the distance, it had more than ever an unearthly look.

Before she left her fire-lit hut, she had heard a distant moaning sound of wind in the valley. The sound had gradually grown stronger; all the air was in motion: After the intense calm of the previous days, the wind in itself carried the feeling of relaxed tension and new excitement. Now, as she sped downward, alone among the night-dimmed mountains, she felt the gale swell and increase. The firs rocked and tossed wild arms above her; the forest in the valley seemed to shout like the assembled voice of a great host in the distance. What was strangest was that the wind, in the midst of this wintry scene, was not cold—it actually seemed warm. She wrapped her veil more and more tightly around her, as a boatman furls his sail, to escape the pressure of the wind, not for warmth.

She did not now fear pursuit, but she had an object in using all possible haste to accomplish her journey quickly. It was her great hope that she might succeed in stopping the train. It had been so long be-



fore the men slept that she had already heard the rush of the first train of the night—that bound for the western shore. Her hope lay now in making a danger signal large enough to be seen by the driver of the train from which she had fallen four nights before. She wanted to reach the railway line in time to choose the most favourable place for her attempt.

She felt herself to be running zigzag on the road, almost as a ball runs when it bounds from the obstacles that bar its straighter progress. The snow, not much trodden, was still deep enough to hold her feet firmly from sliding; but it was not until she had descended far that she noticed how much shallower and firmer the white carpet now was than when last she had touched it.

When she came to the level of the notch she glanced about her fearfully. To her right she heard the stream beating upon the wooden troughs of the digging. She looked over the dim reaches of the level, illimitable in the night: no outline broke the whiteness of the ground and the blackness of the air. Only one road lay trodden before her—it was that by which Hamilton had brought her from the railway; but when she essayed to follow it she found to her dismay, that it had been crossed and recrossed by trampling feet, perhaps of the miners, perhaps of cattle—she could not tell. She was fain to remember the general direction in which she must go and run

on. The snow was now so shallow that she felt the ground an inch or two below its surface.

In this way she came upon the railway near to the spur of the hill from which she had descended.

The air came in great surging waves, for long minutes almost overwhelming her with its force and swiftness, as a long wave of the sea overwhelms a bather. Then there would be a lull, a moment of peace in which she could walk steadily, and a hush in the nearer part of the forest, while she could hear the roar of the next surge beginning to the westward.

She did not dare to stand upon the line; she felt that if she did, the wind, acquiring a little more force, might at any moment hurl her down the steep on the other side. She had no means of knowing how long it would be before the train came. She still walked with speed, seeking to find some sheltering rock, in whose lee she might wait and arrange the torch which she hoped to kindle.

So far the excitement of escape and the stimulant of the wind had kept up her hopes; now she began to see how unfavourable this strong wind would be for her torch. The train and the gale were travelling in the same direction; she must hold the torch in the face of the wind.

Shelter was not easily obtained; she was afraid to leave the railway more than a few paces, lest the

train should come. At length, where the hill rose immediately above the line, she found a portion of earth that sheltered her somewhat. Crouching behind it she unfastened from the folds of her silken shawl certain treasures wrapped therein; these were, a stick of wood, a cotton garment, an old newspaper, and a bit of string. She proceeded to tie the paper and the calico to the upper part of the stick. She took out now, for the first time with a feeling of security, the silver cigarette case. There was no one here to challenge her for its possession. She took it out to light one of the vestas which it held in a separate compartment; but it struck her with a grotesque sense of humour that she might now comfort herself by smoking, without any fear of unpleasant familiarities following the act. The mountains, the forest, the wind, the river, would not regard her.

She crouched for some minutes, puffing at the cigarette in complete solitude, thinking to herself how odd a contrast there was between her enjoyment of this little roll of perfumed tobacco and the part which she had played in the scene of the evening. It was only because the men of these parts were some decades behind the times in their notions of propriety that the contrast between a woman smoking and a pious lady would have been so great in their eyes! And yet—and yet—at the same moment with these thoughts, she felt a certain satisfaction in the fact that the great

white mountain peak was, while she smoked, veiled by darkness.

She had perfected her torch as far as she was able. The distant rush of a gust of wind constantly, in its far western beginning, deceived her into thinking that the train was coming. In the lull again, she discovered the deception. The hour was long; she marvelled that she was not more cold. The air seemed almost hot about her.

At last, deceived so often by the mighty wind, the awful rush of the train was loud and comparatively near before she knew it. She had, all through the hour of waiting, realized most keenly that when this moment came all her hope would depend upon the speedy and skilful lighting of the torch. It would have been strange if she had not fumbled with the matches before one was alight; her fingers were numb, not with cold, but with excitement. Yet she was not a woman to be helpless in such a crisis. She lit the paper and the calico; she sheltered them with her shawl until they blazed. It seemed now, from the noise, that she must be almost too late with her signal. She started frantically out from the hillside; the great yellow eye of the engine had not as yet come round the first curve to the west.

There was a distance of about twenty feet between the railway line and the hill; in this she stood, expecting at every moment to see the train. A great surge

of the wind came upon her; her torch, drenched in it as in water, died out.

She dashed again behind the rock; the ragged edges of paper and calico were still red where they were charred. She struck match after match, casting them burning into the rent of the torch. The thing was aflame. She stood once more, a little frantic figure, torch in hand, beside the track, in the vast solitude of night. The fiery eye of the great monster was coming nearer, so was the great rush of the wind. It was but a moment that the torch blazed, then it was again extinguished.

She still waved it—it was all that she could do. She cast her arms about, and screamed with all her might. It seemed that the fiery eye was coming straight upon her. Then the black train was rattling past with a noise that was terrible, as if the mountains themselves were falling. She believed that she saw a man upon the engine swing head and shoulders out sideways and look back at her with curiosity, if not with indecision. Perhaps he could hardly see her in the night; perhaps he was accustomed to strange, half-savage figures appearing in unlooked-for places. She saw the dim lights of the passenger-cars pass her, then she saw the red lights at the rear. The whole great noise and commotion was gone; there was nothing left but the wind and the surrounding wilds.

She went back to the shelter where she had before

been sitting smoking. The very ground seemed much colder, and the rock more inhospitable. She had not Hope now for a companion; Disappointment sat with her, and, for a little while, Despair. She dropped her face upon her small white hands. It seemed to her that she was too small and soft a thing for Fate to mock and use so cruelly. She determined at first that she would hide herself, and die alone among the mountains. She had an idea that she would take revenge upon Something by so doing, the Something that had made such cruel sport of her.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER a while, Mary decided that the only course which offered any hope for her was to retrace her steps to the digging, and throw herself upon the mercy of the superstitious men there. She lacked physical strength to walk to the distant railway station, and she was filled with terror at the thought of being found alone by Hamilton's party, or by the Chinamen. She had no reason to believe that the miners were good men; she had heard them confess with their own lips that they had been together in some crime. Yet she was fain to believe that they would not injure her. She walked very wearily, nothing but absolute necessity gave her strength; she was hardly the same creature that, full of excitement, had come swiftly down the hill in the earlier part of the night. It was quite two miles she had to walk; happily the contour of the land was such that she could not easily mistake her way.

She had not gone far before she realized that the

snow was passing away before the wind as quickly as frost upon the window pane can be melted by the breath. Already there were large tracts over which she walked where the grass was bare; she knew now why, an hour or two before, the snow had seemed so shallow and compact. There was not much moisture left upon the ground, the great warm wind seemed to dry it as it melted.

She began to understand that it might have been true, what the men told her, that there was no way of getting to the station while deep snow was on the ground, because, if it was so transient, it was natural that no preparations should be made for travelling in it.

During the long weary walk she heard the mountain stream running. It seemed to be divided into small streams, that were strewn over the land. She saw sometimes the outline of what seemed a wooden trough or spout. She knew enough to suppose that the water was divided thus for the purposes of gold-washing.

This time the huts belonging to the miners were completely dark; she was close to the long low buildings before she saw them.

She turned away from that in which the men slept; if she could only find a corner in which to rest until morning, it would be better. Two sheds there were in which animals were kept; she heard



the sound of their breath and their restlessness; they were no doubt the ponies and draught oxen. The heavy door of the first shed was locked, so also was the largest door in the second building, but a smaller door at one end she found to be only bolted in such a manner that, after her small white fingers had worked long at it, she was able to undo the fastening and pull it open.

She crept into the dark shadow of the interior. Here, indeed, it was night, no star, no reflecting snow. There were animals in the place; she heard them moving as if to turn and look at her; she smelt their warm breath. While the door remained open, she saw a darker shadow that might be a row of stalls about three feet within; when she had closed it quickly, she put out her hand as far as she could reach, and touched the face of some creature. She could not understand why it was tied with its face to the door. She walked a few paces to the right, feeling her way. Her steps were blocked now by a pile of hay or straw. By feeling with her hands, she perceived that another stall and the head of another beast were opposite this. She was afraid to examine the animals more nearly; she was content to find that there seemed to be some bar which kept them in their present place. She sank down upon the hay, shivering with relief at the warmth given out by the animals and the comfort of the bed.

It was in the dim hour of dawn that she awoke. A man was entering the door; the heads of two great oxen were stretched out from the stalls towards him. Her first glance at them suggested that they were expecting food. The man pushed a large bucket within the narrow opening of the door, then he stepped in himself. It was such a very narrow space, such a compressed stable, that for the moment he was quite absorbed in adjusting himself and his load to the required limit.

The girl had risen silently; she stood up, leaning for support against the hay and against the wooden wall. It was thus, across the heads of the oxen, in the grey light of dawn, that the man caught sight of her.

He stopped in the attitude in which he stood, tilting the large bucket to roll it upon the floor; he remained for the space of some seconds, staring with wide stupid eyes.

"I am only a girl," she began. "I need your help."

The man let his burden settle back upon the floor; he backed precipitately out of the stable, making a curious gasping sound. When he got out it seemed that he saw some of his companions, for he uttered a short shout that by its intonation clearly meant that he was in need of help. She heard steps coming in several directions.

She could not get past to the door; the cattle had stretched their heads quite out of the stalls, and were smelling at the tub which, heavy and full of some liquid food, blocked the rest of the passage.

She heard the men who had come up, speaking; they seemed to be asking, more in derision than in sympathy, what was the matter. Then the first man came in again, with three others behind him. The first man was middle-aged, bearded and shaggy; another had a beard, but was younger; the other two were mere boys. The light from the door was full upon them; they were roughly dressed; their faces, too, were not a little wild and rough.

She was too well trained in art not to feel the influence of the picture. It was hard for her to find any words that seemed to chime in with this influence.

"I need your help," she said. "I need to be taken to the next town. I must get to the train. I am only a poor girl, hungry and tired and cold. I fell off the train, and when I came here the first night my throat was so bad I could not speak; and then the man who was here with you—his name is Hamilton—took me away to a house up the hill." She pointed in the direction from which she had come.

The men, who it seemed had hardly taken in the sense of her words at first, at the mention of Hamilton's name became excited. They spoke to one an-

other rapidly, but so low that she could not hear them.

“No one hurt me when I was up there,” she said; “but I was afraid of them. I ran away in the night because I was afraid, and now I have come here to ask you to take care of me and take me to the station.”

The men looked at each other; they looked at her. A certain incredulity as to the truth of her tale mingled with much bashfulness in her presence. The youngest suddenly dived out of the door. Then they all went out, and stood together just outside. She was aware that they did not go away; they seemed to be standing together like animals taking counsel in silence.

She felt entirely encouraged by their faces; they were not drunk now, as they had been on the first night; there was certainly none of that ferocity towards her which Hamilton had described. She was inclined to think that she was safe if she could get these men to do what she required before Hamilton returned.

She felt sure that there was need of haste; Hamilton would certainly not be long in seeking her. She called to the men in pleading voice to let her come out.

They came in, slapping the heads of the oxen so that they were withdrawn, and turning aside the tub.

She stood in the doorway, and they stood just below, looking at her.

"Give me food," she said, "and then take me to the station where I can wait for the train—surely that is not asking much."

Another man, crossing the enclosure and suddenly seeing her at the door, stood motionless a moment, and then ran to the dwelling-house. In a minute several more men streamed across the space between the huts; they all stood looking at her. The tall Yankee, whom she had noticed upon her previous visit, began to manifest signs of delight which were evidently contagious.

Before the exultation had spread there was also some talking.

"Where's the lady been?"

"Never went away of herself! Old Harry took her up to Wilson's."

Before the full meaning of question and answer had reached their minds, the Yankee's jubilant sentiment had caught most of them. The Yankee threw up his cap, and gave a yell indicative of pleasure. Most of them waved their caps in the air, and made gesticulation, suggesting that good fortune had come to the camp.

It was not just what she wanted; she had no desire that they should be so pleased with her presence that they would not be willing to get her away quickly.

In this demonstration the men who had first found her took no part; in a minute or two she found out that this was because they had understood the facts concerning Hamilton. They began to talk to the others in a low tone; they spoke of Hamilton as "Old Harry;" they seemed to attribute to him almost, if not all, the power that the spirit who goes by that name is supposed to have.

"Won't you give me something to eat?" she asked.

She looked piteous enough. Her face was very white; it had lost its roundness. Her eyes were large and supernaturally bright. She felt so weary and ill that she was almost ready to comply with any suggestion they made to her, and give up the battle for liberty as lost. Nothing but a resolute little will, upholding itself behind all the region of imaginations and desires which at this hour lay wilted like flowers and seemingly dead, kept her firm to the one purpose of reaching the station that day.

At her request for food the men were brought suddenly back to what notions they had of courtesy. One of them, who apparently officiated as cook, ran at once to the dwelling but. The Yankee stepped forward, hat in hand, and with the caricature of elegance, begged that she would accompany him. The breakfast, he said, "if not tasty," would be "square."

She hardly noticed what he did or said; she walked to the other hut, the men following. All the sweep of the plain in the notch had lost its whiteness; the earth and rock of the digging and the water-spouts were bare; the near hillsides were green again; the ground that she trod upon was brown and soft; the air, comparatively calm, was very mild. The feeling of relaxed muscles and exhausted nerve prevented her from taking any pleasure in the change; even the exciting little drama of which she was the principal figure, lost interest.

The Yankee, long of limb and energetic, had darted into the hut first, and now it seemed to occur to him that it was not in a fit state for her reception. He gave vent to his views on this point vigorously, and the opinion of the company on the whole coincided with his. She was left standing outside, two or three of them guarding her, while the others inside made a great commotion. Their excitement showed in certain wrestlings which took place, short laughs, and a snatch or two of song. With ears sensitive to catch every indication of their spirit towards her, she noticed that when more than one air had been started for a bar or two, that which prevailed was a swinging mission hymn; not that the words were articulate, or that any sense of them could be said to pervade the occasion, but the music made its own atmosphere.

At length they brought her <sup>in</sup>. It seemed that the beds had been kicked bodily to one end of the place, in a heap. They gave her a chair near the stove; they set a cup of coffee, and bread and beef before her, on a rude stand. There was a big table at the other end of the room where the meal for the men was set out; a few of the more phlegmatic ate theirs while she was eating hers. The tall Yankee sat and grinned at her with benevolent delight. One or two of the others also stood a good way off, and surreptitiously feasted their eyes.

Thought came back to her with the strength of the food. Both Hamilton and the dwarf had agreed in telling her that this camp was a poor one, containing a set of low and vicious men. Remembering the curious confession that some of these men had made to her, she thought that this statement was probably true. The fact that they evidently stood in dread of Hamilton spoke, as it seemed, for their own lawlessness and low status. They would hardly regard him thus if they were not under some disreputable obligation to him.

Her own troubles were giving her a new heart of kindness. With the power that a stimulated imagination lent her of standing apart and looking at her own situation, she saw the pathos in the lives of these men; the pleasure they took in merely looking at her was pathetic. There was no lack of respect in the way



that they looked at her. After her late experience, she felt that she loved them all for this respect. She would gladly have stayed with them awhile, and done something to make their lives brighter, if it had been possible. A dim vision of a higher plane of life, in which it might have been possible for her to do it, came to her. That, after all, would be something worth doing, much more worth doing than going home where, as far as she knew, no one loved her very much, and working out for herself some individual ambition, and having her gowns and good manners praised in the newspapers. It was partly because physical life was at such a low ebb within her that she felt the craving to do some small thing that was eternal while she yet lived. The eternal thing that she thought of was, of course, quite impossible; but, in some way that she could not explain, she knew that at the root of things the reason of this impossibility was that she was only a mock saint, not a real one.

When she had eaten and drunk, she felt that it would be courteous to go out again and let the men eat their meal without constraint. She told them this; she said that she would go back to the cattle-shed and sit upon the hay. The Yankee escorted her. The oxen, that had now been fed, looked at her with big gentle eyes as they chewed the cud. The air was so mild that, instead of entering, she sank upon the doorstep. The Yankee went back to his breakfast.

## CHAPTER XIX.

WHILE Mary sat upon the doorstep of the shed, two dogs came racing from the back of it. One was a ragged terrier of years and experience, the other a huge creature of mastiff and mongrel descent, perhaps some six months old, whose strength so far had gone to bones rather than brains. In front of them, madly scampering from them for its life, was a kitten. The kitten, every hair on end, darted into a hole scooped out where the floor of the shed met the ground. The terrier, making himself very flat, scuttled through after her. The huge pup, evidently unconscious that he was three times too big to follow, charged at the hole madly with his head, and, after trying in vain for a full minute to make himself small enough, sat up and wept with disappointment. Inside, the terrier could be heard making short runs in the hole and barking with the voice of an experienced huntsman, proclaiming that he knew where the quarry had gone, and that he would soon reach it. In the meantime, in a little hole between the roof and the top of the wall,

the kitten appeared. There she sat, a little fluffy ball of indignation, looking at the weeping pup, and listening to the barking terrier.

Mary was completely diverted; she had a vague idea that only strange unknown animals lived in these wilds. There was something simple and homely about the dogs and the cat which, like the respectfulness of the men, comforted her greatly. Her mind had borne a strain so long that, now the tension had relaxed, she felt like one who, after crossing the desert, drinks from a spring of cool water.

In a minute or two the men began to straggle out from the other hut and come over towards her. They had dispatched their food quickly; the noise that the dogs were making was an excuse for them to interfere.

Tears were running down the cheeks of the great baby-dog; he was whining dismally. It was evident that, in his estimation, not his own size, but some mysterious enemy, had foiled him in the attempt to follow the terrier. Mary laughed—she could not help it. She told the first men who came up what had happened; she would not let them drive away the dogs.

They began to watch the game too. The young dog did not see the kitten above him; every now and then he butted at the hole and scrambled on the ground with his big body, and tried to get through.

Nearly all the men came and stood round to see the fun. They seemed to be vastly entertained at the interest Mary took in it; that, no doubt, was the entrancing element in the scene to them. She made small excited remarks about the absurdity of the pup, the excitement of the terrier, and the security of the kitten. At length, when her interest in the safety of the kitten became apparent, one of the men climbed, caught it, and gave it to her. Then they whistled for the terrier, and held the dogs from springing, while the small atom of fury in kitten's fur arched itself and spat at them valiantly. Such great valour in so small a thing amused them all when their attention was concentrated upon it by the pretty woman who held it. When she laughed, they all shouted with laughter.

This morning, after the warm wind of the night, was like spring; they all felt a tendency to be pleased because of the passing of the snow; the dogs wagged their tails at receiving so much attention, even though they were held back from the kitten. The kitten, under Mary's stroking, showed a disposition to feel herself safe, and began to play with the soft white fingers. The men, at ease now, loitered in half-worshipful admiration, while she told them the tricks of a kitten and a dog which she had at home.

It was just then that a party appeared nearing the

huts; three men were riding on ponies—Hamilton, the dwarf, and the priest.

Mary's first reflection was that now she was surrounded by men who felt for her nothing but reverence. She had, at least, wasted no time. She could not have sped away after her breakfast soon enough to have escaped Hamilton, for he would have met her upon the road.

As soon as the men saw who was coming, their geniality vanished. They began to talk to one another in twos and threes, just beyond her hearing. In a minute the Yankee asked her quickly to tell them what it was "Old Harry" had done, and why she had run away.

The pleasure of being natural and at ease was gone: she became once more a schemer. For an instant she was in miserable indecision, not knowing whether it was wiser to try to set these men against Hamilton by showing his conduct in the worst light, or to appease him by concealing his plot and its failure. Unable to tell in the least which policy would succeed best, she fell back upon the simple truth, told as it would be told by a heart incapable of thinking more evil than was forced upon it.

"I went away from here the first morning," she said, "because I was very ill, and I hoped I should find some house where there was a woman who would take care of me. I walked a long way, and

the only place I came to was full of Chinamen, and they frightened me." (A murmur of sympathy went round the men.) "And that big tall man—I think his name is Mr. Hamilton—came with a sledge, and he said he would take me where I would be safe. So he took me all the way up the hill, to where there were three huts, and I lived, in one of them all alone for three days. He was very kind; he gave me fire and food, and left me all alone; but yesterday evening he brought the little man with the crooked back, and a priest whom he had sent for from a long way over the hills; and he wanted me to marry him—to be married by the priest; and when I would not, he was very angry. So I was frightened; and when they left me alone I climbed out of the hut, and I came down here to ask you all to take care of me, and to take me back to the railway station safely."

The Yankee silently put his hand to his hat, and lifting it above his head, waved it three times, as if he was entirely loyal to the lady, but at the same time he said nothing. All the more demonstrative of the men joined him in this silent gesture; but they did not speak. In a minute, having satisfied their feelings, as it were, by this action, they thought of the next thing they wished to do, and they all went away to meet Hamilton.

There was a loud consultation at the place of

meeting. Mary sat still where she was and watched this meeting with growing anxiety. She felt sure that the men who had shown themselves to have such peaceful intentions, could not join in any plot against her. She tried to feel sure, in spite of Hamilton's extraordinary influence, that they would protect her at any cost.

In a minute or two, out of the group of men and horses Hamilton walked. He strode across the soft wet ground toward her. Even when he was quite at a distance she felt that his step and bearing were not amicable. When he came near, she saw that he wore a hard, tyrannical look. She had often heard the modern complaint that men tyrannize over women. She had always laughed at it as a thing that was absurd. A woman who allowed herself to be tyrannized over was merely stupid, and deserved her lot. But as this man came nearer she began to have a sensation that the ground of all her lifelong security was slipping from beneath her feet.

He strode near, and stood looking down at her with displeasure.

"Why did you run away?" he asked. "What was all that canting talk about the trust you had in me? If you had trusted me—look! the snow is gone now; it is quite easy to get to the station—if you'd stayed quiet, I'd have taken you there safe enough. I let you off last night; I was going to deal fair and

square with you this morning. Now look! after the fool you've made of me, you shall not go."

She had risen. She spoke in pale, uncontrolled anger.

"I will go."

He laughed a sneering laugh. It seemed as if he felt the laugh to be answer enough, for he let it stand for one.

"Do you think for a moment," she cried, "that all those men are going to stand by and see you insult me?"

"A nice lot of religion you talked to us last night, oh yes, 'pon my honour!—took us in, too. You really set me feeling quite cublike and sentimental over you, although I had seen too much of the world to show it. You did it very well." He laughed the same laugh again, and turned his hand to her, so that something he had held concealed showed on his open palm. "What was it you said your name was—Mary Howard, was it?"

It was the silver cigarette-case with her name engraved upon it. She knew that it must have dropped from her dress during her walk hither.

Hamilton, still sneering, looked at her with a glance which he intended to show great intelligence.

"Fell from the train in your sleep, did you, my dear? Oh yes, we all understand. I'm inclined to think there is some more interesting explanation of



your descent from the train than that; and since you've come to visit us, there's no reason why we should be inhospitable because you don't find it as interesting as you thought you would. We don't have much groceries stored up, but I think we can perhaps manage as much as a brandy-and-soda all round to celebrate the finding of this little box. You would not like to have lost it, you know. It's a keepsake, isn't it?"

She had lost some of the violence of the feeling of personal contradiction towards him when she realized that there was a certain logic in his change of mind towards her. She was deep in thought as to how to explain away that solid silver argument against the sobriety of her character. Custom makes the whole significance of an act in itself colourless. According to the only knowledge of the outside world which he possessed, the man was righteous enough in his attitude towards her—she had the justice to recognize that. She had the spirit of the educated woman in this, that she was just, even when her mind was sore put to it to invent a way of escape.

"The case is mine," she said. "It used to be my brother's; and when he died, my mother had my name put on it and gave it to me."

The dwarf and several of the other men had come up now. They were listening with interest.

Hamilton gave a short laugh. He pressed the spring, and laid it open in his hand, the cigarettes showing.

"And these little fellows inside," he said; "they belonged to the dead brother, too?"

Her eyes opportunely filled with tears. She was not able to bring them at will, but pity for herself at being so insulted overcame her for the moment, and she had the wit to turn the emotion to account.

"He—only died last year," she said, with faltering voice, "and I—I have kept them in it just as he left them. I have carried it about always with me for his sake"—here she put her small hand upon her breast—"and last night I remembered that there were matches in it, and I lit them all, hoping that the train would see, and stop for me; but it did not——"

Her voice had entirely died away with the last words. She was wiping her eyes, trying to control the tendency to hysterical sobs which she felt. She let her grief, her helplessness and misery, all plainly appear in her trembling attitude and white, tear-stained face. She had all her life despised women who use these weapons in the warfare of life—she had held it a mean and paltry thing to do; now she was only too thankful to hear a murmur of sympathy from some of the men.

Encouraged by this, she looked up at them. The

dwarf standing beside Hamilton had a look of anxious interest in his thin nervous face; his mind was not made up. The murmur of sympathy had come from the more ignorant men who stood behind the two. She lifted her eye to meet Hamilton's. On his handsome wicked face there was still the sneering snile; in that moment she saw clearly—a flash of perception—that this man was clever enough to see through her acting. He had been shrewd enough to suspect it perhaps since the first day; last night his mind had wavered, but now that the silver box, not the cause but the corroboration of his suspicion, had cleared his sight, her dissimulation was by him clearly detected. No doubt he supposed the deceit to belong to a life and character wholly different from her own, but that he was certain of the deceit, and not again to be deceived, she understood. Some tone in her voice, some line in her face, had made it evident; and now, as far as this man was concerned, she was worse off than if she had not sought to appear religious.

She turned from Hamilton, and looked at the others with silent appeal.

Hamilton also turned to them. "When this pretty lady was up at Wilson's," he said, "she told me that if I'd get the priest and do the marrying, she'd stay and be queen of us all. You see, she got tired of life in the world, had her own reasons, de-

cided she'd seek her fortune in the far West—rather a jolly thing for us, isn't it? I have taken a fancy to the lady, and the lady has taken a fancy to me—at least, that's what she said up at Wilson's. Then we had a little quarrel, and that's what's put her in the pouts now; but, bless her! she'll come round out of it. And we don't even need to wait for that, for the priest he's got to go back to the Crees, so we'll have to make use of him while he's here. Why, boys, if you come to think of it, it's a tremendous lark. The lady's got tin, you know—no end of it, all fastened up in her pocket-handkerchief. You see, when she left her happy home she came off for good, so she brought her booty with her. We'll have the biggest old time out with some of the tin to celebrate the wedding. When we send to the station for the lady's wedding clothes, we'll send for the wedding breakfast too. I'll build a new house, too, for me and the queen, you know. We'll keep open house to the whole of you; and the lady is graciously pleased to use some of her fortune to pay off that score that we all know about. We like to be rid of old scores."

It was this very last part of his speech, more than any other, that seemed to excite and animate them; but to the whole of it they had listened with more pleasure than disapproval. In a wild life it is the unexpected which is chiefly desirable, and it was evident

that there were certain reasons why this plan of his was peculiarly welcome.

All the men were around her now. Mary spoke, her utterance almost thick with her intense loathing of Hamilton.

"It is not true. I have no money. I never spoke to him in a friendly way. I never said these things; he lies."

"You see," said Hamilton, still holding his audience by an eloquence which they seemed to appreciate, "the hitch in the matter's just this—the lady showed me her money. How would I know she had it if she hadn't shown it to me? And we were going to get married as soon as the priest came, as easy and nice as could be; but I said to her, 'My dear, I'm delighted that you've had the goodness to turn up and marry me so handy, but I'll not desert my boys. If this marriage is to take place you must give up a lot of that tin to pay this score that we have on our consciences—quite providential that you arrived to do it, too.'"

A murmur of approval went round the men.

"It was about that that the little lady went into the sulks—not that she minded paying our debts for us, but she got it into her head that I mightn't be what you call 'affectionate' enough, thought I was marrying her for her money. Now, I put it to you all; is it likely, with such a pretty little lady

as this, that a man would want to marry her *for her money?* ”

When he waved his hand towards her, demanding that they should look and see for themselves whether she was not worthy of his affection, their very enthusiasm for her turned all in his favour, and they expressed themselves as certain that no man would need to marry her from mercenary motives.

With consummate skill, playing always upon their very admiration and pity for her, and also upon some secret need they had for money which he promised them, holding himself up before them as greatly generous in being so loyal to them at this exciting and romantic juncture of his own life, he carried their sentiment with him moment by moment.

Bewildered, half-stunned as to feeling, Mary stood listening. It came to her mind that she had read of slave markets where women were bartered away by a glib auctioneer. She was like one of those women now. She had never before thought to pity them much; so novel a mode of marriage had seemed to her interesting and romantic. She remembered once, to have maintained this view, saying that anything was better than the respectable commonplace. The memory of this came back to her like a strange dim dream.

Hamilton's tirade produced in her almost blankness of mind. Sometimes she lifted her head, and said strongly, "It is not true;" but he always covered

the sound of her voice with his own louder words. She looked from one man to the other; her eye found no rest except upon the face of the dwarf. There, where she least expected it, she felt that there was some hope for her. The dwarf said nothing; he did nothing. He was endeavouring to fix his face into its ordinary look of cold cynicism; none of his companions noticed that cynicism was not really there.

At length Mary ventured to appeal to him. She spoke not in the former tone in which she had tried to reach all the men, but in a quick aside, addressed only to him. "You know that this is not true?"

"How do I know?" he replied, exactly in the same tone.

It was very curious, but as Hamilton was still persuading the men, gaining a loud and easy victory for the time, and as they in turn were growling or ejaculating their sentiments upon his words, Mary, in the very midst of them all, held parley with the dwarf unheard and unnoticed.

"You *do* know," she said; "you know that every word I said to you last night was true."

There came a look of almost dreamy reflection into the dwarf's face.

"If it wath, it will be all wight," he said.

"What am I to do?"

There came upon the dwarf's face a new look; it was almost like a sunrise. She was hardly conscious

that by these words she had put herself under his protection until she saw the great pleasure she had given.

She hardly knew what happened in the next few minutes. Hamilton was giving the men an account of the interview in which he said she had consented to marry him, and giving it with such minute imaginative detail that it was difficult, even to her, to believe it fiction; and they, who would evidently not have trusted his word in mere denial or affirmation, being wholly incapable themselves of such a fictional narrative, did not apparently doubt its truth in the main.

She felt almost hopeless of making any further appeal to the other men. If it had been true that she had once consented to Hamilton's plan and then repented of her consent, that was no reason, to men like these, why she should not be protected now and allowed to have her own will. It was clear that the reason why their protective instinct was ebbing, as far as she was concerned, was that her character, as represented in this story, was not one for which they had respect. Nothing was said against her; she was merely represented as easy in manner, indifferent as to past and future as long as she could enjoy the present. She was not at all sure that Hamilton had not, by some subtle insight, hit off her real character pretty truly, and it sickened her to find that, in the eyes of these men, who saw no nice shade of differ-



ence, such a sketch represented a woman who could take care of herself. They were willing to hail her as a jovial companion; their protective attitude had gone.

Well, after all, was it not precisely the thing she had been proud of—that she could take care of herself? and here she was left, as it were, by this company of men simply to do that as best she might.

And all this time every one concerned was standing in front of the cattle-shed, upon the soft wet earth, busy, every one of them, talking or listening; except the priest, who, a strange uncouth figure, was pacing at a little distance with a curious rapt sort of look, as if he might be performing some half-savage rite. The three ponies, still saddled, had been tied to a post; it was the signal for the breaking-up of the discussion when some one went to unsaddle them.

The sky was grey with cloud overhead; the huge sides of the notch looked down upon them; the digging with its flume and riffles lay brown and drear. The huts were of rough unpainted wood; the men wore rough and dirty clothes. The one solitary woman wrapped her silken veil more closely round her, and shrank from them, turning again to the doorstep of the cattle-shed; it was the only resting-place that seemed in any sense her own. She felt that she could almost have bartered her life at that moment for a little space of rest and peace—time to gather her forces to resist the next trial.

## CHAPTER XX.

FOR a time the men left Mary alone; the work of the day was to be done. She wondered at her own defeat. She had been ill, but she considered that she had got better; she had not enough experience of illness to know that recovery from so sharp an ailment was impossible until more time had elapsed. She had not been capable of enduring the exertion of the past night without a reaction that, even amid the extraordinary excitement of her present situation, produced now a lassitude which seemed to her almost imbecility.

An awful fear came across her that some poisonous thing might have been added to her breakfast to produce her present feeling of helplessness. She looked about at the men. They had begun to go about their ordinary morning duties, not however in an ordinary way, for they were much excited; whatever they were doing, their faces were apt to be turned in her direction.

She heard laughter that seemed horrid to her;

she heard them shouting one to another; she felt that behind the shouts was a current of excitement in regard to herself and Hamilton.

She dropped her head upon her hands because she felt hardly strong enough to hold it up. She had heard of people walking in a snowstorm who, just as their lives depended on their exertion, were overcome with the desire to sleep: she felt like that now.

The man who had that morning come first into the cattle-shed was working inside it now. She spoke to him.

"What is the name of the little man with the crooked back?" she said.

"'Handsome,'" said the man. "'Handsome,' we call him." He grinned at her as he spoke; it was the sort of humour that he could appreciate.

Being slow of thought and understanding at the time, it took her almost a minute to think over what he had said and say something in return.

"Will you go and tell him I want to speak to him?"

The man appeared much satisfied, as if the trivial request conferred distinction upon him. He stepped past her with an expression which made her imagine he would tell every one he met of the honour she had done him.

"Wait," she said feebly. "I don't want the

others to come around me; don't tell any one but Handsome."

While she waited, looking about her at the hills, it seemed to her that her eyes were growing dim, for the landscape grew less distant. When she looked up and saw the dwarf beside her, this immediate fear was her principal thought.

"They gave me breakfast before you came," she said. "Do you think they could have put anything in it to make me stupid?" She lifted her white face to him, quivering with fear.

"Why did you thend for me?" he asked. Then quickly, without waiting for an answer, as if ashamed of his cold curiosity, "No, I'm thure they didn't. You're knocked up with being out all night. Plucky of you, you know; but not withe; natural—but not withe. You'd weally bowled Hamilton over lath night, you know. Pwetty much all devil, he ith; but 'the devilth altho believe and twemble,' you know. He wath theared of you lath night, would have given in. Now the devil'th got hith back up—bad thing that; and then there'th the cigawetth."

She felt a desire to speak the truth to this man; but the truth was so difficult, perhaps impossible, to explain; it would need that she should introduce him to a new class of ideas. She was incapable of the effort, and to have made it unsuccessfully would have been fatal to her one hope.

She spoke hastily. "You believe what I have said, don't you? You believe that they were my brother's? You see, when I was travelling I was afraid to put valuable things in boxes, and I was afraid to leave them about in the sleeping berth in the train, so I took all that was valuable and wrapped it in a packet in my breast. It is quite true what they say, that I have money—a little, not much—and my ring; but I could not have believed that any set of strong English-speaking men would rob a weak woman."

The dwarf gave her a sidelong glance; he was standing meditatively at the side of the doorstep. He looked a muscular man, except that his face was thin and wore a nervous look of suffering that implies a certain appearance of thought. He did not look like a good man; but the furrows of beardless cheek and chin were relaxing more and more, not in the slightest degree towards tenderness or pleasure, but into sadness and a mood of reflection.

"They'd die wather than wob Beauty, if they called it wobbing," he observed.

"Do you think, then, that they would let Hamilton bring that wicked priest near me again? Would they not defend me from Hamilton, and take me to the train?"

"Why hath Beauty come down on me with widdleth?"

"I did not like you at first," she said. "Now I begin to feel that you are the only man here who can stop and think. No one would ever do very wicked things if they thought about them first, surely."

"Wight you are, with regard to them all except Old Hawwy—thinkth like the devil, he doth."

She drew a long sigh. "Oh, I am so tired," she said. "I would give my life for a rest. Is there no chance of his relenting? You know him, and you *think*—not like a devil, and perhaps not like an angel either, but like a man who could not see a cruel thing done without pain."

She felt that he was touched by this representation of himself, by the extreme weariness of her tone.

His words were reluctant. "Don't think he will welen't now."

"What must I do?" she asked, in tones in which misery was growing strong, waking her, as it were, from weakness by torture.

She thought he had some project in mind to which he was not wholly prepared to commit himself. It must have been something she had said the night before which had worked upon this seemingly coldest of men to make him think of befriending her. She roused herself now to say again such words as might decide him in her favour. It was a moment strong with fate; she did not let her object appear.

"I am so tired," she said. "I feel as if I could

just lay my head down somewhere and die. I would be so content. But, you know, our lives are not our own to give away like that, not unless we have to choose between doing wrong and dying, and then I think it would be right to die, don't you? But it seems to me so sad. I am so sorry for all these men; I am so sorry for you; I wish so that I were a missionary, or a sister of charity, or some one like that, who could quite rightly stay and make life happier and better for you all. These men—what have they to teach them the love of God when no one loves them on earth! Ah, I wish that all the idle worldly women I know could see what I see, and they would give up their foolish pastimes and come to places like this; and just be gentle, and good and true, and merry in their own way—not singing hymns, you know, I don't believe in too much of that, but just be themselves, wearing clean beautiful dresses, and singing and reading to the men, singing beautiful songs that everybody understands, and reading story books and poems, and having the fear of God always in their faces.”

She had sketched the ideal absurdly enough, because she had really small notion how to put it together. Her words arose partly from the generous impulse of pity and good nature which was natural to her heart, but chiefly from the desire to act a saintly part which had actuated her hitherto. She

wanted now to make him think that she was worth saving. "And now," she went on quickly, yet still in pathetic reflective tones, "it seems so sad that, instead of being able to help these men at all, I should only have the life crushed out of me by their unkindness; for I am not strong enough to-day, indeed I am not, to argue and struggle, even to shriek, or beg them to have pity upon me; and you say, you really say, that you think Hamilton will not relent."

He made a sound as if beginning to speak, and then was silent again. After a moment he did speak, not looking at her, not using attitude or expression that would suggest that he was saying anything important, looking in fact steadily at the man who happened to be nearest to them, about twelve yards away.

"You thee, I believe that Beauty hath fear of God in her own face; worth while to take Beauty to thtation if pother. Wondered how I could manage to get off, but now Beauty'th given me new idea about dwops to make one thtupid. Have very bad painth thometimeth: loth of thleeping dwops—wather dangewouth twick." He stopped; he was evidently trying to think out the details of his plan. In a minute he went on again, attacking the subject at a slightly different point. "Old Hawwy'th going to get up gwand dwink, woatht a whole ox behind the bawn before he bwingth on the pwietht again. Thinkth you'll theweam, and all that. Wanth to



have a high old time going on to. cawwy it off. Won't bwing on the pwietht till after the dwinks. Wind'th going down; fog coming on. Geth dawk early here." He stopped again, as if at some obstruction of thought; then, after a minute, he said deliberately, "Beauty'th knocked up, quite knocked up; will need all her thwength. Beauty must go inthide and lie on the hay. Beauty'th thafe enough; give Beauty my word—thall not be dithturbed."

She saw now that what had seemed the dimness of her eyes was gathering mist. She wondered how it would help her, but had not strength to think the matter out.

"You give me your word I shall lose nothing by resting now?" she asked.

"Go in and thleep, beth thing Beauty can do; give my word on it."

She did not look at him; she looked away where he was looking, aware that there must be no outward sign of compact, but she said in a low ringing voice—

"Oh, I can't tell you how I thank you. Some day—some day, if God saves us alive, I will show you how grateful I am."

She went in, past the horned heads of the oxen, and sat down again upon the pile of loose hay. She did not mean to sleep; she meant to rest, alert and vigilant, until she could think over this new develop-

ment. Weakness and the relaxing quality of the mild air completely overcame her. Her head sank upon her arm, her arm upon the hay; she would just sleep for a minute and then be vigilant again.

The dwarf shut the door, and sat down outside with his back to it. Inside, the lady slept profoundly.

## CHAPTER XXI.

MARY did not wake until she was aroused by a voice. She saw the dwarf standing in the dim light of the shed. One of the oxen was stretching out its long nose over his shoulder, expecting him to furnish food. The dwarf took not the slightest notice of the animal; he was looking at Mary with a strange expression of excitement.

He made a gesture; he said a word—"Come."

She could not gather her mind at first to understand, for it seemed but a minute or two since she had been talking to him before; yet she always remembered afterwards how, in that dazed moment, he had appeared to her—the short broad sinewy form, elate as it seemed with a big thought of some sort; the thin white suffering face looking singularly happy, not at all with the happiness of pleasure, but with a joy in which pride and sorrow were mingled, and, curiously enough, it seemed the pride was not in anything he had done, but in her.

"Why should he be proud of me?" she thought

to herself. It was her first distinct waking thought. "Proud of me! why?"

"Come!" he said again.

She staggered to her feet, pushing her soft dark hair back from her face with both hands, passing her fingers across her eyes, as if to clear her vision. He went out of the shed; she followed him.

Three of the men were standing by the door. As she glanced from face to face, she saw that they were the best of the men; the tall Yankee was there, and two of the boys; they were holding two ponies saddled. It was, perhaps, about three in the short winter afternoon. A white fog had gathered everywhere in the air; it was not dense, but it shut out the hills. She looked about all the other buildings with swift apprehension, wondering what she was to understand. Except the men at the door, there was no sign of life anywhere; the two dogs lay sleeping as if they were dead.

The dwarf betrayed excitement; he began to bustle. Pulling the nearest pony close to her, he pointed out a rude horn which they had fastened upon the saddle to make it possible for a woman to sit sideways upon it. He told her that she must mount at once, and they must be off.

As she was clumsily mounting, they told her what had been done. A narcotic had been mixed with the men's dinner. Handsome had not dared to put in any

quantity which might have lasting effect. It was impossible to say how much Hamilton and his friends had taken, even of the portion given them. They were in a lethargic state now, but no one could tell how long it would last. The three accomplices were going to feign sleep when the others awakened.

"I guess most ladies can ride when something depends on it," said the Yankee. He gave the reins into her hand. "Steady now! Don't give him his head. You've got a mighty lot of saving yourself to do, managing that pony. No one can do it for you."

There was no time lost. The dwarf rode on in front. Even in the excitement of feeling the fantastic strangeness of the deep sleep that had fallen on the busy settlement, even in the fear of riding off into unknown wilds in the gathering fog, upon a horse that she did not know, with a man whom she had not much reason to trust—even then Mary's eye caught something in the faces of the men standing beside her that made her feel again the pathos of their life.

All three men were eager that she should be gone; yet she held her reins tight while she leaned over and shook hands with each. One hand after another held hers. She looked in their faces, and she had again a glimpse of a vision of power quite different from that on which she had thought when she had conceived of herself as an actress, different indeed from

any exaltation conjured up in her brain by the strength of vanity.

As a rider the dwarf was fearless. As soon as they were nearly out of sound of the huts, he asked her if she could gallop as far as the railway, for it was the best bit of road they would have.

After that they went through the plain of the notch as a gust of wind or a cloud of dust travels. The rude wooden horn that they had screwed upon a man's saddle enabled her to cling to her seat. It was a mere matter of clinging; there was no ease in the grasp which her knee had around it; and yet she did not think of this; if it gave her pain she did not know it. In that first two miles' dash of speed she had but one distinct thought; all others were like spectres of thought that floated by. Her distinct thought was, that her pony had got his head, and that she had no reason to suppose that when she reached the embankment she could check him. The thoughts that passed like spectres were picturings of the curious thing that was taking place, for, as the dwarf rode in front, he was more like a misty thing of poetic lore than a real body—so dim the mist made their figures. It seemed to her that they two were like ghosts in stories such as she had sometimes heard of—stories of glens or highways, haunted always by the passing of some typical figures who had at some time impressed themselves upon the

imagination of the race by the striking relation they bore to some side of life or death. She and her companion, galloping madly down this misty echoing waste, were perhaps translated already into the region of types and ideals—he a wicked man, deformed body and soul, with just that spark of true life left in him that enabled him for once to reverence and save a woman he deemed good, and she a woman unworthy of his reverence. While the wild excitement of the racing ponies communicated itself to her nerves, she saw herself passing swift like a ghost in the mist, a degraded mixture of good and evil—good, because a certain level of goodness had been hers by birth, forced upon her from without; evil desperately evil, because she had sought to rise no higher.

Some wild cattle near their path caught the excitement of the gallop. She heard their heavy feet rushing madly; she did not see them. The sounds they made added to the ghostliness. The mist was denser here; she began to wonder how dense the mist of death would be. Was she riding swift, direct, into the region of ghosts which comes after death?

When they neared the railway line, the dwarf, seeing that she had lost control of her pony, brought his own up with it and caught her bridle. Then she knew that the excitement of the galloping had given her foolish fancies.

The dwarf continued to lead her pony down the other side of the embankment and across the bridge. Between the bank of the river and the edge of the forest she saw there was a road which had not appeared while the snow lay. Along this they turned, toward the west.

Great boulders of the river bank could be seen to the right hand, and to the left the outskirts of the green forest; beyond that it was mist. They heard the river rushing loudly, but could not descry its movement. They heard birds and squirrels, enlivened by the mild weather, among the trees, but could not see them. Pretty soon the road turned completely into the forest.

They were riding upon such a road as she had walked on to the Chinese Settlement, but now the ground was moist and dark underfoot. The trees were dripping with the moisture of evaporation. Twilight here had her lair, from which she was presently going forth to the open regions of the earth. The great trees in the mist looked greater than they had done in the morning light; to eyes unaccustomed to their greatness it was an unearthly enchanted place. The firs held their shelves of shade motionless above; the cedars swept their long fans of green downward to the earth. The prostrate logs of a former growth of trees had been hewn away from the trail; the ground underneath was firm



enough, strewn with the droppings of cedar, and hemlock, and fir. The footsteps of the ponies were almost noiseless upon it; huge crows that dived above among the billows of evergreen branches made more noise, and so did the scolding squirrels. In front of her, through the mist, the dwarf rode on.

They were riding quickly, but not with all speed as before. Mary felt now the pain of her knee round the misshapen pommel of her saddle; it was sharp, but it did not distress her. That she was going away from unendurable persecution gave her perfect consolation; where, exactly, she was going she did not know. She was following the dwarf with absolute trust, yet, when she came to reason the matter, she despaired little ground for confidence. This brought her to the contemplation of the dwarf as a person, rather than as a tool.

She felt that she must talk to him, if only to discover where he was leading her, and yet she had grown almost more curious now to discover what he was thinking of, and why he kept silence, always looking on before.

Her spirits were high. For the first time in these dreary days she felt comparatively at ease with her companion, and her manner at once became natural. In her normal condition, although she thought nothing of fibbing, she was an honest little person. Only what she deemed necessity had made her appear other

than she was. Her natural sociability and good-heartedness now came uppermost, but was mingled with the impulse to make herself as safe as possible by working upon his sympathy.

She called to him; she knew only one mode of address. "Handsome," she called; "oh, Handsome! I am almost afraid I cannot ride so fast much farther."

The dwarf peered apprehensively behind.

"Do you think," she asked, "that he will follow us?"

There was no doubt with either of them to whom the pronoun referred.

Handsome merely said, "If he wakth up."

"You can't tell how long he will sleep?" she asked, still in a talkative humour.

"Don't know how many dwopth of thtuff he thwallowed."

She had a curious feeling all this time that she had broken into some high dream in which he had been indulging; that she was losing something of his respect, merely because she wanted to talk; yet she could not go back to silence. It was fast growing dark; crows and squirrels were silent; it would soon be deep night, and the thought was terrible, unless she could find out something of what was passing in the man's mind.

"I will not grow tired," she said humbly. "I

will ride as far and as fast as you want me to. I know it is for my sake you are doing it, and I am so thankful to you."

She heard, or thought she heard, him begin his next words in a tenderer tone, but he hastily reassumed that of light cynicism.

"Beauty mutht go on widing; hard on Beauty; not tho hard ath being caught."

Phrases likē these falling from his lips had so impressed themselves upon her mind in hours of terror, and those hours had seemed, or really been, so long a part of her lifetime, that it seemed entirely familiar to her to hear his speech. All that was odd about it was that her whole relation to him had changed. They were now friends, huddling together, as it were, in fear of a common enemy.

"Twemendouthly lucky hour," remarked the dwarf; "pittth dark in a minute, and the fog—don't have a fog like thith wonthe a year. But bletht if I know how we're to get to the thation."

The very real difficulty of the way now struck her forcibly; hitherto she had left its consideration entirely to him.

"I was so glad, so very glad, to get away," she said, "that I have thought of nothing else, so far."

"Woad leadth thwough the canyon," said the dwarf; and the grim way in which he said it made

her know that the canyon offered no easy pass for the horses. Moreover, the terseness of his phrases began to give her a feeling of new timidity towards him. She began, then, and afterwards, to understand, though from no word of his, that he was making more of a sacrifice, in some way, for her than she knew or could know. She felt that, in her transient relation to him, it was useless to attempt to investigate this. It only remained a dim fact, shadowing her dealings with him, and producing in her a new humility.

“Is it very difficult to get through the canyon?” she asked, as a child would.

“When there’th light, jutht wide on the woad till one getth thwough; only four mileth; thlow work, but one getth to the other end. When itth dark ath pitth, madneth to twy; wockth and the wiver about fifty feet beneath; wockth about theven hundred feet above—madneth to twy.”

“What are you going to do?” She felt that her voice came rather faintly.

“There’th a houthe, if I can find it. Beauty may weth athured I will do my betht to find it.”

There was almost a solemnity in his words, which reminded her that he had said he believed she had the fear of God in her face. She took courage; however absurd his reverence for her might be, she believed it would bring her to safety.

"Are there—are there nice people in the house?" she asked. "Is there a woman in it?"

"Keep Beauty outthide all night wather than take her where the folkth aren't nithe."

If he spoke in an assured tone, he also spoke sadly, and this sadness and constraint of his made her feel that unnecessary talking was out of place.

The pony brushed her so close to a trunk of a tree that she checked him with a cry of fear.

"Beatht can't thee," observed the dwarf.

Whereupon he got down, and led both his pony and hers; not that he could see as well as they, but that he had got a better knowledge of the space required for a woman to ride in.

She knew from his height, from the awkwardness of his gait, that his present progress, holding an arm to either pony, must be laborious and painful to him. She wanted to tell him how grateful she was, and found in herself no expression that appeared to fit the circumstances and his sad mood.

"We're not going faster than I can walk," she said at length. "I can lead my own horse; it would rest me to get down and walk." This last was to make him think that her offer did not imply recognition of his deformity.

But he would not let her walk; he gave as excuse that the animals would not walk quietly, and she might be injured by their feet. In truth, the ponies

did not walk quietly; but she was quite aware that under the dwarf's refusal lay a stronger reason than any he had given: exactly what it was she did not know, but she perceived that he did not want her upon the ground beside him. In his mind he had placed her on some level of life wholly different from his own—a creature to be cared for as he would have cared for a little child, to be worshipped as he would have worshipped an angel. It was not her best judgment that this was the right relation of woman to man, and yet she wrapped herself in this ideal of his only too thankfully.

There was not a sound in the darkness but the roaring of the river. It was so dark that it was almost impossible for her to realize that as yet it could not be six o'clock. They were travelling through the heart of the kingdom of solitude.

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE road turned out from under the trees. She was aware of this by a slight lightening of the oppressive darkness; the mist was still such that they could see nothing. The dwarf stopped irresolute.

"Cwoss woad somewhere about here," he murmured.

"Oh, do you think we can find it?" she asked. She knew it was a foolish question, but he was very patient with her.

"Happier if I knew," he replied, meditatively. "Haven't been very long in the partth."

He had hardly said this when his hand suddenly jerked both bridles so that the ponies jumped. He uttered no word at first, but she felt that the jerk was involuntary, the result of nervous shock. She knew that he hardly breathed for a moment or two after the ponies were quiet again. They turned their heads backward, as if listening; she seemed to feel the listening of the whole group. Another moment and she too heard.

There was the sound of a horse coming after them ; it was coming fast down the long lane between the trees.

She felt herself lifted down from her pony ; the dwarf's nervous temperament was such that in his excitement he did not know what he did. After he had pulled her down he stood for a moment with both arms round her, in agony of protective fear, just as he would have embraced a darling child which some one was going to take from him. A minute afterwards he did not know that he had done this ; she thought it probable that he never knew.

While he still held her, he said, "Wun into the twees stwaight in fwont. Logth lying on the ground ; cwal over them quick, far ath you can, and lie down between two. Keep qufet."

She felt him put the reins of both ponies over his arms ; both the animals began to dance. She lost not a moment in extricating herself from the group : she rushed in between the standing trees ; she flung herself over the fallen logs. These lay for the most part in one direction, so that after crossing a few she knew which way they were likely to lie, and what was the depth of the gap between them. Fortunately in the mist sound carried very far ; it was full five minutes after they heard the horse behind them before it came parallel with her on the road. By this time she was lying, as she had been told to, upon the ground,



between two prostrate decaying trees. She was conscious now that during her own rapid progress she had heard the dwarf and the ponies moving also; they, too, were now quite silent.

She knew that the man who was riding upon that other horse was mad; on such a road no one but a madman could have ridden thus. No word had passed between her and the dwarf as to who followed them, but no doubt had arisen in her mind. Had Hamilton a dog? Had he a lantern? She did not dare to raise her head to look for the light.

The pursuer stopped where the road turned out of the forest. At first she thought nothing but that he had stopped because he had come upon the dwarf or the ponies.

There came a pause in which there was no sound. She did not feel any hope of escape. She laid down her face upon the cold ground, her heart panting within her. The man Hamilton was mad, and she was in his clutches. It was an awful fear, a moment by which all other moments of her life seemed small, it was so big with thought and feeling. The relation of all things shifted again for her now, as it had once done before; for it is impossible in a moment of extreme need not to scan the horizon of human life from a level in which its trivialities are unseen, as the pebbles and flowers of a plain are unseen by the spectator upon the mountain.

A horse began to move. At first, in her agony, she felt sure it was one of those which the dwarf had been holding. In a few seconds she perceived that the horse and rider last come were moving onward. She raised her head; there was no gleam of light such as a lantern would give; she heard no breathing or foot-steps of a dog.

In a minute more it seemed evident that Hamilton, if Hamilton it was, had stopped to look and listen at that point for the same reason that the dwarf had stopped, because it was the beginning of a new reach of the road, and near a parting of ways.

She heard the receding sound of his going a longer time than she had heard it coming, for he went more slowly. She heard also slight movement from time to time, which told her that the dwarf and the ponies were not very distant. After a while she began to hear certain stealthy sounds coming nearer. The feet of the ponies she still heard at intervals; they were farther away.

Next came a soft breathing sound, that reached far, making almost no noise. "Hithed!"

She lifted her head, and tried to answer the sound. She had no sooner done so than the movement began again, coming towards her. The soft signal was made to her again, and again she answered. By this means the dwarf came within a few feet of where she was.

"Lithten!" said the voice of the dwarf; "he'th

gone to the houthe. Will find we're not there; likely come back thith way. Thith time, when he thtopped, ponieth behaved like angelth—didn't lift a foot; ithn't no thort of uthe hoping they'll act that way when he comth back, unleth Beauty'th got thome way of thaying her pwayerth that makth hortheth keep quiet."

She was just going ingenuously to disclaim all knowledge of prayer; then she remembered that it was better so.

The dwarf went on at once. "When he'th in a wage, he'th got no more thenthe than an infuwiated beatht. Beauty mutht lie thtill when he comth back, whatever happenth. Beauty had better go ath far ath the can now. Doethn't matter what Beauty may hear—pithtol thot—all the wacket of earth and heaven muthtn't make Beauty move. No dog; can't find Beauty if the keepth thtill. Then when he'th gone, if there'th no one to lead Beauty, the mutht keep along the woad to the wight, find a houthe—nithe woman."

Before she had time to reply he began clambering away again. She heard him moving at first, without any clear notion that he was leaving her.

She felt inclined to cry out hysterically while he was clambering almost noiselessly over moss-covered logs. That was why she did not answer him at once to say that she would do his bidding, and when she was ready to answer she perceived that he had receded as

quickly as he had come. He was going back to his post beside the ponies. Then some glimmering of his meaning came to her.

She spoke out clearly—there was no one there now of whom she need be afraid.

“Don’t go back to the ponies. Come with me and hide as I do; then, even if he finds them, you will be as safe as I.”

She heard him stop for a moment while he only said—

“Beauty muht go back and lie thtill.”

He began to move away again, and she reflected that it was better for herself that he should; the ponies were more likely to keep still if he were soothing them; and then, if they were found, Hamilton was more likely to be delayed and set upon the wrong path if he met the dwarf than if he merely found the ponies tied.

Thinking only of her own safety, she, too, began to move as quickly as she could further away from the road; for some time she was entirely occupied in her own progress, which was not an easy one.

After some five minutes she began to be afraid to go farther; perhaps she would not be able to find her way back. It was terribly lonely so far away from the dwarf. How did she know but that some pit might suddenly receive her, or some wild animal spring upon her? She sat down upon a log, leaning against the

trunk of a pine tree, waiting to hear if Hamilton returned. She could now just hear, or fancy she heard, the slight movements of the ponies a long way away.

The full significance of what the dwarf had done, and her own selfishness in leaving him, came to her now with that appalling clearness with which thoughts not previously dwelt upon sometimes present themselves to the mind when it awakes from sleep in the night-time.

He had told her what she must do if there was no one to lead her after Hamilton had come and gone again. He knew that he met Hamilton at the risk of his life, and yet he had gone back where he was most likely to meet him, and she had acquiesced.

Her whole mind became absorbed in a frantic desire that he should not be injured, and that afterwards she should in some way be able to recompense him, or, if not that, at least express her gratitude for his goodness. Yes, that was it. Now he was good. He had not been so before, but now it was pure goodness that actuated him; and she—she was horribly without this quality of real goodness. She had mocked goodness by affecting it, but now, for a moment, she felt desperately what it was to need it. Goodness was worth everything else in the world.

With a wild feeling that it would be better to sacrifice herself than lack it wholly, she rose to go back to the dwarf; but she had not reached out to

find the first obstacle that she must surmount before she heard a horse galloping in the distance.

She crouched weakly in the darkness, looking and listening.

It was so true, what the dwarf had said, that it was impossible to suppose that, when Hamilton stopped again where the ways divided, the restless ponies would remain still for a second time. She remembered now what he had said about her prayers. She did not believe in prayers, not in the least, but it occurred to her now, for the first time, that perhaps the reason she did not was that her nature was barren of any real goodness.

Such were the thoughts she had in night and darkness and extreme fear; but her fear this time was for the dwarf and not for herself, so that actually it was of a more moderate sort.

There was certainly every reason to fear for any one found by the man now galloping through the night. No one who was not wholly reckless, lost to all sense of reason, could ride like that. It seemed that his horse and he must have some supernatural knowledge of the dark road.

She listened in an agony to hear him check his horse at the entrance to the wood. Then, in a few seconds more, it seemed strange that they should have assumed that he would check it there. It appeared that even he had no thought that they could attempt

the canyon in the darkness. Believing that he had come entirely in the wrong direction, he rode back along the forest road. She could almost hear him breathe as he rode. It seemed every moment that his horse must stun itself against some tree, or that the rider must be thrown off by brushing against them; and yet, down that long black aisle he seemed to gallop successfully, until the distance received him out of their range of hearing, and silence closed upon them again.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

MARY began to clamber back across the logs and between the trees. Now and then she stopped and listened, thinking that Hamilton might be riding back again. As the minutes went on she grew more secure. Her heart—perhaps a somewhat shallow heart—was full of glee at the escape. She was delightfully young; the rebound of feeling was natural to her. When she had gone some way she called aloud—

“Oh! are you there? Oh, I am so glad he did not stop. I was afraid he would hurt you.”

She had to go much further, and call out the words again, before they were heard.

The dwarf was busy with the ponies. When she did at length cause him to speak to her, he explained that he had led them some way from the road, and could not now find smooth ground by which to get them back again. They were restive. She heard them jumping about. She was afraid they would trample upon him.



The dwarf did not seem to share her glee of relief; but she judged that he was excited, because, when he did get back to the road, he was more talkative, and told her it was a very good thing that Hamilton had got to the house, where they must spend the night, before they did; for now, as he believed they were not there, it was likely they could pass the night unmolested.

He then advised her to walk on, feeling for the road as well as she could, while he followed, leading the ponies; for now that there were no trees on either side, the ponies might get off the path at any time, and stumble badly. She wanted to walk near him; but he insisted on her keeping ahead, only within calling distance, for he wished to direct her to the road.

The trees were no longer above them, and the misty atmosphere was less dark. She felt her way with her feet, sometimes with her hands, against leafless shrubs which grew by the roadside. Everything that she touched was dripping with mist; her garments were damp and heavy, but the air was mild.

When they had made certain that they had passed the dividing of the roads and got upon the right track, which lay up-hill and away from the river, there was nothing more to interest or disturb their thoughts—nothing to do but to keep on a long weary mile or more, until they came to their destination.

Every now and then the dwarf called to her, "Are you there? Are you getting on?" And she would answer. This became so wearisome that it occurred to her to sing. It might beguile his way, and would keep him aware of her whereabouts.

She turned and called out, "I will sing as I go, and then you will know I am safe."

It seemed, as she spoke impulsively, that it would be quite easy to find a song to sing, but the next moment, when she felt it would be absurd not to begin at once, no songs came to her, except those the words of which were ardent love ditties or flimsy lyrics of sentiment. Then she attempted the first that came to her that was not wholly objectionable, but her voice was too weak.

"How stupid!" she cried. "I forgot my throat had been bad."

She found that she need not have called aloud. In his eagerness to hear the song he had pressed on silently, and was close beside her.

His resigned word of acquiescence told her of a disappointment deeper than she could have expected. She could remember many a time when she had resented a slight upon her music, but this eagerness for it humbled her.

When they got up to the house she could not see its size; the dwarf and the ponies had come quite close to her before she found the door; then, as she

knocked, she saw a light inside, and heard a man speaking—it was evident their approach had been heard.

“Who is there?” cried a gruff voice.

“Anthwer,” whispered the dwarf.

She lifted her soft woman’s voice, and said—

“It is I—a woman who wants shelter.”

There was more than one exclamation inside the house. Then the door was thrown open, and a big man holding a lamp was revealed. He was a healthy burly fellow; a white shirt bulged loosely above his trousers. Near him stood a woman in nightgown and shawl. Behind the safe protection of his huge arm, her kindly face looked over with great curiosity. It was to her that Mary looked.

“Oh, I am so glad to see a woman!” she said. “I fell from the train; and I have been so frightened and so miserable, until this kind gentleman took pity upon me and brought me here.”

She made a gesture towards the dwarf. He was standing between the heads of the ponies directly in front of the door. The light fell upon him. His white thin face, under the brim of his slouched hat, wore a look of impenetrable gravity; but there was more than that—there was an elevation in the expression of his features, a look as of some exultant happiness, that did not obliterate but triumphed over his sadness.

"It'th all wight, Johnthon," said the dwarf. "Every word the lady thayth about herthelf ith twue."

The householder had surveyed Mary with a comprehensive glance, and let her pass the barrier of his arm. He spoke sharply—

"I'll take the lady's word for it, butt not yours. It's a pretty smart thing of you to think that your word will back her up."

He was, it seeméd, a worthy honest man, but dull. His wife showed far more quickness and curiosity. She twitched his arm, taking almost no notice of Mary for the moment—

"But ask him what it meant, Old Harry coming, and then him and the girl."

The dwarf had not flinched at the rebuff. He still stood, his face and the faces of the two ponies clear in the lamplight against the background of the night.

"Wight you are, Johnthon," he replied. "Hard lineth if the lady needed *me* to thpeak for her."

There was satirical emphasis upon the "me," and yet the words were more sad than cynical; and behind the sadness there was still the evidence of that strange exultation.

Mary broke in, speaking fast. "But he has been very good to me. He has saved me from that awful man they call 'Old Harry,' and from all

those other men at the digging. They were good enough to me for three days, because I was very ill; and to-day, when I began to get well, this kind gentleman got me away when they were not looking, and we have been hiding in the wood while that dreadful man passed. Please let us both in for the night; I know that this gentleman will take me to the railway station to-morrow."

"First good I ever heard of him," growled the householder. "I think he'd better be off to his own place. I don't want neither him nor his ponies here." He still stood staring at Handsome.

His wife, a middle-aged woman, was still peering through the doorway with a face full of interest. She put her hand upon Mary's arm as she would have put it on a child's shoulder, as much as to say she should be attended to when her time came.

"What do you want?" she asked of the dwarf shrewdly. "If you've saved the lady, then that's so much to the good laid up for you. We'll look after her, and some one from here can take her to the station."

It seemed a new idea to the dwarf. His face changed as he comprehended it. He looked at Mary, and trouble came to the surface upon his face; but he said—

"Yeth; it might be better."

The words were so few and sad, that, for her

own sake as well as for his, Mary's heart rebelled against them. Her vanity caused her perhaps to exaggerate the pleasure it would be to him to escort her to the end. Her vanity also made his silent worship agreeable to her, even though in some moods of her complex heart she was humbled by it. She felt at the moment a romantic pride in insisting upon her trust in him. If her kindness arose from mingled motives, she intended to be, and was, purely kind in her interference on his behalf; and yet, in the days after that, she used often to wake in the night and wring her hands with longing, and say to herself, "Ah, if I had only let him go then! if I had only let him go!"

For he would then have gone quietly away—she did not know where, for he could not have returned within reach of Hamilton; but he would have gone away quietly into the night, he and his ponies, and he would never have tried to see her again.

She did not let him go. She spoke vehemently to the good man of the house and to his wife, saying that her friend would be in danger of his life if he returned to the digging, that he had already risked it for her, that she would have perfect confidence in his escort the next day. The dwarf's face became happier as she spoke.

After a while the man went out and established the dwarf and the ponies somewhere upon his prem-

ises, returning quickly. The woman, a strong energetic kindly person, gave Mary such food and drink as she thought suitable, and then hurried her into another room to go to bed.

It was true that she was anxious to put Mary to bed, but she was also anxious to talk with her apart from the big reticent man who apparently regarded talk as foolish. She had a great deal to say—she lived a solitary life; excitement, and a woman to talk to, produced in her much conversation—but she was too strong a character to be diffuse.

When the girl had told the simple outline of what had befallen her, the woman's curiosity was satisfied, and there was true refinement in the reticence of her comments; but she had a long story to tell in return, of the bad reputation which the men in the notch bore—a reputation for cruelty, for reckless dishonesty, and other evil dispositions. It was curious to Mary to observe how one of this woman's strongest sentiments was that of mortified patriotism that the young Englishwoman should have fallen in with the worst, and not the best, folk of the region. She had not lived, it seemed, more than ten years in that place herself, but she was touchy as to its reputation for civility. She was also strongly indignant against the men of the notch, not more on Mary's account than because this last bit of their ill manners was of a piece with their former history. The principal incident of this history

was connected with a couple of Irishmen who, until the previous autumn, had worked a claim in the notch. The two men had been killed; there was not a doubt in the neighbourhood that they had been murdered, that some of the men at the notch were guilty, and that Hamilton, knowing their guilt, had absolute sway over them on that account. As it was, the Government, not being able to obtain any direct evidence, had compounded the matter by demanding that the price of the Irishmen's claim should be paid over to their families in the spring.

"Oh, and Old Harry," said the woman, "he'd have got the money out of you, my dear, if he could; and if not, he'll wring it out of some one else; for it's power he wants—to have those men, soul and body, under him—that's what he wants. They say it's a demon that's got into him, and when the mood's on him there's nothing that he'll stop at. It's as well you got off as you did, and are not lying cold in your grave, or worse. And the little man got you off! Well, they do say that since he came here he's been the imp to put Hamilton up to the worst mischief, but it seems there's civility in him. Well——"

While she talked she had hastily taken a child out of a small bed. Carrying it into her own room, she spread clean linen of the coarsest upon the bed, and rapidly enveloped the weary girl in a night-dress, coarse, but dry and warm and spotlessly clean. With



a single movement of her hand she gathered all the damp clothes and took them to the kitchen. All the time she was talking.

It struck Mary as curious that her own adventures, which had appeared to her so wonderful as to be almost unique in the world's history, did not impress this woman as more than one of the disagreeable incidents of life to be forgotten as soon as possible. Whether this was the want of imagination and dramatic sense, or whether adventure was the commonplace of this region, she could not tell. The room was small, the furniture scant and poor; yet she felt that she had never before known luxury. She felt also that she loved this woman; but against the prosaic treatment which her story received she made some faint rebellion.

"But, you know, those men did treat me well," she remonstrated. "You say that they are so very, very wicked; but think of all they did for me! Even in Hamilton there must have been a mixture of good and bad, and the one that I thought was the worst of them all has brought me here."

The woman answered as all such good woman do, convinced that her opinion was knowledge, and that there was no other knowledge.

"There's not much mixture in them. There may be a trace o' grace in this poor hump-backed chap—not in the others. The hands of half of them are red

with murder; and the others are mixed up in it. They were afraid to get themselves into more of a mess with the Government—that's what the sign o' grace in them was; but there is not another house between here and Vancouver where they'd not have treated you like a lady." This had been the refrain of all she said.

Moved by one of her generous impulses, the girl put up her arm, and drew down the homely face, and kissed it.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

EVEN while Mary slept her heart was troubled by dreams of Hamilton's mad pursuit. When she awoke she was still possessed by the fear, to which reason now added the knowledge that, if he should come again and find her in this house, his enmity would be aroused against its inmates. She was not slow to remember, either, that it would be well for the dwarf to get within the protection of a larger settlement.

Although hospitable offers were made to her, all things considered, it was admitted that it was well she should start again early upon her journey.

The road which she had to go, including the way back to the main track, was little more than four miles.

An hour after the late day-break, upon the last day of the old year, the girl and the dwarf started to go through the narrow canyon, the farmer and one of his sons accompanying them to the main track, offering to set a watch there in order that no pursuer might enter the pass while they were going through.

A light mist yet filled the air, which was very still. It was not now dense; the foreground could be discerned; the nearer hills looked like dark shadows.

At first the girl, whose vitality was revived by sleep, experienced a deep disappointment; the thought of the wonderful panorama of mountains which she had expected to see filled her with restless discontent with the obscurity, but as she advanced a little way, and found all the scene, as it were, compressed between narrow walls, she discovered that nature had its own beauty in the fallen cloud as well as in clearer air. The boiling of the river below them was just seen, half-veiled in vapour. The rocks with their lichens and mosses, some sere, some green, which rose from the river to the road and above the road on its other side, showed the liveliest colours they could display against the soft whiteness of the air, which was seen to kiss them. The towering hill-side was just visible above, magnified somewhat perhaps—an awful steep, its pines rooted in the rock, their branches, rich and green, draped in the soft lace of mist that pressed upon them above and below.

The railway ran upon the other side of the river; upon each side there was just room for one road. She remembered now that last night was the first night she had slept so soundly that she had not heard the echoing rush of the train between these walls of rock. To-night

she expected to be travelling with it. Her heart gave a bound at the thought, and then again she felt sorry; for even in this place of miserable adventure, she would be leaving something behind which she regretted. What was it? Something of her own soul, perhaps, which she had read into the glittering mountain-peaks; but she thought that that which she was loth to leave was in them by their own virtue, not by hers. And then there was something which she regretted more than their transcendent beauty. It was the dwarf she thought of with this lingering wistfulness. Something which she herself had evoked out of this wretched life made her feel that he was worthy of greater regard than she could bestow upon him. Yet she felt gratitude.

She was walking in front, as upon the night before; the dwarf walked behind, leading both ponies. Her horsemanship was not equal to riding upon such a road without the compulsion of necessity. There was no barrier to the downward slope, and the road was in many places broken and loosened by the last heavy fall of snow. As she could not ride, the dwarf could not. He made her walk some way in advance; he made her walk rapidly for fear of pursuit. All the way she knew that his own progress was very toilsome to him. She began to think what she could do to recompense his goodness. She had a generous heart; a gust of gratitude now outweighed the lust

of possession ; and, in the impulse of the fresh morning, she decided to give her diamond to him. The only other thing she had to offer was money, and she felt that there would be something unkind and unpoetical in offering him that.

Yes, she would give him her diamond ring ! Her bosom swelled with the thought of her own generosity. She seemed quite reconciled to herself again, thinking that she was not such a poor specimen after all, and, for the time the burden of gratitude to him rolled from her spirit as lightly as a morning mist before the wind.

The physical mist was indeed beginning to lift now ; a slight air began to blow in their faces ; the curtains of vapour above them began to shift. The air around them lightened, and then again it grew denser, as if a heavier fold of mist from the westward had been rolled upon them. So thick it grew for a few minutes that the dwarf called to her to stop.

She leaned her back against the upright rock. Just above her, in a niche, sere grasses and ferns stretched themselves out from a tuft of moss, like a canopy of feathers. The morning had been so mild that, finding the veil upon her head irksome, she let it drop upon her neck ; it lay huddled up on her shoulders like a peasant woman's shawl. Her petticoat was short ; her little feet were encased in heavy

child's boots, bestowed upon her by the good woman who had sheltered her the night before. She was so full of her interesting determination to give the ring to the dwarf that she was not thinking at all about herself or about her own appearance; but he saw it all—saw the soft full curves of her throat and dimpled face, rising white above the azure fold, and the smoke-like cap of curly hair. He came up and stood within a few feet of her, holding the ponies.

“I'm sure you must be exceedingly tired holding those creatures. Do you think it will soon be safe for us to ride?”

“Not thafe for Beauty to wide till we get out of the cutting.” He stood meditatively looking down at the river, as if interested in its boiling.

For a moment she marvelled to observe how perfectly at ease she was with him. She had learned to trust the new man within him as completely as she would have trusted some old household servant; yet even now she reflected how at first the native vulgarity of this man had made him appear an even more revolting and dangerous enemy than Hamilton. The powerful impulse which had lifted him out of wickedness had, as it seemed, raised him into absolute refinement. It made her almost mentally dizzy to know that the cause was the charm of her own supposed saintliness. She dared not dwell upon this, but took refuge in the pleasure of her real generosity.

Full of her project concerning the ring, she thought she would pave the way towards it.

"I am so very grateful for all you have done, I wish I could do something for you in return."

His answer embodied a very old-fashioned notion of chivalry.

"Beauty doth not need to do anything. Beauty thmilth—that ith enough."

She tossed her head impatiently. She was going to explain, in piquant language, that that idea was obsolete, that it degraded woman. She did not, however, make the explanation. She looked at his face, at the sad strong lines of his thin features, at his meditative glance upon the water. She realized that she was not going to be with him long enough to educate him into new opinions, and that she need not distress him by disagreeing now. Then, too, there was the constraining power of the habit which she had fallen into of appearing more reticent, more dignified than by nature and training she really was.

"You see," she began, "I am afraid I have got you into a quarrel with all your friends——"

"In a vevy little while Beauty will be at the thation; can telegwaph to her own fwienndth; can go to them."

"Yes, but——" she began. The thickness of the mist suddenly shifted; the air was almost clear around them; they saw volumes of cloud passing above, like



a canopy, through the canyon. "How splendid!" she cried involuntarily. For the torrent of the white foaming water was revealed beneath; and the rocks of the opposite sides, with all the ferns and roots and shrubs, sered into yellows or dull pinks, or living and green, were bright in colour by reason of the moisture; and, above, there was a golden glow in the low rolling cloud, as if indeed they two stood in the very gates of the sunrise itself within those tinted clouds that commonly lie at immeasurable distance.

"It will be ath well if Beauty will move on," said the dwarf.

She knew now that she could not talk to him about his own sorrows or heroism, that he would not meet her on any equal grounds of experience or outlook; but in the pleasurable impulse of her own good nature, she was incapable of pursuing her road silently.

"Yon must be so awfully tired, leading both those ponies. Let me try to lead one; I'm sure I could."

The dwarf smiled the first smile she had seen upon his face, and it reminded her of that concealed sunbeam within the cloud, so tender it was towards her, so selfless and so enfolded in the man's large gravity which she did not see through or comprehend.

All he said was, "Beauty could not lead a pony; pony would danthe, and Beauty would fall over the

wockth. Will Beauty go on ath fatht ath conwenient?"

She began to go on then. She walked backwards a few paces: her good-nature towards him was quite overflowing.

"I wish I could help you," she exclaimed.

"Beauty mutht go on," said the dwarf, "but perhaph Beauty will be kind enough to thing."

As the last word, timid and hesitating, caught her ear, she knew it was spoken with eagerness. She did not hesitate to try her voice again. In the elation of her kindness, she thought only of what she could sing well, wishing to give him the utmost pleasure. She remembered an old Norwegian song, which a friend had roughly translated for her, and which, perhaps because its words had fallen in with an episode in her own life, she knew well. As she went, she sang it to its own native music. Some loud, monotonous sound often gives additional strength to the human voice, as it also appears to do to voices of birds. This time her voice answered to her will; long hours in the mild air had wrought healing, as nothing else would have done. Over the roaring of the river her clear young voice rang out—

"It matters nothing to you and me,  
Oh, friend, my lover across the sea,  
Whether we marry,  
Or whether we carry

Our love unspoken  
By sign or token  
Into the distance heavenly.

“It matters much, my friend, that we love  
With strength that will lift us far above  
The selfish measure  
Of pain and pleasure,  
The transient sorrow  
Of tears to-morrow ;  
It matters much that we love.

“It matters much that we live, my friend,  
Life that love shapes to noblest end.  
For love is given  
A boon from heaven,  
A burning passion,  
The heart to fashion  
For nobler uses to foe and friend.

“It matters much that we hope, dear heart;  
Thinkest thou love hath joined to part ?  
Love's tie is longer  
Than earth's, and stronger.  
Here or hereafter  
We meet with laughter.  
Hope on for ever, hope on, dear heart.”

She had quite lost herself in the song ; she had thought before that she could sing it well, but here, in this misty morning among the mountains, with the suffering of the last days behind her, a new strength of meaning seemed to come back to her through the words, and she threw it into the music of her voice. She was walking on, bareheaded, against the rising breeze, not thinking clearly of anything at all, but

carried away by the music and the romance of her deliverance, her mind was full of happy, half solemn thoughts and feelings, that for the time underwent no process, but lay still, illumining human life for her.

A sound of one of the ponies dancing and shaking his bridle recalled her. "Mercy me!" she thought to herself, "I almost forgot I was singing to him." She was conscious that she had put much expression into her voice. "Mercy me!" she said again, "what if he fancies I had the slightest thought of him as I sang?"

It was a moment before she had courage to look around. When she did, she perceived no such thought had entered Handsome's mind, yet she was elated to see that her song had stirred him. There was a glow upon his face, a return of that exultant light which she had seen the evening before, which did not take the place of trouble, but shone through it, as if, although he knew that the joys of life were never for him, yet he had begun to realize that there was an inner perfection in which he could participate with the noblest.

She turned again, and went on without speaking, elated, and yet, at the same time, subdued.

And now the mist, which was being rolled gently eastward, was wholly gone from their path. Coming out of the mouth of the canyon, they could look down a valley which, from this point, spread out like a fan on either side, and sloped to wind-swept distance in

which grey peaks again arose. Immediately in front of them their road, joining with another, crossed a bridge, and led on for a mile or so to a village of wooden houses which was clear in sight. The river, freed from its rock walls, ran joyously down the valley, widening and calming as it went. Behind them were green wooded mountains, rising from either side of the canyon; behind and above that again, the great white mist which was rolling eastward, with the sunshine entangled somewhere in its folds.

They were to mount their ponies here to ride through the village, and the girl bethought her that, when they reached the village, it might not be easy again to have a quiet word with the dwarf. He was known in the village; he had his own reputation to preserve perhaps, and she had hers. While he was arranging her saddle, she put her hand into her breast, and brought out the diamond.

He raised his head from tightening the girth of her saddle. As she stood holding the bridle, she was wrapping her blue drapery the tighter around her, to prepare for the ride. Then she held the ring out to him, and smiled.

"I would like you to take this," she said, "and use it as you like; you have been very good to me."

As she spoke a sunbeam came from the mist, shifting from the eastern side of the zenith; the sun-

beam fell upon the little curly rings of her hair, and upon the diamond.

The dwarf's face had been red with the exertion of tightening the strap; now it went white. She saw his eye caught by the flash of the stone; she saw that he estimated its worth; she saw, too, that for a moment he desired it with a wholly different sort of desire from that which the lofty sentiments she had expressed had evoked; indeed, she perceived anew what the degradation of the man's life had been, because the value of the diamond for a moment evidently transported him out of all the region of good endeavour and beautiful thought.

Then the dwarf lifted his eyes from the stone to her face. She had once seen a look like that—just once. It was in an old church in France, where she had happened to observe a dying man kneeling before a shrine. It was a look that meant that the eyes sought some vision by which the soul that was in them might be steadied and fixed in the faith it needed for salvation.

“Beauty muht put away her wing.”

It was the familiar half-childlike phrasing that brought her back from a moment in which it seemed to her that her soul within her had fainted, for although she had not moved, though she felt that the smile on her lips had hardly changed, she had undergone a spiritual shock, and acquired some

spiritual knowledge which she did not entirely comprehend till long afterwards.

"No, but I give it to you," she said. "It is not wrong for you to take it."

"Beauty mutht put away the wing. Beauty mutht get up on the pony."

There was a note almost harsh in his command, which she well knew was the nervous betrayal of the pain that any effort of further persuasion would give him.

She put away the ring, and mounted. She rode on over the bridge, and he after her. The sunshine came out more and more brightly upon the hills and upon the valley. It was a mild sweet morning, the last of the old year.

The girl rode terribly depressed; she felt miserably ashamed. The power this man's ideal of her had over him transcended her vainest wish, and she saw herself to be base. She remembered the lie she had acted, even since he had befriended her. The thought that, if she had chosen, she might have been the noble woman that he supposed her to be was intolerable.

She had not attained the moral height that sees joy in humility; she hated it. The air was so sweet and fresh, the pleasure of getting back safely to some of the customary environments of life so great, that she rebelled against her misery of self-loathing.

It was because the impression was deep that the tide of reaction set in full and strong. That which makes a mark on the soul too deep ever to be effaced, is the very force from which nature reacts—not because that nature is morbid, but because it is human and healthy. We seldom understand that the reason of this law is that heaven would have us conserve the energy of our penitence for nobler deeds; we have not faith to believe that this natural reaction makes for righteousness; and so, because of our lack of faith in God's way, we think ourselves wicked not to dwell with sorrow, and, losing self-respect, go on to be more wicked, refusing to dwell with righteousness.

That was precisely what the girl did; she felt that she would have done well to mope over her own unworthiness; and because she could not and would not mope, her mind for the time being gave a spring, like a bird from a cage, away, not only from distress, but also from all thought of high endeavour. Long habits of carelessness asserted themselves. In the bottom of her heart she knew that she must return sometime to the serious longing that had been burnt into it, but for that hour she was the creature of past habits.



## CHAPTER XXV.

SOME little birds with grey plumage were chirping by the roadside as if they thought the time for the making of nests was not far off. On all sides there was the lightsome rush of snow-rivulets dancing through sloping pastures to the river. On mist-bedewed verdure, on streams and river, the sunlight sparkled.

Mary's heart beat high with the access of life. Just as one recovering from the pain of fever feels that the mere joy of living is enough delight, so she, after the brief storm of danger through which she had laboured, felt that to take up again the thread of ordinary life would be a new and delicious excitement. She began to invent the telegrams that she would send at once to her friends. Engrossed in their sensational wording, she smiled frequently to herself.

She did not intend to forget the dwarf. She threw him a kindly sedate remark now and then, but she refused to allow her thoughts to linger upon him,

because that provoked depression. It would be time enough when she came to bid him good-bye to think of appropriate words in which to converse with him to some purpose. She determined to find out his true name and address, and afterwards, through her friends, to do him some lasting service.

So they rode on upon the ungroomed ponies. In her short skirt Mary looked almost like a child who had climbed upon the saddle for the sake of play. The mischievous pleasure of inventing her telegrams smoothed from her round face all those lines that told of age and experience. Even the dwarf looked happier than perhaps since his own childhood he had ever looked. The pain and exaltation upon his face were for the hour blended into a hopefulness that was almost serenity. His short misshapen figure gave him the look of a gnome or brownie in attendance upon the blithe childlike creature who rode at his side.

As they neared the village, upon the road which, rough as it was, bore some semblance to a high-road, they saw three riders coming towards them. In a minute Mary was straining her eyes to look at the foremost rider. It was her cousin, Charlie Howard, who had been so sad when she left Vancouver, and who was now, no doubt, searching all this region for her. In any mood she would probably have forgotten all else in the delight of the recognition; but just

at the time the recognition found her, she was most ready, because of recent reaction, to throw herself into the present without a thought of aught else.

With a cry of delight she set her pony galloping forward, and, as she rode, recognized another friend. It was the missionary who had been with her in the train.

"I am here!" she cried. "I am here! How lovely of you to come and look for me! Now that's what I call chummy."

Her cousin was a town-bred man, with a light moustache, and he looked wonderfully waxen and fair compared with the men of the wilds; but he was a sturdy fellow for all that, and honest. The grey-haired missionary had a stately way with him, yet he looked at home in the wilderness.

"There, don't look at me as if you were going to eat me up," she said. "I'm here, and I'm safe. I nearly lost my life, and my money, and everything else. Oh, Charlie, but I have a tale to tell that will turn your hair grey! Never mind now, though. I'm safe enough, old fellow."

While the cousins exchanged their words of almost hysterical greeting, the dwarf was quite out of hearing, and when he clearly perceived that his lady had met with friends he was in no haste to come near her.

"He's really a most worthy little soul," said Mary

to her companions, looking back to where the dwarf was coming. "Saved my life"—she nodded emphatically. "Yes, he did. You'd have given your best boots, Charlie, to have saved it as romantically yourself. He used to be an awful villain, I believe; but you'll have to smile upon him now."

The man who was riding with them as a guide now came near, and said a few words to Howard and the missionary, in an undertone. He was confirming the statement that the dwarf was a villain; he kept his eye apprehensively on him as he spoke.

"He's a perfect saint now," put in the girl eagerly; "if he was a villain, he's reformed. Pat him on the back; he's done me a good turn, anyway."

She knew perfectly well, even while she spoke, that her words did not in any way represent her real feeling towards the dwarf; they did not even represent the account she intended to give her cousin later, but they seemed to her to serve for so hasty and excited a meeting.

When the dwarf came up, Howard's words to him were civil enough; they had in them that tone of superiority which is the product of civilization, but this was not painfully obvious. The missionary would have ridden beside him, but the girl, overflowing with excited pleasure, kept both her friends at her side talking incessantly. The dwarf could have ridden beside them, but he did not; he fell behind.

The man from the village had ridden hastily back, to tell his news. As for Mary, excitement had brought on the most boisterous mood to which in former days she had been prone.

“And so you came to look after me!” she cried. “How long have you been on the search? I thought I was going to be left to the wolves and the bears, for all my friends cared.”

The missionary told her that her travelling companion was in the village; she had come to every station with them to make enquiries and to await the result of their expeditions.

“The old brick! I would not have believed it of her. Well, that is one to her. And it's quite too awfully good of you, too”—this to the missionary. “Did you think this stray sheep wanted shepherding? How sweet of you! Here's Charlie now—it was nothing more than his duty. You needn't both look so serious, and ask such a lot of questions. Did I fall far? No, I didn't fall far; I fell about five feet, into a snowdrift. Did I think I was getting out at a station? No, I didn't; I was walking in my sleep. Did the wolves and bears eat me? No, they didn't; I never met one: but I fell in with as nasty a lot of men, it seems, as there are in the country. But they weren't so bad, after all. That encourages me to hope that even in the infernal regions there might be some very good company. For I was scared out of

my seven senses, and bound to get off if I could; but then, you see, in the infernal regions, one would know one couldn't get off, and one would have no character to maintain, so to speak." She was a good deal elated to think that a man of weight, such as the missionary evidently was, had come so far for her. She was touched, too, and grateful; but the mere fact that he was religious made her flippancy more broad, because, to her falsely educated taste, it seemed the more humorous. "And they brought a priest, or a fellow who pretended to be a priest, to marry me. You needn't swear under your breath like that, Charlie; it's profane. Now, I assure you, I haven't used a bit of bad language since I saw you last. You see, they had some civilized notions and primitive ideas about them, after all; so they brought the priest to impose on me. Oh, I wish you had seen him. He was a beauty! I've never been quite sure whether he wasn't a stuffed priest, with a machine inside wound up to do the talking. Don't swear, old fellow; it doesn't do any good; if you'd been there at the time, I'd have let you round on them as much as ever you liked. Why, Charlie, you're looking quite white in the face! Take a sniff of your smelling-salts, if you have any. I leave that ladylike habit to my grandmothers. But I tell you this—it was a farce! I told you I hadn't been indulging in any profane language, but I'm not at all sure that I

didn't! You know I talked tall to them; I talked pi'. You should have just heard me talking pi'”—this to the missionary. “They were just at that stage when piety was the only thing they respected in a woman, and I put it on thick.”

She was under the impression that the dwarf, riding behind, was altogether out of hearing, but, truth to say, she forgot to make sure.

Both her companions were startled by what she had revealed. Their pain on her account was evident. Just as one talks hastily, sometimes, to avoid tears, so she was talking now to avoid any expression of sentiments too obviously called for to need expression.

They were passing between the houses, which stood straggling not far from the road. They were built of boards, some of them painted.

“Do they call this an hotel?” she cried. “Do look! Why, it's the merest pub'. What fun! I never stayed at a pub' before. What is the sort of thing you ask for? Rum—isn't that the national drink?”

There was a wooden platform or gallery extending in front of the square, ugly hotel. No one happened to be on it. Quite a large group of men and women stood around the guide, who was telling that the lady was found. They were near a stable, about twenty yards away. They all stared at her now.

The sense of this body of spectators, chiming in with her excitement, made her foolishly dramatic. Her cousin lifted her from the pony, and set her upon the verandah. She felt that his strong arms trembled as he did so. Beside the recklessness of her high spirits, it was also a true womanly sentiment which made her wish to check that tremor in him. She was very warm, and she began to fan herself with one end of her long veil.

“Now, what I want is a good stiff brandy-and-soda,” she announced, “and then half a dozen cigarettes. I think I could almost smoke a pipe with you. After that, we can settle down into ordinary humdrum life again. Bless you, Charlie, what are you looking at?”

The missionary had gone into the house to find her friend. Mary, following the direction of her cousin's fascinated gaze, saw that the dwarf, having dismounted to take her pony, was standing at the edge of the verandah, looking up at her. His broad shoulders and sinewy frame were fixed in an attitude of trouble, almost as if turned to stone. His head, always so nervously posed, was thrown back, his thin face upturned to hers. The first look of the mournful eyes, the first expression of that weary troubled face was sorrow—pure sorrow, the pang of an exceeding great disappointment; and then, as they looked, the soul that could feel sorrow died out of



the face, as certainly as if the man himself had died before them. A minute more, and he was the low cynical fellow that he had been when she first knew him—and worse than that, for there was a scowl upon his face which meant—she feared to think what it meant.

“I think that fellow is a sort of a devil,” said her cousin, when the dwarf had taken her pony and was gone.

The girl did not answer him; she had no further word at that time for him or for herself, no further gesture for the interested spectators. With her head bowed, as if with utter fatigue, she went into the house; and when she found her friend, she said—

“Let me lie upon a bed somewhere; let me rest.”

So they left her alone, as they thought, to sleep; but she lay crouching, shivering with a new distress, thinking of the dwarf's face and all that from first to last she had read in it.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

As the day wore on, Mary came out from her room. She did not betray her trouble of heart. She was not sufficiently familiar with trouble to find natural expression for it. She asked for the dwarf, but no one could find him.

Her cousin was joyful in her safety; even her friend was voluble. The missionary was preaching in a church near by. Evening came; they dined and retired, but Mary did not rest.

At eleven o'clock she returned to the door of the small sitting-room, and looked in. It was a bare room, furnished in horse-hair, and perfumed with the ghost of many a cheaply-filled pipe. There was only one person in it. Charlie Howard was sitting on a sofa, sitting apparently doing nothing. His face looked haggard, almost aghast; and when he saw her at the door his expression did not relax, but he rose as if she must be in need of his help.

"Don't get up," she said. "I thought I had heard you come in."

She shut the door, and sat down on one of the horse-hair chairs, as if his having come in was a sufficient reason for her action.

"I thought you were in bed," he said, with a touch of irritation. "What's the good of our staying here a night if you don't rest?"

"What are you looking so cut-up for?" she asked. "You were as jolly as possible at dinner. That was why I came down. I thought you would cheer me up. Charlie, I'm frightfully in the blues; but I thought you were jolly."

"You are tired; that's all that's the matter with you. You know no more what sort of people you've been with than a child, and now you'd better go to bed and sleep off your tiredness like a child. Go to bed, Polly. I'm in dead earnest. Your friend's gone to bed, and you ought to be with her."

"Bless me!"—she tried to put on an air of sprightliness—"is the spirit of my grandfather abroad?"

"Don't!" He spoke irritably. He sat down upon the small hard sofa, and dropped his face in his hands.

"What is it?" she asked quite gently.

He did not raise his face for a minute, and when he did there was a redness about his eyes, a look of constrained feeling in the boyish features, which told her that he had undergone some shock.

She got up and stood by the bare centre table.

"Charlie, you must tell me; you shall tell me. What's come over you since dinner? You frighten me; you *must* tell me."

"It's nothing." He spoke with the irritation of nervous pain. "There's nothing for you to be frightened at, I tell you."

"I will make you tell me." She spoke with intense will.

"It's only that when I was out I saw"—he made a gesture that was like a shudder of disgust, and then—"that brute," he muttered between his teeth.

"Who?" she asked sharply.

He sat looking at the floor, as if seeing something with his mental eye which he could not endure to see. After a minute he pulled himself together, and said, with an effort at pretended indifference—

"I only meant that I had happened to come across that little cur who brought you in this morning."

She put her hand up to her eyes as if suddenly remembering the pain that the long weeping of the morning had wrought in them. She did not propose to weep now; she only pressed her fingers upon the heavy eyelids. The young man did not see the gesture; he was not looking at her.

He spoke again between his teeth. "Yes, I have seen him. I never knew before what a satanic beast a man could make of himself. Oh——"

The last expletive had been almost a groan ; now he nervously hung his head, as if bearing some part of the shame that every wretch brings upon his race.

After a minute she said, "Why does it hurt you so? It hurts me—I don't know why, but it nearly kills me to hear what you're saying. I suppose you mean that he's gone on the spree since the morning. They call him Handsome—poor Handsome."

The weariness in her voice, the depth of its pity, startled him; he sat up suddenly.

"Poor!"—he was speaking again between his teeth—"poor! you've not the slightest conception what he's been doing. I pray God you never may have; but don't call him 'poor.'" A harsh nervous laugh came now, that ended in the sort of shudder she had seen before. "Keep your pity for yourself. When I think—when I think that you have been in his clutches—in the clutches of him and his like——"

He turned his face from her. She saw that he was very nearly moved to tears. She knew that formerly his susceptibility to emotion had amused her, but now it was not the tendency to laughter which she felt she had to restrain.

"Charlie, if you show such a tremendous lot of fresh fatherly feeling for me I shall be quite fascinated. One has only to fall by the wayside among

thieves to know the value of fellow-feeling." Her voice changed, there was a dreary, nervous ring in it. "But if you only knew it, it is not on me that you need waste your pity—not on me; but on the man that you are calling a brute, and a cur, and a beast." Her face had become white, her lips trembled. "I don't know what he's been doing to-day—I don't want to; but I tell you this—if I were"—she stopped—"something—I don't exactly know what, but something better than I am, that man would have left his husks and his swine behind him as entirely as any returned prodigal ever did. You may not believe what I say, but I know it is true, because I saw it with my eyes; and all those other men that I was with are just like him in that—they could be turned into any sort of beautiful thing that one chose, if there were women to do it, and the women were angels."

He was listening to her now with considerable astonishment, but with no incredulity; there was nothing of that in his character.

"But the worst of it is, Charlie—this is what worries me—I don't honestly know what I have done that is wrong. Now don't preach!" She said the last words looking, not at the emotional face of the young man, but at the missionary, who had come into the room listening to her words as he came. "Don't preach," she said. "I do not believe in the little

humdrum rules and regulations that men make for women; and I should be as mean and shabby if I conformed to what I do not believe in, as any heretic who recanted just to escape being burned."

The missionary had not seen or heard of the dwarf. His mind was serene.

"Certainly," said he; "certainly, such rules are not essential."

Charlie turned upon him with a look of scorn, that scorn which youth in its high-strung moods always has for the casual moods of even heroes or saints. Then he said, with what was for him an immense amount of courage—

"There is no use in your calling rules and regulations humdrum, Polly; if you only knew it, there isn't a fellow in the world who would not admire you a great deal more if you gave up all this new-fangled rot."

The missionary's eyes twinkled. They were grey deep-set eyes; they could do a good deal of twinkling under the grey eyebrows that was not obvious, but the girl happened to catch his glance, and answered it sadly.

"As I value freedom much more than that sort of admiration, the dear boy's words are not to the point," she said, "but his sentiment is all right. What he means to say is, that if something in me were different from what it is, one human being

who was evolving on to a higher plane need not have fallen back into the beast."

She sat down and put her elbows upon the table. The frock that her friend had lent her was too large, and the sleeves fell back from her white wrists. She leaned her chin upon her hands, and looked at the missionary. There was nothing now of that vibrating pathos in her voice which had pierced the hearts of her persecutors when she turned at bay, because she had no thought now of the effect of her speech upon her hearers—the hard dull tone of self-absorbed trouble was hers.

"It is only one man," she said, "one little misshapen man; but he was my friend, and he's lost. I never knew what on earth you missionaries meant when you talked about a soul being lost, before. Now I know, for I've seen it. It does not mean any rubbish about St. Peter and the keys, but it means something that, when you've seen it, haunts you all the rest of your life."

For a moment she looked at the stained garish wall-paper as if the dreary future that stretched before her were as hopeless a sight.

"And the thing, you know, that makes my present frame of mind so tiresome is that I really don't know exactly what to repent of. If I could see some reformation to accomplish in myself, *that* would be almost satisfying, but I am sure my way of look-



ing at things has always been the most sensible. And as for humbugging those men by talking pi—it was their fault for requiring it.”

“Naturally you are satisfied with yourself”—he spoke in a consoling voice—“having no standard higher than your own opinion.”

“I can have a high standard without being pious,” she said defiantly. “These backwoodsmen are simply behind the times. They were brought up to associate what Charlie calls ‘new-fangled notions’ in woman with the loss of goodness, just as it used to be supposed that sunlight put out fire. Had they lived in the last ten years they would have learned to distinguish between fact and superstition. That explains most of it.” Her voice lingered diffidently upon the word “most.”

“It doesn’t explain it all,” said Charlie, impatient and authoritative. “I’m not given to religion myself, but I must say I think a woman ought to be religious.”

“Even your *sentiments* have a false ring now,” she answered.

“Well, I mean—I dare say men would be the better for being religious too.”

“You think that you would be the better for something within your reach that you don’t try to get. That, at least, is a depth of degradation to which I never sank.” The steady contempt of her voice

entirely confused him. "Charlie, it is just that pure unadulterated idiotic rubbish that you're talking that is enough to make every sensible woman a free-thinker in religion, and custom, and everything else. Now tell me!"—she turned to the missionary—"tell me why, to fetch those men, I was forced to be pious."

The missionary was standing with his back against the wall; he looked down at her, speaking as if to a friend.

"Don't you see that if you invent your own ideal it must vary as you vary with every phase of thought? Piety involves a standard of beautiful character entirely outside yourself, and higher up. What you may be without this perfect standard, those men could only guess at; and evil minds will always guess at evil. What you must be, if genuinely religious, all have some dim notion of. It is this holy ideal reflected in good women that men worship in such sort that they can subdue selfishness in its presence. Without it"—he looked down at her with a kindly smile—"you are like an eclipsed moon, lit by no ray of higher light. You are not worthy of such worship as this. The sort of worship men can give you is such as the glutton gives to his food, the miser to his gold, the artist to his thing of beauty—for which he will barter the world, truly, but only that he may indulge himself. You

are nothing more than an object of selfish delight; and, except for a little while, in some society whose laws have been made in deference to holy women, nothing can save you from becoming the victim of man's selfishness, because he is stronger than you."

"It is modern progress, not Christianity, that has raised women," she said. No troubled soul ever repeated its creed more sincerely.

He smiled shrewdly. "Does progress reign in any land where woman has not derived her strength and beauty from the imitation of the Christian ideal? Has there been any distinct progress in any nation which has not exalted woman for the sake of the Christ and his mother?"

"It is only since we began to shake ourselves free from the superstitions of religion that we have *begun* to have laws that are just to women." She spoke eagerly. "And there is much to do yet to make them just."

"There is much to do yet to make laws just to women, because the germ of the ideal higher life develops very slowly in Christian nations; we are only by degrees learning that the holy woman has her place, not only in the Church or at the hearth, but in the market-place, in the court of law, in the chambers of government. In all these places, wherever God's voice is calling women to serve their fellow-creatures

—there, if they serve also this high ideal, men will in all respects become their unselfish allies.”

She looked at him with kindness, but there was no lifting of the cloud of trouble from her face.

“Considering that you are a missionary, and can’t help preaching, you speak very fairly ; but ”—she gave a gesture of restless pain—“these ideals have been created by the developing moral consciousness of the world, not sent down from heaven, and we are now ready for a much higher ideal than nineteen hundred years ago. We want to get rid of the superstitions that grew up then.”

“I think, fair lady ”—he spoke quaintly—“that what you call the moral consciousness of the race is the outcome of man’s dealing with the spirit of God, is indeed that very kingdom of Heaven which is within us ; but if, as you think, the religious consciousness is nothing more than moral development plus superstitions that drop off as the race grows older, still my argument does not alter. You believe that the ideal given us in the Gospels was the highest outcome of the moral consciousness of mankind in its then development : I say that—if only to subdue the selfishness in men—there is need that women should still conform to this same ideal—higher and holier if you will by nineteen hundred years, because as we rise in the moral scale our interpretation of the ideal must rise. If you take from it the Divine inspiration that

you call the supernatural, you *only* take from yourself any Divine help in attaining to it. You cannot by removing the supernatural element lower the ideal. The ideal which the moral consciousness of the race has once developed must grow: it may be seen first on one side and then upon another, but at heart it can not change; if it did there would be no law of progress, evolution would be impossible."

She rose with an incredulous laugh, and, having risen, she felt no relief from the movement and hoped for none by leaving the room. There were rude noises to be heard outside the house—noises of drunkards passing by. She went to the window, peeping from the blind in mere idleness; then, sickened at the thought of whom she might see, she turned in a moment, and, out of mere irritation, took up St. Paul upon the theme of women, and hurled it at her companions.

"Whose writing has done more to retard the cause of women?" she asked fiercely.

"It is not St. Paul's fault if many of his followers have misapplied teaching fitting to one short age."

"Do you admit"—she was surprised into an almost joyful laugh—"do you admit that the greater number of Christians are fools?"

"Say rather, silly sheep, obstinately straying after any leaders who, to save the expense of constant thought and new decisions for each fresh phase of

circumstance, teach that piety consists in some old rule of life, rather than in that attitude of the soul which ever seeks fresh wisdom from above."

She felt very restless. In the sounds without she fancied she heard some hideous scene connected with the debauch of the dwarf. She turned towards her friends, who remained passively watching her, with a sense of supreme relief, almost of affection for them both in the knowledge that each in his own good way was good to the heart's core.

"Could your ideal woman treat men as if she and they were rational creatures, instead of being herself an idiotic piece of respectability, like our old-fashioned women?" She was speaking only in idle defiance.

He went on answering with a quaint good humour which betokened the inward peace that perplexed her.

"If you give your heart to Heaven, fair lady, that heart will be your surest guide; but if you ask my opinion, I would say there is nothing that a good man may do that a good woman may not do also."

She began to speak, but stopped suddenly.

A wild yell below the window, the sound of many feet and voices, of howls and execrations mingling all at once together caused her heart to sink in an awful fear of some unknown deed of violence. The men sprang to the window, throwing it open to look

down on the scene beneath. Then, conscious that they attracted attention, they extinguished the lamp.

Nothing of importance, nothing more than usual riot was taking place. A gambling den had discharged its occupants, who on their way homeward had fallen out with one another. The dwarf was not among them, but in Mary's imaginative fear he was there.

She did not go to the window. The cool night air rushed in; she saw the dark figures of her friends dimly outlined against the gleam of lanterns passing without. She held by a chair for support, trembling, faint, heartsick. She said to herself that her nerves were unstrung by the scenes through which she had passed. She clenched her teeth in the effort to master the panic of her heart. She heard a drunken woman screaming, swearing, fighting as it seemed. She knew now that once and for ever it had been branded upon her imagination what it might be like to be dragged down to the hell from out of which this woman shrieked. Never, never again could she hear such a sound without feeling this passion of fear and pity. There was no impulse in her as yet to help. She only cowered before the vivid realization of this hour as before some spectre which had suddenly manifested itself. Yet she found she was still straining her ears for a sound which, even in this moment of abject misery, could

increase her pain. She sought, as it were, among the confused howlings for the voice of Handsome. So acute did her hearing become that she seemed to count the men who were below by their voices—to be able to estimate the degree of beastliness into which each drunken wretch had fallen. She did not hear the voice she listened for, but for Handsome's sake, it was pity only that she felt for these men. She knew now that never, never again could she see a man degraded from man's estate without knowing that women might have held him up, may, rather, exalted him, had women been pure enough to do the work that was given them to do. She felt chill with a sense of responsibility, which she feared was a shadow from which she could never escape. She pressed her hands upon her eyes, as if to extinguish the thought, and then suddenly, against the darkness, a face, lit by the light of the past morning, flashed before her burning brain. It was the face of the dwarf, in his exultation over bringing her safely on her journey, in his wistful effort to refuse the diamond, seeking strength and comfort by an adoring gaze upon her own beauty. For a moment, by a freak of the excited brain, she stood again face to face with him.

“Handsome,” she moaned, “poor Handsome!” And then, in the darkness, she sank kneeling, in a passion of tears that for the time brought relief.



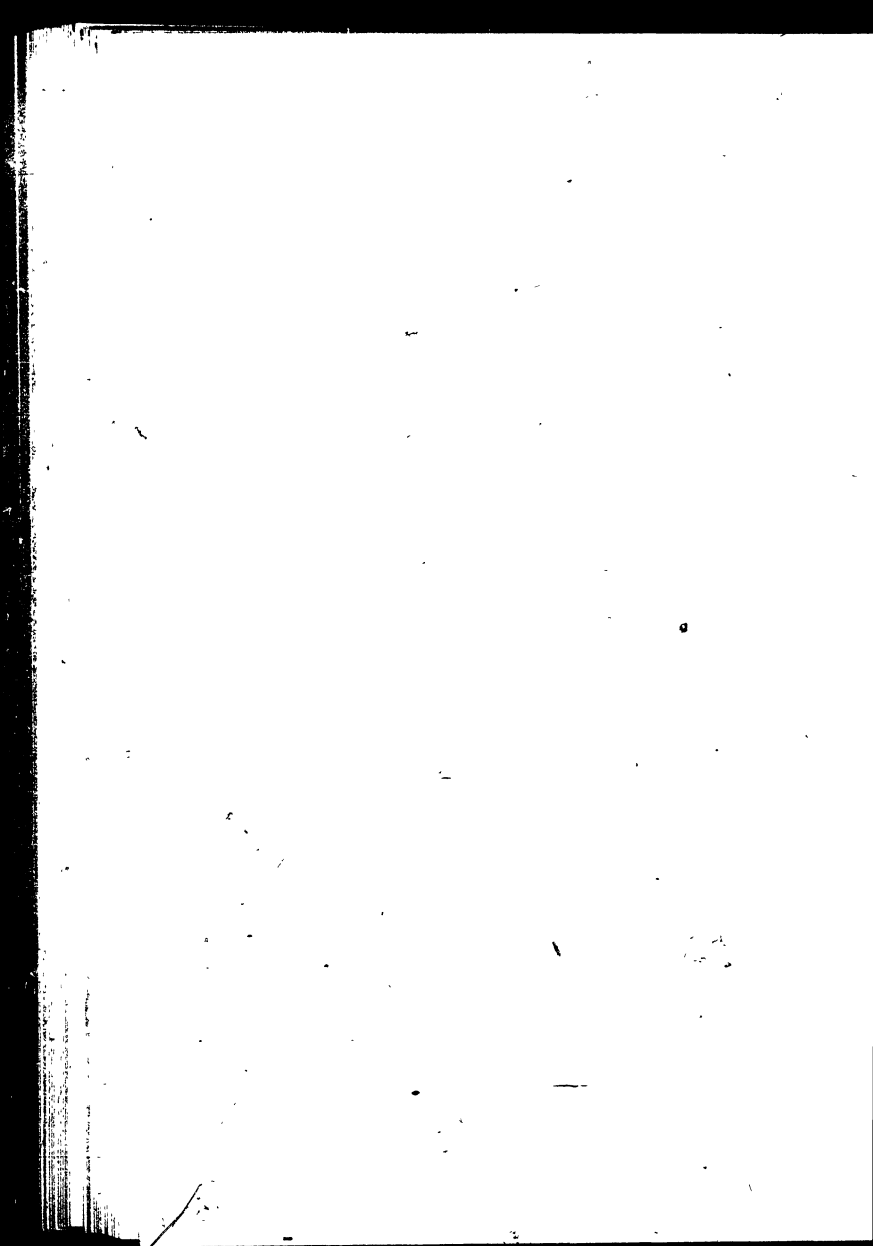
Her two friends, with their heads outside the window, were speaking to one another.

"I thought they might have risen up to catch and lynch him," said Charlie. He was speaking about the dwarf to the missionary.

But the other answered didactically, "It is more often in books than in real life that wickedness comes to a speedy end. It drags out a long course of misery here, as if to teach us that in this life, or in any other, sin can find no easy stopping-place."

The next day another year had begun, and these travellers set out perforce upon another stage of their journey.

THE END.



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