Ryan Marah Ellis

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Содержание

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PROLOGUE

"That girl the murderer of a man – of Lee Holly! That pretty little girl? Bosh! I don't believe it."

"I did not say she killed him; I said she was suspected. And even though she was cleared, the death of that renegade adds one more to the mysteries of our new West. But I think the mere suspicion that she did it entitles her to a medal, or an ovation of some sort."

The speakers were two men in complete hunting costume. That they were strangers in the Northwest was evidenced by the very lively interest they took in each bit of local color in landscape or native humanity. Of the latter, there was a most picturesque variety. There were the Northern red men in their bright blankets, and women, too, with their beadwork and tanned skins for sale. A good market-place for these was this spot where the Kootenai River is touched by the iron road that drives from the lakes to the Pacific. The road runs along our Northern boundary so close that it is called the "Great Northern," and verily the land it touches is great in its wildness and its beauty.

The two men, with their trophies of elk-horn and beaver paws,

with their scarred outfit and a general air of elation gained from a successful "outing," tramped down to the little station after a last lingering view toward far hunting grounds. While waiting for the train bound eastward, they employed their time in dickering with the Indian moccasin-makers, of whom they bought arrows and gaily painted bows of ash, with which to deck the wall of some far-away city home.

While thus engaged, a little fleet of canoes was sighted skimming down the river from that greater wilderness of the North, penetrated at that time only by the prospector, or a chance hunter; for the wealth of gold in those high valleys had not yet been more than hinted at, and the hint had not reached the ears of the world.

Even the Indians were aroused from their lethargy, and watched with keen curiosity the approaching canoes. When from the largest there stepped forth a young girl – a rather remarkable-looking young girl – there was a name spoken by a tall Indian boatman, who stood near the two strangers. The Indians nodded their heads, and the name was passed from one to the other – the name 'Tana – a soft, musical name as they pronounced it. One of the strangers, hearing it, turned quickly to a white ranchman, who had a ferry at that turn of the river, and asked if that was the young girl who had helped locate the new gold find at the Twin Springs.

"Likely," agreed the ranchman. "Word came that she was to cut the diggings and go to school a spell. A Mr. Haydon, who

represents a company that's to work the mine, sent down word that a special party was to go East over the road from here today; so I guess she's one of the specials. She came near going on a special to the New Jerusalem, she did, not many days ago. I reckon you folks heard how Lee Holly – toughest man in the length of the Columbia – was wiped off the living earth by her last week."

"We heard she was cleared of it," assented the stranger.

"Yes, so she was, so she was – cleared by an alibi, sworn to by Dan Overton. You don't know Dan, I suppose? Squarest man you ever met! And he don't have to scratch gravel any more, either, for he has a third interest in that Twin Spring find, and it pans out big. They say the girl sold her share for two hundred thousand. She doesn't look top-heavy over it, either."

And she did not. She walked between two men – one a short, rather pompous elderly man, who bore a slight resemblance to her, and whom she treated rather coolly.

"Of course I am not tired," she said, in a strong, musical voice. "I have been brought all the way on cushions, so how could I be? Why, I have gone alone in a canoe on a longer trail than we floated over, and I think I will again some day. Max, there is one thing I want in this world, and want bad; that is, to get Mr. Haydon out on a trip where we can't eat until we kill and cook our dinner. He doesn't know anything about real comfort; he wants too many cushions."

The man she called Max bent his head and whispered

something to her, at which her face flushed just a little and a tiny wrinkle crept between her straight, beautiful brows.

"I told you not to say pretty things that way, just because you think girls like to hear them. I don't. Maybe I will when I get civilized; but Mr. Haydon thinks that is a long ways ahead, doesn't he?" The wrinkle was gone – vanished in a quizzical smile, as she looked up into the very handsome face of the young fellow.

"So do I," he acknowledged. "I have a strong desire, especially when you snub me, to be the man to take you on a lone trail like that. I will, too, some day."

"Maybe you will," she agreed. "But I feel sorry for you beforehand."

She seemed a tantalizing specimen of girlhood, as she stood there, a slight, brown slip of a thing, dressed in a plain flannel suit, the color of her golden-brown short curls. In her brown cloth hat the wings of a redbird gleamed – the feathers and her lips having all there was of bright color about her; for her face was singularly colorless for so young a girl. The creamy skin suggested a pale-tinted blossom, but not a fragile one; and the eyes – full eyes of wine-brown – looked out with frank daring on the world.

But for all the daring brightness of her glances, it was not a joyous face, such as one would wish a girl of seventeen to possess. A little cynical curve of the red mouth, a little contemptuous glance from those brown eyes, showed one that she took her

measurements of individuals by a gauge of her own, and that she had not that guileless trust in human nature that is supposed to belong to young womanhood. The full expression indicated an independence that seemed a breath caught from the wild beauty of those Northern hills.

Her gaze rested lightly on the two strangers and their trophies of the chase, on the careless ferryman, and the few stragglers from the ranch and the cabins. These last had gathered there to view the train and its people as they passed, for the ties on which the iron rails rested were still of green wood, and the iron engines of transportation were recent additions to those lands of the far North, and were yet a novelty.

Over the faces of the white men her eyes passed carelessly. She did not seem much interested in civilized men, even though decked in finer raiment than was usual in that locality; and, after a cool glance at them all, she walked directly past them and spoke to the tall Indian who had first uttered her name to the others.

His face brightened when she addressed him; but their words were low, as are ever the words of an Indian in converse, low and softly modulated; and the girl did not laugh in the face of the native as she had when the handsome young white man had spoken to her in softened tones.

The two sportsmen gave quickened attention to her as they perceived she was addressing the Indian in his own language. Many gestures of her slim brown hands aided her speech, and as he watched her face, one of the sportsmen uttered the impulsive

exclamation at the beginning of this story. It seemed past belief that she could have committed the deed with which her name had been connected, and of which the Kootenai valley had heard a great deal during the week just passed. That it had become the one topic of general interest in the community was due partly to the personality of the girl, and partly to the fact that the murdered man had been one of the most notorious in all that wild land extending north and west into British Columbia.

Looking at the frank face of the girl and hearing her musical, decided tones, the man had a reasonable warrant for deciding that she was not guilty.

"She is one of the most strongly interesting girls of her age I have ever seen," he decided. "Girls of that age generally lack character. She does not; it impresses itself on a man though she never speak a word to him. Wish she'd favor me with as much of her attention as she gives that hulking redskin."

"It's a 'case,' isn't it?" asked his friend. "You'll be wanting to use her as a centerpiece for your next novel; but you can't make an orthodox heroine of her, for there must have been some reason for the suspicion that she helped him 'over the range,' as they say out here. There must have been something socially and morally wrong about the fact that he was found dead in her cabin. No, Harvey; you'd better write up the inert, inoffensive red man on his native heath, and let this remarkable young lady enjoy her thousands in modest content – if the ghosts let her."

"Nonsense!" said the other man, with a sort of impatience.

"You jump too quickly to the conclusion that there must be wrong where there is suspicion. But you have put an idea into my mind as to the story. If I can ever learn the whole history of this affair, I will make use of it, and I'm not afraid of finding my pretty girl in the wrong, either."

"I knew from the moment we heard who she was that your impressionable nature would fall a victim, but you can't write a story of her alone; you will want your hero and one or two other people. I suppose, now, that very handsome young fellow with the fastidious get-up will about suit you for the hero. He does look rather lover-like when he addresses your girl with the history. Will you pair them off?"

"I will let you know a year from now," returned the man called Harvey. "But just now I am going to pay my respects to the very well-fed looking elderly gentleman. He seems to be the chaperon of the party. I have acquired a taste for trailing things during our thirty days hunt in these hills, and I'm going to trail this trio, with the expectation of bagging a romance."

His friend watched him approach the elder gentleman, and was obviously doubtful of the reception he would get, for the portly, prosperous-looking individual did not seem to have been educated in that generous Western atmosphere, where a man is a brother if he acts square and speaks fair. Conservatism was stamped in the deep corners of his small mouth, on the clean-shaven lips, and the correctly cut side-whiskers that added width to his fat face.

But the journalist proper, the world over, is ever a bit of a diplomat. He has won victories over so many conservative things, and is daunted by few. When Harvey found himself confronted by a monocle through which he was coolly surveyed, it did not disturb him in the least (beyond making it difficult to retain a grave demeanor at the lively interest shown by the Indians in that fashionable toy).

"Yes, sir – yes, sir; I am T. J. Haydon, of Philadelphia," acknowledged he of the glass disc, "but I don't know you, sir."

"I shall be pleased to remedy that if you will allow me," returned the other, suavely, producing a card which he offered for examination. "You are, no doubt, acquainted with the syndicate I represent, even if my name tells you nothing. I have been hunting here with a friend for a month, and intend writing up the resources of this district. I have a letter of introduction to your partner, Mr. Seldon, but did not follow the river so far as to reach your works, though I've heard a good deal about them, and imagine them interesting."

"Yes, indeed; very interesting – very interesting from a sportsman's or mineralogist's point of view," agreed the older man, as he twirled the card in a disturbed, uncertain way. "Do you travel East, Mr. – Mr. Harvey? Yes? Well, let me introduce Mr. Seldon's nephew – he's a New Yorker – Max Lyster. Wait a minute and I'll get him away from those beastly Indians. I never can understand the attraction they have for the average tourist."

But when he reached Lyster he said not a word of the despised

reds; he had other matters more important.

"Here, Max! A most annoying thing has happened," he said, hurriedly. "Those two men are newspaper fellows, and one is going East on our train. Worse still – the one knows people I know. Gad! I'd rather lose a thousand dollars than meet them now! And you must come over and get acquainted. They've been here a month, and are to write accounts of the life and country. That means they have been here long enough to hear all about 'Tana and that Holly. Do you understand? You'll have to treat them well, – the best possible – pull wires even if it costs money, and fix it so that a record of this does not get into the Eastern papers. And, above and beyond everything else, so long as we are in this depraved corner of the country, you must keep them from noticing that girl Montana."

The young man looked across at the girl, and smiled doubtfully.

"I'm willing to undertake any possible thing for you," he said; "but, my dear sir, to keep people from noticing 'Tana is one of the things beyond my power. And if she gives notice to all the men who will notice her, I've an idea jealousy will turn my hair gray early. But come on and introduce your man, and don't get in a fever over the meeting. I am so fortunate as to know more of the journalistic fraternity than you, and I happen to be aware that they are generally gentlemen. Therefore, you'd better not drop any hints to them of monetary advantages in exchange for silence unless you want to be beautifully roasted by a process

only possible in printer's ink."

The older man uttered an exclamation of impatience, as he led his young companion over to the sportsmen, who had joined each other again; and as he effected the introduction, his mind was sorely upset by dread of the two gentlemanly strangers and 'Tana.

'Tana was most shamelessly continuing her confidences with the tall Indian, despite the fact that she knew it was a decided annoyance to her principal escort. Altogether the evening was a trying one to Mr. T. J. Haydon.

The sun had passed far to the west, and the shadows were growing longer under the hills there by the river. Clear, red glints fell across the cool ripples of the water, and slight chill breaths drifted down the ravines and told that the death of summer was approaching.

Some sense of the beauty of the dying October day seemed to touch the girl, for she walked a little apart and picked a spray of scarlet maple leaves and looked from them to the hills and the beautiful valley, where the red and the yellow were beginning to crowd out the greens. Yes, the summer was dying – dying! Other summers would come in their turn, but none quite the same. The girl showed all the feeling of its loss in her face. In her eyes the quick tears came, as she looked at the mountains. The summer was dying; it was autumn's colors she held in her hand, and she shivered, though she stood in the sunshine.

As she turned toward the group again, she met the eyes of

the stranger to whom Max was talking. He seemed to have been watching her with a great deal of interest, and her hand was raised to her eyes, lest a trace of tears should prove food for curiosity.

"It was to one of Akkomi's relations I was talking," she remarked to Mr. Haydon, when he questioned her. "His little grandson is sick, and I would like to send him something. I haven't money enough in my pocket, and wish you would get me some."

After taking some money out of his purse for her, he eyed the tall savage with disfavor.

"He'll buy bad whisky with it," he grumbled.

"No, he will not," contradicted the girl. "If a person treats these Indians square, he can trust them. But if a lie is told them, or a promise broken – well, they get even by tricking you if they can, and I can't say that I blame them. But they won't trick me, so don't worry; and I'm as sure the things will go to that little fellow safely as though I took them."

She was giving the money and some directions to the Indian, when a word from a squaw drew her attention to the river.

A canoe had just turned the bend not a quarter of a mile away, and was skimming the water with the swiftness of a swallow's dart. Only one man was in it, and he was coming straight for the landing.

"Some miner rushing down to see the train go by," remarked Mr. Haydon; but the girl did not answer. Her face grew even more pale, and her hands clasped each other nervously.

"Yes," said the Indian beside her, and nodded to her assuringly. Then the color swept upward over her face as she met his kindly glance, and drawing herself a little straighter, she walked indifferently away.

The stolid red man did not look at all snubbed; he only pocketed the money she had given him, and looked after her with a slight smile, accented more by the deepening wrinkles around his black eyes than by any change about the lips.

Then there was a low rumbling sound borne on the air, and as the muffled whistle of the unseen train came to them from the wilderness to the west, with one accord the Indians turned their attention to their wares, and the white people to their baggage. When the train slowed up Mr. Haydon, barely waiting for the last revolution of the wheels, energetically hastened the young girl up the steps of the car nearest them.

"What's the hurry?" she asked, with a slight impatience.

"I think," he replied quickly, "there is but a short stop made at this station, and as there are several vacant seats in this car, please occupy one of them until I have seen the conductor. There may be some changes made as to the compartments engaged for us. Until that is decided, will you be so kind as to remain in this coach?"

She nodded rather indifferently, and looked around for Max. He was gathering up some robes and satchels when the older man joined him.

"We are not going to make the trip to Chicago in the car with

those fellows if it can be helped, Max," he insisted, fussily; "we'll wait and see what car they are booked for, and I'll arrange for another. Sorry I did not get a special, as I first intended."

"But see here; they are first-class fellows – worth one's while to meet," protested Max; but the other shook his head.

"Look after the baggage while I see the conductor. 'Tana is in one of the cars – don't know which. We'll go for her when we get settled. Now, don't argue. Time is too precious."

And 'Tana! She seated herself rather sulkily, as she was told, and looked at once toward the river.

The canoe was landing, and the man jumped to the shore. With quick, determined strides, he came across the land to the train. She tried to follow him with her eyes, but he crossed to the other side of the track.

There was rather a boisterous party in the car – two men and two women. One of the latter, a flaxen-haired, petite creature, was flitting from one side of the car to the other, making remarks about the Indians, admiring particularly one boy's beaded dress, and garnishing her remarks with a good deal of slang.

"Say, Chub! that boy's suit would be a great 'make-up' for me in that new turn – the jig, you know; new, too. There isn't a song-and-dance on the boards done with Indian make-up. Knock them silly in the East, where they don't see reds. Now sing out, and tell me if it wouldn't make a hit."

"Aw, Goldie, give us a rest on shop talk," growled the gentleman called Chub. "If you'd put a little more ginger into

the good specialty you have, instead of depending on wardrobe, you'd hit 'em hard enough. It ain't plans that count, girlie – it's work."

The "girlie" addressed accepted the criticism with easy indifference, and her fair, dissipated face was only twisted in a grimace, while she held one hand aloft and jingled the bangles on her bracelets as though poising a tambourine.

"Better hustle yourself into the smoker again, Chubby dear. It will take a half-dozen more cigars to put you in your usual sweet frame of mind. Run along now. Ta-ta!"

The other woman seemed to think their remarks very witty, especially when Chub really did arise and make his way toward the smoker. Goldie then went back to the window, where the Indians were to be seen. The quartet were, to judge by their own frank remarks, a party of variety singers and dancers who had been doing the Pacific circuit, and were now booked for some Eastern houses, of which they spoke as "solid."

Some of the passengers had got out and were buying little things from the Indians, as souvenirs of the country. 'Tana saw Mr. Haydon among them, in earnest conversation with the conductor; saw Max, with his hand full of satchels, suddenly reach out the other hand with a great deal of heartiness and meet the man of the canoe.

He was not so handsome a man as Max, yet would have been noticeable anywhere – tall, olive-skinned, and dark-haired. His dress had not the fashionable cut of the young fellow he spoke

to. But he wore his buckskin jacket with a grace that bespoke physical strength and independence; and when he pushed his broad-brimmed gray hat back from his face, he showed a pair of dark eyes that had a very direct glance. They were serious, contemplative eyes, that to some might look even moody.

"There is a fellow with a great figure," remarked the other woman of the quartet; "that fellow with the sombrero; built right up from the ground, and looks like a picture; don't he, Charlie?"

"I can't see him," complained Goldie, "but suppose it's one of the ranchmen who live about here." Then she turned and donated a brief survey to 'Tana. "Do you live in this region?" she asked.

After a deliberate, contemptuous glance from the questioner's frizzed head to her little feet, 'Tana answered:

"No; do you?"

With this curt reply, she turned her shoulder very coolly on the searcher for information.

Vexation sent the angry blood up into the little woman's face. She looked as though about to retort, when a gentleman who had just taken possession of a compartment, and noted all that had passed, came forward and addressed our heroine.

"Until your friends come in, will you not take my seat?" he asked, courteously. "I will gladly make the exchange, or go for Mr. Lyster or Mr. Haydon, if you desire it."

"Thank you; I will take your seat," she agreed. "It is good of you to offer it."

"Say, folks, I'm going outside to take in this free Wild West

show," called the variety actress to her companions. "Come along?"

But they declined. She had reached the platform alone, when, coming toward the car, she saw the man of the sombrero, and shrank back with a gasp of utter dismay.

"Oh, good Heaven!" she muttered, and all the color and bravado were gone from her face, as she shrank back out of his range of vision and almost into the arms of the man Harvey, who had given the other girl his seat.

"What's up?" he asked, bluntly.

She only gave a muttered, unintelligible reply, pushed past him to her own seat, where her feather-laden hat was donned with astonishing rapidity, a great cloak was thrown around her, and she sank into a corner, a huddled mass of wraps and feathers. Any one could have walked along the aisle without catching even a glimpse of her flaxen hair.

'Tana and the stranger exchanged looks of utter wonder at the lightning change effected before their eyes.

At that moment a tap-tap sounded on the window beside 'Tana, and, looking around, she met the dark eyes of the man with the sombrero gazing kindly upward at her.

The people were getting aboard the train again – the time was so short – so short! and how can one speak through a double glass? The fingers were all unequal to the fastening of the window, and she turned an imploring, flushed face to the helpful stranger.

"Can you – oh, will you, please?" she asked, breathlessly. "Thank you, I'm very much obliged."

Then the window was raised, and her hand thrust out to the man, who was bareheaded now, and who looked very much as though he held the wealth of the world when he clasped only 'Tana's fingers.

"Oh, it is you, is it?" she asked, with a rather lame attempt at careless speech. "I thought you had forgotten to say good-by to me."

"You knew better," he contradicted. "You knew – you know now it wasn't because I forgot."

He looked at her moodily from under his dark brows, and noticed the color flutter over her cheek and throat in an adorable way. She had drawn her hand from him, and it rested on the window – a slim brown hand, with a curious ring on one finger – two tiny snakes whose jeweled heads formed the central point of attraction.

"You said you would not wear that again. If it's a hoodoo, as you thought, why not throw it away?" he asked.

"Oh – I've changed my mind. I need to wear it so that I will be reminded of something – something important as a hoodoo," she said, with a strange, bitter smile.

"Give it back to me, 'Tana," he urged. "I will – No – Max will have something much prettier for you. And listen, my girl. You are going away; don't ever come back; forget everything here but the money that will be yours for the claim. Do you understand

me? Forget all I said to you when – you know. I had no right to say it; I must have been drunk. I – I lied, anyway."

"Oh, you lied, did you?" she asked, cynically, and her hands were clasped closely, so close the ring must have hurt her. He noticed it, and kept his eyes on her hand as he continued, doggedly:

"Yes. You see, little girl, I thought I'd own up before you left, so you wouldn't be wasting any good time in being sorry about the folks back here. It wasn't square for me to trouble you as I did. And – I lied. I came down to say that."

"You needn't have troubled yourself," she said, curtly. "But I see you can tell lies. I never would have believed it if I hadn't heard you. But I guess, after all, I will give you the ring. You might want it to give to some one else – perhaps your wife."

The bell was ringing and the wheels began slowly to revolve. She pulled the circlet from her finger and almost flung it at him.

"'Tana!" and all of keen appeal was in his voice and his eyes, "little girl – good-by!"

But she turned away her head. Her hand, however, reached out and the spray of autumn leaves fluttered to his feet where the ring lay.

Then the rumble of the moving train sounded through the valley, and the girl turned to find Max, Mr. Haydon and a porter approaching, to convey her to the car ahead. Mr. Haydon's face was a study of dismay at the sight of Mr. Harvey closing the window and showing evident interest in 'Tana's comfort.

"So Dan did get down to see you off, 'Tana?" observed Max, as he led her along the aisle. "Dear old fellow! how I did try to coax him into coming East later; but it was of no use. He gave me some flowers for you – wild beauties. He never seemed to say much, 'Tana, but I've an idea you'll never have a better friend in your life than that same old Dan."

Mr. Harvey watched their exit, and smiled a little concerning Mr. Haydon's evident annoyance. He watched, also, the flaxen-haired bundle in the corner, and saw the curious, malignant look with which she followed 'Tana, and to his friend he laughed over his triumph in exchanging speech with the pretty, peculiar girl in brown.

"And the old party looked terribly fussy over it. In fact, I've about sifted out the reason. He imagines me a newspaper reporter on the alert for sensations. He's afraid his stupidly respectable self may be mentioned in a newspaper article concerning this local tragedy they all talk about. Why, bless his pocket-book! if I ever use pen and ink on that girl's story, it will not be for a newspaper article."

"Then you intend to tell it?" asked his friend. "How will you learn it?"

"I do not know yet. The 'how' does not matter; I'll tell you on paper some day."

"And write up that handsome Lyster as the hero?"

"Perhaps."

Then a bend of the road brought them again in sight of the

river of the Kootenais. Here and there the canoes of the Indians were speeding across at the ferry. But one canoe alone was moving north; not very swiftly, but almost as though drifting with the current.

Using his field-glass, Harvey found it was as he had thought. The occupant of the solitary canoe was the tall man whose dark face had impressed the theatrical lady so strongly. He was not using the paddle, and his chin was resting on one clenched hand, while in the other he held something to which he was giving earnest attention.

It was a spray of bright-colored leaves, and the watcher dropped his glass with a guilty feeling.

"He brings her flowers, and gets in return only dead leaves," Harvey thought, grimly. "I didn't hear a word he said to her; but his eyes spoke strongly enough, poor devil! I wonder if she sees him, too."

And all through the evening, and for many a day, the picture remained in his mind. Even when he wrote the story that is told in these pages, he could never find words to express the utter loneliness of that life, as it seemed to drift away past the sun-touched ripples of water into that vast, shadowy wilderness to the north.

CHAPTER I.
A STRANGE GIRL

"Well, by the help of either her red gods or devils, she can swim, anyway!"

This explosive statement was made one June morning on the banks of the Kootenai, and the speaker, after a steady gaze, relinquished his field-glass to the man beside him.

"Can she make it?" he asked.

A grunt was the only reply given him. The silent watcher was too much interested in the scene across the water.

Shouts came to them – the yells of frightened Indian children; and from the cone-shaped dwellings, up from the water, the Indian women were hurrying. One, reaching the shore first, sent up a shrill cry, as she perceived that, from the canoe where the children played, one had fallen over, and was being swept away by that swift-rushing, chill water, far out from the reaching hands of the others.

Then a figure lolling on the shore farther down stream than the canoe sprang erect at the frightened scream.

One quick glance showed the helplessness of those above, and another the struggling little form there in the water – the little one who turned such wild eyes toward the shore, and was the only one of them all who was not making some outcry.

The white men, who were watching from the opposite side, could see shoes flung aside quickly; a jacket dropped on the shore; and then down into the water a slight figure darted with the swiftness of a kingfisher, and swam out to the little fellow who had struggled to keep his head above water, but was fast growing helpless in the chill of the mountain river.

Then it was that Mr. Maxwell Lyster commented on the physical help lent by the gods of the red people, as the ability of any female to swim thus lustily in spite of that icy current seemed to his civilized understanding a thing superhuman. Of course, bears and other animals of the woods swam it at all seasons, when it was open; but to see a woman dash into it like that! Well, it sent a shiver over him to think of it.

"They'll both get chilled and drop to the bottom!" he remarked, with irritated concern. "Of course there are enough of the red vagabonds in this new El Dorado of yours, without that particular squaw. But it would be a pity that so plucky a one should be translated."

Then a yell of triumph came from the other shore. A canoe had been loosened, and was fairly flying over the water to where the child had been dragged to the surface, and the rescuer was holding herself up by the slow efforts of one arm, but could make no progress with her burden.

"That's no squaw!" commented the other man, who had been looking through the glass.

"Why, Dan!"

"It's no squaw, I tell you," insisted the other, with the superior knowledge of a native. "Thought so the minute I saw her drop the shoes and jacket that way. She didn't make a single Indian move. It's a white woman!"

"Queer place for a white woman, isn't it?"

The man called Dan did not answer. The canoe had reached that figure in the water and the squaw in it lifted the now senseless child and laid him in the bottom of the light craft.

A slight altercation seemed going on between the woman in the water and the one in the boat. The former was protesting against being helped on board – the men could see that by their gestures. She finally gained her point, for the squaw seized the paddle and sent the boat shoreward with all the strength of her brown arms, while the one in the water held on to the canoe and was thus towed back, where half the Indian village had now swarmed to receive them.

"She's got sand and sense," and Dan nodded his appreciation of the towing process; "for, chilled as she must be, the canoe would more than likely have turned over if she had tried to climb into it. Look at the pow-wow they are kicking up! That little red devil must count for big stakes with them."

"But the woman who swam after him. See! they try to stand her on her feet, but she can't walk. There! she's on the ground again. I'd give half my supper to know if she has killed herself with that ice-bath."

"Maybe you can eat all your supper and find out, too,"

observed the other, with a shrug of his shoulders, and a quizzical glance at his companion, "unless even the glimpse of a petticoat has chased away your appetite. You had better take some advice from an old man, Max, and swear off approaching females in this country, for the specimens you'll find here aren't things to make you proud they're human."

"An old man!" repeated Mr. Lyster with a smile of derision. "You must be pretty near twenty-eight years old – aren't you, Dan? and just about five years older than myself. And what airs you do assume in consequence! With all the weight of those years," he added, slowly, "I doubt, Mr. Dan Overton, if you have really *lived* as much as I have."

One glance of the dark eyes was turned on the speaker for an instant, and then the old felt hat again shaded them as he continued watching the group on the far shore. The swimmer had been picked up by a stalwart Indian woman, and was carried bodily up to one of the lodges, while another squaw – evidently the mother – carried the little redskin who had caused all the commotion.

"I suppose, by living, you mean the life of settlements – or, to condense the question still more, the life of cities," continued Overton, stretching himself lazily on the bank. "You mean the life of a certain set in one certain city – New York, for instance," and he grinned at the expression of impatience on the face of the other. "Yes, I reckon New York is about the one, and a certain part of the town to live in. A certain gang of partners, who have a

certain man to make their clothes and boots and hats, and stamp his name on the inside of them, so that other folks can see, when you take off your coat, or your hat, or your gloves, that they were made at just the right place. This makes you a man worth knowing – isn't that about the idea? And in the afternoon, at just about the right hour, you rig yourself out in a certain cut of coat, and stroll for an hour or so on a certain street! In the evening – if a man wants to understand just what it is to live – he must get into other clothes and drop into the theater, making a point of being introduced to any heavy swell within reach, so you can speak of it afterward, you know. Just as your chums like to say they had a supper with a pretty actress, after the curtain went down; but they don't go into details, and own up that the 'actress' maybe never did anything on a stage but walk on in armor and carry a banner. Oh, scowl if you want to! Of course it sounds shoddy when a trapper outlines it; but it doesn't seem shoddy to the people who live like that. Then, about the time that all good girls are asleep, it is just the hour for a supper to be ordered, at just the right place for the wine to be good, and the dishes served in A1 shape, with a convenient waiter who knows how dim to make the lights, and how to efface himself, and let you wait on your 'lady' with your own hands. And she'll go home wearing a ring of yours – two, if you have them; and you'll wake up at noon next day, and think what a jolly time you had, but with your head so muddled that you can't remember where it was you were to meet her the next night, or whether it was the next night that her husband was to

be home, and she couldn't see you at all." Overton rolled over on his face and grunted disdainfully, saying: "That's about the style of thing you call *living*, don't you, sonny?"

"Great Scott, Dan!" and the "sonny" addressed stared at him in perplexity, "one never knows what to expect of you. Of course there is *some* truth in the sketch you make; but – but I thought you had never ranged to the East?"

"Did you? Well, I don't look as if I'd ever ranged beyond the timber, do I?" and he stretched out his long legs with their shabby coverings, and stuck his fingers through a hole in his hat. "This outfit doesn't look as if the hands of a Broadway tailor had ever touched it. But, my boy, the sketch you speak of would be just as true to life among a certain set in any large city of the States; only in the West, or even in the South, those ambitious sports would know enough to buy a horse on their own judgment, if they wanted to ride. Or would bet on the races without hustling around to find some played-out jockey who would give them tips."

"Well, to say the least, your opinion is not very flattering to us," remarked the young man, moodily. "You've got some grudge against the East, I guess."

"Grudge? Not any. And you're all right, Max. You will find thousands willing to keep to your idea of life, so we won't split on that wedge. My old stepdad would chime in with you if he were here. He prates about civilization and Eastern culture till I get weary sometimes. Culture! Wait till you see him. He's all right in his way, of course; but as I cut loose from home when only

fifteen, and never ran across the old man again until two years ago – well, you see, I can make my estimates in that direction without being biased by family feeling. And I reckon he does the same thing. I don't know what to expect when I go back this time; but, from signs around camp when I left, I wouldn't be surprised if he presented me with a stepmother on my return."

"A stepmother? Whew!" whistled the other. "Well, that shows there are some white women in your region, anyway."

"Oh, yes, we have several. This particular one is a Pennsylvania product; talks through her nose, and eats with her knife, and will maybe try to make eyes at you and keep you in practice. But she is a good, square woman; simply one of the many specimens that drift out here. Came up from Helena with the 'boom,' and started a milliner store – a milliner store in the bush, mind you! But after the Indians had bought all the bright feathers and artificial flowers, she changed her sign, and keeps an eating-house now. It is the high-toned corner of the camp. She can cook some; and I reckon that's what catches the old man."

"Any more interesting specimens like that?"

"Not like that," returned Overton; "but there are some more."

Then he arose, and stood listening to sounds back in the wild forests.

"I hear the 'cayuse' bell," he remarked; "so the others are coming. We'll go back up to the camp, and, after 'chuck,' we'll go over and give you a nearer view of the tribe on the other shore, if you want to add them to the list of your sight-seeing."

"Certainly I do. They'll be a relief after the squads of railroad section hands we've been having for company lately. They knocked all the romance out of the wildly beautiful country we've been coming through since we left the Columbia River."

"Come back next year; then a boat will be puffing up here to the landing, and you can cross to the Columbia in a few hours, for the road will be completed then."

"And you – will you be here then?"

"Well – yes; I reckon so. I never anchor anywhere very long; but this country suits me, and the company seems to need me."

The young fellow looked at him and laughed, and dropped his hand on the broad shoulder with a certain degree of affection.

"Seems to need you?" he repeated. "Well, Mr. Dan Overton, if the day ever comes when *I'm* necessary to the welfare of a section as large as a good-sized State, I hope I'll know enough to appreciate my own importance."

"Hope you will," said Overton, with a kindly smile. "No reason why you should not be of use. Every man with a fair share of health and strength ought to be of use somewhere."

"Yes, that sounds all right and is easy to grasp, if you have been brought up with the idea. But suppose you had been trained by a couple of maiden aunts who only thought to give you the manners of a gentleman, and leave you their money to get through the world with? I guess, under such circumstances, you, too, might have settled into the feathery nest prepared for you, and thought you were doing your duty to the world if you were

only ornamental," and the dubious smile on his really handsome face robbed the speech of any vanity.

"You're all right, I tell you," returned the other. "Don't growl at yourself so much. You'll find your work and buckle down to it, some of these days. Maybe you'll find it out here – who knows? Of course Mr. Seldon would see to it that you got any post you would want in this district."

"Yes, he's a jolly old fellow, and has shown me a lot of favors. Seems to me relatives mean more to folks out here than they do East, because so few have their families or relatives along, I guess. If it had not been for Seldon, I rather think I would not have had the chance of this wild trip with you."

"Likely not. I don't generally want a tenderfoot along when I've work to do. No offense, Max; but they are too often a hindrance. Now that you have come, though, I'll confess I'm glad of it. The lonely trips over this wild region tend to make a man silent – a bear among people when he does reach a camp. But we've talked most of the time, and I reckon I feel the better of it. I know I'll miss you when I go over this route again. You'll be on your way East by that time."

The "cayuse" bell sounded nearer and nearer, and directly from the dense forest a packhorse came stepping with care over the fallen logs, where the sign of a trail was yet dim to any eyes but those of a woodsman. A bell at its neck tinkled as it walked, and after it four others followed, all with heavy loads bound to their backs. It looked strange to see the patient animals thus

walk without guide or driver through the dense timber of the mountains; but a little later voices were heard, and two horsemen came out of the shadows of the wood, and followed the horses upward along the bank of the river to where a little stream of fresh water tumbled down to the Kootenai. There a little camp was located, an insignificant gathering of tents, but one that meant a promising event to the country, for it was to be the connecting point of the boats that would one day float from the States on the river, and the railroad that would erelong lead westward over the trail from which the packhorses were bringing supplies.

The sun was setting and all the ripples of the river shone red in its reflected light. Forests of pine loomed up black and shadowy above the shores; and there, higher up – up where the snow was, all tips of the river range were tinged a warm pink, and where the shadows lay, the lavender and faint purples drifted into each other, and bit by bit crowded the pink line higher and higher until it dared touch only the topmost peaks with its lingering kiss.

Lyster halted to look over the wild beauty of the wilderness, and from the harmony of river and hills and sky his eyes turned to Overton.

"You are right, Dan," he said, with an appreciative smile, a smile that opened his lips and showed how perfect the mouth was under the brown mustache – "you are right enough to keep close to all these beauties. You seem in some way to belong to them – not that you are so much 'a thing of beauty' yourself," and the

smile widened a little; "but you have in you all the strength of the hills and the patience of the wilderness. You know what I mean."

"Yes, I guess so," answered Overton. "You want some one to spout verses to or make love to, and there is no subject handy. I can make allowances for you, though. Those tendencies are apt to stick to a man for about a year after a trip to Southern California. I don't know whether it's the girls down there, or the wine that is accountable for it; but whatever it is, you have been back from there only three months. You've three-quarters of a year to run yet – maybe more; for I've a notion that you have a leaning in that direction even in your most sensible moments."

"H'm! You must have made a trip to that wine country yourself sometime," observed Lyster. "Your theory suggests practice. Were there girls and wine there then?"

"Plenty," returned Overton, briefly. "Come on. There's the cook shouting supper."

"And after supper we're to go over to the Kootenai camp. Say! what is the meaning of that name, anyway? You know all their jargons up here; do you know that, too?"

"Nobody does, I reckon; there are lots of theories flying around. The generally accepted one is that they were called the '*Court Nez*' by the French trappers long ago, and that Kootenai is the result, after generations of Indian pronunciation. They named the '*Nez Perces*,' too – the 'pierced noses,' you know; but that name has kept its meaning better. You'll find the trail of the French all through the Indian tribes up here."

"Think that was a Frenchwoman in the river back there? You said she was white."

"Yes, I did. But it's generally the Frenchmen you find among the reds, and not the women; though I do know some square white women across the line who have married educated Indians."

"But they are generally a lazy, shiftless set?"

The tone was half inquiring, and Overton grimaced and smiled.

"They are not behind the rest, when it comes to a fight," he answered. "And as to lazy – well, there are several colors of people who are that, under some circumstances. I have an Indian friend across in the States, who made eight thousand dollars in a cattle deal last year, and didn't sell out, either. Now, when you and I can do as well on capital we've earned ourselves, then maybe we'll have a right to criticise some of the rest for indolence. But you can't do much to improve Indians, or any one else, by penning them up in so many square miles and bribing them to be good. The Indian cattleman I speak of kept clear of the reservation, and after drifting around for a while, settled down to the most natural civilized calling possible to an Indian – stock-raising. Dig in the ground? No; they won't do much of that, just at first. But I've eaten some pretty good garden truck they've raised."

Lyster whistled and arched his handsome brows significantly.

"So your sympathies run in that direction, do they? Is there a

Kootenai Pocahontas somewhere in the wilderness accountable for your ideas? That is about the only ground I could excuse you on, for I think they are beastly, except in pictures."

They had reached a gathering of men who were seated at a table in the open air – some long boards laid on trestles.

Overton and his friend were called to seats at the head of the table, where the "boss" of the construction gang sat. The rough pleasantries of the men, and the way they made room for him, showed that the big bronzed ranger was a favorite visitor along the "works."

They looked with some curiosity at his more finely garbed companion, but he returned their regard with a good deal of careless audacity, and won their liking by his independence. But in the midst of the social studies he was making of them, he heard Overton say:

"And you have not heard of a white girl in this vicinity?"

"Never a girl. Are you looking for one? Old Akkomi, the Indian, has gone into camp across the river, and he might have a red one to spare."

"Perhaps," agreed Overton. "He's an old acquaintance of mine – a year old. But I'm not looking for red girls just now, and I'm going to tell the old man to keep the families clear of your gang, too." Then to Lyster he remarked:

"Whether these people know it or not, there is a white girl in the Indian camp – a young girl, too; and before we sleep, we'll see who she is."

CHAPTER II.
IN THE LODGE OF AKKOMI

The earliest stars had picked their way through the blue canopy, when the men from the camp crossed over to the fishing village of the Indians; for it was only when the moon of May, or of June, lightened the sky that the red men moved their lodges to the north – their winter resort was the States.

"Dan – umph! How?" grunted a tall brave lounging at the opening of the tepee. He arose, and took his pipe from his lips, glancing with assumed indifference at the handsome young stranger, though, in reality, Black Bow was not above curiosity.

"How?" returned Overton, and reached out his hand. "I am glad to see that the lodges by the river hold friends instead of strangers," he continued. "This, too, is a friend – one from the big ocean where the sun rises. We call him Max."

"Umph! How?" and Lyster glanced in comical dismay at his friend as his hand was grasped by one so dirty, so redolent of cooked fish, as the one Black Bow was gracious enough to offer him.

Thereupon they were asked to seat themselves on the blanket of that dignitary – no small favor in the eyes of an Indian. Overton talked of the fish, and the easy markets there would soon be for them, when the boats and the cars came pushing swiftly through

the forests; of the many wolves Black Bow had killed in the winter past; of how well the hunting shirt of deer-skin had worn that Black Bow's squaw had sold him when he met them last on the trail; of any and many things but the episode of the evening of which Lyster was waiting to hear.

As the dusk fell, Lyster fully appreciated the picturesque qualities of the scene before him. The many dogs and their friendly attentions disturbed him somewhat, but he sat there feeling much as if in a theater; for those barbarians, in their groupings, reminded him of bits of stage setting he had seen at some time or another.

One big fire was outside the lodges, and over it a big kettle hung, and the steam drifted up and over the squaws and children gathered there. Some of them came over and looked at him, and several grunted at Overton. Black Bow would order them away once in a while with a lordly "Klehowyeh," much as he did the dogs; and, like the dogs, they would promptly return, and gaze with half-veiled eyes at the elegance of the high boots covering the shapely limbs of Mr. Lyster.

The men were away on a hunt, Black Bow explained; only he and Akkomi, the head chief, had not gone. Akkomi was growing very old and no longer led the hunts; therefore a young chief must ever be near to his call; so Black Bow was also absent from the hunt.

"We stay until two suns rise," and Overton pointed across to the camp of the whites. "To-morrow I would ask that Black

Bow and the chief Akkomi eat at our table. This is the kinsman —*tillicums*– of the men who make the great work where the mines are and the boats that are big and the cars that go faster than the horses run. He wants that the two great chiefs of the Kootenais eat of his food before he goes back again to the towns of the white people."

Lyster barely repressed a groan as he heard the proposal made, but Overton was blandly oblivious of the appealing expression of his friend; the thing he was interested in was to bring Black Bow to a communicative mood, for not a sign could he discover of a white woman in the camp, though he was convinced there was or had been one there.

The invitation to eat succeeded. Black Bow would tell the old chief of their visit; maybe he would talk with them now, but he was not sure. The chief was tired, his thoughts had been troubled that day. The son of his daughter had been near death in the river there. He was only a child, and could not swim yet; a young squaw of the white people had kept him from drowning, and the squaw of Akkomi had been making medicines for her ever since.

"Young squaw! Where comes a white squaw from to the Kootenai lakes?" asked Overton, incredulously. "Half white, half red, maybe."

"White," affirmed their host. "Where? Humph! Where come the sea-birds from that get lost when they fly too far from shore? Kootenai not know, but they drop down sometimes by the rivers. So this one has come. She has talked with Akkomi; but he tell

nothing; only maybe we will all dance a dance some day, and then she will be Kootenai, too."

"*Adopt* her," muttered Overton, and glanced at Lyster; but that gentleman's attention was given at the moment to a couple of squaws who walked past and looked at him out of the corners of their eyes, so he missed that portion of Black Bow's figurative information.

"I have need to see the chief Akkomi," said Overton, after a moment's thought. "It would be well if I could see him before sleeping. Of these," producing two colored handkerchiefs, "will you give one to him, that he may know I am in earnest, the other will you not wear for Dan?"

The brave grunted a pleased assent, and carefully selecting the handkerchief with the brightest border, thrust it within his hunting shirt. He then proceeded to the lodge of the old chief, bearing the other ostentatiously in his hand, as though he were carrying the fate of his nation in the gaudy bit of silk and cotton weaving.

"What are you trading for?" asked Lyster, and looked like protesting, when Overton answered:

"An audience with Akkomi."

"Great Cæsar! is one of that sort not enough? I'll never feel that my hand is clean again until I can give it a bath with some sort of disinfectant stuff. Now there's another one to greet! I'll not be able to eat fish again for a year. Why didn't luck send the old vagabond hunting with the rest? I can endure the women,

for they don't sprawl around you and shake hands with you. Just tell me what I'm to donate for being allowed to bask in the light of Akkomi's countenance? Haven't a thing over here but some cigars."

Overton only laughed silently, and gave more attention to the lodge of Akkomi than to his companion's disgust. When Black Bow emerged from the tent, he watched him sharply as he approached, to learn from the Indian's countenance, if possible, the result of the message.

"If he sends a royal request that we partake of supper, I warn you, I shall be violently and immediately taken ill – too ill to eat," whispered Lyster, meaningly.

Black Bow seated himself, filled his pipe, handed it to a squaw to light, and then sent several puffs of smoke skyward, ere he said:

"Akkomi is old, and the time for his rest has come. He says the door of his lodge is open – that Dan may go within and speak what there is to say. But the stranger – he must wait till the day comes again."

"Snubbed me, by George!" laughed Lyster. "Well, am I then to wait outside the portals, and be content with the crumbs you choose to carry out to me?"

"Oh, amuse yourself," returned Overton, carelessly, and was on his feet at once. "I leave you to the enjoyment of Black Bow."

A moment later he reached the lodge of the old chief and, without ceremony, walked in to the center of it.

A slight fire was there, – just enough to kill the dampness of the river's edge, and over it the old squaw of Akkomi bent, raking the dry sticks, until the flames fluttered upward and outlined the form of the chief, coiled on a pile of skins and blankets against the wall.

He nodded a welcome, said "Klehowyeh," and motioned with his pipe that his visitor should be seated on another pile of clothing and bedding, near his own person.

Then it was that Overton discovered a fourth person in the shadows opposite him – the white woman he had been curious about.

And it was not a woman at all, – only a girl of perhaps sixteen years instead – who shrank back into the gloom, and frowned on him with great, dark, unchildlike eyes, and from under brows wide and straight as those of a sculptor's model for a young Greek god; for, if any beauty of feature was hers, it was boyish in its character. As for beauty of expression, she assuredly did not cultivate that. The curved red mouth was sullen and the eyes antagonistic.

One sharp glance showed Overton all this, and also that there was no Indian blood back of the rather pale cheek.

"So you got out of the water alive, did you?" he asked, in a matter of fact way, as though the dip in the river was a usual thing to see.

She raised her eyes and lowered them again with a sort of insolence, as though to show her resentment of the fact that he

addressed her at all.

"I rather guess I'm alive," she answered, curtly, and the visitor turned to the chief.

"I saw to-day your child's child in the waters of the Kootenai. I saw the white friend lifting him up out of the river, and fighting with death for him. It would have been a good thing for a man to do, Akkomi. I crossed the water to-night, to see if your boy is well once more, or if there is any way I can do service for the young white squaw who is your friend."

The old Indian smoked in silence for a full minute. He was a sharp-eyed, shrewd-faced old fellow. When he spoke, it was in the Chinook jargon, and with a significant nod toward the girl, as though she was not to hear or understand his words.

"It is true, the son of my daughter is again alive. The breath was gone when the young squaw reached him, but she was in time. Dan know the young squaw, maybe?"

"No, Akkomi. Who?"

The old fellow shook his head, as if not inclined to give the information required.

"She tell white men if she want white men to know," he observed. "The heart of Akkomi is heavy for her – heavy. A lone trail is a hard one for a squaw in the Kootenai land – a white squaw who is young. She rests here, and may eat of our meat all her days if she will."

Overton glanced again at the girl, who was evidently, from the words of the chief, following some lone trail through the

wilderness, – a trail starting whence, and leading whither? All that he could read was that no happiness kept her company.

"But the life of a red squaw in the white men's camps is a bad life," resumed the old man, after a season of deliberation; "and the life of the white squaw in the red man's village is bad as well."

Overton nodded gravely, but said nothing. By the manner of Akkomi, he perceived that some important thought was stirring in the old man's mind, and that it would develop into speech all the sooner if not hurried.

"Of all the men of the white camps it is you Akkomi is gladdest to talk to this day," continued the chief, after another season of silence; "for you, Dan, talk with a tongue that is straight, and you go many times where the great towns are built."

"The words of Akkomi are true words," assented Overton, "and my ears listen to hear what he will say."

"Where the white men live is where this young white squaw should live," said Akkomi, and the listening squaw of Akkomi grunted assent. It was easy to read that she looked with little favor on the strange white girl within their lodge. To be sure, Akkomi was growing old; but the wife of Akkomi had memories of his lusty youth and of various wars she had been forced to wage on ambitious squaws who fancied it would be well to dwell in the lodge of the head chief.

And remembering those days, though so long past, the old squaw was sorely averse to the adoption dance for the white girl who lay on their blankets, and thought it good, indeed, that she

go to live in the villages of the white people.

Overton nodded gravely.

"You speak wisely, Akkomi," he said.

Glancing at the girl, Dan noted that she was leaning forward and gazing at him intently. Her face gave him the uncomfortable feeling that she perhaps knew what they were talking of, but she dropped back into the shadows again, and he dismissed the idea as improbable, for white girls were seldom versed in the lore of Indian jargon.

He waited a bit for Akkomi to continue, but as that dignitary evidently thought he had said enough, if Overton chose to interpret it correctly, the white man asked:

"Would it please Akkomi that I, Dan, should lead the young squaw where white families are?"

"Yes. It is that I thought of when I heard your name. I am old. I cannot take her. She has come a long way on a trail for that which has not been found, and her heart is so heavy she does not care where the next trail leads her. So it seems to Akkomi. But she saved the son of my daughter, and I would wish good to her. So, if she is willing, I would have her go to your people."

"If she is willing!" Overton doubted it, and thought of the scowl with which she had answered him before. After a little hesitation, he said: "It shall be as you wish. I am very busy now, but to serve one who is your friend I will take time for a few days. Do you know the girl?"

"I know her, and her father before her. It was long ago, but

my eyes are good. I remember. She is good – girl not afraid."

"Father! Where is her father?"

"In the grave blankets – so she tells me."

"And her name – what is she called?"

But Akkomi was not to be stripped of all his knowledge by questions. He puffed at the pipe in silence and then, as Overton was as persistently quiet as himself, he finally said:

"The white girl will tell to you the things she wants you to know, if she goes with your people. If she stays here, the lodge of Akkomi has a blanket for her."

The girl was now face downward on the couch of skins, and when Overton wished to speak to her he crossed over and gently touched her shoulder. He was almost afraid she was weeping, because of the position; but when she raised her head he saw no signs of tears.

"Why do you come to me?" she demanded. "I ain't troubling the white folks any. Huh! I didn't even stop at their camp across the river."

The grunt of disdain she launched at him made him smile. It was so much more like that of an Indian than a white person, yet she was white, despite all the red manners she chose to adopt.

"No, I reckon you didn't stop at the white camp, else I'd have heard of it. But as you're alone in this country, don't you think you'd be better off where other white women live?"

He spoke in the kindliest tone, and she only bit her lip and shrugged her angular shoulders.

"I will see that you are left with good people," he continued; "so don't be afraid about that. I'm Dan Overton. Akkomi will tell you I'm square. I know where there's a good sort of white woman who would be glad to have you around, I guess."

"Is it your wife?" she demanded, with the same sullen, suspicious wrinkle between her brows.

His face paled ever so little and he took a step backward, as he looked at her through narrowing eyes.

"No, miss, it is not my wife," he said, curtly, and then walked back and sat down beside the old chief. "In fact, she isn't any relation to me, but she's the nearest white woman I know to leave you with. If you want to go farther, I reckon I can help you. Anyway, you come along across the line to Sinna Ferry, and I feel sure you'll find friends there."

She looked at him unbelievingly. "She's used to being deceived," decided Overton, as she watched him; but he stood her gaze without flinching and smiled back at her.

"Do you live there?" she asked again, in that abrupt, uncivil way, and turned her eyes to Akkomi, as though to read his countenance as well as that of the white man, – a difficult thing, however, for the head of the old man was again shrouded in his blanket, from which only the tip of his nose and his pipe protruded.

In a far corner the squaw of Akkomi was crouched, her bead-like eyes glittering with a watchful interest, as they turned from one to the other of the speakers, and missed no tone or gesture of

the two so strangely met within her tepee. Overton noticed her once, and thought what a subject for a picture Lyster would think the whole thing – at long range. He would want to view it from the door of the tepee, and not from the interior.

But the questioning eyes of the girl were turned to him, and remembering them, he said:

"Live there? Well, as much – a little more than I do anywhere else of late. I am to go there in two days; and if you are ready to go, I will take you and be glad to do it."

"You don't know anything about me," she protested.

He smiled, for her tone told him she was yielding.

"Oh, no – not much," he confessed, "but you can tell me, you know."

"I know I can, but I won't," she said, doggedly. "So I guess you'll just move on down to the ferry without me. He knows, and he says I can live here if I want to. I'm tired of the white people. A girl alone is as well with the Indians. I think so, anyway, and I guess I'll try camping with them. They don't ask a word – only what I tell myself. They don't even care whether I have a name; they would give me one if I hadn't."

"A suitable name – and a nice Indian one – for you would be, 'The Water Rat' or 'The Girl Who Swims.' Maybe," he added, "they will hunt you up one more like poetry in books (the only place one finds poetry in Indians), 'Laughing Eyes,' or 'The One Who Smiles.' Oh, yes, they'll find you a name fast enough. So will I, if you have none. But you have, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have, and it's 'Tana," said the girl, piqued into telling by the humorous twinkle in the man's eyes.

"'Tana? Why, that itself is an Indian name, is it not? And you are not Indian."

"It's 'Tana, for short. Montana is my name."

"It is? Well, you've got a big name, little girl, and as it is proof that you belong to the States, don't you think you'd better let me take you back there?"

"I ain't going down among white folks who will turn up their noses at me, just because you found me among these redskins," she answered, scowling at him and speaking very deliberately. "I know how proud decent women are, and I ain't going among any other sort and that's settled."

"Why, you poor little one, what sort of folks have you been among?" he asked, compassionately. Her stubborn antagonism filled him with more of pity than tears could have done; it showed so much suspicion, that spoke of horrible associations, and she was so young!

"See here! No one need know I found you among the Indians. I can make up some story – say you're the daughter of an old partner of mine. It'll be a lie, of course, and I don't approve of lies. But if it makes you feel better, it goes just the same! Partner dies, you know, and I fall heir to you. See? Then, of course, I pack you back to civilization, where you can – well, go to school or something. How's that?"

She did not answer, only looked at him strangely, from under

those straight brows. He felt an angry impatience with her that she did not take the proposal differently, when it was so plainly for her good he was making schemes.

"As to your father being dead – that part of it would be true enough, I suppose," he continued; "for Akkomi told me he was dead."

"Yes – yes, he is dead," she said coldly, and her tones were so even no one would imagine it was her father she spoke of.

"Your mother, too?"

"My mother, too," she assented. "But I told you I wasn't going to talk any more about myself, and I ain't. If I can't go to your Sunday-school without a pedigree, I'll stop where I am – that's all."

She spoke with the independence of a boy, and it was, perhaps, her independence that induced the man to be persistent.

"All right, 'Tana," he said cheerfully. "You come along on your own terms, so long as you get out of these quarters. I'll tell the dead partner story – only the partner must have a name, you know. Montana is a good name, but it is only a half one, after all. You can give me another, I reckon."

She hesitated a little and stared at the glowing embers of the lodge fire. He wondered if she was deciding to tell him a true one, or if she was trying to think of a fictitious one.

"Well?" he said at last.

Then she looked up, and the sullen, troubled, unchildlike eyes made him troubled for her sake.

"Rivers is a good name – Rivers?" she asked, and he nodded his head, grimly.

"That will do," he agreed. "But you give it just because you were baptized in the river this evening, don't you?"

"I guess I give it because I haven't any other I intend to be called by," she answered.

"And you will cut loose from this outfit?" he asked. "You will come with me, little girl, across there into God's country, where you must belong."

"You won't let them look down on me?"

"If any one looks down on you, it will be because of something you will do in the future, 'Tana," he said, looking at her very steadily. "Understand that, for I will settle it that no one knows how I came across you. And you will go?"

"I – will go."

"Come, now! that's a good decision – the best you could have made, little girl; and I'll take care of you as though you were a cargo of gold. Shake hands on the agreement, won't you?"

She held out her hand, and the old squaw in the corner grunted at the symbol of friendship. Akkomi watched them with his glittering eyes, but made no sign.

It surely was a strange beginning to a strange friendship.

"You poor little thing!" said Overton, compassionately, as she half shrank from the clasp of his fingers. The tender tone broke through whatever wall of indifference she had built about her, for she flung herself face downward on the couch, and sobbed

passionately, refusing to speak again, though Overton tried in vain to calm her.

CHAPTER III.
THE IMAGE-MAKER

The world was a night older ere Dan Overton informed Lyster that they would have an addition of one to their party when they continued their journey into the States.

On leaving the village of Akkomi but little conversation was to be had from Dan. In vain did his friend endeavor to learn something of the white squaw who swam so well. He simply kept silence, and looked with provoking disregard on all attempts to surprise him into disclosures.

But when the camp breakfast was over, and he had evidently thought out his plan of action, he told Lyster over the sociable influence of a pipe, that he was going over to the camp of Akkomi again.

"The fact, is, Max, that the girl we saw yesterday is to go across home with us. She's a ward of mine."

"What!" demanded Max, sitting bolt upright in his amazement, "a ward of yours? You say that as though you had several scattered among the tribes about here. So it is a Kootenai Pocahontas! What good advice was it you gave me yesterday about keeping clear of Selkirk Range females? And now you are deliberately gathering one to yourself, and I will be the unnecessary third on our journey home. Dan! Dan! I wouldn't

have thought it of you!"

Overton listened in silence until the first outburst was over.

"Through?" he asked, carelessly; "well, then, it isn't a Pocahontas; it isn't an Indian at all. It is only a little white girl whose father was – was an old partner. Well, he's gone 'over the range' – dead, you know – and the girl is left to hustle for herself. Naturally, she heard I was in this region, and as none of her daddy's old friends were around but me, she just made her camp over there with the Kootenais, and waited till I reached the river again. She'll go with me down to Sinna; and if she hasn't any other home in prospect, I'll just locate her there with Mrs. Huzzard, the milliner-cook, for the present. Now, that's the story."

"And a very pretty little one it is, too," agreed Mr. Max. "For a backwoodsman, who is not supposed to have experience, it is very well put together. Oh, don't frown like that! I'll believe she's your granddaughter, if you say so," and he laughed in wicked enjoyment at Overton's flushed face. "It's all right, Dan. I congratulate you. But I wouldn't have thought it."

"I suppose, now," remarked Dan, witheringly, "that by all these remarks and giggles you are trying to be funny. Is that it? Well, as the fun of it is not visible to me yet, I'll just keep my laughter till it is. In the meantime, I'm going over to call on my ward, Miss Rivers, and you can hustle for funny things around camp until I come back."

"Oh, say, Dan, don't be vindictive. Take me along, won't you? I'll promise to be good – 'pon honor I will. I'll do penance for any

depraved suspicions I may have indulged in. I'll – I'll even shake hands again with Black Bow, there! Beyond that, I can think of no more earnest testimony of repentance."

"I shall go by myself," decided Overton. "So make a note of it, if you see the young lady before to-morrow, it will be because she specially requests it. Understand? I'm not going to have her bothered by people who are only curious; not but that she can take her own part, as you'll maybe learn later. But she was too upset to talk much last night. So I'll go over and finish this morning, and in the meantime, this side of the river is plenty good enough for you."

"Is it?" murmured Mr. Lyster, as he eyed the stalwart form of the retreating guardian, who was so bent on guarding. "Well, it would do my heart good, anyway, to fasten another canoe right alongside of yours where you land over there, and I shouldn't be surprised if I did it."

Thus it happened that while Overton was skimming upward across the river, his friend, on mischief bent, was getting a canoe ready to launch. A few minutes after Overton had disappeared toward the Indian village, the second canoe danced lightly over the Kootenai, and the occupant laughed to himself, as he anticipated the guardian's surprise.

"Not that I care in the least about seeing the dismal damsel he has to look after," mused Lyster. "In fact, I'm afraid she'll be a nuisance, and spoil our jolly good time all the way home. But he is so refreshingly earnest about everything. And as he doesn't

care a snap for girls in general, it is all the more amusing that it is he who should have a charge of that sort left on his hands. I'd like to know what she looks like. Common, I dare say, for the ultra refined do not penetrate these wilds to help blaze trails; and she swam like a boy."

When he reached the far shore, no one was in sight. With satisfied smiles, he fastened his canoe to that of Overton, and then cast about for some place to lie in wait for that selfish personage and surprise him on his return.

He had no notion of going up to the village, for he wanted only to keep close enough to trace Overton. Hearing children's voices farther along the shore, he sauntered that way, thinking to see Indian games, perhaps. When he came nearer, he saw they were running races.

The contestants were running turn about, two at a time. Each victory was greeted with shrill cries of triumph. He also noticed that each victor returned to a figure seated close under some drooping bushes, and each time a hand was reached out and some little prize was given to the winner. Then, with shouts of rejoicing, a new race was planned.

As the stranger stood back of the thick bushes, watching the stretch of level beach and the half-naked, childish figures, he grew curious to see who that one person just out of sight was.

One thing at last he did discover – that the hand awarding the prizes was tanned like the hand of a boy, but that it certainly had white blood instead of red in its veins. What if it should be the

ward?

Elated, and full of mischief, he crept closer. If only he could be able to give Overton a description of her when Overton came back to the canoe!

At first all he could see were the hands – hands playing with a bit of wet clay – or so it seemed to him.

Then his curiosity was more fully aroused when out of the mass a recognizable form was apparent – a crudely modeled head and shoulders of a decided Indian character.

Lyster was so close now that he could notice how small the hands were, and to see that the head bent above them was covered with short, brown, loosely curled hair, and that there was just a tinge of reddish gold on it, where the sunlight fell.

A race was just ended, and one of the little young savages trotted up where the image-maker was. The small hand was again reached out, and he could see that the prize the little Indian had raced for was a blue bead of glass. He could see, also, that the owner of the hand had the face of a girl – a girl with dark eyes, and long lashes that touched the rather pale cheeks. Her mouth was deliciously saucy, with its bow-like curve, and its clear redness. She said something he did not understand, and the children scampered away to resume the endless races, while she continued the manipulation of the clay, frowning often when it would not take the desired form.

Then one of the sharp-eyed little redskins left his companions and slipped back to her, and said something in a tone so low it

was almost a whisper.

She turned at once and looked directly into the thicket, back of which Lyster stood.

"What are you watching for?" she demanded. "I don't like people who are afraid to show themselves."

"Well, I'll try to change that as quickly as I can," Lyster retorted, and circling the clump of bushes, he stood before her with his hat in his hand, looking smilingly audacious as she frowned on him.

But the frown faded as she looked; perhaps because 'Tana had never seen any one quite so handsome in all her life, or so fittingly and picturesquely dressed, for Mr. Maxwell Lyster was artist enough to make the most of his many good points and to exhibit them all with charming unconsciousness.

"I hope you will like me better here than across there," he said, with a smile that was contagious. "You see, I was too shy to come forward at first, and then I was afraid to interrupt your modeling. It is very good."

"You don't look shy," she said, combatively, and drew the clay image back, where he could not look at it. She was not at all sure that he was not laughing at her, and she covered her worn shoes with the skirt of her dress, feeling suddenly very poor and shabby in the light of his eyes. She had not felt at all like that when Overton looked at her in Akkomi's lodge.

"You would not be so unfriendly if you knew who I am," he ventured meekly. "Of course, I – Max Lyster – don't amount to

much, but I happen to be Dan Overton's friend, and with your permission, I hope to continue with him to Sinna Ferry, and with you as well; for I am sure you must be Miss Rivers."

"If you're sure, that settles it, I suppose," she returned. "So he – he told you about me?"

"Oh, yes; we are chums, as you will learn. Then I was so fortunate as to see your brave swim after that child yesterday. You don't look any the worse for it."

"No, I'm not."

"I suppose, now, you thought that little dip a welcome break in the monotony of camp-life, while you were waiting for Dan."

She looked at him in a quick, questioning way he thought odd.

"Oh – yes. While I was waiting for – Dan," she said in a queer tone, and bent her head over the clay image.

He thought her very interesting with her boyish air, her brusqueness, and independence. Yet, despite her savage surroundings, a certain amount of education was visible in her speech and manner, and her face had no stamp of ignorance on it.

The young Kootenais silently withdrew from their races, and gathered watchfully close to the girl. Their nearness was a discomfiting thing to Lyster, for it was not easy to carry on a conversation under their watchful eyes.

"You gave them prizes, did you not?" he asked. "How much wealth must one offer to get them to run?"

"Run where?" she returned carelessly, though quietly amused at the scrutiny of the little redskins. They were especially

charmed by the glitter of gold mountings on Mr. Lyster's watch-guard.

"Oh, run races – run anywhere," he said.

From a pocket of her blouse she drew forth a few blue beads that yet remained.

"This is all I had to give them, and they run just as fast for one of these as they would for a pony."

"Good enough! I'll have some races for my own edification and comfort," and he drew out some coins. "Will you run for this – run far over there?"

The children looked at the girl. She nodded her head, said a word or two unintelligible to him, but perfectly clear to them; for, with sharp looks at the coins and pleased yells, they leaped away to their racing.

"Now, this is more comfortable," he said. "May I sit down here? Thanks! Now would you mind telling me whose likeness it is you are making in the clay?"

"I guess you know it's nobody's likeness," she answered, and again thrust it back out of sight, her face flushing that he should thus make a jest of her poor efforts. "You've seen real statues, I suppose, and know how they ought to be, but you don't need to look for them in the Purcell Range."

"But, indeed, I am in earnest about your modeling. Won't you believe me?" and the blue eyes looking into her own were so appealing, that she turned away her head half shyly, and a pink flush crept up from her throat. Miss Rivers was evidently not

used to eyes with caressive tendencies and they disturbed her, for all her strangely unchildlike character.

"Of course, your work is only in the rough," he continued; "but it is not at all bad, and has real Indian features. And if you have had no teaching – "

"Huh!" and she looked at him with a mirthless smile. "Where'd any one get teaching of that sort along the Columbia River? Of course, there are some gentlemen – officers and such – about the reservations, but not one but would only laugh at such a big girl making doll babies out of mud. No, I had no teaching to do anything but read, and I did read some in a book about a sculptor, and how he made animals and people's faces out of clay. Then I tried."

As she grew communicative, she seemed so much more what she really was in years – a child; and he noticed, with satisfaction, that she looked at him more frankly, while the suspicion faded almost entirely from her face.

"And are you going to develop into a sculptor under Overton's guardianship?" he asked. "You see, he has told me of his good luck."

She made a queer little sound between a laugh and a grunt.

"I'll bet the rest of the blue beads he didn't call it good luck," she returned, looking at him keenly. "Now, honest Injun – did he?"

"Honest Injun! he didn't speak of it as either good or bad luck; simply as a matter of course, that at your father's death you

should look him up, and let him know you were alone. Oh, he is a good fellow, Dan is, and glad, I am sure, to be of use to you."

Her lips opened in a little sigh of content, and a swift, radiant smile was given him.

"I'm right glad you say that about him," she answered, "and I guess you know him well, too. Akkomi likes him, and Akkomi's sharp."

The winner of the race here trotted back for the coin, and Lyster showed another one, as an incentive for all to scatter along the beach again. It looked as though the two white people must pay for the grant of privacy on the river-bank.

Having grown more at ease with him, 'Tana resumed again the patting and pressing of the clay, using only a little pointed stick, while Lyster watched, with curiosity, the ingenious way in which she seemed to feel her way to form.

"Have you ever tried to draw?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Only to copy pictures, like I've seen in some papers, but they never looked right. But I want to do everything like that – to make pictures, and statues, and music, and – oh, all the lovely things there are somewhere, that I've never seen – never will see them, I suppose. Sometimes, when I get to thinking that I never will see them, I just get as ugly as a drunken man, and I don't care if I never do see anything but Indians again. I get so awful reckless. Say!" she said, again with that hard, short laugh, "girls back your way don't get wild like that, do they? They don't talk

my way either, I guess."

"Maybe not, and few of them would be able, either, to do what we saw you do in this river yesterday," he said kindly. "Dan is a judge of such things, you know, and he thought you very nervy."

"Nervy? Oh, yes; I guess he'd be nervy himself if he was needed. Say! can you tell me about the camp, or settlement, at this Sinna Ferry? I never was there. He says white women are there. Do you know them?"

Lyster explained his own ignorance of the place, knowing it as he did only through Dan's descriptions.

Then she, from her bit of Indian knowledge, told him Sinna was the old north Indian name for Beaver. Then he got her to tell him other things of the Indian country, things of ghost-haunted places and strange witcheries, with which they confused the game and the fish. He fell to wondering what manner of man Rivers, the partner of Dan, had been, that his daughter had gained such strange knowledge of the wild things. But any attempt to learn or question her history beyond yesterday was always checked in some way or other.

CHAPTER IV.
DAN'S WARD

Mr. Max Lyster was not given to the study of deep problems; his habits of thought did not run in that groove. But he did watch the young stranger with unusual interest. Her face puzzled him as much as her presence there.

"I feel as though I had seen you before," he said at last, and her face grew a shade paler. She did not look up, and when she spoke, it was very curtly:

"Where?"

"Oh, I don't know – in fact, I believe it is a resemblance to some one I know that makes me feel that way."

"I look like some one you know?"

"Well, yes, you do – a little – a lady who is a little older than you – a little more of a brunette than you; yet there is a likeness."

"Where does she live – and what is her name?" she asked, with scant ceremony.

"I don't suppose her name would tell you much," he answered. "But it is Miss Margaret Haydon, of Philadelphia."

"Miss Margaret Haydon," she said slowly, almost contemptuously. "So you know her?"

"You speak as though you did," he answered; "and as if you did not like the name, either."

"But you think it's pretty," she said, looking at him sharply. "No, I don't know such swells – don't want to."

"How do you know she is a swell?"

"Oh, there's a man owns big works across the country, and that's his name. I suppose they are all of a lot," she said, indifferently. "Say! are there any girls at Sinna Ferry, any family folks? Dan didn't tell me – only said there was a white woman there, and I could live with her. He hasn't a wife, has he?"

"Dan?" and he laughed at the idea, "well, no. He is very kind to women, but I can't imagine the sort of woman he would marry. He is a queer fish, you know."

"I guess you'll think we're all that up in this wild country," she observed. "Does he know much about books and such things?"

"Such things?"

"Oh, you know! things of the life in the cities, where there's music and theaters. I love the theaters and pictures! and – and – well, everything like that."

Lyster watched her brightening face, and appreciated all the longing in it for the things he liked well himself. And she loved the theaters! All his own boyish enthusiasm of years ago crowded into his memory, as he looked at her.

"You have seen plays, then?" he asked, and wondered where she had seen them along that British Columbia line.

"Seen plays! Yes, in 'Frisco, and Portland, and Victoria – big, real theaters, you know; and then others in the big mining camps. Oh, I just dream over plays, when I do see them, specially when

the actresses are pretty. But I mostly like the villains better than the heroes. Don't know why, but I do."

"What! you like to see their wickedness prosper?"

"No – I think not," she said, doubtfully. "But I tell you, the heroes are generally just too good to be live men, that's all. And the villain mostly talks more natural, gets mad, you know, and breaks things, and rides over the lay-out as though he had some nerve in him. Of course, they always make him throw up his hands in the end, and every man in the audience applauds – even the ones who would act just as he does if such a pretty hero was in their way."

"Well, you certainly have peculiar ideas of theatrical personages – for a young lady," decided Lyster, laughing. "And why you have a grievance against the orthodox handsome hero, I can't see."

"He's too good," she insisted, with the little frown appearing between her brows, "and no one is ever started in the play with a fair chance against him. He is always called Willie, where the villain would be called Bill – now, isn't he? Then the girl in the story always falls in love with him at first sight, and that's enough to rile any villain, especially when he wants her himself."

"Oh!" and the face of the young man was a study, as he inspected this wonderful ward of Dan. Whatever he had expected from the young swimmer of the Kootenai, from the welcomed guest of Akkomi, he had not expected this sort of thing.

She was twisting her pretty mouth, with a schoolgirl's

earnestness, over a problem, and accenting thus her patient forming of the clay face. She built no barriers up between herself and this handsome stranger, as she had in the beginning with Overton. What she had to say was uttered with all freedom – her likes, her thoughts, her ambitions. At first the fineness and perfection of his apparel had been as grandeur and insolence when contrasted with her own weather-stained, coarse skirt of wool, and her boy's blouse belted with a strap of leather. Even the blue beads – her one feminine bit of adornment – had been stripped from her throat, that she might give some pleasure to the little bronze-tinted runners on the shore. But the gently modulated, sympathetic tones of Lyster and the kindly fellowship in his eyes, when he looked at her, almost made her forget her own shabbiness (all but those hideous coarse shoes!) for he talked to her with the grace of the people in the plays she loved so, and had not once spoken as though to a stray found in the shelter of an Indian camp.

But he did look curious when she expressed those independent ideas on questions over which most girls would blush or appear at least a little conscious.

"So, you would put a veto on love at first sight, would you?" he asked, laughingly. "And the beauty of the hero would not move you at all? What a very odd young lady you would have me think you! I believe love at first sight is generally considered, by your age and sex, the pinnacle of all things hoped for."

A little color did creep into her face at the unnecessary

personal construction put on her words. She frowned to hide her embarrassment and thrust out her lips in a manner that showed she had little vanity as to her features and their attractiveness.

"But I don't happen to be a young lady," she retorted; "and we think as we please up here in the bush. Maybe your proper young ladies would be very odd, too, if they were brought up out here like boys."

She arose to her feet, and he saw more clearly then how slight she was; her form and face were much more childish in character than her speech, and the face was looking at him with resentful eyes.

"I'm going back to camp."

"Now, I've offended you, haven't I?" he asked, in surprise. "Really, I did not mean to. Won't you forgive me?"

She dug her heel in the sand and did not answer; but the fact that she remained at all assured him she would relent. He was amused at her quick show of temper. What a prospect for Dan!

"I scarcely know what I said to vex you," he began; but she flashed a sullen look at him.

"You think I'm odd – and – and a nobody; just because I ain't like fine young ladies you know somewheres – like Miss Margaret Haydon," and she dug the sand away with vicious little kicks. "Nice ladies with kid slippers on," she added, derisively, "the sort that always falls in love with the pretty man, the hero. Huh! I've seen some men who were heroes – real ones – and I never saw a pretty one yet."

As she said it, she looked very straight into the very handsome face of Mr. Lyster.

"A young Tartar!" he decided, mentally, while he actually colored at the directness of her gaze and her sweepingly contemptuous opinion of "pretty men."

"I see I'd better vacate your premises since you appear unwilling to forgive me even my unintentional faults," he decided, meekly. "I'm very sorry, I'm sure, and hope you will bear no malice. Of course I – nobody would want you to be different from what you are; so you must not think I meant that. I had hoped you would let me buy that clay bust as a memento of this morning, but I'm afraid to ask favors now. I can only hope that you will speak to me again to-morrow. Until then, good-by."

She raised her eyes sullenly at first, but they dropped, ashamed, before the kindness of his own. She felt coarse and clumsy, and wished she had not been so quick to quarrel. And he was turning away! Maybe he would never speak nicely to her again, and she loved to hear him speak.

Then her hand was thrust out to him, and in it was the little clay model.

"You can have it. I'll give it to you," she said, quite humbly. "It ain't very pretty, but if you like it – "

Thus ended the first of many differences between Dan's ward and Dan's friend.

When Daniel Overton himself came stalking down among the Indian children, looking right and left from under his great

slouch hat, he halted suddenly, and with his lips closed somewhat grimly, stood there watching the rather pretty picture before him.

But the prettiness of it did not seem to appeal to him strongly. He looked on the girl's half smiling, drooped face, on Lyster, who held the model and his hat in one hand and, with his handsome blonde head bared, held out his other hand to her, saying something in those low, deferential tones Dan knew so well.

Her hand was given after a little hesitation. When they beheld Dan so near them, the hands were unclasped and each looked confused.

Mr. Lyster was the first to recover, and adjusting his head covering once more, he held up the clay model to view.

"Thought you'd be around before long," he remarked, with a provoking gleam in his eyes. "I really had no hope of meeting Miss Rivers before you this morning; but fortune favors the brave, you know, and fortune sent me right along these sands for my morning walk – a most indulgent fortune, for, look at this! Did you know your ward is an embryo sculptress?"

The older man looked indifferently enough at the exalted bit of clay.

"I leave discoveries of that sort to you. They seem to run in your line more than mine," he answered, briefly. Then he turned to the girl. "Akkomi told me you were here with the children, 'Tana. If you had other company, Akkomi would have made him welcome."

He did not speak unkindly, yet she felt that in some way he was not pleased; and perhaps – perhaps he would change his mind and leave her where he found her! And if so, she might never see – either of their faces again! As the thought came to her, she looked up at Dan in a startled way, and half put out her hand.

"I – I did not know. I don't like the lodges. It is better here by the river. It is *your* friend that came, and I – "

"Certainly. You need not explain. And as you seem to know each other, I need not do any introducing," he answered, as she seemed to grow confused. "But I have a little time to talk to you this morning and so came early."

"Which means that I can set sail for the far shore," added Lyster, amiably. "All right; I'm gone. Good-by till to-morrow, Miss Rivers. I'm grateful for the clay Indian, and more grateful that you have agreed to be friends with me again. Will you believe, Dan, that in our short acquaintance of half an hour, we have had time for one quarrel and 'make up'? It is true. And now that she is disposed to accept me as a traveling companion, don't you spoil it by giving me a bad name when my back is turned. I'll wait at the canoes."

With a wave of his hat, he passed out of sight around the clump of bushes, and down along the shore, singing cheerily, and the words floated back to them:

"Come, love! come, love!
My boat lies low;

She lies high and dry
On the Ohio."

Overton stood looking at the girl for a little time after Lyster disappeared. His eyes were very steady and searching, as though he began to realize the care a ward might be, especially when the antecedents and past life of the ward were so much of stubborn mystery to him.

"I wonder," he said, at last, "if there is any chance of your being my friend, too, in so short a time as a half-hour? Oh, well, never mind," he added, as he saw the red mouth tremble, and tears show in her eyes as she looked at him. "Only don't commence by disliking, that's all; for unfriendliness is a bad thing in a household, let alone in a canoe, and I can be of more downright use to you, if you give me all the confidence you can."

"I know what you mean – that I must tell you about – about how I came here, and all; but I won't!" she burst out. "I'll die here before I do! I hated the people they said were my people. I was glad when they were dead – glad – glad! Oh, you'll say it's wicked to think that way about relatives. Maybe it is, but it's natural if they've always been wicked to you. I'll go to the bad place, I reckon, for feeling this way, and I'll just have to go, for I can't feel any other way."

"'Tana —*'Tana!*" and his hand fell on her shoulder, as though to shake her away from so wild a mood. "You are only a girl yet. When you are older, you will be ashamed to say you ever hated

your parents – whoever they were – your mother!"

"I ain't saying anything about her," she answered bitterly. "She died before I can mind. I've been told she was a lady. But I won't ever use the name again she used. I – I want to start square with the world, if I leave these Indians, and I can't do it unless I change my name and try to forget the old one. It has a curse on it – it has."

She was trembling with nervousness, and her eyes, though tearless, were stormy and rebellious.

"You'll think I'm bad, because I talk this way," she continued, "but I ain't – I ain't. I've fought when I had to, and – and I'd swear – sometimes; but that's all the bad I ever did do. I won't any more if you take me with you. I – I can cook and keep house for you, if you hain't got folks of your own, and – I do want to go with you."

> "Come, love! come!
> Won't you go along with me?
> And I'll take you back
> To old Tennessee!"

The words of the handsome singer came clearly back to them. Overton, about to speak, heard the words of the song, and a little smile, half-bitter, half-sad, touched his lips as he looked at her.

"I see," he said, quietly, "you care more about going to-day, than you did when I talked to you last night. Well, that's all right. And I reckon you can make coffee for me as long as you like. That mayn't be long, though, for some of the young fellows will be wanting you to keep house for them before many years, and

you'll naturally do it. How old are you?"

"I'm – past sixteen," she said, in a deprecating way, as though ashamed of her years and her helplessness. "I'm old enough to work, and I will work if I get where it's any use trying. But I won't keep house for any one but you."

"Won't you?" he asked, doubtfully. "Well, I've an idea you may. But we'll talk about that when the time comes. This morning I wanted to talk of something else before we start – you and Max and I – down into Idaho. I'm not asking the name of the man you hate so; but if I am to acknowledge him as an old acquaintance of mine, you had better tell me what business he was in. You see, it might save complications if any one should run across us some day and know."

"No one will know me," she said, decidedly. "If I didn't know that, I'd stay right here, I think. And as to him, my fond parent," and she made a grimace – "I guess you can call him a prospector and speculator – either of those would be correct. I think they called him Jim, when he was christened."

"Akkomi said last night you had been on the trail hunting for some one. Was it a friend, or – or any one I could help you look for?"

"No, it wasn't a friend, and I'm done with the search and glad of it. Did you," she added, looking at him darkly, "ever put in time hunting for any one you didn't want to find?"

Without knowing it, Miss Rivers must have touched on a subject rather sensitive to her guardian, for his face flushed, and

he gazed at her with a curious expression in his eyes.

"Maybe I have, little girl," he said at last. "I reckon I know how to let your troubles alone, anyway, if I can't help them. But I must tell you, Max – Max Lyster, you know – will be the only one very curious about your presence here – as to the route you came, etc. You had better be prepared for that."

"It won't be very hard," she answered, "for I came over from Sproats' Landing, up to Karlo, and back down here."

"Over from Sproats – you?" he asked, looking at her nervously. "I heard nothing of a white girl making that trip. When, and how did you do it?"

"Two weeks ago, and on foot," was the laconic reply. "As I had only a paper of salt and some matches, I couldn't afford to travel in high style, so I footed it. I had a ring and a blanket, and I traded them up at Karlo for an old tub of a dugout, and got here in that."

"You had some one with you?"

"I was alone."

Overton looked at her with more of amazement than she had yet inspired in him. He thought of that indescribably wild portage trail from the Columbia to the Kootenai. When men crossed it, they preferred to go in company, and this slip of a girl had dared its loneliness, its dangers alone. He thought of the stories of death, by which the trail was haunted; of prospectors who had verged from that dim path and had been lost in the wilderness, where their bones were found by Indians or white hunters long

after; of strange stories of wild beasts; of all the weird sounds of the jungles; of places where a misstep would send one lifeless to the jagged feet of huge precipices. And through that trail of terror she had walked – alone!

"I have nothing more to ask," he said briefly. "But it is not necessary to tell any of the white people you meet that you made the trip alone."

"I know," she said, humbly, "they'd think it either wasn't true – or – or else that it oughtn't to be true. I know how they'd look at me and whisper things. But if – if you believe me – "

She paused uncertainly, and looked up at him. All the rebellion and passion had faded out of her eyes now: they were only appealing. What a wild, changeable creature she was with those quick contrasts of temper! wild as the name she bore – Montana – the mountains. Something like that thought came into his mind as he looked at her.

He had gathered other wild things from his trips into the wilderness; young bears with which to enliven camp life; young fawns that he had loved and cared for, because of the beauty of eyes and form; even a pair of kittens had been carried by him across into the States, and developed into healthy, marauding panthers. One of these had set its teeth through the flesh of his hand one day ere he could conquer and kill it, and his fawns, cubs and smaller pets had drifted from him back to their forests, or else into the charge of some other prospector who had won their affections.

He remembered them, and the remembrance lent a curious character to the smile in his eyes, as he held out his hand to her.

"I do believe you, for it is only cowards who tell lies; and I don't believe you'd make a good coward – would you?"

She did not answer, but her face flushed with pleasure, and she looked up at him gratefully. He seemed to like that better than words.

"Akkomi called you 'Girl-not-Afraid,'" he continued. "And if I were a redskin, too, I would look up an eagle feather for you to wear in your hair. I reckon you've heard that only the braves dare wear eagle feathers."

"I know, but I – "

"But you have earned them by your own confession," he said, kindly, "and some day I may run across them for you. In the meantime, I have only this."

He held out a beaded belt of Indian manufacture, a pretty thing, and she opened her eyes in glad surprise, as he offered it to her.

"For me? Oh, Dan! – Mr. Overton – I – "

She paused, confused at having called him as the Indians called him; but he smiled understandingly.

"We'll settle that name business right here," he suggested. "You call me Dan, if it comes easier to you. Just as I call you 'Tana. I don't know 'Mr. Overton' very well myself in this country, and you needn't trouble yourself to remember him. Dan is shorter. If I had a sister, she'd call me Dan, I suppose; so I

give you license to do so. As to the belt, I got it, with some other plunder, from some Columbia River reds, and you use it. There is some other stuff in Akkomi's tepee you'd better put on, too; it's new stuff – a whole dress – and I think the moccasins will about fit you. I brought over two pairs, to make sure. Now, don't get any independent notions in your head," he advised, as she looked at him as though about to protest. "If you go to the States as my ward, you must let me take the management of the outfit. I got the dress for an army friend of mine, who wanted it for his daughter; but I guess it will about fit you, and she will have to wait until next trip. Now, as I've settled our business, I'll be getting back across the river, so until to-morrow, *klahowya*."

She stood, awkward and embarrassed, before him. No words would come to her lips to thank him. She had felt desolate and friendless for so long, and now when his kindness was so great, she felt as if she should cry if she spoke at all. Just as she had cried the night before at his compassionate tones and touch.

Suddenly she bent forward for the belt, and with some muttered words he could not distinguish, she grasped his big hand in her little brown fingers, and touching it with her lips, twice – thrice – turned and ran away as swiftly as the little Indians who had run on the shore.

The warm color flushed all over Dan's face, as he looked after her. Of course, she was only a little girl, but he was devoutly glad Max was not in sight. Max would not have understood aright. Then his eyes traveled back to his hand, where her mouth had

touched it. Her kiss had fallen where the scar of the panther's teeth was.

And this, also, was a wild thing he was taking from the forests!

CHAPTER V.
AT SINNA FERRY

"It has been young wolves, an' bears, an' other vicious pets – every formed thing, but snakes or redskins, and at last it's that!"

"Tush, tush, captain! Now, it's not so bad. Why, I declare, now, I was kind of pleased when I got sight of her. She's white, anyway, and she's right smart."

"Smart!" The captain sniffed, dubiously. "We'll get a chance to see about that later on, Mrs. Huzzard. But it's like your – hem! tender heart to have a good word for all comers, and this is only another proof of it."

"Pshaw! Now, you're making game, I guess. That's what you're up to, captain," and Mrs. Huzzard attempted a chaste blush and smile, and succeeded in a smirk. "I'm sure, now, that to hem a few neckties an' sich like for you is no good reason for thinking I'm doing the same for every one that comes around. No, indeed; my heart ain't so tender as all that."

The captain, from under his sandy brows, looked with a certain air of satisfaction at the well rounded personality of Mrs. Huzzard. His vanity was gently pleased – she was a fine woman!

"Well, I mightn't like it so well myself if I thought you'd do as much for any man," he acknowledged. "There's too many men at the Ferry who ain't fit even to eat one of the pies you make."

Mrs. Huzzard was fluting the edge of a pie at that moment, and looked across the table at the captain, with arch meaning.

"Maybe so; but there's a right smart lot of fine-looking fellows among them, too; there's no getting around that."

The unintelligible mutter of disdain that greeted her words seemed to bring a certain comfort to her widowed heart, for she smiled brightly and flipped the completed pie aside, with an airy grace.

"Now – now, Captain Leek, you can't be expecting common grubbers of men to have all the advantages of manners that you've got. No, sir; you can't. They hain't had the bringing up. They hain't had the schooling, and they hain't had the soldier drills to teach them to carry themselves like gentlemen. Now, you've had all that, and it's a sight of profit to you. But don't be too hard on the folks that ain't jest so finished like as you. There's that new Rivers girl, now – she ain't a bad sort, though it is queer to see your boy Dan toting such a stranger into camp, for he never did seem to take to girls much – did he?"

"It's not so easy to tell what he's taken to in his time," returned the captain, darkly. "You know he isn't my own boy, as I told you before. He was eight years old when I married his mother, and after her death he took the bit in his own teeth, and left home. No great grief to me, for he wasn't a tender boy to manage!" And Captain Leek heaved a sigh for the martyrdom he had lived through.

"Oh, well, but see what a fine man he's turned out, and I'm

sure no own son could be better to you," for Mrs. Huzzard was one of the large, comfortable bodies, who never see any but the brightest side of affairs, and a good deal of a peacemaker in the little circle where she had taken up her abode. "Indeed, now, captain, you'll not meet many such fine fellows in a day's tramp."

"If she'd even been a real Indian," he continued, discontentedly, "it would have been easier to manage her – to – to put her in some position where she could earn her own living; for by Dan's words (few enough, too!) I gather that she has no money back of her. She'll be a dead weight on his hands, that's what she'll be, and an expensive savage he'll find her, I'll prophesy."

"Like enough. Young ones of any sort do take a heap of looking after. But she's smart, as I said before, and I do think it's a sight better to make room for a likely young girl than to be scared most to death with young wolves and bears tied around for pets. I was all of a shiver at night on account of them. I'll take the girl every time. She won't scratch an' claw at folks, anyway."

"Maybe not," added the captain, who was too contented with his discontent to let go of it at once. "But no telling what a young animal like that may develop into. She has no idea whatever of duty, Mrs. Huzzard, or of – of veneration. She contradicted me squarely this morning when I made some comment about those beastly redskins; actually set up her ignorance against my years of service under the American flag, Mrs. Huzzard. Yes, madame! she did that," and Captain Leek arose in his wrath and tramped twice across the room, halting again near her table and staring at

her as though defying her to justify that.

When he arose, one could see by the slight unsteadiness in his gait that the cane in his hand was for practical use. His limp was not a deformity – in fact, it made him rather more interesting because of it; people would notice or remember him when nothing else in his personality would cause them to do so.

For Captain Alphonso Leek was not a striking-looking personage. His blue eyes had a washed-out, querulous expression. His sandy whiskers had the appearance of having been blown back from his chin, and lodged just in front of his ears. An endeavor had been made to train the outlying portions of his mustache in line with the lengthy, undulating "mutton chops;" but they had, for well-grounded reasons, failed to connect, and the effect was somewhat spoiled by those straggling skirmishers, bristling with importance but waiting in vain for recruits. The top of his head had got above timber line and glistened in the sun of early summer that streamed through the clear windows of Mrs. Huzzard's back room.

But as that head was generally covered by a hat that sported a cord and tassel, and as his bulging breastbone was covered by a dark-blue coat and vest, on which the brass buttons shone in real military fashion – well, all those things had their weight in a community where few men wore a coat at all in warm weather.

Mrs. Huzzard, in the depths of her being, thought it would be a fine thing to go back to Pennsylvania as "Mrs. Captain," even if the captain wasn't as forehanded as she'd seen men.

Even the elegant way in which he could do nothing and yet diffuse an air of importance, was impressive to her admiring soul. The clerical whiskers and the military dress completed the conquest.

But Mrs. Huzzard, having a bit of native wisdom still left, knew he was a man who would need managing, and that the best way was not to let his opinion rule her in all things; therefore, she only laughed cheerily at his indignation.

"Well, captain, I can't say but she did flare up about the Indians, when you said they were all thieves and paupers, stealing from the Government, and all that. But then, by what she says, she has knowed some decent ones in her time – friends of hers; an' you know any one must say a good word for a friend. You'd do that yourself."

"Maybe; I don't say I wouldn't," he agreed. "But I do say, the friends would not be redskins. No, madame! They're no fit friends for a gentleman to cultivate; and so I have told Dan. And if this girl owns such friends, it shows plainly enough that the class she belongs to is not a high one. Dan's mother was a lady, Mrs. Huzzard! She was my wife, madame! And it is a distress for me to see any one received into our family who does not come up to that same level. That is just the state of the case, and I maintain my position in the matter; let Dan take on all the temper he likes about it."

The lady of the pies did not respond to his remarks at once. She had an idea that she herself might fall under the ban of

Captain Leek's discriminating eyes, and be excluded from that upper circle of chosen humanity to which he was born and bred. He liked her pies, her flap-jacks, and even the many kinds of boiled dinners she was in the habit of preparing and garnishing with "dumplings." So far as his stomach was concerned, she could rule supreme, for his digestion was of the best and her "filling" dishes just suited him. But Lorena Jane Huzzard had read in the papers some romances of the "gentle folk" he was fond of speaking of in an intimate way. The gentle folk in her kind of stories always had titles, military or civil, and were generally English lords and ladies; the villains, as generally, were French or Italian. But think as she might over the whole list, she could remember none in which the highbred scion of blue blood had married either a cook or a milliner. One might marry the milliner if she was very young and madly beautiful, but Lorena Jane was neither. She remembered also that beautiful though the milliner or bailiff's daughter, or housekeeper's niece might be, it was only the villain in high life who married her. Then the marriage always turned out at last to be a sham, and the milliner generally died of a broken heart.

So Mrs. Huzzard sighed and, with a thoughtful face, stirred up the batter pudding.

Captain Leek had given her food for reflection of which he was little aware, and it was quite a little while before she remembered to answer his remarks.

"So Mr. Dan is showing temper, too, is he? Well – well – that's

a pity. He's a good boy, captain. I wouldn't waste my time to go against him, if I was you, and there he is now. Good-morning, Mr. Dan! Come right in! Breakfast over, but I'll get you up a bite at any time, and welcome. It does seem right nice for you to be back in town again."

Overton entered at her bidding, and smiled down from his tall stature to the broad, good-natured face she turned to him.

"Breakfast! Why, I'm thinking more about dinner, Mrs. Huzzard. I was up in the hills last night, and had a camp breakfast before you city folks were stirring. Where's 'Tana?"

A dubious sniff from Captain Leek embarrassed Mrs. Huzzard for a moment. She thought he meant to answer and hesitated to give him a chance. But the sniff seemed to express all he wanted to say, and she flushed a little at its evident significance.

"Well, what's the matter now?" demanded the younger man, impatiently, "where is she – do you know?"

"Oh – why, yes – of course we do," said Mrs. Huzzard hurriedly. "I didn't mean to leave you without an answer – no, indeed. But the fact is, the captain is set against something I did this morning, but I do hope you won't be. Whatever they know or don't know in sussiety, the girl was ignorant of it as could be when she asked to go, and so was I when I let her. That's the gospel truth, and I do hope you won't have hard feeling against me for it."

He came a step nearer them both, and looked keenly from one

to the other – even a little threateningly into the watchful eyes of Captain Leek.

"Let her go! What do you mean? Where – Out with it!"

"Well, then, it was on the river she went, in one of them tiltuppy Indian boats that I'm deathly afraid of. But Mr. Lyster, he did promise faithfully he'd take good care of her. And as she'd seemed a bit low-spirited this morning, I thought it 'ud do her good, and I part told her to run along. And to think of its being improper for them to go together – alone! Well, then, I never did – that's all!"

"Is it?" and Overton drew a long breath as of relief and laughed shortly. "Well, you are perfectly right, Mrs. Huzzard. There is nothing wrong about it, and don't you be worried into thinking there is. Max Lyster is a gentleman – didn't you ever happen to know one, dad? Heavens! what a sinner you must have been in your time, if you can't conceive two young folks going out for an innocent boat ride. If any 'sky pilot' drifts up this way, I'll explain your case to him – and ask for some tracts. Why, man, your conscience must be a burden to you! I understand, now, how it comes I find your hair a little scarcer each time I run back to camp."

He had seated himself, and leaning back, surveyed the irate captain as though utterly oblivious of that gentleman's indignation, and then turned his attention to Mrs. Huzzard, who was between two fires in her regret that the captain should be ridiculed and her joy in Overton's commendation of herself.

The captain had dismayed her considerably by a monologue on etiquette while she was making the pies, and she had inwardly hoped that the girl and her handsome escort would return before Overton, for vague womanly fears had been awakened in her heart by the opinions of the captain. To be sure, Dan never did look at girls much, and he was as "settled down" as any old man yet. The girl was pretty, and there was a bit of mystery about her. Who could tell what her guardian intended her for? This question had been asked by Captain Leek. Dan was very close-lipped about her, and his reticence had intensified the mystery regarding his ward. Mrs. Huzzard had seen wars of extermination started for a less worthy reason than pretty Montana, and so she had done some quiet fretting over the question until 'Tana's guardian set her free from worries by his hearty words.

"Don't you bother your precious head, or 'Tana's, with ideas of what rules people live by in a society of the cities thousands of miles away," he advised her. "It's all right to furnish guards or chaperons where people are so depraved as to need them."

This with a turn of his eyes to the captain, who was gathering himself up with a great deal of dignity.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Huzzard," he said, looking with an unapproachable air across Dan's tousled head. "If my stepson at times forgets what is due a gentleman in your house, do not fancy that I reflect on you in the slightest for it. I regret that he entertains such ideas, as they are totally at variance with the rules by which he was reared. Good-morning, madame."

Mrs. Huzzard clasped her hands and gazed with reproach at Overton, but at the same time she could not repress a sigh of relief.

"Well, now, he is good-natured to take it like that, and speak so beautiful," she exclaimed, admiringly; "and you surely did try any man's patience, Mr. Dan. Shame on you!"

But Dan only laughed and held up his finger warningly.

"You'll marry that man some day, if I don't put a stop to this little mutual admiration society I find here on my return," he said, and caught her sleeve as she tried to pass him. "Now don't you do it, Mrs. Huzzard. You are too nice a woman and too much of a necessity to this camp for any one man to build up a claim for you. Just think what will happen if you do marry him! Why, you'll be my stepmother! Doesn't the prospect frighten you?"

"Oh, stop your nonsense, Mr. Dan! I declare you do try a body's patience. You are too big to send to bed without your supper, or I vow I'd try it and see if it would tame you any. The captain is surely righteous mad."

"Then let him attend to his postoffice instead of interfering with your good cooking. Jim Hill said yesterday he guessed the postoffice had moved to your hotel, and the boys all ask me when the wedding is to be."

She blushed with a certain satisfaction, but tossed her head provokingly.

"Well, now, you can just tell them it won't be this week, Mr. Dan Overton; so you can quit your plaguing. Who knows but they

may be asking the same about you, if you keep fetching such pretty girls into camp? Oh, I guess you don't like bein' plagued any more than other folks."

For Overton's smile had vanished at her words, and a tiny wrinkle crept between his brows. But when she commented on it, he recovered himself, and answered carelessly:

"But I don't think I will keep on bringing pretty girls into camp – that is, I scarcely think it will grow into a steady habit," he said, and met her eyes so steadily that she dismissed all idea of any heart interest in the girl. "But I'd rather 'Tana didn't hear any chaff of that sort. You know what I mean. The boys, or any one, is like enough to joke about it at first; but when they learn 'for keeps,' that I'm not a marrying man, they'll let up. As she grows older, there'll be enough boys to bother her in camp without me. All I want is to see that she is looked after right; and that's what I'm in here to talk about this morning."

"Well, now, I'm right glad to help you all I can – which ain't much, maybe, for I never did have a sight of schooling. But I can learn her the milliner trade – though it ain't much use at the Ferry yet; but it's always a living, anyway, for a woman in a town. And as to cookin' and bakin' – "

"Oh, yes; they are all right; she will learn such things easily, I think! But I wanted to ask about that cousin of yours – the lady who, you said, wanted to come out from Ohio to teach Indians and visit you. Is she coming?"

"Well, she writes like it. She is a fine scholar, Lavina is;

but I kind o' let up on asking her to come after I struck this camp, for she always held her head high, I hear, and wouldn't be noways proud of me as a relation, if she found me doing so much downright kitchen work. I hain't seen her since she was grow'd up, you know, and I don't know how she'd feel about it."

"If she's any good, she'll think all the more of you for having pluck to tackle any honest work that comes," said Overton, decidedly. "We all do – every man in the settlement. If I didn't, I wouldn't be asking you to look after this little girl, who hasn't any folks – father or mother – to look after her right. I thought if that lady teacher would just settle down here, I would make it worth her while to teach 'Tana."

"Well, now, that would be wise," exclaimed Mrs. Huzzard, delightedly. "An' I'll write her a letter this very night. Or, no – not to-night," she added, "for I'll be too busy. To-night the dance is to be."

"What dance?"

"Well, now, I clean forgot to tell you about that. But it was Mr. Lyster planned it out after you left yesterday. As he's to go back East in a few days, he is to give a supper and a dance to the boys, and I just thought if they were going to have it, they might as well have it right and so it's to be here."

Overton twisted his hat around in silence for a few moments.

"What does 'Tana think of it?" he asked, at last.

"She? Why, land's sakes! She's tickled a heap over it. Indeed, to go back to the commencement, I guess it was to please her

he got it up. At least, that's the way it looked to me, for she no sooner said she'd like to see a dance with this crowd at the Ferry than he said there should be one, and I should get up a supper. I tell you that young chap sets store by that little girl of yours, though she does sass him a heap. They're a fine-looking young couple, Mr. Dan."

Mr. Dan evidently agreed, for he nodded his head absently, but did not speak. He did not look especially pleased over the announcement of the dance.

"Well, I suppose she's got to learn soon or late whom to meet and whom to let alone here," he said at last, in a troubled way, "and she might as well learn now as later. Yet I wish Max had not been in such a hurry. And he promised to take good care of her on the river, did he?" he added, after another pause. "Well, he's a good fellow; but I reckon she can guide him in most things up here."

"No, indeed," answered Mrs. Huzzard, with promptness, "I heard her say myself that she had never been along this part of the Kootenai River before."

"Maybe not," he agreed. "I'm not speaking of this immediate locality. I mean that she has good general ideas about finding ways, and trails, and means. She's got ideas of outdoor life that girls don't often have, I reckon. And if she can only look after herself as well in a camp as she can on a trail, I'll be satisfied."

Mrs. Huzzard looked at him as he stared moodily out of the window.

"I see how it is," she said, nodding her head in a kindly way. "Since she's here, you're afraid some of the folks is most too rough to teach her much good. Well, well, don't you worry. We'll do the best we can, and that dead partner o' yours – her father, you know – will know you do your best; and no man can do more. I had a notion about her associates when I let her go out on the river this morning. 'Just go along,' thought I, 'if you get into the way of making company out of real gentlemen, you'll not be so like to be satisfied with them as ain't – "

"Good enough," Dan assented, cheerily. "You have been doing a little thinking on your own account, Mrs. Huzzard? That's all right, then. I'll know that you are a conscientious caretaker, no matter how far out on a trail I am. There's another thing I wanted to say; it's this: Just you let her think that the help she gives you around the house more than pays for her keeping, will you?"

"Why, of course I will; and I'm willing enough to take her company in change for boarding, if that's all. You know I didn't want to take the money when you did pay it."

"I know; that's all right. I want you to have the money, only don't let her know she is any bill of expense to me. Understand! You see, she said something about it yesterday – thought she was a trouble to me, or some such stuff. It seemed to bother her. When she gets older, we can talk to her square about such things. But now, till she gets more used to the thought of being with us, we'll have to do some pious cheating in the matter. I'll take the

responsibilities of the lies, if we have to tell any. It – it seems the only way out, you see."

He spoke a little clumsily, as though uttering a speech prepared beforehand and by one not used to memorizing, and he did not look at Mrs. Huzzard as he talked to her.

But she looked at him and then let her hand fall kindly on his shoulder. She had not read romances for nothing. All at once she fancied she had found a romance in the life of Dan Overton.

"Yes, I see, as plain as need be," she said. "I see that you've brought care for yourself with that little mischief in her Indian dress; an' you take all the care on your shoulders as though it was a blessed privilege. And she's never to know what she owes you. Well, there's my hand. I'm your friend, Dan Overton. But don't waste your days with too much care about this new pet you've brought home. That's all I've got to say. She'll never think more of you for it. Girls don't; they are as selfish as young wolves."

CHAPTER VI.
MRS HUZZARD'S SUSPICIONS

Overton sat silent and thoughtful for a little while after Mrs. Huzzard's words. Then he glanced up and smiled at her.

"I've just been getting an idea of the direction your fancies are taking," he said mockingly, "and they're very pretty, but I reckon you'll change them to oblige me; what I'm doing for her is what I'd do for any other child left alone. But as this child doesn't happen to be a boy, I can't take it on the trail, and a ranger like me is not fit to look after her, anyway. I think I told you before, I'm not a marrying man, and she, of course, would not look at me if I was; so what does it matter about her thinking of me? Of course, she won't – it ain't my intention. Even if she leaves these diggings some day and forgets all about me, just as the young wolves or wildcats do – well, what difference? I've helped old bums all over the country, and never heard or wanted to hear of them again, and I'm sure it's more worth one's while to help a young girl. Now, you're a nice little woman, Mrs. Huzzard, and I like you. But if you and I are to keep on being good friends, don't you speak like that about the child and me. It's very foolish. If she should hear it, she'd leave us some fine night, and we'd never learn her address."

Then he put on his hat, nodded to her, and walked out of the

door as though averse to any further discussion of the subject.

"Bums all over the country!" repeated Mrs. Huzzard, looking after him darkly. "Well, Mr. Dan Overton, it's well for you that ward of yours, as you call her, wasn't near enough to hear that speech. And you're not a marrying man, are you? Well, well, I guess there's many a man and woman, too, goes through life and don't know what they might be, just because they never meet with the right person who could help them to learn, and you're just of that sort. Not a marrying man! Humph! When there's not a better favored one along this valley – that there ain't."

She fidgeted about the dinner preparations, filled with a puzzled impatience as to why Dan Overton should thus decidedly state that he was not one of the men to marry, though all the rest of the world might fall into the popular habit if they chose.

"It's the natural ambition of creation," she declared in confidence to the dried peach-pie she was slipping from the oven. "Of course, being as I'm a widow myself, I can't just make that statement to men folks promiscuous like. But it's true, and every man ought to know it's true, and why Dan Overton – "

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.