

Garland Hamlin

The Captain of the Gray-Horse Troop



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I

A CAMP IN THE SNOW

Winter in the upper heights of the Bear Tooth Range is a glittering desolation of snow with a flaming blue sky above. Nothing moves, nothing utters a sound, save the cony at the mouth of the spiral shaft, which sinks to his deeply buried den in the rocks. The peaks are like marble domes, set high in the pathway of the sun by day and thrust amid the stars by night. The firs seem hopeless under their ever-increasing burdens. The streams are silenced – only the wind is abroad in the waste, the tireless, pitiless wind, fanged like ingratitude, insatiate as fire.

But it is beautiful, nevertheless, especially of a clear dawn, when the shadows are vividly purple and each rime-wreathed summit is smit with ethereal fire, and each eastern slope is resplendent as a high-way of powdered diamonds – or at sunset, when the high crests of the range stand like flaming mile-stones leading to the Celestial City, and the lakes are like pools of pure gold caught in a robe of green velvet. Yet always this land demands youth and strength in its explorer.

King Frost's dominion was already complete over all the crests, over timber-line, when young Captain Curtis set out to cross the divide which lay between Lake Congar and Fort Sherman – a trip to test the virtue of a Sibley tent and the staying qualities of a mountain horse.

Bennett, the hairy trapper at the head of the lake, advised against it. "The snow is soft – I reckon you better wait a week."

But Curtis was a seasoned mountaineer and took pride in assaulting the stern barrier. "Besides, my leave of absence is nearly up," he said to the trapper.

"Well, you're the doctor," the old trapper replied. "Good luck to ye, Cap."

It was sunrise of a crisp, clear autumn morning when they started, and around them the ground was still bare, but by noon they were wallowing mid-leg deep in new-fallen snow. Curtis led the way on foot – his own horse having been packed to relieve the burdens of the others – while Sergeant Pierce, resolute and uncomplaining, brought up the rear.

"We must camp beside the sulphur spring to-night," Curtis said, as they left timber-line and entered upon the bleak, wind-swept slopes of Grizzly Bear.

"Very well, sir," Pierce cheerily replied, and till three o'clock they climbed steadily towards the far-off glacial heights, the drifts ever deepening, the cold ever intensifying. They had eaten no food since dawn, and the horses were weak with hunger and weariness as they topped the divide and looked down upon the vast eastern slope. The world before them seemed even more inhospitable and wind-swept than the land they had left below them to the west. The air was filled with flying frost, the sun was weak and pale, and the plain was only a pale-blue sea far, far below to the northeast. The wind blew through the pass with terrible force, and the cold nipped every limb like a famishing white wolf.

"There is the sulphur spring, sir," said Pierce, pointing towards a delicate strand of steam which rose from a clump of pines in the second basin beneath them.

"Quite right, sergeant, and we must make that in an hour. I'd like to take an observation here, but I reckon we'd better slide down to camp before the horses freeze."

The dry snow, sculptured by the blast in the pass, made the threadlike path an exceedingly elusive line to keep, and trailing narrowed to a process of feeling with the feet; but Curtis set his face resolutely into the northeast wind and led the way down the gulch. For the first half-mile the little pack-train crawled slowly and hesitatingly, like a bewildered worm, turning and twisting,

retracing its way, circling huge boulders, edging awful cliffs, slipping, stumbling, but ever moving, ever descending; and, at last, while yet the sun's light glorified the icy kings behind them, the Captain drew into the shelter of the clump of pines from which the steam of the warm spring rose like a chimney's cheery greeting.

"Whoa, boys!" called Curtis, and with a smile at Pierce, added, "Here we are, home again!"

It was not a cheerful place to spend the night, for even at this level the undisturbed snow lay full twelve inches deep and the pines were bowed with the weight of it, and as the sun sank the cold deepened to zero point; but the sergeant drew off his gloves and began to free the horses from their packs quite as if these were the usual conditions of camping.

"Better leave the blankets on," remarked the young officer. "They'll need 'em for warmth."

The sergeant saluted and continued his work, deft and silent, while Curtis threw up a little tent on a cleared spot and banked it snugly with snow. In a very short time a fire was blazing and some coffee boiling. The two men seemed not to regard the cold or the falling night, except in so far as the wind threatened the horses.

"It's hard luck on them," remarked Curtis, as they were finishing their coffee in the tent; "but it is unavoidable. I don't think it safe to try to go down that slide in the dusk. Do you?"

"It's dangerous at any time, sir, and with our horses weak as they are, it sure would be taking chances."

"We'll make Tom Skinner's by noon to-morrow, and be out of the snow, probably." The young soldier put down his tin cup and drew a map from his pocket. "Hold a light, sergeant; I want to make some notes before I forget them."

While the sergeant held a candle for him, Curtis rapidly traced with a soft pencil a few rough lines upon the map. "That settles that water-shed question," he pointed with his pencil. "Here is the dividing wall, not over there where Lieutenant Crombie drew it. Nothing is more deceptive than the relative heights of ranges. Well, now take a last look at the horses," he said, putting away his pencil, "and I'll unroll our blankets."

As they crawled into their snug sleeping-bags Curtis said again, with a sigh, "I'm sorry for the ponies."

"They'll be all right now, Captain; they've got something in their stomachs. If a cayuse has any fuel in him he's like an engine – he'll keep warm," and so silence fell on them, and in the valley the cold deepened till the rocks and the trees cried out in the rigor of their resistance.

The sun was filling the sky with an all-pervading crimson-and-orange mist when the sergeant crawled out of his snug nest and started a fire. The air was perfectly still, but the frost gripped each limb with benumbing fury. The horses, with blankets awry, stood huddled close together in the shelter of the pines not far away. As the sergeant appeared they whinnied to express their dependence upon him, and when the sun rose they turned their broadsides to it gratefully.

The two men, with swift, unhesitating action, set to work to break camp. In half an hour the tent was folded and packed, the horses saddled, and then, lustily singing, Curtis led the way down upon the floor of the second basin, which narrowed towards the north into a deep and wooded valley leading to the plains. The grasp of winter weakened as they descended; December became October. The snow thinned, the streams sang clear, and considerably before noon the little train of worn and hungry horses came out upon the grassy shore of a small lake to bask in genial sunshine. From this point the road to Skinner's was smooth and easy, and quite untouched of snow.

As they neared the miner's shack, a tall young Payonnay, in the dress of a cowboy, came out to meet them, smiling broadly.

"I'm looking for you, Captain."

"Are you, Jack? Well, you see me. What's your message?"

"The Colonel says you are to come in right off. He told me to tell you he had an order for you."

A slouching figure, supporting a heap of greasy rags, drew near, and a low voice drawled, weakly: "Jack's been here since Friday. I told him where you was, but he thought he'd druther lay by my fire than hunt ye."

Curtis studied the squat figure keenly. "You weren't looking for the job of crossing the range yourself, were you?"

The tramplike miner grinned and sucked at his pipe. "Well, no – I can't say that I was, but I like to rub it into these lazy Injuns."

Jack winked at Curtis with humorous appreciation. "He's a dandy to rub it into an Injun, don't you think?"

Even Skinner laughed at this, and Curtis said: "Unsaddle the horses and give them a chance at the grass, sergeant. We can't go into the fort to-night with the packs. And, Skinner, I want to hire a horse of you, while you help Pierce bring my outfit into the fort to-morrow. I must hurry on to see what's in the wind."

"All right, Captain, anything I've got is yours," responded the miner, heartily.

The bugles were sounding "retreat" as the young officer rode up to the door of Colonel Quinlan's quarters and reported for duty.

"Good-evening, Major," called the Colonel, with a quizzical smile and a sharp emphasis on the word major.

"Major!" exclaimed Curtis; "what do you mean – "

"Not a wholesale slaughter of your superiors. Oh no! You are Major by the grace of the Secretary of Indian Affairs. Colonel Hackett, of the War Department, writes me that you have been detailed as Indian agent at Fort Smith. You'll find your notification in your mail, no doubt."

Curtis touched his hat in mock courtesy. "Thanks, Mr. Secretary; your kindness overwhelms me."

"Didn't think the reform administration could get along without you, did you?" asked the Colonel, with some humor. He was standing at his gate. "Come in, and we'll talk it over. You seem a little breathless."

"It does double me up, I confess. But I can't consistently back out after the stand I've made."

"Back out! Well, not if I can prevent it. Haven't you hammered it into us for two years that the army was the proper instrument for dealing with these redskins? No, sir, you can't turn tail now. Take your medicine like a man."

"But how did they drop onto me? Did you suggest it?"

The Colonel became grave. "No, my boy, I did not. But I think I know who did. You remember the two literary chaps who camped with us on our trial march two years ago?"

The young officer's eyes opened wide. "Ah! I see. They told me at the time that they were friends of the Secretary. That explains it."

"Your success with that troop of enlisted Cheyennes had something to do with it, too," added the Colonel. "I told those literary sharps about that experience, and also about your crazy interest in the sign-language and Indian songs."

"You did? Well, then you *are* responsible, after all."

The Colonel put his hand on his subordinate's shoulder. "Go and do the work, boy! It's better than sitting around here waiting promotion. If I weren't so near retirement I'd resign. I have lived out on these cursed deserts ever since 1868 – but I'll fool 'em," he added, with a grim smile. "I'm going to hang on to the last, and retire on half-pay. Then I'll spend all my time looking after my health and live to be ninety-five, in order to get even."

Curtis laughed. "Quite right, Colonel," and, then becoming serious, he added, "It's my duty, and I will do it." And in this quiet temper he accepted his detail.

Captain George Curtis, as the Colonel had intimated, was already a marked man at Fort Sherman – and, indeed, throughout the western division of the army. He feared no hardship, and

acknowledged no superior on the trail except Pierce, who was as invincible to cold and snow as a grizzly bear, and his chief diversions were these trips into the wild. Each outing helped him endure the monotony of barrack life, for when it was over he returned to the open fire of his study, where he pored over his maps, smoking his pipe and writing a little between bugle-calls. In this way he had been able to put together several articles on the forests, the water-sheds, and the wild animals of the region he had traversed, and in this way had made himself known to the Smithsonian Institution. He was considered a crank on trees and Indians by his fellow-officers, who all drank more whiskey and played a better hand at poker than he; "but, after all, Curtis is a good soldier," they often said, in conclusion. "His voice in command is clear and decisive, and his control of his men excellent." He was handsome, too, in a firm, brown, cleanly outlined way, and though not a popular officer, he had no enemies in the service.

His sister Jennie, who had devotedly kept house for him during his garrison life, was waiting for him at the gate of his little yard, and cried out in greeting:

"How *did* you cross the range in this weather? I was frightened for you, George. I could see the storm raging up there all day yesterday."

"Oh, a little wind and snow don't count," he replied, carelessly. "I thought you'd given up worrying about me."

"I have – only I thought of poor Sergeant Pierce and the horses. There's a stack of mail here. Do you know what's happened to you?"

"The Colonel told me."

"How do you like it?"

"I don't know yet. At this moment I'm too tired to express an opinion."

From the pile of mail on his desk he drew out the order which directed him to "proceed at once to Fort Smith, and as secretly as may be. You will surprise the agent, if possible – intercepting him at his desk, so that he will have no opportunity for secreting his private papers. You will take entire charge of the agency, and at your earliest convenience forward to us a report covering every detail of the conditions there."

"Now that promises well," he said, as he finished reading the order. "We start with a fair expectancy of drama. Sis – we are Indian agents! All this must be given up." He looked round the room, which glowed in the light of an open grate fire. The floor was bright with Navajo blankets and warm with fur rugs, and on the walls his books waited his hand.

"I don't like to leave our snug nest, Jennie," he said, with a sigh.

"You needn't. Take it with you," she replied, promptly.

He glanced ruefully at her. "I knew I'd get mighty little sympathy from you."

"Why should you? I'm ready to go. I don't want you trailing about over these mountains till the end of time; and you know this life is fatal to you, or any other man who wants to do anything in the world. It's all very well to talk about being a soldier, but I'm not so enthusiastic as I used to be. I don't think sitting around waiting for some one to die is very noble."

He rose and stood before the fire. "I wish this whole house could be lifted up and set down at Fort Smith; then I might consider the matter."

She came over, and, as he put his arm about her, continued earnestly: "George, I'm serious about this. The President is trying to put the Indian service into capable hands, and I believe you ought to accept; in fact, you can't refuse. There is work for us both there. I am heartily tired of garrison life, George. As the boys say, there's nothing in it."

"But there's danger threatening at Smith, sis. I can't take you into an Indian outbreak."

"That's all newspaper talk. Mr. Dudley writes –"

"Dudley – is he down there? Oh, you are a masterful sly one! Your touching solicitude for the Tetongs is now explained. What is Dudley doing at Smith besides interfering with my affairs?"

"He's studying the Tetong burial customs – but he isn't there at present."

"These Smithsonian sharps are unexpectedly keen. He'd sacrifice me and my whole military career to have you study skulls with him for a few days. Do you know, I suspect him and Osborne Lawson of this whole conspiracy – and you – you were in it! I've a mind to rebel and throw everything out o' gear."

Jennie gave him a shove. "Go dress for dinner. The Colonel and his wife and Mr. Ross are coming in to congratulate you, and you must pretend to be overjoyed."

As he sat at the head of his handsome table that night Curtis began to appreciate his comforts. He forgot the dissensions and jealousies, the cynical speculations and the bitter rivalries of the officers – he remembered only the pleasant things.

His guests were personable and gracious, and Jennie presided over the coffee with distinction. She was a natural hostess, and her part in the conversation which followed was notable for its good sense, but Mr. Ross, the young lieutenant, considered her delicate color and shining hair even more remarkable than her humor. He liked her voice, also, and had a desire to kick the shins of the loquacious Colonel for absorbing so much of her attention. Mrs. Quinlan, the Colonel's wife, was, by the same token, a retiring, silent little woman, who smiled and nodded her head to all that was said, paying special attention to the Colonel's stories, with which all were familiar; even Mr. Ross had learned them.

At last the Colonel turned to Curtis. "You'll miss this, Curtis, when you're exiled down there at old Fort Smith among the Tetongs. Here we are a little oasis of civilization in the midst of a desert of barbarians; down there you'll be swallowed up."

"We'll take civilization with us," said Jennie. "But, of course, we shall miss our friends."

"Well, you'll have a clear field for experiment at Smith. You can try all your pet theories on the Tetongs. God be with them! – their case is desperate." He chuckled gracelessly.

"When do you go?" asked Mrs. Quinlan.

"At once. As soon as I can make arrangements," replied Curtis, and then added: "And, by-the-way, I hope you will all refrain from mentioning my appointment till after I reach Fort Smith."

The visitors did not stay late, for their host was plainly preoccupied, and as they shook hands with him in parting they openly commiserated him. "I'm sorry for you," again remarked the Colonel, "but it's a just punishment."

After they were gone Curtis turned to his sister. "I must leave here to-morrow morning, sis."

"Why, George! Can't you take time to breathe and pack up?"

"No, I must drop down on that agent like a hawk on a June-bug, before he has a chance to bury his misdeeds. The Colonel has given out the news of my detail, and the quicker I move the better. I must reach there before the mail does."

"But I want to go with you," she quickly and resentfully replied.

"Well, you can, if you are willing to leave our packing in Pierce's hands."

"I don't intend to be left behind," she replied. "I'm going along to see that you don't do anything reckless. I never trust a man in a place requiring tact."

Curtis laughed. "That's your long suit, sis, but I reckon we'll need all the virtues that lie in each of us. We are going into battle with strange forces."

II

THE STREETER GUN-RACK

There is a good wagon-road leading to old Fort Smith from Pinon City, but it runs for the most part through an uninteresting country, and does not touch the reservation till within a few miles of the agency buildings. From the other side, however, a rough trail crosses a low divide, and for more than sixty miles lies within the Tetong boundaries, a rolling, cattle country rising to grassy hills on the west.

For these reasons Curtis determined to go in on horseback and in civilian's dress, leaving his sister to follow by rail and buckboard; but here again Jennie promptly made protest.

"I'll not go that way, George. I am going to keep with you, and you needn't plan for anything else – so there!"

"It's a hard ride, sis – sixty miles and more. You'll be tired out."

"What of that? I'll have plenty of time to rest afterwards."

"Very well. It is always a pleasure to have you with me, you stubborn thing," he replied, affectionately.

It had been hard to leave everything at the Fort, hard to look back from the threshold upon well-ordered books and furniture, and harder still to know that rude and careless hands would jostle them into heaps on the morrow, but Jennie was accustomed to all the hardships involved in being sister to a soldier, and, after she had turned the key in the lock, set her face to the south cheerfully. There was something of the missionary in her, and she had long burned with a desire to help the red people.

They got off at a squalid little cow-town called "Riddell" about noon of the second day, and Curtis, after a swift glance around him, said: "Sis, our chances for dinner are poor."

The hotel, a squat, battlemented wooden building, was trimmed with loafing cowboys on the outside and speckled with flies on the inside, but the landlord was unexpectedly attractive, a smiling, courteous host, to whom flies and cowboys were matters of course. It was plain he had slipped down to his present low level by insensible declinations.

"The food is not so bad if it were only served decently," said Jennie, as they sat at the table eying the heavy china chipped and maimed in the savage process of washing.

"I hope you won't be sorry we've left the army, sis."

"I would, if we had to live with these people," she replied, decisively, looking about the room, which was filled with uncouth types of men, keen-eyed, slouchy, and loud-voiced. The presence of a pretty woman had subdued most of them into something like decorum, but they were not pleasant to look at. They were the unattached males of the town, a mob of barkeepers, hostlers, clerks, and railway hands, intermixed with a half-dozen cowboys who had ridden in to "loaf away a day or two in town."

"The ragged edge of the cloth of gold," said Curtis, as he glanced round at them. "Civilization has its seamy side."

"This makes the dear old Fort seem beautiful, doesn't it?" the girl sighed. "We'll see no more green grass and well-groomed men."

An hour later, with a half-breed Indian boy for a guide, they rode away over the hills towards the east, glad to shake the dust of Riddell off their feet.

The day was one of flooding sunlight, warm and golden. Winter seemed far away, and only the dry grass made it possible to say, "This is autumn." The air was without dust or moisture – crystalline, crisp, and deliciously invigorating.

The girl turned to her brother with radiant face. "This is living! Isn't it good to escape that horrid little town?"

"You'd suppose in an air like this all life would be clean and sweet," he replied. "But it isn't. The trouble is, these people have no inner resource. They lop down when their accustomed props are removed. They come from defective stock."

The half-breed guide had the quality of his Indian mother – he knew when to keep silence and when to speak. He led the way steadily, galloping along on his little gray pony, with elbows flapping like a rooster about to take flight.

There was a wonderful charm in this treeless land, it was so lonely and so sinister. It appealed with great power to Curtis, while it appalled his sister. The solitary buttes, smooth of slope and grotesque of line; the splendid, grassy hollows, where the cattle fed; the burned-up mesas, where nothing lived but the horned toad; the alkaline flats, leprous and ashen; the occasional green line of cottonwood-trees, deep sunk in a dry water-course – all these were typical of the whole vast eastern water-shed of the continental divide, and familiar to the young officer, for in such a land he had entered upon active service.

It was beautiful, but it was an ill place for a woman, as Jennie soon discovered. The air, so dry, so fierce, parched her skin and pinched her red lips. The alkali settled in a gray dust upon her pretty hair and entered her throat, increasing her thirst to a keen pain.

"Oh, George! here is a little stream," she cried out.

"Courage, sis. We will soon get above the alkali. That water is rank poison."

"It looks good," she replied, wistfully.

"We'll find some glorious water up there in that clump of willows," and a few minutes' hard riding brought them to a gurgling little brook of clear, cold water, and the girl not merely drank – she laved away all traces of the bitter soil of the lower levels.

At about four o'clock the guide struck into a transverse valley, and followed a small stream to its source in a range of pine-clad hills which separate the white man's country from the Tetong reservation. As they topped this divide, riding directly over a smooth swell, Curtis drew rein, crying out, "Wait a moment, Louie."

They stood on the edge of a vast dip in the plain, a bowl of amethyst and turquoise. Under the vivid October sun the tawny grass seemed to be transmuted into something that shimmered, was translucent, and yet was firm, while the opposite wall, already faintly in shadow, rose by two degrees to snow-flecked mountains, faintly showing in the west and north. On the floor of this resplendent amphitheatre a flock of cattle fed irregularly, luminous as red and white and deep-purple beads. The landscape was silent – as silent as the cloudless sky above. No bird or beast, save the cattle, and the horses the three travellers rode, was abroad in this dream-world.

"Oh, isn't it beautiful!" exclaimed Jennie.

Curtis sat in silence till the guide said: "We must hurry. Long ways to Streeter."

Then he drew a sigh. "That scene is typical of the old time. Nothing could be more moving to me. I saw the buffaloes feed like that once. Whose are the cattle?" he asked of the boy.

"Thompson's, I think."

"But what are they doing here – that's Tetong land, isn't it?"

The guide grinned. "That don't make no difference to Thompson. All same to him whose grass he eats."

"Well, lead on," said Curtis, and the boy galloped away swiftly down the trail. As they descended to the east the sun seemed to slide down the sky and the chill dusk rose to meet them from the valley of the Elk, like an exhalation from some region of icy waters. Night was near, but Streeter's was in sight, a big log-house, surrounded by sheds and corrals of various sorts and sizes.

"How does Mr. Streeter happen to be so snugly settled on Indian land?" asked Jennie.

"He made his location before the reservation was set aside. I believe there are about twenty ranches of the same sort within the lines," replied Curtis, "and I think we'll find in these settlers the

chief cause of friction. The cattle business is not one that leads to scrupulous regard for the rights of others."

As they clattered up to the door of the ranch-house a tall young fellow in cowboy dress came out to meet them. He was plainly amazed to find a pretty girl at his door, and for a moment fairly gaped with lax jaws.

"Good-evening," said Curtis. "Are you the boss here?"

He recovered himself quickly. "Howdy – howdy! Yes, I'm Cal Streeter. Won't you 'light off?"

"Thank you. We'd like to take shelter for the night if you can spare us room."

"Why, cert. Mother and the old man are away just now, but there's plenty to eat." He took a swift stride towards Jennie. "Let me help you down, miss."

"Thank you, I'm already down," said Jennie, anticipating his service.

The young man called shrilly, and a Mexican appeared at the door of the stable. "Hosy, come and take these horses." Turning to Jennie with a grin, he said: "I can't answer for the quality of the grub, fer Hosy is cooking just now. Mother's been gone a week, and the bread is wiped out. If you don't mind slapjacks I'll see what we can do for you."

Jennie didn't know whether she liked this young fellow or not. After his first stare of astonishment he was by no means lacking in assurance. However, she was plains-woman enough to feel the necessity of making the best of any hospitality when night was falling, and quickly replied: "Don't take any trouble for us. If you'll show me your kitchen and pantry I'll be glad to do the cooking."

"Will you? Well, now, that's a sure-enough trade," and he led the way into the house, which was a two-story building, with one-story wings on either side. The room into which they entered was large and bare as a guard-room. The floor was uneven, the log walls merely whitewashed, and the beams overhead were rough pine boles. Some plain wooden chairs, a table painted a pale blue, and covered with dusty newspapers, comprised the visible furniture, unless a gun-rack which filled one entire wall could be listed among the furnishings. Curtis brought a keen gaze to bear on this arsenal, and estimated that it contained nearly a score of rifles – a sinister array.

Young Streeter opened a side door. "This is where you are to sleep. Just make yourself to home, and I'll rub two sticks together and start a fire."

After Jennie left the room, the young fellow turned abruptly. "Stranger, what might I call you?"

"My name is Curtis. I'm going over to visit the agency."

"She your wife?" He pointed his thumb in Jennie's direction.

"No, my sister."

"Oh! Well, then, you can bunk with me in this room." He indicated a door on the opposite side of the hall. "When she gets ready, bring her out to the kitchen. It's hard lines to make her cook her own grub, but I tell you right now I think she'd better."

As Jennie met her brother a few moments later, she exclaimed, "Isn't he handsome?"

"M – yes. He's good-looking enough, but he's just a little self-important, it seems to me."

"Are you going to let him know who you are?"

"Certainly not. I want to draw him out. I begin to suspect that this house is a rendezvous for all the interests we have to fight. These guns are all loaded and in prime order."

"What a big house you have here," said Jennie, ingratiatingly, as she entered the kitchen. "And what a nice kitchen."

"Oh, purty fair," replied the youth, busy at the stove. "Our ranch ain't what we'd make it if these Injuns were out o' the way. Now, here's the grub – if you can dig up anything you're welcome."

He showed her the pantry, where she found plenty of bacon and flour, and some eggs and milk.

"I thought cattlemen never had milk?"

"Well, they don't generally, but mother makes us milk a cow. Now, I'll do this cooking if you want me to, but I reckon you won't enjoy seein' me do it. I can't make biscuits, and we're all out o' bread, as I say, and Hosy's sinkers would choke a dog."

"Oh, I'll cook if you'll get some water and keep a good fire going."

"Sure thing," he said, heartily, taking up the water-pail to go to the spring. When he came back Jennie was dabbling the milk and flour. He stood watching her in silence for some minutes as she worked, and the sullen lines on his face softened and his lips grew boyish.

"You sure know your business," he said, in a tone of conviction. "When I try to mix dough I get all strung up with it."

She replied with a smile. "Is the oven hot? These biscuit must come out just right."

He stirred up the fire. "A man ain't fitten to cook; he's too blame long in the elbows. We have an old squaw when mother is home, but she don't like me, and so she takes a vacation whenever the old lady does. That throws us down on Hosy, and he just about poisons us. A Mexican can't cook no more'n an Injun. We get spring-poor by the time the old lady comes back." Jennie was rolling at the dough and did not reply to him. He held the door open for her when she was ready to put the biscuit in the oven, and lit another bracket-lamp in order to see her better.

"Do you know, you're the first girl I ever saw in this kitchen."

"Am I?"

"That's right." After a pause he added: "I'm mighty glad I didn't get home to eat Hosy's supper. I want a chance at some of them biscuit."

"Slice this bacon, please – not too thick," she added, briskly.

He took the knife. "Where do you hail from, anyway?" he asked, irrelevantly.

"From the coast," she replied.

"That so? Born there?"

"Oh no. I was born in Maryland, near Washington."

"There's a place I'd like to live if I had money enough. A feller can have a continuous picnic in Washington if he's got the dust to spare, so I hear."

"Now you set the table while I make the omelette."

"The how-many?"

"The omelette, which must go directly to the table after it is made."

He began to pile dishes on the table, which ran across one end of the room, but found time to watch her as she broke the eggs.

"If a feller lives long enough and keeps his mouth shut and his eyes open he'll learn a powerful heap, won't he? I've seen that word in the newspaper a whole lot, but I'll be shot if I ever knew that it was jest aigs."

Jennie was amused, but too hungry to spend much time listening. "You may call them in," she said, after a glance at the biscuit.

The young man opened the door and said, lazily, "Cap, come to grub."

Curtis was again examining the guns in the rack, "You're well heeled."

"Haff to be, in this country," said the young fellow, carelessly. "Set down anywhere – that is, I mean anywhere the cook says."

Jennie didn't like his growing familiarity, but she dissembled. "Sit here, George," she said, indicating a chair at the end. "I will sit where I can reach the coffee."

"Let me do that," said Calvin. "Louie, I guess you're not in this game," he said to the boy looking wistfully in at the door.

"Oh, let him come – he's as hungry as we are. Let him sit down," protested Jennie.

Young Streeter acquiesced. "It's all the same to me, if *you* don't object to a 'breed,'" he said, brutally. Louie took his seat in silence, but it was plain he did not enjoy the insolence of the cowboy.

Curtis was after information. "You speak of needing guns – there isn't any danger, I hope?"

"Well, not right now, but we expect to get Congress to pass a bill removing these brutes, and then there may be trouble. Even now we find it safer to go armed. Every little while some Injun kills

a beef for us, and we want to be prepared to skin 'em if we jump 'em up in time. I wouldn't trust one of 'em as far as you could throw a yearling bull by the tail."

"Are they as bad as that?" asked Jennie, with widely open eyes.

"They're treacherous hounds. Old Elk goes around smiling, but he'd let a knife into me too quick if he saw his chance. Hark!" he called, with lifted hand.

They all listened. The swift drumming of hoofs could be heard, mingled with the chuckle of a carriage. Calvin rose. "That's the old man, I reckon," and going to the door he raised a peculiar whoop. A voice replied faintly, and soon the buggy rolled up to the door and the new-comer entered the front room. A quick, sharp voice cried out:

"Whose hat is that? Who's here?"

"A feller on his way to visit the agent. He's in there eatin' supper."

A rapid, resolute step approached the door, and Curtis looked up to meet the keen eyes of a big, ruddy-faced man of fifty, with hair and beard as white as wool. His eyes were steel-blue and penetrating as fire.

"Good-evening, sir. Good-evening, madam. Don't rise. Keep your seats. I'll just drop my coat and sit down with you."

He was so distinctly a man of remarkable quality that Curtis stared at him in deep surprise. He had expected to see a loose-jointed, slouchy man of middle-age, but Joseph Streeter was plainly a man of decision and power. His white hair did not betoken weakness or age, for he moved like one in the full vigor of his late manhood. To his visitors he appeared to be a suspicious, irascible, and generous man.

"Hello!" he called, jovially, "biscuit! Cal, you didn't do these, nor Hosy, neither."

Cal grinned. "Well, not by a whole row o' dogs. This – lady did 'em."

Streeter turned his vivid blue eyes on Jennie. "I want to know! Well, I'm much obliged. When did you come?" he asked of Curtis.

"About an hour ago."

"Goin' far?"

"Over to the agency."

"Friend of the agent?"

"No, but I have a letter of introduction to him."

Streeter seemed to be satisfied. "You'll find him a very accommodating gentleman."

"So I hear," said Curtis, and some subtle inflection in his tone caused Streeter to turn towards him again.

"What did I understand your name was?"

"Curtis."

"Where from?"

"San Francisco."

"Oh yes. I think I heard Sennett speak of you. Those biscuit are mighty good. I'll take another. Couldn't persuade you to stay here, could I?" He turned to Jennie.

Jennie laughed. "I'm afraid not – it's too lonesome."

Cal seized the chance to say: "It ain't so lonesome as it looks now. We're a lively lot here sometimes."

Streeter gave him a glance which stopped him. "Cal, you take Hosy and go over to the camp and tell the boys to hustle in two hundred steers. I want to get 'em passed on to-morrow afternoon, or next day sure."

Calvin's face fell. "I don't think I need to go. Hosy can carry the orders just as well as me," he said, boyishly sullen.

"I want *you* to go!" was the stern answer, and it was plain that Streeter was commander even of his reckless son.

As he rose from the table, Calvin said, in a low voice, to Jennie, "I'll be here to breakfast all right, and I'll see that you get over to the agency."

Streeter the elder upon reflection considered that his guests had not sufficiently accounted for themselves, and, after Calvin left, again turned a penetrating glance on Curtis, saying, in a peculiar way, "Where did you say you were from?"

"San Francisco," replied Curtis, promptly, and cut in ahead with a question of his own. "You seem to be well supplied with munitions of war. Do you need all those guns now?"

"Need every shell. We're going to oust these devils pretty soon, and they know it, and they're ugly."

"What do you mean by ousting 'em?"

"We're pushing a bill to have 'em removed."

"Where to?"

"Oh, to the Red River reservation, or the Powder Valley; we're not particular, so that we get rid of 'em."

Jennie tingled with indignation as Streeter outlined the plans of the settlers and told of his friction with the redmen, but Curtis remained calm and smiling.

"You'll miss their market for your beef, won't you?"

"Oh, that's a small item in comparison with the extra range we'll get," and thereupon he entered upon a long statement of what the government ought to do.

Jennie rose wearily, and the old man was all attention.

"I suppose you are tired and would like to go to bed?"

"We are rather limp," confessed Curtis, glad to escape the searching cross-examination which he knew would follow Jennie's retirement.

When they were alone the two young people looked at each other in silence, Jennie with big, horrified eyes, Curtis with an amused comprehension of his sister's feeling. "Isn't he a pirate? He doesn't know it, but his state of mind makes him indictable for murder on the high seas."

"George, I don't like this. We are going to have trouble if this old man and his like are not put off this reservation."

"Well, now, we won't put him off to-night, especially as he is a gallant host. But this visit here has put me in touch with the cattlemen. I feel that I know their plans and their temper very clearly."

"George, I will not sleep here in this room alone. You must make up a cot-bed or something. These people make me nervous, with their guns and Mexican servants."

"Don't you worry, sis. I'll roll up in a blanket and sleep across your door-sill," and this he did, acknowledging the reasonableness of her fears.

III

CURTIS ASSUMES CHARGE OF THE AGENT

During the night Curtis was quite sure he heard a party of men ride up to the door, but in the morning there remained no signs of them.

They were early on their feet, and Calvin, true to his promise, was present to help get breakfast. He had shaved some time during the night, and wore a new shirt with a purple silk handkerchief looped about his neck, and Jennie found it hard to be as cold and severe with him as she had resolved upon. He was only a big, handsome boy, after all.

"I'm going to send that half-breed back and take you over to the fort myself," he said to Curtis.

"No, I can't have that," Curtis sharply replied. "If you care to ride with us over to the fort I've no objection, but Louie will carry out his contract with us." The truth was, he did not care to be under any further obligation to the Streeters.

Breakfast was a hurried and rather silent meal. As they rose, Jennie said, apologetically: "I fear I can't stop to do up the dishes. It is a long, hard ride to the fort."

"That's right," replied Calvin, "it's close on thirty-five miles. Never you mind about the dishes. Hossy will swab 'em out."

As they were mounting, the elder Streeter said, hospitably: "If you return this way, Mr. Curtis, make my ranch your half-way house." He bowed to Jennie. "My wife will be here then, miss, and you will not be obliged to cook your own meals."

"Oh, I didn't mind; I rather enjoyed it," responded Jennie.

Calvin was delayed at the start, and came thundering after with a shrill, cowboy yell, his horse running close to the ground with ears viciously laid back. The boy made a fine figure as he swept past them with the speed of an eagle. His was the perfection of range horsemanship. He talked, gesticulated, rolled cigarettes, put his coat on or off as he rode, without apparent thought of his horse or of the ground he crossed.

He knew nothing but the life of a cattleman, and spoke quite frankly of his ignorance.

"The old man tried to send me to school once. Packed me off to St. Joe. I stayed a week. 'See here, old man, don't do that again,' I says. 'I won't stand for it.' Hell! You might as well tie up a coyote as shut me in a school-room."

He made a most picturesque guide as he rode ahead of them, always in view, completing a thousand typical combinations of man and horse and landscape – now suppling in his saddle to look down and a little backward at some "sign," now trotting straight towards a dark opening among the pines, now wheeling swiftly to mount a sudden ascent on the trail. Everything he did was as graceful and as self-unconscious as the movements of a panther. He was a living illustration of all the cowboy stories the girl had read. His horse, his saddle, his peculiar, slouching seat, the roll of clothing behind his saddle, his spurs, his long-heeled boots – every detail was as it should be, and Jennie was glad of him, and of Louis, too.

"Yes, it's all here, Jennie," replied Curtis – "the wild country, the Indian, the gallant scout, and the tender maiden."

"I'm having a beautiful ride. Since we left the wagon-road it really seems like the primitive wilderness."

"It is. This little wedge of land is all these brave people have saved from the flood. They made their last stand here. The reflux from the coast caught them here, and here they are, waiting extinction."

The girl's eyes widened. "It's tragic, isn't it?"

"Yes, but so is all life, except to Calvin Streeter, and even he wants what he can't get. He told me this morning he wanted to go to Chicago and take a fall out of a judge who fined him for carrying a gun. So even he has his unsatisfied ambition. As he told me about it he snarled like a young tiger."

At about one o'clock, Calvin, who was riding ahead, halted on the crest of a timbered ridge and raised a shout.

"He's topped the divide!" called Curtis to Jennie, who was riding behind. "We'll soon be in."

"I'm glad of it. I'm tired."

When they reached the spot where Calvin waited they could look down into the main valley of the Elk, and the agency, a singular village of ancient barracks, sheds, corrals, and red-roofed storehouses was almost beneath them. All about on the low hills the criss-crossing trails gave evidence that the Tetongs were still a nation of horsemen. Theirs was a barren land, a land of pine-clad, precipitous hills and deep valleys, which opened to the east – a region of scant rains and thin, discouraged streams.

The sight of the officers' whitewashed quarters and the parade-ground brought a certain sadness to Curtis.

"The old garrison don't look as it did when I was here in 188-," he said, musingly. "Army days in the West are almost gone. The Indian war is over. What a waste of human life it was on both sides! Yes, Louie, go ahead."

As they alternately slid and trotted down the trail, native horsemen could be seen coming and going, their gay blankets sparkling in the clear air. Others on foot were clustered about the central building, where the flag hung droopingly on a tall staff. As they passed the corral, groups of young Tetongs smiled and nudged each other, but offered no greeting. Neither did the older men, though their keen eyes absorbed every detail of the stranger's dress and bearing. It was plain that they held every white man in suspicion, especially if he came attended by a cowboy.

Calvin was elaborately free and easy with them all, eager to show his wide acquaintanceship. "Hello, Two Horns; hello, Hawk," he called to a couple of fine-looking men of middle age. They did not reply. "Hello, Gray Wolf, you old sardine; want to try another horse-race?"

Gray Wolf, evidently something of a wag, smilingly replied: "You bet. Got new pony – heap fast."

Calvin wheeled and spurred into the bunch of young fellows, who scattered with shouts of laughter, while the Captain and Jennie followed Louie, their guide, to the agency gate.

They were met at the fence before the office by two men, one a middle-aged man, with a dirty-gray beard and fat, bloated cheeks, who said, blandly: "Good-morning, sir. Good-morning, miss; nice day."

Curtis dismounted. "Are you Mr. Sennett?"

"I am – what can I do for you?" He turned to his companion, a tall young man, with innocent gray eyes and a loose, weak mouth: "This is my son Clarence. Clarence, take the lady's horse."

"Thank you," said the Captain, as he stepped inside the gate. "I am Captain Curtis, of the cavalry, detailed to take charge of this agency. You have just left the office – have you the keys in your pocket? If so, please surrender them to me. It is an unpleasant duty, but I am ordered to assume absolute control at once."

The man's red skin faded to a yellow-gray – the color of his beard. For a moment he seemed about to fall, then the blood came surging back; his cheeks grew purple with its weight.

"I'll be damned if I submit. It is an outrage!"

"You can't afford to make any trouble. I am sorry to do this, but I am under orders of the department to take you unawares, and on no account to let you return to your office."

Sennett began to bluster. "Show me your authority."

"My authority is in this paper." He drew the order from his pocket. "If you think a moment you will see that instant acquiescence is best."

While Sennett stormed, the two chiefs, Elk and Two Horns, drew near, and lifting his hand, Curtis, using the sign language swiftly, said to them:

"I am your new agent. The Great Father has heard that the old agent is bad. I am here to straighten matters out. I am Swift Eagle – don't you remember? I came with Bear Robe. I was only second lieutenant then."

The faces of the old chiefs lit up with pleasure. "Ay, we remember! We shake your hands. We are glad you have come."

Curtis then asked: "Who is your interpreter – one you can trust, one who can read this paper."

The two men looked at each other for a moment. Elk said, "Joe?"

Two Horns shook his head; then, catching sight of a man who was regarding the scene from a door-way not very distant, he said, in English: "Him – Nawson. Hay, my friend," he called, "come here!"

This observer at once responded to Two Horns' sign. As he came up the chief said: "My friend, here is a paper from Washington; read it for us."

Curtis said: "I am Captain Curtis, of the cavalry, detailed to act as agent here. This is my commission."

The stranger extended his hand. "I'm glad to meet you, Captain Curtis, very glad, indeed." As they shook hands he added: "I've read your articles on the sign language, et cetera, with great pleasure. My name is Lawson."

Curtis smiled. "Are you Osborne Lawson? I'm mighty glad to meet you. This is my sister, Mr. Lawson."

Mr. Lawson greeted Jennie with grace, and she liked him at once. His manner was direct and his voice pleasing. He was tall, lean, and a little stooping, but strong and brown. "Now, Captain, what can I do for you?" he asked, turning briskly.

"I want you to read this paper to the chiefs here, and then I intend to put a guard on the door. Mr. Sennett is not to be permitted to re-enter his office. These are harsh measures, but I am not responsible for them."

Lawson looked thoughtful. "I see." After reading the paper he said to the chiefs: "It is as this man has said. The Great Father has sent him here to take charge of the office. The old agent is cut off – he is not allowed to go back to his office for fear he may hide something. Have Crow put a guard on the door. The new agent will try to find out why you have not received your rations. This is the secret of this paper, and here is the signature of the Secretary. This is a true thing, and you must now obey Captain Curtis. I know him," he said, looking round him. "He is my friend; you can trust him. That is all."

"Good! Good!" said the chiefs. "We understand."

A short, dark Tetong in a frayed captain's uniform came up. "I am chief of the police," he signed. "What shall I do?"

"Guard the door of the office and of the issue house. Let no one but those I bring enter. Will you do as I say?" he asked.

"Ay!" replied the officer, whose name was Crow.

"Then all is said; go guard the door."

Sennett and his son had withdrawn a little from the scene and were talking in low voices. They had placed themselves in the worst possible light, and they felt it. As Curtis reached this point in his orders, Sennett started to cross the road.

"Wait a moment, gentlemen," called Curtis. "My orders are very strict. I must precede you. There is a certain desk in your library, Mr. Sennett, which I must search."

Sennett flamed out into wild oaths. "You shall not search my private papers."

"Silence!" called Curtis. "Another oath and I'll put you in the guard-house."

"Do you suppose I'm going to submit to this without protest? You treat me like a criminal."

"So far as my orders go, that's what you are," said Curtis. "I give you the benefit of the doubt so long as you act the gentleman, but you must respect the presence of my sister, or I'll gag you." After a pause he added, in a gentler tone: "I don't pretend to judge your case. I am merely obeying the orders of the department."

"I have powerful friends in Washington. You will regret this," snarled Sennett. But his son was like one smitten dumb; his breathing was troubled, and his big, gray eyes were childish in their wide appeal.

Lawson then spoke. "Can I do anything further, Captain? Command me freely."

"No, I think not, except to see that my horses are taken care of and my guide fed. I suppose there is a mess or boarding-house where my sister can get something to eat."

"Won't you come to dinner with me?" asked Lawson. "Mrs. Wilcox, some artist friends, and I are messing over in one of the old quarters, and our mid-day dinner is waiting."

Curtis smiled grimly. "Thank you, I am on duty. I must dine with Mr. Sennett. Jennie will accept your invitation thankfully."

As Curtis walked over to the agency house with Sennett and his son, Jennie looked anxious. "They may do something to him."

Lawson smiled. "Oh no, they won't. They are quite cowed, but I'll suggest a guard." He turned to Two Horns and said, in Dakota: "Father, the old agent is angry. The new agent is a brave man, but he is only one against two."

"I understand," said the old man, with a smile, and a few minutes later a couple of policemen were sitting on the door-step of the agent's house. It was a sunny place to sit, and they enjoyed being there very much. One of them understood English, and the other was well able to tell an angry word when he heard it spoken.

The drowsy hush of mid-day again settled down upon the little cluster of buildings – news, even when it passes swiftly among red people, makes no noise. It walks with velvet foot, it speaks in a murmur; it hastens, but conceals its haste.

IV

THE BEAUTIFUL ELSIE BEE BEE

As Jennie entered the mess-house she uttered a little cry of amazement. Outwardly, it was a rude barrack of whitewashed cottonwood logs, but its interior glowed with color and light. Bright rugs were on the floor, and a big divan in one corner displayed a monstrous black bear-skin. A capacious fireplace, which dated back to the first invasion of the army, filled one end of the hall, which had been enlarged by the removal of a partition. Oil-paintings, without frames, were tacked against the walls, and the odor of fresh pigments lingered in the air.

"This is our general meeting-place," explained Lawson.

"It smells like a studio," Jennie replied, after a glance around her.

A plain, quiet little woman, with a look of inquiry on her face, appeared at the dining-room door, and Lawson called out:

"Mrs. Wilcox, this is Miss Curtis, who will stay with us for a few days." As they greeted each other he added: "There is a story to tell, but we are late, and it can wait. Where is Elsie?"

"Still at work. She never *would* come to her meals if we didn't call her."

"I'm disposed to try it some day. Will you take charge of Miss Curtis while I go fetch the delinquent?"

Under Mrs. Wilcox's direction Jennie prepared for luncheon in an adjoining room, wondering still at the unexpected refinement of the furnishings, and curious to see the artist.

As she re-entered the sitting-room a tall girl rose languidly to meet her, and Lawson said: "Miss Curtis, this is Miss Brisbane, the painter of the pictures you see about."

Miss Brisbane bowed in silence, while Jennie cried out: "Oh! did you do them? I think they are beautiful!"

The sincerity of her voice touched the young artist, and she said: "I'm glad you like them – sometimes I think they're pretty 'bum.'"

A slang word on the red lips of the handsome girl seemed woefully out of place to Jennie, who stared at her with the eager curiosity of a child. She was slender and dark, with an exquisite chin, and her hands, though slim and white, were strong and capable. Her eyes were very dark, of a velvety brown-black, and her hair was abundant and negligently piled upon her small head. Altogether she had a stately and rather foreign presence, which made Jennie feel very dowdy and very commonplace.

Mrs. Wilcox hurried them all out into the dining-room, where a pretty table was spread for six people. Jennie's attention was absorbed by the walls, which were also lightened with sketches of small, red babies in gay cradles, and of glowing bits of tawny plain and purple butte.

"Did you do all of these beautiful things?" she asked.

Lawson interposed. "She did, Miss Curtis. Be not deceived. Miss Brisbane's languid manner springs from her theory of rest. When work is finished she 'devitalizes' – I think that is the word – and becomes a rag. But she's a horrible example of industry, spineless as she now appears."

Miss Brisbane remained quite unmoved by Lawson's words; smiling dreamily, her red lips, as serene as those of a child, softly shaped themselves to say: "The strung bow needs relaxation."

"I think you are right," said Jennie, with sudden conviction.

Elsie opened her eyes wide and murmured, "Thank you."

Jennie went on: "Now my trouble is just that. I'm always nerved up. I can't relax. Won't you teach me how?"

"With pleasure. Are you going to live here?" asked Elsie, with faint accession of interest.

"As long as my brother does."

"I suppose you've come to teach these ragamuffins?"

Lawson here answered for Jennie. "Miss Curtis is a sister to Captain Curtis, who has come to displace your uncle."

Miss Brisbane looked up blankly. "I don't understand."

Lawson became explicit, and as she listened the girl's hands clinched.

"How abominable!" she cried, with eyes aflame.

"Not at all. If Mr. Sennett is an honest employé of the government, he should be willing to be searched – if he isn't, then no measure is too harsh. He'll get a thorough raking over, if my impression of the new agent is correct."

"My father would not put a dishonest man in this place," insisted Elsie, "and I don't believe Uncle Sennett has done wrong."

"Well, now, we'll suspend judgment," retorted Lawson, who knew just when to change his tone. "Captain Curtis is an officer of known ability, and no one can accuse him of prejudice. His living doesn't depend upon pleasing either Mr. Sennett or your father. Undoubtedly the government has good reasons for sending him here, and I for one am willing to accept his judgment."

Elsie rose in swift resolution. "I say it is an outrage! I am going to see that Uncle Sennett is not persecuted."

Lawson laid his hand on her arm and his voice was sternly quiet. "I think you would better finish your tea. Whatever protest you feel called upon to make can be made later. If you like," he added, in a gentler voice, "I will represent you in the matter and go with you to see Captain Curtis during the afternoon. I don't think we should trouble him now."

Elsie resumed her seat without either accepting or rejecting his offer, and the meal continued in some constraint, although Lawson summoned his best humor to cover Elsie's passionate outburst.

A few minutes later Elsie sullenly retired to her studio, and Lawson said: "I am going out to see what is going on, Miss Curtis; please make yourself at home here."

When the door closed behind him Jennie turned to Mrs. Wilcox. "Why does Mr. Lawson use that tone with Miss Brisbane – are they engaged?"

Mrs. Wilcox laughed. "That's just what none of us knows. Sometimes I think they are husband and wife – he lectures her so."

When Curtis joined the mess in the evening he was weary and a little sombre. Vastly preoccupied with his difficult task at the office, he had given but little attention to Jennie's announcement of having been taken into the bosom of an artistic family messing at the barracks, and when Elsie met him in a regal gown, glittering and changeful, he pulled himself up in surprise and admiration.

Elsie, on her part, was eager to see him and ready to do battle, but as he faced her, abrupt, vigorous of movement, keen-eyed and composed – almost stern of countenance – she was a little daunted. He was handsomer than she had expected, and older. His head was impressive, his frame muscular, and his movements graceful. Plainly he was a man of power, one it would be politic to treat with respect.

As they took up their napkins at the table Lawson opened out: "Well, Captain, we don't want to seem inquisitive, but we are dying to know what you've been doing this afternoon. We feel on the outside of it all."

"Yes," Elsie quickly added, "we want to know whether there is to be a revolution, or only a riot."

Curtis turned to her smilingly and replied: "You'll all be disappointed. I've been looking over accounts and holding humdrum audience with my clerks – a very busy but very quiet afternoon – nothing doing, as the phrase goes."

"Where is Uncle Sennett?" inquired Elsie. "I tried to find him, but your men would not let me into the office."

"You shouldn't have tried," interjected Lawson.

"Is he your uncle?" asked Curtis.

"He's my father's sister's husband – but that doesn't matter; I'd defend him if he were a stranger. I think he has been shamefully treated. The idea of searching his private desk!"

Curtis looked at her keenly. "I am under orders," he said. "Mr. Sennett is nothing to me, one way or the other. The question for answer is – has he abused his office?"

"He has not!" exclaimed Elsie. "I *know* he has not. He is not a man to cheat and steal; he is not a strong man, but he is kind and generous."

"Too kind and too generous," muttered Lawson.

"I'm sorry to say that the records are against him," replied Curtis, "and his action is against him. He and his son have gone to Pinon City – riding very like fugitives. I had no orders to hold them; indeed, I was glad to let them go."

Elsie bit her lips. "He has gone to get aid," she said at last, "and when he comes back you will take a different tone with him."

Curtis laughed. "I believe he did say he'd have my hide, or something like that."

Lawson put in a word. "He'll do it, too, if the cattle interest can influence the Secretary. Don't tell us any more than is proper, Captain, but – how do you find his accounts?"

"In very bad shape. The chiefs say he has been holding back rations and turning in bad beef for some time."

"You'd take the word of a nasty Indian against my uncle, or *any* white man, I can see that," said Elsie, in withering scorn.

Curtis turned upon her a most searching glance. "Miss Brisbane, I don't understand your attitude towards me. As a soldier on special duty, detailed almost against my will, I have no prejudice in this affair. It is my duty to see that the treaties of the government are carried out. You seem to think I am started on a line of persecution of your uncle – " he checked himself. "I beg you will not pursue the subject any further." He turned to Lawson with an effort to put aside unpleasant conversation. "Please don't ask me disagreeable questions when I am curious to know the meaning of this artistic invasion of my territory. Who is responsible for these pictures?"

Lawson hastened to explain. "This plague of artists is due to me entirely, Captain Curtis. I am doing some studies of the Tetongs, and Miss Brisbane came out to make some illustrations for me. In fact, she suggested coming here rather than to the upper agencies, because of her uncle's presence. Our coming brought others."

"I am very glad you came," said Curtis, heartily, "and I will do all in my power to further your work. Please do not allow my coming to change your plans in the slightest degree."

Lawson continued: "Intending to stay some months, we concluded to set up a mess and be comfortable – and permit me to say, we hope you'll eat with us until your own goods arrive."

"Thank you; I accept with pleasure, for I don't enjoy camping in the tent of my angry predecessor – this company is more to my mind."

Elsie's red lips were tremulous with indignation. "You can't blame Mr. Sennett for being angry. You would be if treated in the same way. There is no justice in it. *I* would never have surrendered those keys to you."

Curtis patiently repeated, "My orders were peremptory."

"You can't take shelter behind that plea. Your acts are atrocious, and I shall write to my father in Washington and have you investigated." She was beautiful as flame in the glow of her wrath.

Curtis seemed struck with a new idea. "Are you the daughter of ex-Senator Brisbane?"

She braced herself. "Well, suppose I am?"

"Oh, nothing at all – only it explains."

"What does it explain?"

"Your attitude. It is quite natural for a daughter of Andrew Brisbane to take sides against these people." He was not in a mood to be gallant, and his glance quelled the angry girl.

With flushed face and quivering lips she sprang to her feet. "I will not stay to be insulted," she said.

Curtis rose as she swept from the room, but checked his instinctive words of apology and returned to his seat in silence.

Mrs. Wilcox relieved the painful pause by saying, "Captain Curtis, you must not misjudge Elsie. She is a much better girl than she seems."

Lawson was troubled as he said, "She has lashed herself into a great rage over this affair, but as a matter of fact she don't care a hang for Sennett."

"I can't apologize for doing my duty," said Curtis, "even to Miss Brisbane."

"Certainly not," replied Lawson, though he was deeply hurt by Elsie's display of unreason.

As soon as he decently could, he followed her to her studio, where he found her lying in sullen dejection on the big divan. "Bee Bee, you are missing a good dinner," he began, gently.

She was instantly ready to fight. "I suppose you blame me for this scene."

"I think you are hasty, and a little unreasonable. I know Curtis by reputation, and he is above any petty malice."

"You are taking his side against me!"

"Not at all, Bee Bee, I am merely trying to show you – "

"He looked at me as no man ever dared to look before, and I hate him. He thinks because he has a little authority he can lord it over us all here. I shall write to father at once, telling him just how this little prig of a lieutenant – "

"Captain," interrupted Lawson – "for distinguished service."

His smile made her furious. She flung herself back on the divan. "Go away. I hate you, too."

Lawson, at the end of his patience, went out and closed the door behind him. "What is the matter with the girl?" he said to Mrs. Wilcox. "I've seen her in temper, but never like this. She has taken the most violent antagonism to Curtis."

"She'd better let that young man alone," replied Mrs. Wilcox, sagely. "He has a very firm mouth."

V CAGED EAGLES

The word had gone out among all the red people that the old agent was entirely "cut off," and that a soldier and a sign-talker had come to take his place, and so each little camp loaded its tepees on wagons or lashed them to the ponies and came flocking in to sit down before the Little Father and be inspired of him.

The young men came first, whirling in on swift ponies, looking at a distance like bands of cowboys – for, though they hated the cattlemen, they formed themselves on Calvin Streeter as a model. Each wore a wide, white hat and dark trousers, and carried a gay kerchief slung round his neck. All still wore moccasins of buckskin, beautifully beaded and fringed, and their braided hair hung low on their breasts.

The old men, who jogged in later in the day, still carried blankets, though they, too, had adopted the trousers and calico shirts of the white man. Several of the chieftains preserved their precious peace-pipes, and their fans and tobacco pouches, as of old, and a few of those who had been in Washington came in wrinkled suits of army-blue. The women dressed in calico robes cut in their own distinctive style, with wide sleeves, the loose flow of the garment being confined at the waist with a girdle. As this was a time of great formality, several of the young girls returned to their buckskin dresses trimmed with elk teeth, which they highly prized.

As a race they were tall and strong, but the men, from much riding, were thin in the shanks and bowed out at the knee. They had lost the fine proportions for which they were famed in the days when they were trailers a-foot. "Straight as an Indian" no longer applied to them, but they were all skilled and picturesque horsemen. Lacking in beauty and strength, they possessed other compensating qualities which still made them most interesting to an artist. Their gestures were unstudiedly graceful, and their roughhewn faces were pleasant in expression. Ill words or dark looks were rare among them.

In all external things they were quite obviously half-way from the tepee to the cabin. Their homes consisted of small hovels of cottonwood logs, set round with tall tepees and low lodges of canvas, used for dormitories and kitchens in summer. A rack for drying meat rations was a part of each family's possessions. They owned many minute ponies, and their camps abounded in dogs of wolfish breed which they handled not at all, for they were, as of old, merely the camp-guard.

Such were the salient characteristics of the Tetongs, westernmost representatives of a once powerful race of hunters, whose home had been far to the east, in a land of lakes, rivers, and forests. They were not strangers to the young soldier; he knew their history and their habits of thought. He now studied them to detect change and found deterioration. "I am your friend," he said to them each and all. "I come to do you good, to lead you in the new road. It is a strange road to me also, for I, too, am a soldier and a hunter; but together we will learn to make the earth produce meat for our eating. Put your hand in mine."

He was plunged at once into a wilderness of work, but in his moments of leisure the face of Elsie Brisbane came into his thought and her resentment troubled him more than he cared to acknowledge. He well knew that her birth and her training put her in hopeless opposition to all he was planning to do for the Tetongs, and yet he determined to demonstrate to her both the justice and the humanity of his position.

He knew her father's career very well. He had once travelled for two days on the same railway train with him, and remembered him as a boastful but powerful man, whose antagonism no one held in light esteem. Andrew Brisbane had entered the State at a time when its mineral wealth lay undeveloped and free to the taker, and having leagued himself with men less masterly than himself but quite as unscrupulous, had set to work to grasp and hold the natural resources of the great Territory

– he laid strong fists upon the mines and forests and grass of the wild land. Once grasped, nothing was ever surrendered.

It mattered nothing to him and his kind that a race of men already lived upon this land and were prepared to die in defence of it. By adroit juggling, he and his corporation put the unsuspecting settler forward to receive the first shock of the battle, and, when trouble came, loudly called upon the government to send its troops "in support of the pioneers." In this way, without danger to himself, the shrewd old Yankee had acquired mineral belts, cattle-ranges, railway rights, and many other good things, and at last, when the Territory was made a State, he became one of its senators.

Naturally, he hated the red people. They were pestilential because, first of all, they paid no railway charges, and also for the reason that they held the land away from those who would add to his unearned increment and increase the sum total of his tariff receipts. His original plan was broadly simple. "Sweep them from the earth," he snarled, when asked "What will we do with the Indians?" But his policy, modified by men with hearts and a sense of justice, had settled into a process of remorseless removal from point to point, from tillable land to grazing land, from grazing land to barren waste, and from barren waste to arid desert. He had no doubts in these matters. It was good business, and to say a thing was not good business was conclusive. The Tetong did not pay – remove him!

Elsie in her home-life, therefore, had been well schooled in race hatred. Tender-hearted where suffering in a dog or even a wolf was concerned, she remained indifferent when a tribe was reported to be starving. Nothing modified her view till, as an art student in Paris, she came into contact with men who placed high value on the redman as "material." She found herself envied because she had casually looked upon a few of these "wonderful chaps," as Newt Penrose called them, and was often asked to give her impressions of them. When she returned to New York she was deeply impressed by Maurice Stewart's enormous success in sculpturing certain types of this despised race. A little later Wilfred J. Buttes, who had been struggling along as a painter of bad portraits, suddenly purchased a house in a choice suburb on the strength of two summers' work among the mountain Utes.

Thereupon Elsie opened her eyes. Not that money was a lure to her, for it was not, but she was eager for notice – for the fame that comes quickly, and with loud trumpets and gay banners. In conversation with Lawson one day she learned that he was about to do some pen-portraits of noted Tetong chieftains, and at once sprang to her opportunity. She admired and trusted Lawson. His keen judgment, his definiteness of speech awed her a little, and with him she was noticeably less assertive than with the others of her artist acquaintances. So here now she sat, painting with rigor and immense satisfaction the picturesque rags and tinsel ornaments of the Tetongs. To her they were beggars and tramps, on a scale with the lazzaroni of Rome or Naples. That they were anything more than troublesome models had not been borne in on her mind.

She had never professed special regard for her uncle the agent – in fact, she covertly despised him for his lack of power – but, now that the issue was drawn, she naturally flew to the side of those who would destroy the small peoples of the earth. She wrote to her father a passionate letter.

"Can't you stop this?" she asked. "No doubt Uncle Henry will go direct to Washington and make complaint. This Captain Curtis is insufferable. I would leave here instantly only I am bound to do some work for Mr. Lawson. We must all go soon, for winter is coming on, but I would like to see this upstart humbled. He treats me as if I were a school-girl – 'declines to argue the matter.' Oh! he is provoking. His sister is a nice little thing, but she sides with him, of course – and so does Lawson, in a sense; so you see I am all alone. The settlers are infuriated at Uncle Sennett's dismissal, and will support you and Uncle Henry."

In the days that followed she met Curtis's attempts at modifying her resentment with scornful silence, and took great credit to herself that she did not literally fly at his head when he spoke of his work or his wards. Her avoidance of him became so painful that at the end of the third day he said to his sister: "Jennie, I think I will go to the school mess after this. Miss Brisbane's hostility shows no signs of relenting, and the situation is becoming decidedly unpleasant."

"George!" said Jennie, sternly. "Don't you let that snip drive you away. Why, the thing is ridiculous! She is here on sufferance – your sufferance. You could order them all off the reservation at once."

"I know I could, but I won't. You know what I mean – I can't even let Miss Brisbane know that she has made me uncomfortable. She's a very instructive example of the power of environment. She has all the prejudices and a good part of the will of her father, and represents her class just as a little wild-cat represents its species. She's a beautiful girl, and yet she is to me one of the most unattractive women I ever knew."

Jennie looked puzzled. "You are a little hard on her, George. She *is* unsympathetic, but I think she says a lot of those shocking things just to hurt you."

"That isn't very nice, either," he said, quietly. "Well, our goods are on the way, and by Thursday we'll be independent of any one. But maybe you are right – it would excite comment if I left the mess. I will join you all at meals until we are ready to light our own kitchen fire."

Thereafter he saw very little of the artists. By borrowing a few necessities of his head farmer he was able to camp down in the house which Sennett had so precipitately vacated. He was busy, very busy, during the day; but when his work was over and he sat beside his fire, pipe in hand, Elsie's haughty face troubled him. His life had not taken him much among women, and his love fancies had been few. His duties as an officer and his researches as a forester and map-builder had also aided to keep him a bachelor. Once or twice he had been disturbed by a fair face at the post, only to have it whisked away again into the mysterious world of happy girlhood whence it came.

And now, at thirty-four, he was obliged to confess that he was as far from marriage as ever – farther, in fact, for an Indian reservation offers but slender opportunity in way of courtship for a man of his exacting tastes.

He was not quite honest with himself, or he would have acknowledged the pleasure he took in watching Elsie's erect and graceful figure as she rode past his office window of a morning. It was pleasant to pause at the open door of her studio for a moment and say "Good-morning," though he received but a cold and formal bow in return. She was more alluring at her easel than in any other place, for she had several curious and very pretty tricks in working, and seemed like a very intent child, with her brown hair loosening over her temples, her eyes glowing with excitement, while she dabbed at the canvas with a piece of cheese-cloth or a crumb of bread. She dragged her stool into position with a quick, amusing jerk, holding her brush in her teeth meanwhile. Her blouses were marvels of odd grace and rich color.

The soldier once or twice lingered in silence at the door after she had forgotten his presence, and each time the glow of her disturbing beauty burned deeper into his heart, and he went away with drooping head.

Mrs. Wilcox took occasion one day to remonstrate with her niece. "Elsie, you were very rude to Captain Curtis again to-day. He was deeply hurt."

"Now, aunt, don't *you* try to convert me to a belief in that tin soldier. He gets on my nerves."

"It would serve you right if he ordered us off the reservation. Your remarks to-day before that young Mr. Streeter were very wrong and very injudicious, and will be used in a bad cause. Captain Curtis is trying to keep the peace here, and you are doing a great deal of harm by your hints of his removal."

"I don't care. I intend to have him removed. I have taken a frightful dislike to him. He is a prig and a hypocrite, and has no business to come in here in this way, setting his low-down Indians up against the settlers."

"That's just what he is trying *not* to do, and if you weren't so obstinate you'd see it and honor him for his good sense."

"Aunt, don't *you* lecture me," cried the imperious girl. "I will not allow it!"

In truth, Mrs. Wilcox's well-meant efforts at peace-making worked out wrongly. Elsie became insufferably rude to Curtis, and her letters were filled with the bitterest references to him and his work.

Lawson continued most friendly, and Curtis gladly availed himself of the wide knowledge of primitive psychology which the ethnologist had acquired. The subject of Indian education came up very naturally at a little dinner which Jennie gave to the teachers and missionaries soon after she opened house, and Lawson's remarks were very valuable to Curtis. Lawson was talking to the principal of the central school. "We should apply to the Indian problem the law of inherited aptitudes," he said, slowly. "We should follow lines of least resistance. Fifty thousand years of life proceeding in a certain way results in a certain arrangement of brain-cells which can't be changed in a day, or even in a generation. The red hunter, for example, was trained to endure hunger, cold, and prolonged exertion. When he struck a game-trail he never left it. His pertinacity was like that of a wolf. These qualities do not make a market-gardener; they might not be out of place as a herder. We must be patient while the redman makes the change from the hunter to the herdsman. It is like mulching a young crab-apple and expecting it to bear pippins."

"Patience is an unknown virtue in an Indian agent," remarked the principal of the central school – "present company excepted."

"Do you believe in the allotment?" asked Miss Colson, one of the missionaries for kindergarten work, an eager little woman, aflame with religious zeal.

"Not in its present form," replied Lawson, shortly. "Any attempt to make the Tetong conform to the isolated, dreary, lonesome life of the Western farmer will fail. The redman is a social being – he is pathetically dependent on his tribe. He has always lived a communal life, with the voices of his fellows always in his ears. He loves to sit at evening and hear the chatter of his neighbors. His games, his hunting, his toil, all went on with what our early settlers called a 'bee.' He seldom worked or played alone. His worst punishment was to be banished from the camping circle. Now the Dawes theorists think they can take this man, who has no newspaper, no books, no letters, and set him apart from his fellows in a wretched hovel on the bare plain, miles from a neighbor, there to improve his farm and become a citizen. This mechanical theory has failed in every case; nominally, the Sioux, the Piegiens, are living this abhorrent life; actually, they are always visiting. The loneliness is unendurable, and so they will not cultivate gardens or keep live-stock, which would force them to keep at home. If they were allowed to settle in groups of four or five they would do better."

Miss Colson's deep seriousness of purpose was evident in the tremulous intensity of her voice. "If they had the transforming love of Christ in their hearts they would feel no loneliness."

A silence followed this speech; both men mentally shrugged their shoulders, but Jennie came to the rescue.

"Miss Colson, did you ever live on a ranch, miles from any other stove-pipe?"

"No, but I am sure that with God as my helper I could live in a dungeon."

"You should have been a nun," said Lawson. "I don't mind your living alone with Christ, but I think it cruel and unchristian to force your solitary way of life on a sociable redman. Would Christ do that? Would He insist on shutting the door on their mythology, their nature lore, their dances and ceremonies? Would He not go freely among them, glad of their joy, and condemning only what was hurtful? Is there any record that He ever condemned an innocent pleasure? How do you know but they are as near the Creator's design as the people of Ohio?"

The teacher's pretty face was strained and white, and her wide-set eyes were painful to see. She set her slim hands together. "Oh, I can't answer you now, but I know you are wrong – wickedly wrong!"

Jennie again broke the intensity of the silence by saying: "Two big men against one little woman isn't fair. I object to having the Indian problem settled over cold coffee. Mr. Lawson, stop preaching!"

"Miss Colson is abundantly able to take care of herself," said Slicer, and the other teachers, who had handed over their cause to their ablest advocate, chorused approval.

Curtis, who sat with deeply meditative eyes fixed on Miss Colson, now said: "It all depends on what we are trying to do for these people. Personally, I am not concerned about the future life of my wards. I want to make them healthy and happy, here and now."

"Time's up!" cried Jennie, and led the woman out into the safe harbor of the sitting-room.

After they had lighted their cigars, Lawson said privately to Curtis: "Now there's a girl with too much moral purpose – just as Elsie is spoiled by too little. However, I prefer a wholesome pagan to a morbid Christian."

"It's rather curious," Curtis replied. "Miss Colson is a pretty girl – a very pretty girl; but I can't quite imagine a man being in love with her. What could you do with such inexorable moral purpose? You couldn't put your arm round it, could you?"

"You'd have to hang her up by a string, like one of these toy angels the Dutch put atop their Christmas-trees. The Tetongs fairly dread to see her coming – they think she's deranged."

"I know it – the children go to her with reluctance; she doesn't seem wholesome to them, as Miss Diehl does. And yet I can't discharge her."

"Naturally not! You'd hear from the missionary world. Think of it! 'I find Miss Colson too pious, please take her away.'" Both men laughed at the absurdity of this, and Lawson went on: "I wished a dozen times during dinner that Elsie Bee Bee had been present. It would have given her a jolt to come in contact with such inartistic, unshakable convictions."

"She would have been here, only her resentment towards me is still very strong."

"She has it in for you, sure thing. I can't budge her," said Lawson, smiling. "She's going to have you removed the moment she reaches Washington."

"I have moments when I think I'd like to be removed," said Curtis, as he turned towards Mr. Slicer and his other guests. "Suppose we go into the library, gentlemen."

VI

CURTIS SEEKS A TRUCE

"Our artists are going to flit," remarked Jennie, one evening, as they were taking seats at luncheon.

He looked up quickly. "Are they?"

"Yes, Miss Brisbane is going back to Washington, and Mr. Lawson will follow, no doubt."

He unfolded his napkin with unmoved countenance. "Well, they are wise; we are likely to have a norther any day now."

The soldier had all the responsibilities and perplexities he could master without the addition of Elsie Brisbane's disturbing lure. The value of her good opinion was enormously enhanced by the news of her intended departure, and for a day or two Curtis went about his duties with absent-minded ineffectiveness; he even detected himself once or twice sitting with his pen in his hand creating aimless markings on his blotting-pad. Wilson, the clerk, on one occasion waited full five minutes for an answer while his chief debated with himself whether to call upon Miss Brisbane at the studio or at the house. He began to find excuses for her – "A man who is a villain in business may be a very attractive citizen in private life – and she may have been very fond of Sennett. From her point of view – anyhow, she is a lovely young girl, and it is absurd to place her among my enemies." The thought of her face set in bitter scorn against him caused his heart to contract painfully. "I've been too harsh. These people are repugnant to one so dainty and superrefined. There are excuses for her prejudice. I can't let her go away in anger." And in this humble mood he stopped at the door of her studio one morning, prepared to be very patient and very persuasive.

"Good-morning, Miss Brisbane. May I come in?"

"Certainly, if my work will interest you," she replied; "you'll excuse my going on. I want to finish this portrait of Little Peta to-day."

"By all means – I do not intend to interrupt." He took a seat to the front and a little to the left of her, and sat in silence for a few moments. Her brown hair, piled loosely on her head, brought out the exquisite fairness of her complexion, and the big, loose sleeve of her blouse made her hand seem like a child's, but it was strong and steady. She was working with her whole mind, breathing quickly as she mixed her colors, holding her breath as she put her brush against the canvas. She used the apparently aimless yet secure movement of the born painter. With half-closed eyes and head a little to one side, with small hand lifted to measure and compare, she took on a new expression, a bewitching intentness, which quite transformed her.

"I hear you are going away," said Curtis at last, speaking with some effort, uncertain of her temper.

"Yes, we break up and vacate to-morrow."

"Why break up? You will want to come back next spring. Leave the place as it is."

She gave him a quick, keen glance, and put her head again on one side to squint.

"I have no intention of returning."

"Have you exhausted Indian subjects?"

"Oh no!" she exclaimed, with sudden, artistic enthusiasm. "I have just begun to see what I want to do."

"Then why not come back?" She did not reply, and he resumed, with tender gravity: "I hope I haven't made it so unpleasant for you that you are running away to escape *me*?"

She turned with a sharp word on her tongue, but he was so frank and so handsome, and withal so humble, that she instantly relented. She was used to this humility in men and knew the meaning

thereof, and a flush of gratified pride rose to her face. The proud soldier had become a suitor like the others.

"Oh no – you have nothing to do with it," she replied, carelessly.

"I am glad of that. I was afraid you might think me unsympathetic, but I am not. I am here this morning to offer you my cordial assistance, for I am eager to see this people put into art. So far as I know, they have never been adequately treated in painting or in sculpture."

"Thank you," she said, "I don't think I shall go very far with them. They are very pleasant on canvas, but there are too many disagreeable things connected with painting them. I don't see how you endure the thought of living here among them." She shuddered. "I hate them!"

"I don't understand that hardness in you, Miss Brisbane," he replied.

"I'm sure it isn't mysterious. I hate dirt and rags, even when painted. Now Little Peta here is quite different. She is a dear little thing. See her sigh – she gets so tired, but she's patient."

"You are making a beautiful picture of her. Your skill is marvellous." His method of approach was more adroit than he realized; she softened yet again.

"Thank you. I seem to have hit her off very well."

"Will you exhibit in Washington this winter?" he asked, with boyish eagerness.

"I may – I haven't quite decided," she said, quite off guard at last.

"If you do I wish you would let me know. I may be able to visit the exhibition and witness your triumph."

She began to suspect his motives. "Oh, my little row of paintings couldn't be tortured into a triumph. I've stolen the time for them from Mr. Lawson, whose illustrations I have neglected." She was again cold and repellent.

"Miss Brisbane, this whole situation has become intolerable to me." He rose and faced her, very sincere and deeply earnest. "I do not like to have you go away carrying an unpleasant impression of me. What can I do to change it? If I have been boorish or presuming in any way I sincerely beg your pardon."

She motioned to Peta. "You can go now, dear, I've done all I can to-day."

Curtis took up his hat. "I hope I have not broken up your sitting. It would be unpardonable in me."

She squinted back at the picture with professional gravity. "Oh no; I only had a few touches to put in under the chin – that luminous shadow is so hard to get. I'm quite finished."

She went behind a screen for a few moments, and when she reappeared without her brushes and her blouse she was the society young lady in tone and manner.

"Would you like to look at my sketches?" she asked. "They're jolly rubbish, the whole lot, but they represent a deal of enthusiasm."

Her tone was friendly – too friendly, considering the point at which he had paused, and he was a little hurt by it. Was she playing with him?

His tone was firm and his manner direct as he said: "Miss Brisbane, I am accustomed to deal directly with friends as well as enemies, and I like to have people equally frank with me. I know you are angry because of my action in the case of your uncle. I do not ask pardon for that; I was acting there in line of my duty. But if I have spoken harshly or without due regard to your feelings at any time I ask you to forgive me."

He made a powerful appeal to her at this moment, but she wilfully replied: "You made no effort to soften my uncle's disgrace."

"I didn't know he was your uncle at that time," he said, but his face grew grave quickly. "It would have made no difference if I had – my orders were to step between him and the records of the office. So far as my orders enlightened me, he was a man to be watched." He turned towards the door. "Is there anything I can do to help you reach the station to-morrow? My sister and I would gladly drive you down."

She was unrelenting, but very lovely as she replied: "Thank you; you are very kind, but all arrangements are made."

"Good-afternoon, Miss Brisbane."

"Good-bye, Captain Curtis."

"She is hard – hard as iron," he said, as he walked away. "Her father's daughter in every fibre."

He was ashamed to acknowledge how deeply he felt her rejection of his friendship, and the thought of not seeing her again gave him a sudden sense of weakness and loneliness.

Elsie, on her part, was surprised to find a new nerve tingling in her brain, and this tremor cut into the complete self-satisfaction she expected to feel over her refusal of the peace-pipe. Several times during the afternoon, while superintending her packing, she found herself standing in an attitude of meditation – her inward eye reverting to the fine, manly figure he made, while his grave, sweet voice vibrated in her ears. She began to see herself in an unpleasant light, and when at the dinner-table Lawson spoke of Curtis, she listened to him with more real interest than ever before.

"He is making wonderful changes here," Lawson was saying. "Everywhere you go you see Tetongs working at fence-building, bridge-making, cabin-raising, with their eagle feathers fluttering in the winds, their small hands chapped with cold. They are sawing boards and piling grain in the warehouse and daubing red paint on the roofs. They are in a frenzy of work. Every man has his rations and is happy. In some way he has persuaded the chiefs to bring in all the school-children, and the benches are full of the little shock-heads, wild as colts."

"A new broom, etc.," murmured Elsie.

"His predecessor never was a new broom," retorted Lawson, quickly. "Sennett always had a nasty slaunch to him. He never in his life cleaned the dirt from the corners, and I don't see exactly why you take such pains in defending him."

"Because he is my uncle," she replied.

"Uncle Boot-jack! That is pure fudge, Bee Bee. You didn't speak to him once a week; you privately despised him – anybody could see that. You are simply making a cudgel of him now to beat Curtis with – and, to speak plainly, I think it petty of you. More than this, you'd better hedge, for I'm not at all sure that Sennett has not been peculating."

Elsie stopped him with an angry gesture. "I'll not have you accusing him behind his back."

Lawson threw out his hands in a gesture of despair. "All right! But make a note of it: you'll regret this taking sides with a disreputable old bum against an officer of Captain Curtis's reputation."

"You are not my master!" she said, and her eyes were fiercely bright. "I do not wish to hear you use that tone to me again! I resent it!" and she struck the floor with her foot. "Henceforth, if we are to remain friends, you will refrain from lecturing me!" and she left the room with a feeling of having done two men a wrong by being unjust to herself, and this feeling deepened into shame as she lay in her bed that night. It was her first serious difference with Lawson and she grew unhappy over it. "But he shouldn't take sides against me like that," she said, in an attempt to justify her anger.

On the second morning thereafter Lawson came into the office and said: "Well, Captain, we leave you this morning."

Curtis looked up into his visitor's fine, sensitive face, and exclaimed, abruptly – almost violently: "I'm going to miss you, old man."

"My heart's with you," replied Lawson. "And I shall return next spring."

"Bring Miss Brisbane with you."

"I'd like to do so, but she is vastly out of key – and I doubt. Meanwhile, if I can be of any use to you in Washington let me know."

"Thank you, Lawson, I trust you perfectly," Curtis replied, with a glow of warm liking.

As he stood at the gate looking up into Elsie's face, she seemed very much softened, and he wished to reach his hand and stay her where she sat; but the last word was spoken, and the wagon rolled away with no more definite assurance of her growing friendship than was to be read in a polite smile.

Jennie was tearful as she said: "After all, they were worth while."

Curtis sighed as he said: "Sis, the realities of our position begin to make themselves felt. Play-spells will be fewer now that our artists are gone."

"They certainly broke our fall," replied Jennie, soberly. "Osborne Lawson is fine, and I don't believe Elsie Bee Bee is as ferocious as she pretends to be."

"It's her training. She has breathed the air of rapacity from childhood. I can't blame her for being her father's child."

Jennie looked at him as if he were presented from a new angle of vision. "George, there *is* a queer streak in you – for a soldier; you're too soft-hearted. But don't you get too much interested in Elsie Bee Bee; she's dangerous – and, besides, Mr. Lawson wears an air of command."

VII

ELSIE RELENTS A LITTLE

The feeling against the redmen, intensified throughout the State by the removal of Sennett, beat against Curtis like a flood. Delegations of citizens, headed by Streeter and Johnson, proceeded at once to Washington, laden with briefs, affidavits, and petitions, and there laid siege to Congress as soon as the members began to assemble. The twenty original homesteaders were taken as the text for most impassioned appeals by local orators, and their melancholy situation was skilfully enlarged upon. They were described as hardy and industrious patriots, hemmed in by sullen savages, with no outlet for trade and scant pasturage for their flocks – in nightly fear of the torch and the scalping-knife.

To Curtis, these settlers were by no interpretation martyrs in the cause of civilization – they were quite other. His birth, his military training, and his natural refinement tended to make him critical of them. They were to him, for the most part, "poor whites," too pitiless to be civilized, and too degenerate to have the interest of their primitive red neighbors. "The best of them," he said to Jennie, "are foolhardy pioneers who have exiled their wives and children for no good reason. The others are cattlemen who followed the cavalry in order to fatten their stock under the protection of our guidon."

The citizens of Pinon City wondered why their delegates made so little impression on the department, but Streeter was not left long in doubt.

The Secretary interrupted him in the midst of his first presentation of the matter.

"Mr. Streeter, you are a cattleman, I believe?"

Streeter looked a little set back. "I am – yes, sir, Mr. Secretary."

The Secretary took up a slip of paper. "Are you the Streeter located on the reservation itself?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you are an interested witness. How can you expect me to take your word against that of Captain Curtis? He tells me the Tetongs are peaceful, and quick to respond to fair treatment. The department has absolute confidence in Captain Curtis, and you are wasting time in the effort to discredit him. The tribe will *not* be removed. Is there any other question you would like to raise?"

Streeter took his dismissal hard. He hurried at once to Brisbane, his face scarlet with rage. "He turned me down," he snarled, "and he's got to suffer for it. There's a way to get at him, and you must find it."

Brisbane was too crafty to promise any definite thing. "Now wait a moment, neighbor; never try to yank a badger out of his den – wait and catch him on the open plain. We must sound the Committee on Indian Affairs, and then move on the House. If we can't put through our removal bill we'll substitute the plan for buying out the settlers. If that don't work I've a little scheme for cutting down the reservation. We must keep cool – and don't mention my name in the matter. What we want to do is to pave the way for my return to the Senate next fall; then I can be of some real service to you. I am now entirely out of it, as you can see, but I'll do what I can."

Streeter went away with a feeling that Brisbane was losing his vigor, and a few days later returned to the West, very bitter and very inflammatory of speech. "The bill is lost. It will be smothered in committee," he said to Calvin.

Brisbane, after leaving Streeter that day, went home to dinner with an awakened curiosity to know more about this young man in whom the department had such confidence. Lawson was dining at his table that night, and it occurred to him to ask a little more fully about Curtis.

"See here, Lawson, you were out there on the Fort Smith reservation, weren't you? Wasn't that where you and Elsie camped this summer?"

Elsie replied, "Yes, papa. We were there when Uncle Sennett was dismissed."

Brisbane started a little. "Why, of course you were; my memory is failing me. Well, what about this man Curtis – he's a crank on the Indian question, like yourself, isn't he?"

Lawson smiled. "We believe in fair play, Governor. Yes, he's friendly to the Indians."

"And a man of some ability, I take it?"

"A man of unusual ability. He is an able forester, a well-read ethnologist, and has made many valuable surveys for the War Department."

"His word seems to have great weight with the department."

"Justly, too, for he is as able a man as ever held an agent's position. A few men like Curtis would solve the Indian problem."

Elsie, who had been listening in meditative silence, now spoke. "Nevertheless, his treatment of Uncle Sennett was brutal. He arrested him and searched all his private papers – don't you remember?"

Brisbane looked at Lawson solemnly and winked the eye farthest from his daughter. Lawson's lips quivered with his efforts to restrain a smile. Turning then to Elsie, Brisbane said: "I recall your story now – yes, he was pretty rigorous, but I'm holding up the department for that; the agent wasn't to blame. He was sent there to do that kind of a job, and from all accounts he did it well."

Elsie lifted her eyebrows. "Does that excuse him? He kept repeating to me that he was under orders, but I took his saying so to be just a subterfuge."

"Mighty little you know about war, my girl. To be a soldier means to obey orders from general down to corporal. Moreover, your uncle has given me a whole lot of trouble, and I wouldn't insist on a relationship which does us no credit. I've held his chin above water about as long as I'm going to."

Elsie was getting deeper into the motives and private opinions of her father than ever before, and, as he spoke, her mind reverted to the handsome figure of the young soldier as he stood before her in the studio, asking for a kindlier good-bye. His head was really beautiful, and his eyes were deep and sincere. She looked up at her father with frowning brows. "I thought you liked Mr. Sennett? He told me you got him his place."

Brisbane laughed. "My dear chicken, he was a political choice. He was doing work for our side, and had to be paid."

"Do you mean you knew the kind of a man he was when you put him there?"

Brisbane pulled himself up short. "Now see here, my daughter, you're getting out of your bailiwick."

"But I want to understand – if you knew he was stealing – "

"I didn't know it. How should I know it? I put him there to keep him busy. I didn't suppose he was a sot and a petty plunderer. Now let's have no more of this." Brisbane was getting old and a trifle irritable, but he was still master of himself. "I don't know why I should be taken to task by my own daughter."

Elsie said no more, but her lips straightened and her eyes grew reflective. As the coffee and cigars came in, she left the two men at the table and went out into the music-room. It seemed very lonely in the big house that night, and she sat down at the piano to play, thinking to cure herself of an uneasy conscience. She was almost as good a pianist as a painter, and the common criticism of her was on this score. "Bee does everything *too* well," Penrose said.

She played softly, musingly, and, for some reason, sadly. "I wonder if I have done him an injustice?" she thought. And then that brutal leer on her father's face came to disturb her. "I wish he hadn't spoken to me like that," she said. "I don't like his political world. I wish he would get out of it. It isn't nice."

In the end, she left off playing and went slowly up to her studio, half determined to write a letter of apology. Her "work-shop," which had been added to the house since her return from Paris, was on a level with her sitting-room, which served as a reception hall to the studio itself. Her artist friends declared it to be too beautiful to work in, and so it seemed, for it was full of cosey corners and soft divans – a glorious lounging-place. Nevertheless, its walls were covered with pictures of her

own making. Costly rugs and a polished floor seemed not to deter her from effort. She remained a miracle of industry in spite of the scoffing of her fellows, who were stowed about the city in dusty lofts like pigeons.

Proud and wilful as she seemed, Elsie had always prided herself on being just, and to be placed in the position of doing an honorable man a wrong was intolerable. The longer she dwelt upon her action the more uneasy she became. Her vision clarified. All that had been hidden by her absurd prejudice and reasonless dislike – the soldier's frank and manly firmness, Lawson's reproaches, her aunt's open reproof – all these grew in power and significance as she mused.

Taking a seat at her desk, she began a letter, "Captain Curtis, Dear Sir – " But this seemed so palpably a continuance of her repellent mood that she tore it up, and started another in the spirit of friendliness and contrition which had seized upon her:

"Dear Captain Curtis, – I have just heard something which convinces me that I have done you an injustice, and I hasten to beg your pardon. I knew my uncle Sennett only as a child knows a man of middle age – he was always kind and good and amusing to me. I had no conception of his real self. My present understanding of him has changed my feeling towards your action. I still think you were harsh and unsympathetic, but I now see that you were simply doing the will of the department. So far I apologize. If you come to Washington I hope you will let us know."

As she re-read this it seemed to be a very great concession indeed; but as she recalled the handsome, troubled face of the soldier, she decided to send it, no matter what he might think of her. As she sealed the letter her heart grew lighter, and she smiled.

When she re-entered the library her father was saying: "No, I don't expect to get him removed. The present administration and its whole policy must be overthrown. Curtis is only a fly on the rim of the wheel. He don't count."

"Any man counts who is a moral force," Lawson replied, with calm sincerity. "Curtis will bother you yet."

VIII

CURTIS WRITES A LONG LETTER

The stage-driver and mail-carrier to Fort Smith was young Crane's Voice, and this was his first trip in December. He congratulated himself on having his back to the wind on the fifty-mile ride up the valley. A norther was abroad over the earth, and, sweeping down from arctic wildernesses, seemingly gathered power as it came. It crossed two vast States in a single night and fell upon the Fort Smith reservation with terrible fury about ten o'clock in the morning.

Crane's Voice did not get his mail-sack till twelve, but his ponies were fed and watered and ready to move when the bag came. He did not know that it contained a letter to warm the heart of his hero, the Captain, but he flung the sack into his cart and put stick to his broncos quite as manfully as though the Little Father waited. The road was smooth and hard and quite level for thirty miles, and he intended to cover this stretch in five hours. Darkness would come early, and the snow, which was hardly more than a frost at noon, might thicken into a blizzard. So he pushed on steadily, fiercely, silently, till a sinister dusk began to fall over the buttes, and then, lifting his voice in a deep, humming, throbbing incantation, he sang to keep off spirits of evil.

Crane's Voice was something of an aristocrat. As the son of Chief Elk he had improved his opportunities to learn of the white man, and could speak a little English and understand a good deal more than he acknowledged, which gave him a startling insight at times into the words and actions of the white people. It was his report of the unvarying kindness and right feeling of Captain Curtis which had done so much to make the whole tribe trust and obey the new agent.

Crane's Voice was afraid of spirits, but he shrank from no hardship. He was proud of his blue uniform, and of the revolver which he was permitted to wear to guard the mail. No storm had ever prevented him from making his trip, and his uncomplaining endurance of heat, cold, snow, and rain would have been counted heroic in a military scout. His virtues were so evident even to the cowboys that they made him an exception by saying, "Yes, Crane is purty near white," and being besotted in their own vanity, they failed to see the humor of such a phrase in the mouth of a drunken, obscene, lawless son of a Missouri emigrant. As a matter of fact there were many like Crane in the tribe, only the settlers never came in personal contact with them.

Crane found his road heavy with drifts as he left the main valley and began to climb, and he did not reach the agency till long after Curtis had gone to bed, but he found his anxious mother waiting for him, together with the captain of police, who took the bag of mail to the office. As he drove into the big corral out of the wind the boy said, in his quaint English: "Me no like 'um blizzard. Fleeze ears like buffalo horn."

Curtis came to the office next morning with a heavy heart. He knew how hard the bitter cold pressed upon his helpless wards, and suffered acutely for sympathy. He spoke to all of those he met with unusual tenderness, and asked minutely after the children, to be sure that none were ill or hungry.

As Wilson, his clerk, laid the big package of letters and papers on his table, the pale-blue, square envelope which bore Elsie's handwriting was ostentatiously balanced on top. Wilson, the lovelorn clerk, sighed to think he had no such missive in his mail that gloomy morning. Looking in, a half-hour later, he found Curtis writing busily in answer to that letter, all the rest of his mail being untouched. "I thought so," said he; "I'd neglect any business for a sweet little envelope like that," and he sighed again.

Curtis had opened the letter eagerly, but with no expectation of comfort. As he read he forgot the storm outside. A warm glow crept into his blood. Lover-like, he got from the letter a great deal more than Elsie had intended to say. He seized his pen to reply at once – just a few lines to set her mind at rest; but his thought ran on so fast, so full of energy, that his writing became all but illegible:

"Dear Miss Brisbane, – You have given me a great pleasure by your letter, and I am replying at once to assure you that I did not lay your words up against you, because I felt you did not fully understand the situation. Your letter gives me courage to say that I think you are unjust in your attitude towards these primitive races – and I also hope that as fuller understanding comes you will change your views.

"Here they are, fenced in on the poorest part of this bleak reservation, on the cold slope of the range, exposed to the heat and drought of summer and the storms of winter. This morning, for example, the wind is rushing up the converging walls of this valley – which opens out to the northeast, you remember – and the cold is intense. I am just sending out messengers to see that no children are freezing. Everything is hard as iron, and the Indians, muffled in their blankets, are sitting beside their fires glum as owls, waiting the coming of the sunshine.

"I must tell you something which happened since you went away – it may correct your views of the Tetongs. It is my policy to give all hauling and wood contracts to the Indian instead of the white man, and when I told the white who has been putting in the wood that I was about to let the contract to the reds he laughed and said, 'You can't get 'em to do that work!' But I felt sure I could. I called them together and gave them fifty axes and told them how much wood I wanted. A few days later I thought I'd ride over to see how they were getting along. As I drew near I heard the most astonishing click-clack of axe-strokes, shouts, laughter, the falling of trees, and when I came in sight I 'trun up both hands.' They had hundreds of cords already cut – twice as much, it seemed, as I could use. I begged them to stop, and finally got them to begin to haul. In the end I was obliged to take sixty cords more than I needed.

"You cannot understand what a pleasure it is for me to see ancient lies about these people destroyed by such experiences as this. It was pathetic to me to find the Two Horns, the Crawling Elk, and other proud old warriors toiling awkwardly with their axes, their small hands covered with blisters; but they laughed and joked about it, and encouraged each other as if they were New-Englanders at a husking-bee. My days and nights are full of trouble, because I can do so little for them. If they were on tillable land I could make them self-supporting in two years, but this land is arid as a desert. It is fair to look upon, but it will not yield a living to any one but a herder.

"Your attitude towards the so-called *savage* races troubles me more than I have any right to mention. The older I grow the less certain I am that any race or people has a monopoly of the virtues. I do not care to see the 'little peoples' of the world civilized in the sense in which the word is commonly used. It will be a sorrowful time to me when all the tribes of the earth shall have cottonade trousers and derby hats. You, as an artist, ought to shrink from the dead level of utilitarian dress which the English-speaking race seems determined to impose on the world. If I could, I would civilize only to the extent of making life easier and happier – the religious beliefs, the songs, the native dress – all these things I would retain. What is life for, if not for this?

"My artist friends as a rule agree with me in these matters, and that is another reason why your unsympathetic attitude surprises and grieves me. I know your home-life has been such as would prejudice you against the redman, but your training in Paris should have changed all that. You consider the Tetongs 'good material' – if you come to know them as I do you will find they are *folks*, just like anybody else, with the same rights to the earth that we have. Of course, they *are* crude and

unlovely – and sometimes they are cruel; but they have an astonishing power over those who come to know them well.

"Pardon this long letter. You may call me a crank or any hard name you please, but I am anxious to have you on the right side in this struggle, for it is a struggle to the death. The tragedy of their certain extinction overwhelms me at times. I found a little scrap of canvas with a sketch of Peta on it – may I keep it? My sister is quite well and deep in 'the work.' She often speaks of you and we are both hoping to see you next year."

It was foolish for him to expect an immediate reply to this epistle, but he did – he counted the days which lay between its posting and a possible date for return mail. Perhaps, had he been in Washington, diverted by Congress, cheered by the Army and Navy Club, and entertained by his friends, he would not have surrendered so completely to the domination of that imperious girl-face; but in the dead of winter, surrounded by ragged, smoky squaws and their impatient, complaining husbands, with no companionship but his sister and Wilson, the love-sick clerk, his thought in every moment of relaxation went back to the moments he had spent in Elsie's company. Nature cried out, "It is not good for man to be alone," but the iron ring of circumstance held him a prisoner in a land where delicate women were as alien as orange blossoms or tea-roses.

Outwardly composed, indefatigable, stern in discipline and judicial of report, he was inwardly filled with a mighty longing to see again that slim young girl with the big, black, changeful eyes. He made careful attempt to conceal his growing unrest from Jennie, but her sharp eyes, accustomed to every change in his face, detected a tremor when Elsie's name was mentioned, and her ears discovered a subtle vibration in his voice which instructed her, though she did not attain complete realization of his absorbing interest. She was sympathetic enough to search out Elsie's name in the social columns of the Washington papers, and it was pitiful to see with what joy the busy Indian agent listened to the brief item concerning "Miss Brisbane's reception on Monday," or the description of her dress at the McCartney ball.

Jennie sighed as she read of these brilliant assemblages. "George, I wonder if we will ever spend another winter in Washington?"

"Oh, I think so, sis – some time."

"Some time! But we'll both be so old we won't enjoy it. Sometimes I feel that we are missing everything that's worth while."

He did not mention Elsie's letter, and as the weeks passed without any reply he was very glad he had kept silence. Jennie had her secret, also, which was that Elsie was as good as engaged to Lawson. No one knew this for a certainty, but Mrs. Wilcox was quite free to say she considered it a settled thing.

Jennie was relieved to know how indifferent her brother was to Miss Colson, the missionary, who seemed to be undergoing a subtle transformation. With Jennie she was always moaning and sighing, but in the presence of her lord, the agent, she relaxed and became quite cheerful and dangerously pretty. The other teachers – good, commonplace souls! – went their mechanical way, with very little communication with the agent's household, but Miss Colson seized every opportunity to escape her messmates. "They are so material," she said, sighfully; "they make spiritual growth impossible to me."

Jennie was not deceived. "You're a cat, that's what you are – a nice, little, scared cat; but you're getting over your scare," she added, as she watched the devotee in spirited conversation with her brother.

Elsie's reply to Curtis's long letter was studiously cool but polite. "I feel the force of what you say, but the course of civilization lies across the lands of the 'small peoples.' It is sorrowful, of course, but they must go, like the wolves and the rattlesnakes." In this phrase he recognized the voice of Andrew J. Brisbane, and it gave him a twinge to see it written by Elsie's small hand. The letter ended by

leaving matters very adroitly at an equipoise. It was friendlier than she had ever been in conversation, yet not so womanly as he had hoped it might be. As he studied it, however, some subtler sense than sight detected in its carefully compounded phrases something to feed upon, and though he did not write in answer to it, he had a feeling that she expected him to do so.

Meanwhile the tone of the opposition grew confident. The settlers were convinced that Congress would accede to their wishes and remove the Tetongs, and they began to treat the redmen with a certain good-natured tolerance, as if to say, "Well, you'll soon be settled for, anyway."

Calvin Streeter came often to the agency, and not infrequently stayed to dinner with Curtis, paying timid court to Jennie, who retained enough of her girlhood's coquetry to enjoy the handsome cowboy's open-eyed admiration, even though she laughed at him afterwards in response to her brother's jesting. Calvin vastly improved under the stress of his desire to be worthy of her. He caught up many of the Captain's nice mannerisms, and handled his fork and napkin with very good grace indeed. He usually came galloping across the flat, his horse outstretched at full speed, his hat-rim uprolled by the wind, his gay neckerchief fluttering, his hands holding the reins high – a magnificent picture of powerful young manhood. As he reached the gate it was his habit to put his horse on his haunches with one sudden, pitiless wrench on the Mexican bit and drop to the ground, and in dramatic contrast with his approach call out in smooth, quiet voice:

"Howdy, folks, howdy! Nice day."

These affectations pleased Jennie very much, though she finally complained of his cruelty in reining in his horse so sharply.

"All right, miss, I won't do it no more," he said, instantly.

He quite regularly invited them to the dances given round about, and Jennie was ready to go, but Curtis, being too deeply occupied, could not spare the time, and that debarred Jennie, though Calvin could see no good reason why it should. "I'll take care of you," said he, but the girl could not trust herself to his protection.

His was not a secretive nature, and he kept Curtis very well informed as to the feeling of the settlers, reporting, as he did, their conversations as well as their speeches, with great freedom and remarkable accuracy.

In this way the agent learned that the cattlemen had agreed to use caution in dealing with him. "He's a bad man to monkey with," was the sentiment Calvin reported to be current among the settlers on the West Fork. Young Crane's Voice also circulated this phrase, properly translated into Dakota, to his uncles Lame Paw and Two Horns, and so the tribe came to understand that they had a redoubtable defender in Swift Eagle, as they called the agent in their own tongue.

From every source they heard good things of him, and they came to love him and to obey him as they had never loved and obeyed even their best-regarded chief. The squaws made excuse to come in and shake hands with him and hear his laughter, and the children no longer hid or turned away when he came near – on the contrary, they ran to him, crying "Hello, Hagent!" and clung to his legs as he walked. The old men often laid their arms across his shoulders as they jokingly threatened to pull out the hairs of his face, in order to make him a redman. His lightest wish was respected. The wildest young dare-devil would dismount and take a hand at pushing a wagon or lifting a piece of machinery when Curtis asked it of him.

"If I only had the water that flows in these three little streams," he often said to Jennie, "I'd make these people self-supporting."

"We'll have things our own way yet," replied Jennie, always the optimist.

IX

CALLED TO WASHINGTON

One day Curtis announced, with joyful face:

"Sis, we are called to Washington. Get on your bonnet!"

She did not light up as he had expected her to do. "I can't go, George," she replied, decisively and without marked disappointment.

He seemed surprised. "Why not?"

"Because I have my plans all laid for giving my little 'ingines' such a Christmas as they never had, and you must manage to get back in time to be 'Sandy Claws.'"

"I don't see how I can do it. I am to appear before the Committee on Indian Affairs relative to this removal plan, and there may be other business requiring me to remain over the holidays."

"I don't like to have you away. I suppose you'll see Mr. Lawson and Miss Brisbane," she remarked, quietly, after a pause.

"Oh yes," he replied, with an assumption of carelessness. "I imagine Lawson will appear before the committee, and I hope to call on Miss Brisbane – I want to see her paintings." He did not meet his sister's eyes as squarely as was his wont, and her keen glance detected a bit more color in his face than was usual to him. "You must certainly call," she finally said. "I want to know all about how they live."

Many things combined to make this trip to Washington most pleasurable to the soldier. He was weary with six weeks of most intense application to a confused and vexatious situation, and besides he had not been East for several years, and his pocket was filled with urgent invitations to dinner from fellow-officers and co-workers in science, courtesies which he now had opportunity to accept; but back of all and above all was the hope of meeting Elsie Brisbane again. He immediately wrote her a note, telling her of his order to report at the department, and asking permission to call upon her at her convenience.

It was a long ride, but he enjoyed every moment of it. He gave himself up to rest. He went regularly to his meals in the dining-car; he smoked and dreamed and looked out with impersonal, shadowy interest upon the flying fields and the whizzing cities. He slept long hours and rose at will. Such freedom he had known only on the trail; here luxury was combined with leisure. In Chicago a friend met him and they lunched at a luxurious club, and afterwards went for a drive. That night he left the Western metropolis behind and Washington seemed very near.

As the train drew down out of the snows of the hill country into the sunshine and shelter of the Potomac Valley his heart leaped. This was home! Here were the little, whitewashed cabins, the red soil, the angular stone houses – verandaed and shuttered – of his native town. It was pleasant to meet the darkies swarming, chirping like crickets, around the train. They shadowed forth a warmer clime, a less insistent civilization than that of the West, and he was glad of them. They brought up in his mind a thousand memories of his boy-life in an old Maryland village not far from the great city, which still retained its supremacy in his mind. He loved Washington; to him it was the centre of national life.

The great generals, the great political leaders were there, and the greatest ethnologic bureau in all the world was there, and when the gleaming monument came into view over the wooded hills he had only one regret – he was sorrowful when he thought of Jennie far away in the bleak valley of the Elk.

It was characteristic of him that he took a cab to the Smithsonian Society rather than to the Army and Navy Club, and was made at home at once in the plain but comfortable "rooms of the Bug Sharps." He had just time to report by telephone to the Department of the Interior before the close of the official day. Several letters awaited him. One was from Elsie, and this he read at once, finding it unexpectedly cordial:

"My father is writing you an invitation to come to us immediately. You said you would arrive in Washington on the 17th, either on the 11 A.M. train or the one at 3 P.M. In either case we will look for you at 6.30 to dine with us before you get your calendar filled with engagements. I shall wait impatiently to hear how you are getting on out there. It is all coming to have a strange fascination for me. It is almost like a dream."

This letter quickened his pulse in a way which should have brought shame to him, but did not. The Senator's letter was ponderously polite. "I hope, my dear Captain Curtis, you will be free to call at once. My daughter and Lawson – "

At that word a chill wind blew upon the agent's hope. Lawson! "I had forgotten the man!" he said, almost aloud. "Ah! that explains her frank kindness. She writes as one whose affections are engaged, and therefore feels secure from criticism or misapprehension." That explained also her feeling for the valley – it was the scene of her surrender to Lawson. The tremor went out of his nerves, his heart resumed its customary beating, steady and calm, and, setting his lips into a straight line, he resumed the Senator's letter, which ended with these significant words: "There are some important matters I want to talk over in private."

A note from Lawson urged him to take his first breakfast in the city with him. "I want to post you on the inside meaning of certain legislation now pending. I expect to see you at the Brisbanes'."

Curtis made his toilet slowly and with great care, remitting nothing the absence of which would indicate a letting down of military neatness and discipline. He wore the handsome undress uniform of a captain, and his powerful figure, still youthful in its erectness, although the lines were less slender than he wished, was dignified and handsome – fit to be taken as a type of mature soldier. He set forth, self-contained but eager.

The Brisbane portico of rose granite was immensely imposing to a dweller in tents and cantonments, such as Curtis had been for ten years, but he allowed no sign of his nervousness to appear as he handed his overcoat and cap to the old colored man in the vestibule.

As he started down the polished floor of the wide hall, stepping over a monstrous tiger-skin, he saw Elsie in the door of the drawing-room, her back against the folded portière. Her slender figure was exquisitely gowned in pale-green, and her color was iridescent in youthful sparkle. He thought once again – "Evening dress transforms a woman." She met him with a smile of welcome.

"Ah, Captain, this is very good of you, to come to us so soon."

"Not at all," he gallantly replied. "I would have come sooner had opportunity served."

"Father, this is Captain Curtis," she said, turning her head towards a tall man who stood within.

Brisbane came forward, greeting Curtis most cordially. He was grayer than Curtis remembered him, and a little stooping from age. His massive head was covered with a close-clipped bristle of white hair, and his beard, also neatly trimmed, was shaped to a point, from the habit he had of stroking it with his closed left hand in moments of deep thought. His skin was flushed pink with blood, and his urbane manner denoted pride and self-sufficiency. He was old, but he was still a powerful personality, and though he shook hands warmly, Curtis felt his keen and penetrating glance as palpably as an electric shock.

Lawson's voice arose. "Well, Captain, I hardly expected to see you so soon."

As the two men clasped hands Elsie again closely compared them. Curtis was the handsomer man, though Lawson was by no means ill-looking, even by contrast. The soldier more nearly approached the admirable male type, but there was charm in the characteristic attitudes and gestures of the student, who had the assured and humorous manner of the onlooker.

A young woman of indeterminate type who was seated in conversation with Mrs. Wilcox received Curtis with impassive countenance, eying him closely through pinch-nose glasses. Mrs. Wilcox beamed with pleasure, and inquired minutely concerning the people at the agency, and

especially she wished to know how little Johnny and Jessie Eagle were. "I quite fell in love with the tots, they were so cunning. I hope they got the toys I sent."

Brisbane gave Curtis the most studious attention, lounging deep in his big chair. Occasionally he ponderously leaned forward to listen to some remark, with his head cocked in keen scrutiny – actions which did not escape the Captain's notice. "He's sizing me up," he thought. "Well, let him."

Elsie also listened, curiously like her father in certain inclinations of the head – intent, absorbed; only Lawson seemed indifferent to the news the agent guardedly recited.

Brisbane broke his silence by saying: "I infer you're on the side of the redskin?"

"Decidedly, in this connection."

"Quite aside from your duty?"

"Entirely so. My duty in this case happened to be my inclination. I could have declined the detail, but being a believer in the army's arrangement of Indian affairs, I couldn't decently refuse."

Brisbane settled back into his chair and looked straight at his visitor.

"You think the white man the aggressor in this land question?"

Curtis definitely pulled himself up. "I am not at liberty to speak further on that matter."

Mrs. Wilcox interrupted smilingly. "Andrew, don't start an argument now. Dinner is served, and I know Captain Curtis is hungry."

Elsie rose. "Yes, papa, leave your discussion till some other time, when you can bang the furniture."

Curtis expected to take Miss Cooke in to dinner, but Elsie delighted him by saying, "You're to go in with me, Captain."

"I am very glad of the privilege," he said, with deliberate intent to please her; his sincerity was unquestionable.

Curtis would have been more profoundly impressed with the spaciousness of the hall and the dining-room had they been less like the interior of a hotel. The whole house, so far as its mural decoration went, had the over-stuffed quality of a Pullman car (with the exception of the pictures on the walls, which were exceedingly good), for Brisbane had successfully opposed all of Elsie's new-fangled notions with regard to interior decoration; he was of those who insist on being masters in their houses as well as in their business offices, and Elsie's manner was that of an obedient daughter deferring to a sire who had not ceased to consider her a child.

Seated at Elsie's right hand, with Mrs. Wilcox between himself and the head of the table, Curtis was fairly out of reach of Brisbane, who was dangerously eager to open a discussion concerning the bill for the removal of the Tetongs.

Elsie turned to him at once to say: "Do you know, Captain Curtis, I begin to long to return to the West. All my friends are enthusiastic over the studies I made last year, and I've decided to go back next spring. How early could one come out?"

"Any time after the first of May – in fact, that is the most beautiful month in the year; the grass is deliciously green then. I'm glad to know you think of returning. Jennie will also rejoice. It seems too good to be true. Will Mr. Lawson also return?"

"Oh yes. In fact, I go to complete his work – to do penance for neglecting him last summer." And in her tone, he fancied, lay a covert warning, as though she had said: "Do not mistake me; I am not coming out of interest in you."

He needed the word, for under the spell of her near presence and the charm of her smile, new to him, the soldier was beginning to glow again and to soften, in spite of his resolution to be very calm.

She went on: "I am genuinely remorseful, because Mr. Lawson has not been able to bring his paper out as he had planned."

"I will see that you have every possible aid," he replied, matter-of-factly. "The work must be done soon."

"How handsome he is!" the girl thought, as she studied his quiet face. "His profile is especially fine, and the line of his neck and shoulders – " an impulse seized her, and she said:

"Captain, I'd like to make a sketch of you. Could you find time to sit for me?"

"That's very flattering of you, but I'm afraid my stay in Washington is too short and too preoccupied."

Her face darkened. "I'm sorry. I know I could make a good thing of you."

"Thank you for the compliment, but it is out of the question at present. Next summer, if you come out, I will be very glad to give the time for it. And that reminds me, you promised to show me your pictures when I came, and your studio."

"Did I? Well, you shall see them, although they are not as good as I shall do next year. One has to learn to handle new material. Your Western atmosphere is so different from that of Giverny, in which we all paint in Paris; then, the feeling of the landscape is so different; everything is so firm and crisp in line – but I am going to get it! 'There is the mystery of light as well as of the dark,' Meunnot used to say to us, and if I can get that clear shimmer, and the vibration of the vivid color of the savage in the midst of it – "

She broke off as if in contemplation of the problem, rapt with question how to solve it.

"There speaks the artist in you, and it is fine. But I'd like you to see the humanitarian side of life, too," he replied.

"There is none," she instantly replied, with a curious blending of defiance and amusement. "I belong to the world of Light and Might – "

"And I to the world of Right – what about that?"

"Light and Might make right."

"Your team is wrongly harnessed – Light and Right are co-workers. Might fears both Light and Right."

Mrs. Wilcox, who had been listening, fairly clapped her hands. "I'm glad to have you refute her arguments, Captain. She is absolutely heartless in her theories – in practice she's a nice girl."

Elsie laughed. "What amuses me is that a soldier, the embodiment of Might, should dare to talk of Right."

Curtis grew grave. "If I did not think that my profession at bottom guarded the rights of both white men and red, I'd resign instantly. Our army is only an impartial instrument for preserving justice."

"That isn't the old-world notion," put in Lawson from across the table.

"It is *our* notion," stoutly replied Curtis. "Our little army to-day stands towards the whole nation as a police force relates itself to a city – a power that interferes only to prevent aggression of one interest on the rights of another."

Brisbane's big, flat voice took up the theme.

"That's a very pretty theory, but you'll find plenty to claim that the army is an instrument of oppression."

"I'll admit it is sometimes wrongly used," Curtis replied. "We who are in the field can't help that, however. We are under orders. Of course," he added, modestly, "I am only a young soldier. I have seen but ten years of service, and I have taken part in but one campaign – a war I considered unavoidable at that time."

"You would hold, then, that an officer of the army has a right to convictions?" queried Brisbane, in the tone of the lawyer.

"Most certainly. A man does not cease to think upon entering the army."

"That's dangerous doctrine."

"It's the American idea. What people would suffer by having its army intelligent?"

Lawson coughed significantly. "Bring forth the black-swathed axe – treason has upreared her head."

It was plain that Brisbane was lying in wait for him. Curtis whispered to Elsie:

"Rescue me! Your father is planning to quiz me, and I must not talk before I report to the department."

"I understand. We will go to my studio after dinner." And with Lawson's aid she turned the conversation into safe channels.

It was a very great pleasure to the young soldier to sit once more at such a board and in pleasant relation to Elsie. It was more than he had ever hoped for, and he surprised her by his ability to take on her interests. He grew younger in the glow of her own youth and beauty, and they finished their ices in such good-fellowship that Mrs. Wilcox was amazed.

"We will slip away now," Elsie said, in a low tone to Curtis, and they both rose. As they were about to leave the room Brisbane looked up in surprise. "Where are you going? Don't you smoke, Captain? Stay and have a cigar."

Elsie answered for him. "Captain Curtis can come back, but I want him to see my studio now, for I know if you get to talking politics he will miss the pictures altogether."

"She has a notion I'm growing garrulous," Brisbane retorted, "but I deny the charge. Well, let me see you later, Captain; there are some things I want to discuss with you."

"Grace, you are to come, too," Elsie said to her girl friend, and led the way out into the hall.

Miss Cooke stepped to Curtis's side. "You've been in Washington before?" she asked, with an inflection which he hated.

"Oh yes, many times. In fact, I lived here till I was sixteen. I was born in Maryland, not far from here."

"Indeed! Then you know the city thoroughly?"

"Certain sides of it. Exteriorly and officially I know it; socially, I am a stranger to it. My people were proud and poor. A good old family in a fine old house, and very little besides."

Elsie led the way slowly up the big staircase, secretly hoping Miss Cooke would find it too cool for her thin blood. She wished to be alone with Curtis, and this wish, obscure as it was, grew stronger as she set a chair for him and placed a frame on an easel.

"You really need daylight to see them properly."

"Am I to make remarks?"

"Certainly; tell me just what you think."

"Then let me preface my helpful criticisms by saying that I don't know an earthly thing about painting. We had drawing, of a certain kind, at the academy, and I used to visit the galleries in New York when occasion served. Now you know the top and the bottom of my art education."

"It's cold in here, Elsie," broke in Miss Cooke, whom they had quite forgotten. "Is the steam turned on?"

"Wrap my slumber-robe around you," Elsie carelessly replied. "Now here is my completed study of Little Peta. What do you think of that? Is it like her?"

"Very like her, indeed. I think it excellent," he said, with unaffected enthusiasm. "She was a quaint little thing. She is about to be married to young Two Horns – a white man's wedding."

Elsie's eyes glowed. "Oh, I wish I could see that! But don't let her wear white man's clothing. She'd be so cunning in her own way of dress. I wish she had not learned to chew gum."

"None of us quite live up to our best intentions," he replied, laughing. "Peta thinks she's gaining in grace. Most of the white ladies she knows chew gum."

The pictures were an old story to Miss Cooke, who shivered for a time in silence and at last withdrew. Elsie and Curtis were deep in discussion of the effect of white man's clothing on the Tetongs, but each was aware of a subtle change in the other as the third person was withdrawn. A delicious sense of danger, of inward impulse warring with outward restraint, added zest to their intercourse. He instantly recalled the last time he stood in her studio feeling her frank contempt of him. "I am on a different footing now," he thought, with a certain exultation. It was worth years of

hardship and hunger and cold to stand side by side with a woman who had not merely beauty and wealth but talent, and a mysterious quality that was more alluring than beauty or intellect. What this was he could not tell, but it had already made life a new game to him.

She, on her part, exulted with a sudden sense of having him to herself for experiment, and every motion of his body, every tone of his voice she noted and admired.

He resumed: "Naturally, I can say nothing of the technique of these pictures. My praise of them must be on the score of their likeness to the people. They are all admirable portraits, exact and spirited, and yet – " He hesitated, with wrinkled brows.

"Don't spare me!" she cried out. "Cut me up if you can!"

"Well, then, they seem to me unsympathetic. For example, the best of them all is Peta, because you liked her, you comprehended her, partly, for she was a child, gentle and sweet. But you have painted old Crawling Elk as if he were a felonious mendicant. You've delineated his rags, his wrinkled skin, his knotted hands, but you've left the light out of his eyes. Let me tell you something about that old man. When I saw him first he was sitting on the high bank of the river, motionless as bronze, and as silent. He was mourning the loss of his little grandchild, and had been there two days and two nights wailing till his voice had sunk to a whisper. His rags were a sign of his utter despair. You didn't know that when you painted him, did you?"

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