

Erskine Payne

The Mountain Girl



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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	18
CHAPTER IV	23
CHAPTER V	29
CHAPTER VI	36
CHAPTER VII	41
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	46

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CHAPTER I

IN WHICH DAVID THRYNG

ARRIVES AT CAREW'S CROSSING

The snow had ceased falling. No wind stirred among the trees that covered the hillsides, and every shrub, every leaf and twig, still bore its feathery, white load. Slowly the train labored upward, with two engines to take it the steepest part of the climb from the valley below. David Thryng gazed out into the quiet, white wilderness and was glad. He hoped Carew's Crossing was not beyond all this, where the ragged edge of civilization, out of which the toiling train had so lately lifted them, would begin again.

He glanced from time to time at the young woman near the door who sat as the bishop had left her, one slight hand grasping the handle of her basket, and with an expression on her face as placid and fraught with mystery as the scene without. The train began to crawl more heavily, and, looking down, Thryng saw that they were crossing a trestle over a deep gorge before skirting the mountain on the other side. Suddenly it occurred to him that he might be carried beyond his station. He stopped the smiling young brakeman who was passing with his flag.

"Let me know when we come to Carew's Crossing, will you?"

"Next stop, suh. Are you foh there, suh?"

"Yes. How soon?"

"Half an houh mo', suh. I'll be back d'rectly and help you off, suh. It's a flag station. We don't stop there in winter 'thout we're called to, suh. Hotel's closed now."

"Hotel? Is there a hotel?" Thryng's voice betokened dismay.

"Yes, suh. It's a right gay little place in summah, suh." He passed on, and Thryng gathered his scattered effects. Ill and weary, he was glad to find his long journey so nearly at an end.

On either side of the track, as far as eye could see, was a snow-whitened wilderness, seemingly untouched by the hand of man, and he felt as if he had been carried back two hundred years. The only hint that these fastnesses had been invaded by human beings was an occasional rough, deeply red wagon road, winding off among the hills.

The long trestle crossed, the engines labored slowly upward for a time, then, turning a sharp curve, began to descend, tearing along the narrow track with a speed that caused the coaches to rock and sway; and thus they reached Carew's Crossing, dropping down to it like a rushing torrent.

Immediately Thryng found himself deposited in the melting snow some distance from the station platform, and at the same instant, above the noise of the retreating train, he heard a cry: "Oh, suh, help him, help him! It's poor little Hoyle!" The girl whom he had watched, and about whom he had been wondering, flashed by him and caught at the bridle of a fractious colt, that was rearing and plunging near the corner of the station.

"Poor little Hoyle! Help him, suh, help him!" she cried, clinging desperately, while the frantic animal swung her off her feet, close to the flying heels of the kicking mule at his side.

Under the heavy vehicle to which the ill-assorted animals were attached, a child lay unconscious, and David sprang forward, his weakness forgotten in the demand for action. In an instant he had drawn the little chap from his perilous position and, seizing the mule, succeeded in backing him to his place. The cause of its fright having by this time disappeared, the colt became tractable and stood quivering and snorting, as David took the bridle from the girl's hand.

"I'll quiet them now," he said, and she ran to the boy, who had recovered sufficiently to sit up and gaze in a dazed way about him. As she bent over him, murmuring soothing words, he threw his arms around her neck and burst into wild sobbing.

"There, honey, there! No one is hurt. You are not, are you, honey son?"

"I couldn't keep a holt of 'em," he sobbed.

"You shouldn't have done it, honey. You should have let me get home as best I could." Her face was one which could express much, passive as it had been before. "Where was Frale?"

"He took the othah ho'se and lit out. They was aftah him. They – "

"S-sh. There, hush! You can stand now; try, Hoyle. You are a man now."

The little fellow rose, and, perceiving Thryng for the first time, stepped shyly behind his sister. David noticed that he had a deformity which caused him to carry his head twisted stiffly to one side, and also that he had great, beautiful brown eyes, so like those of a hunted fawn as he turned them upon the stranger with wide appeal, that he seemed a veritable creature of the wilderness by which they were surrounded.

Then the girl stepped forward and thanked him with voice and eyes; but he scarcely understood the words she said, as her tones trailed lingeringly over the vowels, and almost eliminated the "r," so lightly was it touched, while her accent fell utterly strange upon his English ear. She looked to the harness with practised eye, and then laid her hand beside Thryng's, on the bridle. It was a strong, shapely hand and wrist.

"I can manage now," she said. "Hoyle, get my basket foh me."

But Thryng suggested that she climb in and take the reins first, although the animals stood quietly enough now; the mule looked even dejected, with hanging head and forward-drooping ears.

The girl spoke gently to the colt, stroking him along the side and murmuring to him in a cooing voice as she mounted to the high seat and gathered up the reins. Then the two beasts settled themselves to their places with a wontedness that assured Thryng they would be perfectly manageable under her hand.

David turned to the child, relieved him of the basket, which was heavy with unusual weight, and would have lifted him up, but Hoyle eluded his grasp, and, scrambling over the wheel with catlike agility, slipped shyly into his place close to the girl's side. Then, with more than childlike thoughtfulness, the boy looked up into her face and said in a low voice: —

"The gen'l'man's things is ovah yandah by the track, Cass. He cyant tote 'em alone, I reckon. Whar is he goin'?"

Then Thryng remembered himself and his needs. He looked at the line of track curving away up the mountain side in one direction, and in the other lost in a deep cut in the hills; at the steep red banks rising high on each side, arched over by leafy forest growth, with all the interlacing branches and smallest twigs bearing their delicate burden of white, feathery snow. He caught his breath as a sense of the strange, untamed beauty, marvellous and utterly lonely, struck upon him. Beyond the tracks, high up on the mountain slope, he thought he spied, well-nigh hid from sight by the pines, the gambrel roof of a large building – or was it a snow-covered rock?

"Is that a house up there?" he asked, turning to the girl, who sat leaning forward and looking steadily down at him.

"That is the hotel."

"A road must lead to it, then. If I could get up there, I could send down for my things."

"They is no one thar," piped the boy; and Thryng remembered the brakeman's words, and how he had rebelled at the thought of a hotel incongruously set amid this primeval beauty; but now he longed for the comfort of a warm room and tea at a hospitable table. He wished he had accepted the bishop's invitation. It was a predicament to be dropped in this wild spot, without a store, a cabin, or even a thread of blue smoke to be seen as indicating a human habitation, and no soul near save these two children.

The sun was sinking toward the western hilltops, and a chillness began creeping about him as the shadows lengthened across the base of the mountain, leaving only the heights in the glowing light.

"Really, you know, I can't say what I am to do. I'm a stranger here – "

It seemed odd to him at the moment, but her face, framed in the huge sunbonnet, – a delicate flower set in a rough calyx, – suddenly lost all expression. She did not move nor open her lips. Thryng thought he detected a look of fear in the boy's eyes, as he crept closer to her.

In a flash came to him the realization of the difficulty. His friend had told him of these people, – their occupations, their fear of the world outside and below their fastnesses, and how zealously they guarded their homes and their rights from outside intrusion, yet how hospitable and generous they were to all who could not be considered their hereditary enemies.

He hastened to speak reassuring words, and, bethinking himself that she had called the boy Hoyle, he explained how one Adam Hoyle had sent him.

"The doctor is my friend, you know. He built a cabin somewhere within a day's walk, he told me, of Carew's Crossing, on a mountain top. Maybe you knew him?"

A slight smile crept about the girl's lips, and her eyes brightened. "Yes, suh, we-all know Doctah Hoyle."

"I am to have the cabin – if I can find it – live there as he did, and see what your hills will do for me." He laughed a little as he spoke, deprecating his evident weakness, and, lifting his cap, wiped the cold moisture from his forehead.

She noted his fatigue and hesitated. The boy's questioning eyes were fixed on her face, and she glanced down into them an answering look. Her lips parted, and her eyes glowed as she turned them again on David, but she spoke still in the same passive monotone.

"Oh, yes. My little brothah was named foh him, – Adam Hoyle, – but we only call him Hoyle. It's a right long spell since the Doctah was heah. His cabin is right nigh us, a little highah up. Theah is no place wheah you could stop nighah than ouahs. Hoyle, jump out and help fetch his things ovah. You can put them in the back of the wagon, suh, and ride up with us. I have a sight of room foh them."

The child was out and across the tracks in an instant, seizing a valise much too heavy for him, and Thryng cut his thanks short to go to his relief.

"I kin tote it," said the boy shrilly.

"No, no. I am the biggest, so I'll take the big ones. You bring the bundle with the strap around it – so. Now we shall get on, shan't we? But you are pretty strong for a little chap;" and the child's face radiated smiles at the praise.

Then David tossed in valise and rug, without which last no Englishman ever goes on a journey, and with much effort they managed to pull the box along and hoist it also into the wagon, the body of which was filled with corn fodder, covered with an old patchwork quilt.

The wagon was of the rudest, clumsiest construction, the heavy box set on axles without springs, but the young physician was thankful for any kind of a conveyance. He had been used to life in the wild, taking things as he found them – bunking in a tent, a board shanty, or out under the open sky; with men brought heterogeneously together, some merely rough woodsmen in their natural environment, others the scum of the cities to whom crime was become first nature, decency second, and others, fleeing from justice and civilized law, hiding oftentimes a fine nature delicately reared. During this time he had seldom seen a woman other than an occasional camp follower of the most degraded sort.

Inured thus, he did not find his ride, embedded with good corn fodder, much of a hardship, even in a springless wagon over mountain roads. Wrapped in his rug, he braced himself against his box, with his face toward the rear of the wagon, and gazed out from under its arching canvas hood at the wild way, as it slowly unrolled behind them, and was pleased that he did not have to spend the night under the lee of the station.

The lingering sunlight made flaming banners of the snow clouds now slowly drifting across the sky above the white world, and touched the highest peaks with rose and gold. The shadows, ever changing, deepened from faintest pink-mauve through heliotrope tints, to the richest violet in the heart of the gorges. Over and through all was the witching mystery of fairy-like, snow-wreathed branches and twigs, interwoven and arching up and up in faint perspective to the heights above, and down, far down, to the depths of the regions below them; and all the time, mingled with the murmur of the voices behind him, and the creaking of the vehicle in which they rode, and the tramp of the animals when they came to a hard roadbed with rock foundation, – noises which were not loud, but which seemed to be covered and subdued by the soft snow even as it covered everything, – could be heard a light dropping and pattering, as the overlaid last year's leaves and twigs dropped their white burden to the ground. Sometimes the great hood of the wagon struck an overhanging bough and sent the snow down in showers as they passed.

Heavily they climbed up, and warily made their descent of rocky steep, passing through boggy places or splashing in clear streams which issued from springs in the mountain side or fell from some distant height, then climbing again only to wind about and again descend. Often the way was rough with boulders that had never been blasted out, – sometimes steeply shelving where the gorge was deepest and the precipice sheerest. Past all dangers the girl drove with skilful hand, now encouraging her team with her low voice, now restraining them, where their load crowded upon them over slippery, shelving rocks, with strong pulls and sharp command. David marvelled at her serenity under the strain, and at her courage and deftness. With the calmness of the boy nestling at her side, he resigned himself to the sweet witchery of the time and place. Glancing up at the high seat behind him, he saw the child's feet dangling, and knew they must be cold.

"Why can't your little brother sit back here with me?" he said; "I'll cover him with my rug, and we'll keep each other warm."

He saw the small hunched back stiffen, and try to appear big and manly, but she checked the team at a level dip in the road.

"Yes, sonny, get ovah theah with the gentleman. It'll be some coldah now the sun's gone." But the little man was shyly reluctant to move. "Come, honey. Sistah'd a heap rathah you would."

Then David reached up and gently lifted the atom of manhood, of pride, sensitiveness, and affection, over where he caused him to snuggle down in the fodder close to his side.

For a while the child sat stiffly aloof, but gradually his little form relaxed, and his head drooped sideways in the hollow of the stranger's shoulder, held comfortably by Thryng's kindly encircling arm. Soon, with his small feet wrapped in the warm, soft rug, he slept soundly and sweetly, rocked, albeit rather roughly, in the jolting wagon.

Thryng also dreamed, but not in sleep. His mind was stirred to unusual depths by his strange surroundings – the silence, the mystery, the beauty of the night, and the suggestions of grandeur and power dimly revealed by the moonlight which bathed the world in a flood of glory.

He was uplifted and drawn out of himself, and at the same time he was thrown back to review his life and to see his most inward self, and to marvel and question the wherefore of it all. Why was he here, away from the active, practical affairs which interest other men? Was he a creature of ideals only, or was he also a practical man, taking the wisest means of reaching and achieving results most worth while? He saw himself in his childhood – in his youth – in his young manhood – even to the present moment, jogging slowly along in a far country, rough and wild, utterly dependent on the courtesy of a slight girl, who held, for the moment, his life in her hands; for often, as he gazed into the void of darkness over narrow ledges, he knew that only the skill of those two small hands kept them from sliding into eternity: yet there was about her such an air of wontedness to the situation that he was stirred by no sense of anxiety for himself or for her.

He took out his pipe and smoked, still dreaming, comparing, and questioning. Of ancient family, yet the younger son of three generations of younger sons, all probability of great inheritance

or title so far removed from him, it behooved that he build for himself – what? Fortune, name, everything. Character? Ah, that was his heritage, all the heritage the laws of England allowed him, and that not by right of English law, but because, fixed in the immutable, eternal Will, some laws there are beyond the power of man to supersede. With an involuntary stiffening of his body, he disturbed for an instant the slumbering child, and quite as involuntarily he drew him closer and soothed him back to forgetfulness; and they both dreamed on, the child in his sleep, and the man in his wide wakefulness and intense searching.

His uncle, it is true, would have boosted him far toward creating both name and fame for himself, in either army or navy, but he would none of it. There was his older brother to be advanced, and the younger son of this same uncle to be placed in life, or married to wealth. This also he might have done; well married he might have been ere now, and could be still, for she was waiting – only – an ideal stood in his way. Whom he would marry he would love. Not merely respect or like, – not even both, – but love he must; and in order to hold to this ideal he must fly the country, or remain to be unduly urged to his own discomfiture and possibly to their mutual undoing.

As for the alternatives, the army or the navy, again his ideals had formed for him impassable bars. He would found his career on the saving rather than the taking of life. Perhaps he might yet follow in the wake of armies to mend bodies they have torn and cut and maimed, and heal diseases they have engendered – yes – perhaps – the ideals loomed big. But what had he done? Fled his country and deftly avoided the most heart-satisfying of human delights – children to call him father, and wife to make him a home; peace and wealth; thrust aside the helping hand to power and a career considered most worthy of a strong and resourceful man, and thrown personal ambition to the winds. Why? Because of his ideals – preferring to mend rather than to mar his neighbor.

Surely he was right – and yet – and yet. What had he accomplished? Taken the making of his life into his own hands and lost – all – if health were really gone. One thing remained to him – the last rag and remnant of his cherished ideals – to live long enough to triumph over his own disease and take up work again. Why should he succumb? Was it fate? Was there the guidance of a higher will? Might he reach out and partake of the Divine power? But one thing he knew; but one thing could he do. As the glory of white light around him served to reveal a few feet only of the way, even as the density beyond seemed impenetrable, still it was but seeming. There was a beyond – vast – mysterious – which he must search out, slowly, painfully, if need be, seeing a little way only, but seeing that little clearly, revealed by the white light of spirit. His own or God's? Into the infinite he must search – search – and at last surely find.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH DAVID THRYNG EXPERIENCES THE HOSPITALITY OF THE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE

Suddenly the jolting ceased. The deep stillness of the night seemed only intensified by the low panting of the animals and the soft dropping of the wet snow from the trees.

"What is it?" said Thryng, peering from under the canvas cover. "Anything the matter?"

The beasts stood with low-swung heads, the vapor rising white from their warm bodies, wet with the melting snow. His question fell unheard, and the girl who was climbing down over the front wheel began to unhitch the team in silence. He rolled the sleeping child in his rug and leaped out.

"Let me help you. What is the trouble? Oh, are you at home?"

"I can do this, suh. I have done it a heap of times. Don't go nigh Pete, suh. He's mighty quick, and he's mean." The beast laid back his ears viciously as David approached.

"You ought not go near him yourself," he said, taking a firm grip of the bridle.

"Oh, he's safe enough with me – or Frale. Hold him tight, suh, now you have him, till I get round there. Keep his head towa'ds you. He certainly is mean."

The colt walked off to a low stack of corn fodder, as she turned him loose with a light slap on the flank; and the mule, impatient, stamping and sidling about, stretched forth his nose and let out his raucous and hideous cry. While he was thus occupied, the girl slipped off his harness and, taking the bridle, led the beast away to a small railed enclosure on the far side of the stack; and David stood alone in the snow and looked about him.

He saw a low, rambling house, which, although one structure, appeared to be a series of houses, built of logs plastered with clay in the chinks. It stood in a tangle of wild growth, on what seemed to be a wide ledge jutting out from the side of the mountain, which loomed dark and high behind it. An incessant, rushing sound pervaded the place, as it were a part of the silence or a breathing of the mountain itself. Was it wind among the trees, or the rushing of water? No wind stirred now, and yet the sound never ceased. It must be a torrent swollen by the melting snow.

He saw the girl moving in and out among the shadows, about the open log stable, like a wraith. The braying of the mule had disturbed the occupants of the house, for a candle was placed in a window, and its little ray streamed forth and was swallowed up in the moonlight and black shades. The child, awakened by the horrible noise of the beast, rustled in the corn fodder where Thryng had left him. Dazed and wondering, he peered out at the young man for some moments, too shy to descend until his sister should return. Now she came, and he scrambled down and stood close to her side, looking up weirdly, his twisted little form shivering and quaking.

"Run in, Hoyle," she said, looking kindly down upon him. "Tell mothah we're all right, son."

A woman came to the door holding a candle, which she shaded with a gnarled and bony hand.

"That you, Cass?" she quavered. "Who aire ye talkin' to?"

"Yes, Aunt Sally, we'll be there directly. Don't let mothah get cold." She turned again to David. "I reckon you'll have to stop with us to-night. It's a right smart way to the cabin, and it'll be cold, and nothing to eat. We'll bring in your things now, and in the morning we can tote them up to your place with the mule, and Hoyle can go with you to show you the way."

She turned toward the wagon as if all were settled, and Thryng could not be effusive in the face of her direct and conclusive manner; but he took the basket from her hand.

"Let me – no, no – I will bring in everything. Thank you very much. I can do it quite easily, taking one at a time." Then she left him, but at the door she met him and helped to lift his heavy belongings into the house.

The room he entered was warm and brightly lighted by a pile of blazing logs in the great chimneyplace. He walked toward it and stretched his hands to the fire – a generous fire – the mountain home's luxury.

Something was cooking in the ashes on the hearth which sent up a savory odor most pleasant and appealing to the hungry man. The meagre boy stood near, also warming his little body, on which his coarse garments hung limply. He kept his great eyes fixed on David's face in a manner disconcerting, even in a child, had Thryng given his attention to it, but at the moment he was interested in other things. Dropped thus suddenly into this utterly alien environment, he was observing the girl and the old woman as intently, though less openly, as the boy was watching him.

Presently he felt himself uncannily the object of a scrutiny far different from the child's wide-eyed gaze, and glancing over his shoulder toward the corner from which the sensation seemed to emanate, he saw in the depths of an old four-posted bed, set in their hollow sockets and roofed over by projecting light eyebrows, a pair of keen, glittering eyes.

"Yas, you see me now, do ye?" said a high, thin voice in toothless speech. "Who be ye?"

His physician's feeling instantly alert, he stepped to the bedside and bent over the wasted form, which seemed hardly to raise the clothing from its level smoothness, as if she had lain motionless since some careful hand had arranged it.

"No, ye don't know me, I reckon. 'Tain't likely. Who be ye?" she iterated, still looking unflinchingly in his eyes.

"Hit's a gentleman who knows Doctah Hoyle, mothah. He sent him. Don't fret you'se'f," said the girl soothingly.

"I'm not one of the frettin' kind," retorted the mother, never taking her eyes from his face, and again speaking in a weak monotone. "Who be ye?"

"My name is David Thryng, and I am a doctor," he said quietly.

"Where be ye from?"

"I came from Canada, the country where Doctor Hoyle lives."

"I reckon so. He used to tell 'at his home was thar." A pallid hand was reached slowly out to him. "I'm right glad to see ye. Take a cheer and set. Bring a cheer, Sally."

But the girl had already placed him a chair, which he drew close to the bedside. He took the feeble old hand and slipped his fingers along to rest lightly on the wrist.

"You needn't stan' watchin' me, Cass. You 'n' Sally set suthin' fer th' doctah to eat. I reckon ye're all about gone fer hunger."

"Yes, mothah, right soon. Fry a little pork to go with the pone, Aunt Sally. Is any coffee left in the pot?"

"I done put in a leetle mo' when I heered the mule hollah. I knowed ye'd want it. Might throw in a mite mo' now th' gentleman's come."

The two women resumed their preparations for supper, the boy continued to stand and gaze, and the high voice of the frail occupant of the bed began again to talk and question.

"When did you come down f'om that thar country whar Doctah Hoyle lives at?" she said, in her monotonous wail.

"Four days ago. I travelled slowly, for I have been ill myself."

"Hit's right quare now; 'pears like ef I was a doctah I wouldn't 'low myself fer to get sick. An' you seed Doctah Hoyle fo' days back!"

"No, he has gone to England on a visit. I saw his wife, though, and his daughter. She is a young lady – is to be married soon."

"They do grow up – the leetle ones. Hit don't seem mo'n yestahday 'at Cass was like leetle Hoyle yandah, an' hit don't seem that since Doctah Hoyle was here an' leetle Hoyle came. We named him fer th' doctah. Waal, I reckon ef th' doctah was here now 'at he could he'p me some. Maybe ef

he'd 'a' stayed here I nevah would 'a' got down whar I be now. He was a right good doctah, bettah'n a yarb doctah – most – I reckon so."

David smiled. "I think so myself," he said. "Are there many herb doctors here about?"

"Not rightly doctahs, so to speak, but they is some 'at knows a heap about yarbs."

"Good. Perhaps they can teach me something."

The old face was feebly lifted a bit from the pillow, and the dark eyes grew suddenly sharp in their scrutiny.

"Who be ye, anyhow? What aire ye here fer? Sech as you knows a heap a'ready 'thout makin' out to larn o' we-uns."

David saw his mistake and hastened to allay the suspicion which gleamed out at him almost malignantly.

"I am just what I said, a doctor like Adam Hoyle, only that I don't know as much as he – not yet. The wisest man in the world can learn more if he watches out to do so. Your herb doctors might be able to teach me a good many things."

"I 'spect ye're right thar, on'y a heap o' folks thinks they knows it all fust."

There was a pause, and Thryng leaned back in his stiff, splint-bottomed chair and glanced around him. He saw that the girl, although moving about setting to rights and brushing here and there with an unique, home-made broom, was at the same time intently listening.

Presently the old woman spoke again, her threadlike voice penetrating far.

"What do you 'low to do here in ouah mountains? They hain't no settlement nighabouts here, an' them what's sick hain't no money to pay doctahs with. I reckon they'll hev to stay sick fer all o' you-uns."

David looked into her eyes a moment quietly; then he smiled. The way to her heart he saw was through the magic of one name.

"What did Doctor Hoyle do when he was down here?"

"Him? They hain't no one livin' like he was."

Then David laughed outright, a gay, contagious laugh, and after an instant she laughed also.

"I agree with you," he said. "But you see, I am a countryman of his, and he sent me here – he knows me well – and I mean to do as he did, if – I can."

He drew in a deep breath of utter weariness, and leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands, and gazed into the blazing fire. The memories which had taken possession of his soul during the long ride seemed to envelop him so that in a moment the present was swept away into oblivion and his spirit was, as it were, suddenly withdrawn from the body and projected into the past. He had been unable to touch any of the greasy cold stuff which had been offered him during the latter part of his journey, and the heat brought a drowsiness on him and a faintness from lack of food.

"Cass – Cassandry! Look to him," called the mother shrilly, but the girl had already noticed his strange abstraction, and the small Adam Hoyle had drawn back, in awe, to his mother.

"Get some whiskey, Sally," said the girl, and David roused himself to see her bending over him.

"I must have gone off in a doze," he said weakly. "The long ride and then this warmth – " Seeing the anxious faces around him, he laughed again. "It's nothing, I assure you, only the comfort and the smell of something good to eat;" he sniffed a little. "What is it?" he asked.

Old Sally was tossing and shaking the frying salt pork in the skillet at the fireplace, and the odor aggravated his already too keen appetite.

"Ye was more'n sleepy, I reckon," shrilled the woman from the bed. "Hain't that pone done, Sally? No, 'tain't liquor he needs; hit's suthin' to eat."

Then the girl hastened her slow, gliding movements, drew splint chairs to a table of rough pine that stood against the side of the room, and, stooping between him and the fire, pulled something from among the hot ashes. The fire made the only light in the room, and David never forgot the supple grace of her as she bent thus silhouetted – the perfect line of chin and throat black against the blaze,

contrasted with the weird, witchlike old woman with roughly knotted hair, who still squatted in the heat, and shook the skillet of frying pork.

"Thar, now hit's done, I reckon," said old Sally, slowly rising and straightening her bent back; and the woman from the bed called her orders.

"Not that cup," she cried, as Sally began pouring black coffee into a cracked white cup. "Git th' chany one. I hid hit yandah in th' cornder 'hind that tin can, to keep 'em f'om usin' hit every day. I had a hull set o' that when I married Farwell. Give hit here." She took the precious relic in her work-worn hands and peered into it, then wiped it out with the corner of the sheet which covered her. This Thryng did not see. He was watching the girl, as she broke open the hot, fragrant corn-bread and placed it beside his plate.

"Come," she said. "You sure must be right hungry. Sit here and eat." David felt like one drunken with weariness when he rose, and caught at the edge of the table to steady himself.

"Aren't you hungry, too?" he asked, "and Hoyle, here? Sit beside me; we're going to have a feast, little chap."

The girl placed an earthen crock on the table and took from it honey in the broken comb, rich and dark.

"Have a little of this with your pone. It's right good," she said.

"Frale, he found a bee tree," piped the child suddenly, gaining confidence as he saw the stranger engaged in the very normal act of eating with the relish of an ordinary man. He edged forward and sat himself gingerly on the outer corner of the next chair, and accepted a huge piece of the pone from David's hand. His sister gave him honey, and Sally dropped pieces of the sizzling hot pork on their plates, from the skillet.

David sipped his coffee from the flowered "chany cup" contentedly. Served without milk or sugar, it was strong, hot, and reviving. The girl shyly offered more of the corn-bread as she saw it rapidly disappearing, pleased to see him eat so eagerly, yet abashed at having nothing else to offer.

"I'm sorry we can give you only such as this. We don't live like you do in the no'th. Have a little more of the honey."

"Ah, but this is fine. Good, hey, little chap? You are doing a very beneficent thing, do you know, saving a man's life?" He glanced up at her flushed face, and she smiled deprecatingly. He fancied her smiles were rare.

"But it is quite true. Where would I be now but for you and Hoyle here? Lying under the lee side of the station coughing my life away, – and all my own fault, too. I should have accepted the bishop's invitation."

"You helped me when the colt was bad." Her soft voice, low and monotonous, fell musically on his ear when she spoke.

"Naturally – but how about that, anyway? It's a wonder you weren't killed. How came a youngster like you there alone with those beasts?" Thryng had an abrupt manner of springing a question which startled the child, and he edged away, furtively watching his sister.

"Did you hitch that kicking brute alone and drive all that distance?"

"Aunt Sally, she he'ped me to tie up; she give him co'n whilst I th'owed on the strops, an' when he's oncet tied up, he goes all right." The atom grinned. "Hit's his way. He's mean, but he nevah works both ends to oncet."

"Good thing to know; but you're a hero, do you understand that?" The child continued to edge away, and David reached out and drew him to his side. Holding him by his two sharp little elbows, he gave him a playful shake. "I say, do you know what a hero is?"

The startled boy stopped grinning and looked wildly to his sister, but receiving only a smile of reassurance from her, he lifted his great eyes to Thryng's face, then slowly the little form relaxed, and he was drawn within the doctor's encircling arm.

"I don't reckon," was all his reply, which ambiguous remark caused David, in his turn, to look to the sister for elucidation. She held a long, lighted candle in her hand, and paused to look back as she was leaving the room.

"Yes, you do, honey son. You remembah the boy with the quare long name sistah told you about, who stood there when the ship was all afiah and wouldn't leave because his fathah had told him to bide? He was a hero." But Hoyle was too shy to respond, and David could feel his little heart thumping against his arm as he held him.

"Tell the gentleman, Hoyle. He don't bite, I reckon," called the mother from her corner.

"His name begun like yourn, Cass, but I cyan't remembah the hull of it."

"Casabianca, was it?" said Thryng, smiling.

"I reckon. Did you-uns know him?"

"When I was a small chap like you, I used to read about him." Then the atom yielded entirely, and leaned comfortably against David, and his sister left them, carrying the candle with her.

Old Sally threw another log on the fire, and the flames leaped up the cavernous chimney, lighting the room with dramatic splendor. Thryng took note of its unique furnishing. In the corner opposite the one where the mother lay was another immense four-poster bed, and before it hung a coarse homespun curtain, half concealing it. At its foot was a huge box of dark wood, well-made and strong, with a padlock. This and the beds seemed to belong to another time and place, in contrast to the other articles, which were evidently mountain made, rude in construction and hewn out by hand, the chairs unstained and unpolished, and seated with splints.

The walls were the roughly dressed logs of which the house was built, the chinks plastered with deep red-brown clay. Depending from nails driven in the logs were festoons of dried apple and strips of dried pumpkin, and hanging by their braided husks were bunches of Indian corn, not yellow like that of the north, but white or purple.

There were bags also, containing Thryng knew not what, although he was to learn later, when his own larder came to be eked out by sundry gifts of dried fruit and sweet corn, together with the staple of beans and peas from the widow's store.

Beside the window of small panes was a shelf, on which were a few worn books, and beneath hung an almanac; at the foot of the mother's bed stood a small spinning-wheel, with the wool still hanging to the spindle. David wondered how long since it had been used. The scrupulous cleanliness of the place satisfied his fastidious nature, and gave him a sense of comfort in the homely interior. He liked the look of the bed in the corner, made up high and round, and covered with marvellous patchwork.

As he sat thus, noting all his surroundings, Hoyle still nestled at his side, leaning his elbows on the doctor's knees, his chin in his hands, and his soft eyes fixed steadily on the doctor's face. Thus they advanced rapidly toward an amicable acquaintance, each questioning and being questioned.

"What is a 'bee tree'?" said David. "You said somebody found one."

"Hit's a big holler tree, an' hit's plumb full o' bees an' honey. Frale, he found this'n."

"Tell me about it. Where was it?"

"Hit war up yandah, highah up th' mountain. They is a hole thar what wil' cats live in, Wil' Cat Hole. Frale, he war a hunt'n fer a cat. Some men thar at th' hotel, they war plumb mad to hunt a wil' cat with th' dogs, an' Frale, he 'lowed to git th' cat fer 'em."

"And when was that?"

"Las' summah, when th' hotel war open. They war a heap o' men at th' hotel."

"And now about the bee tree?"

"Frale, he nevah let on like he know'd thar war a bee tree, an' then this fall he took me with him, an' we made a big fire, an' then we cut down th' tree, an' we stayed thar th' hull day, too, an' eat thar an' had ros'n ears by th' fire, too."

"I say, you know. There seem to be a lot of things you will have to enlighten me about. After you get through with the bee tree you must tell me what 'ros'n ears' are. And then what did you do?"

"Thar war a heap o' honey. That tree, hit war nigh-about plumb full o' honey, and th' bees war that mad you couldn't let 'em come nigh ye 'thout they'd sting you. They stung me, an' I nevah hollered. Frale, he 'lowed ef you hollered, you wa'n't good fer nothin', goin' bee hunt'n'."

"Is Frale your brother?"

"Yas. He c'n do a heap o' things, Frale can. They war a heap o' honey in that thar tree, 'bout a bar'l full, er more'n that. We hev a hull tub o' honey out thar in th' loom shed yet, an' maw done sont all th' rest to th' neighbors, 'cause maw said they wa'n't no use in humans bein' fool hogs like th' bees war, a-keepin' more'n they could eat jes' fer themselves."

"Yas," called the mother from her corner, where she had been admiringly listening; "they is a heap like that-a-way, but hit ain't our way here in th' mountains. Let th' doctah tell you suthin' now, Hoyle, – ye mount larn a heap if ye'd hark to him right smart, 'thout talkin' th' hull time youse'f."

"I has to tell him 'bouts th' ros'n ears – he said so. Thar they be." He pointed to a bunch of Indian corn. "You wrop 'em up in ther shucks, whilst ther green an' sof', and kiver 'em up in th' ashes whar hit's right hot, and then when ther roasted, eat 'em so. Now, what do you know?"

"Why, he knows a heap, son. Don't ax that-a-way."

"In my country, away across the ocean – " began David.

"Tell 'bout th' ocean, how hit look."

"In my country we don't have Indian corn nor bee trees, nor wild cat holes, but we have the ocean all around us, and we see the ships and – "

"Like that thar one whar th' boy stood whilst hit war on fire?"

"Something like, yes." Then he told about the sea and the ships and the great fishes, and was interrupted with the query: —

"Reckon you done seed that thar fish what swallowed the man in th' Bible an' then th'ow'd him up agin?"

"Why no, son, you know that thar fish war dade long 'fore we-uns war born. You mustn't ax fool questions, honey."

Old Sally sat crouched by the hearth intently listening and asking as naïve questions as the child, whose pallid face grew pink and animated, and whose eyes grew larger as he strove to see with inward vision the things Thryng described. It was a happy evening for little Hoyle. Leaning confidently against David, he sighed with repletion of joy. He was not eager for his sister to return – not he. He could lean forever against this wonderful man and listen to his tales. But the doctor's weariness was growing heavier, and he bethought himself that the girl had not eaten with them, and feared she was taking trouble to prepare quarters for him, when if she only knew how gladly he would bunk down anywhere, – only to sleep while this blessed and delicious drowsiness was overpowering him.

"Where is your sister, Hoyle? Don't you reckon it's time you and I were abed?" he asked, adopting the child's vernacular.

"She's makin' yer bed ready in th' loom shed, likely," said the mother, ever alert. With her pale, prematurely wrinkled face and uncannily bright and watchful eyes, she seemed the controlling, all-pervading spirit of the place. "Run, child, an' see what's keepin' her so long."

"Hit's dark out thar," said the boy, stirring himself slowly.

"Run, honey, you hain't afeared, kin drive a team all by youse'f. Dark hain't nothin'; I ben all ovah these heah mountains when thar wa'n't one star o' light. Maybe you kin he'p her."

At that moment she entered, holding the candle high to light her way through what seemed to be a dark passage, her still, sweet face a bit flushed and stray taches of white cotton down clinging to her blue homespun dress. "The doctah's mos' dade fer sleep, Cass."

"I am right sorry to keep you so long, but we are obleeged – "

She lifted troubled eyes to his face, as Thryng interrupted her.

"Ah, no, no! I really beg your pardon – for coming in on you this way – it was not right, you know. It was a – a – predicament, wasn't it? It certainly wasn't right to put you about so; if – you will just let me go anywhere, only to sleep, I shall be greatly obliged. I'm making you a lot of trouble, and I'm so sorry."

His profusion of manner, of which he was entirely unaware, embarrassed her; although not shy like her brother, she had never encountered any one who spoke with such rapid abruptness, and his swift, penetrating glance and pleasant ease of the world abashed her. For an instant she stood perfectly still before him, slowly comprehending his thought, then hastened with her inherited, inborn ladyhood to relieve him from any sense that his sudden descent upon their privacy was an intrusion.

Her mind moved along direct lines from thought to expression – from impulse to action. She knew no conventional tricks of words or phrases for covering an awkward situation, and her only way of avoiding a self-betrayal was by silence and a masklike impassivity. During this moment of stillness while she waited to regain her poise, he, quick and intuitive as a woman, took in the situation, yet he failed to comprehend the character before him.

To one accustomed to the conventional, perfect simplicity seems to conceal something held back. It is hard to believe that all is being revealed, hence her slower thought, in reality, comprehended him the more truly. What he supposed to be pride and shame over their meagre accommodations was, in reality, genuine concern for his comfort, and embarrassment before his ease and ready phrases. As in a swift breeze her thoughts were caught up and borne away upon them, but after a moment they would sweep back to her – a flock of innocent, startled doves.

Still holding her candle aloft, she raised her eyes to his and smiled. "We-uns are right glad you came. If you can be comfortable where we are obliged to put you to sleep, you must bide awhile." She did not say "obleegeed" this time. He had not pronounced it so, and he must know.

"That is so good of you. And now you are very tired yourself and have eaten nothing. You must have your own supper. Hoyle can look after me." He took the candle from her and gave it to the boy, then turned his own chair back to the table and looked inquiringly at Sally squatted before the fire. "Not another thing shall you do for me until you are waited on. Take my place here."

David's manner seemed like a command to her, and she slid into the chair with a weary, drooping movement. Hoyle stood holding the candle, his wry neck twisting his head to one side, a smile on his face, eying them sharply. He turned a questioning look to his sister, as he stiffened himself to his newly acquired importance as host.

Thryng walked over to the bedside. "In the morning, when we are all rested, I'll see what can be done for you," he said, taking the proffered old hand in his. "I am not Dr. Hoyle, but he has taught me a little. I studied and practised with him, you know."

"Hev ye? Then ye must know a heap. Hit's right like th' Lord sont ye. You see suthin' 'peared like to give way whilst I war a-cuttin' light 'ud th' othah day, an' I went all er a heap 'crost a log, an' I reckon hit hurt me some. I hain't ben able to move a foot sence, an' I lay out thar nigh on to a hull day, whilst Hoyle here run clar down to Sally's place to git her. He couldn't lif' me hisse'f, he's that weak; he tried to haul me in, but when I hollered, – sufferin' so I war jes' 'bleeged to holler, – he kivered me up whar I lay and lit out fer Sally, an' she an' her man they got me up here, an' here I ben ever since. I reckon I never will leave this bed ontwell I'm cyarried out in a box."

"Oh, no, not that! You're too much alive for that. We'll see about it to-morrow. Good night."

"Hoyle may show you the way," said the girl, rising. "Your bed is in the loom shed. I'm right sorry it's so cold. I put blankets there, and you can use all you like of them. I would have given you Frale's place up garret – only – he might come in any time, and – "

"Naw, he won't. He's too skeered 'at – " Hoyle's interruption stopped abruptly, checked by a glance of his sister's eye.

"I hope you'll sleep well – "

"Sleep? I shall sleep like a log. I feel as if I could sleep for a week. It's awfully good of you. I hope we haven't eaten all the supper, Hoyle and I. Come, little chap. Good night." He took up his valise and followed the boy, leaving her standing by the uncleared table, gazing after him.

"Now you eat, Cassandry. You are nigh about perished you are that tired," said her mother.

Then old Sally brought more pork and hot pone from the ashes, and they sat down together, eating and sipping their black coffee in silence. Presently Hoyle returned and began removing his clumsy shoes, by the fire.

"Did he ax ye a heap o' questions, Hoyle?" queried the old woman sharply.

"Naw. Did'n' ax noth'n'."

"Waal, look out 'at you don't let on nothin' ef he does. Talkin' may hurt, an' hit may not."

"He hain't no government man, maw."

"Hit's all right, I reckon, but them 'at larns young to hold ther tongues saves a heap o' trouble fer themselves."

After they had eaten, old Sally gathered the few dishes together and placed all the splint-bottomed chairs back against the sides of the room, and, only half disrobing, crawled into the far side of the bed opposite to the mother's, behind the homespun curtain.

"To-morrow I reckon I kin go home to my old man, now you've come, Cass."

"Yes," said the girl in a low voice, "you have been right kind to we-all, Aunt Sally."

Then she bent over her mother, ministering to her few wants; lifting her forward, she shook up the pillow, and gently laid her back upon it, and lightly kissed her cheek. The child had quickly dropped to sleep, curled up like a ball in the farther side of his mother's bed, undisturbed by the low murmur of conversation. Cassandra drew her chair close to the fire and sat long gazing into the burning logs that were fast crumbling to a heap of glowing embers. She uncoiled her heavy bronze hair and combed it slowly out, until it fell a rippling mass to the floor, as she sat. It shone in the firelight as if it had drawn its tint from the fire itself, and the cold night had so filled it with electricity that it flew out and followed the comb, as if each hair were alive, and made a moving aureola of warm red amber about her drooping figure in the midst of the sombre shadows of the room. Her face grew sad and her hands moved listlessly, and at last she slipped from her chair to her knees and wept softly and prayed, her lips forming the words soundlessly. Once her mother awoke, lifted her head slightly from her pillow and gazed an instant at her, then slowly subsided, and again slept.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH AUNT SALLY TAKES HER DEPARTURE AND MEETS FRALE

The loom shed was one of the log cabins connected with the main building by a roofed passage, which Thryng had noticed the evening before as being an odd fashion of house architecture, giving the appearance of a small flock of cabins all nestling under the wings of the old building in the centre.

The shed was dark, having but one small window with glass panes near the loom, the other and larger opening being tightly closed by a wooden shutter. David slept late, and awoke at last to find himself thousands of miles away from his dreams in this unique room, all in the deepest shadow, except for the one warm bar of sunlight which fell across his face. He drowsed off again, and his mind began piecing together fragments and scenes from the previous day and evening, and immediately he was surrounded by mystery, moonlit, fairylike, and white, a little crooked being at his side looking up at him like some gnome creature of the hills, revealed as a part of the enchantment. Then slowly resolving and melting away after the manner of dreams, the wide spaces of the mystery drew closer and warmer, and a great centre of blazing logs threw grotesque, dancing lights among them, and an old face peered out with bright, keen eyes, now seen, now lost in the fitful shadows, now pale and appealing or cautiously withdrawn, but always watching – watching while the little crooked being came and watched also. Then between him and the blazing light came a dark figure silhouetted blackly against it, moving, stooping, rising, going and coming – a sweet girl's head with heavily coiled hair through which the firelight played with flashes of its own color, and a delicate profile cut in pure, clean lines melting into throat and gently rounded breast; like a spirit, now here, now gone, again near and bending over him, – a ministering spirit bringing him food, – until gradually this half wake, dreaming reminiscence concentrated upon her, and again he saw her standing holding the candle high and looking up at him, – a wondering, questioning spirit, – then drooping wearily into the chair by the uncleared table, and again waiting with almost a smile on her parted lips as he said "good night." Good night? Ah, yes. It was morning.

Again he heard the continuous rushing noise to which he had listened in the white mystery, that had soothed him to slumber the night before, rising and falling – never ceasing. He roused himself with sudden energy and bounded from his couch. He would go out and investigate. His sleep had been sound, and he felt a rejuvenation he had not experienced in many months. When he threw open the shutter of the large unglazed window space and looked out on his strange surroundings, he found himself in a new world, sparkling, fresh, clear, shining with sunlight and glistening with wetness, as though the whole earth had been newly washed and varnished. The sunshine streamed in and warmed him, and the air, filled with winelike fragrance, stirred his blood and set his pulses leaping.

He had been too exhausted the previous evening to do more than fall into the bed which had been provided him and sleep his long, uninterrupted sleep. Now he saw why they had called this part of the home the loom shed, for between the two windows stood a cloth loom left just as it had been used, the warp like a tightly stretched veil of white threads, and the web of cloth begun.

In one corner were a few bundles of cotton, one of which had been torn open and the contents placed in a thick layer over the long bench on which he had slept, and covered with a blue and white homespun counterpane. The head had been built high with it, and sheets spread over all. He noticed the blankets which had covered him, and saw that they were evidently of home manufacture, and that the white spread which covered them was also of coarse, clean homespun, ornamented in squares with rude, primitive needlework. He marvelled at the industry here represented.

As for his toilet, the preparation had been most simple. A shelf placed on pegs driven between the logs supported a piece of looking-glass; a splint chair set against the wall served as wash-stand

and towel-rack – the homespun cotton towels neatly folded and hung over the back; a wooden pail at one side was filled with clear water, over which hung a dipper of gourd; a white porcelain basin was placed on the chair, over which a clean towel had been spread, and to complete all, a square cut from the end of a bar of yellow soap lay beside the basin.

David smiled as he bent himself to the refreshing task of bathing in water so cold as to be really icy. Indeed, ice had formed over still pools without during the night, although now fast disappearing under the glowing morning sun. Above his head, laid upon cross-beams, were bundles of wool uncarded, and carding-boards hung from nails in the logs. In one corner was a rudely constructed reel, and from the loom dangled the idle shuttle filled with fine blue yarn of wool. Thryng thought of the worn old hands which had so often thrown it, and thinking of them he hastened his toilet that he might go in and do what he could to help the patient. It was small enough return for the kindness shown him. He feared to offer money for his lodgment, at least until he could find a way.

At last, full of new vigor and very hungry, he issued from his sleeping-room, sadly in need of a shave, but biding his time, satisfied if only breakfast might be forthcoming. He had no need to knock, for the house door stood open, flooding the place with sunlight and frosty air. The huge pile of logs was blazing on the hearth as if it had never ceased since the night before, and the flames leaped hot and red up the great chimney.

Old Sally no longer presided at the cookery. With a large cup of black coffee before her, she now sat at the table eating corn-bread and bacon. A drooping black sunbonnet on her head covered her unkempt, grizzly hair, and a cob pipe and bag of tobacco lay at her hand. She was ready for departure. Cassandra had returned, and her gratuitous neighborly offices were at an end. The girl was stooping before the fire, arranging a cake of corn-bread to cook in the ashes. A crane swung over the flames on which a fat iron kettle was hung, and the large coffee-pot stood on the hearth. The odor of breakfast was savory and appetizing. As David's tall form cast a shadow across the sunlit space on the floor, the old mother's voice called to him from the corner.

"Come right in, Doctah; take a cheer and set. Your breakfast's ready, I reckon. How have you slept, suh?"

The girl at the fire rose and greeted him, but he missed the boy. "Where's the little chap?" he asked.

"Cassandry sent him out to wash up. F'ust thing she do when she gets home is to begin on Hoyle and wash him up."

"He do get that dirty, poor little son," said the girl. "It's like I have to torment him some. Will you have breakfast now, suh? Just take your chair to the table, and I'll fetch it directly."

"Won't I, though! What air you have up here! It makes me hungry merely to breathe. Is it this way all the time?"

"Hit's this-a-way a good deal," said Sally, from under her sunbonnet, "Oh, the' is days hit's some colder, like to make water freeze right hard, but most days hit's a heap warmer than this."

"That's so," said the invalid. "I hev seen it so warm a heap o' winters 'at the trees gits fooled into thinkin' hit's spring an' blossoms all out, an' then come along a late freez'n' spell an' gits their fruit all killed. Hit's quare how they does do that-a-way. We-all hates it when the days come warm in Feb'uary."

"Then you must have been glad to have snow yesterday. I was disappointed. I was running away from that sort of thing, you know."

Thryng's breakfast was served to him as had been his supper of the evening before, directly from the fire. As he ate he looked out upon the usual litter of corn fodder scattered about near the house, and a few implements of the simplest character for cultivating the small pocket of rich soil below, but beyond this and surrounding it was a scene of the wildest beauty. Giant forest trees, intertwined and almost overgrown by a tangle of wild grapevines, hid the fall from sight, and behind them the mountain rose abruptly. A continuous stream of clearest water, icy cold, fell from high above into

a long trough made of a hollow log. There at the running water stood little Hoyle, his coarse cotton towel hung on an azalia shrub, giving himself a thorough scrubbing. In a moment he came in panting, shivering, and shining, and still wet about the hair and ears.

"Why, you are not half dry, son," said his sister. She took the towel from him and gave his head a vigorous rubbing. "Go and get warm, honey, and sister'll give you breakfast by the fire." She turned to David: "Likely you take milk in your coffee. I never thought to ask you." She left the room and returned with a cup of new milk, warm and sweet. He was glad to get it, finding his black coffee sweetened only with molasses unpalatable.

"Don't you take milk in your coffee? How came you to think of it for me?"

"I knew a lady at the hotel last summer. She said that up no'th 'most everybody does take milk or cream, one, in their coffee."

"I never seed sech. Hit's clar waste to my thinkin'."

Cassandra smiled. "That's because you never could abide milk. Mothah thinks it's only fit to make buttah and raise pigs on."

Old Sally's horse, a thin, wiry beast, gray and speckled, stood ready saddled near the door, his bridle hanging from his neck, the bit dangling while he also made his repast. When he had finished his corn and she had finished her elaborate farewells at the bedside, and little Hoyle had with much effort succeeded in bridling her steed, she stepped quickly out and gained her seat on the high, narrow saddle with the ease of a young girl. Meagre as a willow withe in her scant black cotton gown, perched on her bony gray beast, and only the bowl of her cob pipe projecting beyond the rim of her sunbonnet as indication that a face might be hidden in its depths, with a meal sack containing in either end sundry gifts – salt pork, chicken, corn-bread, and meal – slung over the horse's back behind her, and with contentment in her heart, Aunt Sally rode slowly over the hills to rejoin her old man.

Soon she left the main road and struck out into a steep, narrow trail, merely a mule track arched with hornbeam and dogwood and mulberry trees, and towered over by giant chestnuts and oaks and great white pines and deep green hemlocks. Through myriad leafless branches the wind soughed pleasantly overhead, unfelt by her, so completely was she protected by the thickly growing laurel and rhododendron on either side of her path. The snow of the day before was gone, leaving only the glistening wetness of it on stones and fallen leaves and twigs underfoot, while in open spaces the sun beat warmly down upon her.

The trail led by many steep scrambles and sharp descents more directly to her home than the road, which wound and turned so frequently as to more than double the distance. At intervals it cut across the road or followed it a little way, only to diverge again. Here and there other trails crossed it or branched from it, leading higher up the mountain, or off into some gorge following the course of a stream, so that, except to one accustomed to its intricacies, the path might easily be lost.

Old Sally paid no heed to her course, apparently leaving the choice of trails to her horse. She sat easily on the beast and smoked her pipe until it was quite out, when she stowed it away in the black cloth bag, which dangled from her elbow by its strings. Spying a small sassafras shrub leaning toward her from the bank above her head, she gave it a vigorous pull as she passed and drew it, root and all, from its hold in the soil, beat it against the mossy bank, and swished it upon her skirt to remove the earth clinging to it. Then, breaking off a bit of the root, she chewed it, while she thrust the rest in her bag and used the top for a switch with which to hasten the pace of her nag.

The small stones, loosened when she tore the shrub from the bank, rattled down where the soil had been washed away, leaving the steep shelving rock side of the mountain bare, and she heard them leap the smooth space and fall softly on the moss among the ferns and lodged leaves below. There, crouched in the sun, lay a man with a black felt hat covering his face. The stones falling about him caused him to raise himself stealthily and peer upward. Descrying only the lone woman and the gray horse, he gave a low peculiar cry, almost like that of an animal in distress. She drew rein sharply and listened. The cry was repeated a little louder.

"Come on up hyar, Frale. Hit's on'y me. Hu' come you thar?"

He climbed rapidly up through the dense undergrowth, and stood at her side, breathing quickly. For a moment they waited thus, regarding each other, neither speaking. The boy – he seemed little more than a youth – looked up at her with a singularly innocent and appealing expression, but gradually as he saw her impassive and unrelenting face, his own resumed a hard and sullen look, which made him appear years older. His forehead was damp and cold, and a lock of silken black hair, slightly curling over it, increased its whiteness. Dark, heavy rings were under his eyes, which gleamed blue as the sky between long dark lashes. His arms dropped listlessly at his side, and he stood before her, as before a dread judge, bareheaded and silent. He bore her look only for a minute, then dropped his eyes, and his hand clinched more tightly the rim of his old felt hat. When he ceased looking at her, her eyes softened.

"I 'low ye mus' hev suthin' to say fer yourse'f," she said.

"I reckon." The corners of his mouth drooped, and he did not look up. He made as if to speak further, but only swallowed and was silent.

"Ye reckon? Waal, why'n't ye say?"

"They hain't nothin' to say. He war mean an' – an' – he's dade. I reckon he's dade."

"Yas, he's dade – an' they done had the buryin'." Her voice was monotonous and plaintive. A pallor swept over his face, and he drew the back of his hand across his mouth.

"He knowed he hadn't ought to rile me like he done. I be'n tryin' to make his hoss go home, but I cyan't. Hit jes' hangs round thar. I done brung him down an' lef' him in your shed, an' I 'lowed p'rhaps Uncle Jerry'd take him ovah to his paw." Again he swallowed and turned his face away. "The critter'd starve up yander. Anyhow, I ain't hoss stealin'. Hit war mo'n a hoss 'twixt him an' me." From the low, quiet tones of the two no one would have dreamed that a tragedy lay beneath their words.

"Look a-hyar, Frale. Thar wa'n't nothin' 'twixt him an' you. Ye war both on ye full o' mean corn whiskey, an' ye war quarrellin' 'bouts Cass." A faint red stole into the boy's cheeks, and the blue gleam of his eyes between the dark lashes narrowed to a mere line, as he looked an instant in her face and then off up the trail.

"Hain't ye seed nobody?" he asked.

"You knows I hain't seed nobody to hurt you-uns 'thout I'd tell ye. Look a-hyar, son, you are hungerin'. Come home with me, an' I'll get ye suthin' to eat. Ef you don't, ye'll go back an' fill up on whiskey agin, an' thar'll be the end of ye." He walked on a few steps at her side, then stopped suddenly.

"I 'low I better bide whar I be. You-uns hain't been yandah to the fall, have ye?"

"I have. You done a heap mo'n you reckoned on. When Marthy heered o' the killin', she jes' drapped whar she stood. She war out doin' work 'at you'd ought to 'a' been doin' fer her, an' she hain't moved sence. She like to 'a' perished lyin' out thar. Pore little Hoyle, he run all the way to our place he war that skeered, an' 'lowed she war dade, an' me an' the ol' man went ovah, an' thar we found her lyin' in the yard, an' the cow war lowin' to be milked, an' the pig squeelin' like hit war stuck, fer hunger. Hit do make me clar plumb mad when I think how you hev acted, – jes' like you' paw. Ef he'd nevah 'a' started that thar still, you'd nevah 'a' been what ye be now, a-drinkin' yer own whiskey at that. Come on home with me."

"I reckon I'm bettah hyar. They mount be thar huntin' me."

"I know you're hungerin'. I got suthin' ye can eat, but I 'lowed if you'd come, I'd get you an' the ol' man a good chick'n fry." She took from her stores, slung over the nag, a piece of corn-bread and a large chunk of salt pork, and gave them into his hand. "Thar! Eat. Hit's heart'nin'."

He was suffering, as she thought, and reached eagerly for the food, but before tasting it he looked up again into her face, and the infantile appeal had returned to his eyes.

"Tell me more 'bouts maw," he said.

"You eat, an' I'll talk," she replied. He broke a large piece from the corn-cake and crowded the rest into his pocket. Then he drew forth a huge clasp-knife and cut a thick slice from the raw salt

pork, and pulling a red cotton handkerchief from his belt, he wrapped it around the remainder and held it under his arm as he ate.

"She hain't able to move 'thout hollerin', she's that bad hurted. Paw an' I, we got her to bed, an' I been thar ever since with all to do ontwell Cass come. Likely she done broke her hip."

"Is Cass thar now? Hu' come she thar?" Again the blood sought his cheeks.

"Paw rode down to the settlement and telegrafted fer her. Pore thing! You don't reckon what-all you have done. I wisht you'd 'a' took aftah your maw. She war my own sister, 'nd she war that good she must 'a' went straight to glory when she died. Your paw, he like to 'a' died too that time, an' when he married Marthy Merlin, I reckoned he war cured o' his ways; but hit did'n' last long. Marthy, she done well by him, an' she done well by you, too. They hain't nothin' agin Marthy. She be'n a good stepmaw to ye, she hev, an' now see how you done her, an' Cass givin' up her school an' comin' home thar to ten' beastes an' do your work like she war a man. Her family wa'n't brought up that-a-way, nor mine wa'n't neither. Big fool Marthy war to marry with your paw. Hit's that-a-way with all the Farwells; they been that quarellin' an' bad, makin' mean whiskey an' drinkin' hit raw, killin' hyar an' thar, an' now you go doin' the same, an' my own nephew, too." Her face remained impassive, and her voice droned on monotonously, but two tears stole down her wrinkled cheeks. His face settled into its harder lines as she talked, but he made no reply, and she continued querulously: "Why'n't you pay heed to me long ago, when I tol' ye not to open that thar still again? You are a heap too young to go that-a-way, – my own kin, like to be hung fer man-killin'."

"When did Cass come?" he interrupted sullenly.

"Las' evenin'."

"I'll drap 'round thar this evenin' er late night, I reckon. I have to get feed fer my own hoss an' tote hit up er take him back – one. All I fetched up last week he done et." He turned to walk away, but stood with averted head as she began speaking again.

"Don't you do no such fool thing. You keep clar o' thar. Bring the hoss to me, an' I'll ride him home. What you want o' the beast on the mountain, anyhow? Hit's only like to give away whar ye'r' at. All you want is to git to see Cass, but hit won't do you no good, leastways not now. You done so bad she won't look at ye no more, I reckon. They is a man thar, too, now." He started back, his hands clinched, his head lifted, in his whole air an animal-like ferocity. "Thar now, look at ye. 'Tain't you he's after."

"'Tain't me I'm feared he's after. How come he thar?"

"He come with her las' evenin' – " A sound of horses' hoofs on the road far below arrested her. They both waited, listening intently. "Thar they be. Git," she whispered. "Cass tol' me ef I met up with ye, to say 'at she'd leave suthin' fer ye to eat on the big rock 'hind the holly tree at the head o' the fall." She leaned down to him and held him by the coat an instant, "Son, leave whiskey alone. Hit's the only way you kin do to get her."

"Yas, Aunt Sally," he murmured. His eyes thanked her with one look for the tone or the hope her words held out.

Again the laugh, nearer this time, and again the wild look of haunting fear in his face. He dropped where he stood and slipped stealthily as a cat back to the place where he had lain, and crawling on his belly toward a heap of dead leaves caught by the brush of an old fallen pine, he crept beneath them and lay still. His aunt did not stir. Patting her horse's neck, she sat and waited until the voices drew nearer, came close beneath her as the road wound, and passed on. Then she once more moved along toward her cabin.

CHAPTER IV

DAVID SPENDS HIS FIRST DAY AT HIS CABIN, AND FRALE MAKES HIS CONFESSION

Doctor Hoyle had built his cabin on one of the pinnacles of the earth, and David, looking down on blue billowing mountain tops with only the spaces of the air between him and heaven – between him and the ocean – between him and his fair English home – felt that he knew why the old doctor had chosen it.

Seated on a splint-bottomed chair in the doorway, pondering, he thought first of his mother, with a little secret sorrow that he could not have taken to his heart the bride she had selected for him, and settled in his own home to the comfortable ease the wife's wealth would have secured for him. It was not that the money had been made in commerce; he was neither a snob nor a cad. Although his own connections entitled him to honor, what more could he expect than to marry wealth and be happy, if – if happiness could come to either of them in that way. No, his heart did not lean toward her; it was better that he should bend to his profession in a strange land. But not this, to live a hermit's life in a cabin on a wild hilltop. How long must it be – how long?

Brooding thus, he gazed at the distance of ever paling blue, and mechanically counted the ranges and peaks below him. An inaccessible tangle of laurel and rhododendron clothed the rough and precipitous wall of the mountain side, which fell sheer down until lost in purple shadow, with a mantle of green, deep and rich, varied by the gray of the lichen-covered rocks, the browns and reds of the bare branches of deciduous trees, and the paler tints of feathery pines. Here and there, from damp, springy places, dark hemlocks rose out of the mass, tall and majestic, waving their plummy tops, giant sentinels of the wilderness.

Gradually his mood of brooding retrospect changed, and he knew himself to be glad to his heart's core. He could understand why, out of the turmoil of the Middle Ages, men chose to go to sequestered places and become hermits. No tragedies could be in this primeval spot, and here he would rest and build again for the future. He was pleased to sit thus musing, for the climb had taken more strength than he could well spare. His cabin was not yet habitable, for the simple things Doctor Hoyle had accumulated to serve his needs were still locked in well-built cupboards, as he had left them.

Thyrng meant soon to go to work, to take out the bed covers and air them, and to find the canvas and nail it over the framework beside the cabin which was to serve as a sleeping apartment. All should be done in time. That was a good framework, strongly built, with the corner posts set deep in the ground to keep it firm on this windswept height, and with a door in the side of the cabin opening into the canvas room. Ah, yes, all that the old doctor did was well and thoroughly done.

His appetite sharpened by the climb and the bracing air, David investigated the contents of one of those melon-shaped baskets which Cassandra had given him when he started for his new home that morning, with little Hoyle as his guide.

Ah, what hospitable kindness they had shown to him, a stranger! Here were delicate bits of fried chicken, sweet and white, corn-bread, a glass of honey, and a bottle of milk. Nothing better need a man ask; and what animals men are, after all, he thought, taking delight in the mere acts of eating and breathing and sleeping.

Utterly weary, he would not trouble to open the cot which lay in the cabin, but rolled himself in his blanket on the wide, flat rock at the verge of the mountain. Here, warmed by the sun, he lay with his face toward the blue distance and slept dreamlessly and soundly, – very soundly, for he was not awakened by a crackling of the brush and scrambling of feet struggling up the mountain wall below his hard resting-place. Yet the sound kept on, and soon a head appeared above the rock, and

two hands were placed upon it; then a strong, catlike spring landed the lithe young owner of the head only a few feet away from the sleeper.

It was Frale, his soft felt hat on the back of his head and the curl of dark hair falling upon his forehead. For an instant, as he gazed on the sleeping figure, the wild look of fear was in his eyes; then, as he bethought himself of the words of Aunt Sally, "They is a man thar," the expression changed to one more malevolent and repulsive, transforming and aging the boyish face. Cautiously he crept nearer, and peered into the face of the unconscious Englishman. His hands clinched and his lips tightened, and he made a movement with his foot as if he would spurn him over the cliff.

As suddenly the moment passed; he drew back in shame and looked down at his hands, blood-guilty hands as he knew them to be, and, with lowered head, he moved swiftly away.

He was a youth again, hungry and sad, stumbling along the untrodden way, avoiding the beaten path, yet unerringly taking his course toward the cleft rock at the head of the fall behind the great holly tree. It was not the food Cassandra had promised him that he wanted now, but to look into the eyes of one who would pity and love him. Heartsick and weary as he never had been in all his young life, lonely beyond bearing, he hurried along.

As he forced a path through the undergrowth, he heard the sound of a mountain stream, and, seeking it, he followed along its rocky bed, leaping from one huge block of stone to another, and swinging himself across by great overhanging sycamore boughs, drawing, by its many windings, nearer and nearer to the spot where it precipitated itself over the mountain wall. Ever the noise of the water grew louder, until at last, making a slight detour, he came upon the very edge of the descent, where he could look down and see his home nestled in the cove at the foot of the fall, the blue smoke curling upward from its great chimney.

He seated himself upon a jutting rock well screened by laurel shrubs on all sides but the one toward the fall. There, his knees clasped about with his arms, and his chin resting upon them, he sat and watched.

Behind the leafage and tangle of bare stems and twigs, he was so far above and so directly over the spot on which his gaze was fixed as to be out of the usual range of sight from below, thus enabling him to see plainly what was transpiring about the house and sheds, without himself being seen.

Long and patiently he waited. Once a dog barked, – his own dog Nig. Some one must be approaching. What if the little creature should seek him out and betray him! He quivered with the thought. The day before he had driven him down the mountain, beating him off whenever he returned. Should the animal persist in tracking him, he would kill him.

He peered more eagerly down, and saw little Hoyle run out of the cow shed and twist himself this way and that to see up and down the road. Both the child and the dog seemed excited. Yes, there they were, three horsemen coming along the highway. Now they were dismounting and questioning the boy. Now they disappeared in the house. He did not move. Why were they so long within? Hours, it seemed to Frale, but in reality it was only a short search they were making there. They were longer looking about the sheds and yard. Hoyle accompanied them everywhere, his hands in his pockets, standing about, shivering with excitement.

All around they went peering and searching, thrusting their arms as far as they could reach into the stacks of fodder, looking into troughs and corn sacks, setting the fowls to cackling wildly, even hauling out the long corn stalks from the wagon which had served to make Thryng's ride the night before comfortable. No spot was overlooked.

Frequently they stood and parleyed. Then Frale's heart would sink within him. What if they should set Nig to track him! Ah, he would strangle the beast and pitch him over the fall. He would spring over after him before he would let himself be taken and hanged. Oh, he could feel the strangling rope around his neck already! He could not bear it – he could not!

Thus cowering, he waited, starting at every sound from below as if to run, then sinking back in fear, breathless with the pounding of his heart in his breast. Now the voices came up to him painfully

clear. They were talking to little Hoyle angrily. What they were saying he could not make out, but he again cautiously lifted his head and looked below. Suddenly the child drew back and lifted his arm as if to ward off a blow, but the blow came. Frale saw one of the men turn as he mounted his horse to ride away, and cut the boy cruelly across his face and arm with his rawhide whip. The little one's shriek of fright and pain pierced his big brother to the heart and caused him to forget for the moment his own abject fear.

He made as if he would leap the intervening space to punish the brute, but a cry of anger died in his throat as he realized his situation. The selfishness of his fear, however, was dispelled, and he no longer cringed as before, but had the courage again to watch, awake and alert to all that passed beneath him.

Hoyle's cry brought Cassandra out of the house flying. She walked up to the man like an angry tigress. Frale rose to his knees and strained eagerly forward.

"If you are such a coward you must hit something small and weak, you can strike a woman. Hit me," she panted, putting the child behind her.

Muttering, the man rode sullenly away. "He no business hangin' roun' we-uns, list'nin' to all we say."

Frale could not make out the words, but his face burned red with rage. Had he been in hiding down below, he would have wreaked vengeance on the man; as it was, he stood up and boldly watched them ride away in the opposite direction from which they had come.

He sank back and waited, and again the hours passed. All was still but the rushing water and the gentle sighing of the wind in the tops of the towering pines. At last he heard a rustling and sniffing here and there. His heart stood still, then pounded again in terror. They had – they had set Nig to track him. Of course the dog would seek for his old friend and comrade, and they – they would wait until they heard his bark of joy, and then they would seize him.

He crept close to the rock where the water rushed, not a foot away, and clinging to the tough laurel behind him, leaned far over. To drop down there would mean instant death on the rocks below. It would be terrible – almost as horrible as the strangling rope. He would wait until they were on him, and then – nearer and nearer came the erratic trotting and scratching of the dog among the leaves – and then, if only he could grapple with the man who had struck his little brother, he would drag him over with him. A look of fierce joy leaped in his eyes, which were drawn to a narrow blue gleam as he waited.

Suddenly Nig burst through the undergrowth and sprang to his side, but before the dog could give his first bark of delight the yelp was crushed in his throat, and he was hurled with the mighty force of frenzy, a black, writhing streak of animate nature into the rushing water, and there swept down, tossed on the rocks, taken up and swirled about and thrown again upon the rocks, no longer animate, but a part of nature's own, to return to his primal elements.

It was done, and Frale looked at his hands helplessly, feeling himself a second time a murderer. Yet he was in no way more to blame for the first than for this. As yet a boy untaught by life, he had not learned what to do with the forces within him. They rose up madly and mastered him. With a man's power to love and hate, a man's instincts, his untamed nature ready to assert itself for tenderness or cruelty, without a man's knowledge of the necessity for self-control, where some of his kind would have been inert and listless, his inheritance had made him intense and fierce. Loving and gentle and kind he could be, yet when stirred by liquor, or anger, or fear, – most terrible.

His deed had been accomplished with such savage deftness that none pursuing could have guessed the tragedy. They might have waited long in the open spaces for the dog's return or the sound of his joyous yelp of recognition, but the sacrifice was needless. The affectionate creature had been searching on his own behalf, careless of the blows with which his master had driven him from his side the day before.

Trembling, Frale crouched again. The silence was filled with pain for him. The moments swept on, even as the water rushed on, and the sun began to drop behind the hills, leaving the hollows in deepening purple gloom. At last, deeming that the search for the time must have been given up, he crept cautiously toward the great holly tree, not for food, but for hope. There, back in the shadow, he sat on a huge log, his head bowed between his hands, and listened.

Presently the silence was broken by a gentle stirring of the fallen leaves, not erratically this time, only a steady moving forward of human feet. Again Frale's heart bounded and the red sought his cheek, but now with a new emotion. He knew of but one footstep which would advance toward his ambush in that way. Peering out from among the deepest shadows, he watched the spot where Cassandra had promised food should be placed for him, his eyes no longer a narrow slit of blue, but wide and glad, his face transformed from the strain of fear with eager joy.

Soon she emerged, walking wearily. She carried a bundle of food tied in a cloth, and an old overcoat of rough material trailed over one arm. These she deposited on the flat stone, then stood a moment leaning against the smooth gray hole of the holly tree, breathing quickly from the exertion of the steep climb.

Her eyes followed the undulating line of the mountain above them, rising tree-fringed against the sky, to where the highest peak cut across the setting sun, haloed by its long rays of gold. No cloud was there, but sweeping down the mountain side were the earth mists, glowing with iridescent tints, draping the crags and floating over the purple hollows, the verdure of the pines showing through it all, gilded and glorified.

Cassandra waiting there might have been the dryad of the tree come out to worship in the evening light and grow beautiful. So Thryng would have thought, could he have seen her with the glow on her face, and in her eyes, and lighting up the fires in her hair; but no such classic dream came to the youth lingering among the shadows, ashamed to appear before her, bestowing on her a dumb adoration, unformed and wordless.

Because his friend had maudlinly boasted that he was the better man in her eyes, and could any day win her for himself, he had killed him. Despite all the anguish the deed had wrought in his soul, he felt unrepentant now, as his eyes rested on her. He would do it again, and yet it was that very boast that had first awakened in his heart such thought of her.

For years Cassandra had been as his sister, although no tie of blood existed between them, but suddenly the idea of possession had sprung to life in him, when another had assumed the right as his. Frale had not looked on her since that moment of revelation, of which she was so ignorant and so innocent. Now, filled with the shame of his deed and his desires, he stood in a torment of longing, not daring to move. His knees shook and his arms ached at his sides, and his eyes filled with hot tears.

Quickly the sun dropped below the edge of the mountain. Cassandra drew a long sigh, and the glow left her face. She looked an instant lingeringly at the articles she had brought, and turned sadly away. Then he took a step toward her with hands outstretched, forgetful of his shame, and all, except that she was slipping away from him. Arrested by the sound of his feet among the leaves, she spoke.

"Frale, are you there?" Her voice was low as if she feared other ears than his might hear.

He did not move again, and speak he could not, for remembrance rushed back stiflingly and overwhelmed him. Descrying his white face in the shadow, a pity as deep as his shame filled her heart and drew her nearer.

"Why, Frale, come out here. No one can see you, only me."

Still tongue-tied by his emotion, he came into the light and stood near her. In dismay she looked up in his face. The big boy brother who had taken her to the little Carew Crossing station only two months before, rough and prankish as the colt he drove, but gentle withal, was gone. He who stood at her side was older. Anger had left its mark about his mouth, and fear had put a strange wildness in his eyes – but – there was something else in his reckless, set lips that hurt her. She shrank from him, and

he took a step closer. Then she placed a soothing hand on his arm and perceived he was quivering. She thought she understood, and the soft pity moistened her eyes and deepened in her heart.

"Don't be afraid, Frale; they're gone long ago, and won't come back – not for a while, I reckon."

He smiled faintly, never taking his eyes from her face. "I hain't afeared o' them. I hev been, but – " He shook her hand from his arm and made as if he would push her away, then suddenly he leaned toward her and caught her in his arms, clasping her so closely that she could feel his wildly beating heart.

"Frale, Frale! Don't, Frale. You never used to do me this way."

"No, I never done you this-a-way. I wisht I had. I be'n a big fool." He kissed her, the first kisses of his young manhood, on brow and cheeks and lips, in spite of her useless writhings. He continued muttering as he held her: "I sinned fer you. I killed a man. He said he'd hev you. He 'lowed he'd go down yander to the school whar you war at an' marry you an' fetch you back. I war a fool to 'low you to go thar fer him to foller an' get you. I killed him. He's dade."

The short, interrupted sentences fell on her ears like blows. She ceased struggling and, drooping upon his bosom, wept, sobbing heart-brokenly.

"Oh, Frale!" she moaned, "if you had only told me, I could have given you my promise and you would have known he was lying and spared him and saved your own soul." He little knew the strength of his arms as he held her. "Frale! I am like to perish, you are hurting me so."

He loosed her and she sank, a weary, frightened heap, at his feet. Then very tenderly he gathered her in his arms and carried her to the great flat rock and placed her on the old coat she had brought him.

"You know I wouldn't hurt you fer the hull world, Cass." He knelt beside her, and throwing his arms across her lap buried his face in her dress, still trembling with his unmastered emotion. She thought him sobbing.

"Can you give me your promise now, Cass?"

"Now? Now, Frale, your hands are blood-guilty," she said, slowly and hopelessly.

He grew cold and still, waiting in the silence. His hands clutched her clothing, but he did not lift his head. He had shed blood and had lost her. They might take him and hang him. At last he told her so, brokenly, and she knew not what to do.

Gently she placed her hand on his head and drew the thick silken hair through her fingers, and the touch, to his stricken soul, was a benediction. The pity of her cooled the fever in his blood and swept over his spirit the breath of healing. For the first time, after the sin and the horror of it, after the passion and its anguish, came tears. He wept and wiped his tears with her dress.

Then she told him how her mother had been hurt. How Hoyle had driven the half-broken colt and the mule all the way to Carew's alone, to bring her home, and how he had come nigh being killed. How a gentleman had helped her when the colt tried to run and the mule was mean, and how she had brought him home with her.

Then he lifted his head and looked at her, his haggard face drawn with suffering, and the calmness of her eyes still further soothed and comforted him. They were filled with big tears, and he knew the tears were for him, for the change which had come upon him, lonely and wretched, doomed to hide out on the mountain, his clothes torn by the brambles and soiled by the red clay of the holes into which he had crawled to hide himself. He rose and sat at her side and held her head on his shoulder with gentle hand.

"Pore little sister – pore little Cass! I been awful mean an' bad," he murmured. "Hit's a badness I cyan't 'count fer no ways. When I seed that thar doctah man – I reckon hit war him I seed lyin' asleep up yander on Hangin' Rock – a big tall man, right thin an' white in the face – " he paused and swallowed as if loath to continue.

"Frale!" she cried, and would have drawn away but that he held her.

"I didn't hurt him, Cass. I mount hev. I lef' him lie thar an' never woke him nor teched him, but – I felt hit here – the badness." He struck his chest with his fist. "I lef' thar fast an' come here. Ever sence I killed Ferd, hit's be'n follerin' me that-a-way. I reckon I'm cursed to hell-fire fer hit now, ef they take me er ef they don't – hit's all one; hit's thar whar I'm goin' at the las'."

"Frale, there is a way –"

"Yes, they is one way – only one. Ef you'll give me your promise, Cass, I'll get away down these mountains, an' I'll work; I'll work hard an' get you a house like one I seed to the settlement, Cass, I will. Hit's you, Cass. Ever sence Ferd said that word, I be'n plumb out'n my hade. Las' night I slep' in Wild Cat Hole, an' I war that hungered an' lone, I tried to pray like your maw done teached me, an' I couldn' think of nothin' to say, on'y just, 'Oh, Lord, Cass!' That-a-way – on'y your name, Cass, Cass, all night long."

"I reckon Satan put my name in your heart, Frale; 'pears to me like it is sin."

"Naw! Satan nevah put your name thar. He don't meddle with sech as you. He war a-tryin' to get your name out'n my heart, that's what he war tryin', fer he knowed I'd go bad right quick ef he could. Hit war your name kep' my hands off'n that doctah man thar on the rock. Give me your promise now, Cass. Hit'll save me."

"Then why didn't it save you from killing Ferd?" she asked.

"O Gawd!" he moaned, and was silent.

"Listen, Frale," she said at last. "Can't you see it's sin for you and me to sit here like this – like we dared to be sweethearts, when you have shed blood for this? Take your hands off me, and let me go down to mothah."

Slowly his hold relaxed and his head drooped, but he did not move his arms. She pushed them gently from her and stood a moment looking down at him. His arms dropped upon the stone at his side, listless and empty, and again her pitying soul reached out to him and enveloped him.

"Frale, there is just one way that I can give you my promise," she said. He held out his arms to her. "No, I can't sit that way; you can see that. The good book says, 'Ye must repent and be born again.'" He groaned and covered his face with his hands. "Then you would be a new man, without sin. I reckon you have suffered a heap, and repented a heap – since you did that, Frale?"

"I'm 'feared – I'm 'feared ef he war here an' riled me agin like he done that time – I'm 'feared I'd do hit agin – like he war talkin' 'bout you, Cass." He rose and stood close to her.

The soft dusk was wrapping them about, and she began to fear lest she lose her control over him. She took up the bundle of food and placed it in his hand.

"Here, take this, and the coat, too, Frale. Come down and have suppah with mothah and me to-night, and sleep in your own bed. They won't search here for one while, I reckon, and you'll be safah than hiding in Wild Cat Hole. Hoyle heard them say they reckoned you'd lit off down the mountain, and were hiding in some near-by town. They'll hunt you there first; come."

She walked on, and he obediently followed. "When we get nigh the house, I'll go first and see if the way is clear. You wait back. If I want you to run, I'll call twice, quick and sharp, but if I want you to come right in, I'll call once, low and long."

After that no word was spoken. They clambered down the steep, winding path, and not far from the house she left him. She wondered Nig did not bound out to greet her, but supposed he must be curled up near the hearth in comfort. Frale also thought of the dog as he sat cowering under the laurel shrubs, and set his teeth in anguish and sorrow.

"Cass'll hate hit when she finds out," he muttered.

After a moment, waiting and listening, he heard her long, low call float out to him. Falling on his hurt spirit, it sounded heavenly sweet.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH CASSANDRA GOES TO DAVID WITH HER TROUBLE, AND GIVES FRALE HER PROMISE

After his sleep on Hanging Rock, David, allured by the sunset, remained long in his doorway idly smoking his pipe, and ruminating, until a normal and delightful hunger sent him striding down the winding path toward the blazing hearth where he had found such kindly welcome the evening before. There, seated tilted back against the chimney side, he found a huge youth, innocent of face and gentle of mien, who rose as he entered and offered him his chair, and smiled and tossed back a falling lock from his forehead as he gave him greeting.

"This hyar is Doctah Thryng, Frale, who done me up this-a-way. He 'lows he's goin' to git me well so's I can walk again. How air you, suh? You certainly do look a heap better'n when you come las' evenin'."

"So I am, indeed. And you?" David's voice rang out gladly. He went to the bed and bent above the old woman, looking her over carefully. "Are you comfortable? Do the weights hurt you?" he asked.

"I cyan't say as they air right comfortable, but ef they'll help me to git 'round agin, I reckon I can bar hit."

Early that morning, with but the simplest means, David had arranged bandages and weights of wood to hold her in position.

She was so slight he hoped the broken hip might right itself with patience and care, more especially as he learned that her age was not so advanced as her appearance had led him to suppose.

Now all suspicion of him seemed to have vanished from the household. Hoyle, happy when the fascinating doctor noticed him, leaned against his chair, drinking in his words eagerly. But when Thryng drew him to his knee and discovered the cruel mark across his face and asked how it had happened, a curious change crept over them all. Every face became as expressionless as a mask; only the boy's eyes sought his brother's, then turned with a frightened look toward Cassandra as if seeking help.

Thryng persisted in his examination, and lifted the boy's face toward the light. If the big brother had done this deed, he should be made to feel shame for it. The welt barely escaped the eye, which was swollen and discolored; and altogether the face presented a pitiable appearance.

As David talked, the hard look which had been exorcised for a time by the gentle influence of that home, and more than all by the sight of Cassandra performing the gracious services of the household, settled again upon the youth's face. His lips were drawn, and his eyes ceased following Cassandra, and became fixed and narrowed on one spot.

"You have come near losing that splendid eye of yours, do you know that, little chap?" Hoyle grinned. "It's a shame, you know. I have something up at the cabin would help to heal this, but – " he glanced about the room – "What are those dried herbs up there?"

"Thar is witch hazel yandah in the cupboard. Cass, ye mount bile some up fer th' doctah," said the mother. "Tell th' doctah hu-come hit happened, son; you hain't afeared of him, be ye?" A trampling of horse's hoofs was heard outside. "Go up garret to your own place, Frale. What ye bid'n here fer?" she added, in a hushed voice, but the youth sat doggedly still.

Cassandra went out and quickly returned. "It's your own horse, Frale. Poor beast! He's limping like he's been hurt. He's loose out there. You better look to him."

"Uncle Carew rode him down an' lef' him, I reckon." Frale rose and went out, and David continued his care of the child.

"How was it? Did your brother hurt you?"

"Naw. He nevah hurted me all his life. Hit – war my own se'f – "

Cassandra patted the child on his shoulder. "He can't beah to tell hu-come he is hurted this way, he is that proud. It was a mean, bad, coward man fetched him such a blow across the face. He asked little son something, and when Hoyle nevah said a word, he just lifted his arm and hit him, and then rode off like he had pleased himself." A flush of anger kindled in her cheeks. "Nevah mind, son. Doctah can fix you up all right."

A sigh of relief trembled through the boy's lips, and David asked no more questions.

"You hain't goin' to tie me up that-a-way, be you?" He pointed to the bed whereon his mother lay, and they all laughed, relieving the tension.

"Naw," shrilled the mother's voice, "but I reckon doctah mount take off your hade an' set hit on straight agin."

"I wisht he could," cried the child, no whit troubled by the suggestion. "I'd bar a heap fer to git my hade straight like Frale's." Just then his brother entered the room. "You reckon doctah kin take off my hade an' set hit straight like you carry yours, Frale?" Again they all laughed, and the big youth smiled such a sweet, infantile smile, as he looked down on his little brother, that David's heart warmed toward him.

He tousled the boy's hair as he passed and drew him along to the chimney side, away from the doctor. "Hit's a right good hade I'm thinkin' ef hit be set too fer round. They is a heap in hit, too, more'n they is in mine, I reckon."

"He's gettin' too big to set that-a-way on your knee, Frale. Ye make a baby of him," said the mother. The child made an effort to slip down, but Frale's arm closed more tightly about him, and he nestled back contentedly.

So the evening passed, and Thryng retired early to the bed in the loom shed. He knew something serious was amiss, but of what nature he could not conjecture, unless it were that Frale had been making illicit whiskey. Whatever it was, he chose to manifest no curiosity.

In the morning he saw nothing of the young man, and as a warm rain was steadily falling, he was glad to get the use of the horse, and rode away happily in the rain, with food provided for both himself and the beast sufficient for the day slung in a sack behind him.

"Reckon ye'll come back hyar this evenin'?" queried the old mother, as he adjusted her bandages before leaving.

"I'll see how the cabin feels after I have had a fire in the chimney all day."

As he left, he paused by Cassandra's side. She was standing by the spout of running water waiting for her pail to fill. "If it happens that you need me for – anything at all, send Hoyle, and I'll come immediately. Will you?"

She lifted her eyes to his gratefully. "Thank you," was all she said, but his look impelled more. "You are right kind," she added.

Hardly satisfied, he departed, but turned in his saddle to glance back at her. She was swaying sidewise with the weight of the full pail, straining one slender arm as she bore it into the house. Who did all the work there, he wondered. That great youth ought to relieve her of such tasks. Where was he? Little did he dream that the eyes of the great youth were at that moment fixed darkly upon him from the small pane of glass set in under the cabin roof, which lighted Frale's garret room.

David stabled the horse in the log shed built by Doctor Hoyle for his own beast, – for what is life in the mountains without a horse, – then lingered awhile in his doorway looking out over the billows of ranges seen dimly through the fine veil of the falling rain. Ah, wonderful, perfect world it seemed to him, seen through the veil of the rain.

The fireplace in the cabin was built of rough stone, wide and high, and there he made him a brisk fire with fat pine and brushwood. He drew in great logs which he heaped on the broad stone hearth to dry. He piled them on the fire until the flames leaped and roared up the chimney, so long unused. He sat before it, delighting in it like a boy with a bonfire, and blessed his friend for sending him there, smoking a pipe in his honor. Among the doctor's few cooking utensils he found a stout

iron tea-kettle and sallied out again in the wet to rinse it and fill it with fresh water from the spring. He had had only coffee since leaving Canada; now he would have a good cup of decent tea, so he hung the kettle on the crane and swung it over the fire.

In his search for his tea, most of his belongings were unpacked and tossed about the room in wild disorder, and a copy of *Marius the Epicurean* was brought to light. His kettle boiled over into the fire, and immediately the small articles on his pine table were shoved back in confusion to make room for his tea things, his bottle of milk, his corn pone, and his book.

Being by this time weary, he threw himself on his couch, and contentment began – his hot tea within reach, his door wide open to the sweetness of the day, his fire dancing and crackling with good cheer, and his book in his hand. Ah! The delicious idleness and rest! No disorders to heal – no bones to mend – no problems to solve; a little sipping of his tea – a little reading of his book – a little luxuriating in the warmth and the pleasant odor of pine boughs burning – a little dreamy reverie, watching through the open door the changing lights on the hills, and listening to an occasional bird note, liquid and sweet.

The hour drew near to noon and the sky lightened and a rift of deep blue stretched across the open space before him. Lazily he speculated as to how he was to get his provisions brought up to him, and when and how he might get his mail, but laughed to think how little he cared for a hundred and one things which had filled his life and dogged his days ere this. Had he reached Nirvana? Nay, he could still hunger and thirst.

A footstep was heard without, and a figure appeared in his doorway, quietly standing, making no move to enter. It was Cassandra, and he was pleased.

"My first visitor!" he exclaimed. "Come in, come in. I'll make a place for you to sit in a minute." He shoved the couch away from before the fire, and removing a pair of trousers and a heap of hose from one of his splint-bottomed chairs, he threw them in a corner and placed it before the hearth. "You walked, didn't you? And your feet are wet, of course. Sit here and dry them."

She pushed back her sunbonnet and held out to him a quaint little basket made of willow withes, which she carried, but she took no step forward. Although her lips smiled a fleeting wraith of a smile that came and went in an instant, he thought her eyes looked troubled as she lifted them to his face.

He took the basket and lifted the cover. "I brought you some pa'triges," she said simply.

There lay three quail, and a large sweet potato, roasted in the ashes on their hearth as he had seen the corn pone baked the evening before, and a few round white cakes which he afterwards learned were beaten biscuit, all warm from the fire.

"How am I ever to repay you people for your kindness to me?" he said. "Come in and dry your feet. Never mind the mud; see how I've tracked it in all the morning. Come."

He led her to the fire, and replenished it, while she sat passively looking down on the hearth as if she scarcely heeded him. Not knowing how to talk to her, or what to do with her, he busied himself trying to bring a semblance of order to the cabin, occasionally dropping a remark to which she made no response. Then he also relapsed into silence, and the minutes dragged – age-long minutes, they seemed to him.

In his efforts at order, he spread his rug over the couch, tossed a crimson cushion on it and sundry articles beneath it to get them out of his way, then occupied himself with his book, while vainly trying to solve the riddle which his enigmatical caller presented to his imagination.

All at once she rose, sought out a few dishes from the cupboard, and, taking a neatly smoothed, coarse cloth from the basket, spread it over one end of the table and arranged thereon his dinner. Quietly David watched her, following her example of silence until forced to speak. Finally he decided to question her, if only he could think of questions which would not trespass on her private affairs, when at last she broke the stillness.

"I can't find any coffee. I ought to have brought some; I'll go fetch some if you'll eat now. Your dinner'll get cold."

He showed her how he had made tea and was in no need of coffee. "We'll throw this out and make fresh," he said gayly. "Then you must have a cup with me. Why, you have enough to eat here for three people!" She seemed weary and sad, and he determined to probe far enough to elicit some confidence, but the more fluent he became, the more effectively she withdrew from him.

"See here," he said at last, "sit by the table with me, and I will eat to your heart's content. I'll prepare you a cup of tea as I do my own, and then I want you to drink it. Come."

She yielded. His way of saying "Come" seemed like a command to be obeyed.

"Now, that is more like." He began his dinner with a relish. "Won't you share this game with me? It is fine, you know."

He could not think her silent from embarrassment, for her poise seemed undisturbed except for the anxious look in her eyes. He determined to fathom the cause, and since no finesse availed, there remained but one way, – the direct question.

"What is it?" he said kindly. "Tell me the trouble, and let me help you."

She looked full into his eyes then, and her lips quivered. Something rose in her throat, and she swallowed helplessly. It was so hard for her to speak. The trouble had struck deeper than he dreamed.

"It is a trouble, isn't it? Can't you tell it to me?"

"Yes. I reckon there isn't any trouble worse than ours – no, I reckon there is nothing worse."

"Why, Miss Cassandra!"

"Because it's sin, and – and 'the wages of sin is death.'" Her tone was hopeless, and the sadness of it went to his heart.

"Is it whiskey?" he asked.

"Yes – it's whiskey 'stilling and – worse; it's – " She turned deathly white. Too sad to weep, she still held control of her voice. "It's a heap worse – "

"Don't try to tell me what it is," he cried. "Only tell me how I may help you. It's not your sin, surely, so you don't have to bear it."

"It's not mine, but I do have to bear it. I wish my bearing it was all. Tell me, if – if a man has done – such a sin, is it right to help him get away?"

"If it is that big brother of yours, whom I saw last night, I can't believe he has done anything so very wicked. You say it is not the whiskey?"

"Maybe it was the whiskey first – then – I don't know exactly how came it – I reckon he doesn't himself. I – he's not my brothah – not rightly, but he has been the same as such. They telegraphed me to come home quick. Bishop Towahs told me a little – all he knew, – but he didn't know what all was it, only some wrong to call the officahs and set them aftah Frale – poor Frale. He – he told me himself – last evening." She paused again, and the pallor slowly left her face and the red surged into her cheeks and mounted to the waves of her heavy hair.

"It is Frale, then, who is in trouble! And you wish me to help him get away?" She looked down and was silent. "But I am a stranger, and know nothing about the country."

He pushed his chair away from the table and leaned back, regarding her intently.

"Oh, I am afraid for him." She put her hand to her throat and turned away her face from his searching eyes, in shame.

"I prefer not to know what he has done. Just explain to me your plan, and how I can help. You know better than I."

"I can't understand how comes it I can tell you; you are a strangah to all of us – and yet it seems like it is right. If I could get some clothes nobody has evah seen Frale weah – if – I could make him look different from a mountain boy, maybe he could get to some town down the mountain, and find work; but now they would meet up with him before he was halfway there."

Thryng rose and began pacing the room. "Is there any hurry?" he demanded, stopping suddenly before her.

"Yes."

"Then why have you waited all this time to tell me?"

She lifted her eyes to his in silence, and he knew well that she had not spoken because she could not, and that had he not ventured with his direct questions, she would have left him, carrying her burden with her, as hopelessly silent as when she came.

He sat beside her again and gently urged her to tell him without further delay all she had in her mind. "You feel quite sure that if he could get down the mountain side without being seen, he would be safe; where do you mean to send him? You don't think he would try to return?"

"Why – no, I reckon not – if – I – " Her face flamed, and she drew on her bonnet, hiding the crimson flush in its deep shadow. She knew that without the promise he had asked, the boy would as surely return as that the sun would continue to rise and set.

"He must stay," she spoke desperately and hurriedly. "If he can just make out to stay long enough to learn a little – how to live, and will keep away from bad men – if I – he only knows enough to make mean corn liquor now – but he nevah was bad. He has always been different – and he is awful smart. I can't think how came he to change so."

Taking the empty basket with her, she walked toward the door, and David followed her. "Thank you for that good dinner," he said.

"Aunt Sally fetched the pa'trises. Her old man got them for mothah, and she said you sure ought to have half. Sally said the sheriff had gone back up the mountain, and I'm afraid he'll come to our place again this evening. Likely they're breaking up Frale's 'still' now."

"Well, that will be a good deed, won't it?"

The huge bonnet had hid her face from him, but now she lifted her eyes frankly to his, with a flash of radiance through her tears. "I reckon," was all she said.

"Are they likely to come up here, do you think, those men?"

"Not hardly. They would have to search on foot here. It's out of their way; only no place on the mountain is safe for Frale now."

"Send him to me quickly, then. I have cast my lot with you mountain people for some time to come, and your cause shall be mine."

She paused at the door with grateful words on her lips unuttered.

"Don't stop for thanks, Miss Cassandra; they are wasted between us. You have opened your doors to me, a stranger, and that is enough. Hurry, don't grieve – and see here: I may not be able to do anything, but I'll try; and if I can't get down to-night, won't you come again in the morning and tell me all about it?"

Instantly he thought better of his request, yet who was here to criticise? He laughed as he thought how firmly the world and its conventions held him. Sweet, simple-hearted child that she was, why, indeed, should she not come? Still he called after her. "If you are too busy, send Hoyle. I may be down to see your mother, anyway."

She paused an instant in her hurried walk. "I'll be right glad to come, if I can help you any way."

He stood watching her until she passed below his view, as her long easy steps took her rapidly on, although she seemed to move slowly. Then he went back to his fire, and her words repeated themselves insistently in his mind – "I'll be right glad to come, if I can help you any way."

Aunt Sally was seated in the chimney-corner smoking, when Cassandra returned. "Where is he?" she cried.

"He couldn't set a minute, he was that restless. He 'lowed he'd go up to the rock whar you found him las' evenin'."

Without a word, Cassandra turned and fled up the steep toward the head of the fall. Every moment, she knew, was precious. Frale met her halfway down and took her hand, leading her as he had been used to do when she was his "little sister," and listened to her plans docilely enough.

"I mean you to go down to Farington, to Bishop Towahs'. He will give you work." She had not mentioned Thryng.

Frale laughed.

"Don't, Frale. How can you laugh?"

"I ra'ly hain't laughin', Cass. Seems like you fo'get how can I get down the mountain; but I reckon I'll try – if you say so."

Then she explained how the doctor had sent for him to come up there quickly, and how he would help him. "You must go now, Frale, you hear? Now!"

Again he laughed, bitterly this time. "Yas – I reckon he'll be right glad to help me get away from you. I'll go myse'f in my own way."

Under the holly tree they had paused, and suddenly she feared lest the boy at her side return to his mood of the evening before. She seized his hand again and hurried him farther up the steep.

"Come, come!" she cried. "I'll go with you, Frale."

"Naw, you won't go with me neithah," he said stubbornly, drawing back.

"Frale!" she pleaded. "Hear to me."

"I'm a-listenin'."

"Frale, I'm afraid. They may be on their way now. For all we know they may be right nigh."

"I've done got used to fearin' now. Hit don't hurt none. On'y one thing hurts now."

"I've been up to see Doctor Thryng, and he's promised he'll fix you up some way so that if anybody does see you, they – they'll think you belong somewhere else, and nevah guess who you be. Frale, go."

He held her, with his arm about her waist, half carrying her with him, instead of allowing her to move her own free gait, and she tried vainly with her fingers to pull his hands away; but his muscles were like iron under her touch. He felt her helplessness and liked it. Her voice shook as she pleaded with him.

"Oh, Frale! Hear to me!" she wailed.

"I'll hear to you, ef you'll hear to me. Seems like I've lost my fear now. I hain't carin' no more. Ef I should see the sheriff this minute, an' he war a-puttin' his rope round my neck right now, I wouldn't care 'thout one thing – jes' one thing. I'd walk straight down to hell fer hit, – I reckon I hev done that, – but I'd walk till I drapped, an' work till I died for hit." He stood still a moment, and again she essayed to move his hands, but he only held her closer.

"Oh, hurry, Frale! I'm afraid. Oh, Frale, don't!"

"Be ye 'feared fer me, Cass?"

"You know that, Frale. Leave go, and hear to me."

"Be ye 'feared 'nough to give me your promise, Cass?"

"Take your hand off me, Frale."

"We'll go back. I 'low they mount es well take me first as last. I hain't no heart lef' in me. I don't care fer that thar doctah man he'pin' me, nohow," he choked.

"Leave me go, and I'll give you promise for promise, Frale. I can't make out is it sin or not; but if God can forgive and love – when you turn and seek Him – the Bible do say so, Frale, but – but seem like you don't repent your deed whilst you look at me like that way." She paused, trembling. "If you could be sorry like you ought to be, Frale, and turn your heart – I could die for that."

He still held her, but lifted one shaking hand above his head.

"Before God, I promise –"

"What, Frale? Say what you promise."

He still held his hand high. "All you ask of me, Cass. Tell me word by word, an' I'll promise fair."

"You will repent, Frale?"

"Yas."

"You will not drink?"

"I will not drink."

"You will heed when your own heart tells you the right way?"

"I will heed when my heart tells me the way: hit will be the way to you, Cass."

"Oh, don't say it that way, Frale. Now say, 'So help me God,' and don't think of me whilst you say it."

"Put your hand on mine, Cass. Lift hit up an' say with me that word." She placed her palm on his uplifted palm. "So help me, God," they said together. Then, with streaming tears, she put her arms about his neck and gently drew his face down to her own.

"I'll go back now, Frale, and you do all I've said. Go quick. I'll write Bishop Towahs, and he'll watch out for you, and find you work. Let Doctah Thryng help you. He sure is a good man. Oh, if you only could write!"

"I'll larn."

"You'll have a heap more to learn than you guess. I've been there, and I know. Don't give up, Frale, and – and stay – "

"I hain't going to give up with your promise here, Cass; kiss me."

She did so, and he slowly released her, looking back as he walked away.

"Oh, hurry, Frale! Don't look back. It's a bad omen." She turned, and without one backward glance descended the mountain.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH DAVID AIDS FRALE TO MAKE HIS ESCAPE

Elated by his talk with Cassandra, Frale walked eagerly forward, but as he neared Thryng's cabin he moved more slowly. Why should he let that doctor help him? He could reach Farington some way – travelling by night and hiding in the daytime. But David was watching for him and strolled down to meet him.

"Good morning. Your sister says there is no time to lose. Come in here, and we'll see if we can find a way out of this trouble."

Having learned not to expect any response to remarks not absolutely demanding one, and not wishing the silence to dominate, David talked on, as he led Frale into the cabin and carefully closed the door behind them.

Thryng's intuition was subtle and his nature intense and strong. He had been used to dealing with men, and knew that when he wished to, he usually gained his point. Feeling the antagonism in Frale's heart toward himself, he determined to overcome it. Be it pride, jealousy, or what not, it must give way.

He had learned only that morning that circumlocution or pretence of any sort would only drive the youth further into his fortress of silence, and close his nature, a sealed well of turbid feeling, against him; therefore he chose a manner pleasantly frank, taking much for granted, and giving the boy no chance to refuse his help, by assuming it to have been already accepted.

"We are about the same size, I think? Yes. Here are some things I laid out for you. You must look as much like me as possible, and as unlike yourself, you know. Sit here and we'll see what can be done for your head."

"You're right fair, an' I'm dark."

"Oh, that makes very little difference. It's the general appearance we must get at. Suppose I try to trim your hair a little so that lock on your forehead won't give you away."

"I reckon I can do it. Hit's makin' you a heap o' trouble."

David was pleased to note the boy's mood softening, and helped him on.

"I'm no hand as a barber, but I'll try it a little; it's easier for me to get at than for you." He quickly and deftly cut away the falling curl, and even shaved the corners of the forehead a bit, and clipped the eyebrows to give them a different angle. "All this will grow again, you know. You only want it to last until the storm blows over."

The youth surveyed himself in the mirror and smiled, but grimly. "I do look a heap different."

"That's right; we want you to look like quite another man. And now for your chin. You can use a razor; here is warm water and soap. This suit of clothes is such as we tramp about in at home, different from anything you see up here, you know. I'll take my pipe and book and sit there on the rock and keep an eye out, lest any one climb up here to look around, and you can have the cabin all to yourself. You see what to do; make yourself look as if you came from my part of the world." Thryng glanced at his watch. "Work fast, but take time enough to do it well. Say half an hour, – will that do?"

"Yas, I reckon."

Then David left him, and the moments passed until an hour had slipped away, but still the youth did not appear, and he was on the point of calling out to him, when he saw the twisted form of little Hoyle scrambling up through the underbrush.

"They're comin'," he panted, with wild and frightened eyes fixed on David's face. "I see 'em up the road, an' I heered 'em say they was goin' to hunt 'round the house good, an' then s'arch the cabin ovah Hanging Rock." The poor child burst into tears. "Do you 'low they'll shoot Frale, suh?"

"They'd not reached the house when you saw them?"

"They'll be thar by now, suh," sobbed the boy.

"Then run and hide yourself. Crawl under the rock – into the smallest hole you can. They mustn't see that you have been here, and don't be frightened, little man. We'll look after Frale."

The child disappeared like a squirrel in a hole, and Thryng went to the cabin door and knocked imperatively. It was opened instantly, and Frale stood transformed, his old, soiled garments lying in a heap at his side as if he had crept out of his chrysalis. A full half hour he had been lingering, abashed at himself and dreading to appear. The slight growth of adolescence was gone from lip and chin, and Thryng was amazed and satisfied.

"Good," he cried. "You've done well."

The youth smiled shamefacedly, yet held his head high. With the heavy golf stockings, knee breeches, and belted jacket, even to himself he seemed another man, and an older man he looked by five years.

"Now keep your nerve, and square your shoulders and face the world with a straight look in the eye. You've thrown off the old man with these." David touched the heap of clothing on the floor with his foot. "Hoyle is here. He says the men are on their way here and have stopped at the house."

Instead of turning pale as Thryng had expected, a dark flush came into Frale's face, and his hand clinched. It was the ferocity of fear, and not the deadliness of it, which seized him with a sort of terrible anger, that David felt through his silence.

"Don't lose control of yourself, boy," he said, placing his hand gently on his shoulder and making his touch felt by the intimate closing of his slender fingers upon the firmly rounded, lean muscles beneath them.

"Follow my directions, and be quick. Put your own clothes in this bag." He hastily tossed a few things out of his pigskin valise. "Cram them in; that's right. Don't leave a trace of yourself here for them to find. Pull this cap over your eyes, and walk straight down that path, and pass them by as if they were nothing to you. If they speak to you, of course nod to them and pass on. But if they ask you a question, say politely, 'Beg pardon?' just like that, as though you did not understand – and – wait. Don't hurry away from them as if you were afraid of them. They won't recognize you unless you give yourself away by your manner. See? Now say it over after me. Good! Take these cigars." He placed his own case in the boy's vest pocket.

"Better leave 'em free, suh. I don't like to take all your things this-a-way." He handed back the case, and put them loose in his pocket.

"Very well. If you smoke, just light this and walk on, and if they ask you anything about yourself, if you have seen a chap of the sort, understand, offer them each a cigar, and tell them no. Don't say 'I reckon not,' for that will give you away, and don't lift your cap, or they will see how roughly your hair is cut. Touch it as if you were going to lift it, only – so. I would take care not to arrive at the house while they are there; it will be easier for you to meet them on the path. It will be the sooner over."

Thryng held out his hand, and Frale took it awkwardly, then turned away, swallowing the thanks he did not know how to utter. For the time being, David had conquered.

The lad took a few steps and then turned back. "I'd like to thank you, suh, an' I'd like to pay fer these here – I 'low to get work an' send the money fer 'em."

"Don't be troubled about that; we'll see later. Only remember one thing. I don't know what you've done, nor why you must run away like this – I haven't asked. I may be breaking the laws of the land as much as you in helping you off. I am doing it because, until I know of some downright evil in you, I'm bound to help you, and the best way to repay me will be for you to – you know – do right."

"Are you doin' this fer her?" He looked off at the hills as he spoke, and not at the doctor.

"Yes, for her and for you. Don't linger now, and don't forget my directions."

The youth turned on the doctor a quick look. Thryng could not determine, as he thought it over afterward, if there was in it a trace of malevolence. It was like a flash of steel between them, even as they smiled and again bade each other good-by.

For a time all was silent around Hanging Rock. Thryng sat reading and pondering, expecting each moment to hear voices from the direction Frale had taken. He could not help smiling as he thought over his attempt to make this mountain boy into the typical English tourist, and how unique an imitation was the result.

He called out to comfort Hoyle's fearful little heart: "Your brother's all safe now. Come out here until we hear men's voices."

"I better stay whar I be, I reckon. They won't talk none when they get nigh hyar."

"Are you comfortable down there?"

"Yas, suh."

Hoyle was right. The two men detailed for this climb walked in silence, to give no warning of their approach, until they appeared in the rear of the cabin, and entered the shed where Frale's horse was stabled. Sure were they then that its owner was trapped at last.

They were greatly surprised at finding the premises occupied. David continued his reading, unconcerned until addressed.

"Good evenin', suh."

He greeted them genially and invited them into his cabin, determined to treat them with as royal hospitality as was in his power. To offer them tea was hardly the thing, he reasoned, so he stirred up the fire, while descanting on the beauty of the location and the health-giving quality of the air, and when his kettle was boiling, he brought out from his limited stores whiskey, lemons, and sugar, and proceeded to brew them so fine a quality of English toddy as to warm the cockles of their hearts.

Questioning them on his own account, he learned how best to get his supplies brought up the mountains, and many things about the region interesting to him. At last one of them ventured a remark about the horse and how he came by him, at which he explained very frankly that the widow down below had allowed him the use of the animal for his keep until her son returned.

They "'lowed he wa'n't comin' back to these parts very soon," and David expressed satisfaction. His evident ignorance of mountain affairs convinced them that nothing was to be gained from him, and they asked no direct questions, and finally took their departure, with a high opinion of their host, and quite content.

Then David called his little accomplice from his hiding-place, took him into his cabin, and taught him to drink tea with milk and sugar in it, gave him crisp biscuits from his small remainder in store, and, still further to comfort his heart, searched out a card on which was a picture of an ocean liner on an open sea, with flags flying, great rolls of vapor and smoke trailing across the sky, with white-capped waves beneath and white clouds above. The boy's eyes shone with delight. He twisted himself about to look up in Thryng's face as he questioned him concerning it, and almost forgot Frale in his happiness, as he trudged home hugging the precious card to his bosom.

Contentedly Thryng proceeded to set his abode in order after the disarray of the morning, undisturbed by any question as to the equity of his deed. His mind was in a state of rebellion against the usual workings of the criminal courts, and, biassed by his observation of the youth, he felt that his act might lead as surely toward absolute justice, perhaps more surely, than the opposite course would have done.

Erelong he found a few tools carefully packed away, as was the habit of his old friend, and the labor of preparing his canvas room began. But first a ladder hanging under the eaves of the cabin must be repaired, and long before the slant rays of the setting sun fell across his hilltop, he found himself too weary to descend to the Fall Place, even with the aid of his horse. With a measure of discouragement at his undeniable weakness, he led the animal to water where a spring bubbled sweet and clear in an embowered hollow quite near his cabin, then stretched himself on the couch before

the fire, with no other light than its cheerful blaze, too exhausted for his book and disinclined even to prepare his supper.

After a time, David's weariness gave place to a pleasant drowsiness, and he rose, arranged his bed, and replenished the fire, drank a little hot milk, and dropped into a wholesome slumber as dreamless and sweet as that of a tired child.

Such a sense of peace and retirement closed around him there alone on his mountain, that he slept with his cabin door open to the sweet air, crisp and cold, lulled by the murmuring of the swaying pine tops without, and the crackling and crumbling of burning logs within. Rolled in his warm Scotch rug, he did not feel the chill that came as his fire burned lower, but slept until daybreak, when the clear note of a Carolina wren, thrice repeated close to his open door, sounded his reveille.

Deeply inhaling the cold air, he lay and mused over the events of the previous day. How quickly and naturally he had been drawn into the interests of his neighbors below him, and had absorbed the peculiar atmosphere of their isolation, making a place for himself, shutting out almost as if they had never existed the harassments and questionings of his previous life. Was it a buoyancy he had received from his mountain height and the morning air? Whatever the cause, he seemed to have settled with them all, and arrived at last where his spirit needed but to rest open and receptive before its Creator to be swept clear of the dross of the world's estimates of values, and exalted with aspiration.

Every long breath he drew seemed to make his mental vision clearer. God and his own soul – was that all? Not quite. God and the souls of men and of women – of all who came within his environment – a world made beautiful, made sweet and health-giving for these – and with them to know God, to feel Him near. So Christ came to be close to humanity.

A mist of scepticism that had hung over him and clouded the later years of his young manhood suddenly rolled away, dispelled by the splendor of this triumphant thought, even as the rays of the rising sun came at the same moment to dispel the earth mists and flood the hills with light. Light; that was it! "In Him is no darkness at all."

Joyously he set himself to the preparation for the day. The true meaning of life was revealed to him. The discouragement of the evening before was gone. Yet now should he sit down in ecstatic dreaming? It must be joy in life – movement – in whatever was to be done, whether in satisfying a wholesome hunger, in creating warmth for his body, or in conquering the seeds of decay and disease therein, and keeping it strong and full of reactive power for his soul's sake.

It was a revelation to him of the eternal God, wonder-working and all-pervading. Now no longer with a haunting sense of fear would he search and learn, but with a glad perception of the beautiful orderliness of the universe, so planned and arranged for the souls of men when only they should learn how to use their own lives, and attune themselves to give forth music to the touch of the God of Love.

A cold bath, the pure air, and his abstemiousness of the previous evening gave him a compelling hunger, and it was with satisfaction he discovered so large a portion of his dinner of yesterday remaining to be warmed for his morning meal. What he should do later, when dinner-time arrived, he knew not, and he laughed to think how he was living from hour to hour, content as the small wren fluting beside his door his care-free note. Ah, yes! "God's in His heaven, all's right with the world."

The wren's note reminded him of a slender box which always accompanied his wanderings, and which had come to light rolled in the jacket which he had given Frale as part of his disguise. He opened it and took therefrom the joints of a silver flute. How long it had lain untouched!

He fitted the parts and strolled out to the rock, and there, as he gazed at the shifting, subtle beauty spread all before him and around him, he lifted the wandlike instrument to his lips and began to play. At first he only imitated the wren, a few short notes joyously uttered; then, as the springs of his own happiness welled up within him, he poured forth a tumultuous flood of trills – a dancing staccato of mounting notes, shifting and falling, rising, floating away, and then returning in silvery echoes, bringing their own gladness with them.

The pæan of praise ended, the work of the day began, and he set himself with all the nervous energy of his nature to the finishing of his canvas room. Again, ere the completion of the task, he found he had been expending his strength too lavishly, but this time he accepted his weariness more philosophically, glad if only he might labor and rest as the need came.

Nearly the whole of the glorious day was still left him. In moving his couch nearer the door, he found his efforts impeded by some heavy object underneath it, and discovered, to his surprise and almost dismay, the identical pigskin valise which Frale had taken away with him the day before. How came it there? No one, he was certain, had been near his cabin since Hoyle had trotted home yesterday, hugging his picture to his breast.

David drew it out into the light and opened it. There on the top lay the cigars he had placed in the youth's pocket, and there also every article of wearing apparel he had seen disappear down the laurel-grown path on Frale's lithe body twelve hours or more ago. He cast the articles out upon the floor and turned them over wonderingly, then shoved them aside and lay down for his quiet siesta. He would learn from Cassandra the meaning of this. He hoped the young man had got off safely, yet the fact of finding his kindly efforts thus thrust back upon him disturbed him. Why had it been done? As he pondered thereon, he saw again the steel-blue flash in the young man's eyes as he turned away, and resolved to ask no questions, even of Cassandra.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH FRALE GOES DOWN TO FARINGTON IN HIS OWN WAY

Frale felt himself exalted by the oath he had sworn to Cassandra, as if those words had lifted the burden from his heart, and taken away the stain. As he walked away in his disguise, it seemed to him that he had acted under an irresistible spell cast upon him by this Englishman, who was to bide so near Cassandra – to be seen by her every day – to be admired by her, while he, who had the first right, must hide himself away from her, shielding himself in that man's clothes. Fine as they seemed to him, they only abashed him and filled him with a sense of obligation to a man he dreaded.

Like a child, realizing his danger only when it was close upon him, his old recklessness returned, and he moved down the path with his head held high, looking neither to the right nor to the left, planning how he might be rid of these clothes and evade his pursuers unaided. The men, climbing toward him as he descended, hearing his footsteps above them, parted and stood watching, only half screened by the thick-leaved shrubs, not ten feet from him on either side; but so elated was he, and eager in his plans, that he passed them by, unseeing, and thus Thryng's efforts saved him in spite of himself; for so amazed were they at the presence of such a traveller in such a place that they allowed him to pass unchallenged until he was too far below them to make speech possible. Later, when they found David seated on his rock, they assumed the young man to be a friend, and thought no further of it.

Frale soon left the path and followed the stream to the head of the fall, where he lingered, tormented by his own thoughts and filled with conflicting emotions, in sight of his home.

To go down to the settlement and see the world had its allurements, but to go in this way, never to return, never to feel again the excitement of his mountain life, evading the law and conquering its harassments, was bitter. It had been his joy and delight in life to feel himself masterfully triumphant over those set to take him, too cunning to be found, too daring and strong to be overcome, to take desperate chances and win out; all these he considered his right and part of the game of life. But to slink away like a hunted fox followed by the dogs of the law because, in a blind frenzy, he had slain his own friend! What if he had promised to repent; there was the law after him still!

If only his fate were a tangible thing, to be grappled with! To meet a foe and fight hand to hand to the death was not so hard as to yield himself to the inevitable. Sullenly he sat with his head in his hands, and life seemed to stretch before him, leading to a black chasm. But one ray of light was there to follow – "Cass, Cass." If only he would accept the help offered him and go to the station, take his seat in the train, and find himself in Farington, while still his pursuers were scouring the mountains for him, he might – he might win out. Moodily and stubbornly he resisted the thought.

At last, screened by the darkness, he turned out his soiled and torn garments, and divesting himself of every article Thryng had given him, he placed them carefully in the valise. Then, relieved of one humiliation, he set himself again on the path toward Hanging Rock cabin.

As he passed the great holly tree where Cassandra had sat beside him, he placed his hand on the stone and paused. His heart leaned toward her. He wanted her. Should he go down to her now and refuse to leave her? But no. He had promised. Something warm splashed down upon his hand as he bent over the rock. He sprang up, ashamed to weep, and, seizing the doctor's valise, plunged on through the shadows up the steep ascent.

He had no definite idea of how he would explain his act, for he did not comprehend his own motives. It was only a wordless repugnance that possessed him, vague and sullen, against this man's offered friendship; and his relief was great when he found David asleep before his open door.

Stealthily he entered and placed his burden beneath the couch, gazed a moment at the sleeping face whereon the firelight still played, and softly crept away. Cassandra should know that she had no need to thank the Englishman for his freedom.

Then came the weary tramp down the mountain, skulking and hiding by day, and struggling on again by night – taking by-paths and unused trails – finding his uncertain way by moonlight and starlight – barked at by dogs, and followed by hounds baying loudly whenever he came near a human habitation – wading icy streams and plunging through gorges to avoid cabins or settlements – keeping life in him by gnawing raw turnips which had been left in the fields ungathered, until at last, pallid, weary, dirty, and utterly forlorn, he found himself, in the half-light of the dawn of the fourth day, near Farington. Shivering with cold, he stole along the village street and hid himself in the bishop's grounds until he should see some one astir in the house.

The bishop had sat late the night before, half expecting him, for he had received Cassandra's letter, also one from Thryng. Neither letter threw light on Frale's deed, although Cassandra's gave him to understand that something more serious than illicit distilling had necessitated his flight. David's was a joyous letter, craving his companionship whenever his affairs might bring him near, but expressing the greatest contentment.

When Black Carrie went out to unlock the chicken house door and fetch wood for her morning fire, she screamed with fright as the young man in his wretched plight stepped before her.

"G'long, yo – pore white trash!" she cried.

"I'm no poor white trash," he murmured. "Be Bishop Towah in the house?"

"Co'se he in de haouse. Whar yo s'poses he be dis time de mawnin'?" She made with all haste toward her kitchen, bearing her armful of wood, muttering as she went.

"I reckon I'll set hyar ontwell he kin see me," he said, dropping to the doorstep in sheer exhaustion. And there he was allowed to sit while she prepared breakfast in her own leisurely way, having no intention of disturbing her "white folkses fer no sech trash."

The odor of coffee and hot cakes was maddening to the starving boy, as he watched her through the open door, yet he passively sat, withdrawn into himself, seeking in no way either to secure a portion of the food or to make himself known. After a time, he heard faintly voices beyond the kitchen, and knew the family must be there at breakfast, but still he sat, saying nothing.

At last the door of the inner room was burst open, and a child ran out, demanding scraps for her puppy.

"I may! I may, too, feed him in the dining room. Mamma says I may, after we're through."

"Go off, honey chile, mussin' de flo' like dat-a-way fer me to clean up agin. Naw, honey. Go out on de stoop wif yer fool houn' dog." And the tiny, fair girl with her plate of scraps and her small black dog leaping and dancing at her heels, tumbled themselves out where Frale sat.

Scattering her crusts as she ran, she darted back, calling: "Papa, papa! A man's come. He's here." The small dog further emphasized the fact by barking fiercely at the intruder, albeit from a safe distance.

"Yas," said Carrie, as the bishop came out, led by his little daughter, "he b'en hyar sence long fo' sun-up."

"Why didn't you call me?" he said sternly.

"Sho – how I know anybody wan' see yo, hangin' 'roun' de back do'? He ain' say nuthin', jes' set dar." She continued muttering her crusty dislike of tramps, as the bishop led his caller through her kitchen and sent his little daughter to look after her puppy.

He took Frale into his private study, and presently returned and himself carried him food, placing it before him on a small table where many a hungry caller had been fed before. Then he occupied himself at his desk while he quietly observed the boy. He saw that the youth was too worn and weak to be dealt with rationally at first, and he felt it difficult to affix the thought of a desperate

crime upon one so gentle of mien and innocent of face; but he knew his people well, and what masterful passions often slept beneath a mild and harmless exterior.

Nor was it the first time he had been called upon to adjust a conflict between his own conscience and the law. Often in his office of priest he had been the recipient of confidences which no human pressure of law could ever wrest from him. So now he proceeded to draw from Frale his full and free confession.

Very carefully and lovingly he trespassed in the secret chambers of this troubled soul, until at last the boy laid bare his heart.

He told of the cause of his anger and his drunken quarrel, of his evasion of his pursuers and his vow with Cassandra before God, of his rejection of Doctor Thryng's help and his flight by night, of his suffering and hunger. All was told without fervor, – a simple passive narration of events. No one could believe, while listening to him, that storms of passion and hatred and fear had torn him, or the overwhelming longing he had suffered at the thought of Cassandra.

But when the bishop touched on the subject of repentance, the hidden force was revealed. It was as if the tormenting spirit within him had cried out loudly, instead of the low, monotonous tone in which he said: —

"Yas, I kin repent now he's dade, but ef he war livin' an' riled me agin that-a-way like he done – I reckon – I reckon God don't want no repentin' like I repents."

It was steel against flint, the spark in the narrow blue line of his eyes as he said the words, and the bishop understood.

But what to do with this man of the mountains – this force of nature in the wild; how guard him from a far more pernicious element in the civilized town life than any he would find in his rugged solitudes?

And Cassandra! The bishop bowed his head and sat with the tips of his fingers pressed together. The thought of Cassandra weighed heavily upon him. She had given her promise, with the devotion of her kind, to save; had truly offered herself a living sacrifice. All hopes for her growth into the gracious womanhood her inheritance impelled her toward, – her sweet ambitions for study, gone to the winds – scattered like the fragrant wild rose petals on her own hillside – doomed by that promise to live as her mother had lived, and like other women of her kin, to age before her time with the bearing of children in the midst of toil too heavy for her – dispirited by privation and the sorrow of relinquished hopes. Oh, well the bishop knew! He dreaded most to see the beautiful light of aspiration die out of her eyes, and her spirit grow sordid in the life to which this untamed savage would inevitably bring her. "What a waste!"

And again he repeated the words, "What a waste!" The youth looked up, thinking himself addressed, but the bishop saw only the girl. It was as if she rose and stood there, dominant in the sweet power of her girlish self-sacrifice, appealing to him to help save this soul. Somehow, at the moment, he failed to appreciate the beauty of such giving. Almost it seemed to him a pity Frale had thus far succeeded in evading his pursuers. It would have saved her in spite of herself had he been taken.

But now the situation was forced upon the bishop, either to give him up, which seemed an arbitrary taking into his own hands of power which belonged only to the Almighty, or to shield him as best he might, giving heed to the thought that even if in his eyes the value of the girl was immeasurably the greater, yet the youth also was valued, or why was he here?

He lifted his head and saw Frale's eyes fixed upon him sadly – almost as if he knew the bishop's thoughts. Yes, here was a soul worth while. Plainly there was but one course to pursue, and but one thread left to hold the young man to steadfast purpose. Using that thread, he would try. If he could be made to sacrifice for Cassandra some of his physical joy of life, seeking to give more than to appropriate to himself for his own satisfaction – if he could teach him the value of what she had done – could he rise to such a height, and learn self-control?

The argument for repentance having come back to him void, the bishop began again. "You tell me Cassandra has given you her promise? What are you going to do about it?"

"Hit's 'twixt her an' me," said the youth proudly.

"No," thundered the bishop, all the man in him roused to beat into this crude, triumphant animal some sense of what Cassandra had really done. "No. It's betwixt you and the God who made you. You have to answer to God for what you do." He towered above him, and bending down, looked into Frale's eyes until the boy cowered and looked down, with lowered head, and there was silence.

Then the bishop straightened himself and began pacing the room. At last he came to a stand and spoke quietly. "You have Cassandra's promise; what are you going to do about it?"

Frale did not move or speak, and the bishop felt baffled. What was going on under that passive mask he dared not think. To talk seemed futile, like hammering upon a flint wall; but hammer he must, and again he tried.

"You have taken a man's life; do you know what that means?"

"Hangin', I reckon."

"If it were only to hang, boy, it might be better for Cassandra. Think about it. If I help you, and shield you here, what are you going to do? What do you care most for in all this world? You who can kill a man and then not repent."

"He hadn't ought to have riled me like he done; I – keer fer her."

"More than for Frale Farwell?"

The boy looked vaguely before him. "I reckon," was all he said.

Again the bishop paced the floor, and waited.

"I hain't afeared to work – right hard."

"Good; what kind of work can you do?" Frale flushed a dark red and was silent. "Yes, I know you can make corn whiskey, but that is the devil's work. You're not to work for him any more."

Again silence. At last, in a low voice, he ventured: "I'll do any kind o' work you-all gin' me to do – ef – ef only the officers will leave me be – an' I tol' Cass I'd larn writin'."

"Good, very good. Can you drive a horse? Yes, of course."

Frale's eyes shone. "I reckon."

The bishop grew more hopeful. The holy greed for souls fell upon him. The young man must be guarded and watched; he must be washed and clothed, as well as fed, and right here the little wife must be consulted. He went out, leaving the youth to himself, and sought his brown-eyed, sweet-faced little wisp of a woman, where she sat writing his most pressing business letters for him.

"Dearest, may I interrupt you?"

"In a minute, James; in a minute. I'll just address these."

He dropped into a deep chair and waited, with troubled eyes regarding her. "There!" She rubbed vigorously down on the blotter. "These are all done, every blessed one, James. Now what?"

In an instant she was curled up, feet and all, like a kitten in his lap, her small brown head, its wisps of fine, straight hair straying over temples and rounded cheeks, tucked comfortably under his chin; and thus every point was carefully talked over.

With many exclamations of anxiety and doubt, and much discreet suggestion from the small adviser, it was at last settled. Frale was to be properly clothed from the missionary boxes sent every year from the North. He should stay with them for a while until a suitable place could be found for him. Above all things he must be kept out of bad company.

"Oh, dear! Poor Cassandra! After all her hopes – and she might have done so much for her people – if only – " Tears stood in the brown eyes and even ran over and dropped upon the bishop's coat and had to be carefully wiped off, for, as he feelingly remarked, —

"I can't go about wearing my wife's tears in plain view, now, can I?"

And then Doctor Hoyle's young friend – she must hear his letter. How interesting he must be! Couldn't they have him down? And when the bishop next went up the mountain, might she accompany

him? Oh, no. The trip was not too rough. It was quite possible for her. She would go to see Cassandra and the old mother. "Poor Cassandra!"

But the self-respecting old stepmother and her daughter did not allow these kind friends to trespass on any missionary supplies, for Uncle Jerry was despatched down the mountain with a bundle on the back of his saddle, which was quietly left at the bishop's door; and Frale next appeared in a neat suit of homespun, home woven and dyed, and home-made clothing.

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