Brady Cyrus Townsend

The Chalice Of Courage: A Romance of Colorado

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Содержание

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PREFACE

Prefaces, like much study, are a weariness to the flesh; to some people, not to me. I can conceive of no literary proposition more attractive than the opportunity to write unlimited prefaces. Let me write the preface and I care not who writes the book. Unfortunately for my desires, I can only be prefatory in the case of my own. Happily my own are sufficiently numerous to afford me some scope in the indulgence of this passion for forewords.

I suppose no one ever sat down to write a preface until after he had written the book. It is like the final pat that the fond parent gives to the child before it is allowed to depart in its best clothes. I have seen the said parent accompany the child quite a distance on the way, keeping up a continual process of adjustment of raiment which it was evidently loath to discontinue.

And that is my case exactly. Here is the novel with which I have done my best, which I have written and rewritten after long and earnest thought, and yet I cannot let it go forth without some final, shall I say caress? And as it is, I really have nothing of importance to say! The final pats and pulls and tugs and smoothings do not materially add to the child's appearance or increase its fascination, and I am at a loss to find a reason for the preface except it be the converse of the statement about the famous and much disliked Dr. Fell!

Perhaps, if I admit to you that I have been in the cañon, that I have followed the course of the brook, that I have seen that lake, that I have tramped those trails, it will serve to make you understand, dear reader, how real and actual it all is to me. Yes, I have even looked over the precipice down which the woman fell. I have talked with old Kirkby; Robert Maitland is an intimate friend of mine; I have even met his brother in Philadelphia and as for that glorious girl Enid – well, being a married man, I will refrain from any personal appraisement of her qualities. But I can with propriety dilate upon Newbold, and even Armstrong, bad as he was, has some place in my regard.

If these people shall by any chance seem real to you and become your friends as they are mine, another of those pleasant ties that bind the author and his public together will have been woven, knotted, forged. Never mind the method so long as there is a tie. And with this hope, looking out up the winter snows that might have covered the range, as I have often seen them there, I bid you a happy good morning.

Cyrus Townsend Brady

St. George's Rectory, Kansas City, Missouri.

Thanksgiving Day, 1911.

THE CHALICE OF COURAGE

(Courtesy of *The Outlook*)

Drink of the Chalice of Courage!
Pressed to the trembling lip,
The dark-veiled fears
From the passing years,
Like a dusty garment slip.

Drink of the Chalice of Courage!
Poured for the Hero's feast,
When the strength divine
Of its subtle wine
Is shared with the last and least.

Drink of the Chalice of Courage!
The mead of mothers and men,
And the sinewed might
Of the Victor's might,
Be yours, again and again.

Marie Hemstreet

BOOK I
THE HIGHER LAW

CHAPTER I
THE CUP THAT WOULD NOT PASS

The huge concave of the rocky wall towering above them threw the woman's scream far into the vast profound of the cañon. It came sharp to the man's ear, yet terminated abruptly; as when two rapidly moving trains pass, the whistle of one is heard shrill for one moment only to be cut short on the instant. Brief as it was, however, the sound was sufficiently appalling; its suddenness, its unexpectedness, the awful terror in its single note, as well as its instantaneity, almost stopped his heart.

With the indifference of experience and long usage he had been riding carelessly along an old pre-historic trail through the cañon, probably made and forgotten long before the Spaniards spied out the land. Engrossed in his thoughts, he had been heedless alike of the wall above and of the wall below. Prior to that moment neither the over-hanging rock that curved above his head nor the almost sheer fall to the river a thousand feet beneath the narrow ledge of the trail had influenced him at all. He might have been riding a country road so indifferent had been his progress. That momentary shriek dying thinly away into a strange silence changed everything.

The man was riding a sure-footed mule, which perhaps somewhat accounted for his lack of care, and it seemed as if the animal must also have heard and understood the meaning of the woman's scream, for with no bridle signal and no spoken word the mule stopped suddenly as if petrified. Rider and ridden stood as if carved from stone.

The man's comprehending, realizing fear almost paralyzed him. At first he could scarcely force himself to do that toward which his whole being tended – look around. Divining instantly the full meaning of that sudden cry, it seemed hours before he could turn his head; really her cry and his movement were practically simultaneous. He threw an agonized glance backward on the narrow trail and saw – nothing! Where there had been life, companionship, comradeship, a woman, there was now vacancy.

The trail made a little bend behind him, he could see its surface for some distance, but not what lay beneath. He did not need the testimony of his eyes for that. He knew what was down there.

It seemed to his distorted perceptions that he moved slowly, his limbs were like lead, every joint was as stiff as a rusty hinge. Actually he dropped from the mule's back with reckless and life-defying haste and fairly leaped backward on his path. Had there been any to note his progress, they would have said he risked his own life over every foot of the way. He ran down the narrow shelf, rock strewn and rough, swaying upon the unfathomable brink until he reached the place where she had been a moment since. There he dropped on one knee and looked downward.

She was there! A few hundred feet below the trail edge the cañon wall, generally a sheer precipice, broadened out into a great butte, or buttress, which sloped somewhat more gently to the foaming, roaring river far beneath. About a hundred and fifty feet under him a stubby spur with a pocket on it jutted out from the face of the cliff; she had evidently struck on that spur and bounded off and fallen, half rolling, to the broad top of the butte two hundred or more feet below the pocket.

Three hundred and fifty feet down to where she lay he could distinguish little except a motionless huddled mass. The bright blue of her dress made a splotch of unwonted color against the reddish brown monotones of the mountain side and cañon wall. She was dead, of course; she must be dead, the man felt. From that distance he could see no breathing, if such there were; indeed as he stared she grew less and less distinct to him, his eyes did not fill with tears, but to his vision the

very earth itself, the vast depths of the cañon, the towering wall on the other side, seemed to quiver and heave before him. For the first time in his life the elevation made him dizzy, sick. He put his hands to his face to shut out the sight, he tore them away to look again. He lifted his eyes toward the other side across the great gulf to the opposing wall which matched the one upon which he stood, where the blue sky cloudless overhung.

"God!" he whispered in futile petition or mayhap expostulation.

He was as near the absolute breaking point as a man may go and yet not utterly give way, for he loved this woman as he loved that light of heaven above him, and in the twinkling of an eye she was no more. And so he stared and stared dumbly agonizing, wondering, helpless, misty-eyed, blind.

He sank back from the brink at last and tried to collect his thoughts. What was he to do? There was but one answer to that question. He must go down to her. There was one quick and easy way; over the brink, the way she had gone. That thought came to him for a moment, but he put it away. He was not a coward, life was not his own to give or to take, besides she might be alive, she might need him. There must be some other way.

Determining upon action, his resolution rose dominant, his vision cleared. Once again he forced himself to look over the edge and see other things than she. He was a daring, skillful and experienced mountaineer; in a way mountaineering was his trade. He searched the side of the cañon to the right and the left with eager scrutiny and found no way within the compass of his vision to the depths below. He shut his eyes and concentrated his thoughts to remember what they had passed over that morning. There came to him the recollection of a place which as he had viewed it he had idly thought might afford a practicable descent to the river's rim.

Forgetful of the patient animal beside him, he rose to his feet and with one last look at the poor object below started on his wild plunge down the trail over which some men might scarcely have crept on hands and knees. Sweat bedewed his forehead, his limbs trembled, his pulses throbbed, his heart beat almost to bursting. Remorse sharpened by love, passion quickened by despair, scourged him, desperate, on the way. And God protected him also, or he had fallen at every uncertain, hurried, headlong step.

And as he ran, thoughts, reproaches, scourged him on. Why had he brought her, why had he allowed her to take that trail which but for him and for her had probably not been traversed by man or woman or beast, save the mountain sheep, the gray wolves, or the grizzly bear, for five hundred years. She had protested that she was as good a mountaineer as he – and it was true – and she had insisted on accompanying him; he recollected that there had been a sort of terror in her urgency, – he must take her, he must not leave her alone, she had pleaded; he had objected, but he had yielded, the joy of her companionship had meant so much to him in his lonely journeying, and now – he accused himself bitterly as he surged onward.

After a time the man forced himself to observe the road, he discovered that in an incredibly short period, perhaps an hour, he had traversed what it had taken them four times as long to pass over that very day. He must be near his goal. Ah, there it was at last, and in all the turmoil and torture of his brain he found room for a throb of satisfaction when he came upon the broken declivity. Yes, it did afford a practicable descent; some landslide centuries back had made there a sort of rude, rough, broken, megalithic stairway in the wall of the cañon. The man threw himself upon it and with bleeding hands, bruised limbs and torn clothing descended to the level of the river.

Two atoms to the eye of the Divine, in that vast rift in the gigantic mountains. One unconscious, motionless, save for faint gasping breaths; the other toiling blindly along the river bank, fortunately here affording practicable going, to the foot of the great butte upon whose huge shoulder the other lay. The living and the dead in the waste and the wilderness of the everlasting hills.

Unconsciously but unerringly the man had fixed the landmarks in his mind before he started on that terrific journey. Without a moment of incertitude, or hesitation, he proceeded directly to the base of the butte and as rapidly as if he had been fresh for the journey and the endeavor. Up

he climbed without a pause for rest. It was a desperate going, almost sheer at times, but his passion found the way. He clawed and tore at the rocks like an animal, he performed feats of strength and skill and determination and reckless courage marvelous and impossible under less exacting demands. Somehow or other he got to the top at last; perhaps no man in all the ages since the world's first morning when God Himself upheaved the range had so achieved that goal.

The last ascent was up a little stretch of straight rock over which he had to draw himself by main strength and determination. He fell panting on the brink, but not for a moment did he remain prone; he got to his feet at once and staggered across the plateau which made the head of the butte toward the blue object on the further side beneath the wall of the cliff above, and in a moment he bent over what had been – nay, as he saw the slow choking uprise of her breast, what was – his wife.

He knelt down beside her and looked at her for a moment, scarce daring to touch her. Then he lifted his head and flung a glance around the cañon as if seeking help from man. As he did so he became aware, below him on the slope, of the dead body of the poor animal she had been riding, whose misstep, from whatever cause he would never know, had brought this catastrophe upon them.

Nothing else met his gaze but the rocks, brown, gray, relieved here and there by green clumps of stunted pine. Nothing met his ear except far beneath him the roar of the river, now reduced almost to a murmur, with which the shivering leaves of aspens, rustled by the gentle breeze of this glorious morning, blended softly like a sigh of summer. No, there was nobody in the cañon, no help there. He threw his head back and stretched out his arms toward the blue depths of the heavens above, to the tops of the soaring peaks, and there was nothing there but the eternal silence of a primeval day.

"God! God!" he murmured again in his despair.

It was the final word that comes to human lips in the last extremity when life and its hopes and its possibilities tremble on the verge. And no answer came to this poor man out of that vast void.

He bent to the woman again. What he saw can hardly be described. Her right arm and her left leg were bent backward and under her. They were shattered, evidently. He was afraid to examine her and yet he knew that practically every other bone in her body was broken as well. Her head fell lower than her shoulders, the angle which she made with the uneven rock on which she lay convinced him that her back was broken too. Her clothing was rent by her contact with the rocky spur above, it was torn from the neck downward, exposing a great red scar which ran across her sweet white young breast, blood oozing from it, while in the middle of it something yellow and bright gleamed in the light. Her cheek was cut open, her glorious hair, matted, torn and bloody, was flung backward from her down-thrown head.

She should have been dead a thousand times, but she yet lived, she breathed, her ensanguined bosom rose and fell. Through her pallid lips bloody foam bubbled, she was still alive.

The man must do something. He did not dare to move her body, yet he took off his hat, folded it, lifted her head tenderly and slipped it underneath; it made a better pillow than the hard rock, he thought. Then he tore his handkerchief from his neck and wiped away the foam from her lips. In his pocket he had a flask of whiskey, a canteen of water that hung from his shoulder somehow had survived the rough usage of the rocks. He mingled some of the water with a portion of the spirit in the cup of the flask and poured a little down her throat. Tenderly he took his handkerchief again, and wetting it laved her brow. Except to mutter incoherent prayers again and again he said no word, but his heart was filled with passionate endearments, he lavished agonized and infinite tenderness upon her in his soul.

By and by she opened her eyes. In those eyes first of all he saw bewilderment, and then terror and then anguish so great that it cannot be described, pain so horrible that it is not good for man even to think upon it. Incredible as it may seem, her head moved, her lips relaxed, her set jaw unclenched, her tongue spoke thickly.

"God!" she said.

The same word that he had used, that final word that comes to the lips when the heart is wrung, or the body is racked beyond human endurance. The universal testimony to the existence of the Divine, that trouble and sometimes trouble alone, wrings from man. No human name, not even his, upon her lips in that first instant of realization!

"How I – suffer," she faltered weakly.

Her eyes closed again, the poor woman had told her God of her condition, that was all she was equal to. Man and human relationships might come later. The man knelt by her side, his hands upraised.

"Louise," he whispered, "speak to me."

Her eyes opened again.

"Will," the anguished voice faltered on, "I am – broken – to pieces – kill me. I can't stand – kill me" – her voice rose with a sudden fearful appeal – "kill me."

Then the eyes closed and this time they did not open, although now he overwhelmed her with words, alas, all he had to give her. At last his passion, his remorse, his love, gushing from him in a torrent of frantic appeal awakened her again. She looked him once more in the face and once more begged him for that quick relief he alone could give.

"Kill me."

That was her only plea. There has been One and only One, who could sustain such crucifying anguish as she bore without such appeal being wrested from the lips, yet even He, upon His cross, for one moment, thought God had forsaken and forgotten Him!

She was silent, but she was not dead. She was speechless, but she was not unconscious, for she opened her eyes and looked at him with such pitiful appeal that he would fain hide his face as he could not bear it, and yet again and again as he stared down into her eyes he caught that heart breaking entreaty, although now she made no sound. Every twisted bone, every welling vein, every scarred and marred part on once smooth soft flesh was eloquent of that piteous petition for relief. "Kill me" she seemed to say in her voiceless agony. Agony the more appalling because at last it could make no sound.

He could not resist that appeal. He fought against it, but the demand came to him with more and more terrific force until he could no longer oppose it. That cup was tendered to him and he must drain it. No more from his lips than from the lips of Him of the Garden could it be withdrawn. Out of that chalice he must drink. It could not pass. Slowly, never taking his eyes from her, as a man might who was fascinated or hypnotized, he lifted his hand to his holster and drew out his revolver.

No, he could not do it. He laid the weapon down on the rock again and bowed forward on his knees, praying incoherently, protesting that God should place this burden on mere man. In the silence he could hear the awful rasp of her breath – the only answer. He looked up to find her eyes upon him again.

Life is a precious thing, to preserve it men go to the last limit. In defense of it things are permitted that are permitted in no other case. Is it ever nobler to destroy it than to conserve it? Was this such an instance? What were the conditions?

There was not a human being, white or red, within five days' journey from the spot where these two children of malign destiny confronted each other. That poor huddled broken mass of flesh and bones could not have been carried a foot across that rocky slope without suffering agonies beside which all the torture that might be racking her now would be as nothing. He did not dare even to lay hand upon her to straighten even one bent and twisted limb, he could not even level or compose her body where she lay. He almost felt that he had been guilty of unpardonable cruelty in giving her the stimulant and recalling her to consciousness. Nor could he leave her where she was, to seek and bring help to her. With all the speed that frantic desire, and passionate adoration, and divine pity, would lend to him, it would be a week before he could return, and by that time the wolves and the vultures – he could not think that sentence to completion. That way madness lay.

The woman was doomed, no mortal could survive her wounds, but she might linger for days while high fever and inflammation supervened. And each hour would add to her suffering. God was merciful to His Son, Christ died quickly on the cross, mere man sometimes hung there for days.

All these things ran like lightning through his brain. His hand closed upon the pistol, the eternal anodyne. No, he could not. And the tortured eyes were open again, it seemed as if the woman had summoned strength for a final appeal.

"Will," she whispered, "if you – love me – kill me."

He thrust the muzzle of his weapon against her heart, she could see his movement and for a moment gratitude and love shone in her eyes, and then with a hand that did not tremble, he pulled the trigger.

A thousand thunder claps could not have roared in his ear with such detonation. And he had done it! He had slain the thing he loved! Was it in obedience to a higher law even than that writ on the ancient tables of stone?

For a moment he thought incoherently, the pistol fell from his hand, his eyes turned to her face, her eyes were open still, but there was neither pain, nor appeal, nor love, nor relief in them; there was no light in them; only peace, calm, darkness, rest. His hand went out to them and drew the lids down, and as he did so, something gave way in him and he fell forward across the red, scarred white breast that no longer either rose or fell.

CHAPTER II
ALONE UPON THE TRAIL

They had started from their last camp early in the morning. It had been mid-day when she fell and long after noon when he killed her and lapsed into merciful oblivion. It was dusk in the cañon when he came to life again. The sun was still some distance above the horizon, but the jutting walls of the great pass cut off the light, the butte top was in ever deepening shadow.

I have often wondered what were the feelings of Lazarus when he was called back to life by the great cry of his Lord. "Hither – Out!" Could that transition from the newer way of death to the older habit of living have been accomplished without exquisite anguish and pain, brief, sudden, but too sacred, like his other experiences, to dwell upon in mortal hours?

What he of Bethany might perhaps have experienced this man felt long after under other circumstances. The enormous exertions of the day, the cruel bruises and lacerations to which clothes and body gave evidence, the sick, giddy, uncertain, helpless, feeling that comes when one recovers consciousness after such a collapse, would have been hard enough to bear; but he took absolutely no account of any of these things for, as he lifted himself on his hands, almost animal-like for a moment, from the cold body of his wife, everything came across him with a sudden, terrific, overwhelming, rush of recollection.

She was dead, and he had killed her. There were reasons, arguments, excuses, for his course; he forgot them confronted by that grim, terrific, tragic fact. The difference between that mysterious thing so incapable of human definition which we call life, and that other mysterious thing equally insusceptible of explanation which we call death, is so great that when the two confront each other the most indifferent is awed by the contrast. Many a man and many a woman prays by the bedside of some agonized sufferer for a surcease of anguish only to be brought about by death, by a dissolution of soul and body, beseeching God of His mercy for the oblivion of the last, long, quiet, sleep; but when the prayer has been granted, and the living eyes look into the dead, the beating heart bends over the still one – it is a hard soul indeed which has the strength not to wish again for a moment, one little moment of life, to whisper one word of abiding love, to hear one word of fond farewell.

Since that is true, what could this man think whose hand had pointed the weapon and pulled the trigger and caused that great gaping hole through what had once been a warm and loving heart? God had laid upon him a task, than which none had ever been heavier on the shoulders of man, and he did not think as he stared at her wildly that God had given him at the same time strength to bear his burden.

Later, it might be that cold reason would come to his aid and justify him for what he had done, but now, now, he only realized that she was dead, and he had killed her. He forgot her suffering in his own anguish and reproach of himself. He found time to marvel at himself with a strange sort of wonder. How could he have done it.

Something broke the current of his thoughts, and it was good for him that it was so. He heard a swish through the air and he looked away from his dead wife in the direction of the sound. A little distance off upon a pinnacle of rock he saw a vulture, a hideous, horrible, unclean, carrion bird. While he watched, another and another settled softly down. He rose to his feet and far beneath him from the tree clad banks of the river the long howl of a wolf smote upon his ear. Gluttony and rapine were at hand. Further down the declivity the body of the dead mule was the object of the converging attack from earth and air. The threat of that attack stirred him to life.

There were things he had to do. The butte top was devoid of earth or much vegetation, yet here and there in hollows where water settled or drained, soft green moss grew. He stooped over and lifted the body of the woman. She seemed to fall together loosely and almost break within his hands – it was evidence of what the fall had done for her, justification for his action, too, if he had been in a mood to

reason about it, but his only thought then was of how she must have suffered. By a strange perversion he had to fight against the feeling that she was suffering now. He laid her gently and tenderly down in a deep hollow in the rock shaped almost to contain her. He straightened her poor twisted limbs. He arranged with decent care the ragged dress, covering over the torn breast and the frightful wound above her heart. With the last of the water in the canteen, he washed her face, he could not wash out the scar of course. With rude unskillful hands, yet with pitiable tenderness, he strove to arrange her blood-matted hair, he pillowed her head upon his hat again.

Sometimes the last impression of life is stamped on the face of death, sometimes we see in the awful fixity of feature that attends upon dissolution, the index of the agony in which life has passed, but more often, thank God, death lays upon pain and sorrow a smoothing, calming hand. It was so in this instance. There was a great peace, a great relief, in the face he looked upon; this poor woman had been tortured not only in body, that he knew, but she had suffered anguish of soul of which he was unaware, and death, had it come in gentler form would perhaps not have been unwelcome. That showed in her face. There was dignity, composure, surcease of care, repose – the rest that shall be forever!

The man had done all that he could for her. Stop, there was one thing more; he knelt down by her side, he was not what we commonly call a religious man, the habit that he had learned at his mother's knee he had largely neglected in maturer years, but he had not altogether forgotten, and even the atheist – and he was far from that – might have prayed then.

"God, accept her," he murmured. "Christ receive her," – that was all but it was enough.

He remained by her side some time looking at her; he would fain have knelt there forever; he would have been happy at that moment if he could have lain down by her and had someone do for them both the last kindly office he was trying to do for her. But that was not to be, and the growing darkness warned him to make haste. The wolf barks were sharper and nearer, he stooped over her, bent low and laid his face against hers. Oh that cold awful touch of long farewell. He tore himself away from her, lifted from her neck a little object that had gleamed so prettily amid the red blood. It was a locket. He had never seen it before and had no knowledge of what it might contain. He kissed it, slipped it into the pocket of his shirt and rose to his feet.

The plateau was strewn with rock; working rapidly and skillfully he built a burial mound of stone over her body. The depression in which she lay was deep enough to permit no rock to touch her person. The cairn, if such it may be called, was soon completed. No beast of the earth or bird of the air could disturb what was left of his wife. It seemed so piteous to him to think of her so young, and so sweet and so fair, so soft and so tender, so brave and so true, lying alone in the vast of the cañon, weighted down by the great rocks that love's hands had heaped above her. But there was no help for it.

Gathering up the revolver and canteen he turned and fell rather than climbed to the level of the river. It was quite dark in the depths of the cañon, but he pressed rapidly on over the uneven and broken rocks until he reached the giant stairway. Up them he toiled painfully until he attained again the trail.

It was dark when he reached the wooded recess where they had slept the night before. There were grass and trees, a bubbling spring, an oasis amid the desert of rocks; he found the ashes of their fire and gathering wood heaped it upon the still living embers until the blaze rose and roared. He realized at last that he was weary beyond measure, he had gone through the unendurable since the morning. He threw himself down alone where they had lain together the night before and sought in vain for sleep. In his ears he heard that sharp, sudden, breaking cry once more, and her voice begging him to kill her. He heard again the rasp of her agonized breathing, the crashing detonation of the weapon. He writhed with the anguish of it all. Dry-eyed he arose at last and stretched out his hands to that heaven that had done so little for him he thought.

Long after midnight he fell into a sort of uneasy, restless stupor. The morning sun of the new and desolate day recalled him to action. He arose to his feet and started mechanically down the trail alone – always and forever alone. Yet God was with him though he knew it not.

Four days later a little party of men winding through the foothills came upon a wavering, ghastly, terrifying figure. Into the mining town two days before had wandered a solitary mule, scraps of harness dangling from it. They had recognized it as one of a pair the man had purchased for a proposed journey far into the unsurveyed and inaccessible mountains – to hunt for the treasures hidden within their granite breasts. It told too plainly a story of disaster. A relief party had been hurriedly organized to search for the two, one of whom was much beloved in the rude frontier camp.

The man they met on the way was the man they had come to seek. His boots were cut to pieces, his feet were raw and bleeding for he had taken no care to order his going or to choose his way. His clothes were in rags, through rents and tatters his emaciated body showed its discolored bruises. His hands were swollen and soiled with wounds and the stains of the way. The front of his shirt was sadly and strangely discolored. He was hatless, his hair was gray, his face was as white as the snow on the crest of the peak, his lips were bloodless yet his eyes blazed with fever.

For four days without food and with but little water this man had plodded down the mountain toward the camp. All his energies were merged in one desire, to come in touch with humanity and tell his awful story; the keeping of it to himself, which he must do perforce because he was alone in the world, added to the difficulty of endurance. The sun had beaten down upon him piteously during the day. The cold dew had drenched him in the night. Apparitions had met his vision alike in the darkness and in the light. Voices had whispered to him as he plodded on. But something had sustained him in spite of the awful drain, physical and mental, which had wasted him away. Something had sustained him until he came in touch with men, thereafter the duty would devolve upon his brethren not upon himself.

They caught him as he staggered into the group of them, these Good Samaritans of the frontier; they undressed him and washed him, they bound up his wounds and ministered to him, they laid him gently down upon the ground, they bent over him tenderly and listened to him while he told in broken, disjointed words the awful story, of her plunge into the cañon, of his search for her, of her last appeal to him. And then he stopped.

"What then?" asked one of the men bending over him as he hesitated.

"God forgive me – I shot her – through the heart."

There was appalling stillness in the little group of rough men, while he told them where she lay and begged them to go and bring back what was left of her.

"You must bring her – back," he urged pitifully.

None of the men had ever been up the cañon, but they knew of its existence and the twin peaks of which he had told them could be seen from afar. He had given them sufficient information to identify the place and to enable them to go and bring back the body for Christian burial. Now these rude men of the mining camp had loved that woman as men love a bright and cheery personality which dwelt among them.

"Yes," answered the spokesman, "but what about you?"

"I shall be – a dead man," was the murmured answer, "and I don't care – I shall be glad – "

He had no more speech and no more consciousness after that. It was a sardonic comment on the situation that the last words that fell from his lips then should be those words of joy.

"Glad, glad!"

BOOK II
THE EAST AND THE WEST

CHAPTER III
THE YOUNG LADY FROM PHILADELPHIA

Miss Enid Maitland was a highly specialized product of the far east. I say far, viewing Colorado as a point of departure not as identifying her with the orient. The classic shades of Bryn Mawr had been the "Groves of Academus where with old Plato she had walked." Incidentally during her completion of the exhaustive curriculum of that justly famous institution she had acquired at least a bowing acquaintance with other masters of the mind.

Nor had the physical in her education been sacrificed to the mental. In her at least the *mens sana* and the *corpore sano* were alike in evidence. She had ridden to hounds many times on the anise-scented trail of the West Chester Hunt! Exciting tennis and leisurely golf had engaged her attention on the courts and greens of the Merion Cricket Club. She had buffeted "Old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste" on the beach at Cape May and at Atlantic City.

Spiritually she was a devoted member of the Episcopal Church, of the variety that abhors the word "Protestant" in connection therewith. Altogether she reflected great credit upon her pastors and masters, spiritual and temporal, and her up-bringing in the three departments of life left little to be desired.

Upon her graduation she had been at once received and acclaimed by the "Assembly Set," of Philadelphia, to which indeed she belonged unquestioned by right of birth and position – and there was no other power under heaven by which she could have effected entrance therein; at least that is what the "outs" thought of that most exclusive circle. The old home of the Maitlands overlooking Rittenhouse Square had been the scene of her début. In all the refined and decorous gayeties of Philadelphia's ultra-fastidious society she had participated. She had even looked upon money standardized New York in its delirium of extravagance, at least in so far as a sedate and well-born Philadelphia family could countenance such golden madness. During the year she had ranged like a conqueror – pardon the masculine appellation – between Palm Beach in the South and Bar Harbor in the North. Philadelphia was proud of her, and she was not unknown in those unfortunate parts of the United States which lay without.

In all this she had remained a frank, free, unspoiled young woman. Life was full of zest for her, and she enjoyed it with the most un-Pennsylvanian enthusiasm.

The second summer after her coming out found her in Colorado. Robert Maitland was one of the big men of the west. He had departed from Philadelphia at an early age and had settled in Colorado while it was still in the formative period. There he had grown up with the state. The Philadelphia Maitlands could never understand it or explain it. Bob Maitland must have been, they argued, a reversion to an ancient type, a throwback to some robber baron long antecedent to William Penn. And the speculation was true. The blood of some lawless adventurer of the past, discreetly forgot by the conservative section of the family, bubbled in his veins unchecked by the repressive atmosphere of his home and his early environment.

He had thoroughly identified himself with his new surroundings and had plunged into all the activities of the west. During one period in his life he had actually served as sheriff of one of the border counties, and it was a rapid "bad man" indeed, who enjoyed any advantage over him when it came to drawing his "gun." His skill and daring had been unquestioned. He had made a name for

himself which still abides, especially in the mountains where things yet remained almost as primitive as they had been from the beginning.

His fame had been accompanied by fortune, too; the cattle upon a thousand hills were his, the treasures of mines of fabulous richness were at his command. He lived in Denver in one of the greatest of the bonanza palaces on the hills of that city, confronting the snow-capped mountain range. For the rest he held stock in all sorts of corporations, was a director in numerous concerns and so on – the reader can supply the usual catalogue, they are all alike. He had married late in life and was the father of two little girls and a boy, the oldest sixteen and the youngest ten.

Going east, which he did not love, on an infrequent business trip he had renewed his acquaintance with his brother and the one ewe lamb of his brother's flock, to wit, the aforementioned Enid. He had been struck, as everybody was, by the splendid personality of the girl and had striven earnestly to disabuse her mind of the prevalent idea that there was nothing much worth while on the continent beyond the Alleghanies except scenery.

"What you need, Enid, is a ride across the plains, a sight of real mountains, beside which these little foothills in Pennsylvania that people back here make so much of wouldn't be noticed. You want to get some of the spirited glorious freedom of the west into your conservative straight-laced little body!"

"In my day, Robert," reprovingly remarked his brother, Enid's father, "freedom was the last thing a young lady gently born and delicately nurtured would have coveted."

"Your day is past, Steve," returned the younger Maitland with shocking carelessness. "Freedom is what every woman desires now, especially when she is married. You are not in love with anybody are you, Enid?"

"With not a soul," frankly replied the girl, greatly amused at the colloquy between the two men, who though both mothered by the same woman were as dissimilar as – what shall I say, the east is from the west? Let it go at that.

"That's all right," said her uncle, relieved apparently. "I will take you out west and introduce you to some real men and – "

"If I thought it possible," interposed Mr. Stephen Maitland in his most austere and dignified manner, "that my daughter," with a perceptible emphasis on the "my," as if he and not the daughter were the principal being under consideration, "should ever so far forget what belongs to her station in life and her family as to allow her affections to become engaged by anyone who, from his birth and up-bringing in the er – ah – unlicensed atmosphere of the western country would be *persona non grata* to the dignified society of this ancient city and – "

"Nonsense," interrupted the younger brother bluntly. "You have lived here wrapped up in yourselves and your dinky little town so long that mental asphyxiation is threatening you all."

"I will thank you, Robert," said his brother with something approaching the manner in which he would have repelled a blasphemy, "not to refer to Philadelphia as – er – What was your most extraordinary word?"

"'Dinky,' if my recollection serves."

"Ah, precisely. I am not sure as to the meaning of the term but I conceive it to be something opprobrious. You can say what you like about me and mine, but Philadelphia, no."

"Oh, the town's right enough," returned his brother, not at all impressed. "I'm talking about people now. There are just as fine men and women in the west as in New York or Philadelphia."

"I am sure you don't mean to be offensive, Robert, but really the association of ideas in your mention of us with that common and vulgar New York is er – unpleasant," fairly shuddered the elder Maitland.

"I'm only urging you to recognize the quality of the western people. I dare say they are of a finer type than the average here."

"From your standpoint, no doubt," continued his brother severely and somewhat wearily as if the matter were not worth all this argument. "All that I want of them is that they stay in the west where they belong and not strive to mingle with the east; there is a barrier between us and them which it is not well to cross. To permit any intermixtures of er – race or – "

"The people out there are white, Steve," interrupted his brother sardonically. "I wasn't contemplating introducing Enid here to Chinese, or Negroes, or Indians, or – "

"Don't you see," said Mr. Stephen Maitland, stubbornly waving aside this sarcastic and irrelevant comment, "from your very conversation the vast gulf that there is between you and me? Although you had every advantage in life that birth can give you, we are – I mean you have changed so greatly," he had quickly added, loath to offend.

But he mistook the light in his brother's eyes, it was a twinkle not a flash. Robert Maitland laughed, laughed with what his brother conceived to be indecorous boisterousness.

"How little you know of the bone and sinew of this country, Steve," he exclaimed presently. Robert Maitland could not comprehend how it irritated his stately brother to be called "Steve." Nobody ever spoke of him but as Stephen Maitland – "But Lord, I don't blame you," continued the Westerner. "Any man whose vision is barred by a foothill couldn't be expected to know much of the main range and what's beyond."

"There isn't any danger of my falling in love with anybody," said Enid at last, with all the confidence of two triumphant social seasons. "I think I must be immune even to dukes," she said gayly.

"I referred to worthy young Americans of – " began her father who, to do him justice, was so satisfied with his own position that no foreign title 'dazzled' him in the least degree.

"Rittenhouse Square," cut in Robert Maitland with amused sarcasm. "Well, Enid, you seem to have run the gamut of the east pretty thoroughly, come out and spend the summer with me in Colorado. My Denver house is open to you, we have a ranch amid the foothills, or if you are game we can break away from civilization entirely and find some unexplored, unknown cañon in the heart of the mountains and camp there. We'll get back to nature, which seems to be impossible in Philadelphia, and you will see things and learn things that you will never see or learn anywhere else. It'll do you good, too; from what I hear, you have been going the pace and those cheeks of yours are a little too pale for so splendid a girl, you look too tired under the eyes for youth and beauty."

"I believe I am not very fit," said the girl, "and if father will permit – "

"Of course, of course," said Stephen Maitland. "You are your own mistress anyway, and having no mother" – Enid's mother had died in her infancy – "I suppose that I could not interfere or object if I wished to, but no marrying or giving in marriage: Remember that."

"Nonsense, father," answered the young woman lightly. "I am not anxious to assume the bonds of wedlock."

"Well, that settles it," said Robert Maitland. "We'll give you a royal good time. I must run up to New York and Boston for a few days, but I shall be back in a week and I can pick you up then."

"What is the house in Denver, is it er – may I ask, provided with all modern conveniences and – " began the elder Maitland nervously.

Robert Maitland laughed.

"What do you take us for, Steve? Do you ever read the western newspapers?"

"I confess that I have not given much thought to the west since I studied geography and —*The Philadelphia Ledger* has been thought sufficient for the family since – "

"Gracious!" exclaimed Maitland. "The house cost half a million dollars if you must know it, and if there is anything that modern science can contribute to comfort and luxury that isn't in it, I don't know what it is. Shall it be the house in Denver, or the ranch, or a real camp in the wilds, Enid?"

"First the house in Denver," said Enid, "and then the ranch and then the mountains."

"Right O! That shall be the program."

"Will my daughter's life be perfectly safe from the Cowboys, Indians and Desperadoes?"

"Quite safe," answered Robert, with deep gravity. "The cowboys no longer shoot up the city and it has been years since the Indians have held up even a trolley car. The only real desperado in my acquaintance is the mildest, gentlest old stage driver in the west."

"Do you keep up an acquaintance with men of that class, still?" asked his brother in great surprise.

"You know I was Sheriff in a border county for a number of years and – "

"But you must surely have withdrawn from all such society now."

"Out west," said Robert Maitland, "when we know a man and like him, when we have slept by him on the plains, ridden with him through the mountains, fought with him against some border terror, some bad man thirsting to kill, we don't forget him, we don't cut his acquaintance, and it doesn't make any difference whether the one or the other of us is rich or poor. I have friends who can't frame a grammatical sentence, who habitually eat with their knives, yet who are absolutely devoted to me and I to them. The man is the thing out there." He smiled and turned to Enid. "Always excepting the supremacy of woman," he added.

"How fascinating!" exclaimed the girl. "I want to go there right away."

And this was the train of events which brought about the change. Behold the young lady astride of a horse for the first time in her life in a divided skirt, that fashion prevalent elsewhere not having been accepted by the best equestriennes of Philadelphia. She was riding ahead of a lumbering mountain wagon, surrounded by other riders, which was loaded with baggage, drawn by four sturdy broncos and followed by a number of obstinate little burros at present unencumbered with packs which would be used when they got further from civilization and the way was no longer practicable for anything on wheels.

Miss Enid Maitland was clad in a way that would have caused her father a stroke of apoplexy if he could have been suddenly made aware of her dress, if she had burst into the drawing-room without announcement for instance. Her skirt was distinctly short, she wore heavy hobnailed shoes that laced up to her knees, she had on a bright blue sweater, a kind of a cap known as a tam-o-shanter was pinned above her glorious hair, which was closely braided and wound around her head. She wore a silk handkerchief loosely tied around her neck, a knife and revolver hung at her belt, a little watch was strapped to one wrist, a handsomely braided quirt dangled from the other, a pair of spurs adorned her heels and, most discomposing fact of all, by her side rode a handsome and dashing cavalier.

How Mr. James Armstrong might have appeared in the conventional black and white of evening clothes was not quite clear to her, for she had as yet never beheld him in that obliterating raiment, but in the habit of the west, riding trousers, heavy boots that laced to the knees, blue shirt, his head covered by a noble "Stetson," mounted on the fiery restive bronco which he rode to perfection, he was ideal. Alas for the vanity of human proposition! Mr. James Armstrong, friend and protégé these many years of Mr. Robert Maitland, mine owner and cattle man on a much smaller scale than his older friend, was desperately in love with Enid Maitland, and Enid, swept off her feet by a wooing which began with precipitant ardor so soon as he laid eyes on her, was more profoundly moved by his suit, or pursuit, than she could have imagined.

Omne ignotum pro magnifico!

She had been wooed in the conventional fashion many times and oft, on the sands of Palm Beach, along the cliffs of Newport, in the romantic glens of Mount Desert, in the old fashioned drawing-room overlooking Rittenhouse Square. She had been proposed to in motor cars, on the decks of yachts and once even while riding to hounds, but there had been a touch of sameness about it all. Never had she been made love to with the headlong gallantry, with the dashing precipitation of the west. It had swept her from her moorings. She found almost before she was aware of it that her past experience now stood her in little stead. She awoke to a sudden realization of the fact that she

was practically pledged to James Armstrong after an acquaintance of three weeks in Denver and on the ranch.

Business of the most important and critical nature required Armstrong's presence east at this juncture, and willy-nilly there was no way he could put off his departure longer. He had to leave the girl with an uneasy conscience that though he had her half-way promise, he had her but half-way won. He had snatched the ultimate day from his business demands to ride with her on the first stage of her journey to the mountains.

CHAPTER IV
THE GAME PLAYED IN THE USUAL WAY

The road on which they advanced into the mountains was well made and well kept up. The cañon through the foothills was not very deep – for Colorado – and the ascent was gentle. Naturally it wound in every direction following the devious course of the river which it frequently crossed from one side to the other on rude log bridges. A brisk gallop of a half mile or so on a convenient stretch of comparatively level going put the two in the lead far ahead of the lumbering wagon and out of sight of those others of the party who had elected to go a horseback. There was perhaps a tacit agreement among the latter not to break in upon this growing friendship or, more frankly, not to interfere in a developing love affair.

The cañon broadened here and there at long intervals and ranch houses were found in every clearing, but these were few and far between and for the most part Armstrong and Enid Maitland rode practically alone save for the passing of an occasional lumber wagon.

"You can't think," began the man, as they drew rein after a splendid gallop and the somewhat tired horses readily subsided into a walk, "how I hate to go back and leave you."

"And you can't think how loath I am to have you return," the girl flashed out at him with a sidelong glance from her bright blue eyes and a witching smile from her scarlet lips.

"Enid Maitland," said the man, "you know I just worship you. I'd like to sweep you out of your saddle, lift you to the bow of mine and ride away with you. I can't keep my hands off you, I – "

Before she realized what he would be about he swerved his horse toward her, his arm went around her suddenly. Taken completely off her guard she could make no resistance, indeed she scarcely knew what to expect until he crushed her to him and kissed her, almost roughly, full on the lips.

"How dare you!" cried the girl, her face aflame, freeing herself at last, and swinging her own horse almost to the edge of the road which here ran on an excavation some fifty feet above the river.

"How dare I?" laughed the audacious man, apparently no whit abashed by her indignation. "When I think of my opportunity I am amazed at my moderation."

"Your opportunity, your moderation?"

"Yes; when I had you helpless I took but one kiss, I might have held you longer and taken a hundred."

"And by what right did you take that one?" haughtily demanded the outraged young woman, looking at him beneath level brows while the color slowly receded from her face. She had never been kissed by a man other than a blood relation in her life – remember, suspicious reader, that she was from Philadelphia – and she resented this sudden and unauthorized caress with every atom and instinct of her still somewhat conventional being.

"But aren't you half-way engaged to me?" he pleaded in justification, seeing the unwonted seriousness with which she had received his impudent advance. "Didn't you agree to give me a chance?"

"I did say that I liked you very much," she admitted, "no man better, and that I thought you might – "

"Well, then – " he began.

But she would not be interrupted.

"I did not mean that you should enjoy all the privileges of a conquest before you had won me. I will thank you not to do that again, sir."

"It seems to have had a very different effect upon you than it did upon me," replied the man fervently. "I loved you before, but now, since I have kissed you, I worship you."

"It hasn't affected me that way," retorted the girl promptly, her face still frowning and indignant. "Not at all, and – "

"Forgive me, Enid," pleaded the other. "I just couldn't help it. You were so beautiful I had to. I took the chance. You are not accustomed to our ways."

"Is this your habit in your love affairs?" asked the girl swiftly and not without a spice of feminine malice.

"I never had any love affairs before," he replied with a ready masculine mendacity, "at least none worth mentioning. But you see this is the west, we have gained what we have by demanding every inch that nature offers, and then claiming the all. That's the way we play the game out here and that's the way we win."

"But I have not yet learned to play the 'game,' as you call it, by any such rules," returned the young woman determinedly, "and it is not the way to win me if I am the stake."

"What is the way?" asked the man anxiously. "Show me and I'll take it no matter what its difficulty."

"Ah, for me to point out the way would be to play traitor to myself," she answered, relenting and relaxing a little before his devoted wooing. "You must find it without assistance. I can only tell you one thing."

"And what is that?"

"You do not advance toward the goal by such actions as those of a moment since."

"Look here," said the other suddenly. "I am not ashamed of what I did, and I'm not going to pretend that I am, either."

"You ought to be," severely.

"Well, maybe so, but I'm not. I couldn't help it any more than I could help loving you the minute I saw you. Put yourself in my place."

"But I am not in your place, and I can't put myself there. I do not wish to. If it be true, as you say, that you have grown to – care so much for me and so quickly – "

"If it be true?" came the sharp interruption as the man bent toward her fairly devouring her with his bold, ardent gaze.

"Well, since it is true," she admitted under the compulsion of his protest, "that fact is the only possible excuse for your action."

"You find some justification for me, then!"

"No, only a possibility, but whether it be true or not, I do not feel that way – yet."

There was a saving grace in that last word, which gave him a little heart. He would have spoken, but she suffered no interruption, saying:

"I have been wooed before, but – "

"True, unless the human race has become suddenly blind," he said softly under his breath.

"But never in such ungentle ways."

"I suppose you have never run up against a real red-blooded man like me before."

"If red-blooded be evidenced mainly by lack of self-control, perhaps I have not. Yet there are men whom I have met who would not need to apologize for their qualities even to you, Mr. James Armstrong."

"Don't say that. Evidently I make but poor progress in my wooing. Never have I met with a woman quite like you." – And in that indeed lay some of her charm, and she might have replied in exactly the same language and with exactly the same meaning to him. – "I am no longer a boy. I must be fifteen years older than you are, for I am thirty-five."

The difference between their years was not quite so great as he declared, but woman-like the girl let the statement pass unchallenged.

"And I wouldn't insult your intelligence by saying you are the only woman that I have ever made love to, but there is a vast difference between making love to a woman and loving one. I have

just found that out for the first time. I marvel at the past, and I am ashamed of it, but I thank God that I have been saved for this opportunity. I want to win you, and I am going to do it, too. In many things I don't match up with the people with whom you train. I was born out here, and I've made myself. There are things that have happened in the making that I am not especially proud of, and I am not at all satisfied with the results, especially since I have met you. The better I know you the less pleased I am with Jim Armstrong, but there are possibilities in me, I rather believe, and with you for inspiration, Heavens!" – the man flung out his hand with a fine gesture of determination. "They say that the east and west don't naturally mingle, but it's a lie, you and I can beat the world."

The woman thrilled to his gallant wooing. Any woman would have done so, some of them would have lost their heads, but Enid Maitland was an exceedingly cool young person, for she was not quite swept off her feet, and did not quite lose her balance.

"I like to hear you say things like that," she answered. "Nobody quite like you has ever made love to me, and certainly not in your way, and that's the reason I have given you a half-way promise to think about it. I was sorry that you could not be with us on this adventure, but now I am rather glad, especially if the even temper of my way is to be interrupted by anything like the outburst of a few moments since."

"I am glad, too," admitted the man. "For I declare I couldn't help it. If I have to be with you either you have got to be mine, or else you would have to decide that it could never be, and then I'd go off and fight it out."

"Leave me to myself," said the girl earnestly, "for a little while; it's best so. I would not take the finest, noblest man on earth – "

"And I am not that."

"Unless I loved him. There is something very attractive about your personality. I don't know in my heart whether it is that or – "

"Good," said the man, as she hesitated. "That's enough," he gathered up the reins and whirled his horse suddenly in the road, "I am going back. I'll wait for your return to Denver, and then – "

"That's best," answered the girl.

She stretched out her hand to him, leaning backward. If he had been a different kind of a man he would have kissed it, as it was he took it in his own hand and almost crushed it with a fierce grip.

"We'll shake on that, little girl," he said, and then without a backward glance he put spurs to his horse and galloped furiously down the road.

No, she decided then and there, she did not love him, not yet. Whether she ever would she could not tell. And yet she was half bound to him. The recollection of his kiss was not altogether a pleasant memory; he had not done himself any good by that bold assault upon her modesty, that reckless attempt to rifle the treasure of her lips. No man had ever really touched her heart, although many had engaged her interest. Her experiences therefore were not definitive or conclusive. If she had truly loved James Armstrong, in spite of all that she might have said, she would have thrilled to the remembrance of that wild caress. The chances, therefore, were somewhat heavily against him that morning as he rode hopefully down the trail alone.

His experiences in love affairs were much greater than hers. She was by no means the first woman he had kissed – remember suspicious reader that he was *not* from Philadelphia! – hers were not the first ears into which he had poured passionate protestations. He was neither better nor worse than most men, perhaps he fairly enough represented the average, but surely fate had something better in store for such a superb woman – a girl of such attainments and such infinite possibilities, she must mate higher than with the average man. Perhaps there was a sub-consciousness of this in her mind as she silently waited to be overtaken by the rest of the party.

There were curious glances and strange speculations in that little company as they saw her sitting her horse alone. A few moments before James Armstrong had passed them at a gallop, he

had waved his hand as he dashed by and had smiled at them, hope giving him a certain assurance, although his confidence was scarcely warranted by the facts.

His demeanor was not in consonance with Enid's somewhat grave and somewhat troubled present aspect. She threw off her preoccupation instantly and easily, however, and joined readily enough in the merry conversation of the way.

Mr. Robert Maitland, as Armstrong had said, had known him from a boy. There were things in his career of which Maitland did not and could not approve, but they were of the past, he reflected, and Armstrong was after all a pretty good sort. Mr. Maitland's standards were not at all those of his Philadelphia brother, but they were very high. His experiences of men had been different; he thought that Armstrong, having certainly by this time reached years of discretion, could be safely entrusted with the precious treasure of the young girl who had been committed to his care, and for whom his affection grew as his knowledge of and acquaintanceship with her increased.

As for Mrs. Maitland and the two girls and the youngster, they were Armstrong's devoted friends. They knew nothing about his past, indeed there were things in it of which Maitland himself was ignorant, and which had they been known to him might have caused him to withhold even his tentative acquiescence in the possibilities.

Most of these things were known to old Kirkby who with masterly skill, amusing nonchalance and amazing profanity, albeit most of it under his breath lest he shock the ladies, tooled along the four nervous excited broncos who drew the big supply wagon. Kirkby was Maitland's oldest and most valued friend. He had been the latter's deputy sheriff, he had been a cowboy and a lumberman, a mighty hunter and a successful miner, and now although he had acquired a reasonable competence, and had a nice little wife and a pleasant home in the mountain village at the entrance to the cañon, he drove stage for pleasure rather than for profit. He had given over his daily twenty-five mile jaunt from Morrison to Troutdale to other hands for a short space that he might spend a little time with his old friend and the family, who were all greatly attached to him, on this outing.

Enid Maitland, a girl of a kind that Kirkby had never seen before, had won the old man's heart during the weeks spent on the Maitland ranch. He had grown fond of her, and he did not think that Mr. James Armstrong merited that which he evidently so overwhelmingly desired. Kirkby was well along in years, but he was quite capable of playing a man's game for all that, and he intended to play it in this instance.

Nobody scanned Enid Maitland's face more closely than he, sitting humped up on the front seat of the wagon, one foot on the high brake, his head sunk almost to the level of his knee, his long whip in his hand, his keen and somewhat fierce brown eyes taking in every detail of what was going on about him. Indeed there was but little that came before him that old Kirkby did not see.

CHAPTER V
THE STORY AND THE LETTERS

Imagine, if you please, the forest primeval; yes, the murmuring pines and the hemlocks of the poem as well, by the side of a rapidly rushing mountain torrent fed by the eternal snows of the lofty peaks of the great range. A level stretch of grassy land where a mountain brook joined the creek was dotted with clumps of pines and great boulders rolled down from the everlasting hills – half an acre of open clearing. On the opposite side of the brook the cañon wall rose almost sheer for perhaps five hundred feet, ending in jagged, needle-edged pinnacles of rock, sharp, picturesque and beautiful. A thousand feet above ran the timber line, and four thousand feet above that the crest of the greatest peak in the main range.

The white tents of the little encampment which had gleamed so brightly in the clear air and radiant sunshine of Colorado, now stood dim and ghost-like in the red reflection of a huge camp fire. It was the evening of the first day in the wilderness.

For two days since leaving the wagon, the Maitland party with its long train of burros heavily packed, its horsemen and the steady plodders on foot, had advanced into unexplored and almost inaccessible retreats of the mountains – into the primitive indeed! In this delightful spot they had pitched their tents and the permanent camp had been made. Wood was abundant, the water at hand was as cold as ice, as clear as crystal and as soft as milk. There was pasturage for the horses and burros on the other side of the mountain brook. The whole place was a little amphitheater which humanity occupied perhaps the first time since creation.

Unpacking the burros, setting up the tents, making the camp, building the fire had used up the late remainder of the day which was theirs when they had arrived. Opportunity would come to-morrow to explore the country, to climb the range, to try the stream that tumbled down a succession of waterfalls to the right of the camp and roared and rushed merrily around its feet until, swelled by the volume of the brook, it lost itself in tree-clad depths far beneath. To-night rest after labor, to-morrow play after rest.

The evening meal was over. Enid could not help thinking with what scorn and contempt her father would have regarded the menu, how his gorge would have risen – hers too for that matter! – had it been placed before him on the old colonial mahogany of the dining-room in Philadelphia. But up there in the wilds she had eaten the coarse homely fare with the zest and relish of the most seasoned ranger of the hills. Anxious to be of service, she had burned her hands and smoked her hair and scorched her face by usurping the functions of the young ranchman who had been brought along as cook, and had actually fried the bacon herself! Imagine a goddess with a frying pan! The black thick coffee and the condensed milk, drunk from the graniteware cup, had a more delicious aroma and a more delightful taste than the finest Mocha and Java in the daintiest porcelain of France. *Optimum condimentum.* The girl was frankly, ravenously hungry, the air, the altitude, the exertion, the excitement made her able to eat anything and enjoy it.

She was gloriously beautiful, too; even her brief experience in the west had brought back the missing roses to her cheek, and had banished the bister circles from beneath her eyes. Robert Maitland, lazily reclining propped up against a boulder, his feet to the fire, smoking an old pipe that would have given his brother the horrors, looked with approving complacency upon her, confident and satisfied that his prescription was working well. Nor was he the only one who looked at her that way. Marion and Emma, his two daughters, worshiped their handsome Philadelphia cousin and they sat one on either side of her on the great log lying between the tents and the fire. Even Bob junior condescended to give her approving glances. The whole camp was at her feet. Mrs. Maitland had been greatly taken by her young niece. Kirkby made no secret of his devotion; Arthur Bradshaw and Henry Phillips, each a "tenderfoot" of the extremest character, friends of business connections in the

east, who were spending their vacation with Maitland, shared in the general devotion; to say nothing of George the cook, and Pete, the packer and "horse wrangler."

Phillips, who was an old acquaintance of Enid's, had tried his luck with her back east and had sense enough to accept as final his failure. Bradshaw was a solemn young man without that keen sense of humor which was characteristic of the west. The others were suitably dressed for adventure, but Bradshaw's idea of an appropriate costume was distinguished chiefly by long green felt puttees which swathed his huge calves and excited curious inquiry and ribald comment from the surprised denizens of each mountain hamlet through which they had passed, to all of which Bradshaw remained serenely oblivious. The young man, who does not enter especially into this tale, was a vestryman of the church in his home in the suburbs of Philadelphia. His piety had been put to a severe strain in the mountains.

That day everybody had to work on the trail – everybody wanted to for that matter. The hardest labor consisted in the driving of the burros. Unfortunately there was no good and trained leader among them through an unavoidable mischance, and the campers had great difficulty in keeping the burros on the trail. To Arthur Bradshaw had been allotted the most obstinate, cross-grained and determined of the unruly band, and old Kirkby and George paid particular attention to instructing him in the gentle art of manipulating him over the rocky mountain trail.

"Wall," said Kirkby with his somewhat languid, drawling, nasal voice, "that there burro's like a ship w'ich I often seed 'em w'n I was a kid down east afore I come out to God's country. Nature has pervided 'em with a kind of a hellum. I remember if you wanted the boat to go to the right you shoved the hellum over to the left. Sta'boad an' port was the terms as I recollects 'em. It's jest the same with burros, you takes 'em by the hellum, that's by the tail, git a good tight twist on it an' ef you want him to head to the right, slew his stern sheets around to the left, an' you got to be keerful you don't git no kick back w'ich if it lands on you is worse 'n the ree-coil of a mule."

Arthur faithfully followed directions, narrowly escaping the outraged brute's small but sharp pointed heels on occasion. His efforts not being productive of much success, finally in his despair he resorted to brute strength; he would pick the little animal up bodily, pack and all – he was a man of powerful physique – and swing him around until his head pointed in the right direction; then with a prayer that the burro would keep it there for a few rods anyway, he would set him down and start him all over again. The process, oft repeated, became monotonous after a while. Arthur was a slow thinking man, deliberate in action, he stood it as long as he possibly could. Kirkby who rode one horse and led two others, and therefore was exempt from burro driving, observed him with great interest. He and Bradshaw had strayed way behind the rest of the party.

At last Arthur's resistance, patience and piety, strained to the breaking point, gave way suddenly. Primitive instincts rose to the surface and overwhelmed him like a flood. He deliberately sat down on a fallen tree by the side of a trail, the burro halting obediently, turned and faced him with hanging head apparently conscious that he merited the disapprobation that was being heaped upon him, for from the desperate tenderfoot there burst forth so amazing, so fluent, so comprehensive a torrent of assorted profanity, that even the old past master in objurgation was astonished and bewildered. Where did Bradshaw, mild and inoffensive, get it? His proficiency would have appalled his Rector and amazed his fellow vestrymen. Not the Jackdaw of Rheims himself was so cursed as that little burro. Kirkby sat on his horse in fits of silent laughter until the tears ran 'down his cheeks, the only outward and visible expression of his mirth.

Arthur only stopped when he had thoroughly emptied himself, possibly of an accumulation of years of repression.

"Wall," said Kirkby, "you sure do overmatch anyone I ever heard w'en it comes to cursin'. W'y you could gimme cards an' spades an' beat me, an' I was thought to have some gift that-a-way in the old days."

"I didn't begin to exhaust myself," answered Bradshaw, shortly, "and what I did say didn't equal the situation. I'm going home."

"I wouldn't do that," urged the old man. "Here, you take the hosses an' I'll tackle the burro."

"Gladly," said Arthur. "I would rather ride an elephant and drive a herd of them than waste another minute on this infernal little mule."

The story was too good to keep, and around the camp fire that night Kirkby drawled it forth. There was a freedom and easiness of intercourse in the camp, which was natural enough. Cook, teamster, driver, host, guest, men, women, children, and I had almost said burros, stood on the same level. They all ate and lived together. The higher up the mountain range you go, the deeper into the wilderness you plunge, the further away from the conventional you draw, the more homogeneous becomes society and the less obvious are the irrational and unscientific distinctions of the lowlands. The guinea stamp fades and the man and the woman are pure gold or base metal inherently and not by any artificial standard.

George, the cattle man who cooked, and Peter, the horse wrangler, who assisted Kirkby in looking after the stock, enjoyed the episode uproariously, and would fain have had the exact language repeated to them, but here Robert Maitland demurred, much to Arthur's relief, for he was thoroughly humiliated by the whole performance.

It was very pleasant lounging around the camp fire, and one good story easily led to another.

"It was in these very mountains," said Robert Maitland, at last, when his turn came, "that there happened one of the strangest and most terrible adventures that I ever heard of. I have pretty much forgotten the lay of the land, but I think it wasn't very far from here that there is one of the most stupendous cañons through the range. Nobody ever goes there – I don't suppose anybody has ever been there since. It must have been at least five years ago that it all happened."

"It was four years an' nine months, exactly, Bob," drawled old Kirkby, who well knew what was coming.

"Yes, I dare say you are right. I was up at Evergreen at the time, looking after timber interests, when a mule came wandering into the camp, saddle and pack still on his back."

"I knowed that there mule," said Kirkby. "I'd sold it to a feller named Newbold, that had come out yere an' married Louise Rosser, old man Rosser's daughter, an' him dead, an' she bein' an orphan, an' this feller bein' a fine young man from the east, not a bit of a tenderfoot nuther, a minin' engineer he called hisself."

"Well, I happened to be there too, you remember," continued Maitland, "and they made up a party to go and hunt up the man, thinking something might have happened."

"You see," explained Kirkby, "we was all mighty fond of Louise Rosser. The hull camp was actin' like a father to her at the time, so long's she hadn't nobody else. We was all at the weddin', too, some six months afore. The gal married him on her own hook, of course, nobody makin' her, but somehow she didn't seem none too happy, although Newbold, who was a perfect gent, treated her white as far as we knowed."

The old man stopped again and resumed his pipe.

"Kirkby, you tell the story," said Maitland.

"Not me," said Kirkby. "I have seen men shot afore for takin' words out'n other men's mouths an' I ain't never done that yit."

"You always were one of the most silent men I ever saw," laughed George. "Why, that day Pete yere got shot accidental an' had his whole breast tore out w'en we was lumbering over on Black Mountain, all you said was, 'Wash him off, put some axle grease on him an' tie him up.'"

"That's so," answered Pete, "an' there must have been somethin' powerful soothin' in that axle grease, for here I am, safe an' sound, to this day."

"It takes an old man," assented Kirkby, "to know when to keep his mouth shet. I learned it at the muzzle of a gun."

"I never knew before," laughed Maitland, "how still a man you can be. Well, to resume the story, having nothing to do, I went out with the posse the sheriff gathered up – "

"Him not thinkin' there had been any foul play," ejaculated the old man.

"No, certainly not."

"Well, what happened, Uncle Bob," inquired Enid.

"Just you wait," said young Bob, who had heard the story. "This is an awful good story, Cousin Enid."

"I can't wait much longer," returned the girl. "Please go on."

"Two days after we left the camp, we came across an awful figure, ragged, blood stained, wasted to a skeleton, starved – "

"I have seen men in extreme cases afore," interposed Kirkby, "but never none like him."

"Nor I," continued Maitland.

"Was it Newbold?" asked Enid.

"Yes."

"And what had happened to him?"

"He and his wife had been prospecting in these very mountains, she had fallen over a cliff and broken herself so terribly that Newbold had to shoot her."

"What!" exclaimed Bradshaw. "You don't mean that he actually killed her?"

"That's what he done," answered old Kirkby.

"Poor man," murmured Enid.

"But why?" asked Phillips.

"They were five days away from a settlement, there wasn't a human being within a hundred and fifty miles of them, not even an Indian," continued Maitland. "She was so frightfully broken and mangled that he couldn't carry her away."

"But why couldn't he leave her and go for help?" asked Bradshaw.

"The wolves, the bears, or the vultures would have got her. These woods and mountains were full of them then and there are some of them, left now, I guess."

The two little girls crept closer to their grown up cousin, each casting anxious glances beyond the fire light.

"Oh, you're all right, little gals," said Kirkby, reassuringly, "they wouldn't come nigh us while this fire is burnin' an' they're pretty well hunted out I guess; 'sides, there's men yere who'd like nothin' better'n drawin' a bead on a big b'ar."

"And so," continued Maitland, "when she begged him to shoot her, to put her out of her misery, he did so and then he started back to the settlement to tell his story and stumbled on us looking after him."

"What happened then?"

"I went back to the camp," said Maitland. "We loaded Newbold on a mule and took him with us. He was so crazy he didn't know what was happening, he went over the shooting again and again in his delirium. It was awful."

"Did he die?"

"I don't think so," was the answer, "but really I know nothing further about him. There were some good women in that camp, and we put him in their hands, and I left shortly afterwards."

"I kin tell the rest," said old Kirkby. "Knowin' more about the mountains than most people hereabouts I led the men that didn't go back with Bob an' Newbold to the place w'ere he said his woman fell, an' there we found her, her body, leastways."

"But the wolves?" queried the girl.

"He'd drug her into a kind of a holler and piled rocks over her. He'd gone down into the cañon, w'ich was somethin' frightful, an' then climbed up to w'ere she'd lodged. We had plenty of rope, havin' brought it along a purpose, an' we let ourselves down to the shelf where she was a lyin'. We wrapped her body up in blankets an' roped it an' finally drug her up on the old Injun trail, leastways I suppose it was made afore there was any Injuns, an' brought her back to Evergreen camp, w'ich

the only thing about it that was green was the swing doors on the saloon. We got a parson out from Denver an' give her a Christian burial."

"It that all?" asked Enid as the old man paused again.

"Nope."

"Oh, the man?" exclaimed the woman with quick intuition.

"He recovered his senses so they told us, an' w'en we got back he'd gone."

"Where?" was the instant question.

Old Kirkby stretched out his hands.

"Don't ax me," he said. "He'd jest gone. I ain't never seed or heerd of him sence. Poor little Louise Rosser, she did have a hard time."

"Yes," said Enid, "but I think the man had a harder time than she. He loved her?"

"It looked like it," answered Kirkby.

"If you had seen him, his remorse, his anguish, his horror," said Maitland, "you wouldn't have had any doubt about it. But it is getting late. In the mountains everybody gets up at daybreak. Your sleeping bags are in the tents, ladies, time to go to bed."

As the party broke up, old Kirkby rose slowly to his feet. He looked meaningly toward the young woman, upon whom the spell of the tragedy still lingered, he nodded toward the brook, and then repeated his speaking glance at her. His meaning was patent, although no one else had seen the covert invitation.

"Come, Kirkby," said the girl in quick response, "you shall be my escort. I want a drink before I turn in. No, never mind," she said, as Bradshaw and Phillips both volunteered, "not this time."

The old frontiersman and the young girl strolled off together. They stopped by the brink of the rushing torrent a few yards away. The noise that it made drowned the low tones of their voices and kept the others, busy preparing to retire, from hearing what they said.

"That ain't quite all the story, Miss Enid," said the old trapper meaningly. "There was another man."

"What!" exclaimed the girl.

"Oh, there wasn't nothin' wrong with Louise Rosser, w'ich she was Louise Newbold, but there was another man. I suspected it afore, that's why she was sad. W'en we found her body I knowed it."

"I don't understand."

"These'll explain," said Kirkby. He drew out from his rough hunting coat a package of soiled letters; they were carefully enclosed in an oil skin and tied with a faded ribbon. "You see," he continued, holding them in his hand, yet carefully concealing them from the people at the fire. "W'en she fell off the cliff – somehow the mule lost his footin', nobody never knowed how, leastways the mule was dead an' couldn't tell – she struck on a spur or shelf about a hundred feet below the brink. Evidently she was carryin' the letters in her dress. Her bosom was frightfully tore open an' the letters was lying there. Newbold didn't see 'em, because he went down into the cañon an' came up to the shelf, or butte head, w'ere the body was lyin', but we dropped down. I was the first man down an' I got 'em. Nobody else seein' me, an' there ain't no human eyes, not even my wife's, that's ever looked on them letters, except mine and now yourn."

"You are going to give them to me?"

"I am," said Kirkby.

"But why?"

"I want you to know the hull story."

"But why, again?"

"I rather guess them letters'll tell," answered the old man evasively, "an' I like you, and I don't want to see you throwed away."

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, curiously, thrilling to the solemnity of the moment, the seriousness, the kind affection of the old frontiersman, the weird scene, the fire light, the tents

gleaming ghost-like, the black wall of the cañon and the tops of the mountain range broadening out beneath the stars in the clear sky where they twinkled above her head. The strange and terrible story, and now the letters in her hand which somehow seemed to be imbued with human feeling, greatly affected her! Kirkby patted her on the shoulder.

"Read the letters," he said. "They'll tell the story. Good-night."

CHAPTER VI
THE POOL AND THE WATER SPRITE

Long after the others in the camp had sunk into the profound slumber of weary bodies and good consciences, a solitary candle in the small tent occupied by Enid Maitland alone, gave evidence that she was busy over the letters which Kirkby had handed to her.

It was a very thoughtful girl indeed who confronted the old frontiersman the next morning. At the first convenient opportunity when they were alone together she handed him the packet of letters.

"Have you read 'em?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Wall, you keep 'em," said the old man gravely. "Mebbe you'll want to read 'em agin."

"But I don't understand why you want me to have them."

"Wall, I'm not quite sure myself why, but leastways I do an' – "

"I shall be very glad to keep them," said the girl still more gravely, slipping them into one of the pockets of her hunting shirt as she spoke.

The packet was not bulky, the letters were not many nor were they of any great length. She could easily carry them on her person and in some strange and inexplicable way she was rather glad to have them. She could not, as she had said, see any personal application to herself in them, and yet in some way she did feel that the solution of the mystery would be hers some day. Especially did she think this on account of the strange but quiet open emphasis of the old hunter.

There was much to do about the camp in the mornings. Horses and burros to be looked after, fire wood to be cut, plans for the day arranged, excursions planned, mountain climbs projected. Later on unwonted hands must be taught to cast the fly for the mountain trout which filled the brook and pool, and all the varied duties, details and fascinating possibilities of camp life must be explained to the new-comers.

The first few days were days of learning and preparation, days of mishap and misadventure, of joyous laughter over blunders in getting settled, or learning the mysteries of rod and line, of becoming hardened and acclimated. The weather proved perfect; it was late October and the nights were very cold, but there was no rain and the bright sunny days were invigorating and exhilarating to the last degree. They had huge fires and plenty of blankets and the colder it was in the night the better they slept.

It was an intensely new experience for the girl from Philadelphia, but she showed a marked interest and adaptability, and entered with the keenest zest into all the opportunities of the charming days. She was a good sportswoman and she soon learned to throw a fly with the best of them. Old Kirkby took her under his especial protection, and as he was one of the best rods in the mountains, she enjoyed every advantage.

She had always lived in the midst of life. Except in the privacy of her own chamber she had rarely ever been alone before – not twenty feet from a man: she thought whimsically; but here the charm of solitude attracted her, she liked to take her rod and wander off alone. She actually enjoyed it.

The main stream that flowed down the cañon was fed by many affluents from the mountain sides, and in each of them voracious trout appeared. She explored them as she had opportunity. Sometimes with the others but more often by herself. She discovered charming and exquisite nooks, little stretches of grass, the size perhaps of a small room, flower decked, ferny bordered, overshadowed by tall gaunt pine trees, the sunlight filtering through their thin foliage, checkering the verdant carpet beneath. Huge moss covered boulders, wet with the everdashing spray of the roaring brooks, lay in mid-stream and with other natural stepping stones hard-by invited her to cross to either shore. Waterfalls laughed musically in her ears, deep still pools tempted her skill and address.

Sometimes leaving rod and basket by the waterside, she climbed some particularly steep acclivity of the cañon wall and stood poised, wind blown, a nymph of the woods, upon some pinnacle of rock rising needle like at the cañon's edge above the sea of verdure which the wind waved to and fro beneath her feet. There in the bright light, with the breeze blowing her golden hair, she looked like some Norse goddess, blue eyed, exhilarated, triumphant.

She was a perfectly formed woman on the ancient noble lines of Milo rather than the degenerate softness of Medici. She grew stronger of limb and fuller of breath, quicker and steadier of eye and hand, cooler of nerve, in these demanding, compelling adventures among the rocks in this mountain air. She was not a tall woman, indeed slightly under rather than over the medium size, but she was so ideally proportioned, she carried herself with the fearlessness of a young chamois, that she looked taller than she was. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon her, yet she had the grace of Hebe, the strength of Pallas Athene, and the swiftness of motion of Atalanta. Had she but carried bow and spear, had she worn tunic and sandals, she might have stood for Diana and she would have had no cause to blush by comparison with the finest model of Praxiteles' chisel or the most splendid and glowing example of Appelles' brush.

Uncle Robert was delighted with her. His contribution to her western outfit was a small Winchester. She displayed astonishing aptitude under his instructions and soon became wonderfully proficient with that deadly weapon and with a revolver also. There was little danger to be apprehended in the daytime among the mountains the more experienced men thought, still it was wise for the girl always to have a weapon in readiness, so in her journeyings, either the Winchester was slung from her shoulder or carried in her hand, or else the Colt dangled at her hip. At first she took both, but finally it was with reluctance that she could be persuaded to take either. Nothing had ever happened. Save for a few birds now and then she had seemed the only tenant of the wildernesses of her choice.

One night after a camping experience of nearly two weeks in the mountains, and just before the time for breaking up and going back to civilization, she announced that early the next morning she was going down the cañon for a day's fishing excursion.

None of the party had ever followed the little river very far, but it was known that some ten miles below the stream merged in a lovely gem-like lake in a sort of crater in the mountains. From thence by a series of waterfalls it descended through the foothills to the distant plains beyond. The others had arranged to climb one especially dangerous and ambition provoking peak which towered above them and which had never before been surmounted so far as they knew. Enid enjoyed mountain climbing. She liked the uplift in feeling that came from going higher and higher till some crest was gained, but on this occasion they urged her to accompany them in vain.

When the fixity of her decision was established she had a number of offers to accompany her, but declined them all, bidding the others go their way. Mrs. Maitland, who was not feeling very well, old Kirkby, who had climbed too many mountains to feel much interest in that game, and Pete, the horse wrangler, who had to look after the stock, remained in camp; the others, with the exception of Enid, started at daybreak for their long ascent. She waited until the sun was about an hour high and then bade good-by to the three and began the descent of the cañon. Traveling light for she was going far – farther indeed than she knew – she left her Winchester at home, but carried the revolver with the fishing tackle and substantial luncheon.

Now the river – a river by courtesy only – and the cañon turned sharply back on themselves just beyond the little meadow where the camp was pitched. Past the tents that had been their home for this joyous period the river ran due east for a few hundred feet, after which it curved sharply, doubled back and flowed westward for several miles before it gradually swung around to the east on its proper course again.

It had been Enid's purpose to cut across the hills and strike the river where it turned eastward once more, avoiding the long detour back. In fact she had declared her intention of doing that to Kirkby and he had given her careful directions so that she should not get lost in the mountains.

But she had plenty of time and no excuse or reason for saving it; she never tired of the charm of the cañon; therefore, instead of plunging directly over the spur of the range, she followed the familiar trail and after she had passed westward far beyond the limits of the camp to the turning, she decided, in accordance with that utterly irresponsible thing, a woman's will, that she would not go down the cañon that day after all, but that she would cross back over the range and strike the river a few miles above the camp and go up the cañon instead.

She had been up in that direction a few times, but only for a short distance, as the ascent above the camp was very sharp; in fact for a little more than a mile the brook was only a succession of waterfalls; the best fishing was below the camp and the finest woods were deeper in the cañon. She suddenly concluded that she would like to see what was up in that unexplored section of the country and so, with scarcely a momentary hesitation, she abandoned her former plan and began the ascent of the range.

Upon decisions so lightly taken what momentous consequences depend? Whether she should go up the stream or down the stream, whether she should follow the rivulet to its source or descend it to its mouth, was apparently a matter of little moment, yet her whole life turned absolutely upon that decision. The idle and unconsidered choice of the hour was fraught with gravest possibilities. Had that election been made with any suspicion, with any foreknowledge, had it come as the result of careful reasoning or far-seeing of probabilities, it might have been understandable, but an impulse, a whim, the vagrant idea of an idle hour, the careless chance of a moment, and behold! a life is changed. On one side were youth and innocence, freedom and contentment, a happy day, a good rest by the cheerful fire at night; on the other, peril of life, struggle, love, jealousy, self-sacrifice, devotion, suffering, knowledge – scarcely Eve herself when she stood apple in hand with ignorance and pleasure around her and enlightenment and sorrow before her, had greater choice to make.

How fortunate we are that the future is veiled, that the psalmist's prayer that he might know his end and be certified how long he had to live is one that will not and cannot be granted; that it has been given to but One to foresee His own future, for no power apparently could enable us to stand up against what might be, because we are only human beings not sufficiently alight with the spark divine. We wait for the end because we must, but thank God we know it not until it comes.

Nothing of this appeared to the girl that bright sunny morning. Fate hid in those mountains under the guise of fancy. Lighthearted, carefree, fitted with buoyant joy over every fact of life, she left the flowing water and scaled the cliff beyond which in the wilderness she was to find, after all, the world.

The ascent was longer and more difficult and dangerous than she had imagined when she first confronted it, perhaps it was typical and foretold her progress. More than once she had to stop and carefully examine the face of the cañon wall for a practicable trail; more than once she had to exercise extremest care in her climb, but she was a bold and fearless mountaineer by this time and at last surmounting every difficulty she stood panting slightly, a little tired but triumphant, upon the summit.

The ground was rocky and broken, the timber line was close above her and she judged that she must be several miles from the camp. The cañon was very crooked, she could see only a few hundred yards of it in any direction. She scanned her circumscribed limited horizon eagerly for the smoke from the great fire that they always kept burning in the camp, but not a sign of it was visible. She was evidently a thousand feet above the river whence she had come. Her standing ground was a rocky ridge which fell away more gently on the other side for perhaps two hundred feet toward the same brook. She could see through vistas in the trees the up-tossed peaks of the main range, bare, chaotic, snow covered, lonely, majestic, terrible.

The awe of the everlasting hills is greater than that of the heaving sea. Save in the infrequent periods of calm, the latter always moves, the mountains are the same for all time. The ocean is quick, noisy, living; the mountains are calm, still – dead.

The girl stood as it were on the roof of the world, a solitary human being, so far as she knew, in the eye of God above her. Ah, but the Eyes Divine look long and see far; things beyond the human ken are all revealed. None of the party had ever come this far from the camp in this direction she knew. And she was glad to be the first, as she fatuously thought, to observe that majestic solitude.

Surveying the great range she wondered where the peak climbers might be. Keen sighted though she was she could not discover them. The crest that they were attempting lay in another direction hidden by a nearer spur. She was in the very heart of the mountains; peaks and ridges rose all about her, so much so that the general direction of the great range was lost. She was at the center of a far flung concavity of crest and range. She marked one towering point to the right of her that rose massively grand above all the others. To-morrow she would climb to that high point and from its lofty elevation look upon the heavens above and the earth beneath, aye and the waters under the earth far below. To-morrow! – it is generally known that we do not usually attempt the high points in life's range at once, content are we with lower altitudes to-day.

There was no sound above her, the rushing water over the rocks upon the nearer side she could hear faintly beneath her, there was no wind about her, to stir the long needles of the pines. It was very still, the kind of a stillness of body which is the outward and visible complement of that stillness of the soul in which men know God. There had been no earthquake, no storm, the mountains had not heaved beneath her feet, the great and strong wind had not passed by, the rocks had not been rent and broken, yet Enid caught herself listening as if for a Voice. The thrall of majesty, silence, loneliness was upon her. She stood – one stands when there is a chance of meeting God on the way, one does not kneel until He comes – with her raised hands clasped, her head uplifted in exultation unspeakable, God-conquered with her face to heaven upturned.

"I will lift up mine eyes to the hills whence cometh my salvation," her heart sang voicelessly. "We praise Thee, O God, we magnify Thy Holy Name forever," floated through her brain, in great appreciation of the marvelous works of the Almighty Shaping Master Hand. Caught up as it were into the heavens, her soul leaped to meet its maker. Thinking to find God she waited there on the heaven-kissing hill.

How long she stayed she did not realize; she took no note of time, it did not occur to her even to look at the watch on her wrist; she had swept the skyline cut off as it were by the peaks when first she came, and when at last she turned away – even divinest moments must have an end – she looked not backward. She saw not a little cloud hid on the horizon behind the rampart of ages, as it were, no bigger than a man's hand, a cloud full of portent and which would alarm greatly the veteran Kirkby in the camp and Maitland on the mountain top. Both of them unfortunately were unable to see it, one being on the other side of the range, and the other deep in the cañon, and for both of them as for the girl the sun still shone brightly.

The declivity to the river on the upper side was comparatively easy and Enid Maitland went slowly and thoughtfully down to it until she reached the young torrent. She got her tackle ready, but did no casting as she made her way slowly up the ever narrowing, ever rising cañon. She was charmed and thrilled by the wild beauty of the way, the spell of the mountains was deep upon her. Thoughtfully she wandered on until, presently she came to another little amphitheater like that where the camp was pitched, only smaller. Strange to say the brook, or river, here broadened into a little pool perhaps twenty feet across; a turn had thrown a full force of water against the huge boulder wall and in ages of effort a giant cup had been hollowed out of the native rock. The pool was perhaps four or five feet deep, the rocky bottom worn smooth, the clearing was upon the opposite side and the banks were heavily wooded beyond the spur of the rock which formed the back of the pool. She could see the trout in it. She made ready to try her fortune, but before she did so an idea came to her – daring, unconventional, extraordinary, begot of innocence and inexperience.

The water of course was very cold, but she had been accustomed all her life to taking a bath at the natural temperature of the water at whatever season. She knew that the only people in that

wilderness were the members of her own party; three of them were at the camp below, the others were ascending a mountain miles away. The cañon was deep sunk, and she satisfied herself by careful observation that the pool was not overlooked by any elevations far or near.

Her ablutions in common with those of the rest of the campers had been by piecemeal of necessity. Here was an opportunity for a plunge in a natural bath tub. She was as certain that she would be under no observation as if she were in the privacy of her own chamber. Here again impulse determined the end. In spite of her assurance there was some little apprehension in the glance that she cast about her, but it soon vanished. There was no one. She was absolutely alone. The pool and the chance of the plunge had brought her down to earth again; the thought of the enlivening exhilaration of the pure cold water dashing against her own sweet warm young body changed the current of her thoughts – the anticipation of it rather.

Impulsively she dropped her rod upon the grass, unpinned her cap, threw the fishing basket from her shoulder. She was wearing a stout sweater; that too joined the rest. Nervous hands manipulated buttons and the fastenings. In a few moments the sweet figure of youth, of beauty, of purity and of innocence brightened the sod and shed a white luster upon the green of the grass and moss and pines, reflecting light to the gray brown rocks of the range. So Eve may have looked on some bright Eden morning. A few steps forward and this nymph of the woods, this naiad of the mountains, plunged into the clear, cold waters of the pool – a water sprite and her fountain!

CHAPTER VII
THE BEAR, THE MAN AND THE FLOOD

The water was deep enough to receive her dive and the pool was long enough to enable her to swim a few strokes. The first chill of the icy water was soon lost in the vigorous motions in which she indulged, but no mere human form however hardened and inured could long endure that frigid bath. Reluctantly, yet with the knowledge that she must go, after one more sweeping dive and a few magnificent strokes, she raised her head from the water lapping her white shoulders, and shaking her face clear from the drops of crystal, faced the shore. It was no longer untenanted, she was no longer alone.

What she saw startled and alarmed her beyond measure. Planted on her clothes, looking straight at her, having come upon her in absolute silence, nothing having given her the least warning of his approach, and now gazing at her with red, hungry, evil, vicious eyes, the eyes of the covetous filled with the cruel lust of desire and carnal possession, and yet with a glint of surprise in them, too, as if he did not know quite what to make of the white loveliness of this unwonted apparition flashing so suddenly at him out of the water, this strange invader of the domain of which he fancied he was sole master and lord paramount, stood a great, monstrous frightful looking Grizzly Bear. *Ursus Horribilis*, indeed.

He was an aged monarch of the mountains, reddish brown in color originally, but now a hoary dirty gray. His body was massive and burly, his legs short, dark colored and immensely powerful. His broad square head moved restlessly. His fanged mouth opened and a low hoarse growl came from the red cavern of his throat. He was an old and terrible monster who had tasted the blood of man and who would not hesitate to attack even without provocation especially anything at once so harmless and so whitely inviting as the girl in the pool.

The girl forgot the chill of the water in the horror of that moment. Alone, naked, defenseless, lost in the mountains, with the most powerful, sanguinary and ferocious beast of the continent in front of her, she could neither fight nor fly, she could only wait his pleasure. He snuffed at her clothing a moment and stood with one fore foot advanced for a second or two growling deeply, evidently, she thought with almost superhuman keenness of perception, preparing to leap into the pool and seize upon her.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.