

eBook

Carmen's Messenger

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Carmen's Messenger

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I

FEATHERSTONE CHANGES HIS PLANS

It was getting dark, and a keen wind blew across the ragged pines beside the track, when Jake Foster walked up and down the station at Gardner's Crossing in North Ontario. Winter was moving southwards fast across the wilderness that rolled back to Hudson's Bay, silencing the brawling rivers and calming the stormy lakes, but the frost had scarcely touched the sheltered valley yet and the roar of a rapid throbbed among the trees. The sky had the crystal clearness that is often seen in northern Canada, but a long trail of smoke stretched above the town, and the fumes of soft coal mingled with the aromatic smell of the pines. Gardner's Crossing stood, an outpost of advancing industry, on the edge of the

lonely woods.

The blue reflections of big arc-lamps quivered between the foam-flakes on the river, a line of bright spots, stretching back along the bank, marked new avenues of wooden houses, and, across the bridge, the tops of tall buildings cut against the glow that shimmered about the town. At one end rose the great block of the Hulton factory, which lost something of its utilitarian ugliness at night. Its harsh, rectangular outline faded into the background of forest, and the rows of glimmering windows gave it a curious transparent look. It seemed to overflow with radiance and filled the air with rumbling sound.

In a large measure, Gardner's Crossing owed its rapid development to the enterprise of the Hulton Manufacturing Company. Hulton was ready to make anything out of lumber for which his salesmen found a demand; but his firm grip on the flourishing business had recently relaxed, and people wondered anxiously what would happen if he did not recover from the blow that had struck him down. Fred Hulton, his only son, and assistant treasurer to the Company, had been found in the factory one morning with a bullet-hole in his head, and it was believed that he had shot himself. His father gave his evidence at the inquiry with stern self-control, but took to his bed afterwards and had not left it yet. So far as the townsfolk knew, this was the first time he had shown any weakness of body or mind.

The train was late, but Foster enjoyed the pipe he lighted. It was ten years since he landed at Montreal, a raw lad without friends or money, and learned what hard work was in a lumber camp. Since then he had prospered, and the strenuous life he led for the first few years had not left much mark on him. Now he thought he had earned a holiday, and all arrangements for his visit to England were made. Featherstone, his partner, was going with him. Their sawmill, which was run by water-power, had closed for the winter, when building material was not wanted, and the development of a mineral claim they owned would be stopped by the frost. They had planned to put in a steam engine at the mill, but the Hulton Company had delayed a contract that would have kept the saws running until the river thawed.

Foster, however, did not regret this. Except on Sundays, he had seldom had an hour's leisure for the last few years. Gardner's Crossing, which was raw and new, had few amusements to offer its inhabitants; he was young, and now he could relax his efforts, felt that he was getting stale with monotonous toil. But he was a little anxious about Featherstone, who had gone to see a doctor in Toronto.

A whistle rang through the roar of the rapid and a fan-shaped beam of light swung round a bend in the track. Then the locomotive bell began to toll, and Foster walked past the cars as they rolled into the station. He found Featherstone putting on a fur coat at a vestibule door, and gave him a keen glance as he came down the steps. He thought his comrade looked graver than usual.

"Well," he said, "how did you get on?"

"I'll tell you later. Let's get home, but stop at Cameron's drug store for a minute."

Foster took his bag and put it in a small American car. He drove slowly across the bridge and up the main street of the town, because there was some traffic and light wagons stood in front of the stores. Then as he turned in towards the sidewalk, ready to pull up, he saw a man stop and fix his eyes on the car. The fellow did not live at the Crossing, but visited it now and then, and Foster had met him once when he called at the sawmill.

"Drive on," said Featherstone, touching his arm.

Although he was somewhat surprised, Foster did as he was told, and when they had passed a few blocks Featherstone resumed: "I can send down the prescription to-morrow. That was Daly on the sidewalk and I didn't want to meet him."

A minute later Foster stopped to avoid a horse that was kicking and plunging outside a livery stable while a crowd encouraged its driver with ironical shouts. Looking round, he thought he saw Daly following them, but a man ran to the horse's head and Foster seized the opportunity of getting past.

"What did the doctor tell you?" he asked.

"He was rather disappointing," Featherstone replied, and turned up the deep collar of his coat.

Foster, who saw that his comrade did not want to talk, imagined that he had got something of a shock. When they left the town, however, the jolting of the car made questions difficult and he was forced to mind his steering while the glare of the headlamps flickered across deep holes and ruts. Few of the dirt roads leading to the new Canadian cities are good, but the one they followed, though roughly graded, was worse than usual and broke down into a wagon trail when it ran into thick bush. For a time, the car lurched and labored like a ship at sea up and down hillocks and through soft patches, and Foster durst not lift his eyes until a cluster of lights twinkled among the trees. Then with a sigh of relief he ran into the yard of a silent sawmill and they were at home.

Supper was waiting, and although Foster opened a letter he found upon the table, neither of the men said anything of importance during the meal. When it was over, Featherstone sat down in a big chair by the stove, for the nights were getting cold. He was about thirty years of age, strongly built, and dressed in city clothes, but his face was pinched. For part of the summer, he and Foster had camped upon their new mineral claim in the bush and worked hard to prove the vein. June, as often happens in Canada, was a wet month, and although Featherstone was used to hardship, he sickened with influenza, perhaps in consequence of digging in heavy rain and sleeping in wet clothes. As he was nothing of a valetudinarian he made light of the attack, but did not get better as soon as he expected on his return, and went to see the Toronto doctor, when Foster urged him.

The latter lighted his pipe and looked about the room. It was warm and well lighted, and the furniture, which was plain but good, had been bought, piece by piece, to replace ruder articles they had made at the mill. One or two handsome skins lay upon the uncovered floor, and the walls were made of varnished cedar boards. A gun-rack occupied a corner, and the books on a shelf indicated that their owners had some literary taste, though there were works on mining and forestry. Above the shelf, the huge head of a moose, shot on a prospecting Journey to the North, hung between the smaller heads of bear and caribou.

Foster, who had hitherto lived in tents and shacks, remembered his misgivings when they built the house. Indeed, he had grumbled that it might prove a dangerous locking up of capital that was needed for the enlargement of the mill. Featherstone, however, insisted, and since most of the money was his, Foster gave in; but they had prospered since then. They were good friends, and had learned to allow for each other's point of view during several years of strenuous toil and stern economy. Still, Foster admitted that their success was not altogether due to their own efforts, because once or twice, when they had to face a financial crisis, the situation was saved by a check Featherstone got from home. By and by the latter turned to his comrade.

"Your letter was from Hulton, wasn't it? What does he want?"

"He doesn't state, but asks us to call at the factory to-morrow evening. That's all, but I heard in town that the doctor and nurse had left; Cameron told me Hulton fired them both because they objected to his getting up."

"It's possible," Featherstone agreed. "Hulton's not the man to bother about his health or etiquette when he wants to do a thing. Anyhow, as he has been a pretty good friend of ours, we will have to go, but I wouldn't have imagined he'd have been ready to talk about the tragedy just yet."

"You think that is what he wants to talk about?"

Featherstone nodded. "We knew Fred Hulton better than anybody at the Crossing, and at the inquiry I tried to indicate that his death was due to an accident. I imagined that Hulton was grateful. It's true that I don't see how the accident could have happened, but I don't believe Fred shot himself. Though it was an open verdict, you and I and Hulton are perhaps the only people who take this view."

"We'll let it drop until to-morrow. What did you learn at Toronto?"

"Perhaps the most important thing was that I'll have to give up my trip to the Old Country."

"Ah," said Foster, who waited, trying to hide his disappointment and alarm, for he saw that his suspicions about his partner's health had been correct.

"The doctor didn't think it wise; said something about England's being too damp, and objected to a winter voyage," Featherstone resumed. "It looks as if you were better at calculating the profit on a lumber deal than diagnosing illness, because while you doctored me for influenza, it was pneumonia I had. However, I admit that you did your best and you needn't feel anxious. It seems I'm not much the worse, though I'll have to be careful for the next few months, which I'm to spend on the Pacific slope, California for choice. It's a bit of a knock, but can't be helped."

Foster declared his sympathy, but Featherstone stopped him. "There's another matter; that fellow Daly's here again. I expect you guessed what he came for the last time?"

"I did. The bank-book showed you drew a rather large sum."

"No doubt you thought it significant that the check was payable to myself?"

Foster was silent for a moment or two. He trusted his comrade, but suspected that there was something in his past history that he meant to hide. For one thing, Featherstone never spoke about his life in the Old Country, and Foster was surprised when he stated his intention of spending a few months there. It looked as if Daly knew his secret and had used his knowledge to blackmail him.

"I'll go to California with you," he said. "One place is as good as another for a holiday, and I'm really not keen on going home. I've no near relations and have lost touch with my friends."

"No," said Featherstone, with a grateful look. "I want you to go to England and stay with my people. I haven't said much about them, but you'll find they will do their best to make things pleasant. Anyhow, it's time you knew that I left home in serious trouble and meant to stop away until I thought the cause of it forgotten. Well, not long ago, I heard that the man I'd injured was dead, but had sent me word that as I had, no doubt, paid for my fault in this country, I'd nothing more to fear. Then Daly got upon my track."

Foster nodded sympathetically. "How much does he know?"

"Enough to be dangerous, but I don't know how he learned it and don't mean to keep on buying him off. Now I want you to go home and tell my people what we're doing; if you can give them the impression that I've, so to speak, made good in Canada, so much the better. This is not entirely for my sake, but because it might be a relief to them. You see, they've had to suffer something on my account and felt my disgrace, but, although I deserved it, they wouldn't give me up."

"Very well," said Foster, "I'll do as you wish."

He knocked out and re-filled his pipe, as an excuse for saying nothing more, because he was somewhat moved. He guessed that Featherstone had not found it easy to take him into his confidence, and felt that he had atoned for his errors in the past. Still, there was a point he was doubtful about. His comrade had a well-bred air, and Foster imagined that his people were rich and fastidious.

"I'm not sure your relatives will enjoy my visit," he resumed after a time. "My father and mother died when I was young, and I was sent to a second-rate school and kept there by an uncle who wanted to get rid of me. Then I'd a year or two in a merchant's office and cheap lodgings, and when I'd had enough of both came out to Canada with about five pounds. You know how I've lived here."

Featherstone gave him an amused glance. "You needn't let that trouble you. It's curious, but the bush seems to bring out the best that's in a man. I can't see why getting wet and half frozen, working fourteen hours a day, and often going without your dinner, should have a refining influence, but it has. Besides, I'm inclined to think you have learned more in the Northwest than they could have taught you at an English university. Anyhow, you'll find my people aren't hard to please."

"When are you going to California?" Foster, who felt half embarrassed, asked.

"Let's fix Thursday next, and I'll start with you."

"But I'm going east, and your way's by Vancouver."

"Just so," said Featherstone dryly. "For all that, I think I'll start east, and then get on to a west-bound train at a station down the line. The folks at the Crossing know I'm going home, and I don't want to put Daly on my track." He smoked in silence for a few moments, and then added: "I wonder whether Austin helped the fellow to get after me?"

Foster looked up with surprise, but admitted that his partner might be right. Austin was a real-estate agent who now and then speculated in lumber and mineral claims. He had some influence at the Crossing where, however, he was more feared than liked, since he lent money and bought up mortgages. On three or four occasions he had been a business rival of Foster and Featherstone's, and the former thought he might not have forgiven them for beating him.

"It's possible," he said thoughtfully. "But you don't imagine Daly told him what he knows about you?"

"I should think it most unlikely," Featherstone rejoined. "Daly means to keep all he can get for himself, but if he gave Austin a hint that he could injure me, the fellow might be willing to help. He's pretty often up against us; but we'll let that go. You're a friend of Carmen Austin's, and as you'll meet her at the reunion, it might be better if you didn't tell her I have changed my plans. Of course, I don't mean to hint that she has anything to do with her father's schemes."

Foster laughed. He liked Carmen Austin and was mildly flattered by the favor she showed him, but thought he knew her well enough not to attach much importance to this. Carmen was clever and ambitious, and would, no doubt, choose a husband who had wealth and influence. Though very young, she was the acknowledged leader of society at the Crossing.

"You needn't be afraid of hurting my feelings," he said. "To some extent I do enjoy Miss Austin's patronage, but I know my drawbacks and don't cherish any foolish hopes. If I did, I believe she'd tactfully nip them in the bud."

"On the whole, I'm pleased to hear it," Featherstone replied. "Now, if you don't mind, there's something I want to read."

II

THE MILL-OWNER

Big arc-lamps flared above the railroad track that crossed the yard of the Hulton factory, but except for a yellow glimmer from a few upper windows, the building rose in a huge dark oblong against the sky. The sharp clanging of a locomotive bell jarred on the silence, for the mill hands had gone home and the wheels that often hummed all night were still. It seemed to Foster, who glanced at his watch as he picked his way among the lines, that the shadow of the recent tragedy brooded over the place.

"I don't know that I'm imaginative; but I wouldn't like the night-watchman's job just now," he remarked to Featherstone. "Hulton's illness can't have spoiled his nerve, or he'd have asked us to meet him at his house, in view of what he probably wants to talk about."

"I suspect that Hulton's nerve is better than yours or mine, and although I'm sorry for the old man. It was a surprise to me when he broke down," Featherstone replied. "This is the first time I've been in the mill since Fred was shot, and I'll own that I'd sooner have come in daylight."

They went round a row of loaded cars to the timekeeper's office, where a man told them that Hulton was waiting and they were to go right up. A dark passage, along which their footsteps echoed, led to a flight of stairs, and they felt there was something oppressive in the gloom, but a small light burned near the top of the building, and when they reached a landing Featherstone touched his partner. It was at this spot Fred Hulton had been found lying on the floor, with a fouled pistol of a make he was known to practice with near his hand. Foster shivered as he noted the cleanness of the boards. It indicated careful scrubbing, and was somehow more daunting than a sign of what had happened there.

A short flight of stairs led to the offices of the head of the firm, and the treasurer, whose assistant Fred Hulton had been. They went on and entered a small, plainly-furnished room, well lighted by electric lamps, where Hulton sat at a writing-table and signed them to sit down. His shoulders were bent, his clothes hung slackly on his powerful frame, and Featherstone thought his hair had grown whiter since he saw him last. He looked ill, but his face was hard and resolute, and when he let his eyes rest on the young men his mouth was firmly set. Hulton's business acumen and tenacity were known, and it was supposed that the latter quality had helped him much in the earlier part of his career. The other man, who sat close by, was the treasurer, Percival.

"To begin with, I want to thank you for the way you gave your evidence," Hulton said to Featherstone, who had been one of the last to see Fred Hulton alive.

"I don't know that thanks are needed," Featherstone replied. "I had promised to tell the truth."

"Just so. The truth, however, strikes different people differently, and you gave the matter the most favorable look you could. We'll let it go at that. I suppose you're still convinced my son was in his usual health and spirits? Mr. Percival is in my confidence, and we can talk without reserve."

"Yes, sir; I never found him morbid, and he was cheerful when I saw him late that night."

"In fact, you were surprised when you heard what happened soon after you left?" Hulton suggested in a quiet voice.

"I was shocked. But, if I catch your meaning, I was puzzled afterwards, and had better say I see no light yet."

"Is this how you feel about it?" Hulton asked Foster.

"It is," said Foster, noting the man's stern calm, and Hulton turned to Percival.

"That's my first point! These men knew my son."

Then he looked at Featherstone. "Fred went with you now and then on hunting and prospecting trips, and that probably led to a certain intimacy. You say he was never morbid; did you ever find him anxious or disturbed?"

Featherstone pondered. Fred Hulton, who was younger, had spent a year or two in Europe before he entered the factory. He had moreover told Featherstone about some trouble he had got into there, but the latter could not tell how much his father knew.

"You can talk straight," Hulton resumed. "I guess I won't be shocked."

"Very well. I did find him disturbed once or twice. Perhaps you knew he had some difficulties in Paris."

"I knew about the girl," Hulton answered grimly. "I found that out not long since; she was a clever adventuress. But I don't know where Fred got the money he sent her. Did you lend it him?"

"I lent him some," Featherstone admitted, hesitatingly. "He told me afterwards she had promised to make no further claim, and I understand she kept her word."

Hulton turned to the treasurer. "You will see Mr. Featherstone about this to-morrow. I've cleared up another point; Fred was not being urged to send more money." Then he asked Foster: "Do you know if he had any other dangerous friends?"

"There was Daly. They were friends, in a way, and I wouldn't trust the fellow. Still, I don't know how far his influence went, and imagine Fred hadn't much to do with him for some months. Besides, Daly wasn't at the Crossing when-----"

Hulton said nothing for the next few moments and Foster mused. Fred Hulton had been very likable, in spite of certain weaknesses, and he thought it cost his father something to talk about him as he did. Hulton, however, seldom showed what he felt and would, no doubt, take the line he thought best with a stoic disregard of the pain it might cause. He rested his elbow on the table, as if he were tired, and sat very quiet with his chin on his hand, until he asked Featherstone:

"Why did you lend Fred the money he sent the girl?"

"For one thing, because he was my friend," Featherstone answered with a flush. "Then I knew into what straits the need of money can drive a young man. I got into trouble myself some years ago."

Hulton nodded. "Thank you. You helped him out. You have no ground to think he was embarrassed by the need of money on the night he died?"

"I feel sure he was not. He kept me some time talking cheerfully about a hunting trip we meant to make."

"Well," said Hulton quietly, "you're going to be surprised now. I did not give my evidence as frankly as you claim to have done, but kept something back. Mr. Percival was away for two or three weeks, and Fred was the only person besides myself who knew the combination that opens the safe. On the morning after we found him dead I examined the safe. A number of bonds and a wad of small bills for wages had gone. It was significant that Percival was due back next day."

Featherstone started, but his face was hot with scornful anger.

"That had no significance! I'd as soon suspect myself or my partner of stealing the bonds, but the safe's being open throws a new light upon the thing. Somebody you haven't thought of yet knew or found out the combination."

"Then, in face of what you have heard, you do not believe my son fired the shot that took his life?"

"No, sir," said Featherstone, with quiet earnestness. "I never thought it, and it is impossible to believe it now."

"My partner's opinion's mine," Foster broke in. Hulton looked from one to the other and a curious steely glitter came into his eyes. It hinted at a pitiless, unchangeable purpose, and bracing himself with an effort he clenched his fist.

"Nor do I believe it! If necessary, I'll let my business and factory go and spend the last dollar I've got to find the man who killed my boy."

Next moment he sank limply back in his chair, as if the strain and vindictive emotion, reacting on his physical weakness, had overcome him, and there was silence until he recovered. Foster felt it something of a relief that the man's icy self-control had broken down.

"Very well," Hulton resumed in a shaky voice. "I brought you here because you knew my son and I wanted your support. Then I meant to convince Percival, whose help I may need to clear the boy's good name. We'll let that go and try to be practical."

"Were the bonds negotiable?" Foster asked. "Could they be easily sold?"

Percival, who was about fifty years of age and had a reserved manner, answered: "Some were bearer bonds, and, if the thief acted quickly, would be as good as cash. Most, however, were registered stock, and it is probable that he would be afraid to sell them in Canada or America. The transfers would require to be forged."

"What about Europe?"

"That is where the danger lies. If he had clever confederates, a large part of the value of the bonds could be borrowed from a bank, or they might be sold to unsuspecting buyers on a French or German bourse."

"But this would depend on the publicity you gave their theft."

"Exactly," Percival agreed with some dryness. "I have been trying to make Mr. Hulton recognize it."

Hulton's tense look softened and he smiled. "Percival seems to have forgotten that I am a business man. At the inquiry I shirked my duty by keeping something back, and now he expects me to brand my son's good name. The money must go. In a sense, it is a trifling loss."

"At last, you put me wise," said Percival. "But to prove that Fred was innocent you must find the thief."

"That's so. It must be done with skill and tact by the best New York private investigation man that I can hire. The job's too delicate for the regular police."

Featherstone, who had been sitting thoughtfully silent, looked up. "Perhaps it's lucky the wage clerk went into the treasurer's office after I left, though I spoke to the watchman, Jordan, as I went out."

"No," said Percival sharply. "It wasn't Jordan's week on night-guard."

There was silence for a moment, and then Hulton asked: "Where did you meet the man you thought was Jordan? Did he answer you?"

"He was going along the ground-floor passage in front of me, and the only light was in the pay-office at the end. He stood in the doorway as I passed and I said, 'It's a cold night, Tom.' I'd gone a few yards when he answered, 'It will be colder soon.'"

"Then as you passed the door he must have seen your face, though you could not see his," said Hulton, who turned to Percival. "Clark was on night-guard and his name's not Tom. Where was he when Mr. Featherstone left?"

"In the lathe-room at the other end of the building. The punch in the check-clock shows it," Percival replied.

Hulton pondered, knitting his brows, before he said, "Since you thought the man was Jordan, you wouldn't know him again."

"No; he was about Jordan's height and build, but I only saw his figure. It showed dark and rather indistinct against the light."

"Well," said Hulton, "you see the importance of this. We have something to go upon; a stranger was in the factory." Then he got up with a look of keen relief in his worn face. "I thank you and your partner; you have given me hope. Some day all who knew my boy will believe what you believe. Now I have something to say to Percival, and then he must help me home to bed."

He shook hands with them and let them go. They left the factory in silence, but as they crossed the yard Foster remarked: "I'm sorry for Hulton. For all his quietness, he takes the thing very hard."

"I imagine the fellow who shot Fred Hulton will need your pity most," Featherstone replied. "The old man will run him down with the determination and energy that helped him to build up his business. Money with brains behind it is a power, but I wouldn't like Hulton on my track if he hadn't a cent. There's something relentless about the man." He paused and resumed: "Well, he has a clew. It's curious I didn't think of mentioning before that I spoke to the watchman, but I thought the fellow was Jordan. I wonder how the thief will get the bonds across to Europe."

"There would be some danger in carrying them; anyhow, he'd imagine so, although it looks as if Hulton doesn't mean to tell the police much just yet. Of course, there's the mail, but the thief might be afraid to post the papers."

Featherstone nodded. "I think it's in Hulton's favor that he'll be satisfied with one of the private detective agencies to begin with, while the man he's looking for will be on his guard against the police. Besides, it's possible that the fellow won't take many precautions, since there's a plausible explanation of Fred Hulton's death."

"Do you think the man you passed saw you well enough to know you again?"

"He may have done so."

"Then if he imagined that you saw him, it would make a difference," Foster said thoughtfully, "He'd reckon that you were the greatest danger he had to guard against."

Featherstone stopped and caught his comrade's arm as the yard locomotive pushed some cars along the track they were about to cross, and the harsh tolling of the bell made talking difficult. When the cars had passed they let the matter drop and went back to the hotel where they had left their automobile.

III

FOSTER MAKES A PROMISE

There was been frost next evening and Foster drove to the Crossing without his comrade, who thought it wiser to stay at home. The reunion he was going to attend was held annually by one or two mutual-improvement societies that combined to open their winter sessions. It had originally begun with a lecture on art or philosophy, but had degenerated into a supper and dance. Supper came early, because in Canada the meal is generally served about six o'clock.

The wooden hall was decorated with flags and cedar boughs, and well filled with young men and women, besides a number of older citizens. The floor and music were good, and Foster enjoyed two dances before he met Carmen Austin. He had not sought her out, because she was surrounded by others, and he knew that if she wanted to dance with him she would let him know. It was generally wise to wait Carmen's pleasure.

When he left his last partner he stood in a quiet nook, looking about the hall. The girls were pretty and tastefully dressed, though generally paler than the young Englishwomen he remembered. The men were athletic, and their well-cut clothes, which fitted somewhat tightly, showed their finely developed but rather lean figures. They had a virile, decided look, and an ease of manner that indicated perfect self-confidence. Indeed, some were marked by an air of smartness that was half aggressive. A large number were employed at the Hulton factory, but there were brown-faced farmers and miners from the bush, as well as storekeepers from the town.

On the whole, their dress, manners and conversation were American, and Foster was sometimes puzzled by their inconsistency. He liked these people and got on well with them, but had soon discovered that in order to do so he must abandon his English habits and idiosyncrasies. His neighbors often showed a certain half-hostile contempt for the customs of the Old Country, and he admitted that had he been less acquainted with their character, it would have been easy to imagine that Gardner's Crossing was situated in Michigan instead of Ontario. Yet they had rejected the Reciprocity Treaty on patriotic grounds, and in a recent crisis had demonstrated their passionate approval of Britain's policy. He had no doubt that if the need came they would offer the mother country the best they had with generous enthusiasm, and nobody knew better that their best was very good.

By and by Carmen dismissed the young men around her and summoned him with a graceful motion of her fan. He crossed the floor, and when he stopped close by with a bow that was humorously respectful she gave him a cool, approving glance. Foster was twenty-eight, but looked younger. Though he had known hardship, his face was smooth, and when unoccupied he had a good-humored and somewhat languid air. He was tall and rather thin, but athletic toil had toughened and strengthened him, and he had frank gray eyes that generally smiled. A glove that looked significantly slack covered his left hand, which had been maimed by a circular saw when he worked in his mill.

Carmen was a blonde, but with none of the softness that often characterizes this type of beauty. Her features were sharply cut, her well-proportioned figure was firmly lined, and the lack of color in her face was made up for by the keen sparkle in her eyes. As a rule, Carmen Austin's wishes were carried out. She knew how to command, and rival beauties who now and then ventured to oppose her soon found that her power was unshakable.

"You haven't thought it worth while to ask for a dance yet," she remarked, and Foster could not tell if she was offended or not.

"No," he replied, smiling, "I was afraid of getting a disappointment, since I didn't know your plans, but only made a few engagements in case you sent for me. One finds it best to wait your orders."

Carmen studied him thoughtfully. "You generally take the proper line; sometimes I think you're cleverer than you look. Anyway, one isn't forced to explain things to you. Explaining what one wants is always annoying."

"Exactly. My business is to guess what you would like and carry it out as far as I can. When I'm right this saves you some trouble and gives me keen satisfaction. It makes me think I am intelligent."

"Our boys are a pretty good sample, but they don't talk like that. I suppose you learned it in the Old Country. You know, you're very English, in some respects."

"Well," said Foster, "that is really not my fault. I was born English, but I'll admit that I've found it a drawback since I came to Canada."

Carmen indicated the chair next her. "You may sit down if you like. You start for the Old Country on Thursday, don't you?"

"Thank you; yes," said Foster. "One likes to be in the fashion, and it's quite the proper thing to make the trip when work's finished for the winter. You find miners saving their wages to buy a ticket, and the Manitoba men sail across by dozens after a good harvest. As they often maintain that the Old Country's a back number, one wonders why they go."

"After all, I suppose they were born there."

"That doesn't seem to count. As a rule, there's nobody more Canadian first of all than the man who's only a Canadian by adoption."

"Then why do you want to go?"

"I can't tell you. I had a hard life in England and, on the whole, was glad to get away. Perhaps it's a homing instinct, like the pigeon's, and perhaps it's sentiment. We came out because nobody wanted us and have made ourselves pretty comfortable. America's our model and we have no use for English patronage, but every now and then the pull comes and we long to go back, though we wouldn't like to stop there. It's illogical, but if there was trouble in Europe and the Old Country needed help, we'd all go across."

"In a mild way, the journey's something of an adventure," Carmen suggested. "Doesn't that appeal to a man?"

"It does," Foster agreed. "One might imagine that there was enough adventure here, but it really isn't so. The lone trail has a mineral claim at the end of it; you look forward to the elevator company's receipt when you break the new furrow. Hardship gets as monotonous as comfort; you want something fresh, a job, in fact, that you don't undertake for money."

Of course, if you look at it economically, this is foolish."

"I like you better as a sentimentalist than a philosopher," Carmen answered. "It's the former one goes to when one wants things done. However, if you would like a dance-----"

She danced well and Foster knew there were men in the hall who envied him. He, moreover, imagined that Carmen knew it would be remarked that she had banished her other attendants and shown him special favor. This, of course, would not trouble her, because Carmen generally did what she pleased, but he felt inclined to wonder about her object. He knew her well enough to think she had an object. When the music stopped she said, "Now you may take me in to supper."

Supper was served in an ante-room, but, although this was contrary to local custom, the guests came in when they liked and were provided with small, separate tables. Instead of Foster's leading, Carmen guided him to a quiet nook, partly screened by cedar branches, where they could see without being seen. He thought it significant that a spot with such advantages should be unoccupied, but this did not cause him much surprise. Things generally happened as Carmen wanted, and it was a privilege to sup with the prettiest and cleverest girl in the hall.

"You are going to stay at Featherstone's home in England, aren't you?" she asked by and by.

"Yes," said Foster, who wondered how she knew. "Since I've spent ten years on the plains and in the bush, it will be a rather embarrassing change. You see, I'm better used to bachelor shacks and logging camps than English country houses."

Carmen firmly brought him back to the subject. "Do you know much about your partner's relatives? It's obvious that he belongs to a good family. However, you'll have him with you."

Foster smiled. He did not mean to tell her that Featherstone was not going with him.

"I know nothing about them. In fact, my ignorance of the habits of a good family rather weighs on my mind."

Carmen gave him a level, critical glance. "They won't be able to find much fault with you, and if they did, you wouldn't guess it, so it wouldn't matter. But that is not what I meant. You have been Featherstone's partner for some time, and it's curious that he has told you nothing about his home."

"He's reserved," said Foster, who looked up as Daly came into the room with a laughing girl, at whom Carmen glanced somewhat coldly. "Do you know what that man is doing here?"

"I don't, but as he's agent for an engineering company, I dare say he's looking for orders. Hulton's are buying new plant."

"But he's often in your father's office and at your house, and Mr. Austin doesn't buy machines."

"Then perhaps he's speculating in building lots; we deal in them," Carmen rejoined with a laugh. "I sometimes meet my father's friends, but don't ask them about their business."

She went on with her supper, and Daly and his companion sat down not far off. The fellow was well dressed and on the whole a handsome man, though there was nothing about him to excite marked attention. He looked a little older than Foster, who studied him thoughtfully. Daly had sold one or two machines in the neighborhood of the Crossing, but the business he did there hardly seemed to warrant his visit. It was possible that he made it an excuse for watching

Featherstone, but Foster fancied that Carmen knew more about him than she confessed.

"Perhaps you will visit Scotland before you come back," she said by and by.

"It's possible. Featherstone's relations live near the Border."

"Then I dare say you will take a packet for me to Edinburgh."

"Of course," said Foster, who felt some surprise, and thought Carmen saw this although she looked at him gratefully.

"I know you'll take care of it, and you don't ask questions; but you wonder why I want to send it by you. Well, the girls are inquisitive in our post office, and I'm sending the packet to a man. Besides, I wouldn't like it damaged, and things sometimes get broken in the mail."

Foster said this often happened and hinted that the man was fortunate, but Carmen laughed.

"Oh," she said, "he's as old as my father; we have friends in the Old Country. But there really is a little secret about the matter, and I don't want anybody but you to see the packet."

"Very well; but I believe the Customs searchers, who examine your baggage, are sometimes officious. They might think I was trying to smuggle and make me open the thing."

"No; they wouldn't suspect you. You have such a careless and innocent look. For all that, your friends know you can be trusted."

"Thank you! I suppose I'm lucky, because one meets people whose looks are against them. Anyhow, I'll take the packet, and if necessary, protect it with my life."

"It won't be necessary," Carmen answered, smiling. Although she talked about other matters for some minutes before she told him to take her back to the hall, he imagined this was tactful politeness and she did not want to dismiss him too soon after obtaining her object.

He danced one or two dances with other partners and enjoyed them keenly. His work was finished for the winter, and after the strenuous toil of the last ten years, it was a new and exhilarating experience to feel at liberty. Then there was no reason he should deny himself the pleasure he expected to derive from his trip. Their small mill was only adapted for the supply of certain kinds of lumber, for which there was now not much demand, and they had not enough money to remodel it, while business would not get brisk again until the spring.

By and by he went to the smoking-room and lighting a cigarette, thought over what Carmen had said to him. At first she had seemed anxious to find out something about Featherstone, but he was not surprised by this. Carmen liked to know as much as possible about everybody she met, and used her knowledge cleverly when it was to her advantage. The other matter was more puzzling and he wondered why she wanted to send a packet secretly to a man as old as her father. It might, of course, be a caprice, because girls were fond of mystery, but, as a rule, Carmen had a practical object for what she did. She had stated that they had friends in England, and this might mean that she had a lover. Perhaps she had exaggerated his age, and in any case, Foster thought it would not be a great drawback, if the man were rich. Carmen was rather ambitious than romantic.

Her plans, however, were not his business, and he felt no jealousy. He liked Carmen and had some respect for her abilities, but thought he would sooner not marry her, even if she were willing, which was most improbable. Since he had promised to take the packet, he would do so and say nothing about the matter.

He left the hall early, and driving home found his partner sitting by the stove.

"Was Daly at the reunion?" Featherstone asked.

Foster said he was there, and Featherstone resumed thoughtfully: "It's curious he hasn't come to the mill yet, but if he doesn't turn up before Thursday, he'll be too late. I'll be ready to start with you by the afternoon train, and as there's no use in spoiling a good plan for a few dollars, I'll buy a ticket and check my baggage to Ottawa. Then I'll get off at Streeton Creek, where I won't have long to wait if the west-bound train's on time. You can express my things on from Ottawa. The Montreal express stops about an hour."

"That ought to throw Daly off the track," Foster agreed, and they talked about something else.

IV

THE FIRST ADVENTURE

It was about ten o'clock at night and the Montreal express sped through the lonely forest of North Ontario. The train was light, for there were few passengers on board, and the road was by no means good, but in spite of the jolting Foster enjoyed his cigarette in a corner of the smoking compartment at the end of a car. A colored porter had told him his berth in the sleeper was ready, Featherstone had left the train, and most of the passengers were already in bed, but Foster did not want to follow them just yet. For a time, he had done with business, and was on his way to England. He relished the unusual sense of freedom.

A half-moon shone down upon the rugged wilderness, and he could see the black pines rush past. The cars lurched and he heard the great locomotive snort on the inclines. Now and then there was a roar as they sped across a bridge, and water glimmered among the rocks below; afterwards the roar sank into a steady clatter and a soothing throb of wheels. The car was warm, and Foster, who had given the porter his overcoat, was lighting another cigarette when a man came in and sat down opposite. He looked hard at Foster, who quietly returned his gaze. The man was about his own height but some years older, and his expression was disturbed.

Foster felt interested. He had faced danger in the northern wilderness, where he had risked starvation and traveled on frozen rivers when the ice was breaking up. Besides, he had once or twice been involved in savage fights about disputed mining claims, and knew how men looked when they bore a heavy strain. He thought the stranger was afraid but was not a coward.

"You're going to Ottawa, aren't you? I heard you talking to your friend," said the man.

"I'm going to Montreal, but don't see what that has to do with you."

The other made a sign of impatience. "Well, I dare say you can be trusted, and I've got to take a risk."

"It is a risk to trust a man you don't know," Foster rejoined. "But how can I help?"

"I want you to put on my coat and cap, and stay here, reading the *Witness*, for about ten minutes."

"Holding the newspaper in front of my face, I suppose? Well, it's rather an unusual request and I must know a little more. If there's a detective on your trail and you expect me to hold his attention while you hide or try to jump off the train, I must refuse."

The stranger smiled. "I've wired for the police to meet me at Ottawa; the trouble is that I mayn't get there. Time won't allow of a long explanation, but there are men on board who'd stop at nothing to prevent my arrival. In fact, to some extent, I'm putting my life in your hands."

Foster looked at him, surprised. He had not expected an adventure of this kind on a Canadian Pacific train, but did not think the other was exaggerating.

"How many men?" he asked.

"I've seen one, but know there are more."

"Then why not tell the conductor and have the train searched?"

"It wouldn't work. I might find one enemy, but I'd warn the others that I was on my guard, and to let them think I suspect no danger is the best chance I have. The conductor's making his way up the train, and I'm going to see if he can get me into the express car. It's the only safe place; the clerks are armed. Well, my business is lawful and in the public interest, and I take it you're a patriotic citizen."

Foster saw that he must decide quickly. Somehow he did not doubt the man, who kept his eyes on the door as if he expected somebody to come in. Moreover, he expected to be met by the police at Ottawa.

"It looks as if I'd run your risk when I put on your coat," he said.

"The porter's sweeping up the car, and if you keep the door open, you'll be safe while he's about. Besides, if I can't get into the express car, I'll come back. Give me ten minutes, and then, if I don't turn up and you feel uneasy, take off the coat and put the newspaper down."

"Very well," said Foster. "Perhaps you had better take my hat."

The stranger gave him his heavy fur coat. "I'll ask you for it at Ottawa. You're going to Montreal. What's your name?"

Foster told him and he resumed: "Then, if you don't see me, stop at the *Windsor*, where I can telegraph, a day or two. You'll be repaid for any expense or inconvenience. Well, I'm going. Thanks!"

"Good luck!" said Foster, who sat down and opened the *Witness*.

Now he was alone, he began to wonder if he had been imposed upon. The man, however, did not look like a criminal; though alarmed, he had an air of quiet authority. In a sense, it seemed absurd that he should think himself in danger. Violence was not common in Canada, where the carrying of weapons was prohibited, and Foster had never heard of any sensational crime on the big expresses. Still he thought the man would not be afraid without good cause. He did not look like a detective, and Foster felt nearly sure he had not got on board at the Crossing. This seemed to indicate that he could not have been investigating the tragedy there, particularly since Hulton had only recovered from the shock a few days ago. Then Hulton had stated that he meant to send for a New York man, and not that he had done so. The fellow, however, might be a confidential agent of the Government's, who had perhaps found out something about certain

mysterious attempts to damage public property.

By and by Foster smiled. Carmen had given him a valuable packet to take care of, and now this stranger had asked his help. Both had stated their confidence in him, but it was getting obvious that to look as if one could be trusted had its drawbacks. He did not feel much disturbed as he read the newspaper, which reported the arrest of two strangers with dynamite cartridges near the locks of a big canal, but presently put it down and glanced at his watch. The ten minutes had nearly gone and he looked out of the window. A frozen lake shimmered at the edge of the track and then, with a harsh uproar, the train plunged into the shadow of a cliff. On the summit stunted pines cut against the sky, and Foster knew they ran from the Manitoban border to the Ottawa across as rugged and stony a wilderness as there is in the Dominion. The stations were small and sometimes only places where the locomotives stopped for water. He could not remember when they had passed the last.

Looking at his watch again, he saw that he had kept his promise, but decided to give the man a few more minutes, and then go to his berth, unless he could learn something about him from the conductor. The berth was in the Pullman farther along the train, and after walking through the empty car he opened the door of a vestibule and stepped out on the platform. It was unprotected except for a brass rail at the side, which was divided in the middle where the steps went down. The floor jolted and a bitter wind that whistled between the vestibules buffeted him. Although he wore the fur coat, he shivered, and as he stepped across the gap between the platforms the door behind him rattled.

Turning sharply round, he saw a man's dark figure in the shadow of the curving roof, and felt his heart beat. Then the door he had been making for swung back, and he knew he had another antagonist to deal with. He carried no pistol and there was not much chance of a shout for help being heard, but he did not wait to be attacked, and with a sudden spring threw himself upon the man in front. He felt his knuckles jar and heard the fellow's head crash against the vestibule, but the other seized him as he turned. Foster surmised that they feared the report of a pistol but might use the knife, and determined to throw the fellow down the steps. If this proved impossible, he must try to jump off the train.

So far as he could remember, the savage struggle only lasted a few moments. His assailant had apparently not room enough to draw a weapon and Foster kept his grip on him, so that he could not free his right arm, although this left his own face exposed. He was breathless and exhausted when he fell against the rail, but with a tense effort he lifted the fellow off his feet. Since there seemed to be no other way, they must both fall off the train. He lost his balance and his foot slipping from the top step threw him backward. Then he missed the rail he clutched at and felt a heavy shock.

When his senses came back he found that he was lying on hard-frozen ground. There were dark firs about, but, a little farther on, the rails glistened in the moonlight, and he dully realized that he had fallen off the car. A faint snorting and a rumble that echoed across the forest showed that the train was going on. Foster lay still and listened until the sound died away. It looked as if nobody but the men who had attacked him knew there had been a struggle and he was left behind. Then he cautiously raised his head and leaning on his elbow looked about. It was a relief to find that he could do so, but he must see if his antagonist had fallen off with him, because if the fellow was not badly hurt he might renew the attack.

There was nothing in the shadow beside the line, the gap where the rails ran into the moonlight was empty, and everything was still, except for the sigh of the cold breeze among the firs. For all that, Foster hesitated about getting up. The train was probably going at forty miles an hour, the ground was hard, and he might find that some bones were broken when he tried to move. The shock had perhaps dulled his senses and prevented his feeling much pain. It was, however, bitterly cold, and making an effort he got shakily upon his feet. To his surprise, he discovered that he was not much the worse although he felt sore and dizzy, and he sat down on a fallen branch to think what he should do.

The next station was probably only marked by an agent's office and a water-tank. Besides, his antagonists might get down there and come back to look for him, in which case he would be at their mercy if they met. It was a long way to

the station they had passed, but he thought the safest plan would be to make for it. This meant a walk of some hours, with nothing to eat on the way, but a train from Winnipeg would stop early in the morning, and the others would not expect him to resume his journey east. If they had found out their mistake, they would take it for granted that he was a confederate of the man they followed and most likely calculate on his trying to reach the new Canadian Northern line. Foster felt angry with the fellow who had lured him into the adventure and resolved to extricate himself from it as soon as possible.

Getting up, he started west along the track, and after a time found himself embarrassed by the fur coat. It was heavy and too warm, but he would need it when he stopped. Then he wore thin city boots, and the track, as usual, was roughly ballasted with coarse gravel. The stones rolled about under his feet, and the ties were irregularly spaced, so that he could not step from one to another except by an awkward stride. He went on, however, and by and by began to wonder where he could get a drink, for the struggle or the shock had made him thirsty.

The big coat proved troublesome to carry when he took it off. After a time his feet got sore and he tried to walk in the shallow drain beside the line, but this was filled with ice, on which he slipped. He had traveled by rougher trails and carried heavy loads, but that was some years ago and he wore different boots and fastened on his pack by proper straps. Moreover, one got soft when leading a business life.

By and by he heard the roar of water and pushing on faster came to a foaming creek that plunged down a stony ravine. A bridge crossed the gorge, and leaving the track he clambered down the rocky bank. Where the spray had fallen there were patches of ice, but Foster felt that he must get a drink. When he was half-way down his foot slipped and he slid the rest of the distance, bringing up with a shock at the edge of the water, where he struck a projecting stone. He felt shaken, but got a drink, and when he began to climb back found that he had wrenched his knee. Some movements were not painful, but when his weight came upon the joint it hurt. He must get up, for all that, and reached the top, where he sat down with his lips firmly set, and after putting on the coat felt in the pocket for a cigarette.

The case he took out was not his, and he remembered that he was wearing another man's coat. The cigarettes were of Turkish tobacco, which is not much used in Canada, and he thought the quality remarkably good. This seemed to imply that their owner had a cultivated taste, and Foster began to wonder whether he was after all not a business man running away from his creditors, but rejected the theory. It was strange that although the cigarettes were expensive the case was of the kind sold in Western stores for fifty cents, but Foster presently gave up speculating about the man.

The moon was getting low and ragged pine branches cut against the light. The track was wrapped in shadow that was only a little less dense than the gloom of the surrounding bush. It was not really cold for North Ontario, but the fur coat was hardly enough protection to make a bed in the open air comfortable. Foster had slept in the Athabasca forests when the thermometer marked forty degrees below zero, but he then wore different clothes and had been able to make a roaring fire and build a snow-bank between him and the wind. Moreover, he was still liable to be overtaken by the men on the train.

Getting up, he found his knee sore and stiff, but limped on for an hour or two after the moon sank. He seemed to be stumbling along the bottom of a dark trench, for the firs shut him in like a wall and there was only an elusive glimmer of light above their serrated tops. He did not expect to find a house until he reached the station, for much of North Ontario is a wilderness where the trees are too small for milling and agriculture is impossible among the rocks. To make things worse, he felt hungry. The train had stopped at about seven o'clock at a desolate station where the passengers were given a few minutes to get supper, but Foster's portion was too hot for him to eat. He tried to encourage himself by remembering that he had once marched three hundred miles across the snow with a badly frozen foot, but this did not make his present exertion easier.

As he got hungry he got angry. He had gone away to enjoy himself, and this was how his holiday had begun! The Government agent, if that was what he was, ought not to have dragged a confiding stranger into his difficulties. He was now safe in the express car and chuckling over the troubles he had left his substitute to face. Then Foster tried to remember if he had left any papers with his address in his overcoat and decided that he had not done so. His wallet was now in his jacket pocket. This was satisfactory, because he meant to have nothing more to do with the matter. Tying the fur coat round his waist to take some of the weight off his shoulders, he trudged on as briskly as he could through the gloom.

V

FEATHERSTONE'S PEOPLE

After walking for some time, Foster heard a rumble in the distance behind him and climbed the rocky bank of the single-line track. There was not much room between the bank and rails, and he was glad of an excuse for sitting down. Taking out the stranger's case, he lighted another of the Turkish cigarettes. They were the only benefit he was likely to derive from the adventure, and he felt some satisfaction in making use of them.

In the meantime, the rumble grew into a roar that rolled across the forest with a rhythmic beat, and a ray of light pierced the gloom up the track. It was very bright and he knew it was thrown by a locomotive headlamp. A west-bound freight train was coming and he must wait until it passed. Freight trains were common objects, but as a rule when Foster saw one approaching he stopped to watch. The great size and power of the locomotive appealed to his imagination, and he liked to think of the reckless courage of the men who drove the steel road through eight hundred miles of rugged wilderness to Port Arthur, and then on again through rocks and muskegs to the Western prairie. It was a daring feat, when one remembered the obstacles and that there was no traffic to be developed on the way.

The beam of light became a cone of dazzling radiance; the rocks throbbed, and the gnarled pines shook as the roar swelled into a tremendous harmony of many different notes. Then there was sudden darkness as the locomotive leaped past, and huge box-cars rushed, lurching and rocking, out of the thick, black smoke. Flying ballast crashed against the rocks, and though the ground was frozen hard a hail of small particles rattled among the trees. Then, as the tail-lights on the caboose sped by, a deep hoot of the whistle came back from about a quarter of a mile off, and soon afterwards the fading glimmer vanished round a curve. It seemed to be going slower, and the rumble died away suddenly. Foster thought there was a side-track ahead, where the freight would wait until a train going in the other direction crossed the switches. If he could reach the spot in time, he might save himself a long walk.

His knee hurt as he stumbled over the gravel at the best pace he could make, but that did not matter much, A few minutes' sharp pain could be borne, and he set his lips as he ran, while the perspiration dripped from him and his breath got short. This was the consequence of leading a soft and, in a sense, luxurious life, he thought, but when he tried to walk next day he understood the reason better. Still, he did not mean to be left behind in the frozen bush, and as he reached the curve was relieved to see lights flicker about the track. When he stopped a man flashed a lantern into his face.

"Looks as if you'd made good time, but the track's pretty rough for breaking records on," he remarked.

"That's so," Foster answered breathlessly. "I wanted to get here before you pulled out, because I'm going on with you."

"No, sir; it's clean against the rules. You can't get a free ride now on a C.P. freight"

"The rules apply to hobos. I've got a first-class ticket to Montreal."

"Then why in thunder are you running back to Fort William?"

"I'd have been satisfied to make the next station. You see, I fell off the train."

Another man, who wore big gloves and grimy over-alls, had come up, and laughed when he heard Foster's explanation.

"You sure look pretty lively after falling off the Montreal express. Guess you must have done that kind of thing before? But our bosses are getting blamed particular about these free rides."

Foster opened his wallet and took out a strip of paper, folded in sections, but it was not by accident he held two or three dollar bills against it.

"There's my ticket. I bought it at the agent's office, but I expect you know what would have happened if I'd got it on board. Anyway, you've heard of the drummer who beat his passage from Calgary to Toronto at the cost of a box of cigars."

The brakemen grinned, because the hint was plain. It is said on Western railroads that when a conductor collects a fare he throws the money at the car-roof and accounts to the company for as much as sticks there.

"Well," said the first man, "I guess we'll take our chances and you can get into the caboose. You'll find blankets, and a bunk where you can lie down if you take off your boots. We'll dump you somewheres handy for catching the next east-bound."

Foster found the caboose comfortably warm. There was a stove in the middle and two or three bunks were fixed to the walls. In a few minutes the train they waited for went roaring past, and when the freight started one of the men gave him some supper. Then he got into a bunk and went to sleep.

He caught the next express going east, and on reaching Ottawa, where he had some time to wait, half expected the man he had helped would come, or send somebody, to meet him. Although he wore the fur coat and stood in a conspicuous place, he was not accosted, and presently bought a newspaper. It threw no light upon the matter, and for a time he walked up and down, considering if he would go to the police. This was perhaps his duty, but it looked as if the owner of the coat had not been molested. After all, the fellow might be an absconding debtor, and if not it was obvious that he had some reason for keeping his secret. Foster decided to let him do so, and went back to the train.

When he arrived at Montreal he went to the *Windsor* as he had been told, but there was no letter or telegram waiting and none came during the day or two he stayed. On the evening before he sailed he was sitting in the large entrance hall, which is a feature of American and Canadian hotels, when he thought a man some distance off looked hard at him over his newspaper. Foster only caught a momentary glimpse of his face, because he held up the paper as if to get a better light and people were moving about between them; but he thought the man was Daly, and after a few moments carelessly crossed the floor.

A man sat at the spot he had marked and the chairs on both sides were unoccupied, but when Foster sat down in the nearest he saw the fellow was a stranger. This puzzled him, since he did not think he had been mistaken. It was, however, possible that Daly had been there, but had moved off quietly when Foster's view was obstructed. If so, he must have had an object for hiding, and Foster waited some minutes before he went to the office and examined the guestbook. Daly's name did not appear, and he found that nobody from the West had signed the book recently.

"I wanted to see if a man I know is staying here," he told the clerk.

"That's all right," said the other. "Quite a number of people have been looking for friends to-day."

Foster described Daly as well as he could, and asked if he had examined the book.

"No," said the clerk. "Nobody just like that had the register while I've been about; but now I think of it, a man who might meet the bill stood by while another looked at the last page." Then he indicated a figure near the revolving door, "There! that's who he was with!"

As the man pushed the door round Foster saw his face, and knew him for the stranger who had occupied the chair in which he had expected to find Daly. He thanked the clerk and went back thoughtfully to his place, because it looked as if Daly had been there and the other had helped him to steal away. If this surmise was correct, they might be trying to follow Featherstone; but he was, fortunately, out of their reach, and Foster decided that he must not exaggerate the importance of the matter. After all, Daly might have come to Montreal on business, and the rotunda of a Canadian hotel is something of a public resort. Still, he felt disturbed and presently gave the clerk the fur coat, telling him to deliver it when asked for. He felt it a relief to get rid of the thing.

Next day he sailed on an Empress liner, and on the evening after he reached England left the train at a lonely station in the North. It was not yet dark, and for a moment or two he stood on the platform looking about. There had been rain, and the air had a damp freshness that was unusual in Canada. In the east and north the sky was covered with leaden cloud, against which rounded hilltops were faintly marked. Rugged moors rolled in long slopes towards the west, where the horizon was flushed with vivid saffron and delicate green. Up the middle of the foreground ran a deep valley, with blue shadow in its bottom and touches of orange light on its heathy sides. There were few trees, although a line of black firs ran boldly to the crest of a neighboring rise, and stone dykes were more common than the ragged hedges. Foster saw no plowed land, and nothing except heather seemed to grow on the peaty soil, which looked black as jet where the railway cutting pierced it. Indeed, he thought the landscape as savage and desolate as any he had seen in Canada, but as he did not like tame country this had a certain charm.

While he looked about a man came up. He was elderly and dressed with extreme neatness in old-fashioned dark clothes, but he had the unmistakable look of a gentleman's servant. Though there was a small car in the road, he was obviously not a professional chauffeur.

"You'll be Mr. Foster, sir, for the Garth?" he said.

Foster said he was and the man resumed: "Mr. Featherstone sent the car and his apologies. He had to attend the court, being a magistrate, and hoped you would excuse his not coming."

Then he picked up Foster's portmanteau and called a porter, who was moving some clanging milk cans, to bring his bag.

"Never mind; I'll take it," Foster told him.

"As you like, sir, but it's perhaps not quite usual in this country," the other answered in a deprecatory tone.

"I suppose I ought to have remembered that," Foster agreed smiling.

They crossed the platform, and while they waited for the bag the man said respectfully, "Might I ask if Mr. Lawrence was better when you left, sir? It was a disappointment to us when we heard he could not come home."

Foster liked the fellow. He was very formal, but seemed to include himself in his master's family.

"Yes," he said. "In fact, I expect he'll be quite well in a month or two. I suppose you were at the Garth before my partner left?"

"I've served Mr. Featherstone for thirty years, sir, and led Mr. Lawrence's first pony and cleaned his first gun. It wasn't my regular duty, sir, but he was the only son and I looked after him. If I may say so, we were much upset when we heard that he was ill."

Then the bag was brought, and as the car ran across the moor Foster noted the smooth, hard surface of the wet road. The country was wild and desolate, but they had no roads like this in Canada, except perhaps in one or two of the larger cities. Indeed, in Western towns he knew, it was something of an adventure to cross the street during the spring thaw. The light got red and angry as they dipped into the valley; the firs on the hillcrest stood out black and sharp, and then melted into the gray background. A river pool shone with a ruby gleam that suddenly went out, and the dim water vanished into the shadow, brawling among the stones.

There was smooth pasture in the valley, broken by dark squares of turnip fields and pale stubble; but here and there the heath appeared again and wild cotton showed faintly white above the black peat-soil. By and by a cross, standing by itself on the lonely hillside, caught Foster's eye, and he asked his companion about it.

"The Count's Cross, sir; a courtesy title they held in the next dale. He was killed in a raid on a tower down the water, before the Featherstones came."

"But did they bury him up there?"

"No, sir; they were all buried at night by the water of Langrigg, but when they were carrying him home in the mist by the hill road the Scots from the tower overtook them. The Count's men were wounded and their horses foundered, but the Scots let them go when they found that he was dead. About 1300, sir. Somebody put up the cross to commemorate it."

"They seem to have been a chivalrous lot," Foster remarked. "I wonder if that kind of thing would happen nowadays!"

"I'm afraid one couldn't expect it, sir," the old fellow answered and Foster smiled.

The cross faded into the hillside; it got dark and the valley narrowed. Trees grew in sheltered spots; the faint, delicate tracery of birch branches breaking the solid, black ranks of the firs. The road wound along the river, which roared, half seen, in the gloom. Now and then they ran through water, and presently the glare of the headlamps bored through breast-high mist. There was a smell of wet soil and rotting leaves. It was very different from the tangled pine bush of Ontario and the stark bareness of the plains, but it was somehow familiar and Foster felt that he was at home.

By and by the moon came out, and the mist got thinner as they ran into an opening where the side of the glen fell back. Lights twinkled at the foot of a hill, and as they sped on the irregular outline of a house showed against a background of trees. It glimmered, long and low, in the moonlight, and then Foster lost it as they ran through a gate into the darkness of a belt of firs. A minute or two later, the car slowed and stopped after passing round a bend.

A wide door stood hospitably open, and a figure upon the steps cut against the light. There were two more figures inside the hall, and as he got down Foster heard voices that sounded strangely pleasant and refined. Then a man whom he could not see well shook hands with him and took him in, and he stopped, half dazzled by the brightness.

The hall was large and a fire burned on a deep hearth. There were oil lamps on tall pillars, and in the background a broad staircase ran up to a gallery in the gloom. Foster, however, had not much time to look about, for as soon as he had given

up his hat and coat his host led him towards the fire and two ladies came up. He knew one was his partner's mother and the other his sister, but although they were like Lawrence he remarked a difference that was puzzling until he understood its origin. Mrs. Featherstone had an unmistakable stamp of dignity, but her face was gentle and her look very friendly; her daughter was tall and Foster thought remarkably graceful, with an air of pride and reserve, although this vanished when she gave him a frank welcoming smile. Featherstone, who was older than his wife, had short, gray hair, and a lined, brown face, but looked strong and carried himself well.

Foster, who liked them at once, wondered rather anxiously whether he had pleased or disappointed them. But he imagined that they would reserve their opinion. They were, of course, not the people to show what they thought, and if he had felt any embarrassment, they would have known how to put him at his ease. Still his type was, no doubt, new to them and his views might jar. He did not remember what they said, but they somehow made him feel he was not a stranger but a friend who had a claim, and when he went to his room he knew he would enjoy his stay with Featherstone's people.

VI

HIS COMRADE'S STORY

Foster spent the most part of the next day in the open air with his host. Featherstone had a quiet, genial manner and seemed to have read much, though he held the narrow views that sometimes mark the untraveled Englishman. He appeared to be scrupulously just and showed sound judgment about matters he understood, but he had strong prejudices and Foster did not think him clever. With his rather sensitive pride and fastidiousness he was certainly not the man to make his mark in Canada, and Foster began to understand certain traits of his comrade's that had puzzled him. Lawrence, although he had keener intelligence, was not quite so fine a type as his father, and in consequence stood rough wear better. But he too, in spite of his physical courage, now and then showed a supine carelessness and tried to avoid, instead of boldly grappling with, things that jarred.

They set out to go shooting, but Featherstone stopped to talk to everybody they met, and showed keen interest in such matters as the turnip crop and the price of sheep. It was clear that he was liked and respected. Sometimes he turned aside to examine tottering gates and blocked ditches, and commented to Foster upon the economics of farming and the burden of taxes. The latter soon gathered that there was not much profit to be derived from a small moorland estate and his host was far from rich. It looked as if it had cost him, and perhaps his family, some self-denial to send the money that had once or twice enabled Lawrence, and Foster with him, to weather a crisis.

At noon they were given a better lunch than Foster had often been satisfied with at a lonely farm, where Featherstone spoke of him as his son's partner, and seemed to take an ingenuous pride in making it known that Lawrence was prospering. This gave Foster a hint that he acted on later. They, however, shot a brace of partridges in a turnip field, a widgeon that rose from a reedy tarn, and a woodcock that sprang out of a holly thicket in a bog. It was a day of gleams of sunlight, passing showers, and mist that rolled about the hills and swept away, leaving the long slopes in transient brightness, checkered with the green of mosses and the red of withered fern. The sky cleared as they turned homewards, and when they reached the Garth an angry crimson glow spread across the west.

Tea was brought them in the hall and Foster, who had changed his clothes, which was a rare luxury in Canada, sat with much content in a corner by the hearth. He had been out in the raw wind long enough to enjoy the rest and warmth, and the presence of two English ladies added to the charm. Mrs. Featherstone was knitting, but Alice talked to her father about the shooting and what he had noted on the farms. Foster thought her cleverer than the others, but it was obvious that her interest was not forced. She understood agriculture and her remarks were singularly shrewd.

In a sense, this was puzzling, for she had, in an extra degree, the fastidious refinement that marked the rest, and with it a touch of quiet haughtiness. Although she often smiled, she was characterized by a restful calm, and her glance was steady and level. Alice was tall, with unusually regular features, brown eyes, and brown hair, but Foster could not analyze her charm, which was somehow strengthened by a hint of reserve. He was in the glow of the fire, and imagined that she once or twice gave him a glance of thoughtful scrutiny.

The room was getting dim, but lights had not been brought, and the red glow outside filled the large oblong of the casement window. Dark fir branches cut against the lurid color and Foster, looking out, saw the radiance strike through the straight rows of trunks.

"Something like Ontario, isn't it?" said Featherstone, indicating the trees.

"Yes, in a way, but there's a difference," Foster replied. "In eastern Manitoba and Ontario the bush is choked and tangled, and runs nearly eight hundred miles. The small pines are half burned in places; in others they're wrecked and rotten, and lean across each other as if they were drunk. Then you can travel all day without finding an opening, unless it's a lonely lake or a river tumbling among the rocks."

"It sounds depressing," Mrs. Featherstone remarked. "We must hope you will find your stay here a pleasant change."

"The curious thing is that it doesn't feel strange. All I've seen so far, including the Garth, seems familiar."

"But perhaps that isn't remarkable. You are English and were, I dare say, brought up in the country and used to our mode of life."

Foster saw Alice glance at him and felt he must be frank.

"No," he said, "my life in England was different from yours. It was spent in monotonous work, and when I went home at night to a shabby room in a street of small dingy houses it was too late, and I was often too dejected, to think of amusements. Twice I spent a glorious ten days among the hills, but that was all I saw of England unspoiled by tramway lines and smoke, and the holidays cost a good deal of self-denial. Railway fares were a serious obstacle."

Alice smiled, but he thought the look she gave him hinted at approval.

"Self-denial isn't so unusual as you seem to think. We know something about it at the Garth."

"But you sent my partner money when he needed it," Foster answered, wondering how far he could go. "The last time it was a large amount and helped us to turn an awkward corner. In fact, we should have gone under for a time if it hadn't come, and I remember feeling that I owed much to friends I might never see, because I shared the benefit with your brother. In its Western sense, partner means more than a business associate."

"That is obvious," Alice rejoined quietly, but with meaning.

"The main thing is that the money seems to have been well spent," Featherstone interposed. "For all that, we don't know much about what Lawrence did with it or, indeed, about his life in Canada."

"It's curious that one gets out of the way of writing home in the West, and it's often difficult to give one's friends a clear idea of how one lives. Things are different-----"

Mrs. Featherstone smiled, and Foster saw that his wish to make excuses for his comrade's negligence was understood. Featherstone, however, was franker than he expected.

"There were good reasons for Lawrence's not writing home and they made it awkward for us to write to him for a time. You can now tell us what he has done in Canada. We want to know."

Foster began with some hesitation by relating how he had first met his comrade in the churned-up mud outside a logging camp after a dispute with the bullying manager. The men were beaten, but Lawrence and two or three more from the river-gang would not give in, and started in the rain, without blankets and with very little food, which a sympathetic cook stole for them, on a long march to the nearest settlement. There they took a contract for clearing land, and Foster described how they lived in a rude bark shack while they felled the trees and piled them up for burning. It was strenuous work, and having been unable to collect their wages from the lumber firm, the clothes they could not replace went to pieces and they slept, for the most part, in the wet rags they wore by day. But they held out until the work was done and paid for. Foster tried to do his comrade justice and thought he had not exaggerated, for Lawrence's philosophic good humor had encouraged the rest and smoothed over difficulties that threatened to break up the gang.

Then he stopped and glanced at the others, wondering whether he had said too much and had drawn a picture they shrank from contemplating. Alice's eyes were steadily fixed on him. Mrs. Featherstone looked grave, but there was a hint of proud satisfaction in her husband's face. Somewhat to his surprise, Foster saw that he had not jarred or bored them.

"You made good; I believe that's the proper phrase," said Featherstone. "Go on, please."

Foster did so. His adventures had not appeared remarkable when they happened, and he did not think himself much of a story-teller, but he meant to do his best, for his partner's sake. It would be something if he could show Lawrence's people the courage and cheerfulness with which he had faced his troubles. Still, he thought it better to vary the theme, and related how they engaged themselves as salesmen at a department store, where Lawrence rashly undertook to serve the drugs and prescribed for confiding customers until a mistake that might have had disastrous consequences led to his being fired. Foster went with him, and they next undertook to cook, without any useful knowledge of the art, for a railroad construction gang. Their incompetence became obvious when Lawrence attempted to save labor by putting a week's supply of desiccated apples to soak at once, with the consequence that the floor of the caboose was covered with swollen fruit that had forced itself out of the pot. One of the gang, who went in to steal some fried pork, declared that the blamed apples chased him down the steps.

Featherstone's chuckle was encouraging, but Foster glanced at Alice and thought he read another emotion than amusement in her sparkling eyes. It was now nearly dark, but the glow of the fire touched the others' faces and nobody seemed to think of ringing for lights.

He went on to describe their retreat in winter from a worthless mineral claim, where they had remained until the snow surprised them when their food was nearly gone. Eight or nine miles a day was the most they could drag their hand-sledge through the tangled bush, and Foster got his foot frozen through sleeping in wet boots. The frozen part galled into a wound, but with provisions running out they could not stop to rest. The tent and half their blankets had to be thrown away and Lawrence hauled him on the sledge over rocks and fallen logs, with the temperature at forty degrees below, until they reached a frozen river, down which he struggled against a savage wind.

Then came a profitable contract, which Lawrence obtained against keen opposition, for supplying telephone posts, and Foster was surprised to find that the description of their efforts to get the logs out of a rugged wilderness made a stirring tale. Although he paused once or twice apologetically, the others made him resume, and he began to wish he was not in the firelight when he saw that Alice was quietly studying him. It was his partner's story he meant to tell, but since they

were together he could not leave himself out.

He could, however, change the scene, and skipping much, came to their start as general contractors at Gardner's Crossing. The Hulton Company, which was not so large then, gave them work, but they were hampered by want of capital, and had to meet the competition of richer and sometimes unscrupulous antagonists. Still they made progress; staking all they had on the chance of carrying out risky work that others would not touch, sometimes testing the patience of creditors, and now and then outwitting a rival by an ingenious ruse. Lawrence lived in the single-room office, cooking for himself on an oil-stove, while Foster camped with their men where they were at work.

Then they built the sawmill with the help of Lawrence's check from home, and soon afterwards met with their worst reverse. They had engaged to supply the Hulton Company with lumber of a certain kind for some special work, and then found that few of the trees they required grew near the river. This meant that a skidway must be made over a very rough hill and a gasoline winding engine bought or hired to haul the logs out of the next valley. There was, however, another fir easily accessible that might suit the purpose, but not quite as well, and Foster related how he and his partner sat up late one night, calculating costs and wondering whether they should pay Hulton a fine to break the bargain. He added naively that they were some time arguing if they should substitute the inferior wood.

"Whose opinion was it that you should supply the exact material you had promised?" Featherstone asked.

"Well," said Foster, "Lawrence said so first, but I think we both meant to let them have the best."

Featherstone's glance at his wife indicated relief, but something in Alice's face showed that she had known what Foster's reply would be. She had listened with keen interest, and he stopped, half amused and half embarrassed. Perhaps he had talked too much, and while he meant to do Lawrence justice, he did not want to play the part of the indomitable pioneer for the girl's benefit. Moreover, he knew she would detect, and despise him for, any attempt to do so, and as he valued her good opinion, it was not modesty alone that led him to make Lawrence the hero of the piece.

"So you stuck to your bargain!" Featherstone remarked. "Tell us how you carried it out."

Foster forgot himself and the others as he continued, for he had a vivid memory of the struggle. He took charge of the work in the woods, while Lawrence tactfully pressed for payment of outstanding accounts, put off creditors, and somehow provided money for wages. As extra gangs had to be hired, Foster owned that he did not know how the thing was done. He cut a grade for the skidway up the hill, slashing tangled bush and blasting rocks, worked in the snow by moonlight long after his men stopped, and afterwards learned that Lawrence often went without a meal when pay-day got near. But they hauled out the logs and the lumber was delivered. When he stopped, Featherstone looked up with some color in his face.

"Thank you," he said. "It is a moving tale. The money we sent you was well spent. I could have expected nothing better of my son. But I suppose you found it paid to keep your promise."

"In this case, it did," Foster answered with a smile. "Hulton's gave us the first chance of any work they did not care to do themselves; you see, we had put in a few wood-working machines. In fact, after a time, Hulton told Lawrence to walk through the factory now and then and send in anything the heads of departments required. But I've talked long enough and fear you're bored."

"No," said Featherstone simply, "you have given us great pleasure and made us realize the bracing life my son is leading. You could have done us no favor that would equal this."

Then he took Foster off to the gun-room, where they smoked and talked about the day's shooting, until Featherstone said rather abruptly, "Perhaps I had better tell you that I didn't send Lawrence the check that enabled you to build the mill. It was not in my power to do so then."

"But he said the money came from home."

"It did. Alice was left a small legacy and insisted on selling the shares it consisted of in order to help her brother. I must confess that I thought she was rash, but the money was hers. Now it is obvious that the sacrifice she made was justified."

Featherstone began to talk about something else, but Foster felt embarrassed. It looked as if he owed his success in business to the girl's generosity, and although he could not see why this should disturb him, it did.

He went down to dinner rather early and found Alice in the hall. There was nobody else about, and by the way she looked up as he advanced he thought she had been waiting for him. Alice had beauty, but it was her proud reserve he felt most. She did not give her friendship lightly, but he believed it was worth winning.

"I wanted to thank you for explaining things so well," she said. "It's the first time we have really learned much about my brother's life in Canada."

Foster hesitated, "I felt that you wanted to know. But, in a way, it must have sounded rather egotistical. In fact, the thing wasn't as easy as you perhaps think."

Alice smiled. "You couldn't leave yourself out, although it was obvious that you meant to give my brother the leading part."

"I honestly don't think I exaggerated."

"No," she agreed, "it sounded real, and there were touches, little personal characteristics, you couldn't have imagined. You see, I am younger than Lawrence and thought him something of a romantic hero before he left home." Then she paused for a moment. "I got a very bad shock when he was forced to go. You know why he went?"

"I don't; I've sometimes thought he wanted to tell me."

"Then you never asked?"

"I did not; I think I didn't want to know."

She gave him a steady searching glance and he felt that if he had been insincere she would have found out.

"But you knew there was something wrong. If he had injured somebody in England, he might have injured you. What made you so trustful?"

"Your brother himself. Then he was, so to speak, my benefactor. If he hadn't taken me up, I might have been chopping trees in the snow, instead of enjoying a holiday in England and, to emphasize the contrast, staying at a house like this."

"It doesn't follow; you might have found another opportunity. The point is that you did trust Lawrence."

Foster disliked sentiment and knew that if he struck a false note it would jar.

"Well," he said, "I don't claim that I'm a judge of character, but one can't make progress in Canada and be a fool. We had gone hungry in the bush together, and hauled the hand-sledge across the snow, when it was very doubtful if we'd make the settlements. Perhaps there isn't a better way of testing a partner than that. Then a man starts fair in the new countries, and one feels that this is right. He may have given way once to some strong temptation and go the straighter for it afterwards."

Alice looked at him with a curious gleam in her eyes that made his heart beat.

"It was a very strong temptation," she said quietly and stopped as Mrs. Featherstone came in.

VII

THE PACKET

When he had been a few days at the Garth, Foster thought he had better take Carmen's packet to Edinburgh. She had said nothing about its being urgent and he did not want to go, but he must keep his promise and would afterwards be at liberty. Mrs. Featherstone had given him to understand that he was to make the Garth his headquarters as long as he stayed in England, and he looked forward to doing so with much content. The more he saw of his hosts, the better he liked them, and it was a privilege to enjoy Alice Featherstone's friendship. She had, of course, given it him for her brother's sake, but he must try to keep it on his merits.

Since he had seen Alice he began to understand Carmen better. Carmen had charm and knew how to use it to her advantage, while he could not imagine Alice's employing her beauty to gain an object. She was proud, with an essentially clean pride, and sincere, while Carmen had a talent for intrigue. The latter enjoyed using her cleverness to put down a rival or secure a prominent place; she was a hustler, as they said in the West. Alice, he thought, would not even claim what was hers; it must be willingly offered or she would let it go. Yet he knew she would be a staunch and generous friend to anybody who gained her confidence.

This kind of comparison, however, was profitless and perhaps in bad taste. After all, he was a friend of Carmen's and must do her errand. He left the Garth next morning, and Featherstone, who made him promise to come back as soon as possible, drove him across the moors to a small station on the North British line, where he caught an Edinburgh train.

When they ran out of the hills at Hawick, rain was falling and the valley filled with smoky haze, through which loomed factories and chimney stacks. The station was crowded, and Foster gathered from the talk of the people who got in that a big wool sale was going on and the townsfolk who were not at the auction made it a holiday. His compartment was full, but looking through the window he saw a fashionably dressed girl hurrying along the platform with a porter. They tried one or two carriages, in which there seemed to be no room, and the guard had blown his whistle when they came abreast of Foster's compartment. Opening the door as the train began to move, he held out his hand and pulled the girl in.

"My bag; it mustn't be left!" she cried, trying to get back to the door, but Foster caught the bag as the porter held it up and put it on the rack.

"There's a seat in the corner," he said and went into the corridor.

When they stopped at Galashiels a number of people got out, and he returned to the compartment. It was now unoccupied except by an old man and the girl he had helped, who gave him a grateful smile.

"I hadn't time to thank you, but I should have missed the train if you had not been prompt," she said.

Foster did not know if Scottish etiquette warranted anything more than a conventional reply, but he ventured to remark: "You certainly seemed to have cut things rather fine."

"I had to drive some distance and the hill roads were bad; then when we got to the town the streets were crowded."

"That would be sae," the old man agreed. "Hawick's gey thrang at the wool sales when the yarn trade is guid."

Foster liked to talk to strangers and as the girl had not rebuffed him, he took her cloak, which looked very wet, from the rack.

"Perhaps I'd better shake this in the corridor and then we can hang it up," he said.

She allowed him to do so and the old man remarked:

"Guid gear's worth the saving, and I was thinking it would be nane the waur o' a bit shake, but if ye had leeved to my age among the mosses, ye'd no' find yereself sae soople."

"Any kind of gear's worth taking care of."

"That's true," agreed the other. "A verra praise-worthy sentiment, if ye practice it. But I wouldna' say ye were a Scot."

"In a sense, I'm a Canadian, but from what I've seen of the Ontario Scots the difference isn't very marked. Anyhow, they don't buy new material until the old's worn out."

The man chuckled, but Foster thought the girl looked interested.

"Then you come from Canada," she said. "Do you know any of the Ontario cities?"

"I have been in Toronto, but I know the small towns near the Manitoba border best. In fact, I left an ambitious place called Gardner's Crossing about fourteen days ago."

From the quick glance she gave him he imagined that she had heard of the town, but she said, "I have some friends in Ontario and understand that they have had what they call a set-back there. Did this extend to the neighborhood you came from?"

Foster told her something about the development of the lumber trade and mining, but although he had hardly expected her to be interested he thought she was, and the old man's shrewd remarks helped the conversation along.

"Isn't the Crossing where the big factory is? I forget the name of it," she asked by and by.

"Hulton's," said Foster, and afterwards thought she tactfully encouraged him to talk about the manufacturing firm, although he did not mention Fred Hulton's death. Her manner, however, was quite correct; he had been of some small help, which warranted her conversing with him to pass the time. That was all, and when their companion got out and she opened a book he went to the smoking-compartment.

When he left the train at the Waverley station he saw her on the platform and she gave him a slight bow, but he understood that their acquaintance ended there and was content. After lunch he walked along, Princes Street and back to the castle. The sky was clear, the sun shone on the old tall houses, and a nipping north-easter blew across the Forth. In

spite of its age and modern industry, the town looked strangely clean and cold. No smoke could hang about it in the nipping wind; its prevailing color was granite-gray. The Forth was a streak of raw indigo, and the hills all round were steely blue. Edinburgh was like no English town; it had an austere half-classical beauty that was peculiar to itself; perhaps Quebec, though different, resembled it most of all the cities he had seen.

Then he remembered Carmen's packet, and after asking a passer-by took a tram-car that carried him through the southern quarter of the town into a wide road, lined by well-built stone houses. Standing in small, neat gardens, they ran back to the open country, with a bold ridge of moors in the distance. Foster got down where he was directed and crossed the road to one of the houses. They were all much alike and he thought hinted at the character of their occupants. One would expect to find the people who lived there prosperous citizens with sober, conventional habits.

He went up a short, tiled path and rang the bell. A smart maid-servant showed him into a small, morning-room, where everything was very neat, and after a few moments a man came in. He was the kind of man Foster had expected to find in such a house, well-dressed, with polite but rather formal manners, and Foster briefly stated his business. He thought the man looked at him sharply, but it was about four o'clock in the afternoon and the light was not good.

"Mr. Graham does not live here now; he left a week or two ago," he said. "Do you know him personally?"

"No," said Foster. "Miss Austin asked me to give him the packet."

"Then you know Mr. Austin."

"In a way," said Foster, smiling. "We speak when we meet on the street, but don't get much further. In fact, Austin's a business rival of mine."

The man seemed to ponder for a moment or two. Then he said, "I gather that you want to deliver the packet, not to post it?"

"That's so. I don't know if it matters much, but I'd like to put it in Graham's hands."

"Very well. He's gone to Newcastle, but I have his address somewhere. If you will wait a minute or two, I'll look."

He took the packet, as if he meant to write the address on it, and Foster sat down. The door of the room was half open and while he waited somebody entered the house. Steps came along the hall, and a girl pushed the door back, and then stopped, looking at him in surprise. He understood this as he saw she was the girl he had helped into the train.

"I didn't know you were coming here," she said.

"Nor did I, in a sense," Foster answered with a smile. "I mean I didn't know it was your house."

"My name was on the label of the bag and rather conspicuous."

"It would have meant nothing if I had seen it. In fact, I must own I don't know it now."

The girl looked puzzled, and Foster explained that he had come with a packet, but had merely been given Graham's name and the number of the house. He added that he had found he must look for the man in Newcastle.

"Then you are a friend of Mr. Austin's?" she said.

Foster thought it strange that she had not told him she knew Austin when she asked about the Crossing, but he replied: "I'm a friend of Miss Austin's."

"Ah!" she said thoughtfully; "do you mind explaining what you mean by that?"

"Perhaps it's hardly worth while, but I can't claim that Austin and I are particularly friendly. Our business interests sometimes clash."

She was silent for a few moments, and he wondered why both she and the man had been curious to know how far his acquaintance with Austin went. Then she looked up with a quick movement. "Newcastle is not a charming town, and if you have no other reason for going there, it might be better to post the packet."

Foster was somewhat puzzled. She had spoken meaningfully, as if she meant to give him a hint.

"The trouble is that I promised Miss Austin to deliver it."

"You have brought it to England," she persisted. "It will be safe in the post-----"

She stopped with a glance at the door, and Foster heard a step in the passage. Then she quietly turned to the man who had taken the packet.

"I would have missed the train at Hawick but for this gentleman's help," she said. "Still, I did not know he was coming here until I saw him as I passed the door."

The other, who had looked at her rather sharply, nodded and gave Foster the packet.

"As there was room enough, I wrote the new address on the cover."

Foster thanked him and took his leave, but as the man went before him to the door the girl made a sign.

"Post it," she whispered and turned back into the room.

After leaving the house Foster walked along the road in a thoughtful mood. The girl was apparently the man's daughter or niece. Their relative ages warranted the surmise, and her quick explanation of how she came to be talking to a stranger indicated that she recognized his authority, while Foster thought she had been disturbed when she heard his step. It was strange that she should urge him to post the packet, and he would sooner have done so, but it was not a long journey to Newcastle and he must keep his promise. Then he saw a tram-car coming and dismissed the matter.

Going back to his hotel, he found there was an evening train and decided to leave by it. Edinburgh had attractions, but he could come back and was anxious to get rid of the packet, moreover he grudged the time he spent away from the Garth. There were not many passengers at the station and he found an empty compartment, where he read a newspaper until he got tired and lifting a corner of the blind looked out. Here and there a light rushed back through the darkness and vanished as the express sped south with a smoothness that was a contrast to the jolting he had been used to in Canada. Indeed, except for the roar when they ran across a bridge and the confused flashing past of lamps as they swept through a station, he could hardly have imagined himself on board a train. There was, however, not much to be seen, and he took out the packet.

It looked somewhat bulkier and he examined it carefully, but the cover did not seem to have been removed. It could not have been replaced by another, because the original address was there and he knew Carmen's hand; then there was a seal, which he did not think could have been tampered with. Besides, the man had only had it for a minute or two, and if he had opened it, would probably have taken something out instead of putting something in. Foster decided that he was mistaken about its size and returned it to his pocket.

Then he wanted a cigarette and took out the case he had got in the fur coat. Since he had left the coat in Montreal, the case was the only record of his adventure on the train, and he wondered whether he would ever be able to restore it to its owner and speculated languidly about the man. As the latter knew his name, it was strange that he had not communicated with him at the Windsor, as he had promised. He had obviously not been attacked, because there had been nothing about it in the Canadian newspapers. The thing was puzzling, but after all it did not concern Foster much and he thought about something else.

It was late when he arrived at Newcastle and went to an hotel. There was fog and rain next morning, and he saw very little of the town, which seemed filled with smoke. Taking a tram-car that carried him past rows of dingy buildings and shops where lights twinkled, he got out at the corner of a narrow street that ran back into the haze. After looking at the address on the packet, he plunged into the gloom beside a row of tall, sooty buildings. There was no pavement, and here and there a cart stood beneath an opening in the wall. The buildings were apparently warehouses, but some of the doors had brass plates and lights shone in the upper windows. By and by he found the number he wanted and entered a dirty arch, inside which a few names were painted on the wall. Graham's was not there, but he went up the steps to inquire at the first office he reached.

The lower stories were used as a warehouse and he came to the top landing before he saw a name that seemed to be Danish or Scandinavian painted on a door. Going in, he knocked on the counter. The office was small and shabby and smelt of bacon, which he thought indicated that its occupant dealt in provisions, but he could not see much because of a glass partition. When he was getting impatient, an old man came to the counter.

"Can you tell me if there's a Mr. Graham in this building?" Foster asked.

"Yes, he's here," said the other. "What do you want?"

Foster said he had brought a packet from Canada, and the old man, who looked rather hard at him, lifted a flap in the counter and told him to pass through. A door in the partition opened as he advanced and another man beckoned him to come in. It looked as if the latter had heard what had passed, but this saved an explanation and Foster, who asked if he was Graham, put the packet on a table. There was not much else in the small, dusty room, except a cupboard fitted with pigeon-holes, a desk, and a safe.

"This is from Miss Austin of Gardner's Crossing," he remarked.

Graham glanced at the packet carelessly, as if he did not consider it of much importance, and Foster felt puzzled. The fellow was not as old as Carmen's father, but Foster thought there was nothing about him that would attract a girl used to admiration, as Carmen was. He was certainly not handsome and had, on the whole, a commonplace look, while he was obviously in a small way of business.

"Thank you," he said. "It seems you have been to Edinburgh. We had a branch there, but closed it recently. Newcastle has more facilities for importing our goods. I'm afraid you have been put to some trouble."

Foster replied that he did not mind this, since he had promised Miss Austin to bring the packet and she was a friend of his, but although he studied the man's face saw nothing to indicate that he was interested.

"Are you staying here?" he asked, and when Foster told him that he was going back as soon as he could, resumed: "If you had been staying, I would have been glad to take you about the town; but, after all, there's nothing much in the way of amusement going on. I might arrange to meet you in the afternoon, but must now finish some letters for the Continental mail."

Foster said he could not wait and went out, feeling that the other was pleased to get rid of him. Graham was obviously a small importer of provisions, and he could not see why the girl in Edinburgh had warned him to post the packet. Carmen's reason for sending such a man something she valued was impossible to discern.

This, however, was not Foster's business, and after lunch he caught a train to Hexham and, finding he could get no farther, spent the night in the old Border town.

VIII

AN OFFER OF HELP

It rained and the light was going when Foster sat in a window seat of the library at the Garth. He was alone, but did not mind this. The Featherstones treated him as one of the family; he was free to do what he liked, and Alice had just gone away, after talking to him for half an hour. Lighting a cigarette, he mused and looked about.

Outside, the firs rose, black and dripping, above the wet drive. Between their trunks he saw the river, stained with peat, brawling among the stones, and the streaks of foam that stretched across a coffee-colored pool. Then a few boggy fields ran back into the mist that hung about the hills. A red fire threw a soft glow about the library. The room was somewhat shabby but spacious. Rows of old books in stained bindings, which Foster thought nobody read, faded into the gloom at its other end. It was warm and quiet, and he found it a comfortable retreat.

He had now been a fortnight at the Garth and did not want to leave. Featherstone and his wife obviously wished him to stay; he was grateful for the welcome they had given him, and felt as if he belonged to the place. What Alice thought was not clear, but she treated him with a quiet friendliness that he found singularly pleasant. By and by he began to wonder why Lawrence had not written, particularly as he had brought away a bag of his. Foster had one like it, and as both had its owner's initials stamped outside, he imagined the baggage agent had been deceived by the F when he affixed the check. Lawrence's bag, however, had his name engraved upon the lock.

Foster sat down in a big chair by the fire, and imagined he fell asleep, because it had got nearly dark without his noticing it when the opening of the door roused him. Looking up, he saw Featherstone come in with a letter in his hand. The post did not arrive until the afternoon.

"Ah!" he said, "you have heard from Lawrence."

"No, but the letter is about him," Featherstone replied, and sitting down opposite, was silent for a few moments. His pose was slack and he looked as if he had got a shock.

"I don't see how you can help, but perhaps you had better know how matters are," he resumed and gave the letter to Foster.

It was short, but Foster, who was surprised and disturbed, understood his host's alarm. Daly had written from Hexham, asking, or rather summoning, Featherstone to meet him there next day, although he stated that if this was impossible, he would arrive at the Garth in the evening. There was a threat in the intimation that it would be to Lawrence's advantage if Featherstone saw him soon.

"Well," said Foster dryly, "it looks as if our plot had succeeded better than we thought. We certainly didn't expect the fellow would follow me to England."

Featherstone did not seem to understand, and Foster remembered that, with the object of saving him anxiety, he had said nothing about Daly's having extorted money from Lawrence in Canada. He now explained the situation in as few words as possible.

"But Lawrence ought to have told me!" Featherstone exclaimed.

"I don't know that it would have been of much use. You see, Lawrence meant to put Daly off the track, and if he failed in this, to fight. When I heard of it, I quite agreed."

"But he can't fight," Featherstone objected in a strained voice. "I'd have urged him to do so, if it had been possible. We're not cowards."

"Why is it impossible?"

"Don't you know?" Featherstone asked with some surprise.

"I know my partner's in trouble; that's all."

Featherstone hesitated, as if he wanted to take the other into his confidence, but shrank from doing so. Then he said with forced quietness: "If this rogue knows as much as I suspect, he can get my son arrested."

"On a serious charge? I don't ask what it is."

"It would mean a long imprisonment, to say nothing of the humiliation," Featherstone answered brokenly, and was silent for a minute with the firelight on his tense face. Then he went on with an effort: "I must tell you what I can. Lawrence in a desperate moment injured, I had better call it robbed, a relative of ours. The boy had got into difficulties, but hitherto, although he had been a fool, there was a certain generosity in his rashness. He was very hard pressed---I have seen that since---but I can make no excuse for what he did."

"He made good afterwards," Foster interposed.

"We tried to think so, but it looks as if one can't make good. The punishment for a wrong done, or consented to, must be borne. Well, when I learned the truth I went to the man my son had robbed and offered to repay him. He said he would take no money, for reasons that I ought to grasp, and sent me away afraid, because I knew he was hard and very just."

Featherstone paused, and Foster, who murmured a few words of awkward sympathy, waited until he resumed; "I am a magistrate, pledged to do my duty, but I helped my boy to escape, and the man I was afraid of did nothing, though he knew. After a time, I went to him again, and he gave me to understand that he would not interfere so long as Lawrence stayed away, but must be free to take the proper line if he came back. It's plain now that he knew my son's faults and meant to give him the chance of overcoming them by hard work in Canada. At last, when he was very ill, he sent for me

and said I could let Lawrence know he was forgiven."

"Ah!" said Foster, "now I understand what my partner meant."

"This was not long before you came," Featherstone continued. "It was a wonderful relief to know the danger was over, and then you told us how Lawrence had grown out of his folly and become a useful man. Although we longed to see him, our satisfaction was complete. Now this letter comes, and I fear my wife is unable to bear the strain again."

Foster was moved by his distress. Featherstone was proud and honorable, and it must have cost him much to help his son to steal away. Indeed, Foster thought what he had done then would always trouble him, and after all it had proved useless. The worst was that his sensitive uprightness might make him an easy victim of the unscrupulous adventurer. But Foster did not mean him to be victimized. As a rule, he was rather humorous than dramatic, but he got up and stood with his hands clenched.

"This thing touches us both, sir. Lawrence is your son, but he's my friend, and I've got to see him through, which warrants my giving you the best advice I can. Very well, you must show a bold front to Daly; to begin with you can't go to Hexham."

Featherstone gave him a grateful glance. He felt dejected and desperate, but Foster looked comfortingly resolute. At first he had welcomed him for his son's sake, but had come to like him for himself.

"No," he agreed. "I can't go; but that doesn't help us; because he'll come here."

"Yes; he must be met. But do you know how he came to learn about the matter?"

"I don't, but my relative, who was interested in politics and social schemes, had a secretary. I can't remember his name, but this might be the fellow."

"Then it's curious he didn't get on Lawrence's track before. Anyway, he must be met with the bluff direct now."

"How can he be bluffed?" Featherstone asked with a hopeless gesture. "He can have my son arrested if I don't agree to his demands."

"He would first have to tell the police all he knew, and as soon as he did this his hold on you would be gone. Then they'd ask why he'd kept the secret, which would be remarkably hard to answer, although he might perhaps take the risk out of malice if he saw you meant to be firm. For all that, you must be firm; you can't buy him off. He'd come back later with a fresh demand. Would your estate stand the strain?"

"My wife and daughter would make any sacrifice for Lawrence's sake."

"The sacrifice would benefit this bloodsucker, which is a different thing," Foster rejoined. "Then, even if you impoverished your family, you'd only put off the reckoning, which would come when the fellow had taken all you'd got. In short, he must be bluffed off now."

He sat down and pondered and there was silence for some minutes. It had got dark and he heard the steady patter of the rain. He knew he had undertaken a difficult task, and felt daunted because he could not see his way. Still, it looked as if the happiness of these charming people, and perhaps his partner's future, depended upon him. If that were so, he must not fail them.

"Well," he said by and by, "my opinion is that Daly thinks Lawrence is here, so to speak within his reach, which must be a strong encouragement. If he learns the truth, he'll, no doubt, go back to Canada and get on his track. I'd like to set him searching up and down Great Britain. There would be something amusing in his wasting his time and money, but at present I don't see how it could be done. However, we have until to-morrow to think of a plan."

Featherstone left him soon afterwards and he stayed in the library until dinner, which was a melancholy function. It was necessary to appear undisturbed while the servants were about, and he envied his friends' fine self-control. These people had courage and when they talked carelessly about things of no importance he did his best to play up. Still, although they sometimes laughed, their amusement sounded forced, there was a curious feeling of tension, and he thought Mrs. Featherstone once or twice showed signs of strain.

When the meal was over he made an excuse for leaving them alone, but some time afterwards Alice came into the hall, where he sat quietly thinking. She was calm, but he saw she had heard about the threatened danger. He got up as she advanced, but she beckoned him to sit down.

"My father has told me about the letter, and I understand you know," she said.

"I wish I knew what ought to be done! It's an awkward matter. To tell the truth, it bothers me."

Alice sat down, shielding her face from the fire with her hand.

"You mean you feel you ought to put it right?"

"Something of the kind," said Foster, forcing a smile, "In a sense, of course, that's presumptuous; but then, you see, I'm in your brother's debt."

"You like to pay your debts," Alice remarked, fixing a level glance on him.

"When I can; but that's not all. I'm not in Lawrence's debt alone," Foster answered with some diffidence. "I came over here, a stranger, ignorant of your ideas and customs, and you made me welcome. Of course, if I had jarred you, you wouldn't have let me know; but there are degrees of hospitality."

Alice smiled. "You needn't labor your excuses for wanting to help us, and you are not a stranger now. You must have understood this when my father showed you the letter."

"Thank you," Foster replied with feeling, and was silent for the next few moments. Alice, who was proud and reserved, trusted him, and he must somehow justify her confidence. He had a vague plan in his mind, but it needed working out.

"But we must be practical," she resumed. "Can you help? You must see that there is nobody else who can."

Foster made a sign of agreement, for it was plain that Featherstone could not tell his friends about his trouble.

"I begin to think I might; but although I haven't quite made my plans yet, I see some danger. Would you take a risk for your brother's sake?"

The girl's eyes sparkled, and he saw that she had Lawrence's reckless courage. He had heard his partner laugh when they faced starvation on the frozen trail.

"I would take any risk to save him or punish the blackmailer."

"Very well. I rather think your father will leave things to me, and I have a half-formed plan. There ought to be some humor in the plot, if I can work it out. Daly's plainly convinced that your brother's here, and I don't see why he shouldn't be encouraged to stick to his opinion. In fact, the longer he looks for Lawrence, the more amusing the thing will get. Of course, he may turn spiteful when he finds he has been tricked, but he, no doubt, means to do all the harm he can already. However, you must give me until tomorrow."

Alice got up and when he rose said quietly, but with something in her voice that thrilled him: "I think you like my mother and she knows I meant to talk to you. Lawrence is very dear to her and if he were dragged back into disgrace, now when we thought it was all forgotten and he has made a new start in Canada, I am not sure she could bear the shock. There is nobody else who could help us and we trust to you."

"Then I must try to deserve it," Foster answered with a bow. "But what about your old servant, John? Have you much confidence in him?"

The girl's tense face relaxed. "In a sense, John is one of the family, but if you want his help, you must use some tact and not expect Western frankness. He is remarkably discreet."

Foster opened the door for her, and then went to the gun-room, where he found John, who had driven him from the station when he arrived, pouring out some Rangoon oil. Sitting down carelessly, he lighted a cigarette.

"I understand you were rather fond of my partner, Lawrence Featherstone," he remarked.

"If I may say so, sir, I was. A very likable young gentleman."

"I expect you know he got into trouble."

John looked pained at his bluntness. "I heard something about it, sir. Perhaps Mr. Lawrence was a little wild. It sometimes happens in very good families."

"Just so," said Foster. "Would you be surprised to hear he hadn't got out of that trouble yet?"

"Not surprised exactly; I was afraid of something like it, sir."

Foster knew this was as much as he would admit, but felt that he could trust the man.

"Very well. My partner's in some danger, and with Mr. Featherstone's permission I must try to see him through, but may want your help. I suppose you're willing?"

"Yes, sir. If it's for Mr. Lawrence, you can take it that I am."

"You can drive an automobile pretty well?"

"Not like a professional, sir, but now we don't keep a chauffeur I often drive to the station."

"That's satisfactory. I may want the car to-morrow evening, but nobody else must know about this."

"Very good, sir," said John. "When you're ready you can give me your instructions; they'll go no further."

Then he dipped a rag in the oil and began to rub a gun, and Foster went out, feeling satisfied. It was plain that he could rely upon the old fellow, who he thought was unflinchingly loyal to the Featherstones. After all, it was something to have the respect and affection of one's servant.

IX

THE FALSE TRAIL

When Foster got up next morning he had made his plan, and spent ten minutes explaining it to John. The old fellow understood his orders, and although he listened with formal deference, the faint twinkle in his eyes showed that he approved. After breakfast, Foster asked Featherstone to come out on the terrace and while they walked about indicated the line he thought it best to take.

Featherstone agreed, but expressed some misgivings. "There may be danger in putting Daly on the track, and after all I'm only delaying a crisis that must be faced."

"The longer it's delayed, the better; something may happen in the meantime," Foster replied. "Then, you see, the track is false. When the fellow finds you obstinate, he'll try to get hold of Lawrence, particularly as he got money from him before; but as he believes Lawrence is in England, he'll have some trouble. The advantage is that he won't be able to bother you while all his time and energy's occupied by following me."

"That is possible," said Featherstone. "But you may find it difficult to get away from the rogue, since you must give him some kind of a clew."

Foster laughed. "I don't mind the difficulty, sir. In fact, I imagine, I'm going to enjoy the chase."

"There's a point that must be thought of. If he goes to the police when he can't find Lawrence, it would be awkward. I should be no better off than I am now."

"It's unlikely. So long as Daly sees the smallest chance of extorting money he'll keep his secret. The reason's obvious."

"Well," said Featherstone, with feeling, "you are doing us a service we can't repay. I frankly don't like the plan, because it can only work at your expense, but it will give us time and I can think of nothing else."

Foster left him with a feeling of pleasant excitement. He was doing his host a favor and this was something, but the adventure appealed to him for other reasons. He had, in Canada, found scope for his energy in profitable work, but there was a reckless vein in him, and it was exhilarating to feel that he could now follow his bent, without being hampered by the necessity for making the undertaking pay. After all, there was not much enjoyment in what one did for money, and he thought he was going to get some amusement out of the game. Still, he did not want to leave the Garth. Alice had treated him with a quiet friendliness he valued and he began to hope he was making some progress in her good opinion. It was, however, comforting to feel that he was going to save her pain, and for the rest of the day he was conscious of a cheerfulness he tried to hide in view of the anxiety the others had to bear.

In the evening John put Lawrence's traveling bag under a small table near the door in the hall and arranged the cloth so that it hung over and covered part of the bag but did not hide it altogether. He took some trouble, and when he was satisfied it looked as if the bag had been carelessly placed where it would be out of sight but ready to be picked up

quickly if its owner meant to leave the house in a hurry. Moreover, if anybody thought it worth while to look under the table, the letters L.F. could be distinguished and Lawrence's name was engraved upon the lock. Foster, having learned from the railway guide when Daly would arrive, had arranged that he should be left alone for a minute or two in the hall. If the fellow made good use of the time, so much the better.

After putting on a gray waterproof, leggings, and strong boots, Foster stood at the open door of his room until he heard Daly come in. There was silence for the next minute, and then footsteps echoed along a passage as the visitor was taken to the library, where Featherstone would receive him, and Foster pulled out his watch. As there was no town for some distance and Daly would not expect to be asked to stay, he no doubt intended to return to the station across the moor, where he could catch the last train. Allowing for the long drive, he could not stop long at the Garth; but Foster must give Featherstone time enough. The latter had a rather difficult part, because he must allow Daly to state his terms, and not reject them until the last moment. He was too honest and too proud to dissemble well, but he was not a fool and there was much at stake.

At length, Foster stole quietly down the stairs, and smiled as he remarked that the cloth on the small table had been pulled aside. This had been done cautiously, but a fold that overhung the edge was not in quite its former position. Then he picked up the bag and went out, making noise enough to be heard in the library as he shut the hall door. When he went down the steps he saw the lights of the car that had brought Daly glimmer on the wet gravel of the drive. The back of the car was next him, for it had been turned round ready to start. Then Featherstone's car rolled up quietly, and Foster was getting in when he stopped and felt his heart beat as a slender figure appeared on the terrace. He turned, with his foot on the step, and waited until Alice came up.

"I couldn't let you go without a last word of thanks," she said. "It is splendid! We can't forget."

"I believe I'm going to have an amusing trip," Foster replied. "Then, you see, the Garth is a remarkably nice place to come back to, and there's the pleasure of looking forward to my return. But I'm unselfish enough to hope I won't have that satisfaction all to myself."

Alice smiled, but there was something very friendly in her look and her voice was unusually soft.

"You can always be sure of your welcome and we will miss you when you are away. I very sincerely wish you good luck."

Foster was seldom theatrical, but felt the occasion justified his doing something unusual. John, having already grasped the wheel, had his back to them, and Foster took the girl's hand, which rested on the rail, and kissed it. She made a little abrupt movement, and he thought he saw a tinge of color in her face, but she did not look angry and he felt a strange exultant thrill.

"Make as much noise as you can," he said to John.

The car backed across the rattling gravel, and the girl's figure faded into the gloom; then John turned the wheel and they shot forward down the drive. The lights of the other car vanished, there was a splash as they swung into the wet road, and Foster pulled the rug around him when he had struck a match and noted the time.

"You needn't hurry her too much," he said. "If I catch the train by about a minute, it is all I want."

"Very good, sir. If I may remark, the other's a powerful car."

"I don't think they'll try to overtake us until we're near the station," Foster answered with a laugh. "But we can't allow it then."

"No, sir," said John. "I quite understand."

They ran down the valley at a moderate speed, and Foster, looking around when they came to a straight piece of road, was not surprised to see a gleam of light in the distance. He lost it a few moments afterwards, but it flashed out again every now and then, until they plunged into a thick fir wood. They were about half-way to the station, but the light had not got much nearer. He had, however, not expected it to do so, because he thought Daly would be satisfied if he kept his supposititious victim in sight. The danger would arise when they got near the station, and whether they overcame it or not depended on John's coolness and nerve. Foster thought the man would not fail him.

It was a dark night and a damp haze thickened the gloom. Stone walls and ragged thorn bushes leaped up in the glare of the lamps and faded, but one could see nothing outside the bright beam. This was a disadvantage, because Foster could not tell where he was and much depended on his reaching the station with exactly the right time to spare. He was rather anxious about it, since his plan would be spoiled at the start if the train were late. By striking a match in the shelter of the screen, he could see his watch, but it did not seem prudent to distract John's attention often.

By and by the walls vanished and withered heath, glistening with damp, rolled past the car. They were running through a peat moss, with a deep ditch on one side, and climbing an incline, to judge by the heavy throb of the engine. Shallow ruts, filled with water, ran on in the blaze ahead and showers splashed about the wheels. Outside the bright beam the darkness was impenetrable. Foster, however, was conscious of a pleasant thrill. If one looked at the thing in one way, he was plunging into trouble that might have been avoided; but he had been prudent long enough and found a strange satisfaction in being rash. Besides, no matter what difficulties he got into, he would be repaid by the memory of the look Alice had given him. The way the warm color crept into her face had stirred him as nothing else had done. Anyhow, he had started on the adventure and was going to see it through.

After a time, they sped across a bridge, where a burn splashed noisily down a ravine, and John asked: "How long have we got, sir?"

"Ten minutes, if the train's punctual."

"And where's the other car, sir?"

Foster, whose eyes were dazzled by the match he had struck, looked round and saw a misty flash in the dark.

"About half a mile behind, I think."

"Very good, sir. It all depends upon the train now. She's not often late."

The throb of the engine quickened and struck a sharper note, and Foster felt the car leap forward up the hill. Turning in his seat, he watched the flickering gleam behind and saw it grow fainter and then gradually get bright. It looked as if the pursuers had lost sight of the front car's tail lamp and were increasing their speed.

"They're creeping up," he said to John, who did not reply.

Foster thought they had now reached the top of the moor, and as they swung up and down across the heathy undulations a streak of light flashed out in the distance.

"That's the train," he said.

"Yes, sir. You can see her for two or three miles."

Then there was a change in the sound and motion, and Foster knew the engine was running all-out. Showers of small stones and water flew up about the wheels and the wind whipped his face, but the following light was a little nearer when he looked behind. The other car had reached the summit and it would be a close race, but he thought they could keep their lead long enough. Then he looked ahead and saw that the bright streak he had noticed had gone. The fireman had, no doubt, closed the furnace door, but the lights from the carriage windows twinkled faintly across the heath. He could not see the station, but it was obvious that he had not much time to spare.

A few moments later they swept across a low rise and a faint blur of buildings loomed among a cluster of lights. They were now going furiously and he seized the side of the car as they swung round a curve. He felt the near wheels sink as they crushed through spongy sod, and the car tilted, but they got round, and there was a sudden jar when the station lay some fifty yards ahead. Foster jumped out before the car quite stopped.

"Round with her! I'm all right," he said.

"Very good, sir. If I might remark-----"

Foster heard nothing more as he ran up the road, carrying the bag. The train was very near; he could hear the roar it made in a shallow cutting, but as he reached the station the sound ceased and the engine rolled past. He took a ticket to Edinburgh, and hurrying across the bridge, picked a compartment that had another occupant and stood at the door, where he could see the steps he had come down. There was nobody on the bridge and he seemed to be the only passenger, but a porter began to drag some packages from the van and leisurely put them on a truck. Foster quivered with impatience as he watched the fellow. If he kept the train another minute, it might be too late. Then he glanced back at the bridge. Nobody came down the steps yet, but the porter had not finished, and one could still catch the train.

He crossed the floor to the opposite window, from which he could see the booking office, but as he loosed the strap he felt a jerk. Then the engine panted and the wheels began to turn. He ran back to the other door, but there was only the porter on the platform and the lamps were sliding past. Pulling up the window, he turned to the passenger with a forced smile.

"Sorry if I disturbed you! The man I was looking for hasn't come."

In the meantime, John turned the car round and drove back to the bend. The road was narrow, but there was room for two vehicles to pass, provided that both kept well to the proper side. John, however, took the middle and did not swerve much when a dazzling beam swept round the curve. He blew his horn; there was an answering shriek from an electric hooter, and then a savage shout. John, who was near the left side now, but not so close as he ought to have been, freed the clutch and used the brake, and the other car, missing him by an inch or two, plunged into the wet grass across the road. As he stopped he saw the boggy soil fly up and the lamps sink towards the ground. Jumping off, he found the car had brought up in front of a wall, with the front wheels buried to the axle. The driver and a very angry man in a soft hat were getting out.

"You nearly wrecked us," said the latter. "What d'you mean by fooling about the middle of the road like that?"

"I wasn't quite in the middle, sir. It's an awkward curve and your lights dazzled me."

"Where's the man you brought?"

"I imagine he's caught the train, sir," John answered with imperturbable calm.

He thought the other came near to knocking him down, for he clenched his fist, but after a savage exclamation went back to the car.

"The engine won't move her. How are we going to get her out?" he said.

"I could give you a pull, sir," John replied with respectful gravity, "They keep a rope at the station for shunting. Perhaps you had better send the driver, sir."

X

THE DROVE ROAD

Foster spent the next day lounging about Edinburgh and looking out for Daly, whom he had expected to follow him. He, however, saw nothing of the man, and felt half disappointed, because he missed the excitement of the chase. It was too cold and wet to roam the streets with much enjoyment, there was no good play at the theaters, and he had seen picture palaces in Canada. Moreover, he had led an active life, and having nothing to do soon began to get irksome. It was curious that he had never felt bored at the Garth, even when he scarcely saw Alice during the day, but then the Garth had a peculiar charm. It was possible that Daly had gone back there, and he had been a fool to leave.

He was sitting in the hotel smoking-room next morning when a stranger came up and sat down close by. The man had a quiet, thoughtful air, and lighted his pipe. There was nothing about him to indicate his rank or occupation, and Foster wondered what he wanted.

"I hope you won't object to my asking if you're a Canadian?" he said.

"I don't know if I object or not. Anyhow, I'm English."

"But perhaps you have been in Canada," the stranger remarked politely.

Foster looked hard at him. "I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance, but had better hint that you're wasting time if you're a friend of Daly's."

The stranger smiled and Foster saw that he had been incautious. "I don't know the gentleman."

"Then what is your business?"

"If you insist on knowing, I'm connected with the police."

"Well," said Foster, "I'll pay you a compliment by stating that I wouldn't have imagined it; but I don't understand what the police have to do with me."

"It's very possible that they have nothing to do with you, but you can perhaps make that plain. You signed the visitor's book John Foster, which doesn't quite correspond with the letters on your bag."

"Ah!" said Foster, "I begin to understand. No doubt, you noticed Lawrence Featherstone's name on the lock, and the Canadian Pacific label?"

"I did," the other admitted with humorous dryness.

Foster pondered. On the whole, he was glad he had registered in his proper name, though he had been tempted to give Featherstone's, in case Daly made inquiries. He had, however, decided that the latter probably thought they were both in Great Britain and would expect them to keep together. He did not doubt that his visitor belonged to the police, because an impostor would be easily found out.

"Featherstone's my partner and I took his baggage by mistake when we left a small Canadian town," he said, and added after a pause: "I expect the explanation sounds rather lame."

The other smiled, but Foster felt he was being subjected to a very close scrutiny. Although sensible of some annoyance, he felt inclined to like the man, who presently resumed: "You have been in Edinburgh before."

"For a day; I left in the evening and went to Newcastle."

"To Newcastle?" said the other thoughtfully. "Did you stay there?"

"I did not," said Foster, thinking frankness was best. "I went back to a country house in Northumberland that belongs to my partner's father. Lawrence Featherstone and I own a sawmill in Canada, but at present I'm taking a holiday in the Old Country."

He could not tell if the man was satisfied or not, for he asked abruptly: "Who is the Mr. Daly you mentioned?"

"I really don't know. It looks as if he were something of a blackmailer, and I must admit that I was trying to keep out of his way."

The man pondered for a minute, and then getting up gave Foster a card.

"Very well; I don't think I need keep you. You have my address if you should want to communicate with me."

He went out and Foster thought he had not handled the situation with much skill. It was a mistake to mention Daly and perhaps to state that he had been to Newcastle. He thought the man looked interested when he heard this. Then it was curious that he seemed to imagine Foster might want to write to him; but he began to see a possible reason for his being watched. Hulton had, no doubt, sent somebody over to inquire about the stolen bonds, and if the man had discovered anything important, he might have asked the help of the police. In this case, the movements of strangers from Canada would be noted. The trouble was that Foster could not be frank with the police, because Lawrence's secret must be carefully guarded.

In the afternoon he entered a fashionable tea-room and sat for a time in a corner. The room was divided into quiet nooks by Moorish arches, from which lamps of an antique pattern hung by chains and threw down a soft red glow. Heavy imitation Eastern curtains deadened the hum of voices and rattle of cups. The air was warm and scented, the light dim, and Foster, who had often camped in the snow, felt amused by the affectation of sensual luxury as he ate iced cakes and languidly watched the people. He could only see two or three men, one of whom he had noticed at the hotel and afterwards passed in the street. This was probably a coincidence, but it might have a meaning, and he moved back behind the arch that cut off his corner. When he next looked about, the fellow had gone. There were, however, a number

of pretty, fashionably-dressed girls, and he remarked the warm color in their faces and the clearness of their voices. The Scottish capital seemed to be inhabited by handsome women.

He was, however, somewhat surprised when one came towards him and he recognized the girl he had met at Hawick station. He had hardly expected her to claim his acquaintance, as she obviously meant to do.

"You seem to be fond of Edinburgh," she remarked, sitting down at his table.

"It's an interesting city. I'm a stranger and ignorant of your etiquette; but would I be permitted to send for some cakes and tea?"

"I think not," she answered, smiling. "For one thing, I must go in a minute."

Foster waited. The girl had good manners, and he thought it unlikely that she was willing to begin a flirtation with a man she did not know; besides she had stopped him sending for the tea. She was pretty, and had a certain air of refinement, but it was a dainty prettiness that somehow harmonized with the exotic luxury of the room. This was a different thing from Alice Featherstone's rather stately beauty, which found an appropriate background in the dignified austerity of the Garth.

"Are you enjoying your stay here?" she resumed. "I begin to think I've had enough. The climate's not very cheerful, and the people seem suspicious about strangers."

"The Scots are proverbially cautious," she answered carelessly, but Foster thought he saw a gleam of interest in her eyes. "I suppose somebody has been bothering you with questions?"

"Yes; as I'm of a retiring character, it annoys me. Besides, I really think it's quite unjustified. Do I look dangerous?"

"No," she said with a twinkle, "if you did, I shouldn't have ventured to speak to you. On the contrary, you have a candid air that ought to banish distrust. Of course, I don't know if it's deceptive."

"You have to know people for some time before you understand them, but, on the whole, I imagine I'm harmless," Foster replied. "That's what makes it galling. If I had, for example, a part in some dark plot, I couldn't resent being watched. As it happens, I merely want to get as much innocent pleasure as possible out of a holiday, and feel vexed when people won't let me."

The girl gave him a quick, searching look, and then said carelessly, "One can sympathize with you; it is annoying to be watched. But after all, Edinburgh's rather dull just now, and the cold winds are trying to strangers."

"Is this a hint that I ought to go away?"

"Do you take hints?" she asked with a smile. "Somehow I imagine you're rather an obstinate man. I suppose you took the packet to Newcastle?"

"I did," Foster admitted in an apologetic voice. "You see, I promised to deliver the thing."

"And, of course, you kept your word! Well, that was very nice of you, but I wouldn't make any rash promises while you stay in this country. Sometimes they lead one into difficulties. But I must go."

She left him with a friendly smile, and he sat down again in a thoughtful mood. It looked as if she had had an object in talking to him, and she had learned that he had gone to Newcastle and had since been watched. He gathered that she thought the things had some connection, though her remarks were guarded. Then she had given him another hint, which he meant to act upon.

Leaving the tea-room, he walked for a short distance and then stopped on the pavement in Princes Street and looked about. It was dark, but a biting wind had cleared the air. At one end of the imposing street a confused glimmer marked the neighborhood of the Caledonian station, and when one looked the other way a long row of lights ran on, and then curving round and rising sharply, ended in a cluster of twinkling points high against the sky. The dark, blurred mass they gathered round was the Castle rock, and below it the tall spire of the Scott monument was faintly etched against the shadowy hollow where the gardens sloped away.

Now he had resolved to leave the city, Foster felt its charm and half resented being, in a manner, forced to go, but walked on, musing on the way women had recently meddled with his affairs. To begin with, Carmen had given him the troublesome packet, then it was largely for Alice Featherstone's sake he had embarked on a fresh adventure, and now the girl in the tea-room had warned him to leave the town. It was a privilege to help Alice, but the others' interference was, so to speak, superfluous. A man could devote himself to pleasing one woman, but one was enough.

After a few minutes he stopped and looked into a shop window as a man passed a neighboring lamp. It was Daly and the fellow moved slowly, although Foster did not think he had seen him yet. He would know very soon and for a moment or two he felt his heart beat, but when he looked round Daly had passed. Foster followed and saw him enter the tea-room. This was disturbing, although Foster remembered that he had told nobody he was going there. He decided to leave Edinburgh as soon as he could next morning and bought a map of southern Scotland on his way back to the hotel.

After dinner, he sat down in the smoking-room near a man to whom he had once or twice spoken. The latter was a red-faced, keen-eyed old fellow, and looked like a small country laird.

"I've come over to see Scotland and have been long enough in the capital," he said. "After all, you can't judge a country by its towns. What would you advise?"

"It depends upon what ye want to see?" the man replied.

"I think I'd like the moors and hills. I get enough of industrial activity in Ontario, and would sooner hear the grouse and the black-cock than shipyard hammers. Then I'd prefer to take my time and go on foot."

His companion nodded approval. "Ye have sense. Are ye a good walker?"

"I have walked three hundred miles through pretty rough country and dragged my belongings on a hand-sledge."

"Then I think I can tell ye how to see rugged Scotland, for the country has two different sides. Ye can take your choice, but ye cannot see both at once. I could send ye by main roads, where the tourists' motors run, to the show-places, where ye would stay at smart hotels, with Swiss and London waiters, and learn as much o' Scottish character as ye would in Lucerne or the Strand."

"I don't think that is quite what I want. Besides, I haven't much time and would sooner keep to the south."

"Then ye'll take the high ground and go by tracks the moss-troopers rode, winding up the waters and among the fells, where there's only cothouse clachans and lonely farm-towns. Ye'll see there why the old Scottish stock grows firm and

strong and the bit, bleak country breeds men who make it respected across the world. Man, if I had not rheumatism and some fashious business I cannot neglect, we would take the moors together!"

"You don't seem to like the smart hotels," Foster remarked, half amused.

"I do not like the folk they harbor. The dusty trippers in leather coats and goggles ye meet at Melrose and Jedburgh are an affront to an old Scottish town. But a man on foot, in clothes that match the ling and the gray bents, gives a human touch to the scene, whether ye meet him by a wind-ruffled lochan or on the broad moor. Ye ken he has come slowly through the quiet hills, for the love o' what he sees. But ye will not understand an old man's hivering!"

"I think I do," said Foster. "One learns the charm of the lone trail in the Canadian bush. But I have a map, and don't care much where I go, so long as it's somewhere south. Suppose you mark me out a route towards Liddesdale."

The man did so, and jotted down a few marginal notes.

"I'm sending ye by the old drove roads," he explained. "Sometimes ye'll find them plain enough, but often they're rough green tracks, and nobody can tell ye when they were made. The moss-troopers wore them deeper when they rode with the spear and steel-cap to Solway sands. Afterwards came the drovers with their flocks and herds, the smugglers' pack-horse trains, and messengers to Prince Charlie's friends from Louis of France. That's why the old road runs across the fell, while the turnpike keeps the valley. If ye follow my directions, ye'll maybe find the link between industrial Scotland and the stormy past; it's in the cothouse and clachan the race is bred that made and keeps alive Glasgow and Dundee."

Foster thanked him and examined the map. It was clearly drawn and showed the height and natural features of the country, which was obviously rough. The path marked out led over the Border hills, dipped into winding valleys, and skirted moorland lakes. It seemed to draw him as he studied it, for the wilderness has charm, and the drove road ran through heathy wastes far from the smoke of factories and mining towns. Well, he was ready to cross the bleak uplands, without troubling much about the mist and rain, for he had faced worse winters than any Scotland knew, but he reflected with grim amusement that Daly would find the traveling rough if he got on his trail.

There were, however, some things he needed for the journey, and he went out to buy them while the shops were open. Next morning he gave instructions that letters for himself and Lawrence should be sent to Peebles, and when the clerk objected that he could not forward Featherstone's without the latter's orders, said it did not matter. He had left a clew for Daly, which was all he wanted, but, in order to make it plainer, he sent the porter to the station with the bag and told him to wait by the Peebles train. Then he set off, dressed in the oldest clothes he had, wondering what adventures he would meet with in the wilds.

XI

THE POACHERS

Foster left Peebles soon after his arrival and following the Tweed down stream to Traquair turned south across the hills. A road brought him to Yarrow, where he sat down to smoke in the shelter of a stone dyke by the waterside. He had no reason to believe that he was followed, and there were two good hotels beside St. Mary's loch, which was not far off. But Foster did not mean to stay at good hotels and knew that Daly would not have much trouble in reaching St. Mary's in a car if he arrived at Peebles by a later train. It would then be difficult to keep out of his way, and if he found Foster alone, he would, no doubt, go back to look for Lawrence at the Garth. Taking this for granted, Foster thought it better to put Ettrick Forest between himself and possible pursuit.

It looked a lonely region on the map, and when he glanced south the hills loomed, dark and forbidding, through thin gray mist. Pools of water dotted the marish fields, and beyond these lay a wet, brown moss where wild cotton grew among the peat-hags. Plover were crying about the waste and a curlew's shrill tremolo rang out as it flitted across the leaden sky. The outlook was not encouraging, but Foster picked his way across the bog and struck up the side of a fell. There was a road, but it would take him some distance round.

Wiry grass twined about his feet, he sank in velvety green patches where the moss grew rank, and walking was harder when he crossed belts of withered heath. Here and there a gnarled thorn bush rattled its dry twigs in the wind; there were bits of dykes and rusty wire fences, but he saw no path except the winding tracks the sheep had made. Still Ettrick water was not far off, and he would strike it if he held south. Heavy rain met him on the summit, and after struggling on for a time he took shelter behind a broken dyke. The rain got worse and the moor was lost in mist a quarter of a mile away, but he heard a faint, hoarse sound in the haze below. He thought this was the roar of Ettrick or a fall on a moorland burn that would lead him down.

When he began to feel cold he set off again, and the rain, which thinned as he went down hill, stopped altogether when he reached the bottom. A road ran beside the angry water, but the valley was deeply sunk in the dark fells and their summits were hidden by drifting mist. There was no hint of life in the dreary landscape except a moving patch that looked like a flock of sheep, and a glance at the map showed that his path led on across the waste to the south. It would be a long march to Hawick, which was the town he meant to reach, particularly if he went up the valley, until he found a road, but his director had indicated a clachan as his stopping-place. He understood that a clachan meant a hamlet, and the old fellow had said he would find rough but sufficient accommodation in what he called a change-house. It would be awkward if he lost the way, but this must be risked, and crossing the river he struck into the hills.

He found a rough track, and presently the sky began to clear. Pale-blue patches opened in the thinning clouds, and gleams of sunshine, chased by shadow, touched the moor. Where they fell the brown heath turned red and withered fern glowed fiery yellow. The green road, cropped smooth by sheep and crossed by rills of water, swung sharply up and down, but at length it began a steady descent, and about four o'clock in the afternoon Foster stopped in the bottom of a deep glen.

A few rushy fields occupied the hollow and a house stood in the shelter of a thin fir wood. It had mullioned windows and a porch with pillars, but looked old, and the walls were speckled with lichens. A garden stretched about it, and looking in through the iron rails, Foster saw gnarled fruit trees fringed with moss. Their branches cut against a patch of saffron sky, and a faint warm glow touched the front of the building. There was a low window at its nearer end and Foster saw a woman sewing by the fire.

The house had a strangely homelike look after the barren moors, and Foster, feeling tired and cold, longed to ask for shelter. Had it been a farm, he might have done so, but he thought it belonged to some country laird and resumed his march. He never saw the house again, but remembered it now and then, as he had seen it with the fading light that shone through the old apple trees touching its lichen wall.

The road led upwards and he stopped for breath at the summit. The glen was now shut in and the light going, but here and there in the distance a loch reflected a pale gleam. A half-moon shone above the hills and the silver light got brighter as he went on. The wind had fallen and the silence was emphasized by the faint splash of water. After a time, he came down to lower ground where broken dykes divided straggling fields, but there was no sign of life until as he turned a corner an indistinct figure vanished among the dry fern in the shadow of a wall. Foster thought this curious, particularly when he passed the spot and saw nobody there, but there was an opening in the dyke for the sheep to go through.

A little farther on, the road ran across a field, and when he was near the middle he saw something move behind a gorse bush. Although it looked like a man's head, he did not stop. Going on, as if he had seen nothing, until he was close to the gorse, he left the track and walked swiftly but softly across the grass. When he reached the bush a man who had been crouching behind it sprang to his feet. He was tall and roughly dressed, and looked like a shepherd or farm-hand.

"Weel," he said with a truculent air, "what is it ye want with me?"

The question somewhat relieved Foster, who now noted the end of a long, thin net in the grass.

"I was curious to see what you were doing. Then I meant to ask the way to Langsyke."

"What are ye wanting there?"

"To stay the night. I was directed to a change-house where they'd take me in."

"They might. Ye're a stranger, and ye'll tak' the road again the morn?"

Foster said he meant to do so and the other pondered.

"Weel, there's a soft flow where ye might get mired if ye left the road, which is no' that plain, and I could set ye on the way, but there's a bit job I'll hae to finish first." He paused and added with a grin as he indicated the net: "Maybe ye hae a notion what it is."

"I imagine it's connected with somebody else's grouse or partridges, but that's not my business. You'll be a shilling or two richer if you show me the way."

"Then the sooner I'm finished here, the sooner we'll be off, though I doot we hae fleyt the paltrig. Bide ye by the whinns, and when ye see me at the dyke come forrad with the net. If I lift my airm, ye'll stop."

He went off with the end of the net, and Foster waited, half amused. The fellow probably wanted to ensure his saying nothing about the poaching by making him an accomplice, but this did not matter much. It was an adventure and he was anxious to find a guide. By the way the net unwound and slipped across the grass he thought there was another man at work, but he carried his part forward as he had been told and then dropped it and sat down among some rushes. Two indistinct figures were moving towards each other and he got up presently when one signaled. When he joined them a number of small dark objects showed through the net.

"Hae!" said a man who opened the meshes, and added when Foster picked up two limp birds: "We've no' done so bad."

Then Foster remembered the man he had seen as he came along the road.

"How many of you are in the gang?" he asked.

"There's twa o' us her. I'm thinking that's a' ye need ken."

"It's what I meant," said Foster apologetically. "Still I passed another fellow hiding, a short distance back."

The men, saying nothing, took out the birds and began to roll up the net. Foster had now four partridges, which they seemed to expect him to carry, and was putting their legs together so as to hold them conveniently when he heard a rattle

of stones. Then a dark figure leaped down from the wall and somebody shouted: "Stand where ye are or I'll put a chairge o' number four in ye!"

A leveled gun twinkled in the moonlight, and for a moment Foster hesitated. He hardly thought the man would shoot, and it would be awkward if he was arrested with the partridges in his hand. Springing suddenly forward, he struck, from below upwards, with his stick. There was a flash and a report, but he felt himself unharmed and brought the stick down upon the gamekeeper's head. He heard the gun drop, and then turned and, keeping in the shadow of the wall, ran across the field. When he was near the opposite end, he saw another man waiting to cut him off, and seizing the top of the dyke swung himself over. He came down among withered fern and ran back behind the wall towards the spot where he had left his first antagonist, until he struck a small, winding hollow through which water flowed. This seemed to offer a good hiding-place, but Foster knew better, although he followed it for a short distance. One can often hide best in the open and it was prudent to avoid the obvious line of search. Creeping out of the hollow, he made for a clump of rushes and felt satisfied when he lay down behind it. His waterproof and cap were gray, and his pursuers would have to search all the field before they found him, unless they were lucky.

After a few minutes, he saw them, but while one plunged into the hollow, the other sat on top of the wall. This seemed to be the fellow he had struck, and Foster was relieved to see he was not badly hurt. The man, however, occupied a commanding position, because Foster's chance of remaining unseen depended largely on the searcher's height above the ground. He knew from experience gained in hunting that a very small object will hide a man so long as the line of sight he must avoid is nearly horizontal, but the fellow on the wall could see over the rushes. In consequence, immobility was his only resource, and he very cautiously turned his head enough to enable him to see.

The gamekeeper who had entered the hollow presently came back into the field and began to walk methodically up and down, and Foster regretted his rashness in helping with the net. The poachers had vanished, but the others seemed to know there was somebody about, and since they were gamekeepers would be hard to deceive. His cover was not good, and although he might have changed his place when the fellow in the field was farthest away, he feared that a movement would betray him to the other on the wall.

In the meantime, the chill of the wet soil crept through his mackintosh and his hands got numbed. He thrust them into the mossy grass for fear they should show in the moonlight, and buried his face in the rushes, which prickled his skin. He could, with some trouble, see through the clump and anxiously watched the fellow who came steadily nearer. Now and then he turned aside to examine a whinn bush, and Foster saw that he had acted wisely when he dropped behind the rushes. Had he chosen a prominent object for cover, he would have been caught.

At length, the searcher crossed the field on a line that would bring him close to where Foster lay, and the latter let his face sink lower and tried to check his breathing. He durst not look about, but heard the man's heavy boots splash in the boggy grass, until the fellow suddenly stopped. Foster thought he had seen him, but did not move. In the Northwest, he had now and then caught a jack-rabbit by carefully marking its hiding-place, but had not seen it afterwards until he nearly trod upon the crouching animal. It was comforting to remember that his pursuers had not watched him drop behind the rushes.

"Hae ye seen aught, Jock?" the keeper near him called, and Foster was conscious of keen relief.

"Naething ava," answered the other. "If he went doon the burn, he's no' come oot."

"He's no' there; ye would ha' seen him if he'd headed back."

There was silence for a moment or two and Foster heard the water bubble in the moss as the man moved his foot. The fellow would tread upon him if he took a few steps in the right direction, but his mackintosh was much the color of the withered grass and his face and hands were hidden.

Then the man on the wall remarked in a thoughtful tone: "I'm no' quite sure he went ower the dyke. Ye see, I was kin' o' staggered by the clout on the head, and he might ha' slippit oot by the gate."

"It will be Lang Pate, of course."

"Just him," agreed the other. "He was near enough to reach me with his stick and the light no' that bad. Besides, wha' else would it be?"

Foster, seeing that he had escaped notice, felt amused. Long Pete was suspected and therefore judged guilty; the keeper's last argument banished doubt.

"My heid's sair," the man resumed. "We'll look if they've gone doon the glen, and then tak' the road if ye'll row up the net."

The other crossed the field and Foster lay still until he heard him climb the wall and afterwards made for a hole that led into the road. Somewhat to his surprise, he found that he had brought the partridges. He followed the road quietly, keeping in the shadow of a dyke, although he thought the gamekeepers had gone the other way, and on turning a corner came upon the poachers lurking behind a thorn bush.

"We thought they had caught ye," one remarked.

"I suppose you were anxious about it, because you were afraid I might put them on your track."

"I canna say ye're altogether wrang, but whaur are they the noo?"

"Looking for you in the glen, I believe. But which of you is Long Pete?"

The man he had met first said it was his name, and Foster resumed: "Then I imagine the fellow with the gun means to declare that you struck him."

"He would!" Pete remarked, grinning. "Weel, it's lucky I hae twa three friends wha'll show that I couldna' ha' been near the spot just then. But we'll need to hurry."

"I think I understand," said Foster, who went on with them. "Still you can't save much time, even if you walk very fast."

"Verra true," Pete replied. "But it's no' difficult to pit back the clock."

Leaving the road presently, they struck across a bog that got softer as they advanced until Foster felt the rotten turf tremble beneath his feet. All round were clumps of rushes, patches of smooth but treacherous moss, and holes where water glimmered in the moonlight. He imagined it was a dangerous place for a stranger to cross, but his companions knew the way, and although he sank to the top of his boots they reached firmer ground. Soon afterwards, Pete showed him a rough track that crossed the side of a hill.

"Yon's your road and ye'll see the clachan in about a mile. If they're no' verra willing to tak' ye in, ye can tell them ye're a freend o' mine."

Foster thanked him and followed the track, which led him to a hollow where lights shone among a clump of bare ash trees. A few low, white houses straggled along the roadside, and he thought one that was somewhat larger and had dormer windows was the change-house. When he knocked he was shown into an untidy kitchen where two men sat drinking by a peat fire. At first, the landlord seemed doubtful about being able to find room for him, but his manner changed when Foster carelessly mentioned that he understood from Pete that he would be welcome, and one of the others gave him a keen glance.

"Where met ye Pate?" he asked.

"On the hill," said Foster, who felt sure of his ground. "I helped him with the net."

"Had he any luck?"

"Not much," said Foster. "Two gamekeepers turned up and although we got a few partridges Pete lost his net."

There was silence for a moment, and then another remarked: "I wouldna' say but we ken enough. We hae helpit Pate oot before, and a change is lightsome. He can gang till the moss-side folk noo."

They let the matter drop, but Foster was given a better supper than he expected and afterwards a bed in a cupboard fixed to the kitchen wall.

XII

A COMPLICATION

At noon next day Foster sat, smoking, on a bridge near the clachan. The air was mild and sunshine filled the hollow, while Foster had just dined upon some very appetizing broth. The broth was thick with vegetables, but he did not think the meat in it came from a barn-door fowl. The clachan was a poor and untidy place, but he was tired, and as the gamekeepers would not suspect a neatly-dressed stranger, had thought of stopping another night. When he had nearly finished his pipe. Long Pete came up. Foster, who had only seen him in the moonlight, now noted that he had a rather frank brown face and a twinkling smile.

"Ye'll be for Hawick?" he remarked.

Foster said he was going there and Pete resumed in a meaning tone: "It's a grand day for the road and ye could be in Hawick soon after it's dark."

"Just so," said Foster, who could take a hint. "But is there any reason I should start this afternoon?"

"Ye should ken. I was across the muir in the morning and found a polisman frae Yarrow at Watty Bell's. He'd come ower the hills on his bicycle and was asking if they'd seen a stranger wi' a glove on his left han'."

Foster made a little abrupt movement that he thought the other noted, but said carelessly, "The fellow must have had a rough trip."

"A road gangs roon' up the waterside, though I wouldna' say it's very good. I'm thinking he made an early start and would wait for dinner with Watty. Then ye might give him twa 'oors to get here."

Foster looked at his watch and pondered. He was beginning to understand Scottish tact and saw that Pete meant to give him a friendly warning. It was obvious that the policeman would not have set off across the hills in the dark of a winter morning unless he had been ordered to make inquiries. Moreover, since the gamekeepers had mistaken Foster for Pete, the orders had nothing to do with the poaching.

"Perhaps I had better pull out," he said. "But the fellow won't have much trouble in learning which way I've gone."

"I'm no' sure o' that. There's a road o' a sort rins west to Annandale and Lockerbie."

"But I'm not going west."

"Weel," said Pete, "ye might start that way, and I would meet ye where a sheep track rins back up the glen---ye'll ken it by the broken dyke where ye cross the burn. Then I would set ye on the road to Hawick ower the hill."

"Thanks," said Foster thoughtfully. "I suppose I ought to let the folks at the inn know I've gone towards Annandale, so they can tell the policeman?"

Pete's eyes twinkled. "It might be better if they didna' exactly tell him, but let him find it oot; but I'll see tae that. Polisman Jock is noo and then rather shairp."

Ten minutes later, Foster left the inn and set off across the moor. The heath shone red, and here and there little pools, round which white stones lay in the dark peat, flashed in the sunshine. The pale-blue of the sky changed near the horizon to delicate green, and a soft breeze blew across the waste. Foster enjoyed the walk, although he was puzzled and somewhat disturbed. If inquiries had been made about Featherstone, he could have understood it, but the police were asking for a man with a glove on his left hand, which could only apply to him. Daly, of course, would be glad to get him out of the way, if he had learned that he was in Scotland, but the police could not arrest a man who had done nothing wrong.

Foster now regretted that he had helped the poachers, although he thought he had made friends who would not betray him and might be useful. He had met Border Scots in Ontario, and knew something about their character. They were marked by a stern independence, inherited from their moss-trooper ancestors, and he thought Pete was a typical specimen of the virile race. The man met him at the broken dyke, and leaving the road they turned east up the side of a sparkling burn.

The narrow strip of level ground was wet and covered with moss, in which their feet sank, but the hillside was too steep to walk along. It ran up, a slope of gray-white grass, to the ragged summit where the peat was gashed and torn. Here and there a stunted thorn tree grew in a hollow, but the glen was savagely desolate, and Foster, glancing at his companion, thought he understood why the men who wrung a living from these barren hills prospered when they came out to the rich wheat-soil of Canada. The Flowers of the Forest, who fell at Flodden, locking fast the Scottish square against the onslaught of England's finest cavalry, were bred in these wilds, and had left descendants marked by their dour stubbornness. Pete's hair was turning gray and his brown face was deeply lined, but he crossed the quaking moss with a young man's stride, and Foster thought his mouth could set hard as granite in spite of his twinkling smile. He was a man who would forget neither a favor nor an injury, and Foster was glad to feel that he was on his side.

At the head of the glen they climbed a long grassy slope and came to a tableland where the peat was torn into great black rifts and piled in hummocks. This was apparently Nature's work, but Foster could not see how the storms that burst upon the hills could have worked such havoc. Crossing the rugged waste to a distant cairn, they sat down upon the stones, and Pete filled his pipe from Foster's pouch.

"Ye'll haud east until ye find a burn that will lead ye doon to the road; then as ye cross the breist o' a fell ye'll see the reek o' Hawick," he said and added after a pause: "Maybe ye'll no' be stopping in the town?"

"I'll stay the night. After that, I think I'll take the hills again. I'm going south towards Liddesdale, but I expect that's out of your beat."

Pete smiled. "There's maist to be done in my regular line this side o' Hawick. Buccleugh looks after his hares and paltrigs weel, and his marches rin wide across the country from Teviot to Liddel. But I hae freends a' the way to the North Tyne, and there's no' many sheep sales I do not attend. If ye're wanting them, I could give ye a few directions that might help ye on the road."

Foster thanked him and listened carefully. It looked as if the poachers, who seemed to work now and then as honest drovers, knew each other well and combined for mutual protection. It might be useful to be made an honorary member of the gang.

"Weel," his companion concluded, "if ye stop at the inns I've told ye o', ye'll find folks who can haud a quiet tongue, and if ye see ony reason for it, ye can say ye're a freend o' mine."

Foster rather diffidently offered him some money, but was not surprised when the man refused the gift. Indeed, he felt that it would have jarred him had Pete taken it. The latter gave him his hand with a smile and turned back to the glen while Foster pushed on across the heath. He reflected with some amusement that Pete probably thought him a fugitive from the law.

After a time he stopped to look about. His view commanded a horizon of two or three miles, for he seemed to be near the center of the tableland. Its surface was broken by the hummocks and hollows of the peat, and tufts of white wild cotton relieved the blackness of the gashes in the soil. Sheep fed in the distance, and he heard the harsh cry of a grouse that skimmed the heath. The skyline was clear, and by and by two sharp but distant figures cut against it.

Foster's first impulse was to drop into the ling, but he did not. If the men were following him, it would take them half an hour to reach the spot he occupied and, if necessary, the roughness of the ground would enable him to reach the edge of the moor without their seeing which way he went. Besides, since he would be visible as long as he stood up, he could find out whether they were looking for him or not. They came nearer and then vanished, and he sat down and speculated about his line of retreat. Their disappearance was suspicious, and although he thought he could baffle the rural police, it would be different if he had gamekeepers to deal with.

By and by the men reappeared, but as they did not seem anxious to cover their movements he felt relieved. It was possible that they had come to mend a fence or look for some sheep. For all that, he drew back among the hummocks, and looked for hollows where he would have a background for his figure as he resumed his march. He saw no more of the men and by and by came to a burn, which he followed to lower ground, where he found the road Pete had told him about.

It led him up and down hill, and now and then the track was faint, while when he crossed the last ridge the light was fading. Motionless gray clouds stretched across the sky, which glimmered with pale saffron in the west. Rounded hills,

stained a deep blue, cut against the light, and a trail of gauzy vapor hung about a distant hollow. Since there was no mist on the moors, he knew it was the smoke of Hawick mills.

As he went down, stone dykes began to straggle up the hill. The fields they enclosed were rushy and dotted with whinns, but they got smoother and presently he came to stubble and belts of plowing. Then he turned into a good road and saw rows of lights that got gradually brighter in the valley ahead. It had been dark some time when he entered Hawick, and the damp air was filled with a thin, smoky haze. Factory windows glimmered in the haze and tall chimneys loomed above the houses. The bustle of the town fell pleasantly but strangely on his ears after the silence of the moors.

Reaching a hotel that looked comfortable, he went in, ordered dinner, and provisionally booked a room, though he did not register and explained that he could not tell yet if he would stay all night. Then, leaving his knapsack, he went into the street and stopped by a bridge where three roads met. A guide-post indicated that one led to Selkirk, and the map had shown Foster that this was the way to Peebles and Yarrow. Another ran up the waterside to Langholm and the south.

Foster lighted a cigarette and drawing his maimed hand into the sleeve of his mackintosh, leaned against the side of the bridge and watched the Selkirk road. It was not cold and the street was well lighted by the windows of the shops. Briskly moving people streamed across the bridge, as if the factory hands were going home from work, but nobody seemed interested in Foster and the policeman who stood by the guide-post paid him no attention. He thought about going back to the hotel when a car, traveling rather fast, came down the road and pulled up close by.

Foster leaned quietly against the bridge and did not turn his head, but saw Daly sitting beside the driver; the half-dried mud that was thickly crusted about the car indicated a long journey. An abrupt movement might be dangerous, although he did not think Daly expected to find him or Featherstone calmly lounging about the street. The driver beckoned the policeman and Foster heard him ask if one crossed the bridge for Langholm.

The man told him to turn to the right, and after speaking to the driver Daly asked if there was a garage and a good hotel near. The policeman gave him some directions, and when the car turned round and rolled away Foster followed. He passed close by the policeman and, taking advantage of the sociable Scottish custom, nodded and remarked that it was a fine night. The man answered civilly, with a careless glance at Foster, who went on, feeling satisfied with his experiment. It was obvious that no inquiries about him had been telegraphed to Hawick and he had only Daly to deal with. This was curious, if the police were really anxious to find him.

The garage was open and Foster asked a man if he could hire a motor bicycle. The fellow said he thought so, but the manager was out, and Foster strolled about the room. Daly's driver was refilling the lamps with carbide, and when he finished asked for petrol.

"Ye're for the road again," the man who brought the tin remarked.

"For Langholm," replied the driver. "I don't expect we'll go farther to-night, but I must have things ready if the boss wants to go on."

Foster hoped the other would ask where they had come from, but he did not do so, and next moment Daly walked down some steps at the other end of the room. Knowing that a quick retreat might betray him, Foster stood still and examined a lamp he picked up. Daly crossed the floor, passing within a yard or two.

"You can fix her all right, I suppose?" he said to the driver.

The latter said something about a sparking-plug, and when Daly stooped over the engine the light of a lamp shone into his face. He was a big, handsome man, but Foster, studying him closely, noted his hard and greedy eyes. For a moment, he came near forgetting the need for caution and giving way to a fit of rage. The fellow had it in his power to bring disgrace upon upright people and drag an honored name in the mire. He could humble Alice Featherstone's pride and ruin the brother she loved.

Lawrence had done wrong, but had paid for it and made good in Canada, and now the rogue who had learned his secret would drag him down, or, as the price of silence, bring his relatives to poverty. Foster felt that Daly was not the man to be merciful when there was an advantage to be got; one saw a sinister hint of cruelty in his coarsely-handsome face. It would have been a relief to provoke the fellow and throw him out of the garage, but Foster knew he must deny himself this satisfaction, since it would make things worse for those he meant to shield. He did not remember having felt so full of primitive savageness before, but he exercised his self-control.

Standing in the shadow, he turned his head, looking down at the lamp he began to take to pieces, and presently Daly said to the driver, "You had better get some food; I'll want you soon."

Then he came back and passing close enough to touch Foster, went up the steps and through a door. Foster put down the lamp and strolled out of the garage. He found dinner ready at his hotel and when he had finished went to the smoking-room, which was opposite the office. He left the door open and by and by heard a man enter the hall and stop at the counter.

"Have you an American called Franklin here?" he asked and Foster smiled as he recognized Daly's voice.

He had half-expected the visit, and the inquiry was cleverly framed. Daly had not asked about a Canadian, because the accent of Western Canada is that of the United States, and Franklin resembled Featherstone enough to prompt the girl clerk to mention the latter if he were a guest. For all that, Daly was ignorant of the Scottish character, because the Scot seldom offers information that is not demanded.

"No," she said, "we have no American staying with us."

Foster thought Daly opened the visitors' book, which lay on the counter, but as he had not yet entered his name, there was nothing to be learned from it. Still Daly might come into the smoking-room, and he picked up the *Scotsman* and leaning back in his chair held up the newspaper to hide his face. After a few moments, Daly said, "I don't know anybody here; it looks as if my friends aren't in the town."

Then he went along the hall, and when the door shut Foster put down the newspaper and began to think. He imagined that Daly hardly expected to find Featherstone in Hawick, but it was curious that he was going to Langholm, which was on the best road to Lockerbie in Annandale. It was the police Foster had tried to put off the track at the clachan by striking west across the moors, and he did not think Daly had anything to do with them. He could see no light on the matter, but when he went back to the garage it was something of a relief to find the car had gone.

XIII

FOSTER RETURNS TO THE GARTH

After breakfast next morning Foster asked the hotel porter to take his knapsack to the station and get him a ticket to Carlisle. He must leave a clue for Daly, who might come back to Hawick when he failed to find him in Annandale but would be badly puzzled if he went to Carlisle, because it was an important railway center, where one would have a

choice of several different routes. This would give Foster a few quiet days, after which he must think of a way of inducing Daly to resume the chase. The latter probably thought he was following Lawrence, and if he did not, no doubt concluded that Foster was working in concert with him, and to find one would help him to deal with the other.

It was a dark morning and the smoke of the woolen factories hung about the town. A few lights burned in the station, but the building was gloomy and Foster had some trouble in finding the porter among the waiting passengers. Soon after he did so, the train came in and the man hurried along the platform, looking into the carriages.

"Ye wanted a corridor, sir," he said as he opened a door.

Foster got in and stood at the window until the porter went away. People were running up and down looking for places, but he had no time to lose. Opening the door on the opposite side, he went along the corridor and stood for a moment on the step at the other end of the carriage. He could not see the porter, and when two or three passengers ran up got down from the step. Next moment the whistle blew, the engine snorted, and the train rolled out of the station.

As none of the porters spoke to him, Foster thought he had managed the thing neatly and made it look as if he had come to see somebody off instead of having been left behind. For all that, he waited a minute or two, studying a time-table, to avoid the risk of overtaking the hotel porter; and then made his way by back streets out of the town. For some miles, the road he took ran south up a well-cultivated valley, past turnip and stubble fields and smooth pasture; and then changed to a rough stony track that climbed a hill.

A turn shut in the valley when he reached higher ground, and a long stretch of moor rolled away ahead. Foster thought these sharp transitions from intensive cultivation to the sterile wilds were characteristic of southern Scotland. It had rained since he left Hawick, but now the sun shone down between the clouds and bright gleams and flying shadows chased each other across the waste. To the south the sky was clear and shone with a lemon-yellow glow, against which the rounded hills rose, delicately gray. In one place there was a gap that Foster thought was Liddesdale, and his path led across the latter towards the head of Tyne. Not a house broke the sweep of withered grass and heath, and only the crying of plover that circled in the distance disturbed the silence.

Foster liked the open trail and went on with a light step, until as he crossed the watershed and the country sloped to the south, he came to a wire fence and saw the black mouth of a railway tunnel beneath. It was now about two o'clock, and feeling hungry, he sat down where a bank cut off the wind, and took out some food he had bought at Hawick. He did not know if he found the shining rails and row of telegraph posts that curved away down the hillside out of place, but somehow they made him feel foolishly unconventional. His boots and mackintosh were wet, he was lunching on sweet biscuits and gingerbread, and did not know where he would spend the night, although it would not be at a comfortable hotel. Until he saw the tunnel, he had felt at home in the wilds and might have done so yet, had he, for example, been driving a flock of sheep; but the railway was disturbing.

In this country, people traveled by steam-heated trains, instead of on foot, and engaged a lawyer to defend them from their enemies. He was going back to the methods of two or three centuries ago, and not even doing this properly, since the moss-troopers who once rode through those hills carried lances instead of a check-book, which was after all his best weapon. He laughed and felt himself something of a modern Don Quixote as he lighted his pipe.

Then there was a roar in the tunnel and a North British express, leaping out through a cloud of smoke, switched his thoughts on to another track. His adventures had begun in a train, and it was in a train he met the girl who warned him not to deliver Carmen's packet. He did not see what the packet had to do with him, but he had had some trouble about it and thought it might turn up again. Then he wondered whether Daly was now in Annandale. The fellow was obviously determined to find Lawrence, and, if one admitted that he had come to England for the purpose, did not mind how much

it cost him, which was rather strange. After all, blackmailing was a risky business and the Featherstones were not rich. It looked as if Daly might have some other object in tracking Lawrence, but Foster could not see what it was. Indeed, he was frankly puzzled. There was a mystery about Carmen's packet, he had been warned out of Edinburgh, and inquiries about him were afterwards made, while Daly's keenness was not quite explained. He wondered whether these things were somehow related, but at present they only offered him tangled clues that led nowhere. Well, he might be able to unravel them by and by, and getting up went on his way.

He spent the night at a lonely cothouse on the edge of a peat-moss and reached the Garth next afternoon. John let him in and after taking his mackintosh remarked: "Mr. and Mrs. Featherstone are out, but Miss Featherstone is at home; I will let her know you have arrived." Then he paused and added in a half-apologetic tone: "I hope you had a pleasant journey, sir."

Foster smiled. John had softened his imperturbable formality by just the right touch of respectful interest. In a sense, they were accomplices, but Foster thought if they had committed a crime together, the old fellow would have treated him with unmoved deference as his master's guest.

"On the whole, I had. I suppose you met the other car when you turned back at the station?"

"Yes, sir. I met it coming round the bend."

"As the road's narrow, your judgment's pretty good. Did anything happen?"

John's eyes twinkled faintly. "Not to our car, sir. The other had the bad luck to run on to the grass where the ground was soft. In fact, we had some trouble to pull her out. The gentleman seemed annoyed, sir."

Foster went to his room chuckling. He could imagine the deferential way in which John, who had caused the accident, had offered help. When he went down Alice met him in the hall and he thrilled at something in her manner as she gave him her hand. It was getting dark and the glow of the fire flickered among the shadows, but there was only one lamp, and as it was shaded the light did not travel far beyond the small table, on which tea was presently served. This hinted at seclusion and homelike intimacy. An embroidered cloth half-covered the dark, polished oak, the china was old but unusually delicate, and the blue flame of a spirit lamp burned beneath the copper kettle.

Foster thought everything showed signs of fastidious taste, but there was something austere about it that harmonized with the dignified shabbiness of the house. It was, for example, very different from the prettiness of the Edinburgh tea-room, and he thought it hinted of the character of the Borderers. For all that, the society of his companion had the greatest charm. Alice was plainly dressed, but simplicity became her. The girl had the Border spirit, with its reserves of strength and tenderness. Now she was quietly friendly, but Foster knew her friendship was not lightly given and was worth much.

Alice made him talk about his journey and he did so frankly, except that he did not mention his meeting the girl in the tea-room or the detective's visit to his hotel. Still he felt a certain embarrassment, as he had done when he told his partner's story. It was rather hard to relate his own exploits, and he knew Alice would note any error he was led into by vanity or false diffidence.

"Then it was really to keep a promise to Miss Austin you went to Newcastle," she remarked presently. "Since she sent you with the packet, you must know her pretty well."

"Yes," said Foster, "in a way, we are good friends. You see there are not a great many people at the Crossing."

Alice gave him a quiet glance. He was not such a fool as to imagine it mattered to her whether he knew Carmen well or not. But he thought she was not altogether pleased.

"What is Miss Austin like?" she asked.

Foster was careful about his reply. He wanted Alice to understand that he was not Carmen's lover, which needed tact; but he was her friend and must do her justice, while any breach of good taste would be noted and condemned. He did his best, without learning if he had produced the right effect, for Alice let the matter drop, as if it no longer interested her.

"Perhaps it's a pity you helped the men who were poaching," she said. "I'm afraid you're fond of romantic adventures."

"I'm sometimes rash and sorry afterwards," Foster admitted. "However, there's an excuse for the other thing. This is a romantic country and I've spent a long time in Canada, which is altogether businesslike."

Alice gave him an approving smile, but she said, "One shouldn't be sorry afterwards. Isn't that rather weak?"

"I'm human," Foster rejoined. "A thing looks different when you come to pay for doing it. It's pretty hard not to feel sorry then."

"After all, that may be better than counting the cost beforehand and leaving the thing undone."

"You're a Borderer; one of the headstrong, old-fashioned kind that broke the invasions and afterwards defied their own rulers for a whim."

"As a matter of fact, a number of them were very businesslike. They fought for their enemies' cattle and the ransom of captured knights."

"Not always," Foster objected. "At Flodden, where the Etrick spears all fell in the smashed squares, the Scots king came down from his strong camp to meet the English on equal terms. Then it wasn't businesslike when Buccleugh, with his handful of men, carried off Kimmont Willie from Carlisle. There was peace between the countries and he had two offended sovereigns to hold him accountable."

"It looks as if you had been reading something about our history," Alice said smiling.

"I haven't read much," Foster answered modestly. "Still, we have a few books at the mill, and in the long winter evenings, when the thermometer marks forty degrees below and you sit close to the red-hot stove, there's nothing to do but read. It would be hard for you to picture our little room; the match-boarding, split by the changes from heat to bitter cold, the smell of hot iron, the dead silence, and the grim white desolation outside. Perhaps it's curious, but after working hard all day, earning dollars, one can't read rubbish. One wants romance, but romance that's real and has the truth in it."

"But your own life has been full of adventure."

"In a way, but there was always a business proposition to justify the risk. It's good to be reckless now and then, and I've felt as I read about your ancestors that I envied them. There must have been some charm in riding about the moors with one's lady's glove on one's steel cap, ready to follow where adventure called."

"So far as we know," said Alice, "it was the custom to honor one lady, always. The Border chiefs were rude, but they had their virtues, and there are some pretty stories of their constancy."

Foster imagined he saw a faint sparkle in her eyes. He would have liked to think she resented his having gone to Newcastle on Carmen's behalf, but doubted this. After a pause she resumed:

"People say we are decadent and getting slack with luxury, but one likes to think the spirit of the race survives all changed conditions and can't be destroyed. There is a colliery not very far off where the water broke in some years ago. The men in the deep workings were cut off, but the few who escaped went back into the pit--and never came up. They knew the thing was impossible, their leaders frankly told them so, but they would not be denied. Well, the colliery was not reopened, the shaft-head towers are falling down, but there's a granite fountain on the moor that will stand for ages to record the splendid sacrifice."

"They had all to lose," said Foster. "One must admire, without hoping to emulate, a deed like that."

Alice changed the subject rather abruptly. "What you have told me is puzzling. I can't see why the police followed you, and there's something mysterious about the packet. It all seems connected with Lawrence's affairs, and yet I can't see how. I suppose you have no explanation?"

"Not yet. I feel there's something going on in which I may by and by take a part. The clews break off, but I may find one that's stronger, and then-----"

He stopped, but Alice gave him an understanding glance. "Then you would follow the clew, even if it led you into some danger, for Lawrence's sake?"

"I'd try," said Foster, with a flush that gave him a curiously ingenuous look. "As I've no particular talent for that kind of thing, I mightn't do much good, but you have accused me of being romantic and I've owned that I am rash."

Alice smiled. "You're certainly modest; but there's a rashness that is much the same as generosity."

Then Featherstone came in and after a time took Foster to the library, where he gave him a cigarette.

"It's strange we haven't heard from Lawrence yet," he said in a disturbed voice. "He hasn't given the Canadian post office his new address, because here's a letter they have sent on."

"From Hulton, who seems to be in Toronto," said Foster, picking up the envelope. "As I'm a partner, I'll open it."

He did so and gave Featherstone the letter, which inquired if they could supply some lumber the company needed.

"I'm sorry we can't do the work, because we won't be back in time. It would have been an interesting job to cut the stuff in the way Hulton wants."

"He seems to leave a good deal to your judgment and to have no doubt about your sending him the right material."

"I suppose that is so," Foster agreed. "Hulton soon got into the way of sending for Lawrence when he wanted any lumber that had to be carefully sawn. In fact, he treats him as a kind of consulting specialist, and I imagine likes him personally."

He was silent for the next minute or two. Featherstone's remark had shown him more clearly than he had hitherto realized how high Lawrence stood in the manufacturer's esteem. No other outsider was treated with such confidence. Then he told Featherstone about his journey, and the latter said:

"I have heard nothing from Daly, but soon after you left, a gentleman from Edinburgh came here to inquire about you."

"Ah!" said Foster, rather sharply. "I suppose he was sent by the police and imagine I met him at my hotel. His name was Gordon; I thought it curious that he gave me his card."

"That was the name. He asked if I knew you and I said I did."

"Then it looks as if he meant to test my statements. Did he seem surprised to learn I was staying here?"

"It was hard to tell what the fellow thought; but somehow I felt that he expected to find your story true. He, however, gave me no information. What do you suppose he wants?"

"I can't imagine; the thing's puzzling. What makes it stranger is that I thought the interest Gordon took in me was, so to speak, benevolent."

"But why should it be benevolent, if he had any ground for suspecting you?" Featherstone asked.

Foster glanced at him keenly. There was a change in his host's manner, which had grown less cordial, but he admitted that Featherstone's confidence was being subjected to some strain. It would certainly be disturbing to find the police inquiring about him. Lawrence had not written, and Foster saw that there was much in his statements that sounded rather lame.

"I don't understand the matter at all; but it might be better if I left quietly in the morning," he said. "If I don't put Daly on my trail again, he may come back."

"Very well," said Featherstone, getting up. "But what did you do with Lawrence's bag?"

"I left it at a Peebles hotel. I thought if Daly found it was there, it would give him a place to watch."

Featherstone gloomily made a sign of agreement. "I wish Lawrence would write to us. We are getting anxious about him and a letter would put our minds at rest."

XIV

FOSTER SEES A LIGHT

After leaving the Garth, Foster went to Carlisle, where he bought small articles at different shops and had them sent to his hotel, addressed to Featherstone. He also asked if any letters for his partner had come, and then, having done all he could think of to give his pursuers a hint, waited to see what would happen. He imagined that since Daly seemed to be well provided with money he would not undertake the search alone, and there were private inquiry agents who would help him. The services of these gentlemen would not be cheap, and Foster wondered if the fellow knew that there was not very much to be extorted from Featherstone. This, however, was Daly's business, and seeing no result from his experiment, he resolved to leave Carlisle.

He reached the station undecided where to go. A Midland express would shortly start for the south, but it would be difficult to leave a clew in the big manufacturing towns, and there was a stopping train soon after the other on the North British line, which traverses the Border hills. Foster preferred this neighborhood, because he was beginning to know it and it was not far from the Garth, but after a few moments' consideration went to the Midland ticket window.

A row of passengers were waiting their turn, and as he took his place in the line a man crossed the floor and stood behind him. There was nothing suspicious in this, but the fellow had not come in by the entrance hall, and if he had been in the station, it was strange he had not got his ticket earlier. When his turn came, Foster asked for a ticket to Appleby in a husky voice, and when the booking clerk demanded, "Where?" looked over his shoulder. The man behind was leaning forward, as if to catch his reply.

"Appleby," said Foster, who had seen by a railway map that the town was not far off, and getting his ticket, joined the passengers on the platform. As he did so, the long train came in, but knowing that it would be a minute or two before the engine was changed he walked up the platform leisurely, looking into the carriages. There was some bustle, for people were getting out and in, and he kept out of sight among them until the guard waved his flag. Then he stepped behind a truck loaded with milk-cans as the train rolled away.

If the man he had noticed had been watching him, he thought he had put him off the track, but he had no time to lose if he meant to catch the stopping train. He got in as it started, choosing an old carriage without a corridor, so that nobody could spy on him. They jolted over the crossings, the old red wall of the city rolled by and dropped behind, and as they ran out towards the open country across the Eden, Foster thoughtfully lighted a cigarette. He had tried to put his pursuers on his partner's supposititious trail, but it began to look as if they were not following Lawrence but him. His injured hand could hardly have escaped notice, and he was not really like Lawrence, of whom Daly would no doubt have given his agents a good description.

He wondered who was on his track, and with what object. Daly would gain nothing by molesting him, and he could not see why the police should take an interest in his movements, but he was being watched, and felt uneasy. He was not sure that he had sent the last man off to Appleby, although he hoped he had.

The train, which stopped now and then, ran across flat fields until it entered the valley of the Esk. The valley narrowed as they sped through the woods beside the stream, and when the line turned up the water of Liddel bleak hills began to rise ahead. The trees and rich cultivation were gradually left behind, the air got keener, and lonely moors rolled down to the winding dale. It got dark as they followed the river, and soon afterwards Foster alighted at a small station. Nobody else left the train except two or three country people, and he went to an inn in the straggling little town.

Next morning he set off on foot, heading northeast into the hills. He walked leisurely, because he was going to Jedburgh, but had not made up his mind if he would get there that night, since Pete had told him of a farm where he could stop.

About four o'clock in the afternoon he stopped near the middle of a barren moorland and looked round. The road ran back into the strong yellow glow of the sunset, but it crossed a ridge about a mile off, and there was nobody in sight. It was very rough in places, but he thought a skillful driver could take a car over it. To the east, where the horizon was hazy, the high ground fell away, and he thought he could strike another road to Jedburgh in three or four miles if he crossed the heath. There seemed to be no reason why he should do so, but he left the road and some time later came to a burn that ran down hill.

By and by a rough track began in a marish field and got smoother as it followed the burn. Then a hedge of tall thorns, with wool-fringed gaps between their stems where the sheep went through, ran down the waterside, and Foster sat down on a stone and studied his map. He thought it would take him nearly two hours to reach Jedburgh, but the small farm Pete had spoken of was not far off. The track he was on seemed to lead to a better road in the valley. Mist was gathering in the hollow, but when he looked back the sky was bright and the yellow glow rested on the hill. The evening was very calm; he heard a curlew crying far off across the moor, and then raised his head sharply at a quick ringing sound. There was a wire fence up the hill, which he had got over because the rotten gate stuck fast. Somebody had stumbled in climbing it and his foot had struck the wire.

Foster's eyes narrowed as he gazed up the track and saw two figures come round a corner. They were too far off to be distinct, but were walking fast. If he sat still, he would be invisible for two or three minutes but not longer, and he quickly studied his surroundings. There were large boulders and brambles between him and the water, and the tall hedge offered a hiding place on the other side. It might be wiser to get out of sight, but he would make an experiment, and dropped a few wax matches and a London newspaper he had bought in Carlisle. The country people did not use wax matches and London newspapers were not common among the Border moors.

Then, moving slowly, he made for the hedge. There were only a few bushes between him and the approaching men, but he had a good background, into which his figure would melt, and was ready to lie down if needful. He paused for a moment at the edge of the burn, which spread out in a shallow that reflected the fading light. He might be seen against the water, but something must be risked, and if the men were looking for him, they would watch the road. Stepping into the stream, he waded across, making as little splash as possible, and found a hole in the hedge, through which he crawled. He was now in the shadow and it would be difficult to distinguish him among the thick stems.

The men were plainly visible and did not look like country people, for the hill farmers and shepherds walk with a curious gait. Foster crouched down and waited, knowing he would get a useful hint when they reached the spot he had left. They stopped and one picked up the newspaper, while his companion bent down and got up with something in his hand. Foster, seeing that the fellow had found the matches, wondered whether he had made the trail too plain. If they suspected the trick, they would know he was not far off and search for him.

He could not distinguish their faces and regretted this, because it would have been useful to know the men again, and when they began to talk their voices were too low for him to hear what they said. Presently one left the road on the opposite side to the stream and climbed the bank, on which he stood as if he wished to look across the moor. The other walked along the edge of the grass with his head bent, but Foster thought it was too dark to see any footprints he might have left. The fellow came on a few yards towards the stream, and then stood still while Foster tried to study him, but could only distinguish his face as a white oval in the gathering dark.

He was anxious and puzzled, because he did not know whether the men wanted him or Lawrence. The nearer of them would, no doubt, see him if he crossed the burn, but Foster thought he might seize and put the fellow out of action before the other came up. This, however, would be risky, and since he did not know their intentions he was not sure he would gain much if he came off victor. To his relief, the man went back and joined his companion in the road, where they stood looking about, and then set off rapidly down hill as if they had decided to go on to Jedburgh.

When their footsteps died away Foster turned back along the hedge and struck across the moor in the dark. It would be better to avoid Jedburgh, and he must try to find the house that Pete had told him of. He had some trouble in doing so and on the way fell into a bog, but at length a light blinked on a hillside and he came to a small building, sheltered by a few stunted ash trees. A shed thatched with heather and a rough stone byre stood near the house, and a big peat-stack filled one end of a miry yard. A dog ran out and circled around Foster, barking, until an old man with a lantern drove it off and asked what he wanted.

Foster said he wanted shelter for the night and was willing to pay for the accommodation, to which the other replied that they did not take in strangers. When Foster stated that Long Pete had told him to go there he hesitated, and finally said, "Weel, ye can come awa' in and see the mistress."

The flagged kitchen was very clean and a big peat fire burned in the grate. A black oak meal-chest stood against the wall and old-fashioned china filled the rack above. On the opposite side, there was a large cupboard, which Foster thought concealed a bed. The room was warm and looked comfortable after the wet moor. Then Foster turned to the red-cheeked old woman who sat knitting by the fire and fixed on him a quietly-scrutinizing gaze. He explained that he

was tired and wanted to stay the night, adding that Pete had said they would be willing to accommodate him.

"What for no', if ye're a friend o' his?" she asked. "It's a lang road to Jedburgh. But ye'll be wanting some supper."

Foster confessed that he was hungry and after a time sat down to a plain but appetizing meal. When this was over he gave his host his tobacco pouch and for an hour or two they talked and smoked. The man farmed a patch of sour moss-land, but he was marked by a grave politeness and asked his guest no awkward questions. Foster thought the woman was studying him, but she restrained her curiosity and he admitted that the manners of both were remarkably good. He was beginning to understand and like the lowland Scots, though he saw that some of the opinions he had formed about them were wrong.

They were reserved, essentially practical, and industrious, but they had, when one came to know them, a certain reckless humor that one did not often find among Englishmen. Then they were marked by an individualistic independence of character that made them impatient of authority. They were not turbulent or given to protesting about freedom, but they could not be cajoled or driven. It was strange to find a well-organized fraternity of poachers in a quiet, law-keeping country, but one must allow something for habits inherited from moss-trooper ancestors. Foster had noted their respect for good landlords of ancient stock, but this did not prevent them using the landlord's salmon and game. Since he had, so to speak, been made a member of the band, it was comforting to feel that they could be trusted, and he was somehow sure of this.

He slept soundly in the cupboard bed and made an excuse for staying at the farm next day, but as he stood outside the house in the afternoon his host came up.

"There were two men on the Jedburgh road asking about a stranger on a walking tour."

"Ah!" said Foster. "Do you know whether they asked if the man they wanted wore a glove?"

"They did that!"

Foster pondered. He was being searched for, and his host knew he was the man inquired about, but the old fellow's face was expressionless.

"Since I didn't get so far as the road, they'd learn nothing."

The other's eyes twinkled. "I wouldna' say they would find out much if they cam' up here."

"Well," said Foster, "I don't know yet if I'll go on to-day or not."

"Ye ken best about that," the farmer answered with Scottish dryness. "I dinna' see much objection if ye're for stopping another night."

He went off, but Foster felt satisfied that he was safe with him, and presently strolled round to the peat-stack where he sat down in the sun. There was a hollow where the peats had been pulled out, and the brown dust was warm and dry. Lighting his pipe, he began to think. He was being watched, but whether by the police, or Daly, or somebody else, there was nothing to show. He did not think his poaching adventure had much to do with it, but he had taken the packet to Newcastle, although he had been warned against this. There was a mystery about the packet.

For a time he got no further, and as he sat, gazing vacantly across the moor, the sun went behind a cloud and the freshening wind whistled round the stack. It got cold and Foster's pipe burned out, but he did not move. Hitherto he had been working in the dark, feeling for a clew, but he began to see a glimmer of light and presently clenched his fist with an exclamation. The light dawned on him in an illuminating flash.

He had been tricked and made a tool. Carmen had acted by her father's, or somebody else's, orders when she gave him the packet, and the man in Edinburgh had enclosed something before he sent him on to Newcastle. Nobody would suspect him and that was why he had been entrusted with the packet in Canada. It was now clear that he had been made use of to carry the stolen bonds to Great Britain. Carmen, of course, knew nothing about them, but had been influenced by Daly. Perhaps she was in love with him, but in the meantime this did not matter. Foster filled his pipe again, because he meant to solve the puzzle while the light was clear and his brain was working well.

Alice Featherstone had given him the first hint of the truth when she suggested that the packet was somehow connected with his being watched and Daly's pursuit of Lawrence. Of course it was! The police had not much ground for suspecting him, but he had come to England without any obvious business, and if Hulton or his agents had warned them, they would inquire about strangers from Canada. Then he began to see why Daly was determined to find Lawrence.

Fred Hulton had been robbed and killed and Daly was implicated in the crime, if he had not committed it himself. The fellow's first object was not blackmail; he meant to use his power over Lawrence to ensure his secrecy. Lawrence was the only person who had seen the murderer. It could not have been clear if he had mistaken him for the watchman or not when he went into the pay-office at the factory, and as long as a doubt remained Lawrence was the greatest danger the gang had to reckon on. Foster felt sure there was a gang. Admitting all this, one could understand why Daly meant to find Lawrence, but Foster began to see how he could make use of the situation.

He had been easily deceived and the plotters no doubt thought him a fool. Suppose he took advantage of their belief and asked for an answer to his message or something of the kind? He might by good luck get a letter or find out enough about them to explain what had happened in Canada. The vague plan appealed to him strongly. He was savage at the way he had been tricked, and it would be something to circumvent the people who had made him a tool. Besides, he could not go to the police yet: Lawrence's secret must be kept. He must first of all gain such a hold on Daly as would render him powerless to injure his comrade. After that, when he knew how far the man was implicated in the robbery, he could decide what ought to be done. Well, he would go to Newcastle and see Graham, to whom he had given the packet, but he might need help and thought he knew where to find it. Getting up with a quick, resolute movement, he went back to the house.

"I'm going to write to Pete and bring him here," he said to the woman. "I don't suppose you'll turn me out before he comes."

She gave him a quiet, searching glance, and her husband seemed to leave the matter to her.

"For a' his poaching, ye'll find Pate an honest man," she answered meaningly.

"So am I; it's an honest man I want. You have trusted me and I'll trust you as far as I can when Pete arrives. Shall we leave it until then?"

The woman nodded. "Ye can stay until he ken what yere business is."

"Thank you," said Foster, who sat down to write to Pete.

He thought her judgment would be just, if she had not already decided in his favor. Until he came to Scotland, he had never met people who could say so little and mean so much. Moreover, he imagined one could depend upon their standing by all that they implied. They were taciturn but staunch.

XV

THE GLOVE

Pete arrived in the evening when it was getting dark, and after a meal, which they ate together, Foster moved his chair back from the table and sat opposite his companions. A lamp was burning and the red glow from the peat fire fell on their rough clothing and quiet brown faces as they waited for him to speak. He admitted that what he was about to do was rash. He had no logical reason for trusting these people and perhaps no right to involve them in his difficulties, while the sensible course would be to put the matter in the hands of the police. But this was a course he did not mean to take.

"I sent for you because I want your help and I'm willing to pay for it well," he said to Pete.

"Just that!" Pete answered quietly. "In an ordinar' way, I'm no' verra particular, but before I take the money I'd like to ken how it's to be earned."

"As a matter of fact, you won't get all of it until it is earned and I see how much the job is worth. In the meantime, you can judge, and if necessary go to the police."

Pete grinned. "They're no' the kin' o' gentry I hae mony dealings with."

"What for are ye hiding frae them?" the woman asked.

Foster saw the others' eyes were fixed on him and he must, to some extent, satisfy their curiosity. He did not think he could have convinced conventional Englishmen, or perhaps Canadians, but these Scots were different. They were certainly not less shrewd than the others, but while sternly practical in many ways they had imagination; moreover, they were descendants of the Border cattle-thieves.

"I'm not really hiding from the police, but from people who have better grounds for fearing them. I owe nobody anything and, so far as I know, have done nobody wrong."

There was silence for a moment or two and he recognized that his statement was very incomplete, but somehow thought the others did not discredit it.

"If I could tell you the whole story, I would, but that's impossible just now," he resumed. "Other people, honorable, upright people, are involved. Of course, the thing looks suspicious, and you know nothing about me, but what I mean to do is not against the law."

They were silent yet, but after a few moments Foster saw his host glance at the woman.

"What is it ye mean to do?" she asked.

"I'm going to Newcastle to try to get some information and papers that will help me to save a friend from serious trouble. That's my first object, but I hope to find out something about a crime in Canada, by which another friend of mine

suffered terribly. I may have to steal the papers, and if I get them, expect I shall have to deal with a gang of dangerous men, who will try to take them back. That's why I want Pete; but he'll probably find it a risky business."

Foster waited anxiously for a reply. He was not justified in expecting it to be favorable, but he did so. The woman seemed to ponder, but presently turned to Pete.

"Ye had better gang."

Pete laughed, a reckless laugh that hinted at a love of excitement and danger.

"Aye," he said, "that's what I was thinking!"

After this the matter was soon arranged, and next morning Foster and Pete set off. They went south by hill-tracks, for Foster meant to visit the Garth, but preferred to arrive when dusk was falling. He did not want his visit to be marked, but must see Alice before he embarked upon his new adventure.

The sun was setting behind the moors when they came down the waterside, and leaving Pete in the gloom of the fir wood, he walked through a shrubbery to the house. He had seen nothing to indicate that he was watched and could trust Pete to see that nobody followed him from the road, but he meant to take precautions and did not want to meet Featherstone. When he left the shrubbery he had only a few yards of open lawn to cross and the light was dim beside the house, but he kept off the graveled terrace until he was abreast of the door. He was now faced by a difficulty, but must leave something to chance and felt relieved when John answered his quiet knock. The man showed no surprise at seeing him.

"Mr. Featherstone is out, sir, and Mrs. Featherstone occupied, but Miss Featherstone is at home," he said.

"Will you ask her if she can meet me for a few minutes in the orchard?"

"Very good, sir; I will take your message."

Foster turned away. He had given John no hint to keep his visit secret, because this would be useless. If the old fellow thought it his duty to tell his master, he would do so; if not, one could trust to his discretion. Entering the orchard by an arch in a mossy wall, he waited where a soft light shone into it from the west. Outside the arch, the smooth sweep of lawn ran back into deepening shadow and the bare trees behind it rose, sharp and black, against the sky. Above there was a heavy bank of gray-blue clouds.

Then his heart began to beat as Alice appeared in the arch. Her figure was silhouetted against the light and he noted how finely she held herself and moved. Still he could not see her face and waited with some uneasiness until she advanced and gave him her hand.

"I hoped you would come," he said. "But I was half afraid-----"

Alice smiled and as she turned her head the fading glow touched her face. It gave no hint of resentment or surprise.

"That I would not come?" she suggested. "After all, I really think men are more conventional than we are. But why did you not let John bring you in?"

"When I was last here, I noted a change in your father's manner. That is one reason, though there are others. Then I must go in two or three minutes."

Alice looked at him steadily and he knew that frankness was best.

"You mean you thought he had lost his confidence in you?"

"I was afraid he might find it getting strained. He seemed disturbed."

"He is disturbed," Alice said quietly. "We have heard nothing from my brother yet."

"One can sympathize with you, but I don't think you have much ground for uneasiness. Lawrence was told he must be careful, but that was all, and there's no likelihood of his health's suddenly breaking down. Then I understand he was rather irregular about writing home; he forgot now and then."

"He did forget," Alice agreed and fixed her eyes on Foster while a slight flush crept into her face. "Perhaps I had better say I do not altogether share my father's anxiety."

Foster felt a thrill, for he thought she meant she had not lost her confidence in him.

"I'd like to go back and look for Lawrence, but can't do so yet," he said. "For one thing, it might put Daly on his track and it's now important that he shouldn't meet Lawrence in Canada. There have been developments; in fact, I have come to think Daly had something to do with sending the packet I took to Newcastle."

"Then Miss Austin was in the plot against my brother and made use of you?"

"No; she certainly made use of me, but I imagine others made use of her. There is a plot, but I don't believe she knew anything about it."

"I suppose you feel you must defend the girl?"

"In a way," Foster agreed. "Carmen Austin is a friend of mine; but I'm not sure she really needs defending. Anyhow, if I'd known what was in the packet, I wouldn't have taken it."

"Then you have found out what was in it?"

"I have a suspicion. I'm going to see how far it's justified, and if I'm fortunate, rather think the people who sent me to Newcastle will be sorry."

Alice said nothing for a few moments, but he thought she grasped the significance of his hint that he was willing to spoil the plans of Carmen's friends. He did not know if this gave her any satisfaction, but did not expect her to show her feelings.

"Can you tell me anything more?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "I feel I ought to tell somebody, because it may turn out rather a serious undertaking. One reason for choosing you is that it's a complicated and unlikely tale."

"And you thought I would believe where others might doubt?"

Foster bowed. "I did hope something of the kind. I don't know if I was too venturesome. But if you'll listen-----"

She gave him a curious look and he began by telling her of the tragedy at the Hulton mill and Lawrence's meeting the supposititious watchman. Then he related how he had been tracked through the hills, and explained the conclusions he had arrived at when the light first dawned on him as he puzzled out the matter by the peat stack. She said nothing until he finished, but he thought she looked somewhat moved.

"But wouldn't it be better to leave the thing to the police?" she asked.

"No," said Foster, smiling. "To begin with, they might suspect me; one understands they're not very credulous people and it would take some time to prove my statements. Then, if they weren't very careful, they'd frighten the Newcastle man away, while I might, so to speak, catch him off his guard."

"It sounds plausible; but I think you have a better reason."

"If I have, it's to some extent temperamental; a natural reaction after leading a sober life," Foster said humorously. "There's a charm in trying to do something that's really beyond your mark and ought to be left to somebody else."

"It's possible; but I'm not satisfied yet."

Foster hesitated. "After all, it might be better to keep the police off Daly's track until I've seen him. He might make trouble for Lawrence if he was arrested, but I don't think this counts for much. You would be nearer the mark if you took it for granted that I'm naturally rash and can't resist a chance of adventure."

They had walked round the orchard, and reached the arch again, but Alice stopped.

"So it seems," she said in a quiet voice that nevertheless gave a Foster a thrill. "The charm of rashness is a favorite subject of yours."

"It's better that your friends should understand you," Foster replied modestly.

"One must admit that you live up to the character you give yourself. First you plunged into difficulties to keep a promise you should not have made, then you undertook to baffle a dangerous man because your partner needed help, and now I think you are going to face a very serious risk."

Foster, who felt embarrassed, said nothing, and Alice gave him her hand.

"I am glad you have been frank with me, and if my wish can bring you good fortune, it will be yours. You will do your best, I know; but be careful and come back safe!"

Foster had kissed her hand on another occasion, but durst not do so now. He was conscious of a keen emotional stirring and thought the girl felt some strain. There was a hint of suppressed feeling in her voice that sapped his self-control, and he thought it was because she trusted and liked him her manner had a certain touch of pride.

"After all, I don't think I run much risk," he answered. "But if there was a risk, it would be well worth while."

It was nearly dark, but he thought he saw some color in her face.

"Good luck! But wait in the road for a minute or two," she said and turned away.

He watched her cross the lawn until her figure faded into the gloom, after which he went back to the gate and waited until John came up with a small packet.

"Miss Featherstone sends you this, sir, but hopes you won't open it until you are in the train."

Foster thanked him and went back with Pete up the waterside. The air was keen and a light mist hung about the rough track that took them to the moors. There was a beat of wings as a flock of wild duck passed overhead when they skirted a reedy pool, and once or twice the wild cry of a curlew came out of the dark. Except for this, the moor was silent and desolate, but Foster felt a strange poignant elation as he stumbled among the ruts and splashed across boggy grass. They walked for two or three hours and he was muddy and rather wet when the lights of a small station began to twinkle in the gloom ahead.

Half an hour later they caught a train to Hexham, and Foster, who sent Pete to a smoking compartment, was alone when he opened the packet John had brought. Then the blood rushed to his face and his heart beat, for when he unfolded the thin paper he saw a small white glove. Remembering how they had once talked about Border chivalry, he knew what Alice meant. She believed his tale and knew the risks he ran, and had sent him her glove that he might carry it as her badge. He folded the piece of delicate kid carefully and put it in a pocket where it rested upon his heart.

"After this, I've got to put my job over, whatever it costs," he said.

XVI

A DIFFICULT PART

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when Foster stopped in front of the grimy building where Graham had his office, and looked up and down the street. Close by, a carter stood at the head of an impatient horse that stamped and rattled its harness, and a hoist clanked as a bale of goods went up to a top story; but except for this the street was quiet. Farther off, one or two moving figures showed indistinctly, for rain was falling and the light getting dim. Foster, who had arrived in Newcastle that morning, had waited, thinking it might suit him better to leave the town in the dark.

"Go back to the end of the street, where you can see the clock," he said to Pete. "If I don't join you in half an hour, run to the nearest police station and ask for a man to search the top office in this building."

"The polis are no' good friends o' mine," Pete replied doubtfully. "I would sooner come for ye my lane. There's an airnmonger's roon' the corner, where I would maybe get a shairp gairden fork."

Foster laughed. Pete's methods were too primitive, although, in his strong hands, the fork would prove a dangerous weapon.

"I don't expect you'd be able to help much if I'm not back when I said. But you can walk along the street now and then, and notice anybody who leaves the building."

He went in and set his lips as he climbed the stairs, for he imagined he would need all the tact and coolness he possessed. He had been made the tool of people who thought him an unsuspecting simpleton, but was uncertain how far

it would be safe to trade upon this view of his character, although he meant to do so to some extent. There might be an advantage in hinting that he knew a little about their business; but he must make no mistakes. His steps echoed hollowly along the top landing and there was something daunting in the gloom, for the gas had not yet been lighted and the building was very quiet. It was possible that he had started on this adventure with a rashness as great as his folly in undertaking Carmen's errand, but he carried Alice Featherstone's glove and it was unthinkable that he should turn back.

There was nobody in the outer office when he opened the door, but after he had knocked once or twice a voice he recognized told him to come in and he strolled carelessly into Graham's room. Sitting down, he offered his cigarette case to Graham, who glanced at him with some surprise but took a cigarette while Foster lighted another. It would be easier to look languidly indifferent if he could smoke. Graham pushed aside some papers on his desk as if impatient at being disturbed. He was dressed and looked like a sober business man, and Foster admitted that it was ridiculous to imagine him to be anything else.

"I'm rather busy just now," he said. "For all that, if I can be of any use to you, Mr. ----"

Foster thought he overdid it by pretending to forget his name, but he smiled.

"Foster. You'll recollect I brought you a packet, and as I'm going back to Canada soon, I imagined I might take Miss Austin or Daly a reply. You can see that they thought me a reliable messenger."

"Miss Austin obviously did so," Graham admitted.

"Doesn't this imply that Daly shared her good opinion?" Foster asked.

Graham glanced at him sharply and then picked up a letter and studied it, but Foster imagined he wanted time to think. He had made the plunge and indicated that he knew more than the other supposed; but the rest needed care.

"You expect to meet Daly when you get back to Canada?" Graham inquired, and Foster, who saw that he was cautious, wondered whether he was alarmed.

"Oh, no; I expect to meet him before I start."

"You imply that he's in England."

"Don't you know he is?" Foster rejoined.

Graham knocked the ash off his cigarette and looked at him curiously. His appearance was commonplace, he had a slight stoop, and was not muscular, but Foster felt he might prove dangerous.

"I don't know where he is just now. Do you?"

"Well," said Foster, "I believe I could find him if I tried."

The other was silent for the next few moments and Foster waited with some anxiety. If he pretended to know too much, he might be found out, but if Graham imagined he knew nothing, he would hesitate about informing him. The difficulty was that while he played the part of a simpleton who had been made use of by the rest of the gang, he must imply that they had to some extent taken him into their confidence.

"To tell the truth, I haven't heard from Daly for a month," Graham replied. "This has disadvantages and I'll own that I'd like to know what he is doing."

"Then it looks as if I was better informed. Mr. Daly's engaged in some private business."

"Private business?"

"Just so," Foster answered, smiling. "He imagines it will turn out profitable, but I expect it will take up much of his time."

"But----" said Graham, and stopped.

Foster made a sign of comprehension. "You feel he oughtn't to have any business that might interfere with his duty to the rest of you?"

"What do you know about his duty?" Graham asked.

"Well," said Foster, "I frankly don't know very much. In fact, it looks as if your Canadian friends didn't trust me very far, but just told me enough to make me understand my job. No doubt, that was wisest, although it's not flattering. Anyhow, I brought you a packet with some valuable enclosures, which ought to justify your sending back any confidential message to the people it came from by me."

He had made a bold venture, but saw that he was right, for Graham knitted his brows, as if he was thinking hard. Then he said, "Very well. As it happens, there are some papers I would like to send, and if you don't mind taking them, I'll give you a letter to Daly and another to Miss Austin."

"Miss Austin, of course, will pass the letter on."

"That's understood," Graham agreed.

Foster carelessly lighted a fresh cigarette, and Graham, leaning forward, opened a safe and took out one or two papers that Foster could not see well. So far, the latter had done better than he had hoped, and in another few minutes would be in the possession of papers that might throw a useful light upon the plot. Yet the strain was beginning to tell and his nerves tingled as he watched his companion write.

A lamp with a broken mantle flickered above Graham's head and the stove crackled, but the outer office, the door of which was open, was dark, and the building was strangely quiet. No sound rose from the narrow street below, which ran like a still backwater among the tall warehouses. Foster, putting his hand in his pocket as if to feel for matches, touched the small Browning pistol he had brought. He was not afraid of Graham, but somebody might come in. At length the man sealed two envelopes and put them beside his writing-pad.

"If you cannot find Daly, you must bring the first back to me. When do you sail?"

"I don't know yet; I haven't looked up the steamship companies' notices," Foster answered, and as soon as he had spoken saw that he had made a mistake.

He had led Graham to believe he was going at once; indeed, this was his excuse for offering to take a message, but he remembered that in order to get a good room on a fast boat it was necessary to book one's passage some time in advance.

He thought Graham had marked the slip, although his face was expressionless.

"I don't want the letters carried about for long," he said.

"Certainly not," Foster agreed. "If I'm delayed, or can't get hold of Daly as soon as I thought, I'll bring them back. However, I've kept you from your business and must get off."

Graham did not move, and the letters were out of Foster's reach.

"You have got your instructions from Gascoyne and know what to do if you have any trouble on your journey?"

Foster felt embarrassed. He did not know if Gascoyne was the man he had gone to in Edinburgh, and durst not risk a fresh mistake. Besides, it was possible that there was not such a person among the other's friends and the question was a trap.

"No," he said boldly. "I can get all the instructions that are needful when I meet Daly. Give me the letters."

"I think not. It would be better to wait until we hear what Gascoyne has to say, since you haven't seen him as I thought. He may have something to send with the other documents. Suppose you come back about this time to-morrow."

Foster feared he was found out, and imagined that if he agreed, he would find the office closed and Graham gone; unless perhaps the fellow waited for him with one or two of his accomplices. Foster was certain he had accomplices. He knew he was playing a dangerous game, but he carried Alice Featherstone's glove and meant to get the letters.

"No," he said. "I'm willing to do you a favor, particularly as I want something to show my friends in Canada that I brought the packet safe. But I'm not going to put myself to much inconvenience. You have written the letters. Let me have them; I must catch my train."

He put his hand on the Browning pistol and was glad to feel it there, though he hardly thought he would be forced to draw it. He was physically stronger than Graham, but it had come to a trial of nerve and he knew he had a cunning antagonist. Besides, he could not tell how much longer they would be left alone and he might be in serious danger if somebody else came in. Still, he must not look anxious and quietly fixed his eyes on Graham's face.

"I can't take the risk," the latter declared. "Will you wait until I see if I can get Gascoyne on the telephone?"

The telephone was in the other office and Foster durst not let the man out of his sight.

"I've been here long enough and have just time to get to the station."

There was silence for a few moments and Foster felt his heart beat. He meant to finish the interview as it had begun, without doing anything unusual, but if this was impossible, he had another plan. His muscles were stiffened ready for a spring; he would pin the fellow to his desk while he seized the letters. Though he meant to look calm, his face got very grim; but Graham carelessly pushed the letters towards him.

"Very well! You will take the responsibility if there's any trouble."

"I will," said Foster, as coolly as he could, and picked up the envelopes. "Sorry if I've detained you. Good afternoon."

He was half afraid to turn his back to the other, but there was no avoiding this and he heard no suspicious movement until he reached the door. Then, as he expected, the telephone bell rang, and Foster, running down the steps, drew a breath of relief when he reached the street. It was now dark, but he felt comforted as he saw Pete's tall figure in the gloom.

"Look behind you now and then and tell me if anybody follows us," he said, and knowing that Pete's eyes could be trusted, carefully reviewed the situation when they turned into a busy street.

It was obvious that the conclusions he had come to by the peat-stack were correct, and the police, who were obviously watching him, thought he might know something about the Hulton tragedy. If so, his movements had not been calculated to allay their suspicions. He had now papers that were probably dangerous in his pocket, and if he were caught before he got rid of them, it would be difficult to prove his innocence. The safe line would be to make for the nearest police station and give up the documents. So long as he kept them, he had as much to fear from the police as from Daly's gang. But he did not mean to give them up just yet.

His duty to the State was plain, but he was frankly determined to save his comrade first, and imagined that he could do so, although the thing would be difficult. For all that, Daly must be forced to keep Lawrence's secret. Then he had, to some extent, discredited Daly with his accomplice by informing Graham that he was engaged upon some profitable private business. It looked as if Graham did not know what the fellow's object was; after all, the gang might not trust each other very far. The trouble was that Daly might not be easily found, and in the meantime Foster had two dangers to guard against; but he meant to be careful, and to tell the police all he knew as soon as he had dealt with Daly.

Nothing indicated that they were followed on their way to the Central Station, where Foster left Pete outside and ascertained that a train would shortly start for Carlisle. He would have liked to travel by it, since he expected to find Daly near the western Border. Besides, it was prudent to leave Newcastle as soon as he could, since his injured hand made him easily distinguishable and Graham had run to the telephone. The latter would not have let him take the papers without a struggle had he not some plan of getting them back. Foster did not know how many accomplices Graham had, but imagined he had to deal with a well-organized gang, who would find it much easier to watch the railway than the lonely moors between it and the Cheviots. Making his way through a crowd on a busy platform, he left the station by another door, where he met Pete, whom he had sent round. It was possible that these precautions were needless, but he did not mean to take any risk he could avoid.

"Where will ye be for the noo?" Pete asked.

"The head of Liddesdale, to begin with. But I don't know yet if we'll go west by the old military road, or across the moors. It will depend upon whether the fellow I went to see gets upon my track."

Pete's eyes twinkled. "It will be a clever man who tracks us when we tak' the heather. But have ye the papers ye went tae steal?"

"I have. If they're what I think and I can keep them safe until I use them, they're worth twenty pounds to you."

"Aweel," said Pete, "I'll feel mair sure o' the money when we win oot o' the toon. It's ower full o' polls, and my talents are no' o' much use here."

They had left the station and reaching a street where Foster made some inquiries, waited in the door of an office building until a tram-car came up. Getting in, they were carried through the wet and smoky streets towards the city's western outskirts.

THE LETTERS

The sky had cleared when Foster left the car at the end of the line and headed towards open country. On the whole, he thought he was fortunate to get out of Newcastle safe, because there were grounds for believing that Graham had found out the trick. If this were so, he would certainly try to recover the documents. On the surface, it seemed strange that the fellow had let him take them away; but, when one came to think of it, as soon as he had written and sealed the letters he was helpless.

In order to keep them, he would have had to overpower Foster, for which he had not the physical strength, while any noise they made in the struggle might have brought in help. Then supposing that Graham had by some chance mastered him, he would not have gained much, because Foster would have gone to the police when he got away. It was, of course, absurd to think that Graham might have killed him, since this would have led to his arrest. He had accordingly given up the letters, but Foster felt he was not safe yet. He might be attacked in some cunning way that would prevent his assailants being traced. It depended upon whether the documents were worth the risk, and he would know this soon.

In the meantime he was entering a belt of ugly industrial country. Now and then the reflected glare of a furnace quivered in the sky; tall chimney-stacks and mounds of refuse showed faintly in the dark, and he passed clusters of fiercely burning lights and dull red fires. He supposed they marked pithead banks and coke-ovens; but pushed on steadily towards the west. He wanted to put some distance between himself and Newcastle before he stopped.

After a time a row of lights twinkled ahead and, getting nearer, he saw chimneys, dark skeleton towers of timber, and jets of steam behind the houses. It was a colliery village, and when he passed the first lamps he vacantly noticed the ugliness of the place. The small, grimy houses were packed as close as they could be got, the pavement was covered with black mud, and the air filled with acrid smoke. Presently, however, he came to a pretentious hotel, built of glaring red brick and ornamented with sooty paint. He wondered what accounted for its being planted there; but it offered shelter for the night and he went in.

He admitted that he had slept in worse places than the room he was shown, although it looked far from comfortable, but the supper he got was good, and he afterwards entered a small room behind the bar. There was a bright fire, near which he sat down when Pete went away. The strain he had borne had brought its reaction; he felt tired and slack. There was another room across the passage, and he smelt rank tobacco and heard voices speaking a harsh dialect and the tramp of heavy boots on boards. The door was open and men with curiously pale faces that did not look clean passed now and then. Foster thought they were colliers and he had nothing to fear from them.

He had two or three companions, who sat round a small table and seemed by their talk to belong to a football committee. The landlord treated them with some deference, as if they were important people, but Foster wished they would go. He wanted to examine the letters, but thought it safer to wait until he was alone, since inquiries might afterwards be made about him. At length the footballers went way, and shutting the door, he turned his chair so that he could see anybody who came in, without looking round. It was satisfactory to note that the table would be between him and a new-comer.

Before opening the letters, he tried to recollect what had happened in Graham's office. The fellow sat in front of a desk with a row of pigeon-holes and sides that prevented Foster's noting exactly what he did after he began to write. In consequence, Foster could not tell if he had put anything except the letters in the envelopes, although he had taken some papers from the safe. It looked as if Graham had not meant him to see and had not trusted him altogether from the beginning. Now he probably knew he was an impostor, although this was not quite certain. Foster took out the envelopes, and broke the seal of the first, which was addressed to Daly, without hesitation.

It contained a tourist agency's circular cheque for a moderate sum, payable by coupons at any of the company's offices in England and Canada, and Foster saw the advantage of this, because, as the offices were numerous, one could not tell where the coupons would be cashed. Then he found a letter, which he thought bore out his conclusions, although, on the surface, it did not tell him much. It stated that Jackson's business had been satisfactorily transacted in Berlin, but the Hamburg matter had not been arranged yet. Lascelles had had some difficulties in Paris, but expected to negotiate a sale.

Foster carefully folded the papers and replaced them in his pocket. The names were probably false, but they stood for agents of the gang, whose business was, no doubt, the sale of the stolen bonds. He remembered Percival, the treasurer's, statement that the securities might be disposed of on a Continental bourse, and Hulton's reluctance to advertise their loss. Well, he now had proof that Daly was, at least, a party to the theft, and ground for believing him to be open to a more serious charge. The fellow was in his power.

He, however, hesitated a moment before opening the letter to Carmen. He was half-afraid of finding her to some extent implicated in the plot; and it was with relief he saw nothing but another envelope inside the first, which he threw into the fire. The enclosed envelope was addressed to a man he did not know, and he thought Carmen's part would be confined to giving it to her father, or somebody else, who would pass it on. Tearing it open, he found a cheque on an American bank for a thousand dollars, but the payee's name was different from that on the cover. Foster put it away and lighted his pipe.

Some of the bonds had obviously been sold and there were a number of men in the plot, though it was possible that they did not know all about the Hulton tragedy. Foster understood that one could dispose of stolen securities through people who would undertake the dangerous business without asking awkward questions, if the profit were high enough. Still he thought Graham knew, and this would give him an incentive stronger than his wish to save the money for trying to get the letters back. Indeed, Foster imagined that he was now in serious danger. Graham's run to the telephone had alarmed him.

Nobody came in and by degrees the room across the passage got quiet as its occupants went away. It was some relief that the noise had stopped, but Foster liked to feel that there were people about. He was tired and began to get drowsy as he lounged in front of the fire, but roused himself with an effort, knowing he ought to keep awake. For all that, he did not hear the door open, and got up with a start as a man came in. Then his alarm vanished for Pete stood looking at him with a sympathetic twinkle.

"I ken what ye feel," the latter remarked. "It's like meeting a keeper when ye hae a hare in the lining o' yere coat."

"Yes," said Foster, "I expect its something like that. But where have you been?"

"Roon' the toon, though it's no' verra big or bonnie. Then I stopped a bit in the bar o' the ither hotel. Sixpence goes some way, if ye stick to beer."

"I hope you didn't say much if there were strangers about."

Pete grinned. "I said a' I could; aboot the sheep and bullocks we were going to look at up Bellingham way; but, if it's only comfort, there's no strangers in the place but a commaircial who deals with the grossers and anither who got a good order from the colliery. Maybe that's worth the money for the beer!"

"It certainly is," Foster agreed. "We'll have a reckoning at the end of the journey, but here's your sixpence." Then he looked at his watch. "Well, I think it's late enough to go to bed, and you can order breakfast. We had better get off as soon as it's light."

"There's a train to Hexham at nine o'clock, the morn. It might suit ye to start for the station, even if ye dinna' get there."

"No," said Foster thoughtfully. "We'll pull out by some by-road before that. You see, the train comes from Newcastle."

He went to his room, which was next to Pete's, and after putting the letters under his pillow quietly moved a chest of drawers against the door. The lock was a common pattern and could probably be opened by a key from any of the neighboring rooms. He was half-ashamed of this precaution, but admitted that he was getting nervous. Hitherto he had found some amusement in leaving a trail for his pursuers, but there was a difference now. For all that, he slept soundly until he was awakened by a noise at the door. It was dark and somebody was trying to get in. Seizing his pistol, he leaned on one elbow, ready to spring out of bed, and then felt keen relief as he heard Pete say, "Dinna' keep on knocking! Leave the hot water outside."

"Yes; put it down, thanks," said Foster, who got up, feeling angry with himself.

It looked as if the person outside had been knocking for some time, and the landlord's curiosity might have been excited had he heard that his guest had barricaded his door. Dressing by gaslight, he found breakfast ready when he went down, and day broke soon after the meal was over. Foster paid his bill and set off with Pete, taking the main road west until they reached the end of the village, where some men were working on a colliery bank. Pete indicated a lane that branched off to the north.

"Yon's our way, but I'm thinking we'll gang straight on for a bit."

They followed the main road until the men were out of sight, and then crossing some fields, turned into the lane they had passed, which rose steadily to higher ground. After a time they found another road running straight towards the west. This was the old military road, made when the Romans built the Pict's wall, and long afterwards repaired by General Wade, who tried to move his troops across to intercept Prince Charlie's march. Foster sat down for a few minutes at the corner and looked back at the distant chimney-stacks and trails of smoke.

The railway and the road by which the main traffic went followed the valley of the Tyne, but the military road kept to the edge of the bleak moors. He gathered from the map that it was, for the most part, lonely, and thought Graham would expect him to go by train; the latter probably knew enough about him to anticipate his making for Liddesdale, and as there were not many trains running north from Hexham, would reckon on his traveling by Carlisle. If this were so, and he was being looked for, his pursuers would now be in front of him instead of behind, and he saw some advantage in keeping them there. Still he must not lose much time in finding Daly; for one thing, it would be awkward if the police arrested him while he had the checks in his pocket. All the same, he meant to visit the Garth, tell Alice he had been successful, ask if she had news of Lawrence, and try to overcome Featherstone's suspicions. Then, if Lawrence had not written yet, he must go back to Canada as soon as he had seen Daly.

Beyond this Foster's plans were vague; he did not know, for example, how he could force Daly to keep Lawrence's secret, without promising to withhold evidence that would bring the man to justice. But he might find a way and was tired of puzzling about the matter. In a sense, he had taken a ridiculous line from the beginning and perhaps involved himself in needless difficulties. His partner, however, must be protected, and in the meantime he had two objects; to avoid the police and Graham.

"Perhaps we had better keep the military road until we strike the North Tyne," he said to Pete. "Then, if nothing turns up to prevent it, we might risk stopping for the night at Hexham."

Having the day before them, they set off at a leisurely pace. The air was cold but still, and bright sunshine shone upon the tableland, which rolled north, rising steadily towards distant snow-streaked hills. Nothing suspicious happened, and late in the afternoon they came down into the valley of the North Tyne and turned south for Hexham. As they did so they passed an inn and Foster stopped. They were some distance from Hexham and he felt hungry, while the inn looked unusually comfortable. He was tempted to go in and order a meal, but hesitated, for no very obvious reason.

"We'll wait and get dinner when we make Hexham," he said, setting off again.

A thin wood, separated from the road by a low fence, ran between them and the river. The light was faint among the trees, the road narrow, and presently they heard a car coming towards them. It was going very fast and when it lurched across an opening in the hedge round a bend Foster put his hand on the fence and swung himself over. Pete followed silently, but when they stood in the shadow among the dry undergrowth Foster felt annoyed because he had yielded to a half-instinctive impulse. He must, of course, be cautious, but there was no reason for overdoing it.

Next moment, the car, which swung towards the fence as it took the curve, dashed past, and Foster set his lips as he saw Graham, who seemed to be gazing up the road. Then the car vanished among the trees, and Pete looked at him curiously.

"Is yon the man frae Newcastle?" he asked.

"Yes," said Foster grimly; "I rather think we were just in time. It's very possible that he'd have run over me if I'd been in the road. An accident of that kind would have suited him well. But I thought I was a fool for jumping."

Pete nodded. "I ken! When ye feel ye must do a thing, it's better just to do it and think afterwards." Then he raised his hand. "She's stopping!"

The throb of the engine suddenly slackened, as if the driver had seen the inn, and Foster got over the fence.

"It's lucky we didn't stop for a meal; but, although it may be risky, I'm going back."

They kept along the side of the road, where the ground was soft, but Foster was ready to jump the fence if the car returned; the noise would give him warning enough. After a few minutes they stopped and waited in the gloom of a hedge, where they could see the inn. The car stood in the road and it was empty. Graham had obviously gone in to make inquiries, and Foster wondered whether anybody had seen him and his companion pass. He would know when Graham came out, and moved a few yards farther until he reached a gate, which he opened, ready to slip through. There was no need to warn Pete now the latter understood matters. One could trust a poacher to hide himself quickly.

Foster felt some strain. It was disturbing to find Graham already on his track and he wondered whether the fellow had been to Carlisle. It would be awkward if he went to Hexham. After a few minutes two men came out of the inn and Foster waited anxiously while one cranked the car, but they drove on when the engine started. Then, as he turned back, the throbbing stopped again and he beckoned Pete.

"They don't know you and it's getting dark. Go on and see which way they take."

He kept close to the hedge when Pete vanished. The car had stopped where the military road cut across another that followed the river into the moors, and Graham apparently did not know which to take. It looked as if the fellow had ascertained that he was not at Hexham. After a time he heard the car start. It was not coming back, but he could not tell which way it went, and waited in the gathering dark for Pete's return.

"They'd gone before I cam' up, but I heard her rattling on the hill to my left han'," he said.

"That means they've gone west towards Carlisle."

"There's anither road turns aff and rins north awa' by Bellingham."

Foster frowned, because this was the road he meant to take next day, and if his pursuers did so now, it would be because they expected him to make for the Garth. They were, however, in front, where he would sooner have them than behind, and he set off down the valley for Hexham. He found the old Border town, clustering round the tall dark mass of the abbey, strangely picturesque; the ancient Moot Hall and market square invited his interest, but he shrank from wandering about the streets in the dark. Now he had Graham's checks, he must be careful; moreover his knapsack and leggings made him conspicuous, and he went to a big red hotel.

He sent Pete to an inn farther on, because it seemed advisable that they should not be seen together, although he would have liked to know the man was about. After dinner, he sat in a quiet nook in the smoking-room, reading the newspapers and keeping his gloved hand out of sight, until it was time to go to bed.

XVIII

SPADEADAM WASTE

About eleven o'clock next morning Foster stopped at the top of a hill and sitting down on a broken wall lighted his pipe. In front, the undulating military road ran straight across the high tableland to the west. To the south, a deep hollow, the bottom of which he could not see, marked the course of the Tyne. Plumes of smoke rose out of the valley and trailed languidly across the sky, for the river flowed past well-cultivated fields, old-fashioned villages, and rows of sooty cottages that clustered round pithead towers. Human activity had set its stamp upon the sheltered dale, alike in scenes of quiet pastoral beauty and industrial ugliness.

It was different to the north, where the shaggy moors rolled back in bleak, dark ridges. There were no white farmsteads here; one looked across a lonely waste that had sheltered the wolf and the lurking Pict when the Romans manned the Wall, and long afterwards offered a refuge to outlaws and cattle thieves. Foster's way led through this desolation, but his map indicated a road of a kind that ran north to the head of Liddel. He must decide whether he should take it or plunge into the wilds.

Since Graham was in front of him, he had probably gone to Liddesdale, with the object of finding if Foster was at the Garth. If he did not come back by the road he had taken, he would watch the railway that roughly followed it across the moors from Hexham, which seemed to close the latter to Foster and make it dangerous for him to go near the Garth at all. Nevertheless he meant to see Alice before he looked for Daly, and he turned to Pete.

"On the whole, I'd sooner keep off the road. Is there a way across the heath to the upper Liddel?"

"I wouldna' say there's a way," Pete answered with a dry smile. "But I can take ye ower the Spadeadam waste, if ye do not mind the soft flows and some verra rough traiveling. Then I'll no' promise that we'll win farther than Bewcastle to-night, an' if there's much water in the burns, we'll maybe no' get there."

They struck across a rushy field, crept through a ragged hedge, and came out upon rough pasture that gradually merged into the heath. A green bank and a stragging line of stones, some fallen in large masses and some standing two or three feet high, presently stretched across their path, and Foster stopped for a few moments. The bank and moat-like hollow he

looked down upon marked the *vallum*; the squared stones, to which the lime still clung, apparently undetachable, the *murus*. He was looking at the great rampart a Roman emperor had built. He understood that it was higher and less damaged farther west and would have liked to follow it, but he had something else to think about than antiquities.

The heath got rougher when they left the wall. Spongy moss grew among the ling that caught their feet, and the ground began to rise. Looking at the sun, Foster saw they were not taking as northerly a line as he had expected, but the back of a bold ridge rose between them and the west and he supposed Pete meant to follow its other side. They stopped to eat the food they had brought where a stream had worn away a hollow in a bank. The sun, striking the wall of peaty soil behind them, was pleasantly warm. It was a calm day, with slowly-drifting clouds, and gray shadows streaked the wide, brown waste.

There was no house in sight and only in one place a few scattered dots that looked like sheep. Getting out his map, Foster noted that they were crossing the high neck where the Pennine range slopes down to meet the southern spurs of the Cheviots. He had seen nothing in Canada wilder or more desolate than this bleak tableland.

In the afternoon they toiled up the rise he had noticed in the distance, winding in and out among soft places and hummocks of the peat, but when they came to the top there was not the dip to a valley he had expected. The ground was rougher than before, and the moor rolled on, rising and falling in heathy undulations. By degrees, however, it became obvious that they had crossed the water-shed and were descending, for streams that increased in size crossed their path. So far, none were deep, but the ravines they ran through began to seam the gradual slope and Foster understood Pete's remark that something depended on there not being much water in the burns.

Looking back after a time, he saw the crest of the moor run up behind them against the sky, and the next ravine they came to was awkward to climb down, while he was wet to the knees when he crossed the burn. A mile farther on, he reached another that was worse and they had to work back along the crumbling sides of its channel to find a place to cross. After this their progress was marked by erratic curves, and Foster was soon splashed with black peat-mud and green slime. By and by they came to a broad level, shut in by a ridge on its other side, and picked their way carefully between clumps of rushes and curious round holes filled with dark-colored water. The ground was very soft and walking became a toil, but Pete held steadily to his winding course and Foster, although getting tired, did not lag behind.

They were some time crossing the bog and when they reached the foot of the rise, which ran in a long line between them and the west, the light got dimmer suddenly. A yellow glow that seemed to come from low down flushed the sky, but the rough slope was dark and the hummocks and gullies on its side were losing their distinctness. Foster felt somewhat daunted by the prospect of pushing across the waste after darkness fell, and doggedly kept level with Pete as they went up the hill obliquely, struggling through tangled grass and wiry heath. When they reached the summit, he saw they were on the western edge of the tableland but some distance below its highest point. Though it was broken by rolling elevations, the ground ran gradually down to an extensive plain where white mist lay in the hollows. A belt of saffron light lingered on the horizon, with a half-moon in a streak of green above, and one or two twinkling points showed, faint and far off, in the valley.

"Yon," said Pete, "is Bewcastle dale, and I ken where we'll find a welcome when we cross the water o' Line. But I'm thinking we'll keep the big flow in our left han'."

Instead of descending towards the distant farmsteads, he followed the summit of the rise, and Foster, who understood that a flow is a soft bog, plodded after him without objecting. The heather was tangled and rough, and hid the stones he now and then stumbled against, but it was better to hurry than be left with a long distance to cover in the dark. Indeed, as he caught his feet in the wiry stems and fell into holes, he frankly admitted the absurdity of his adventure, a sense of which amused him now and then. He was in a highly civilized country, there were railways and telegraph lines not far off, and

he was lurking like an ancient outlaw among the bogs! It looked as if there must be better ways of meeting his difficulties, but he could not see one. Anyhow, he had determined to save his partner, and now, if his plans were hazy and not very wise, it was too late to make a sweeping change.

After a time Pete stopped abruptly, and then dropping into a clump of heather, pointed backwards down the long slope on their right hand. Foster's sight was good, but he admitted that the poacher's was better, because it was a minute or two before he saw any ground for alarm. Although there was some light in the sky, the rough descent was dark and it was only by degrees he distinguished something that moved across the heath, below and some distance away. Then he realized that it was a man, and another became faintly visible. They might be shepherds or sportsmen, but it was significant that there were two and they seemed to be ascending obliquely, as if to cut his line of march. He remembered that as he and Pete had kept the crest of the ridge their figures must have shown, small but sharp, against the fading light.

"It's suspicious, but I wouldn't like to say they're on our trail," he remarked.

"Ye'll soon ken. Watch the bit scaur."

Foster saw a faint dark line down the hill, and supposed it was a gully, torn out of the peat. It ran nearly straight up, crossing the strangers' indirect course to the summit, and would make a very rough means of ascent, but if they entered it the men would be out of sight. He blamed himself for not looking back before but had felt safe in the wilds, and even now it was hard to believe that the men were following him. Straining his eyes, he watched them move towards the gully, and set his lips when they disappeared. It was plain that they meant to get as close as possible before they were seen.

He did not move for the next few moments, but his brain was busy. Graham might have come back down the north road in his car and afterwards taken to the moors, but it was difficult to understand how he had found Foster's track. Chance, however, sometimes favored one in a curious way; the fellow might have found out that he had left the road and expected him to stop the night in Bewcastle dale. Since Foster had Pete with him, he was not, in one sense, afraid of Graham. Although the fellow was, no doubt, dangerous, he was not likely to force an equal fight. The risk would come if Graham found him alone and at a disadvantage, when Foster thought it would go hard with him. This was why he could not have the men on his track, watching for the right moment to strike. It was, however, possible that the strangers were police, and he lay in the heath with knitted brows until Pete touched him.

"They wouldna' find us easy if we keepit still, but I'm no' for spending the night among the bents," he said. "I'm thinking we'll try the big flow and lose them in the mire."

He rose and crossing the summit started down the incline, while Foster followed as fast as he could. It would be some time before the others reached the spot they had left, but the light of the sinking moon touched the face of the hill and as long as they were moving their figures could be seen. When they reached the bottom Pete headed west, and presently stopped at the edge of a wide level space. Tufts of wild cotton gleamed lividly in the moonlight, and here and there a sparkle marked a pool, but, farther on, a trail of mist stretched across the bog. It did not look inviting, and when Pete stopped for a few moments Foster heard the water bubble through the wet moss in which his feet sank.

"The black burn rins on the ither side, and there's just one place where ye can cross," Pete said thoughtfully. "An old shieling stands on a bit dry knowe near the middle o' the flow, and I wouldna' say but we might spend the night there, if it was needful."

Foster left it to him, although he was not much attracted by the thought of spending the night in the bog, and Pete moved forward cautiously. He seemed to be following a track, because he went straight ahead, tramping through clumps of

rushes, and splashing into pools. Foster noted that the latter were shallow, though he had fallen into bog-holes that were deep. They tried to move silently, but they made some noise, and he felt relieved when they plunged into a belt of mist that would hide them from their pursuers. By the look of the ground to left and right, he imagined that a stranger who lost the track would have serious trouble in regaining firm soil,

When they came out of the mist, however, he began to find the silence daunting. On the hills one could hear the grouse and plover crying and the murmur of running water, but an oppressive quietness brooded over the flow. Nor could he see much except rushes, treacherous moss, and dully-glimmering pools. By and by, however, a dark mass loomed through the haze and Pete stopped and looked back.

For a moment or two Foster heard nothing, and then there was a splash and a noise, as if somebody was floundering through the rushes. The sounds were nearer than he had thought possible, and he glanced at his companion.

"They're no' traiveling badly and they've keepit the track so far," Pete remarked. "Maybe ye wouldn'a care to try their speed for the next two or three miles?"

"Certainly not," said Foster; "that is, if there's another way."

"Weel," said Pete, "they're surely nearer than I thought, and might see where we crossed the burn. There's nought for't but the shieling on the knowe."

He went on, and the dark mass ahead grew into a rocky mound covered with small trees. They were birches, because Foster saw their drooping, lacelike twigs above the low mist; and the indistinct object among their stems was the shieling. It was obvious that the hut would catch the eyes of the men behind if they came close enough, and he stopped where the ground rose.

"We'll no' gang in yet," said Pete.

They skirted the mound, which was larger than Foster thought and broken by out-cropping rock, and when a thick screen of the birches rose between them and the building, crept into a nook among the stones. Foster imagined that the others might search for half the night without finding them unless they were lucky. Then Pete remarked in a meaning tone: "There's just the twa, and I hae a good stick."

Foster smiled. He was tired, wet, and savage, and would have liked to confront Graham and settle their differences by force; but the matter could not be treated in this primitive way. He could not shoot the men, and would be no better off if he overpowered and threw them in the bog. They would know where he was and would follow him as close as was safe, while he wanted to shake them off and make them uncertain whether they were on his track or not. Besides, his antagonists might avoid a conflict.

"The thing's too complicated to be straightened out by knocking somebody down," he said. "But I'm glad I'm not here alone."

In the meantime, the others were getting nearer, for Foster heard them splash through the wet moss and stumble among the rushy grass. They were walking fast, which indicated that they thought themselves some distance behind the fugitives; but stopped when they saw the birches, and then came on again cautiously. Foster could not see them until their blurred figures appeared among the trees. So long as he kept still there was little chance of his being found.

The moonlight filtered through the low mist that rose half-way up the thin birch trunks on the top of the mound, but the shieling stood on a lower level, and when they went towards it the men's forms got very indistinct. They vanished, but he knew they had gone in when a pale stream of light flickered among the trees.

"A polisman's trick," Pete said in a low voice. "A poacher would not ha' let ye see the light."

Foster felt that he must find out who the men were. The thing was risky, but it was worth trying, and he crawled out from behind the stones. The rock was rough and wet; his hand plunged into some water and he scraped his knee, but he made a few yards and then stopped and lay flat as the light went out. It looked as if the others had heard him, and he lowered his head until his face was buried in withered fern. There was silence for a few moments, and then his nerves tingled as he heard steps; the men, he thought, were coming out to look for him. He did not move, however, and the footsteps got farther off. By and by there was a sharp rustle and he cautiously looked up. Two hazy figures showed among the trees, but it was plain that they were going away.

It was impossible to follow them without being heard, and he waited until Pete joined him. So far as he could judge by the noise they made, the men were hurrying across the bog.

"They're awa', but I wouldna' say they'll no' come back," Pete remarked. "If they dinna' strike the right place, they'll no' find it easy to cross the burn. She rins in a deep cut an' the bottom's saft."

"What's likely to happen if they get off the track?"

"Weel," said Pete, with a chuckle, "it's verra possible they'll stop in the flow till morning, maybe up to the knees in mire. I dinna' think there's much reason they should get in deeper, but they might."

"But suppose they find the way and cross the burn?"

"Then, if they ken the dale, I would expect them to haud a bit south for Shopford, where they would find an inn, or maybe west by the Clattering ford to Canonbie. If they dinna' ken, it's likely they'll hae to sleep behind a dyke. Noo, however, we'll turn back and gang up the dale."

They recrossed the bog and skirted the moor for some time, after which they went down a long slope and reached a level space of grass and heath. They followed it north until a light shone ahead and the barking of dogs indicated that they were approaching a farm. Pete went in first, and Foster did not know what explanation he gave, but the farmer told him to sit down when he entered the big, flagged kitchen. He was not surprised when a woman who came in looked at him curiously, because he was wet and splashed, and bits of fern and heather stuck to his clothes, but his hosts asked no questions and presently gave him supper.

Soon afterwards he was shown a comfortable room and went to bed, leaving Pete with the others in the kitchen. Foster was glad to feel he could be trusted not to tell them too much, although he would, no doubt, have to satisfy their curiosity to some extent. A hint went a long way with the reserved Borderers.

XIX

ALICE'S CONFIDENCE

Foster got up late and after breakfast sat by the kitchen fire, studying his map. He imagined that his pursuers, believing him to be in front, had crossed the low ground towards the cultivated valley of the Esk, where they would not have

trouble in finding shelter for the night. Then, if they thought he was making for the Garth, the railway would take them up Liddesdale.

He meant to visit the Garth, although this might prove dangerous if Graham and his companion watched the neighborhood. So long as Pete was close at hand, the risk might not be great, but Pete could not be with him always and he thought Graham would stick at nothing to get his papers back. One of the gang had killed Fred Hulton, and Foster did not suppose the others would hesitate about getting rid of him, if it could be done without putting the police on their track. A shot or stab in the dark would effectually prevent his betraying them, and it might be made to look like an accident, or perhaps as if he had killed himself. Foster, as a rule, distrusted anything that looked abnormal or theatrical, but admitted that he might be in some danger. For all that, he was going. There was no need for an early start, because he did not want to arrive in daylight and the distance was not great. Then he meant to avoid the high roads, and after a talk with Pete picked out his route across the hills. It was eleven o'clock when they set off, and they spent an hour sheltering behind a dyke while a snowstorm broke upon the moor. The snow was wet and did not lie, but the soaked grass and ling afterwards clung about their feet and made walking laborious. The sky was gray and lowering and there was a bitter wind, but they pushed on across the high moors, and when the light was going saw a gap in a long ridge in front. Foster thought this marked the way down to the Garth.

It was nearly dark when they reached the gap, through which a brown stream flowed, and he could see nothing except dim hillsides and the black trough of the hollow. Pete said they must follow the water, and they stumbled downhill among the stones beside the burn. As they descended, a valley opened up and a rough track began near a sheepfold. Although it was dark, Foster saw that they were now crossing rushy pasture, and they had to stop every now and then to open a gate. The stream was swelling with tributaries from the hills and began to roar among the stones. Birches clustered in the hollows, the track became a road, and at length a group of lights twinkled across a fir wood and he knew the Garth was not far ahead.

Now he had got there, he almost wished he had kept away. He was not sure of his welcome and did not know what line to take if Featherstone showed his doubts. For one thing, he did not mean to talk about his adventures in Newcastle and on Spadeadam waste. The affair was too theatrical for the unimaginative country gentleman to believe, and for that matter, when Foster went up the drive past the well-kept shrubberies and lawn he found it hard to realize that he had been hunted by determined men and was now perhaps in danger of his life. Featherstone, living in his quiet house, could not be expected to credit such a romantic tale. Graham's letters would to some extent corroborate his statements, but not unless Featherstone accepted his surmises as correct; but Foster admitted that after all pride was his strongest motive for saying nothing. If Featherstone distrusted him, he must continue to do so until Foster's efforts to help Lawrence were successful.

He braced his courage when he rang the bell, but John, who let him in, did not seem to find anything remarkable in his choice of a companion. Pete looked very big and rather truculent in his rough, wet clothes, but he was not embarrassed.

"This is a friend of mine," said Foster. "I should be obliged if you will look after him."

John showed no surprise at his statement. "Very good, sir; I think I can promise that. Will you give me your coat, sir?" Then he beckoned Pete. "If you please, come with me."

He took Pete away and Foster wondered with some amusement what they thought of one another. A few moments afterwards Alice came in, dressed with a curious elegant plainness that he thought suited her. Alice needed no ornaments, and fripperies would have struck a jarring note. Foster sometimes called her stately, though he felt that this was not quite what he meant. She had a certain quiet grace, touched with pride, that he had never noticed about anybody else, although he admitted that his knowledge of girls like Alice Featherstone was small. Now, however, she was not as

calm as usual, for her eyes had a keen sparkle and her look was animated. He wondered whether he could believe this was because she was glad to see him.

"You have not been long," she said with a welcoming smile. "Have you succeeded?"

"On the whole, I think so," Foster answered modestly.

"That's splendid!" she exclaimed and he could not doubt the approval in her voice. It sounded as if she meant to applaud him as well as show her satisfaction with the consequences of his exploit.

"Well, I haven't got very far yet, although I imagine I'm on the right line. But have you heard from Lawrence?"

"No," she replied and her satisfaction vanished. Indeed, Foster was somewhat puzzled by the change. "I must confess that I'm getting anxious now."

Foster nodded, "Then I must go and look for him as soon as I've had a reckoning with Daly."

"Daly has been here-----" she said and stopped as Mrs. Featherstone came in.

The latter looked at Foster rather curiously, but gave him her hand and seemed to take it for granted that he meant to resume his stay. She said her husband had gone to dine with a neighbor and would not be back for an hour or two, and then let Foster go to his room.

Dinner was served soon after he came down, but while they talked freely about matters of no importance Foster noted a subtle difference in Mrs. Featherstone's manner. She was not less friendly than usual, but she asked no questions about his journey and avoided mentioning Lawrence. It looked as if she knew her husband's doubts, but Foster somehow thought she did not altogether share them. In the meantime, he tried to act as if their relations were perfectly normal, but found it hard, and now and then glanced at the clock. It was a long way to the nearest inn and he wondered when Featherstone would return, because he could not accept the hospitality of a man who distrusted him.

When dinner was over, he went with the others to the drawing-room and did his best to engage them in careless talk. Alice supported him when his efforts flagged, as they sometimes did, and once or twice gave him a half-amused, half-sympathetic glance. He did not know if he was grateful for this or not, but saw that she knew what he felt. If Mrs. Featherstone guessed, she made no sign; she treated him with the graciousness one would expect from a well-bred hostess, but went no further.

It was a relief when Featherstone came in. He made a little abrupt movement when he saw Foster, to whom he did not give his hand. The latter thought he looked disturbed.

"I am sorry I was not at home when you arrived," Featherstone said. "Still, I had no reason for thinking you would be here."

"In fact, you were rather surprised to see me," Foster suggested.

Featherstone looked at him as if he thought he had been blunter than was necessary, but replied: "Well, I suppose that's true, but I have no doubt Mrs. Featherstone has made up for my absence, and since you have come, we would like to talk to you about Lawrence. I dare say you will give us a few minutes."

He opened the door as Mrs. Featherstone rose, and Foster went with them to the library, where Featherstone sat down at a big table. It was here he wrote his business letters and occasionally attended to magisterial duties, and Foster thought this was why he had chosen the place. It, no doubt, gave him a feeling of authority. Mrs. Featherstone sat by the fire, but Foster was surprised when Alice came in. Featherstone glanced at her with a frown.

"It might have been better if you had stayed downstairs and left this matter to your mother and me," he remarked and waited, as if he expected his wife to support him, but she did not.

"No," said Alice; "I am beginning to get anxious about Lawrence, and if Mr. Foster can tell us anything fresh, I ought to hear it. But I don't think he can. I believe he told us all he knew before."

Featherstone looked disturbed by her boldness, but Foster felt a thrill. Alice was on his side and meant to show the others her confidence in his honesty. He wondered what Featherstone would do, and was not surprised when he made a gesture of resignation. Foster knew his comrade well, and imagined that Featherstone was very like Lawrence. The latter was physically brave, but sometimes gave way to moral pressure and vacillated when he should be firm. Both showed a certain lack of rude stamina; they were, so to speak, too fine in the grain. Foster, however, had other things to think about, and indeed felt rather like a culprit brought before his judges. Then Mrs. Featherstone relieved the unpleasant tension.

"We have not heard from Lawrence yet and do not understand it. Can you do anything to set our fears at rest?"

"I'm sorry I can't," said Foster, and seeing he must deal with the matter boldly, asked Featherstone: "Have you any ground for believing I have not been frank?"

"It is an awkward question. You are our guest and my son sent you to us. I must add that we had begun to like you for your own sake; but I have grounds for supposing that you kept something back. To begin with, Daly, whom you told us you meant to mislead, was here again yesterday."

"Did you give way to his demands? It's important that I should know."

Featherstone hesitated, and Foster saw where his suspicions led, but for the next moment or two was absorbed by speculations about Daly's visit. Then Alice looked at her father with a smile.

"You can tell Mr. Foster. It's obvious that if he was in league with the fellow he would have no need to ask."

"I did not give way," said Featherstone. "He must have seen that I was determined, because after the first I thought he did not press me very hard."

"Ah!" said Foster; "that was curious, but we'll let it go in the meantime. I suppose there is something else?"

"Since you left, the police have paid me another visit. They asked some rather strange questions, besides inquiring where you were."

"Which you couldn't tell them!"

"I didn't know," Featherstone rejoined pointedly, and Foster saw that Alice had said nothing about his recent visit. She gave him an inquiring glance, as if she wondered why he did not state his reasons for going to Newcastle, but he looked as unobservant as he could. He could not signal her, because while this might escape his host's notice he was afraid of

Mrs. Featherstone.

"Well," he said, "it might be better if you, so to speak, formulated your suspicions and made a definite charge. After all, I'm entitled to hear it."

"I do so most unwillingly, but feel an explanation is needed. To begin with, we had one short letter from my son, stating that he could not come home but you would tell us how he was getting on. This was all; he said nothing about Daly, or his starting east with you. You arrived with his portmanteau and what I now think is a rather curious story. Then, after Daly wrote, you suggested an extraordinary plan, which, as the fellow came here, has not worked very well. Besides, the police have made inquiries about you and there's something mysterious about your journeys. I do not think they were all intended to mislead Daly."

"All this is true," Foster admitted. "But you haven't stated the conclusions you draw from it."

"The conclusions are vague but disturbing. Lawrence trusted you and, you tell us, started with you for a place he did not intend to reach. Since then he has vanished. It is possible that you have deceived both him and us."

"That's rather absurd," Alice remarked. "I really don't think Mr. Foster would make a very dangerous plotter, and you admitted that Lawrence trusted him."

"I did," Featherstone rejoined sharply, as if he resented the interruption. "Still I don't see your argument."

"She means that Lawrence is not a simpleton," Mrs. Featherstone interposed. "For myself, I doubt if Mr. Foster could deceive him."

"We'll go on," Featherstone resumed, turning to Foster. "There was a very mysterious affair at Gardner's Crossing shortly before you left and some valuable bonds were missing."

Foster's face got red, but he laughed. "This is too much, sir! If your suspicions went so far, why did you not tell the police?"

"Ah!" said Featherstone with some awkwardness, "there you have me at a disadvantage! While Daly has the power to injure Lawrence, I must keep the police in the dark." He paused and added: "I cannot say I believed you reckoned on this."

"Thank you," said Foster, but Alice broke in: "Why don't you tell my father why you went to Newcastle?"

Featherstone gave her a surprised glance and then turned to Foster. "It looks as if my daughter were better informed than I. There is obviously something I do not know about."

"There is; but I must ask Miss Featherstone to respect my confidence in the meantime," Foster answered, and getting up, stood silent for a few moments, resting his hand on his chair.

He saw restrained curiosity in Mrs. Featherstone's face and her husband's anger, while he thought Alice knew how significant the line she had taken looked. She had boldly admitted that he knew her well enough to trust her with his secrets, and declared herself on his side. In the meantime, he was conscious of a strain that he thought the others felt and was sorry for Featherstone. He could not resent the man's anxiety about his son. For all that, he did not mean to tell him why he had gone to Newcastle. It would not make a plausible tale.

"I must own that things look bad for me," he said. "I can't offer any explanation that would satisfy you and could not expect you to take my word that I mean well. All I can do is to frighten off Daly and then find Lawrence, and I'm going to try."

"It doesn't matter much about Daly now. But if you can find Lawrence, you will clear yourself."

Alice turned to her father with an angry sparkle in her eyes. "That's a very grudging concession for us to make. We will not blame Mr. Foster when he has proved that it's impossible for him to be guilty!"

The tension was too great for any of them to be much surprised by her outbreak and Featherstone said dully, "It's logical."

"Logical!" Alice exclaimed in a scornful tone. "Do you expect Mr. Foster to be satisfied with that, after what he has borne and the risks he has run for us? Now, when things look bad for him, is the time for you to show your trust and knowledge of character."

"You imply that your judgment is better than mine?" Featherstone rejoined, but without heat.

"I know an honest man," Alice said quietly, with some color in her face.

There was silence for a few moments and by an effort of self-control Foster kept his face unmoved. He did not mean to let the others see the exultant satisfaction the girl's statement had given him. Featherstone brooded with knitted brows and a troubled look. Then he said:

"You will understand, Mr. Foster, that this has been a painful interview to my wife and me. You were our guest and my son's friend; but I do not know what has happened and we have no news of him. If you can bring him back, I will ask your forgiveness for all that I have said."

"I will do my best and get to work to-morrow," Foster answered. Then he bowed to Mrs. Featherstone and Alice, and the girl gave him a look that made his heart beat as he went out of the room.

Shortly afterwards he entered the hall, wearing his damp walking clothes, and met Mrs. Featherstone, who protested against his leaving them at night. Foster answered that he had no time to lose and beckoning Pete, who was waiting, went out. Alice had not come down to bid him good-by, but after all he had not expected this; the meeting would not have been free from embarrassment. He had much to say to her, but must wait until he had kept his promise.

He did not blame Featherstone and rather sympathized with him, but could not stay at the Garth or come back there until he had cleared up the mystery about his comrade's silence. Pete did not grumble much when they went down the drive, but said he had no friends in the neighborhood and it was a long way to the nearest inn.

XX

THE RIGHT TRACK

It was a clear night and although the moon was low its light touched the wet road as Foster walked down the dale. He had much to think about and tried to fix his mind on his main object. It would have been delightful to dwell upon Alice's interposition on his behalf, but he must not attach too much importance to this yet; after all she might have been actuated mainly by a love of justice. Besides, the sooner he kept his promise, the sooner he would be able to ask her what she had

meant.

He must find Daly and thought it significant that the fellow's attempt at extortion had not been very determined. If Featherstone was right about this, it indicated that Daly suspected that Lawrence was beyond his reach and had not been at the Garth. It was possible that he had found out how he had been misled and meant to look for his victim in Canada. Foster wondered whether he would go without his money, or if he had received a share of the plunder before, since the circular check was not for a large sum. In any case, it was lucky that Daly had visited the Garth when he did, because if he had waited another day, he might have met Graham, which would have been awkward.

After some thought, Foster decided to act on the supposition that Daly would return to Canada. Then, dismissing the matter for the time, he speculated about the possibility of Graham's lurking in the neighborhood and began to look ahead. A stone dyke, broken in places, ran between the winding road and the stream it followed; on the other side, which lay in shadow, thin birches straggled up a steep hill. The moon was low and would soon sink behind the trees, when it would be very dark. When he looked back he could not see the lights of the Garth. He was on the road to the station, and remembered that there was a train from the south in the evening.

Taking out his watch, he calculated that anybody who left the station on foot when the train arrived might be expected to reach the Garth in the next quarter of an hour. This was disturbing, but he saw nothing to cause him alarm as he went on. Now and then a rabbit, startled by his footsteps, ran across the road, and once or twice an owl hooted as it fluttered overhead. The river splashed among the stones and sometimes the shadows moved as a puff of wind came up the valley; but that was all. Still Foster quickened his pace; it was some distance to the village where he knew of an inn, and he wanted to get there before the people went to bed. He would not admit that he shrank from being left in the dark when the moon sank.

By and by Pete stopped to relight his pipe and uttered an exclamation when he put his hand in his pocket.

"I hae lost the guid pooch ye gave me at Hexham," he said. "I mind I filled my pipe by the big thorn where the wire fence stops, and the moon's on the road. If ye'll bide or gang on slowly, I'll rin back."

"Never mind it. I'll give you another."

"Na," said Pete. "If ye had been used with an auld tin and had a smairt pooch for the first time, ye wouldna' lea' it in the road. Besides, it was fu' o' a better tobacco than I often smoke."

Foster would sooner have kept him, but was unwilling to admit that he did not like to be alone. It was not very far to the thorn tree and Pete would soon overtake him. He went on, but did not loiter, and noted how his footsteps echoed along the edge of a wood ahead. In fact, the noise he made rather jarred his nerves, but the grass by the roadside was hummocky and wet. The road was dark beside the wood, for the moon was near the tops of the black firs, but there were gaps through which the silver light shone down.

As he passed the first of the trees he heard a rattle of wings and stopped abruptly. Wood-pigeons were fluttering among the branches, and if he had not disturbed them, there was somebody in the wood. After a few moments, the sound died away, but he stood listening. He could not hear Pete coming, and was sorry he had let him go; the road looked lonely, and he knew there was no house for some distance. Still, if he had not frightened the pigeons, it might be unsafe to stay where he was, and he did not mean to turn back. It was better to be cautious, but he must not give his imagination rein.

Bracing his courage, he went on, a little faster than before but without hurrying, and for two or three minutes heard no fresh noise. The wood ran along the road for perhaps a quarter of a mile and he was near the middle of it when there was

a sharp report and something flicked against the wall behind him. He sprang aside instinctively, and then running forward smashed through the rotten fence and plunged into the wood. The nervous shrinking he had felt had gone. Now he was confronted with a danger that was not imaginary, he was conscious of savage anger and a fierce desire to come to grips with his treacherous antagonist. His fury was greater because of his previous fear.

The wood was dark and thick. Branches brushed against him and hindered his progress, crawling brambles caught his feet. He could hear nothing except the noise he made, and as the fit of rage passed away his caution returned. He was putting himself at a disadvantage, because his lurking enemy could hear him and would no doubt try another shot if he came near enough. Stopping behind a fir trunk, with his finger on the trigger of the Browning pistol, he listened. At first no sound came out of the dark, but he presently heard a rustle some distance off. There was another man in the wood beside the fellow who had fired at him, but so long as he kept still and the others did not know where he was, he had an advantage over them. They might expose themselves, and he was a good shot.

He would have liked to wait, but reflected that if he killed or disabled somebody, he would have to justify his action, and he had compromising papers in his pocket. He did not want to destroy the checks or tell his story to the police yet. Then he noticed that the rustling was getting farther away, as if the man was pushing through the wood towards the moor behind it, and he turned back half-reluctantly to the road. After getting over the fence, he kept on the wet grass, and had nearly reached the end of the wood when he heard somebody running behind him. The moon was now behind the firs and their dark shadow stretched from fence to wall. It looked as if Pete had heard the shot and was coming to his help, but Foster kept on until he was nearly out of the wood, and then stopped, standing against the fence, a yard or two back from where the moonlight fell upon the road. There was no use in running an unnecessary risk.

The steps got nearer; he heard somebody breathing hard, and a figure appeared in the gloom. Then Foster thrust the pistol into his pocket, for the man who came into the moonlight was Gordon, whom he had met at the Edinburgh hotel.

"Mr. Foster!" he exclaimed breathlessly, but Foster thought he was not surprised, and sitting on the fence took out a cigarette as calmly as he could. He had Graham's checks and must be careful.

"Yes," he said. "I didn't expect to see you."

"I imagine it's lucky that you knew me," Gordon remarked, rather dryly. "Well, perhaps we ought to have stopped you at the other end of the wood."

"You were watching it then?"

"Both ends. It's obvious now that we should have watched the middle."

"Ah," said Foster thoughtfully; "then you knew somebody was hiding among the trees?"

"We thought it very possible."

"Well, you know I was shot at, but I imagine the fellow got away. Do you mean to let him go?"

Gordon laughed. "My friends tell me I'm getting fat, and I'm certainly not so vigorous as I was. Besides, it's not my part of the business to chase a suspected person across the hills, and I have men able to do it better than I can. But you stopped as you entered the wood. Did you expect to be shot at?"

"I thought it very possible," Foster answered dryly.

"A fair retort! You were shot at. Were you nearly hit?"

"I believe the fellow would have got me if he'd used a gun instead of a pistol; but the former would, of course, have been a conspicuous thing to carry about."

"That's true," Gordon agreed. "But, after escaping, why did you stop here and run the risk again?"

Foster pondered. There was no sign of Pete, but he thought the latter could be trusted to elude the police, and did not want to let Gordon know he had felt it necessary to provide himself with a bodyguard. Something of this kind would be obvious if he stated that he was waiting for a companion.

"Well," he said, "it's annoying to be shot at, and when I heard somebody running I thought I might catch the fellow off his guard. You see, I had already gone into the wood to look for him."

"But you must have known that it would have been very rash for the man who fired the shot to run noisily down the middle of the road."

"I suppose I was rather excited and didn't remember that," Foster replied.

Gordon said nothing for a few moments and Foster saw that he had been fencing with him. He had admitted that he had partly expected to be attacked, and the other knew of the danger to which he had been exposed. This was puzzling; but it was lucky the man had not asked his reasons for fearing an attack. Foster believed he had not omitted to do so from carelessness.

Then Gordon said, "I must try to find out what my men are doing. Where are you going to stop tonight?"

Foster told him and he nodded. "I know the inn and will call there as soon as I can. Leave your address if you go before I come."

He went away up the road and Foster, setting off again, had gone about a mile when he heard steps behind him. Soon after he stopped Pete came up.

"Ye're no' hurt?" he asked.

Foster said he was uninjured, and when he asked where Pete had been the latter grinned.

"Up the hill and sitting in a wet peat-hag. There was a polisman who ran better than I thought an' it wasn't a' thegither easy getting clear o' him."

"But why did the policeman run after you?"

"Yon's a thing I dinna' exactly ken, but when I was coming doon the road I heard a shot and saw ye break intil the wood. Weel, I thought the back o' it was the place for me, and I was follying the dyke, quiet and saircumspect, when a man jumped ower and took the heather. He had a stairt, but the brae was steep, and I was thinking it would no' be long before I had a grup o' him when the polis cam' ower the dyke behind. Then I thought it might be better if I didna' interfere, and made for a bit glen that rins doon the fell. When I saw my chance I slippit oot and found the peat-hag."

Foster knitted his brows. It looked as if Pete had drawn the police off his antagonist's track, which was unfortunate; but Gordon had evidently been watching the fellow, who would now have enough to do to make his escape. How Gordon came to be watching him required some thought, but Foster need not puzzle about this in the meantime. That Graham or his accomplice had thought it worth while to risk shooting him in order to recover the checks showed Foster that he was on the right track. Their importance did not depend on their money value; Graham meant to get them back because they were evidence of a crime. It was satisfactory to think there was not much probability of the fellow's meeting Daly, who would have an additional reason for leaving the country if he heard what had happened.

After walking some distance, he came to a straggling village, and although he had to knock for a few minutes was admitted to the inn. Somewhat to his surprise, Gordon did not follow him, and finding that there was a train to Carlisle next morning, he gave the name of a hotel there and went to the station. He had done what Gordon told him, but did not mean to stop at the hotel long.

As the train ran down Liddesdale he sat in a corner, thinking. The fast Canadian Northern boats sailed from Bristol, and Daly might choose that port if he were suspicious and meant to steal away; but Liverpool was nearer and there were more steamers to Montreal. Foster thought he could leave this matter until he reached Carlisle and got a newspaper that gave the steamship sailings. In the meantime he must decide what to do with Pete, and admitted that he would be sorry to part with the man, although he would not be of much help in the towns, and their companionship might make him conspicuous.

"I almost think I had better let you go at Carlisle," he said.

Pete looked rather hard at him, and then asked: "Have I earned my money?"

"Yes," said Foster, "you have earned it well."

"Then, if ye have nae great objection, I'd like to take pairt in the shape o' a third-class passage to Western Canada, where ye come from. I hear it's a gran' country."

"It's a hard country," Foster answered. "You had better not be rash. There's not much poaching yonder; the game, for the most part, belongs to the State. and the laws about it are very strict."

"There's no' that much profit in poaching here; particular when ye pay a smart fine noo and then. For a' that, I wouldna' say but it's better than mony anither job, if ye're lucky."

"You ought to make a good hill shepherd."

"Verra true, an' I might make a good plooman, and get eighteen shillings or a pound a week for either. But what's yon for a man's work frae break o' day till dark? An', mind ye, it's work that needs skill."

"Not very much," Foster agreed.

"Weel," said Pete, rather diffidently, "I thought ye might have some use for me, if ye've no' finished the business ye are on."

Foster doubted if Pete could help him much in Canada, since he did not expect to chase Daly through the woods. The man, however, had been useful and might be so again; then he had talents which, if rightly applied, would earn him much more in Canada than five dollars a week.

"If you mean to come, I'll take you," he said. "If I don't want you myself, I think I can promise to give you a good start."

Pete gave him a grateful glance, and Foster was silent while the train ran down the valley of the Esk. On reaching Carlisle, he went to the hotel he had named and asked for a room, but did not sign the visitors' book. He spent the afternoon watching the station, and then went to the Eden bridge, where the road to Scotland crossed the river. Daly had a car and might prefer to use it instead of the rather infrequent trains.

Foster did not know where the fellow was, but he had been at the Garth two days ago, and, if Featherstone's firmness had given him a hint, might before leaving the country revisit Peebles and Hawick, where Foster had left him the first clew. Daly was not the man to act on a hasty conclusion without trying to verify it, and Lawrence's suit-case was still at Peebles. It was possible that he had already gone south, but there was a chance that he had not passed through Carlisle yet and Foster durst not neglect it.

Dusk was falling when he loitered about the handsome bridge. Lights began to twinkle in the gray bulk of the castle across the park, and along the Stanwix ridge, which rose above the waterside to the north. The gleam faded off the river, but it was not quite dark and there was not much traffic. Daly did not come and Foster, who was getting cold, had begun to wonder how long he should wait when a bright light flashed out at the top of the hill across the bridge.

A car was coming down the hill and Foster stopped behind a tramway cable-post and took out his pipe as if he meant to strike a match. Just then a tram-car rolled across the bridge and the motor swerved towards the spot where he stood. It passed close enough for him to have touched it, and he saw Daly sitting beside the driver, and two ladies behind. He could not distinguish their faces, for the car sped across the bridge and a few moments later its tail light vanished among the houses that ran down to the river.

Foster set off after it as fast as he could walk. Daly would not go to the station, because there was no train south for some time, and the two hotels where motorists generally stayed were not far off. Still he might drive through the town, making for Kendal or Lancaster, in which case Foster would lose him. The car was not in the first garage, and he hurried to the other, attached to his hotel. He found the car, splashed with mud which the driver, whom he had seen at Hawick, was washing off.

"I want some petrol, and you had better leave me a clear road to the door," the man said to a garage hand. "I expect we'll be out first in the morning, because we mean to start as soon as it's light."

Foster had heard enough, and quickly went away. Daly meant to stop the night, and he must decide what to say to him. He was moreover curious about his companions.

XXI

DALY TAKES ALARM

When he returned to the hotel Foster signed the visitors' book, which he examined. Daly's name was not there, but the last entry recorded the arrival of Mr. Forbes and two ladies from Edinburgh, and Foster did not doubt that this was the party he had seen. He next went to the smoking-room and choosing a quiet corner, lighted a cigarette. Daly would probably see his name in the book, but this did not matter, because he meant to seek an interview with the man. Foster did not think he had met Graham, which gave him the advantage of being able to make a surprise attack, since Daly would not know about the documents he carried.

By and by, however, he began to see the matter in a different light. Taking it for granted that Daly meant to leave England, it might be better to let him go. Even if he had not killed Fred Hulton, he had obviously had something to do with the theft of the bonds, and would be more afraid of detection in Canada, which would make him easier to deal with. Besides, his knowledge of Lawrence Featherstone's offense would be of less use to him there. If Foster could keep him in sight and sail by the same vessel, he would be able to have the reckoning when he liked after the ship left port.

On the whole, he thought this the better plan, but resolved to leave the thing to chance. If Daly met him or saw his name in the book, he would deal with the fellow then; if not, he would wait until they were on board ship. When he went in to dinner he chose a place behind a pillar, where he was not likely to be noticed, and looked carefully about. The room was large and occupied by a number of guests, but by and by he saw Daly at a table near its other end. As he had taken a prominent place, it looked as if he was not afraid of being seen. He sat facing Foster, but at some distance, with two ladies on the opposite side. They were fashionably dressed and one was older than the other, but that was all Foster could distinguish.

He had no ground for thinking Daly noticed him during the meal, and did not see the man for an hour afterwards. Then finding that he wanted a railway guide he had left in his room, he went up the stairs and along a corridor. As he did so, he saw a man and woman some distance in front. The carpet was thick, and it was obvious that the others did not hear him, because the man put his arm round his companion's waist. So far as Foster could see, the girl yielded willingly to his embrace, and not wishing to overtake them he stopped. Next moment they passed a lamp and he noted that the man was Daly, though he was unable to distinguish his companion's face. He, however, thought he would know her dress again.

Daly's love affairs had nothing to do with him, but in order to save the girl embarrassment he waited until they opened a door. Foster imagined it led to a music or drawing-room, but passed without looking in, and going up a flight of stairs spent some time in his room, studying the railway guide and a list of steamship sailings. As he entered the corridor on his way back he saw the girl, who was now alone, in front. He knew her by her dress and did not mean to overtake her, but after she had gone a few paces she stopped to pick up something she had dropped. Since it would look rather marked if he waited, he went on and was close to her when she heard his steps and glanced round with a start. Then he stopped as he saw she was the girl he had first met at Hawick. Although he thought she was embarrassed, she met him with a smile.

"It looks as if you had got tired of Edinburgh," she remarked. "Did you stay there long?"

"No," said Foster bluntly. "But I wonder whether you did not know that I had left?"

"How could I know?" she asked with a look of surprise that he thought was well done. "Besides, why should I be interested?"

"You seemed to think it better that I should go away. Anyhow, you gave me a useful hint, which perhaps warrants my doing as much for you."

She hesitated, glancing at an open door close by, and then moved towards it as if she expected him to follow her. Foster did so and found himself in a small drawing-room, where she sat down on a sofa and waited for him to speak. Instead he stood opposite, pondering. The girl was pretty and fashionably dressed, but he had ground for thinking some of her friends or relatives were dangerous criminals. It did not, however, follow that she took part in their plots, and although she obviously knew something about what was going on, he did not believe she knew it was connected with the tragedy at Gardner's Crossing. He admitted that he was perhaps giving way to romantic sentiment, but he was sorry for the girl and thought her Daly's victim. The fellow was handsome and must have charm, since he had been able to influence

Carmen, who was strong-willed and clever.

"Well?" she said presently.

"I saw your name in the book, Miss Huntley, and know whom you came with. I think you ought to go back to Edinburgh at once and must urge you strongly not to go to Canada."

It was plain that she understood him, for the blood rushed into her face and he saw that she felt some confusion. This seemed to indicate that she was not a hardened adventuress.

"To begin with, I am not going to Canada--I did not mean to go," she said, and her eyes sparkled as she added: "But you are guilty of intolerable rudeness. Why do you presume to interfere?"

"I suppose I am rude; I'm certainly unconventional. But you gave me some advice in Edinburgh and I was grateful, because I saw you meant well. Can't you believe that I mean well, too?"

She gave him a quick, half-puzzled, half-nervous glance, but did not answer, and he resumed: "Anyhow, you would run a greater risk in Canada than I did in Edinburgh, and you were rash in coming to Carlisle."

"But I'm not going to Canada!" she broke out.

"Don't you believe me?"

"I suppose I must," said Foster. "But I think you ought to go home."

She laughed, a rather strained laugh. "You are conventional enough to think I would be safe there. How do you know what kind of a home I have?"

"I know nothing about it," Foster admitted. "I find you here with a dangerous companion and dare say I haven't taken a very tactful line in trying to warn you. That's all."

There was silence for the next few moments and he felt sympathetic as he watched her disturbed face. Her anger had vanished and he thought she was grappling with doubt and alarm. In the meantime, he was not free from embarrassment. It was an awkward business, and he had not managed it very well. Then she got up and stood looking at him calmly.

"You have gone too far, in one sense, but not far enough in another. You must be plainer if you want to justify your conduct."

"I see that, but am afraid you'll have to take my honesty for granted, because I can't tell you anything more, except that the man you came with is not to be trusted and may involve you in the difficulties that threaten him. You must think of me as a stranger to whom you tried to do a good turn and who has showed his gratitude in a clumsy way."

"Then there's nothing more to be said; but I suppose I must admit that you meant well," she answered, and giving him a level glance moved to the door.

Foster held it open and after she had gone went down to the smoking-room. Perhaps he had been rash, but this did not matter. On the whole, he did not think the girl would tell Daly about his warning, and if she did, he probably knew

already that Foster was at the hotel. In fact, it was rather significant that they had not met. Still, as she was not going to Canada, he had not gained much, except perhaps by exciting her suspicions and so preventing Daly's making some use of her in his plots. This, however, was not Foster's object, although he imagined Daly had some practical reason for his philandering. It was for the girl's sake he had interfered and her attitude puzzled him.

She could not have been altogether unsuspecting, or she would have bitterly resented his attack upon her lover, but her blush and confusion showed she had scruples and was rather the prey of a foolish infatuation than an accomplice. She knew something, but he felt sure she did not know in what a serious crime her lover was implicated. Foster, however, would not dwell on this. He hoped she would return to Edinburgh, but if she did not, he had done his best. He must be ready to follow Daly in the morning, and going to another garage hired a car and then warned Pete, whom he had sent to a different hotel. A fast car would reach Liverpool in five or six hours.

There was only one thing that disturbed him; he had not heard from the police, but it would be dangerous to disobey an order by telegram, while if Gordon arrived before Daly left, awkward complications might arise. Foster, however, could do nothing to prevent this and presently went to bed.

Getting up in the dark next morning, he went to the garage. The air was very raw and a fog hung over the town, but one or two electric lights burned in the gloomy shed, where an attendant was doing something. Daly's car stood where Foster had last seen it, but the cover was off the engine and some tools and small springs lay about. As there was no sign of the driver, it did not look as if Daly meant to start soon.

"You open early," he said to the attendant. "Nobody seems to be going away just yet."

"I'm here earlier than I need have been," the man grumbled. "By the way the fellow who brought me has left his car, he won't be ready for another hour."

Foster, who had learned what he wanted to know, returned to the hotel and his breakfast was served in a corner of the big dining-room. He imagined that Daly had seen it was a bad morning and had not got up as soon as he meant. The dining-room was cold and only lighted near Foster's table, which did not look as if anybody else was expected.

"I dare say you'd sooner have people who get up later," he remarked to the waiter who brought him another dish.

"We serve breakfast when it's wanted, sir, if you order it beforehand."

"I seem to be the only person who has done so this morning."

"So far as I know, sir," the waiter replied. "But there's another man on early duty."

Foster thought the other waiter would have turned on more lights if he expected a customer, and as there was no need for hurry ate a good meal. Day was breaking when he finished and word was brought him that his car was ready. Going to the office, he paid his bill and asked if a letter or telegram had arrived. There was nothing for him and he went to a window that commanded a view of the street. His car stood close by with Pete inside, but it was some time before Daly's came out of the garage. Knowing that he could reach the door in a few moments, Foster waited until the two ladies who had arrived with Daly went down the steps alone. He could not understand this, but a waiter came up and said that Miss Huntley would like to see him. When Foster reached the pavement the girl had got into the car.

"I thought you would be glad to know I am going home," she said.

"Are you going in this car?" Foster asked sharply.

"As far as Hawick," she answered with a twinkle of amusement. "As I am doing what you urged, I don't see why you should be surprised."

"No," said Foster, "of course not! Well, I really think it was a useful hint."

"Perhaps so. Thank you, and good-by," she said smiling, and signed to the driver.

The car rolled away and Foster, watching it speed up the street, wondered where Daly was, and why the girl had sent for him. It was possible that she had meant to retire, so to speak, with colors flying and not to steal away, but he did not understand her amusement, and feared a Parthian shot. He must find out why Daly did not want the car.

Going back to the office, he asked the clerk: "Can you tell me when Mr. Forbes will be down for breakfast?"

"He left last night. The porter took his luggage to the twelve o'clock train."

Foster savagely clenched his fist. He had been cheated; the girl had warned Daly, who had suspected some danger. Still, Foster did not think she had told him all and she had taken his advice; but this did not matter. Daly had gone and he must get upon his track as soon as possible. Running down the steps, he jumped into the car and told the man to drive to the station.

The twelve o'clock train went to London, but there was a connection by which one could reach Liverpool at about four in the morning. It was now eight o'clock, and Foster walked up and down the platform, growling at his folly, for a minute or two. Then he ascertained that there was another train for Liverpool in half an hour which would arrive at noon, and sending the car away, waited about the office until he could get tickets. After all, he might find Daly before the steamer sailed.

XXII

CARMEN GETS A SHOCK

On his way to Liverpool, Foster tried to review the situation calmly. His anger was vanishing, but he still felt sore and annoyed with himself. He had weakly yielded to sentimental pity for an attractive girl and had paid for it, because she had, no doubt, warned Daly, who knew from Foster's boldness that he had learned enough to make him dangerous. The latter grimly resolved that he would not let any Quixotic folly spoil his plans again. He had been cleverly tricked, but was not beaten yet, because a study of the steamship advertisements led him to believe that Daly could not leave Liverpool until the afternoon. Moreover, the fellow was obviously afraid of him.

Arriving shortly after twelve o'clock, he drove to the Canadian Pacific office and asked a clerk for a list of the passengers by a steamer announced to sail that day. He was given a list and saw that Mr. Andrew Forbes had taken a saloon berth. This indicated that Daly had booked his passage beforehand.

"I see my friend's on board," Foster remarked. "Have you got a first and a second-class berth left?"

"We had," the clerk said, smiling, "Unfortunately, the boat has gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed Foster, who got a shock. "Don't your steamers sail in the afternoon?"

"As a rule," the clerk agreed. "However, this is an extra sailing, and we sent her off earlier to pick up passengers at Belfast Lough."

Foster said nothing, but left the office with a determined look. A swift Canadian Northern liner sailed from Bristol two days later and ought to reach Quebec soon after the other boat. He thought of telegraphing to secure a berth, but decided not to do so. He had given Gordon his Carlisle address, which was all that he had promised, and although he had heard nothing from him, the police might make inquiries at the steamship offices. On the whole, it seemed safer to leave Liverpool and he took the first train to Bristol, but got out at Hereford, which was about half-way. It would be awkward if the police interfered with him now.

Reaching Bristol shortly before the steamer sailed, he had no trouble in taking a passage for himself and Pete, and arrived at Quebec about twelve hours after the Canadian Pacific boat. Daly had got a start, and although Foster did not mean to give up the chase, he felt depressed as the train sped through the forests of Ontario. It was not long since he had come that way in high spirits, looking forward with pleasure to a holiday. Now he looked back, with a feeling of unreality, on his wanderings among the Scottish bogs. All he had done seemed ridiculous and fantastic. Nobody was the better for it, while he had involved himself in a horrible tangle. The police were probably on his track and Featherstone suspected him; he had acted like a romantic boy and not a sober man. There was, however, one bright gleam; Alice trusted him, and he must show that he deserved her confidence.

Arriving at Gardner's Crossing in the evening, he sent Pete to the hotel and went to Austin's house. He must see Carmen and resolved that she should find him proof against her wiles; he was not going to be a sentimental fool again. In a general way, Carmen was, of course, too clever for him, but he had now certain advantages which he meant to use.

He was shown into her drawing-room, where he was left for some time, and imagined with rather grim amusement that she was making preparations to receive him. Carmen knew the power of her beauty, which, however, owed much to her tasteful dress. In the meantime, he looked about the room. It was pretty with a certain exotic touch that the girl knew how to give. The color-plan of carpets, rugs, and curtains, although rather vivid, was good; the furniture pleased the eye. Foster had once thought it charmingly artistic, but knew better now. Alice Featherstone had taught him the difference between prettiness and dignified beauty. He felt that difference plainly when Carmen came in, dressed like the fashionable women he had seen in Edinburgh.

"You have come back soon, but it's nice to see you," she said with a smile. "The Crossing was duller than usual after you had gone."

"Thank you! I came back sooner than I expected," Foster replied, rather dryly.

Carmen gave him a quick look, but sat down with languid grace in an easy chair.

"Well, I've no doubt you have much to tell me about your trip, and if you'll talk about Edinburgh and London, I won't let anybody in."

"Aren't you anxious to know if I delivered the packet?"

"The packet? I had forgotten it," Carmen said carelessly. "Still, I did think you might have written to let me know you took it safe. But I dare say you had many interesting things to do."

"As it happened, I had," Foster replied with a touch of grimness. "For all that, I delivered the packet and got an answer."

Carmen regarded him with surprise, as if she thought he had not played up. "You can give me the answer afterwards. Tell me about Featherstone's place and his people. I'm curious about them; particularly his sisters. I suppose he has some?"

Foster thought he understood. Carmen was clever and would not have used such obvious means had she wished to learn if Lawrence had a sister who had attracted him. What she wanted was to persuade him that the packet was not important.

"I'd sooner talk about the errand you gave me. Did you know what the packet contained?"

She laughed, but he thought the laugh was forced. "Doesn't that sound rather stupid when I sent the thing?"

"Perhaps it does," said Foster gravely. "Still, I hope you didn't know."

Her coquettish manner vanished and she leaned slightly forward while her eyes got hard. Indeed, there was something feline in her alert pose. Now she had, so to speak, unsheathed her claws, he was glad the advantage was heavily on his side. For all that, he did not want to hurt her.

"Go on," she said sharply.

"Very well. I got an answer, which I opened. I'll show it to you, but won't give it up."

"You opened it!" she exclaimed. "Do you mean to keep a letter that was sent to me?"

"I don't think it was sent to you; that's important."

Carmen smiled defiantly and Foster admired her pluck, since it was obvious that he had found out the trick. Still he thought she did not know how important the letter really was.

"Then you can quit fencing and get down to business," she said, and Foster saw that the surface polish she generally wore was thin. The character it concealed was fierce and somewhat primitive. He had suspected that Carmen would not be restrained by conventions if she let herself go.

"If you'll be patient, I'll try to make things plain."

He began by hastily recounting what had happened at the factory the night Fred Hulton was killed. Carmen was obviously puzzled, which was a relief to him, but he saw comprehension in her look as he went on to relate how he had been watched by the police, and his interview with Graham and subsequent adventures. By degrees, her understanding changed to horror, and when he stopped he saw that she had got a cruel shock. Her face was white, her gaze was fixed, and, her eyes were unusually wide open. Still he thought it was through her pride she suffered most. Then she braced herself and looked at him scornfully.

"You surely lost your nerve and got imagining things when you were hiding in the bogs. It's a quite impossible story!"

"It sounds like that, but I have some proof; money for Daly and another man, which I suppose you were to send on. It's evidently their share of the plunder."

He took out his wallet and held up the checks, keeping, however, a firm grip on them, because he knew that if Carmen meant to fight for her lover she would not be scrupulous.

"Daly wasn't near the factory the night Fred Hulton was killed. I know where he was," she said in a strained but defiant voice.

"All the better for him," Foster rejoined. "It's pretty clear that he had a share in the thing."

Carmen suddenly leaned back and turned her head. She had given in sooner than Foster expected, but the evidence was overwhelming. He did not look at her for some moments and felt ashamed of the cruelty he had had to use, but there was no avoiding this when a number of people's happiness was at stake. After all, he thought it was rather her ambition than her affection that had been engaged. Then rousing herself with an effort she turned to him.

"Well," she said, "it looks as if I'd had an escape!"

Foster felt comforted, but did not answer, and she resumed: "You haven't told me this for nothing. What do you want?"

"I want to know where Daly is. I've no doubt he called here on his way west and you have his address."

"You can't force me to give it you."

"I don't know if I can or not, but don't want to use force," Foster replied, and while he waited, hesitating to play his last card, Carmen looked up with fear in her eyes.

"Jake," she said, "you mustn't think my father knows anything about this. I sent the packet, without telling him, because Daly asked me."

"But your father and he had some business together that nobody knew about."

"They had. They were really backing Nicholson, who got the first recorders turned off the Fish-hawk silver claim."

"Ah!" said Foster, "now I understand!"

He was glad to admit that her statement explained Austin's rather mysterious association with Daly. Public feeling had been strongly roused by the dispute about the mine, whose finders it was believed had been cunningly cheated out of their rights. There were, moreover, hints of foul play about a dangerous accident in the workings that had given the victorious claimants a legal advantage. Foster could imagine Daly's finding scope for his talents in the trickery and intrigue, and saw why Austin did not want his share in it known.

"In a way, it's a relief to find that's all your father had to do with the fellow," he resumed. "Anyhow, I want his address."

"I won't give it you," Carmen answered stubbornly.

Foster hesitated. The shock the girl had got had broken down her self-control. He shrank from turning this to his advantage and dealing her another blow, but could not be fastidious when his partner's safety and Alice Featherstone's happiness were at stake. Besides, it would be better for Carmen that her infatuation for Daly should be altogether destroyed.

"Well," he said, "I'm surprised that you should still feel you ought to protect the man, and must try to convince you that he doesn't deserve it."

Then he related what he had seen in the corridor of the Carlisle hotel and how Miss Huntley had helped Daly to deceive him. Carmen's face paled and then suddenly turned crimson; but she answered with a quietness he had not expected:

"You're not a liar, Jake, so I suppose this is true. But you're all of you human, and you say the girl is pretty. What you saw mayn't mean very much."

"She wore an engagement ring. I don't imagine it was given her by another man."

Then Carmen flung the last of her self-control away. Her eyes flashed and Foster thought she looked like a wild cat as she indulged her savage rage.

"The cur!" she cried in a harsh voice. "He went to Banff, in British Columbia. Now you know, you had better go after him. Do what you like with him; I don't mind!"

Foster went to the door, but as he reached it she called him back and looked at him with a bitter, mocking smile.

"You're smarter than I thought, Jake, but I suppose you think I don't know why you meddled! It wasn't for your partner's sake, though I soon guessed that Daly was getting after him; Featherstone has a sister, and you have fallen in love with her. Well, she can have you with pleasure if she has any use for you, and before long you'll make her deadly tired. You'd bore a live woman crazy in a week; you'll never be rich, because you're afraid of touching a dollar you don't earn, and you've got the morals of a convent-school girl!" She gasped and resumed in a scream: "Why don't you go before I throw something at you?"

Foster left and was glad when he shut the door. Carmen was obviously beside herself and had gone further than she meant. If it was any comfort to insult him, he did not grudge it her, but thought he saw where her remarks led. He had been rather fond of Carmen, as she no doubt knew, before he understood her, and their friendship might have ripened until---. Well, he was sorry for her, but it looked as if she was not the only person who had had an escape.

When he got outside, he went to the factory and found Hulton alone in the president's room. The man looked worn, but greeted Foster with a reserved smile and gave him a cigar.

"You haven't been away very long," he remarked. "Didn't your visit turn out as pleasant as you expected?"

"In one way, it did not. But why did you send the British police after me?"

"As a matter of fact, I let them know you were all right, but my agent had to go to them, and thought it might be better if they kept a watch on you. You'd got busy about some mysterious business. What was it?"

"I can't tell you," said Foster bluntly. "It only concerns me and Featherstone, but it led to something else; I'll come to that later. What about the man I helped on the train? If he got through all right, why didn't he send me word?"

"As the fellows who attacked you had got on the wrong track, we thought we'd let them follow it, but they were smarter than we reckoned and we lost them."

"Then you made use of me, at my risk, as the Scottish police did afterwards?" Foster rejoined. "I don't know that I've much to thank you for, since it led to my being thrown off the Montreal express and chased across the Border bogs."

"I must allow that we did something of the kind," Hulton owned with a smile. "But we'll let that go. What have you found out?"

Foster handed him Graham's letter and the check on the American bank, but not the circular check for Daly. Hulton's face showed stern satisfaction and he gave Foster a very grateful look.

"I owe you much for this and am not going to forget the service. These papers prove conspiracy and robbery, and clear my boy. But how did you get them?"

Foster supplied a garbled account of his interview with Graham, and Hulton looked at him thoughtfully.

"Its plain that you're keeping something back, but if it's your or your partner's business, I suppose I can't object. I believe you mean to do the square thing."

"Thank you," said Foster. "What have you found out about Daly?"

"Enough to show he wasn't at the factory the night Fred was killed," Hulton answered with stern self-control. "But he was in the plot and is being watched in Scotland."

"Then you don't know that he's in Canada?"

Hulton stretched out his hand to a bell, but Foster stopped him.

"Wait a moment! You have got to leave Daly to me. Anyhow, you're not to send your agents or the police after him until I telegraph you. I'm going to look for him by to-night's train."

"The train goes west," Hulton answered meaningly.

"It does, but if I think I'm followed, I'll spoil the trail."

Hulton's eyes flashed and his face set very hard. "The man belongs to the gang that killed my son and tried to blacken his name. I don't quit until I've run the last rogue down."

"I mean to see Daly first," Foster answered doggedly.

After a moment or two, Hulton made a gesture of agreement. "Very well; I allow you have a claim. But I won't interfere if my agents have already got on his track."

"I must take the risk of that," Foster replied and left the factory a few minutes afterwards.

XXIII

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

Daly was not at Banff, and Foster, who made cautious inquiries, found nothing to indicate that he had been there. Indeed, he began to weigh the possibility of Carmen's having deceived him, but rejected this explanation. The girl was clever at intrigue, but he did not think she had acted a part. She had really lost her self-control and told him the truth in a fit of rage. On the other hand, it was possible that Daly had deceived her, but there was no obvious reason for his doing

so.

The fellow, however, was not in Banff, which is a small place, frequented mostly by tourists and invalids who come there in summer, and Foster took a west-bound train. He was once more at a loss and felt dispirited. For one thing, he had no time to lose, because it would spoil his plans if Hulton's agents got on Daly's track before him.

He left Banff late at night, with a ticket for Vancouver, which he had bought on speculation, partly because the seaboard city is a clearing-house for travelers to all parts of the Pacific coast, but did not sleep much as the heavy train rumbled through the mountains. The jolting of the cars and the roar of wheels that echoed among the rocks disturbed him, and he was troubled by gloomy thoughts. He had promised Alice Featherstone that he would clear her brother; but he had also to clear himself, and in order to do so must find Lawrence as well as Daly. Just now he had not much hope of finding either, but he cherished a vague belief in his luck, and it was unthinkable that he should neglect any chance of justifying the girl's confidence. He was ready to follow Daly round the world, sooner than lose that. The trouble was that he could not tell if he was following the fellow or not.

He went to sleep at last, and getting up rather late, spent an hour or two trying to knit up broken clews and looking for a light. It was a profitless but absorbing occupation and he vacantly glanced at the majestic panorama of snowy peaks and climbing forest that rolled past the windows of the car. When his thoughts wandered from their groove, he saw Alice Featherstone moving with stately calm about the Garth, or standing in the orchard with the sunset shining on her face. He recalled the grace of her tall figure and how her dress harmonized with the mossy trunks, but he loved to dwell upon the look of trust in her steady eyes. Then the memories were suddenly banished, for a whistle rang up the track and there was a jar of brakes.

Foster hurried out to the platform when the long train stopped, and saw the conductor talking to the engineer and passengers jumping down into the snow. Pete joined him as he followed them, but he stopped for some moments and looked about. There was no station near. The track, which was marked by cinders and stains on the snow, ran along a desolate mountainside. Dark pines that looked as if they had been dusted with icing-sugar rolled in curiously rigid ranks up the slope, getting smaller until they dwindled to a fine saw-edge that bit into a vast sweep of white. This ended in a row of jagged peaks whose summits gleamed with dazzling brightness against the blue sky. Below the track, the ground fell away to a tremendous gorge, where dark-colored mist hung about a green river dotted with drifting ice. The sun struck warm upon his face, though the snow was dry.

"We'll find out why they've stopped," he said to Pete and walked forward past the cars.

The engineer stood on the step of the huge locomotive and had not much information to give.

"Track's gone down not far ahead; snow-slide, I guess."

He shrugged when Foster asked if it would be a long job. "You can see for yourself, if you like," he remarked, indicating a plume of smoke that rose above the pines. "There's a construction gang at work round the bend. It's a sure thing we won't pull out before you're back."

Foster set off with Pete and several passengers, and the Scot gazed about with wonder.

"I was born among the hills, but never have I seen ought like this!" he exclaimed. "Man, it passes dreamin' o'; it's just stupenjious! But I wouldna' say they'll mak' much o' farmin' here."

"They have some bench tablelands and pretty rich alluvial valleys," Foster answered with a smile. "The province depends largely on its minerals."

Pete glanced back up the track that wound down between rock and forest from a distant notch in the high, white rampart.

"I'm thinking the men who built yon line had stout hearts."

"It wasn't an easy job," Foster agreed. "They were up against savage Nature, and she's still too strong for the engineer now and then, as I expect you'll shortly see."

They walked through a gap in the pines and stopped with a sense of awe on the edge of a great red furrow in the mountain. The gash was fringed by shattered trees, and here and there a giant splintered trunk rested precariously among stones ground to fragments. Far beneath, a vast pile of earth and snow dammed the river, and half-way up an overturned locomotive, with boiler crushed like an eggshell, lay among the wreckage. The end of a smashed box-car rose out of the boiling flood. For a hundred yards the track had vanished, but gangs of men were hurrying to and fro about the gap. Farther back, there was clang of flung-down rails and a ringing of hammers.

"If they open the road again by to-morrow morning, they'll be lucky," Foster remarked, and stopped a big fellow who was going past with an ax on his shoulder. "Is there any settlement not too far ahead?"

"There's a smart new hotel at the flag station about six miles off," said the man. "You can make it all right walking if you keep to the track and watch out you don't meet the construction train in the snowshed."

Foster, who knew he would find waiting tedious, went back to the car for his small bag, after which he and Pete set off for the hotel. They had some trouble to cross the path of the avalanche and then spent some time getting past the men who were unloading a row of flat cars. The single-line track was cut out of the rock and one ran a risk of glissading down to the river by venturing outside its edge. Once, indeed, a heavy beam, thrown too far, plunged down like a toboggan, and leaping from a rock's crest splashed into the flood. The men on the cars worked in furious haste, and it was difficult to avoid the clanging rails they threw off.

Foster got past, but did not find walking easy when he had done so. The track wound among the folds of the hills, and where the sun had struck the snow there was a slippery crust, through which he broke. Where it ran past tall crags and between the trees, the snow was dry and loose as dust. They made something over two miles in the first hour and soon afterwards came to the mouth of a snowshed. The opening made a dark blotch on the glittering slope, for the roof was pitched at a very small angle to the declivity and the snow passed down hill over it with scarcely a wrinkle.

It was only when they entered they saw signs of man's work in the massive beams and stringers that braced the structure. These were presently lost in the gloom and Foster stumbled among the ties. Shingle ballast rolled under his feet; where he found a tie to step on it was generally by stubbing his toe, and once or twice he struck the side of the shed.

For all that, he pushed on as fast as possible. The warning he had been given was indefinite, but it looked as if a train was shortly expected and the locomotive, with its outside cylinders, would not give them much room. He imagined that refuges would be provided at intervals, but did not know where to find them. Now and then they stopped to listen, but heard nothing. There was deep silence, which was a relief, and they blundered on again as fast as they could. It was rather daunting work and one could not make much speed, but when a faint, muffled throbbing reached them they began to run.

Foster had no means of guessing the length of the shed, and as he slipped among the ballast looked anxiously in front, but could not see the glimmering patch of light he expected. The darkness was impenetrable, but the contour of the hillside had indicated that the shed was curved, and the outlet might be nearer than he thought. In the meantime, the sweat ran down his face and his breath came hard. He was in good training, for his journeys among the Scottish hills had strengthened his muscles, but the footing was bad among the stones, and he labored through them awkwardly with set lips and clenched hands. He thought of throwing away his heavy coat, but it would take a few moments to get it off and he must put down the bag, in which there was the letter he would need. By and by his foot struck something and lurching forward he lost his balance and came down heavily. The blow shook him and he was a little slow in getting up until he felt a rail he put his hand on quiver. Then he scrambled to his feet, but could not find the bag.

"I hae't," said Pete, who seized his arm and urged him forward.

A deep snorting reached them and a tie he trod on trembled, but as he ran savagely with labored breath there was an elusive glimmer in the dark ahead. It grew brighter, an irregularly-shaped white patch appeared, and making a tense effort while the ballast rolled beneath his feet, he staggered into the sunshine. Then with a gasp of keen relief he threw himself upon the snow beside the track.

About a hundred yards away, a giant locomotive toiled up the incline, hurling out clouds of smoke that streamed far back among the pines. The road bed shook and the hillside rang with the din of wheels. While Foster lay panting, the locomotive labored past, and then long, flat cars, on which men sat upon the load of jarring rails, clanged by. The black mouth of the shed swallowed them, a cloud of smoke and dusty snow curled about the opening, and the uproar suddenly sank to a muffled rumble. This died away and the deep silence of the mountains was emphasized by the sound of the river.

"We were not much too soon," Foster said with a breathless laugh. "Now I come to think of it, there's no obvious reason we shouldn't have stopped on board the train and got our lunch comfortably. I seem to have a habit of doing unusual and unnecessary things; it's curious how soon you get into trouble when you indulge a bent like that."

"Yon's a verra true remark," Pete agreed. "It's a rough and thorny world, an' if ye will not walk in the cleared paths but gang yere air gait, ye must struggle with the briars."

"And scramble through snowsheds? You Scots are a philosophical lot. But do you call poaching sticking to the beaten path?"

"I'm thinking it's as near it as stravinging about the Border mosses, when ye might gang by train."

"A fair hit! But after all, man wears the regulation paths so deep that he can't get out when he wants. What about the pioneers, who blaze the new trails? Aren't they needed?"

"Whiles, maybe," Pete answered grinning. "For a' that, they maun tak' the consequences. Do ye feel it's yere business to break a new road?"

"Certainly not! I'm not a philanthropist and would be quite satisfied with making things a little easier for myself and my friends, but am much afraid I haven't succeeded yet. In fact, there's one friend in England who's very far from grateful. But the question is--Why did I leave the train?"

"Ye just felt ye had to?"

"I think I did. But why did I feel that?"

Pete chuckled. "There ye have me! This I ken; whiles when I had a hare or a few paltrig in the lining o' my auld coat and cam' to a slap in a dyke, I had a kind o' feeling yon was no' the road for me. I couldna' tell there was a keeper hiding on the ither side; but I didna' gang. Maybe it's better no' to argue but follow yere heart."

"No," said Foster, "I imagine it's really better to follow your head. In the meantime, I've had no lunch and think we'll get on."

They came to a wide hollow in the hills where the snow was deep and loose. The sun was shut out and the frost was keen, while Foster saw by the lengthening shadow of the pines across the river that the afternoon was wearing on. A glance at his watch showed that he had been walking for nearly three hours, but there was no sign of the hotel. Dark masses of trees ran up from the water to the line of summer snow, and no roof or curl of smoke broke their somber monotony. High above, the peaks glittered with a steely brightness that seemed to intensify the cold.

Their breath hung about them as they plodded on, but at length, when they came to the middle of the bend, where the hills curved out again, there was a break and they stopped at the end of a bridge. The low sun shone into the gap, which was profoundly deep and majestically beautiful. On its farther side, tremendous crags held up the snow, which trickled down their faces in thin gray streaks and stretched back above, steeped in soft blue shadow. On Foster's side, giant pines glimmered a bright green in the warm light, running up to a glittering slope that ended in two rugged peaks, and a river that sprang from a wrinkled glacier foamed through the dusky gorge. Where a small clearing had been cut in the forest, steep red roofs stood out in harmonious contrast with the green of the firs, and a picturesque wooden building with pillars and verandas occupied the greater part of the opening.

"If the place is as attractive inside, it's worth the walk," Foster remarked. "You appreciate your quarters best when you've had some trouble to get there."

"I'm thinking that's true. The peat fire and the auld rush chair in the bit cothouse are weel worth winning to when ye come through the rain and wind ower the dark moss. This is a gran' country, but it's no' like that ither among the Border fells."

Foster stood for a few moments and mused, for he sympathized with Pete. He remembered the satisfaction with which he had seen the lights of a lonely inn or farmstead twinkle when he tramped, wet and tired, across the Scottish moors. They were bleak and often forbidding, but had a charm one felt but could not analyze, with the half-lights that trembled across them and their subdued coloring. In spite of some hardships, he had been happy in the misty, rain-swept land, but he knew it had been touched by the glamour of romance. That was over. He was on his probation in utilitarian Canada, and very much at a loss; but he meant to make good somehow and go forward, trusting in his luck.

"Well," he said, "I'm hungry and we'll get on. I hope they won't make us wait for supper, though they'll no doubt call it dinner at a place like this."

Five minutes afterwards he stamped the snow off his boots as he entered a glass-fronted veranda in front of the hotel. It was comfortably furnished, warm, and occupied by three people. A lady sat with some sewing at a table, and a very pretty girl, holding a cigarette case, leaned over the side of a basket chair, in which a man reclined. Foster, who imagined he was an invalid by his slack pose, was passing on to the main door when the man moved. As he turned to take a cigarette Foster saw his face.

"Lawrence!" he exclaimed.

"Jake!" said the other, and would have got up, but the girl put her hand restrainingly on his arm.

Foster stood still for a moment, overcome by surprise and satisfaction, but understanding what he saw. The lady with the sewing was studying him, but he did not resent this and thought he would like her. The girl divided her attention between him and his comrade, whom she restrained with a pretty air of authority. She obviously knew who Foster was and felt curious, but meant to take care of Lawrence. There was something in her protective manner that Foster found singularly charming. Then Lawrence beckoned and held out his hand.

"I'm uncommonly glad to see you, Jake, but how did you get here?"

"Why aren't you in California?"

They both laughed and Lawrence turned to the lady.

"This is my neglectful partner, as I dare say you have guessed. Mrs. Stephen, of Victoria, Jake."

She gave Foster her hand and he was next presented to Miss Lucy Stephen. Then Lawrence indicated Pete, who waited, looking very big and muscular but quite at ease.

"Who's this and where did you get him? I'll engage that he was born between Ettrick and Liddel."

"He kens!" Peter remarked with a twinkle. "My name's no' far frae Ettrick, sir."

"My friend, Pete Scott," said Foster. "You have heard the ladies' names, Pete, but this is my partner, Mr. Featherstone, from the Garth."

Pete lifted his hand to his forehead and the movement had a touch of dignity. "Your servant, all; an' if ye'll alloo it, Mr. Foster's friends are mine."

Lawrence laughed. "A very proper sentiment, and a true Borderer! But you haven't told us how you found him, Jake."

"It's a long tale," said Foster. "Besides, I'm hungry. So I expect is Pete."

Lucy Stephen rang a bell. "Tea ought to be ready. We often take it here."

The tea was brought a few minutes afterwards and when Lucy gave him his cup Foster sat in a basket chair studying his comrade. Lawrence's face was pinched and his pose languid, but Foster thought he was not so ill as he had been. He did not know how much he ought to ask and had decided to wait until they were alone when Lawrence smiled.

"You needn't be alarmed, partner. I'm very much better than I was and will soon be quite fit again."

"We have good ground for hoping so," Lucy Stephen added in a friendly tone, and Foster thought she had noted his anxiety and liked him for it.

Her remark seemed to warrant his looking at her and he approved what he saw. The girl was attractive and had character, but what struck him at first sight was the protective gentleness she showed his comrade. He liked her eyes, which were a soft, clear blue, while her supple figure and warm-tinted skin hinted that she was vigorous. It was plain that she had not Alice Featherstone's reserve and pride, nor he thought the depth of tenderness that the latter hid. She

was softer and more pliable, for Alice was marked by an unflinching steadfastness. He smiled as he admitted that for him Alice stood alone on an unapproachable plane.

"But how did you get ill?" he asked.

"I was left on an icy *couloir*," Lawrence replied. "When they found me I was half-frozen, but it makes a story that's probably as long as yours. I'll tell it you later. How's our Borderer getting on?"

Foster turned to Pete, who had a large, hot Canadian biscuit on his plate. "This kind of meal isn't very common in this country, Pete. Perhaps I'd better warn you that there'll be another by and by."

"Aweel," said Pete, grinning, "I've no' done so bad. It's a guid plan to mak' certain when ye hae the chance."

XXIV

LAWRENCE'S STORY

When the meal was over Foster began to feel impatient. Pete went away, but Mrs. Stephen and Lucy remained, and Foster, having much to ask and tell his comrade, was embarrassed by their presence. By and by he saw that Lawrence was watching him with quiet amusement.

"It's like old times to have you with us," Lawrence remarked. "In fact, it only needed your turning up to complete my satisfaction; but you're a disturbing fellow. Don't you think this lucky reunion is rather too good to spoil?"

Foster knew what he meant and was tempted to agree, though he felt this was weak. It was pleasant to lounge, enjoying careless talk, and the society of the two ladies had its charm. They added a touch of domesticity and gave the place a homelike look, while the girl made an attractive picture as she handed Lawrence his matches and cigarettes. Foster thought it was worth being ill to be waited on like that. Then his chair was comfortable and he could see the sunset fading on the snow.

The sky was a wonderful pale-green and the high peaks glowed against it, softly red. There was a belt where the snow glittered, but lower down it faded to gray and blue. The pines were nearly black, but rose out of the shadow in sharp-cut spires, and far down in the dusky gorge, from which the roar of the flood and crash of ice ascended, there were gleams of livid foam. Still there was much he wanted to learn, and it was something of a relief when Mrs. Stephen picked up her sewing and gave her daughter a meaning glance. To Foster's surprise, Lawrence interposed.

"If you don't mind, I'd sooner you didn't go." Then he turned to Foster with a smile. "It's obvious that you want to unbosom yourself, Jake, but you can begin. You needn't be afraid of mentioning Daly. Lucy knows."

Foster remarked the girl's blush. Since she knew so much, it was plain that Lawrence had asked her to marry him and she had agreed. He imagined that Lawrence wanted Mrs. Stephen to hear somebody else's account of the matter, and although it would have been easier to talk to Lawrence alone, he asked:

"Did you know the fellow was in Banff a day or two since?"

Lucy Stephen made an abrupt movement, and her mother looked interested. She was a quiet lady and more reserved than the girl, but Foster thought her intelligent and firm.

"I did not," said Lawrence. "As a matter of fact, I'm no longer afraid of the fellow and mean to fight. He can't do me much harm---now."

The girl's shy glance at his comrade moved Foster. She knew what her lover meant and valued his trust; but he could sympathize with Mrs. Stephen, who looked disturbed. The latter was practical and no doubt saw that Daly might give them trouble.

"You had better begin at the beginning, and then we'll understand why you came back and how you got on Daly's trail," Lawrence resumed with a hint of resignation.

"Very well; but first, why didn't you write?"

"I wrote twice. Once to my mother and once to you."

"We got no letters. Did you post them?"

"Ah!" said Lawrence, "that was unfortunate. I gave the first letter to a steward to send ashore from a San Francisco boat. Walters put the other in the mail."

"Who is Walters?"

"We'll come to him later. Get on with your story."

Foster told it as clearly as he could, though this took some time, and when he had finished was annoyed by his comrade's smile. Lawrence seldom took things seriously enough.

"Jake is a born meddler," he remarked to the others. "He can't resist the temptation to put crooked matters right."

"It is a useful habit," said Mrs. Stephen quietly.

"Just so," Lawrence agreed. "Still it's a habit that ought to be carefully controlled and not, so to speak, be indulged out of sentimental impulses."

Foster felt embarrassed, although he thought he had said no more about Carmen and Alice than was needed to make his narrative clear.

"First of all," Lawrence resumed, "he takes up my defense, then he must help Carmen, and I think deserved the trouble in which she involved him. Next he seems to have been moved by my sister's anxiety." He paused and gave Foster a curious quiet smile. "I wondered what Alice would think of you and hope she was grateful."

Foster saw Lucy's interest, and wondered whether he had told more than he meant, but his comrade's amusement seemed uncalled for, and he rejoined: "I imagined I'd made it plain that your sister wasn't the only relative your carelessness alarmed."

"You did. The situation wasn't without its humor, Jake. After you had embarked on a number of strange adventures on my behalf, it must have been galling to be suspected of having made away with me. However, I understand that Alice didn't take this view?"

"She did not," said Foster shortly, and Lawrence rang a bell.

"Get me a C.P. telegram form," he ordered the waiter.

The form was brought, and Lawrence filled it up and gave it to the man. Then he fixed his eyes on Foster and remarked carelessly: "I've sent it in your name, Jake, and not to my father. I thought somebody had better break the comforting news to him, and briefly stated that you had found me."

"Oughtn't you to have added some particulars?" Mrs. Stephen asked.

"On the whole, I don't think so. For one thing, Jake's taciturn modesty rather becomes him, and the charges for an English telegram are high."

Foster said nothing, but he knew the message had been sent to Alice and Lawrence was satisfied with him as his sister's lover. This was something, but Lawrence's approval might not count for much.

"That's done with," the latter resumed. "Since you didn't find Daly at Banff, we have to decide if Carmen meant to deceive you and he never intended going there. I rather think we had better leave it to Mrs. Stephen and Lucy."

"I imagine she told the truth," Lucy replied. "If she had loved the man, she might, after all, have tried to protect him; but a selfish, ambitious girl who found she had been cheated, would be capable of ruining him in a fit of jealous rage."

"But I didn't state that she was ambitious and selfish," objected Foster.

Lawrence's eyes twinkled. "You don't realize all your talents, Jake. For one thing, you have a gift for narrative, and the portrait you drew of Carmen with a stroke or two was lifelike. Then, when you met and bluffed her into giving Daly away, you couldn't have taken a more effective line if you had been an ambassador. What do you think, Mrs. Stephen?"

"Mr. Foster seems to have used all his advantages and the girl got a shock that found out her weak points. I believe she meant to ruin her worthless lover."

"So do I," Lawrence agreed. "I expect you have made Jake sorry he was firm, but I'd warned him about Carmen and she doesn't deserve much pity. But why did Daly leave England and how did he find out that I'd been at Banff?"

"If you'll tell me what you have done since you left the Crossing, it might help to solve the puzzle," Foster replied.

Lawrence made a gesture of resignation. "I suppose it must be told. I went to California and didn't get as well as I expected. There was a good deal of sea-fog on the coast and after a time I went farther south. That's one reason I didn't write; I felt languid and dejected and didn't want to alarm my folks. Well, I tried Mexico and got rather worse; besides I found lounging tiresome work. In consequence, I joined a steamer going north and her doctor told me that dry cold mountain air was the best cure for troubles like mine. I met Walters on the voyage up the coast."

"Perhaps you had better describe him," Lucy suggested.

"Walters looks about my age and is thin and dark; an amusing fellow and remarkably well informed. In fact, I couldn't guess his nationality; he seemed to have been everywhere. He had good manners, but somehow one missed-----"

"Something that good manners must be founded on," Lucy interposed.

Foster saw that they had argued about the man before, because Lawrence smiled indulgently.

"Then how did he make your acquaintance?" he asked the girl.

"That was not altogether Lawrence's fault. Walters was cleverer than he thought."

"And he mailed one of the letters that did not arrive?"

"The fellow," Lawrence continued, "was a pleasant companion and when I mentioned why I was traveling agreed that the mountains were best for me. Told me about some friends of his whom the air had cured."

"In short, he recommended your trying Banff," Lucy remarked.

"He did me a good turn there. We separated at Seattle, but I found him at Victoria, where I stopped some weeks. It was there I met Lucy, who was going to Banff. I must explain that she's a mountaineer."

The girl blushed. "I climbed in the Olympians twice with college friends. They talked about exploring some of the northern glaciers next summer, and as we wanted a change, I persuaded mother to spend a month or two at a mountain resort where I could get some practice on the ice." She paused and added in a grave voice: "I really don't climb well, Mr. Foster, and doubt if I shall venture on the rocks again."

"Well," resumed Lawrence, "we decided to go to Banff together. I got better rapidly and we made a few easy excursions into the mountains, but the weather was bad and we didn't like our hotel. Then Walters turned up again and told us about this place. In fact, he was rather enthusiastic about it and said we'd find good rock climbs at the door, so we agreed to move."

"And took Walters?"

"He was an amusing fellow. He'd a way of finding something interesting for one to do and was always ready when he was wanted; a very useful man to have about."

Foster imagined his comrade might have found the fellow about when he was not wanted, but Mrs. Stephen's smile was illuminating. It seemed to hint that Lawrence had found Walters useful because he took her off his hands. Foster thought it curious that the man was satisfied with his part, since Lucy was a very attractive girl. Walters had obviously not attached himself to the party on her account.

"As I got stronger we tried some harder climbs," Lawrence went on. "Lucy is clever and steady on the ice; I'd had some practice on Scawfell in winter when I was at home, and though Walters didn't know much about the work his nerve is good. At length, we resolved to try the sharp peak yonder."

It was nearly dark, but Foster, looking up the valley, saw a white summit gleam against the sky. The shoulders of the mountain had faded to a pale gray, and the darker streak that filled a deep hollow marked a glacier.

"We started early and at first found the glacier rough but safe. Walters had insisted on two guides; prospectors, used to the rocks, who now and then took a tourist party out. The glacier brought us up some height, but after a time the surface began to be broken by big crevasses. We spent two hours picking our way across and at noon saw we must find another route. The slope on the right would take us off our line; on the left there were high, icy rocks that would puzzle a member of the Alpine club."

"We sat down and examined the mountain with the glasses. Above the crags, a snowfield ran up to the foot of the last sharp ridge, but we did not see how we could reach it. Ragged clouds drove across the ridge and blowing snow streamed about the peak like mist. Lucy, however, was keen on going on, and by and by one of the guides picked out a *coulee* that might take us up. *Coulee's* good French-Canadian, but Alpinists call it a *couloir*. It looked like a thin, white, perpendicular streak on the face of the dark rock. But perhaps I'm boring you with these particulars."

Lucy gave Foster a meaning glance and he said, "No; I want to understand the thing."

"It was awkward to reach the *coulee*, because the glacier was badly crevassed, but we got there. The gully was nearly precipitous; a narrow trough that serves as a rubbish shoot for the mountain when the thaw splits the rocks. I expect it's ground smooth in summer, but it was filled with hard, slippery snow. We stopped again and studied it, and I felt doubtful I about taking Lucy up, but she didn't want to go back. Walters took my view and said we'd all go back, but he looked disappointed and Lucy wouldn't agree."

"I lost my temper," Lucy admitted. "I never liked Walters and when he supported Lawrence I got obstinate. Besides, I thought he really wanted to get rid of me."

"Anyhow, we decided that one guide should take Lucy back down the glacier."

"Walters decided," Lucy objected. "It's important, Mr. Foster, that he chose the guide. Be careful how you tell the rest, Lawrence."

"He said she must take the best man, and one laughed and said that if we meant to get up we'd better stick to him. Walters, however, sent this fellow off with Lucy, and then we fastened on the rope and began to climb. We got up perhaps a hundred feet by kicking steps in the snow, but that's a tiring job for the leader, and when he found a crack in the wall, where we could stop, the guide had had enough."

"Why was it necessary to find a crack?" Foster asked.

"One couldn't stand on the snow, and if we had tried to sit on it, we'd have shot down to the bottom; for the most part, the walls were ground smooth. When you go up a place like that, the leader kicks a little hole as high as he can in front, and then stands in it while he makes another. The rest put their feet in the holes as they follow. Well, when we set off again I went first and had to use my ax because the snow had hardened into ice, I soon found out I hadn't quite got better, and was forced to stop when we were nearly half-way up. We lay down, with our toes in the nicks, to rest, and I slid my flask down to Walters when I'd had a drink. It was a big flask, and I'd got it filled with brandy. I thought the guide took a remarkably long drink, but he looked steady when he crawled up to take my place.

"After that it was very slow work and we were glad when we found a knob of rock sticking out of the ice. It had been ground into the shape of a bridge pier by the rubbish shooting past. We stopped a bit and argued if we should give it up, but the guide declared he knew a better way down into the next valley and Walters seemed keen, so we ate something, took another drink, and set off again. The slope was dangerously steep and I thought the guide was using his ax wildly, but we came to a deep crack in the wall and when Walters suggested that it might help us out of the gully I threw off the rope. It would have been of no use if I had fallen, and I meant to come down unless I saw a fairly safe route to the snowfield. In fact, I think I meant to give up the climb and only went to find an excuse for this.

"The crack was not quite vertical and gave a good hold, but when I'd got up eighteen or twenty feet I came to an awkward slab. It bulged out, but I found a hold for my hands and scrambled over the edge. I managed this because the alternative was falling off and shooting to the bottom of the *coulee*, but perhaps because I was weaker than I thought, I

wrenched my shoulder during the lift. Anyhow, I couldn't use my arm. It appeared afterwards that a ligament was strained, and the joint pinches yet.

"For a minute or two I thought hard. There was no way up, and I hadn't nerve enough to lower myself over the ledge by one arm. When I moved the other cautiously it hurt worse than at first. I called to the others and told them how I was fixed, but got a shock when the guide looked up.

"Can't get down?" he said. "Then why in thunder don't you jump?"

"The fool's drunk," Walters explained and added that he'd try to bring me the rope.

"I told him to throw me the end, as there was a knob I could double it round and then slide down both parts. The trouble was that Walters had nothing much to stand on when he tried to throw the coil. He lost his balance, slid down the gully, and jerked the guide out of his step. I saw Walters' ax shoot down in front, but the guide stuck to his, and the blade dragging over the rough surface checked them a bit. For all that, it looked as if they'd go straight to the bottom and they would hardly have got there alive, but the small rock wasn't far below. I don't think I breathed while I waited to see if it would bring them up.

"Walters struck the rock first and was very quick with the rope; in fact, I was astonished at his coolness, because he must have got a heavy blow. He stopped the other fellow and they lay on the rock for a few minutes. Then Walters shouted: 'He's not to be trusted, and I can't climb back alone.'

"Well, it was some moments before I could face the situation, but I told him to get down as fast as he could and send a rescue party with the other guide. He objected, but admitted that he saw no other plan, and I felt desperately lonely as I watched them crawl down the *couloir*. I don't know that I felt much worse afterwards, although it began to snow and my hands and feet seemed to turn to ice; two of my left fingers aren't of much use yet. The ledge was wide enough to sit on, but slanted, and one had to be careful to keep from slipping off. The snow stopped, but when dark came I'd given up hope of the rescue party's arriving in time. As a matter of fact, they were nearly too late, and I was in bed a month after they got me down; but Lucy can tell you the rest. You see, she saved my life."

A wave of color flushed Lucy's face. "When I reached the hotel I felt uneasy, and when it got dark and Lawrence didn't come I was alarmed. I had kept the guide who brought me home, and sent him to find some of his friends at a ranch not far off. They went back to look for Lawrence."

"You went back," said Lawrence reprovingly.

"As far as the first big crevasse; they wouldn't let me cross. But before this we met Walters and the other guide, who was drunk. Walters wanted to come with us, but I wouldn't allow him."

"You thought he was too tired?" Foster suggested.

"No," said Lucy quietly, "it wasn't altogether that."

Foster saw she would say no more about it, which seemed significant, and he let her go on.

"There is not much more to tell," she said with a shiver. "I was very anxious while I waited behind a hummock of ice, but at last I heard the men coming; they were carrying Lawrence, who couldn't walk. We got him down to the hotel---and I think that's all."

"But what became of Walters?" Foster asked.

"He stayed for a few days, and we were glad when he had to leave. He was in the way when Lawrence was ill."

"Thank you," said Foster gravely and was silent for a time.

He understood why his comrade called Miss Stephen Lucy, although he had not known her very long. She had, no doubt, saved his life by hurrying off the rescue party and had afterwards taken care of him when he was ill. He thought Lawrence lucky, but was not justified in congratulating him yet, and had something else to think about. Lucy suspected Walters, though Lawrence did not, and Foster imagined that she had some ground for doing so. She had an object for making Lawrence tell his story with full particulars, because it must have been painful to recall the matter.

"We'll say no more about it now, Miss Stephen," he remarked. "Lawrence and I are old friends, and I'm heavily in your debt."

Lucy looked up with a smile and blush, and Foster understood what she meant when she answered: "I hope you will always be his friend."

XXV

FOSTER SETS OFF AGAIN

After dinner the party returned to the veranda, which was warm and well lighted. Mrs. Stephen resumed her sewing, Lawrence settled himself comfortably in his big chair, and Foster engaged Lucy in careless talk. She had a pleasant voice and pretty, animated gestures, and after the strain he had borne there was a charm in relaxing and lazily enjoying the society of an attractive girl. The trouble was that he could not be careless long. Lawrence was inclined to put off disagreeable things, and would no doubt sooner leave disturbing subjects alone; but Foster had only kept half his promise to Alice and time that might be valuable was being lost.

"Your adventure made an interesting story, Lawrence, but you took unusual trouble to make us understand all that happened," he said at length.

Lawrence's gesture hinted at humorous resignation. "You're a restless fellow, Jake, but I hoped you'd wait until to-morrow. You see, I've been warned to keep quiet."

Foster looked at Lucy and imagined that he had her support; she no doubt knew his comrade's weakness for procrastination.

"I'll try not to disturb you much," he replied.

"Then you and Lucy insisted on my relating the thing at length. I felt I had to indulge you."

Lucy's smile hinted that Foster must be firm. "That wasn't quite enough. You had another motive."

"Oh, well," said Lawrence, "I suppose I wanted to recall the thing and see how it looked in the light of what you told me about your exploits in Scotland."

"They make it look different, don't they?" Lucy remarked.

Lawrence gave her a good-humored smile and then turned to Foster. "Lucy's cleverer than I, but I really thought she was rather hard on Walters." He paused for a moment, and then resumed thoughtfully: "You must remember that my object was to keep out of Daly's way, and I thought I was safe as long as I could do so. One would have expected him to play a lone hand."

"Didn't you think there was something suspicious about Walters' turning up again after he'd learned your name? There then were rather too many coincidences."

"Suppose you enumerate them," Lawrence suggested.

"He urged you to try the mountains and followed you to Banff. Then I've no doubt he proposed the trip up the glacier, for which he chose the guides. He sent the best back with Miss Stephen, and while this was the proper thing, it's curious that the other guide got drunk. Walters gave him your flask. Then he fell when he threw the rope---at the only place where a fall would not have led to his shooting down the *couloir*. Afterwards, although speed was urgent, he was very slow in going back for help."

"Besides, he knew exposure to the frost would be very dangerous for you; you told him you had been ill," Lucy interposed.

"I did," Lawrence agreed. "Of course if the fellow had wanted to make an end of me, it's obvious that he took a clever line; but people don't do that kind of thing for nothing. Suppose he was a friend of Daly's, it certainly wouldn't have suited the latter's plans."

"That," said Mrs. Stephen, "is what Lucy and I thought. You can be frank, Mr. Foster, because we know Lawrence's story."

"He was very wise to tell it you," Foster replied, and turned to his partner. "You imagined that Daly only wanted to extort money? Well, my explanation is that he had another object. We'll go back to the night Fred Hulton was shot. You thought you saw the watchman in the passage; was he far in front?"

"Perhaps a dozen yards; it's a long passage."

"He was going towards the office and stopped at the door, with his back to the light?"

"Yes; if he'd gone in I would have seen his face."

"And the remark you made indicated that you thought him the watchman?"

"Suggested it," said Lawrence thoughtfully. "There might have been a doubt."

"Exactly! The man saw you. The light shone out from the office behind him."

"Yes," said Lawrence, "I see your point. I don't think the fellow could have been certain I didn't get a glimpse of his face."

"You said nothing about the meeting at the inquiry, which might look as if you had been warned not to do so."

"Nobody asked a question that led up to it. I didn't learn he wasn't the watchman until afterwards."

Foster turned to the others. "I think my story has shown you that we have to deal with a gang of clever criminals. You'll note that Lawrence saw the only man who knows the truth about Fred Hulton's death."

Mrs. Stephen made a sign of understanding. Lucy shivered, then her eyes sparkled angrily, but Lawrence looked obstinate.

"Jake," he said rather dryly, "you ought to have been a barrister! You have made a clever use of the evidence, but it has some weak points and leaves room for doubt. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to start again to-morrow to look for Daly," Foster replied.

Lucy gave him a grateful glance, and Mrs. Stephen began to talk about something else. By and by she turned to Lawrence, who looked tired, and reminded him that it was past the time at which he ought to go to bed. He grumbled a little but went, and soon afterwards Mrs. Stephen left the others. Foster thought the girl wished this, but had not noticed that she gave her mother a hint. He felt rather awkward, but there was something to be said.

"I suppose you are going to marry my partner," he remarked.

"Yes," she replied, with a pretty flush. "Are you surprised?"

"I'm not surprised that he should wish it. But somehow I hadn't contemplated Lawrence's marrying."

The girl's color deepened. "Are you very frank, or only tactless?"

"I was stupid," said Foster with some confusion. "But I didn't mean what you think. Far from it! My partner has made good, I'm glad you had the wisdom and pluck to see this."

"He is a very dear fellow," she answered with a soft gleam in her eyes that moved Foster. Then she smiled. "You are forgiven---and I must confess that at first my mother took the view I thought you hinted at. She said Lawrence ought to wait until all risk of the past's being brought to light was gone. But I suppose when you guessed the truth it was something of a shock?"

"No," said Foster. "Although I haven't known you long, I feel that I won't lose my partner when he marries you. I was grateful when you said you hoped I would always be his friend."

Lucy nodded. "I saw you understood. Before we met I was rather jealous of you---and curious. I think Lawrence sometimes makes mistakes about people."

"Walters, for example? Well, I like you to be careful about Lawrence, but hope you don't feel anxious now you have seen me."

"He needs a man friend and there's something about you that makes one feel you can be trusted," said Lucy, who gave him a level glance. "You look ingenuous, but perhaps that's deceptive, in a way. I mean that I didn't quite understand you until you told us about your adventures in Scotland."

"Ah!" said Foster, "Carmen once said something like that, but she was blunt. She told me I wasn't quite such a fool as I look. However, I haven't much ground for boasting about my exploits. The main results were that I got myself suspected by the police, warned off Daly, and made Lawrence's father think I had murdered him. Now I'd much rather

look a simpleton than a homicide!"

Lucy laughed, but her eyes were soft. "We all make mistakes, Mr. Foster, but your object was good. Besides, I feel that you will carry it out."

Foster hesitated for a few moments, studying the girl. She had courage and he liked the way she took care of his comrade. In some respects, Lawrence needed to be guarded.

"I hoped you would stop when your mother went," he said.

She nodded. "Yes; I knew you had something to say."

"It's important. But first of all, I expect you had a bad time when Lawrence didn't come back from the mountain."

"I shall not forget it," Lucy said with a shudder. "While I waited and wondered why he didn't come I thought the anxiety intolerable, but it was worse after we met Walters and the drunken guide. He wanted to join us, but I knew he was somehow to blame."

"Afterwards you had to wait alone upon the glacier. That wouldn't make you think any better of him."

"It did not," Lucy agreed, with a hard, fixed look. "I--you see, Lawrence was my lover--I spent two or three hours in agonizing suspense. I knew what I should feel when I stopped, but couldn't go on with the others, because I might have kept them back. It was freezing hard and now and then a little snow fell, but I scarcely noticed this; I was listening, as I hope I shall never listen again. Sometimes the ice cracked and a snow-bridge fell into the crevasse, but that was all, and afterwards the silence was awful. It seemed as if the men would never come. I couldn't go to meet them because of the crevasse; I dream about the horrible black opening yet. Lawrence was on the other side, out of my reach; he might be slowly freezing on the *couloir*, and I couldn't help. But I knew he was suffering for Walters' negligence or perhaps his treachery."

Foster made a sign of sympathetic comprehension. "You hate him for this?"

"Yes," said Lucy frankly; "but not altogether because I'm vindictive. The man who could make people suffer as Lawrence and I did ought to be punished."

"He ought. Well, I'm going to warn Lawrence, and no doubt the proper thing would be to be satisfied with this, but somehow I'm not. You see, Walters probably doesn't know we suspect him."

The girl's eyes narrowed and Foster knew she was afraid, but did not think fear was her strongest emotion.

"You mean he may try again?"

"That is what I mean. If he comes back, you must watch him, but keep him here until I arrive. If it's impossible for me to come, send for the police."

"Yes," said Lucy quietly, "I'll try."

"There's another risk," said Foster. "He may send an accomplice; they're a well-organized gang. In this matter, I'd sooner trust you than Lawrence." He stopped for a moment and gave her an apologetic glance. "Perhaps I've done

wrong to alarm and put this heavy load on you."

"No," she said resolutely. "I have promised to marry Lawrence and must help him."

Then she rose and gave Foster her hand. "I must thank you for your confidence. If the need comes, I don't think I'll fail you."

Foster felt satisfied when she left him. Lucy was clever and had pluck. He had given her a hard part, but she would not shrink. One could trust a woman who was fighting for her lover.

After breakfast next morning, Mrs. Stephen showed Foster some photographs of the mountains, in one or two of which Lucy and Lawrence had a place, and he asked: "Have you a portrait of Walters?"

"No; the man who took these was staying here, and one day asked Walters to join the group he was posing, but he refused."

"How did he get out of it?"

Lawrence, who had come in with Lucy, laughed. "Rather neatly. Said he was a modest sentimentalist and would sooner leave his memory printed on our hearts!"

"One must admit that he did something of the kind," Lucy remarked.

"Will you or Mrs. Stephen describe his looks?" Foster asked.

The girl did so and then inquired: "Why didn't you ask Lawrence?"

"If you want an accurate description of a man, it's better to ask a woman. Our classifications are rather vague; we say he's all right, a good sport, or perhaps an outsider. You note all his idiosyncrasies, the way he talks, the color of his hair-----"

"I suppose we do," Mrs. Stephen agreed with a smile. "You are rather shrewd."

"I don't see why that should surprise my friends, but it sometimes does," Foster rejoined and went to the flag station to ask about the train.

It stopped for him an hour later and he set off again on his search for Daly, which was complicated by the need for being on his guard against a man he did not know. It looked as if Walters had told Daly that Lawrence was in British Columbia, and he had come out to join his accomplice; but, after all, if Foster did not know Walters, the man did not know him. Another thought gave him some comfort: Walters had plotted against Lawrence because his evidence might be dangerous, but probably knew nothing about Daly's blackmailing plan. The latter would, no doubt, consider any money he could extort was his private perquisite, and might try to protect his victim for a time.

As the train sped through the mountains Foster felt very much at a loss. Indeed, unless luck favored him, he thought he might as well give up the search, and by and by got off at a mining town. He had no particular reason for doing so, but felt that to go on to Vancouver would be to leave the place where his last clue broke off too far away.

The town, for the most part, was built of wood, and some of the smaller and older houses of logs, with ugly square fronts that hid the roof. A high, plank sidewalk ran down the main street, so that foot passengers might avoid the mud, but the ruts and holes were now hidden by beaten snow. At one end stood a big smelter, which filled the place with acrid fumes, and the scream of saws rose from sheds beside the river, where rusty iron smoke-stacks towered above sawdust dumps. The green torrent was partly covered by cakes of grinding ice. All round, in marked contrast to the utilitarian ugliness below, dark pines ran up to the glittering snowfields on the shoulders of the peaks. Foster went to a big new hotel, which he found dirty and too hot. Its bare walls were cracked and exuded resin; black drops from the central heater pipes stained the rotunda floor, which was torn by the spikes on the river-Jacks' boots. An electric elevator made a horrible noise. The supper he got in the big dining-room, where an electric organ played, was, however, very good, and he afterwards sat rather drearily in the rotunda, watching the men who came in and out through the revolving door.

There is not much domestic life in the new Western towns, whose inhabitants, for the most part, live at hotels, and the rotundas of the latter are used as a lounge by anybody who prefers them to the street. In consequence, Foster could not tell who were guests and who were not. By and by he filled his pipe, and a man who was lighting his held out the match, which Foster took with a word of thanks. It might have been a trifling politeness, but he thought the other had waited until he was ready.

"You're a stranger," the man remarked.

"Yes," said Foster, "I've just come in."

"Looking for business?"

Foster quietly studied the man. He was neatly dressed and looked keen and alert. It was possible that he was a storekeeper, or a real estate agent, which is a common occupation in a Western town.

"Well," he said, "I don't often let a chance of a trade go past, but when you're in a strange place, the trouble is to tell if you've got a snap or not."

"Sure thing," agreed the other. "What's your line?"

"Dressed lumber."

"Then I can't do much for you, but there's quite a lot of new construction planned and the boys will get busy as soon as the frost breaks," said the man.

He went on to talk about the trade of the town and province, and on the whole Foster was glad he had been in British Columbia before and knew something about the country. It was better to be cautious and he did not want to show he came from the east.

By and by another man crossed the floor and picked up a newspaper that lay near. As he did so, he gave Foster a careless glance, and then went back to the seat he had left. This was at some distance from the heaters and near the entrance, to which people kept passing, but it commanded the spot that Foster and his companion occupied. Foster, however, could not detect him watching them, and soon afterwards the other man went out.

Nothing happened next day, but Foster stopped and in the evening called for Pete, whom he had sent to a different hotel, and strolled down the snowy street. It was very cold and few people were about. A half-moon hung above the summit of the range, and the climbing pines cut in ragged black masses against the snow. After crossing a bridge on the outskirts of

the town they stopped and looked about.

A few half-finished houses stood among blackened stumps in a cleared belt, where there were rubbish heaps and willows were springing up, but a little farther on the forest rose in a shadowy wall. It was quiet except for the roar of the river, and Foster shivered as he filled his pipe.

"It's a nipping wind. I'd better go down the bank a bit before I try to get a light," he said.

He pushed through the willows growing beside the creek, but dropped his matchbox, and Pete came to help him in the search. They found it, but before he could strike a match a man stopped at the end of the bridge and looked back up the street. Foster, imagining he was the fellow who had spoken to him at the hotel, touched Pete, and they stood very still.

The man might have seen them had he glanced their way, although the branches broke the outline of their figures, but he was looking back, as if he expected somebody to come up behind, and after a few moments went on again. He crossed the clearing towards a fence that seemed to indicate a road following the edge of the forest, and vanished into the gloom of the trees. Then, as Foster lighted his pipe, another man came quickly across the bridge and took the same direction as the first.

"I wunner if yon was what ye might ca' a coincidence," Pete said softly.

"So do I, but don't see how it concerns us," Foster replied. "I think we'll take the road straight in front."

They followed a track that led through the bush at a right angle to the other. The snow was beaten firm as if by the passage of logs or sledges, and there were broad gaps among the trees, which rose in ragged spires, sprinkled with clinging snow. In places, the track glittered in the moonlight, but, for the most part, one side was marked by a belt of gray shadow. After a time, they heard a branch spring back; then there was a crackle of undergrowth, and a man came out of an opening ahead. It was the man who had first passed them; Foster knew him by his rather short fur coat. For no obvious reason and half-instinctively, he drew back into the gloom. The man did not see them and went on up the track.

"Yon's a weel-kent trick in my trade," Pete remarked. "When it's no' convenient to be followed, ye send an inquisitive pairson off on anither road. But I would like to see if he has got rid o' the ither fellow."

They waited some minutes, but nobody else appeared, and Foster surmised that the first man knew the ground and the other did not. The fellow had vanished among the trees, but after a time they saw him again, crossing a belt of moonlight some distance in front, and Foster felt he must find out where he was going.

By and by the indistinct figure vanished again, and pushing on cautiously through the shadow, they came to a clearing at the foot of the range. Steep rocks rose above the narrow open space, but although the trail went no farther there was nobody about. Standing behind a fir trunk, Foster searched the edge of the bush, but saw nothing except a ruined shack and some ironwork sticking out of the snow. He could not examine the shack, because if the other man was near he would see him when he left the trees. After waiting a few minutes, he touched Pete and they turned back silently.

XXVI

THE REAL-ESTATE AGENT

Next morning Foster got up in the dark and walked briskly down the main street to the bridge. Lights were beginning to blink in the houses he passed and there was a pungent smell of burning wood. In front, the forest rolled upwards in a

blurred, dark mass, but he could not see the mountains. The air was still and felt damp upon his skin, and he knew a sudden rise of temperature accounted for the obscurity. The main thing, however, was that there was nobody to watch him, and he set off along the road he had taken on the previous night.

He had some trouble to keep the trail when he plunged in among the trees, but day had broken when he reached the clearing, and a faint gray light shone through the haze. There was no obvious reason why the stranger's disappearance at the spot should interest him, but his suspicions were quickly excited and it looked as if the fellow had tried to make his acquaintance in order to learn his business in the town. He had come early, hoping to find footprints that might give him a hint, but was disappointed. There were a number of marks, but they had lost their sharpness and he could not tell which had been made recently.

In the meantime, the light was growing and he saw that the shack at the foot of the rocks had partly fallen down. Thick wooden beams and props lay beside the ironwork he had noticed on his last visit. It was obvious that he was looking at a mineral claim that had been abandoned after some development work had been done, while the trampled snow indicated that somebody had been removing the material not long since. Passing the heap of rusty iron, from which the snow was beginning to shrink, he found a narrow opening in the foot of the hill. This was a test adit, and the tilt of the strata indicated that its slope was steep. The stone that had been taken out showed that it did not penetrate far, and Foster saw no reason for entering.

He next studied the rocks, and although he saw no path, imagined that one could get up that way, but could not see why anybody should wish to do so, and the snow did not seem to have been disturbed. After a minute or two he turned back into the wood with a gesture of disappointment.

The man he had followed had apparently come there to meet somebody, but although the mine was conveniently near the town it was a cold and cheerless spot for a rendezvous, Foster surmised from this that secrecy was important, but after all there was nothing to indicate that the matter had anything to do with him. As he went back he heard a musical humming in the tops of the pines and a lump of wet snow, slipping from a branch, struck his face. The humming grew louder until the wood was filled with sound, and he began to feel clammy and hot. A warm Chinook wind from the Pacific was sweeping up the valley, driving back the frost.

When he reached the town the snow was wet and the lights were out, but the post office was open, and having telegraphed his new address, he went in to ask if there was any mail for him. A girl was busy behind a lettered brass wicket, but did not look up, and Foster saw the man in whom he was interested standing among some others farther along the counter. The fellow came towards him.

"Been for a walk?" he said. "You get up early."

"I'm used to that," Foster answered with a careless smile. "Anyhow, I want my mail, and you enjoy breakfast better if you've been out first."

"Sure thing," agreed the other. "But you want to put on rubber shoes when a Chinook wind strikes this town."

Then the girl clerk looked up and when Foster inquired for letters threw him two. His companion asked for his, giving the name of Telford, and she indicated the lettering on the wicket.

"Farther along, where you came from! Can't you read the alphabet?"

"I can, now I see it," said the other good-humoredly as he turned back.

On the whole, Foster was glad he had picked up the letters as the girl threw them down. It is customary in Western cities for people to call for their mail and girl clerks are sometimes curt, but she seemed to think it strange that the fellow had come to the wrong wicket. If he had had an object for doing so, he had learned Foster's name, but the latter did not think he had seen the postmarks or that one letter had an English stamp. Still, he had noted that Foster's boots were wet, which indicated that the latter had gone farther than the post office.

He went out before he opened the envelopes, and then glancing at the letters put them in his pocket with a thrill of satisfaction, meaning to read them carefully after breakfast. Entering the hotel, he hung up his coat and went to the dining-room. He was promptly served, and when he went out after finishing his meal, saw Telford, who had apparently just returned from the post office, standing in the passage, which was rather dark. It looked as if he had been hanging up his coat, but he stood near Foster's, and then moved on abruptly as another man came up.

Foster met them and saw that the last was the man whom he had half-suspected of watching Telford on the first evening. As he passed, he took the letters from his coat, and entering the rotunda sat down and lighted his pipe. It was possible that Telford had meant to search his pockets, but had been prevented by the appearance of the other, and Foster frowned. He was feeling the strain of the constant watchfulness and getting tired of intrigue. As a matter of fact, he hated that kind of thing, and it would be a keen relief when he could attend to his proper business and finish with the need for caution. In the meantime, he did not know if he had found a fresh clew or not. After all, he had not much ground for suspecting Telford.

Then Foster forgot his perplexities as he took out the letters. The first was from Lucy Stephen, who said that the doctor had visited Lawrence and was satisfied with his progress. She added that Foster knew Lawrence disliked writing letters, but she wanted to reassure him and wish him good luck. The note was short, but seemed to put Foster on a footing of intimate friendship that he was grateful for, and he thought Lucy had written with this object.

The other was from Alice Featherstone and his heart beat as he studied it. She did not say much; they had still no news of Lawrence and her father was very restless and anxious, while she feared her mother felt the suspense. But she knew Foster would make every effort and would not fail them; there was nobody else who could help. All she said struck a note of quiet confidence. Her faith was unshaken; she trusted him.

Foster thrilled and his weariness and dejection vanished. Alice would have got Lawrence's telegram soon after she wrote and she had proof of his honesty now. Still, he had only kept half his promise, and although he had undertaken a task that needed abilities he doubted if he possessed, he meant to keep the other half. He was hemmed in by difficulties and might make mistakes, but somehow he was going to make good.

For a time he sat in a corner, recalling what Alice had said in England and how she had looked. He pictured her standing in the dark-paneled library at the Garth, with eyes that sparkled as she spoke in his defense, sitting with a smile in the half-light by the big hearth in the hall, and waiting for him in the orchard. She moved through all the scenes with the same calm grace; even in her anger--and he had seen her angry---there was a proud reserve. But Alice stood above all other women; there was nobody like her.

Then he got up with a resolute movement. Dreams and memories would not help, and he must get to work. To begin with, he would try to find out something about Telford, and went to the office, where the clerk was unoccupied. As a rule, nobody knows more about everybody else's business than the clerk of a Western hotel.

"Is there much doing in real estate just now?" he asked.

"There will be soon. The mines are paying well and the bosses are planning new developments. Then there's a big scheme for opening up the ranching land in the bench country. That means a bigger city. Are you looking for building lots?"

"My line's dressed lumber, but when you get a building boom you want material. I suppose Mr. Telford does a good trade?"

"Talks as if he was going to, but he hasn't begun yet," the clerk replied with a smile that hinted that he had expected the inquiry.

"Then he hasn't been here long?"

"Only came into town a week since," said the clerk, rather dryly. "When things look like humming these fellows generally do come along. But you want to go slow when you deal with a real-estate man, unless you know all about him."

"Yes," said Foster thoughtfully, "as a rule, that's true. Thank you, anyhow."

He went back to his seat and lighted his pipe again. He had learned that Telford was a stranger and had apparently thought it advisable to account for his visiting the town. Foster saw that he ought to have guessed the fellow was not a resident when he asked for his mail, because had he been in business in the city he would have had his private box at the post office. Moreover he imagined that the clerk knew he really wanted to find out something about Telford, and thought him clumsy, but this did not matter. He had been told he had an ingenuous look, which was rather an advantage, since it suited the part he meant to play. He did not want people to think him clever, but they must not suspect that he was pretending to be dull. Remembering his mistakes, he smiled as he admitted that there was not much danger of this. By and by Telford came in and sat down in the next chair.

"Nothing doing this morning and the street's all mush," he said. "If you're not busy, would you like a game of pool?"

Foster agreed. His only business was to find out Telford's, and the man had given him an opportunity. The pool room is an institution in Canadian towns, but is not, as a rule, much frequented in the morning when trade is good. They had no trouble in getting a table and began to play for a small stake, which Telford insisted on. Foster did not know much about pool, and indeed had seldom had time for games, but he had a steady hand and, somewhat to his surprise, won. Telford, who raised the stake, won the next game, but was afterwards beaten.

In the meantime, Foster had studied his game. The man made some clever strokes, but bungled others. He was not steady enough, but on the whole Foster imagined he meant to let him win. For all that, he did not think the other was playing a common trick with the object of leading him on. The amount of the stake was not large enough for this.

"Well," said Telford, "I guess you're too good for me. Suppose we sit down and take a smoke. I'll play you again another day."

"What you want to do is to let up on the drinks the night before," remarked a man who was standing by. "If you were as cool and steady as he is, you'd beat him easy."

"Perhaps that's so," said Telford with a good-humored laugh and gave Foster a cigar.

"Are you going to make expenses this trip?" he asked.

"I can't say yet," Foster replied. "Anyhow, you don't lose much by taking a look round, and I sometimes go outside my regular line."

"Well, if you feel like speculating in building lots, I might put you wise."

Foster pondered. He knew that gambling on unused land was popular in Canada, in spite of taxes planned to prevent it, and while there are respectable real estate agents, the fringe of the profession is occupied by sharpers who prey upon what is fast becoming a national vice. Confiding strangers with money to invest are often swindled, and there was an obvious motive for Telford's trying to cultivate his acquaintance. On the whole, however, he did not think the fellow meant to victimize him in this way, though he was perhaps willing that Foster should suspect him of such a plan. If so, it might be better to indulge him.

"As a rule, I have a use for all the money I've got," he remarked. "Still if I could find a lot that was bound to go up----"

The other followed the lead and talked about city extension and the development of the neighboring land. He seemed to know his subject, and Foster was beginning to think his suspicions mistaken when Telford carelessly interpolated a few adroit questions about his usual occupation. The questions were difficult to answer without telling more than it was advisable that the other should know, or, what was equally to be avoided, showing that Foster was on his guard. He was now nearly sure that the fellow was an accomplice of Daly's, and the line he had resolved on would be difficult.

He had to deal with a clever rogue who probably knew something about him and meant to find out more. In consequence, there was no use in trying to pose as an unsophisticated simpleton; he must, so to speak, play up to the fellow and persuade him that any suspicions he entertained were about the latter's designs upon his money. With this object, he disputed some of Telford's opinions and presently proved a statement of his wrong.

Telford looked embarrassed and Foster thought he did it very well.

"Perhaps I was putting it a bit too high, but the deal ought to turn out a snap if you can wait a while," he said, and laughed. "Anyhow I've got to give you bedrock facts after the way you caught me out. Say, you're pretty smart!"

"You're apt to get stung over a land deal unless you're careful," Foster modestly replied.

It was a relief when Telford said they would stop talking business and proposed a visit to a bar. Foster felt mentally exhausted and thought a drink would brace him. He did not see Telford at dinner and kept out of his way during the afternoon, but the man came into the dining-room when supper was served. The room was large and furnished with separate tables, but Foster thought he knew the faces of the regular customers and noticed that a stranger sat at a table by himself.

Telford made for this table, which seemed natural, since there was most room there, but a few moments afterwards the man whom Foster suspected of watching him left his place. Crossing the floor carelessly, but in such a way that a pillar hid his approach, he sat down near the other two. Foster admitted that he might not have remarked this had he not been suspicious and keenly watchful. The thing looked significant, particularly when a waitress came across, frowning, with some dishes. The man must have had an object for changing his place after he had given his order, because in the small Canadian towns waitresses deal firmly with troublesome customers.

Telford did not seem to know the stranger and did not speak until the man politely handed him a cruet-stand. He did not say much after this, but Foster could not see him without leaning forward, because some other people sat down between. Still he felt a puzzling curiosity about the fellow, and after supper went to the rotunda where the man presently sat down

not far off. He was young and vigorous, but walked with a slight limp as if one knee was stiff. His eyes were dark and he had a rather engaging smile when one of the rest offered him a newspaper. Telford was not about, but the other man strolled in.

Foster's curiosity got stronger. He could not remember having met the man he was studying, but had a vague feeling that he ought to know him. The strange thing was that he had not expected him to limp, but this was perhaps accounted for by his athletic figure. After a time, the fellow put down the newspaper and went off towards the bar, while Foster, who found he had run out of tobacco, went to his room.

When he got out of the elevator, he saw the other going along a passage in front, which he thought curious, because he could not have stayed more than a few moments in the bar. Moreover his limp was not noticeable now he imagined himself alone. Foster went on quietly, keeping his distance, and knitted his brows in thoughtful surprise when the other opened a door. The man, who did not seem to know Telford, had gone into his room.

When the door shut he heard another step and saw, as he had half-expected, the man who had watched Telford entering the passage, Foster immediately turned his head and went on to his room, where he sat down in the nearest chair. He had got something of a shock, since he now knew why he had studied the fellow with the limp. His brain had been unconsciously occupied with a description Lucy Stephen had given him. The man who had gone into Telford's room was Walters.

XXVII

THE MINE

When Foster was thinking of going to bed Pete, whom he had not seen all day, came into the rotunda, and Foster remarked that his boots were very wet.

"It's saft outside an' I've been paidlin' in the snow," he said and, with the poacher's instinctive caution, put his feet out of sight beneath a table.

"Where have you been in the dark?" Foster asked.

"I thought I'd maybe better watch the bridge over yon bit creek."

Foster frowned. It looked as if he had not much talent for detective work and could only concentrate upon one point at a time. While he had been content to watch what was going on at the hotel, Pete had watched the bridge, and had found out something. Foster admitted that such success as he had had was rather due to luck than ability.

"Well," he said, "what did you see there?"

"To begin with, the man we followed cam' doon the street and went into a shop; and I allooed they might keep something I wanted. He bought a basket."

"A basket?"

"Just that," said Pete. "One o' they cheap baskets ye put grosseries in when ye gang by train."

Foster nodded. On Canadian railways, economical second-class passengers often carry provisions instead of using the meal stations.

"He bought some tinned meat and biscuits," Pete resumed. "Then some tea and a wee spirit-stove."

"There's no train until to-morrow and I imagine the fellow wouldn't be satisfied with canned meat, so long as he could get something better when the cars stopped."

Pete grinned. "I'm no' saying he meant to tak' the train. It looked mair like he was going to picnic in the woods."

"Ah!" said Foster abruptly. "I suppose you followed the man?"

"Far enough to see him tak' the road we went. Then I cam' back. Ye see, I kent where he was going."

Foster made a sign of agreement, because it was obvious that Telford was going to the shack at the mine. He understood how the fellow had got out without his seeing him, since it is usual in Canada to have a separate entrance to a hotel bar and he had stupidly been satisfied with watching the hall.

"He has gone to meet somebody; but why did he take the provisions?"

"Maybe he wanted to give them to the ither man."

"But why should the other need the food?"

"Weel," said Pete, "if I was looking for a hidie-hole convenient to the town, I'd no' find much fault with yon' auld mine. Maybe it's dry, an' the frost wouldna' get far in."

Foster started, for he thought Pete had guessed right. He and Lawrence had camped in the open in colder weather than was often felt in British Columbia, and as wood was plentiful, there was no reason the man should not make a fire after dark, if he could find an outlet for the smoke. He must now find out who was hiding in the mine, but thought he knew, for vague suspicions suddenly got clear.

To begin with, the fellow who watched Telford at the hotel was either a policeman or a private detective in Hulton's pay. Then Foster had lost Daly's track at Banff, which was not very far off, and taking it for granted that Telford belonged to the gang, it was logical to suppose that he had arranged a meeting with Daly and Walters. On arrival Daly had found that the town was watched, but was either unable to leave it without being followed or detained by his business with the others. In consequence, he had taken refuge in the mine.

Foster sent Pete away and smoked another pipe. He would have liked to visit the mine at once, but if he went, would meet Telford coming back or find him when he reached the spot, and he must see Daly alone. He ought, of course, to warn the man he thought a detective, but did not mean to do so, and this resolve brought up a problem he had tried to solve before: what could he offer Daly in return for his keeping Lawrence's secret?

If the fellow had killed Fred Hulton, it was unthinkable that he should help him to escape. Foster felt that he had perhaps, in a sense, already become Daly's accomplice, but meant to save his comrade and keep his promise to Alice. He would see Daly in the morning and decide then what line to take; after all, luck might help him again. Then he knocked out his pipe and went to bed.

After breakfast next morning he called for Pete and walked carelessly to the main bridge. He, however, took his pistol and when they reached the woods Pete cut a heavy stick. Foster did not expect to use force, but it was better to be prepared. While Pete was trimming his cudgel they heard the heavy snorting of a locomotive and a plume of smoke moved across the town. Then they saw through an opening in the trees the cars roll along the mountain side. The Montreal express had stopped on its journey east, but Foster was preoccupied and thought nothing of this.

The snow was very soft when they plodded up the path among the trees, but it was not far to the clearing, and Foster stopped at its edge. He had met nobody, and the woods were silent except for the dying roar of the train, which came faintly down the valley. There was no smoke, but Daly would put out his fire when it got light. Crossing the wet snow noiselessly, he made for the shack and when he reached it beckoned to Pete.

"Stay here for about ten minutes, and then if I'm not back, you had better come in," he said. "If anybody runs out, don't let him pass."

Pete's nod showed he understood and Foster, moving forward quietly, stopped again for a moment at the mouth of the adit. Pete had vanished, but could be trusted to watch the mine as a terrier watches a rat-hole, and Foster knew that if he were attacked and overcome his assailant would not escape. A gray sky hung over the black tops of the firs and the wet snow threw up a curious livid light. It was an unpleasant raw morning, and Foster felt half daunted.

The adit was dark; he was embarking on a rash adventure, and wondered with some misgivings what would happen before he came out again. He heard nothing, and it was rather curious that he could not smell smoke, but bracing himself he stooped and crept into the dark hole.

The floor sloped, following the inclination of the strata, and seemed to be strewn with fallen stones, but he had put on rubber shoes and made very little noise. He did not want to warn Daly that his hiding-place had been discovered, until he was near enough to explain that he had nothing to do with the police. There would not be much danger when the fellow knew who he was and that the mine was watched, but he wanted to get as close as possible before alarming him. Daly, no doubt, carried a pistol.

Stopping for a moment, he raised his head incautiously and smothered an exclamation when he struck it against the roof. He could hear water dripping somewhere below and the slope felt steep. It was nervous work creeping down hill in the dark, and there was, perhaps, a risk of his falling into a pit. When he dislodged a stone that rattled he held his breath as he listened. He heard nothing, and set his lips as he overcame an impulse to turn back. If Daly had heard the stone, he was probably waiting for him with his finger on the trigger.

For all that, Foster went on, feeling for the rough wall, until he struck his foot against a big stone and losing his balance staggered and fell. He made a noise that echoed through the adit and, worse than all, the pistol shot out of his hand. He felt for but could not find it, and for a few moments lay still with tingling nerves. Daly must have heard him and was, no doubt, crouching in the dark, ready to shoot. He tried again to find the pistol, and then with an effort pulled himself together. The next move might draw a shot, but he must risk that and not lie there helpless. Besides, if the fellow missed, he might grapple with and disarm him, and he sprang to his feet.

"Daly!" he called in a voice that he meant to be careless but was rather hoarse. "It's Foster. I want to talk about Featherstone."

There was no reply. He heard water falling into a pool, but except for this the mine was strangely silent, and after waiting for a moment he drew back against the rock.

"Pete!" he shouted.

His voice sounded muffled and he wondered whether Pete could hear, but tried to fix his attention on the dark in front. It was there that danger might lurk. Then he heard Pete stumbling among the stones, and presently the man came up, panting with haste.

"Where's the lamp?" Foster asked.

He knew he was going to do a dangerous thing if Daly was hiding near, but something must be risked and he struck a match. It sputtered, throwing an illusive gleam on the wet rock a yard or two in front, and then went out. Foster struck another with a hoarse exclamation and touched the wick of a small, flat, metal lamp, such as Western miners hook on their hats. Candles are not common in Canadian towns where water-power makes electric lighting cheap. The lamp gave a dim smoky light, and when Foster picked up his pistol they waited a few moments, looking eagerly in front.

A trickle of water fell from a crack in the roof and running down the floor of the adit vanished into the gloom. Here and there a ragged projection caught the light, but the rest of the tunnel was hidden in impenetrable darkness. They went on cautiously, though Foster now felt anxious because there was no sign of Daly. After a minute or two, the light fell on a wall of dry rock with a pool at the bottom, and he knew they had reached the end of the adit. Next moment he saw there was an opening to one side where some ore had been taken out. If Daly was in the mine, he was there, and warning Pete with a sign, he turned the corner.

The light showed a small, dry chamber, strewn with sharp stones, some of which had been put together to make a hearth. Between these lay the ashes of a fire; bits of food were scattered about, and a blue Hudson's Bay blanket lay in a corner. Except for this, the chamber was empty. Foster savagely clenched his fist while Pete stirred the ashes and felt the blanket.

"It's dry an' the reek o' a cigar is fresh on it," he said. "Yon fire's no' been oot lang. I'm thinking it's a pity we didna' come last night."

Foster sat down and looked about. He was getting calm, but felt dull with disappointment. For all that, he saw why the mine had been abandoned. There was a fault in the strata, where the vein had slipped down, but the subsidence had cracked the rock above and he imagined that the fissure reached the surface. The air was fresh and not very cold; there was water close by, and Foster saw no reason why Daly should not have found the chamber a comfortable hiding-place. Yet he had left it.

"Can you see the basket you talked about?" he asked, giving Pete the lamp.

Pete found it behind some stones and they examined it together.

"Here's the spirit-stove, some bread, and the can of meat," said Foster. "But I see no biscuits. Can he have eaten them?"

"There were ower mony. He's ta'en them with him."

"Well," said Foster thoughtfully, "I don't see why the other fellow brought him provisions he didn't need."

"Maybe something happened since he brought the basket," Pete suggested.

Foster pondered. It was possible that something had happened at the hotel after Telford's visit that had altered the accomplices' plans, or made it easier for Daly to get away; but, if this were so, Telford must have gone back to the mine. He might have done so, but Foster thought Daly had perhaps not taken his confederate altogether into his confidence and had changed his plans without warning him. Foster could not tell what chance the fellow had of stealing away, but as he had left the basket and only taken some biscuits, it looked as if he did not expect to go very far on foot.

"We'll get out and try to find which way he's gone," he said.

It was a relief to reach the open air, and they carefully studied the sloppy snow. Foster knew something about tracking elk and moose, and Pete had a poacher's skill, but the rapid thaw had blurred the footprints they found. On the whole, however, Pete imagined that Telford had returned to the mine since his visit on the previous evening.

Then they searched about the foot of the rocks and presently found marks that showed where somebody had climbed. Getting up, they followed the marks to a beaten trail that ran along the hillside from the town to a neighboring mine. There was nothing to be learned here and Foster went back dejectedly to the hotel. Dinner was being served when he arrived, but he did not see Walters and felt annoyed when Telford stopped him as he was coming out.

"I haven't seen you since last night and thought we might have had a game," he said. "Where have you been all morning?"

"I didn't come here to play pool," Foster replied. "There was something I had to see about."

"Then I hope you found business pretty good," Telford remarked with a quiet smile that Foster found disturbing.

He thought the fellow would see him if he went to the clerk's office, and beckoning the bell-boy into a passage gave him a coin.

"Do you know if the lame gentleman with the dark hair is out?" he asked,

"He's certainly out. Left on the Montreal express this morning."

"You're quite sure of that?"

"Yep," said the lad. "I put his baggage in the transfer wagon for the depot."

Foster went to the rotunda and sat down to smoke. He felt savage, for there was no doubt that he had muddled things. Daly had again escaped him, but he thought he saw what Walters' visit meant. Three of the gang had met to make some plot, which might threaten Lawrence, whom they no doubt thought dangerous. It was ominous that Walters had gone east. Daly was obviously afraid of arrest, but the others seemed to think themselves safe and Telford was stopping at the hotel, although it looked as if he were being watched. Foster wondered whether the fellow suspected this.

Another matter demanded consideration. News of what he had done in Newcastle had probably reached the gang, and he had a check belonging to a member of it in his wallet. If they knew this, which was possible, he might be in some danger, and taking it for granted that the watcher was a detective or acting for Hulton, it would simplify things and free him from a grave responsibility if he told what he knew. For all that, he did not mean to do so. His object was to save his comrade's name.

In the afternoon he played pool with Telford, who carelessly asked him a few clever questions, which Foster answered with a misleading frankness that he hoped would put the other off the track. In the evening he read the newspapers and tried to overcome a growing anxiety about Lawrence. He ought to follow Daly, but did not know where he had gone, and thought that if he waited Telford might give him a clew.

There were no letters for him next morning, but soon after breakfast the bell-boy brought him a telegram and he tore open the envelope. The message was from Lucy Stephen and read:

"Mountaineering friend just arrived. Snow dangerous now. Would feel safer if you could join us. Come if possible."

For a moment or two Foster sat still, with his face set. Lucy was guarded, but the mountaineering friend was Walters and she had given him an urgent hint that he was needed. Then he picked up a railroad folder that lay near and noting the time of Walters' arrival, saw that the telegram had been delayed. After this he glanced at his watch and ran out into the street.

A trail of black smoke moved across the roofs and he heard the roll of wheels as the heavy train climbed the incline. He had got Lucy's warning ten minutes too late, and could not leave until next day.

XXVIII

THE LOG BRIDGE

Lawrence had gone to his room to rest and Lucy Stephen was sitting alone in the veranda when she heard the roar of an east-bound train coming up the valley. It stopped, which did not often happen, and she put down her book and looked out at the opening in the pines that led to the track. The smoke that rose into the clear, cold air began to move, and Lucy frowned, because the train had just stopped long enough for passengers to alight. Although the hotel was generally full in summer, there were then only a few other guests, quiet people whose acquaintance she had made, and she did not wish Lawrence to be disturbed by new arrivals. He was getting better, but not so quickly as she wished. Besides, she had another ground for anxiety.

A man came up the road between the pines. It was a relief to see one man instead of a party, but she went to the glass front and watched him with keen curiosity. He vanished among the trees where the road curved and when he came out not far off she set her lips. It was Walters and her vague fears were realized, but he would not reach the hotel for a few minutes and this gave her time to brace herself.

Ringling a bell, she asked for a telegraph form and hurriedly filling it up, said to the waiting lad, "Take this down to the office."

The lad wore a smart uniform and was called a page, but he had the pertness that generally marks the bellboy in Western hotels.

"Certainly, miss. But I reckon I'll be wanted when the stranger who's coming up the road gets here. Guess it will be all right if I take your message when he's fixed."

Lucy, who scarcely heard, sent the page away. Walters would arrive in a minute or two, and now she had warned Foster she thought she had better not avoid him. If she hid her distrust, she might find out something, and she would sooner he saw her before he met Lawrence. There was nobody else in the veranda just then. Walters came in with a smile that somehow intensified her antagonism, but she waited calmly, although she did not give him her hand.

"It looks as if you were rather surprised to see me," he remarked.

"I am," said Lucy. "Perhaps that's not unnatural!"

He laughed and since she did not suggest his sitting down, remained standing in a rather graceful pose. She meant to hide her real feelings if she could, but as she had been angry when he left it was better that he should think her angry now. A marked change in her attitude would be illogical and might excite suspicion.

"I suppose that means you blame me for Lawrence's illness and haven't forgiven me yet?" he suggested.

"I do blame you. You let the guide get drunk and left Lawrence on the *couloir*. Then you were a long time coming back, when you knew the danger he was in."

"Well," said Walters in an apologetic tone, "I suppose all this is true, but I must point out that when we slipped down the gully it was impossible to get up again. Then there were some big crevasses in the glacier and I had a half-drunk man to help across; I really didn't know he would drink too much when I gave him the flask. However, although perhaps I was rather careless, I hope you won't forbid my seeing Lawrence."

"I couldn't forbid your seeing him, as you must know."

"You couldn't, in a sense," Walters agreed. "Still, of course, your wishes go a long way with him, and I imagine he is what one might call amenable."

"I don't understand that."

Walters smiled. "I always found Lawrence good-humored and it would surprise me if he did anything you didn't like. I don't know that I can go farther without venturing on an open compliment. But I'm anxious to know how he is."

"He is getting better, but must be kept quiet for some time. But why did you come here?"

"It ought to be obvious," Walters replied in a tone of mild protest. "You blame me for my friend's illness, and though I don't know what I left undone, I am, in a sense, responsible; anyway, I was with him. Well, I found I had to go east, and determined to put off my business for a day or two so I could stop over and see how he is getting on."

"You may see him. But you must remember that he isn't strong and needs quietness."

"I'll be very careful," Walters said with a grateful look. "May I take it that your consent is a sign that you'll try to forgive me for my share in the accident?"

Lucy forced a smile. "We'll see how you keep your promise."

She sat down, feeling rather limp, when he left her. He had, on the surface, taken a very proper line, and his excuse for coming was plausible, but she knew that it was false. The man had meant to leave her lover to freeze among the rocks and was horribly clever. It was hard to preserve her calm when she hated and feared him, and although she thought she had not acted badly, the interview had been trying. Besides, Lawrence was generous and not very discriminating. Walters might find a way of disarming the suspicions Foster had roused.

When the page showed Walters to his room, he said to the lad, "I want somebody to go to the station for my bag. Have they a telegraph office?"

"Yep; I'm going down to send a wire. Office isn't open long. Agent quits as soon as the east-bound freight comes through."

"I suppose the wire's from Miss Stephen?"

The page nodded and Walters gave him twenty-five cents. "Well, if you can wait a little, I'll have a message to send; it will save you a journey."

The boy hesitated; but the money banished his doubts. "All right; you'd better get it written. The freight's nearly due."

Walters went to Lawrence's room before he wrote the telegram, and met Lucy again at dinner. There were only two tables in use in the large dining-room, and the waiter sent him to Mrs. Stephen's. Lucy wondered whether Walters had arranged this with the man beforehand, but it gave her an opportunity of watching him and she did not object. She admitted that he had nerve and tact, for although she feared him and her mother shared her distrust, he was able to banish the constraint both felt and amuse the party. Lucy could not tell what Lawrence thought, but he laughed at the other's stories and now and then bantered him.

After dinner Walters left them and when they went; to Mrs. Stephen's sitting-room Lucy remarked rather sharply: "You seemed to find Walters amusing!"

"He is amusing," Lawrence answered. "In fact, the fellow puzzles me."

"You mean he couldn't talk in that good-humored, witty way if he had plotted to leave you on the *couloir*?"

"Well," said Lawrence, "I suppose I did feel something of the kind."

"I don't know that it's very logical," Lucy rejoined, hiding her alarm. "You agreed with Foster's conclusions when he was here."

"I did, to some extent. The way Jake argued out the matter made things look pretty bad."

"But they look better now? Walters was talking to you in your room?"

"He didn't say much about our climb; just a word or two of regret for his carelessness in not seeing what had happened to the guide."

"Words that were very carefully chosen, no doubt!"

"Well," said Lawrence, "I'm frankly puzzled; the more I think about our adventure, the harder it is to decide how much one could hold Walters accountable for. It *was* difficult to throw me up the rope without slipping, and there was only a small, projecting rock, on which he might have broken his bones, to prevent his tobogganing to the bottom. If he had slid past it, he would have been killed."

"Walters wouldn't hesitate about a risk. It might have looked like an accident if you hadn't heard Foster's story."

Lawrence knitted his brows, rather impatiently. "After all, Jake's a romantic fellow, and his explanation's theatrical."

"You don't like theatrical things," Mrs. Stephen interposed. "You must admit that they happen, but you feel it's ridiculous that they should happen to you."

"I imagine I do feel that," Lawrence agreed with a smile. "When they happen to somebody else they're not so unnatural."

Lucy tried to preserve her self-control, but her tone was sharp as she said, "Then you feel inclined to forgive Walters the pain and illness he caused you."

"It would be harder to forgive him your anxiety," Lawrence rejoined, and his face set hard. "In fact, if I knew he really had plotted the thing-----" He paused and resumed: "One would be justified in killing a brute who could do what you imagine, but there's a difference between hating a crime and punishing the man accused of it before you have proved his guilt. In the meantime, I'm trying to keep an open mind."

"But you will be careful and not trust him far," Lucy urged.

"I'll run no risks; I've some ground for being cautious."

Lucy said no more. Lawrence was not well yet and sometimes got obstinate if one argued with him. She thought he would be prudent, but it was comforting to remember that she had telegraphed for his comrade. Unfortunately, she did not know that her message was then in the page's pocket. He had waited some time for Walters' telegram, and when he reached the station found the agent gone. In consequence, fearing a reprimand, he resolved to send the messages in the morning and say nothing about the matter.

The next day was clear and calm, with bright sunshine on the snow, and Mrs. Stephen agreed when Lawrence insisted on going for a short walk with her and some of the guests. Walters joined the party, although Lucy tried to leave him behind, and they leisurely climbed a winding path among the pines. The snow was thin and crisp beneath the trees, the air exhilarating, and through openings they caught glimpses of fissured glaciers, rocks that glistened in the steely light, and majestic glittering peaks. The pines were straight and tall, and the great soft-colored trunks rose in long climbing ranks against the blue shadow on the snow.

They stopped for a few minutes at the foot of a crag, and then Lawrence, who had been sitting rather slackly on a log, got up with a shiver.

"The air's keen," he said. "Can't we go back another way where we'll get the sun?"

One of the party said there was a lower and more open trail, and they went down until they reached a narrow track that followed the edge of a steep fall to the river. The hillside above made a sharp angle with the pines that cut, in scattered cones of somber green, against the long, glittering slope. Below, the ground dropped nearly sheer to the green flood that roared among the ice. Although the trail was safe enough, Lucy kept close to Lawrence and was glad to see Walters talking to one of the others some distance behind. She felt jaded, for she had not relaxed her watchfulness since the man arrived. By and by Lawrence gave her a grateful smile.

"You look tired; I expect I'm something of a responsibility. If you like, I'll make an excuse for stopping in until Walters goes."

"No," she said with an effort, "that would be cowardly and not good for you. After all, I may be giving my imagination rein; but I wish he hadn't come."

"He won't be here long. Anyhow, we'll keep out of his way as much as we can for the rest of the time."

"That's a relief. Still, I expect you really think you are indulging me."

"I don't know what to think," Lawrence replied. "You're clever, and Jake, who takes your view, is not a fool. But it doesn't look as if Walters meant to do me much harm."

"He can't, so long as you don't give him an opportunity."

Lawrence's eyes twinkled. "And you'll take care that I don't? Well, it's rather nice to be protected."

Lucy blushed. "If you would take things seriously sometimes-----"

"If I did, you'd find me dull. Now I like you exactly as you are, except that, in one way, I'd sooner you were not so anxious about me. That's partly why I'm not so serious as you expect I'm afraid you'd get worse if I played up to you."

"Never mind me," said Lucy. "Only take care!"

By and by the slope grew gentler, and tall forest crept up the hill when they came to a ravine a torrent had worn out of the mountain side. The ravine was narrow and for a short distance below the top the banks shelved steeply; then a wall of rock fell straight to the water that brawled in the bottom of the deep gap. The light was dim down there, but one could see livid flashes of foam through a haze of spray. The trail had been made by lumbermen or prospectors, who had provided a bridge by chopping a big fir so that it fell across the chasm. Somebody had made the passage easier by roughly squaring its upper surface, though it is seldom a Canadian bushman takes this precaution with his primitive bridge. There was no reason anybody with normal nerve should hesitate to cross, but the party stopped.

"You have gone farther than usual to-day, Featherstone, and perhaps you'd sooner cut out the bridge," said one. "I think we could get round the head of the canon without lengthening the distance much."

Lawrence smiled. "My object is to keep on going farther than I did before, and I don't see why the log should bother me. It's my legs that are weak---not my head."

"Very well," said the other. "I'll go first and Miss Chisholm will come next."

"Am I to be encouraged or shamed into crossing?" Lawrence asked with a laugh.

He let them go, and Lucy did not object. Lawrence was not well yet, but she had seen him climb among the crevasses and knew his steadiness. Then, although she did not know how much this counted, she was proud of his courage and forgot that physical weakness sometimes affects one's nerve. Walters could not harm him, because he was not near enough.

When the first two had gone over, Lawrence walked out upon the log. Lucy was not afraid, but she watched and remarked that he seemed unusually careful. After a few paces, he moved slowly, and when near the middle stopped. She saw him clench his hands as he tried to brace himself.

"Go on, Lawrence," she said, as quietly as she could.

He moved another pace or two uncertainly, and then stopped again, and Lucy struggled with her terror as she tried to think. If he were well, it would not be difficult to turn and come back, or sit upon the log, but either would be dangerous if his nerve had gone. She had failed to rouse him and durst not try again. If he slipped or stumbled, he would plunge into the canon. It was horrible to reflect that she had allowed him to make the venture. Then, throwing off the numbing fear, she sprang to her feet.

"Stand quite still; I'm coming to help you," she said in a strained voice and went towards the log.

Next moment she was seized from behind, and Walters ran past. She struggled fiercely, biting her lips as she stopped the scream that might startle her lover, and heard the man who held her breathing hard. But he held her firmly and she stopped struggling, with a paralyzing horror that made her muscles limp. Still, she could see and think, and the scene fixed itself upon her brain like a photograph; long afterwards she could remember each minute detail.

The log occupied the foreground of the picture, running boldly across the gap in the pines, with a shadowy gulf beneath. Near the middle, Lawrence stood slackly, with his back to her, and behind him Walters walked across the trunk. His step was firm and agile, his figure well-proportioned and athletic, and it was somehow obvious that he relished the opportunity of showing his powers. Afterwards, she hated him for his vanity.

It was plain that little physical help could be given. All that was possible was moral support; a firm, guiding grasp that would restore the shaken man's confidence, and the comfort of feeling there was somebody near who was not afraid. But a very slight push the wrong way, or even an unsteadiness in the hand that should have guided, might be fatal. Lawrence was at the mercy of a man who had plotted to destroy him and could do so now without risk. Lucy could not warn him, because if he were startled, he would fall. Waiting in an agony of suspense, she saw Walters grasp his shoulder.

"Steady, partner; we'll soon be across," he said in a quiet, reassuring voice, and Lawrence's slack pose stiffened, as if he had gathered confidence.

Lucy thought he did not know who had spoken, but the horrible tension did not slacken yet, though Lawrence began to move forward. Walters came close behind, rather guiding than supporting him, and in a few moments they stepped down on the other side. Then Lucy gasped and logs and pines got blurred and indistinct. She conquered the faintness and went resolutely towards the log.

"Wait and let me help you," somebody said.

"No," she answered in a strained voice; "I'm quite steady."

She crossed the log without a tremor and running to where Lawrence sat put her arm round him. Lawrence said nothing, but took and held her hand.

XXIX

FOSTER ARRIVES

When Lucy looked up, the others had gathered round and Walters smiled sympathetically.

"Are you better?" he asked Lawrence.

"Yes; we'll go on in a minute. I don't know what was the matter; felt dizzy and couldn't keep my balance. Think I needed a rest."

"The thing's obvious," Walters agreed. "After seeing you on the glaciers, I reckon your nerve's all right, but you're not well yet and we brought you up the last hill too fast. The exertion disturbed the beating of your heart and a few drops too much blood sent to the brain makes a big difference. That's what happened; it's our fault."

Lucy was grateful for the explanation, and thought it correct, but she noted with some concern that Lawrence did not show the embarrassment she had expected, which indicated that he had not recovered yet. In the meantime, Walters gave her a look of ironical amusement. She could not resent this and it seemed ridiculous to doubt him, but she did.

"Thank you; you were very quick and cool," she said with an effort.

Walters tactfully bowed his acknowledgment, as if he did not want to press his claim on her gratitude, and Lucy turned to one of the others.

"Was it you who held me back?" she asked, and when the man nodded, resumed: "Of course, you were right. I might have startled him and we would both have fallen."

"That's what I was afraid of. Anyhow, Mr. Walters deserves your thanks most. He saw what was needed and did it smartly."

Then Lawrence got up, with some color in his face, and gave Walters his hand. "I expect I would have fallen if you hadn't come along," he said and turned to the rest. "I feel I must apologize for frightening you. My best excuse is that I wasn't as fit as I thought."

They urged him to rest and one offered to run to the hotel for brandy, but he declared he was able to go on, and they tactfully began to talk about something else and after a few minutes let him drop behind. He was grateful and went slowly, with his hand on Lucy's arm. Sometimes he pressed it gently and she gave him a tender look, but said nothing. She could not talk; her relief was too great. When they reached the hotel Lawrence went to his room, and soon afterwards Lucy met Walters on the veranda.

"I hope Lawrence is not much the worse," he said.

Lucy remembered the part she had taken and resolved to play it out.

"I expect he will be as well as usual after a rest. You took a very generous revenge."

Walters laughed. "After all, I was only a little quicker than the rest and really ran no risk. I was behind him and he couldn't get hold of me. In fact, I don't know that I'd have had grit enough to stick to him if he had slipped."

He left her and Lucy could find no fault with his reply, which she admitted was frank and modest. For all that, her distrust had not been banished, and when, after a time, Lawrence came down, she said, "I suppose you're now satisfied that it wasn't Walters' fault you were left on the *couloir*?"

"Aren't you?" Lawrence asked with some surprise.

"No," said Lucy firmly. "I'm not quite satisfied. You see, there were a number of accidents, all leading to one result. Coincidences of that kind don't happen unless somebody arranges them."

Lawrence laughed. "Then they're not coincidences. Do you still hold Walters accountable for the accidents?"

"If he was accountable, they wouldn't be accidents," Lucy rejoined with some color in her face.

"A fair retort! But let's be serious. I'm not sure I'd have fallen off the log if I'd been left alone, but it's very possible. Walters' help was useful, whether he saved my life or not, and you can't deny that he meant to save it."

"No; I think he meant to save you. Did you know who it was when he touched you?"

"I did. Remembering Jake's theory, I saw it was possible he had come to push me off, but I knew he hadn't. That's why I gave him my hand afterwards."

"Ah!" said Lucy. "I was sorry when you did that, because I knew what it meant"

Lawrence looked at her deprecatingly. "I don't like you to be prejudiced, dear, even on my account. I can do nothing that might injure Walters now and can't treat him with suspicion; but he's going soon and, if it's any comfort, I won't leave the hotel grounds for the next day or two. Anyhow I've rather overdone things lately."

"Thank you for the promise," Lucy said, and was glad when her mother joined them, for she felt baffled and wanted to think.

She hated Walters with a half-instinctive hatred that reflection showed her was justified; but beyond the concession he had made Lawrence would not be moved. On the surface, so to speak, he was logical and she was not. She was sure Walters had plotted to leave him on the couloir, although she admitted that he had meant to save his life when he turned dizzy upon the trunk. It was possible that he had yielded to sudden generous emotion, but she did not accept the explanation. The fellow was cold-blooded and calculating; she thought he had deliberately let his opportunity pass, because, after this, nobody would believe him guilty if he found another. But he must not find an opportunity, and it was a keen relief to know that Foster would soon arrive. She had not told Lawrence yet; it might be better to let Foster make an excuse for his visit.

When it began to get dark, she stood near the glass front of the veranda and glanced at her watch. She could see for some distance down the valley and knew that the smoke of a locomotive would spread in a dark cloud across the tops of the pines. The train was late, but there was no smoke yet. It was a long climb from sea-level at Vancouver Inlet and in winter the line was sometimes blocked. There was no obvious ground for alarm, but somehow she was worse afraid of Walters than before.

The massed pines gradually faded to a formless blur on the cold blue-gray slopes of snow. There was no sound from the valley by the roar of the river, and by and by a servant turned on the lamps. Lucy could now see nothing outside and shivered as she looked at her watch. She hoped no accident had delayed the tram.

In the meantime, Lawrence, who was sitting near her mother, had picked up a book, but put it down when Walters came in, and Lucy felt a curious tremor of repugnance as she glanced at him. It was a shrinking she sometimes experienced at the sight of a noxious insect. Yet there was nothing about Walters to excite aversion. He was rather a handsome man, and stood in a careless pose, smiling at the group.

"The trouble about a pleasant time is that it comes to an end, and I'll have to pull out to-morrow," he said. "When are you going to give me the photographs you promised, Lawrence?"

"I'll get them now and you can choose which you like. They're in my room."

"I want one with Miss Stephen in it as well as yourself," Walters replied. "It will be something to remind me of our climbs."

"Send the boy for the packet," Lucy interposed.

"I think the drawer's locked; anyhow I don't want the boy to upset my things," Lawrence objected.

"Then I'll go with you," said Walters. "It will save you taking the packet back and you can get ready for dinner while you are upstairs."

Lawrence got up. "Very well; we'll go now."

"Take the elevator, even if you have to wait," Lucy said as they went to the door.

Lawrence had chosen a room at the top of the building because the view was good and it got the sun early in the morning, but now and then walked up the stairs to see how fast he was recovering his strength. After a minute or two, Lucy heard the elevator start and its harsh rumble jarred her nerves. The electric lifts they use in Canada seldom run silently, and the elevator had not been working well. Lucy was annoyed that the sound disturbed her, and imagined she had not recovered from the shock she got during their walk. She was nervous and admitted that she did not like Lawrence to be out of her sight when Walters was with him. She tried to persuade herself that this was foolish, but could not banish her uneasiness. Then Mrs. Stephen looked up.

"There's the train; I didn't hear it stop."

Lucy listened. She had forgotten the train for the last few minutes, and it seemed to be going fast. The sharp snorting of the mountain engine and rhythmic clang of wheels seemed to indicate that its long climb had not been interrupted. The Montreal express did not stop at the flag station unless the conductor was warned. She felt daunted as she realized that Foster might not have come, and she had not told her mother she had telegraphed for him.

A few minutes later she heard steps outside; then the door opened, and she felt a thrill of satisfaction as Foster came in with Pete. He looked grave and rather hot, as if he had been walking fast, but it was strangely comforting to see him. Besides, she liked his big companion, who waited with Scottish calm.

Foster bowed to Mrs. Stephen and then turned to Lucy.

"Is Lawrence all right?"

"Yes. He overtired himself this morning, but is better now."

Foster looked relieved. "Is Walters here?"

"He goes to-morrow."

"Ah!" said Foster, as if he thought this important. "I should have arrived yesterday if your message had come earlier. I got it just after the train started in the morning."

Mrs. Stephen looked at her daughter, but Lucy offered no explanation. Foster's abruptness disturbed her. He obviously wanted to understand the situation, but seemed to think he had no time to lose.

"I sent the telegram half an hour before the office closed and as the agent goes early you ought to have got it in the evening," she said.

"Then it must have been kept back. Where's Lawrence now?"

"He went to his room with Walters about ten minutes since."

Foster beckoned Pete. "Then I'll go straight up; I know the number."

They went out and Lucy sat down, feeling disturbed but somewhat comforted. It was plain that Foster shared her fears and knew more than she did, but in another minute or two he would join his comrade, and Lawrence would be safe when he was there.

In the meantime, Walters lighted a cigarette Lawrence gave him in his room and sat down to examine the photographs. There were a number of views of the mountains and a group of figures occupied the foreground of several. A guest at the hotel with some talent for photography had taken the pictures, and after a time Walters picked out two in which Lucy and Lawrence appeared.

"I'll take these, if I'm not robbing you," he said and waited until Lawrence put on a Tuxedo jacket, when he resumed: "Well, I suppose we had better go down. Are you coming?"

He went out and as Lawrence crossed the floor to turn off the light, called back: "I forgot the pictures; they're on the bureau. The elevator's coming up and I'll keep it when it's here."

Lawrence told him to do so. The lift had stopped between the floors on their ascent, and the electric light inside it had gone out, while the boy said something about his not being able to run it much longer. The photographs, however, were not on the bureau and Lawrence searched the room before he found them on the bed. Then he turned off the light and went into the passage, which was rather dark. The lamp at the shaft was not burning, but he could see Walters beckoning at the gate.

"He wants to get down before the motor stops," the latter said.

Lawrence hurried along the passage, and when he reached the shaft Walters put his hand on the folding ironwork.

"Come along; his light's out," he said to Lawrence, and added, as if to somebody in the lift: "Start her off! I'll shut the gate."

Lawrence stepped forward and then clutched the ironwork as his advanced foot went down into empty space. Instead of the floor of the lift, there was a dark gap beneath him, and he knew he had come very near to plunging down the shaft. He hung over it, with one foot on the edge and his hand on an iron bar, and looked at the black hole with horror as he braced himself for the effort to swing his body back. There was some strain upon his right arm, because his right knee was bent and his other leg dangled over the shaft. His hold on the ironwork had saved him and he must use it to regain

the passage.

Next moment a hand fastened on his wrist and he thought Walters had come to his help. But the fellow was stupid; he ought to have seized his shoulder. Then the sweat ran down his face as he guessed the truth. Walters had not come to help; he meant to throw him down the shaft.

He set his teeth and felt the veins on his forehead swell with the effort he made. He was in horrible danger and must fight for his life. Walters was trying to pull his hand off the bar, but he resolved that if the fellow succeeded, he should go down the shaft with him. But although his situation was desperate, he did not mean to fall.

Then Walters' fingers slipped away, and something jarred Lawrence's knuckles as he got a firmer hold. The brute had struck him with a pistol butt and the pain was sharp, but he did not let go. Though his muscles were badly strained and his brain struggled with numbing horror, he could think. Walters could have made him loose his grasp had he used his knife, but the thing must look like an accident and there must be no cut to show. The fellow had set a cunning trap for him, but he might escape yet.

Then he thought he heard steps, but his hearing was dull, for there was a sound like bells in his ears and the hand fastened on his wrist again. He arched his back to ease the strain on his arm and wondered vaguely how long he could hold on. Afterwards, he calculated that he had hung over the shaft for about a minute.

Suddenly his antagonist's grasp slackened and his hand was loose. There were running steps; somebody seized his arm and pulled him strongly back. As he staggered across the passage he heard a heavy blow. Walters, reeling past, struck the wall and leaned against it with blood on his white face. He put his hand into his pocket, but a man sprang forward and grappled with him.

They lurched away from the wall and fell down the stairs. Another man ran down after them, and Lawrence, who felt very limp, followed awkwardly. There were lights on the next landing and he saw the struggling men strike the banisters and stop. One had his hand loose and held a pistol; his tense, savage face was uppermost. The man who had gone down after them stooped and struck him with his fist. The struggle stopped, and Lawrence sat down on the steps and tried to pull himself together. He knew now how his illness had weakened him.

Then Foster came up the stairs, very hot and breathless, with his jacket torn, and stopping beside Lawrence, forced a smile.

"It's lucky I got here when I did," he said. "The brute yonder stopped me coming yesterday."

Foster did not remember his reply, but he got up and went down to where Walters lay unconscious. As he reached the spot the hotel manager and a waiter arrived.

"What's the matter? Is he dead?" the manager asked.

"I don't know," said Foster coolly. "It will save the police some trouble if he is."

"But I want to know what's happened,"

Foster indicated a pistol lying on the steps. "That's his; he tried to use it. I'll tell you about the thing later. In the meantime, you can take him to his room and telegraph for the police." He paused and beckoned Pete. "Go with them and don't lose sight of him until I come. He'll probably come round soon."

"Weel," said Pete dryly, "I'm thinking he'll no' be verra sensible for a while yet, but I'll see he doesna' get away."

He and the waiter picked up Walters, and Foster turned to Lawrence.

"Now I'd better wash and straighten myself up. Perhaps you can lend me a jacket."

Lawrence laughed, a rather strained laugh. "Certainly; come along. You're a curious combination, partner. I've called you romantic, but you're not a sentimentalist when you get into action."

XXX

RUN DOWN

Foster did not know what Lawrence told Lucy, because he was occupied for some time in his room. His lip was cut, his face was bruised, and there was a lump on his head where he had struck the steps. After he had attended to the injuries and frowned at his reflection in the glass, he rang the bell, and asking for some paper took out his fountain pen. It was not easy to write, but there was something to be done that had better not be put off. He knew now what the gang was capable of, and meant to leave a record, in case an accident of the kind to which his comrade had nearly fallen a victim happened to him. Moreover, it might be a safeguard to let his antagonists know that they could not destroy his evidence if they took his life.

He related his adventures in Scotland, his pursuit of Daly, and his surmises about the gang, and then going down, asked the hotel clerk to witness his signature and put the document in the safe. After this, he went to the veranda, where Lucy came to meet him with shining eyes.

"Jake," she said with emotion, "I felt we would be safe as soon as you arrived. If you knew how I listened for the train and longed for your step! But the wretch has hurt you; your face is bruised and cut." Foster felt embarrassed, but laughed. "My face will soon recover its usual charm, and if it's any comfort, the other fellow looks, and no doubt feels, much worse." Then he turned to Lawrence, who sat near. "You have evidently been telling Miss Stephen a highly-colored tale."

"Lucy!" she corrected him. "I'm not going to call you Mr. Foster. You're our friend---mother's and mine----as well as Lawrence's." She stopped and shuddered. "But you shall not make a joke of what you did! What might have happened won't bear thinking of. If you hadn't come in time!"

Foster, seeing her emotion, glanced at Mrs. Stephen, begging her to interfere, but her strained look indicated that her feelings harmonized with the girl's. Then Lawrence interposed with a grin---

"Jake always does come in time---that's one of his virtues. He's the kind of man who's there when he's wanted. I don't know how he does it, because he's not really clever."

"Lawrence," said Lucy severely, "sometimes you're not as humorous as you think."

"Then I hope I'm tactful, because you're making poor Jake feel horribly awkward. I believe he thought you wanted to kiss him and was very nearly running away."

Lucy blushed and Lawrence resumed: "He can't deny it; Jake, you know you would have run away! However, I knew what I was doing when I made him my partner some time ago. Jake has a romantic imagination that now and then leads

him into trouble, but although it's perhaps as much luck as genius, when he undertakes a thing he puts it over. For example, there was the sawmill-----"

Lucy stopped him with a gesture. "We are not going to talk about the sawmill. It was your---I mean our---troubles Jake plunged into, and pluck that can't be daunted is better than genius. But you're an English Borderer and therefore half a Scot; you hate to let people guess your feelings."

"Jake kens," said Lawrence, smiling. "Before very long you'll be a Borderer, too."

Lucy's eyes were very soft as she turned to Foster. "Then I must adopt their customs. I think they have a motto, 'Dinna' forget.'"

To Foster's relief, the hotel manager came in and looked at the two ladies hesitatingly. Neither took the hint and Lucy said, rather sharply, "Well?"

"Mr. Walters has come round and demands to be let out of his room. Your man's there, Mr. Foster, and won't let him move."

"Pete's splendid!" said Lucy. "I haven't thanked him yet. Perhaps you had better go, Lawrence, but take Jake."

Foster beckoned the manager and when they were outside asked: "When do you expect the police?"

"Some time to-morrow."

"Then we must watch the fellow closely until they come."

They stopped at a room on the second floor, and the manager frowned when he turned the handle of the door, which would not open.

"Wha's there the noo?" a sharp voice demanded.

Foster laughed as he answered, the door was opened, and they saw Walters, who looked much the worse for the struggle, lying on a couch, while Pete stood grimly on guard. Walters glanced at Foster.

"You're something of a surprise," he said. "We didn't expect much from you."

"That's a mistake other people have made and regretted," Lawrence remarked.

"Well," said Walters, "I demand to be let out."

Foster shook his head. "I think not. The room is comfortable, and you won't be here long."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Hand you to the police."

"On what ground?"

"Attempted murder, to begin with," said Foster dryly.

Walters turned to the manager. "A man can't be arrested without a warrant. I guess you understand you're making trouble for yourself by permitting these fellows to lock me in."

"I don't know if it's quite legal or not," Foster admitted, addressing the manager, who looked irresolute. "Anyhow, you're not responsible, because we're going to take the matter out of your hands. Besides, you haven't much of a staff just now and couldn't interfere."

"In a way, that's so," the manager doubtfully agreed. "I don't want a disturbance in my hotel; I've had enough."

"Very well," said Walters, seeing he could expect no help from him. "But I'm not going to have this wooden-faced Scotchman in my room. The fool won't let me move. If you don't take him away, I'll break the furniture. I can do that, although I'm not able to throw the big brute out."

Foster walked to the window, which he opened. It was some distance from the ground and there was nothing that would be a help in climbing down. Besides, Walters did not look capable of trying to escape.

"We'll take him away," he said, and beckoning Pete and the manager, went out. He locked the door on the other side and resumed: "Send up a comfortable chair, a blanket, and a packet of tobacco. If there's any trouble, you can state that you acted on compulsion and we'll support you, but I rather think you can seize and hold a criminal when you catch him in the act. Stop here until I relieve you, Pete."

Pete nodded and the others went to the dining-room. After dinner, Foster took his turn on watch, but by and by Pete reappeared, holding the page by the arm. He signed to Foster, who went down the passage to meet him.

"I thought I'd maybe better tak' a look roon the back o' the hoose and found the laddie aneath the window. He had a bit paper in his hand."

Foster told him to watch Walters' door, and frowned at the lad.

"I reckon you'd sooner keep out of jail."

"Sure," said the lad, with an effort at carelessness; "I'm not going to get in."

"Well," said Foster grimly, "you're taking steep chances just now. The police will be here to-morrow and there'll be trouble if they know you tried to help their prisoner escape. Where's the telegram he threw you down?"

"It wasn't a telegram."

"A letter's just as bad. The wisest thing you can do is to give it me."

The lad hesitated, but let him have the crumpled envelope. "I was to give it one of the train hands when the next freight stops for water."

Foster opened the envelope, which was addressed to Telford at the mining town. The letter was written guardedly, but after studying it with knitted brows he thought he understood its purport.

"How much were you to get for sending this?" he asked.

"Mr. Walters threw me three dollars. I allow I'd have to give something to the brakesman."

"After all, I don't see why you shouldn't deliver the thing," Foster said thoughtfully. "That means you can keep the money, but as the brakesman's not allowed to carry letters, he'll probably want a dollar. Wait until I get a new envelope."

The boy went off, looking relieved, and Foster returned to his chair at Walters' door. On the whole, he thought he would hear something of the gang on the morrow, and if his suspicions were correct, looked forward to an interesting meeting. Telford had been asked for help, which he would try to send. The west-bound freight had not passed yet, and if it came soon, should reach the mining town early in the morning. Foster lighted his pipe, wrapped the blanket round his legs, and opened a book he had brought.

Next day two policemen arrived in a light wagon and took Walters away. Lawrence was compelled to go with them, and although but little disturbance was made, Foster imagined all the occupants of the hotel knew about the matter. He had ground for regretting this, and kept a close watch on the page whose duties were light just then, which enabled him to wander about the building and see what was going on. He expected to hear something when the train from the coast arrived, but took care to be about when the express from Montreal was due. He had a suspicion that Daly had gone up the line.

The west-bound train came first, and Foster, who had sent Pete to the station, sat in the veranda, where he could see anybody who entered the hotel. The train stopped and went on again, but nobody came up the road, and after a time Pete returned. Three passengers had got down, but they looked like bush ranchers and had taken the trail to a settlement some distance off. Pete, however, did not know Daly, and Foster was not satisfied. He thought the fellow might have bought a cheap skin coat such as the bush ranchers wore. Going out, he walked through the wood that grew close up to the back of the building. After all, Daly might try to find out something from one of the servants before coming to the front entrance.

The sun had sunk behind the range and the light was dim among the pines. The air was keen and a bitter wind that came down the valley in gusts rustled the masses of heavy needles, while the roar of the river throbbed among the stately trunks. This was in Foster's favor, because he had to make his way between fallen branches and through thick undergrowth, and wanted to do so without being heard. He was a good hunter and bushman, and did not think there was much risk of his being seen.

For a time he heard nothing suspicious and began to feel keen disappointment. He had hoped that Walters' message would bring Daly to his rescue, but it looked as if it had not done so. Then, as he stood nearly breast-high among dry brush and withered fern, he heard a faint noise. Not far off, a narrow trail led through the trees to the back of the hotel. Standing quite still, he searched the wood with narrowed eyes.

It was shadowy all around him, but where the trees grew farther apart their tall straight trunks cut against the glimmer of the snow. The noise had stopped, but he could see anybody who crossed the nearest opening, and waited, tense and highly-strung. Then he heard steps coming from the hotel, and an indistinct object emerged from the gloom. It was a man, taking some care to move quietly. When he got nearer, Foster, knowing there was dark brush behind him, thrust his arm into the fern and made it rustle as a gust of wind swept the wood.

The man, who wore an old skin coat, stopped and looked round, and Foster saw his face. It was Daly, and he seemed uncertain if the wind had made the noise or not. After standing motionless for a few moments, he took out his watch, and then moved on again as softly as he could.

The meaning of this was plain. Daly had learned that Walters had been taken away by the police and had concluded that Lawrence meant to fight. As it was too late to interfere, he meant to make his escape. Foster resolved to prevent this if he could, but Daly had the advantage of an open trail, while he was entangled in the brush. He crept out and pushed through the wood as fast and silently as possible, but when looking for a way round a thicket caught his foot and fell among some rotten branches with a crash. He got up, growling at the accident, for there was no use in following the other after this, although he did not feel beaten yet. Daly no doubt hoped to get away by the Montreal express, but would hide in the bush until the last moment.

Foster went back to the hotel for Pete, and leaving a note for Lawrence, dressed for a journey and took the road to the station. On reaching a bend, however, he plunged into the wood and made his way to the line, beside which he and Pete crept in the gloom of the trees, and only came into the open for a few yards near the agent's shack. Here they sat down behind a big water tank and Foster felt satisfied. If they had reached the station without being noticed, they would find Daly when he got on board the train, and if he had seen them, they had cut off his best chance of escape.

It was nearly dark and very cold, but Foster was glad the train was late. By and by he got up and lighted his pipe, though he was careful how he held the match. If Daly was hiding near, he did not want the fellow to see his face, but the latter would not expect anybody who might be on his track to smoke. Strolling carelessly round to the front of the shack, Foster opened the door and asked the agent: "Are you going to stop the east-bound?"

"I am," said the other. "Got a wire to hold her up."

"Ah," said Foster. "I expect we can get tickets on board, but if you don't mind, we'll wait in here. It's freezing pretty fierce."

He imagined that Telford or another of the gang had sent the telegram, and sat down when Pete came in. He heard the wind among the pines and the humming of the telegraph wires, but for a time this was all. Then a faint throbbing came up the valley and got louder until he could distinguish the snorting of a locomotive.

The snorting stopped, a bell began to toll, and with lights flashing the cars rolled past the shack. Foster waited a moment or two, standing at the window, and then as the conductor called "All aboard" saw a man run along the line and jump on to the step of the end car. Then, beckoning Pete, he dashed out and got on board as the train began to move.

It was with a thrill of triumph he sat down in a corner as the cars gathered speed. They would not stop for some time and the game was in his hands at last. The long chase was ended; he had run Daly down.

XXXI

DALY SOLVES THE PUZZLE

The train was speeding along the hillside when Foster took Pete with him and walked through the rocking cars. As he crossed the platforms between them he met an icy wind and saw the dark pines stream by. It was obvious that the track was nearly level and the train running fast, for dusky woods and snowy banks flung back a rapid snorting and a confused roll of wheels. There were not many passengers and nobody seemed to notice Foster, until as they entered a car near the end a man raised a newspaper he was reading so that it hid his face. As they left the car Foster thought he heard a rustle, as if the paper had been lowered, but did not look round. The thing might have no meaning and he did not want to hint that he was suspicious.

He felt anxious but cool. Daly was the cleverer man and the game they must play was intricate, but Foster thought he had the better cards. The last car was empty except for two women, and leaving Pete there, he went through to the smoking compartment at its end. It had only one occupant, who looked up as he came in, and he calmly met Daly's gaze. The fellow had his hand in his pocket and his face was rather hard, but he did not show surprise or alarm.

"Well," he said, "we have been looking for one another for a long time and at last have met."

Foster sat down opposite. "That's so. When we began, you were looking for me, but since then things have, so to speak, been reversed. I've followed you across England and much of Canada."

"I've wondered what accounted for your boldness."

"It looked as if you knew, but if you don't, I'm going to tell you," Foster replied. "But I'd sooner you took your hand out of your pocket. It would be dangerous to use a pistol, because my man's in the car. Then I left a plain statement of all I know and surmise about you, with instructions for it to be handed to the police if I don't come back."

Daly removed his hand and took out a cigarette. "You're not such a fool as some of my friends thought, I suspected this for some time."

"We'll get to business," Foster rejoined. "I want to get it finished, although I don't think we'll be disturbed."

Daly gave him a keen glance, which Foster did not understand then, and the latter resumed: "How did you find out enough about Featherstone to enable you to blackmail him?"

"I was secretary to the man he robbed; as a matter of fact, I stole one or two of his private papers. I don't know that I meant to use them then, but was afterwards in need of money and saw how it could be got. The documents prove your partner's offense."

"You began by extorting money, but your last object was to suppress the evidence my partner could give about the cause of Fred Hulton's death."

"Ah!" said Daly. "I wonder how much you or Featherstone know about that. As there are no listeners, we can be frank."

"Very well. You claim to have documents that give you some power over Featherstone; I have others that give me power over you. Have you got yours here?"

Daly smiled. "I have not. They're kept where nobody but myself could find them."

"I see," said Foster. "Any money you could extort from Featherstone was to be your private perquisite and not shared with the gang! Well, I've brought my documents for you to examine. This is a traveler's circular check for yourself, and this is an ordinary bank check for another man. Taken alone, they don't prove very much, but I'll try to show how they link up with other matters."

He related how Carmen had given him the packet and his adventures in Newcastle, and when he finished Daly nodded.

"On the whole, you don't argue badly."

"I expect a lawyer prosecuting for the Crown would argue it better, particularly if I was ready to go into the witness-box. Then, of course, there's Featherstone's evidence."

For a moment Daly looked alarmed, but recovered his tranquillity without much effort, and Foster saw he had to face his first serious difficulty, though there was another. If Daly knew how little Lawrence could really tell, it would be hard to deal with him.

"Something depends on the importance of Featherstone's evidence."

"Your accomplice thought it important, since he tried to throw him down the elevator shaft," Foster rejoined. "Anyhow, Featherstone saw the man who killed Fred Hulton."

Daly's smile rather disturbed him. "Then it's strange he said nothing about it at the inquiry, and when he was in the factory passage spoke to the man he saw as if he was the night guard."

"That's so. You probably know more about the methods of the police than I do, but I understand they now and then keep something back, with an object. Then Featherstone is not a fool. He was satisfied to answer the questions he was asked. You mustn't take it for granted he didn't know the man was a stranger."

There was silence for some moments while Daly pondered this, although Foster imagined he had carefully weighed the thing before. Then he asked abruptly: "Did your partner think he saw me?"

"No," said Foster, who resolved to tell the truth.

Somewhat to his surprise, Daly made a sign of acquiescence. "Very well! You are near the mark, and I'll tell you what happened. There's not much risk in this, because no Judge would admit as evidence something you declared you had been told. Besides, I'll own that it's an unlikely tale. I was not at or near the factory that night, but I had done some business with Fred Hulton. The lad was a gambler and I'd lent him money; as a matter of fact, I never got it all back. However, a man who now and then acted as my agent learned something about the customs of the factory and went there the night he met Featherstone. But he did not shoot Fred Hulton."

"Then how was the lad killed?"

"He shot himself; in a way, by accident."

Foster looked at Daly with ironical surprise. "Your friends deal too much in accidents! It was by an accident Walters left Featherstone on the snow *couloir*."

"It doesn't matter if you disbelieve me; this is what happened," Daly rejoined. "My friend--we'll call him the man--went to the office late in the evening and after some talk, covered Hulton with his pistol. The lad had had some trouble about his debts, because the old man would have fired him out of the business if he'd heard of them, and his nerve wasn't good. He opened the safe when he was told and the man took the bonds and went out of the office, leaving Hulton in his chair. We don't know what the lad thought, but perhaps he saw he would be suspected or was ashamed of not showing more grit. Anyhow, when the man was on the stairs Hulton came up behind and told him to stop. He had a pistol, but looked strained and nervous, and the other, who had put his away, made a rush at him. Hulton slipped on the steps, his pistol went off, and when he rolled to the bottom the other saw he was dead."

Foster was silent for a time. The story was, on the whole, plausible, and although he did not see why Daly had told it him, he thought he spoke the truth. So far he had been clearing the ground and had not reached his object yet, but Daly showed no inclination to hurry him. They were not likely to be disturbed, and although the rocking of the car and throb of wheels indicated that the train was running fast, the next station was some distance ahead. There was moonlight outside and he saw towering rocks and masses of dark trees roll past.

"Well," he remarked, "you have had a strange career. Leading a gang of swindlers must have been a change from helping a philanthropist."

Daly smiled rather grimly. "For a long time I served a strange man. Philanthropy loses its charm when it becomes a business and results are demanded from all the money given. Then my pay was arranged on the surmise that to be engaged in such an occupation was reward enough, and something must be allowed for the natural reaction. As a matter of fact, I'm not surprised that Featherstone robbed my employer. He deserved it; but I think we can let that go."

Foster nodded and was silent. Perhaps it was because the excitement of the chase was over, but he felt dull and tired. He had no sympathy with Daly; the fellow was a rogue, but he had pluck and charm. In a sense, it was unnatural that they should be talking quietly and almost confidentially, but he did not feel the anger he had expected and his antagonist was calm. Still, he was none the less dangerous and would use any advantage that he could gain.

"Now you had better tell me exactly what you want," Daly resumed.

"I want you to leave my partner alone."

"Would you be satisfied with my promise?"

"No," said Foster; "not without some guarantee."

"Then we must make a bargain. I'm able, if I think it worth while, to give you what you ask. None of my confederates know anything about Featherstone's history; this ought to be obvious if you claim that Walters meant to kill him. Very well; I can, so to speak, bury an unfortunate error of his so that it will never trouble him again. That's much. What have you to offer?"

Foster was now confronted with the difficulty he dreaded most, but he tried to be firm.

"I don't know that I need make an offer. I think I'm able to dictate terms."

"Are you?" Daly asked with an ironical smile. "Well, suppose you had me arrested? My defense would be to discredit your partner's evidence. My lawyer would prove that Featherstone was my enemy and had a motive for revenge, by admitting that I had demanded money from him and would tell the court on what grounds. You must see the danger in which you'd put your friend."

Foster saw it; indeed, he had seen it since he began the chase. He must silence Daly, but the fellow was a criminal and he could not bring himself to promise him immunity from the punishment he deserved. Yet nothing less would satisfy the man. It looked as if he must deny his duty as a citizen if he meant to save his friend. This was the problem, and there was apparently no solution. Daly, who understood it, watched him with dry amusement.

"Well," resumed the latter, "I'll make a proposition. To begin with, we'll exchange documents; the checks against the papers that compromise Featherstone."

"Which you haven't brought!"

"Just so," said Daly. "If we both engage to make no use of the documents we hold, they can be exchanged at some convenient time."

"That means I must put the police off your track and meet you again."

"Exactly; you have no choice. Besides, Featherstone must promise to keep back anything he knows and you to say nothing about your meeting with Graham."

"I can't agree," Foster replied.

"Then I'm afraid your partner must take the consequences."

Foster pondered. Daly looked determined, and, knowing his friendship for Lawrence, meant to trade on it, but Foster must try to persuade him that he counted too much on this. The fellow played a clever game, but it was nearly finished and Foster thought he still held a trump.

"We had better ascertain to whom the consequences would be worse," he said. "Featherstone risks a stained name, his relations' distress, and the loss of friends. We'll admit it, but these things can be lived down. You risk being tried for murder and certainly for a serious robbery. There's evidence enough to convict you of a share in the latter."

"That is so," Daly agreed with unbroken calm. "I'm surprised you don't see that it strengthens my demand. It's obvious that you must help me to avoid the trial, or leave me to defend myself by doing as much damage as possible. There's no other way."

Foster thought there was, so to speak, a middle way between the two, but it was hateful to indicate, and while he hesitated the car lurched as the train ran out upon a bridge. The door swung open and Daly's face got suddenly hard. A passenger from another part of the train had entered the car and was looking into the smoking compartment. It was the man Foster had seen at the hotel. Next moment Daly was on his feet and springing across the narrow floor turned to Foster with a pistol in his hand.

"Blast you!" he said hoarsely. "You fixed this. I thought you were straight!"

Foster understood the situation. The man in the next car was Hulton's detective or a police official who had known that Daly was on the train, and feeling sure of him, had resolved to watch them both. He had probably a companion, and Daly knew the game was up. The latter's voice had warned Foster that he was desperate. Escape was impossible; he meant to fight, and, suspecting Foster of treachery, would shoot him first. This flashed upon Foster in a second, and as Daly, still facing him, opened the vestibule door, he risked a shot and sprang forward.

He heard the pistol explode and his face felt scorched, but he struck savagely, and something rattled upon the floor. The pistol had dropped and he was somewhat surprised to feel himself unhurt as he grappled with Daly. They reeled through the door and fell against the rails of the platform. Then he got a heavy blow and his grasp slackened. Somebody ran through the smoking compartment, and while he tried to collect his senses Daly stepped back to the gap in the rails. Foster was dizzy, but he saw the man's dark figure against the moonlight. There was a glimmer of snow in the gloom beneath, and a confused din; the roar of wheels and a rattle from the bridge. Then Pete sprang across the platform, passing in front of Foster, and when the latter saw the gap again Daly had gone.

Pete leaned against the back of the car, breathing hard and holding a piece of torn silk.

"I was about a second ower lang," he gasped. "He just stepped back and left this in my han'."

Foster, crossing the platform shakily, grasped the rail and looked down. There were rocks and small trees immediately beneath him, but farther back a level white belt indicated a frozen river covered by thin snow. In the middle of this was a dark riband of water where the stream had kept an open channel through the ice. The bridge was one of the long, wooden trestles, flung across rivers and narrow valleys, that are now being replaced by embankments and iron structures. Since the frame, as usual, was open and just wide enough to carry the metals, there was nothing to save anybody who fell off the cars from a plunge to the bottom. Foster thought Daly knew this when he stepped off the platform. Looking back along the curve of the bridge, he imagined that the thing had happened when they were crossing the unfrozen part of the stream. He shivered and then glanced round as a man who had followed Pete closely took the object the latter held.

"His necktie," he remarked. "If it had been stronger, we'd have had him in handcuffs now."

"Weel," said Pete dryly, "it's no certain I wouldna' ha' gone ower the brig wi' him."

There was a hoarseness in their voices that hinted at strain, but the man, ordering Foster not to leave the car, hurried away, and soon afterwards the train slackened speed. Then he came back with another man, and telling Foster and Pete to follow him, got down upon the line. Curious passengers were alighting and asking questions, but the leader did not object when several followed the party. They had to walk some distance, and when they reached the end of the trestle it was difficult to get down the rocky bank.

The bottom of the hollow was roughly level, but part was covered with small, stunted trees, many of which had been uprooted and had fallen across each other. In the open spaces, rocks and boulders rose out of an inch or two of snow. It was plain that there was no chance of Daly's alighting uninjured there. One of the men had brought a train-hand's lantern, and they followed the curve of the trestle, which rose, black and ominously high, against the moonlight. It was not very dark among the trees and the beam of the lantern flickered across the rocks and fallen trunks, but they found nothing, and presently came to the ice, where the light was not needed.

Nothing broke the smooth white surface, and the party stopped at the edge of the water, which looked black and sullen as it rolled past, streaked by lines of foam. There was a belt of ice on the other side, but it was bare.

"Must have gone plumb into the river," said one. "We'd see him if he'd come down where it's frozen."

"Unless he was able to crawl up the bank," somebody suggested.

"I guess that's impossible," another replied, scraping the snow away with his boot. "See here, it's hardly two inches deep; nothing to soften the blow. Besides, anybody falling through the trestle would strike some of the cross-braces or stringers."

The man who had brought Foster touched his companion. "Nothing doing here. We'll stop at Green Rock and you can raise a posse of ranchers and look round to-morrow. I reckon you won't find anything."

They went back and when the train started the man sat down opposite Foster in the smoking compartment.

"We'll probably want your evidence," he said. "What's your address?"

Foster noted that he did not ask his name. "Perhaps the Hulton Manufacturing Company, Gardner's Crossing, would be best. I'm going there now."

The man nodded meaningly. "That will satisfy me. On the whole, it's lucky the fellow shot at you and Hulton told us how you stood. He didn't miss by much; there's burnt powder sticking to your cheek."

XXXII

FEATHERSTONE APOLOGIZES

Three days afterwards, Foster entered the office of the Hulton Company, where the head and treasurer of the firm waited him. It was late in the evening when he arrived, but the private office was filled with the softened throb of machinery and rumble of heavy wheels. Otherwise it was very quiet and cut off by a long passage from the activity of the mill.

Hulton gave him his hand and indicated a chair. "You have got thinner since you took your holiday and look fined down. Well, I reckon we all feel older since that night last fall."

"I do," said Foster, and added: "The mill seems to be running hard."

"She's going full blast. We've had plans for extension standing over until I could give my mind to them. I may be able to do so soon, and expect to consult you and Featherstone. In the meantime, I got your telegram and another that to some extent put me wise. But I want a full account, beginning when you left."

Foster told his story, and when he stopped, Hulton pondered for a minute or two. He somehow looked more human than on Foster's last visit; his stern vindictiveness was not so obvious, but Foster thought he would demand full retribution. Then he said---

"You are keeping something back; I reckon you haven't taken these chances on my account. There's something behind all this that concerns you---or your partner---alone. Well, I guess that's not my business."

He paused and resumed in a curt, businesslike manner: "Daly's tale is plausible and may be true, but I have my doubts. Anyhow, I'm not going to believe it because that doesn't suit my plans. We'll have Walters tried for murder."

"Although you admit he may be innocent!" exclaimed Foster. "It ought to be enough to charge him with trying to kill Featherstone and stealing your bonds. You have no evidence to convict him of the other crime."

Hulton smiled. "I don't care two bits if he's convicted or not. I want to clear my boy's name and put you into the witness-box."

"But you can't make me adapt my story to fit your charge, and the defending lawyer would object to Daly's account as hearsay and not evidence. The judge would rule it out."

"I guess so," Hulton agreed. "For all that, it would have some effect, and the judge couldn't rule it out before it was heard." He knitted his brows and looked hard at Foster. "I'm going to prove that Fred was robbed and was not the thief, and though I don't think Walters will be convicted, he must take his chance. He was one of the gang that caused my son's death, and when he tried to kill your partner knew what he was up against."

Foster thought this was frontier justice and urged another objection.

"After all, the matter's in the hands of the police. You can't dictate the line they ought to take."

Percival, the treasurer, smiled, and Hulton answered with some dryness: "That's true, in a way. But I have some influence, which will be used for all it's worth. Anyhow, I've got to be consulted. If it hadn't been for my agents, the police wouldn't have made much progress yet. However, we'll let this go. It may interest you to know that Daly's gone for good. Read him the night letter, Percival."

It is usual in Canada to allow lengthy telegrams, called night letters, to be sent at a very moderate charge when the lines are disengaged after business hours, and the treasurer picked up a form. The message related the careful search for Daly's body, which had not been found. The snow for some distance on both sides of the river was undisturbed; there was no sign that an injured man had crawled away, and if this were not enough, no stranger had reached any of the scattered ranches where he must have gone for food. Daly would not be found until the ice broke up.

"I expect you're glad the fellow can't be brought to trial," Hulton remarked, looking hard at Foster.

"I am," said Foster quietly.

Hulton made a sign of understanding and there was faint amusement in his eyes.

"Well, you have a good partner. I like Featherstone; he's a live, straight man, and if he had trouble in England, has made good here. But he has his limits; I reckon you'll go further than he will."

"No," said Foster. "I don't think you're right, but if you are, I'll take my partner along with me, or stay behind with him."

"What are you going to do now?" Percival asked.

"Stop at the Crossing and see about starting the mill."

Hulton nodded. "I guess that's the best thing. When you have got her started, come and see what we want. I think that's all in the meantime."

Foster left them and began work next day. He wrote to Lawrence telling him of his plans, but got no answer for a week, when a telegram arrived.

"Come out if you can leave the mill. You're wanted here," it ran.

Foster was puzzled, because he thought the summons would have come from Lucy if Lawrence was ill. Yet the latter knew he was occupied and ought not have sent for him unless he was needed. On the whole, he felt annoyed. Lawrence, who was sometimes careless, should have told him why he was required, and he could not conveniently leave the mill.

Since he had found his partner, he had realized how wide, in a social sense, was the difference between Alice Featherstone and a small Canadian lumber dealer, and had, with characteristic determination, resolved to bridge the gap. This meant bold planning and strenuous effort, but he shrank from neither and meant his partner to help. Lawrence, although resolute enough when things went against them, sometimes got slack when they were going well, and Foster understood that Lucy Stephen had money. For all that, if Lawrence was unwilling to keep pace with him, he must be dragged. Foster frowned as he put off matters that needed prompt attention until his return, and then sent a telegram and caught the next west-bound train.

When he got down at the flag station his annoyance returned. If there was any ground for his being sent for, he ought to have been told, and if there was not, he had been caused a loss of time that could have been well employed. He resolved to tell Lawrence his views upon this as he took the road to the hotel, but stopped with a beating heart when he entered the veranda.

Lawrence lounged negligently in a big chair and greeted him with a smile, but his father, Mrs. Featherstone, and Alice sat close by, with Mrs. Stephen and Lucy in the background. It cost Foster something of an effort to preserve his calm, but he advanced to Mrs. Featherstone, who gave him a look of quiet gratitude that repaid him for much. Featherstone welcomed him heartily, but with a touch of embarrassment, and then Foster thrilled as Alice gave him her hand. There was a curious quiet confidence in her level glance, as if she meant that she had known his promise would be kept. He did not remember what he said to Mrs. Stephen and Lucy, but was grateful to Lawrence, who laughed.

"I imagined you'd get something of a surprise, Jake. In fact, when the train stopped I pictured you coming up the road as fast as you could, divided between anxiety and a determination to tell me what you thought. Before that, when I got your curt telegram, I told Alice I could see you frowning as you filled up the form."

"I didn't know Miss Featherstone was here," Foster replied awkwardly.

"That's obvious," Lawrence said, chuckling. "Candor's one of your virtues. But what about the rest of us?"

Foster wished he had been more tactful and thought his comrade's amusement might better have been restrained; but Lawrence resumed: "It must have been annoying to leave the mill when you had much to do. The curious thing is that when you set off from the Crossing with me you declared you were tired of working for dollars."

"Mr. Foster's tiredness didn't prevent him from working for his friends," Alice interposed.

"He must work, anyhow; that's the kind of man he is, and I don't suppose he was much disappointed when he got a strenuous holiday."

Then Featherstone turned to Foster. "I imagine we both dislike formal speeches and Lawrence, knowing this, means to smooth over our meeting. For all that, there's something to be said, and now, when the others are here, is the proper time. When we got your telegram in England I was overwhelmed by gratitude and regret. I saw, in fact, what a fool I had been." He paused with a gleam of amusement in his embarrassment. "Indeed, I'm not sure that the recognition of my folly wasn't the stronger feeling. Now I'm half-ashamed to apologize for my ridiculous suspicions and must ask you to forget all about them if you can."

"They were very natural suspicions, sir. I couldn't logically blame you and honestly don't think I did."

"Well," said Featherstone, "it's some comfort to reflect that my wife and daughter knew you better. I'm glad to think you're generous, because there is no amend I can make commensurate with the service you have done us."

"In one sense, it was an excellent joke," Lawrence remarked. "While Jake was lurking in the bogs and putting up with much unpleasantness on my account, he was suspected of making away with me for the sake of an old traveling bag, which was all he could have got. But don't you think, sir, there was something characteristic about his telegram? I mean the brief statement of his success."

"My relief was so great that I did not criticize the wording, which I'm not sure I remember," Featherstone replied.

Lawrence glanced at his mother. "I expect you remember it."

Mrs. Featherstone said nothing, but gave him a gentle, understanding smile.

Then Featherstone made Foster relate his last meeting with Daly on the train. Foster had no wish to harrow the listeners' feelings, but his memory was strangely vivid and he pictured the scene with unconscious dramatic power. They saw it all, as he had seen it; the background of flitting trees and glimmering snow, the struggle on the rocking platform, while the icy wind screamed past the car, and the dark figure filling, for a moment, the gap in the rails. Then they felt his thrill of horror when the gap was empty and Pete held up the torn necktie. Foster concluded with Pete's terse statement, "He just stepped back."

"Into the dark!" said Alice softly and there was silence for the next few moments.

"He made us suffer," Featherstone remarked. "But he had pluck and boldly took the best way. It is not for us to judge him now."

Then Lawrence leaned forward with a flushed face. "In the beginning, I made you suffer, and it might have been better if I had openly paid for my fault. We'll let that go; but there's something yet to be said." He stopped and looked at the others with badly suppressed emotion. "That I have escaped a fate like Daly's is due to the love and trust that was given me in spite of my offense, and my partner's unselfish loyalty."

Mrs. Featherstone looked at him with gentle approval and her husband said, "Lawrence has taken a very proper line; but I think this matter need not be spoken of again."

It was a relief to talk about something else, and by and by the party broke up. An hour or two later, Foster, who wanted to send his foreman some instructions, met Lucy in a passage as he was going to the writing-room. She stopped him and said, "I haven't thanked you, Jake; you were careful not to give me an opportunity, but you have banished a haunting fear I couldn't get rid of. You know what I mean---Lawrence told me his story. Now he is safe."

She stopped Foster, who began to murmur something. "This is not all I want to say. I am not the only person who loves Lawrence and owes you much. Don't be too modest; urge your claim."

Foster would not pretend he did not understand and looked at her steadily. "If I made a claim on such grounds, I should deserve to have it refused."

"Then choose better grounds, Jake; I think they can be found," Lucy answered with a smile. "But show what you want. You can't expect to have it offered, for you to pick up."

She went away, leaving him in a thoughtful mood, though his heart beat. Lucy was clever and would not have given him such a hint unless she thought it was justified. Still, she might be mistaken and he feared to risk too much; then there were other difficulties---he was not rich. He went to the writing-room, knitting his brows, and stopped abruptly when he found Alice there alone. She put aside a half-finished letter, as if she did not want him to go away, and he advanced to the table and stood looking down at her.

"I did not send the telegram stating that I had found Lawrence."

"No," she said, smiling, "I know you didn't. But why do you wish to explain this?"

Foster hesitated. "To begin with, it must have looked as if I wanted to boast about keeping my promise and hint that you owed me something."

"But you were glad you were able to keep your promise?"

"I was," said Foster; "very glad, indeed."

Alice gave him a quick glance that thrilled him strangely. "So Lawrence said for you what you would have liked to say yourself? One would imagine he knew your feelings."

"Yes," said Foster steadily, "I didn't tell him, but I think he did know."

He stopped and Alice looked down at the table for a moment. Then she looked up again and met his fixed gaze.

"After all, you would have liked to have my gratitude?"

There was something in her face that stirred his blood, and forgetting his drawbacks he made a reckless plunge.

"I wanted it tremendously, but it wasn't enough."

"Not enough! Aren't you rather hard to satisfy?" she asked with a hint of pride that deceived but did not stop him.

"I'm afraid I'm very rash," he answered quietly. "You see, I wanted your love; I wanted you. But I was afraid to ask."

She looked at him in a way he did not understand, although her manner enforced a curious restraint.

"Now I wonder why?"

"You're so beautiful! I durstn't hope you'd come down to my level. I'd nothing to offer."

"You have unselfishness, loyalty, and unflinching steadfastness. Are these nothing?"

Foster felt embarrassed, but the sense of restraint was stronger. Alice had somehow imposed it and he must wait until she took it away. He thought she wanted him to finish.

"Then I knew my disadvantages. In many ways, Canada is a hard country, and I'm poor."

"Did you think that would count for very much? We are not rich at the Garth."

"I seemed to know that if by any chance you loved me, you would not flinch. But there were other things; your upbringing and traditions. I couldn't hope your parents would agree."

Then Alice got up with a quiet grace he thought stately and stood facing him. There was a strange new softness in her eyes that had yet a hint of pride.

"I don't think I am undutiful, but it is my right to choose my husband for myself." She paused and his heart beat fast as he waited until she resumed: "The evening I came to the orchard I had chosen you."

He held out his hands with a low cry of triumph and she came to him.

Next morning Foster saw Featherstone, who listened without surprise, and then remarked: "It would perhaps have been better if you had come to me before the matter went so far; but I can't lay much stress on this. The times are changing."

"I couldn't, sir. You see, until last night-----"

Featherstone nodded. "Yes, of course! But all that's done with. I can't understand how the absurd notion came into my mind."

"Things did look suspicious," said Foster, smiling.

"Well," resumed Featherstone, "except for that ridiculous interval, I liked you from the beginning, as did my wife. Besides, it would be very hard for either of us to refuse you anything, and if Alice is satisfied---But there's another consideration; I understand from Lawrence that your business is not large, and although Miss Stephen wants him to extend it, this won't augment your share. Well, you understand why I must ask you to wait a year, until we see how you get on."

Foster, having succeeded better than he expected, thanked him and agreed, and a few days later returned to the Crossing. The Featherstones were coming to stay there for a time, and business demanded his attention. He had long worked hard, but had now an object that spurred him to almost savage activity. He resented the loss of time when Walters was brought to trial and he had to attend the court. The man was sentenced for robbery, and Foster's evidence, although objected to by the defense, sufficed to prove that Fred Hulton had no complicity in the theft.

A few weeks later, when Featherstone and his family were at the Crossing, Hulton sent for Foster.

"I suppose you won't want to sell the mill?" he asked.

"No," said Foster. "Business looks like booming and our chances are pretty good."

Hulton made a sign of agreement. "That's so. I reckon you could do a bigger trade than you have the money to handle. However, I guess you and Featherstone mean to continue the partnership?"

"Yes," said Foster, quietly, "we stick together."

"Although he is going to marry a lady who will invest some money in the business? If your friendship stands that test, it must be pretty sound. But I'd better state why I sent for you. Our trade is growing fast, and there's a risk of our running short of half-worked material. Well, if you won't sell your mill, you must enlarge it on a scale that will enable you to keep us going, besides coping with your other orders. I'm open to supply the capital, and have thought out a rough proposition. Give him the paper, Percival."

The treasurer did so, and Foster studied the terms with keen satisfaction.

"If there's anything you don't agree to, you can indicate it," Hulton remarked.

Foster hesitated. "It's a very fair and liberal offer. But I wouldn't like to take it, so to speak, as a reward. You see, I didn't-----"

"Expect anything from me," Hulton suggested with dry amusement. "You were acting for Featherstone, but were willing to do me a favor! Anyhow, you can regard the thing as a plain business proposition. I get a number of advantages, besides good interest."

"Then I'll accept the main terms now, because I can promise for Featherstone," Foster replied. "If any alteration's needed, we can talk about it afterwards."

He left the office with a thrill of satisfaction. With Hulton's help, he and Lawrence could extend their operations and control a very profitable trade. Featherstone had told him he must wait a year, but by this stroke of luck he had made good when only a month had gone. Still, it was characteristic that he finished his day's work before he went to the hotel where the others were staying.

Featherstone frankly expressed his pleasure at the news, and afterwards Foster and Alice went out and stopped at the bridge on the outskirts of the town. There was a moon in the clear sky and the night was calm. The snow was crisp, but patches of uncovered wood showed where it had melted off the bridge, and the southern slope of the river bank was nearly bare. In the stream, fissured ice drifted down a wide, dark channel; one felt that spring was coming.

Behind the town, somber pines rolled back across the rocky wilderness; in the foreground, dazzling arc-lamps flung their blue reflections on the ice, and the lights of the Hulton factory ran far up in gleaming rows. Civilization had reached the spot and stopped for a time. The scene held harsh contrasts between man's noisy activities and the silent austerity of the wilds.

"It's a grim country," Foster said. "But one gets fond of it."

Alice put her hand in his. "I think I shall love it; I'm not afraid, Jake. There's something in the clear air and sunshine that makes one brave. Then it's virgin country; waiting for you and the others to make good use of."

Foster nodded. "Something of a responsibility! Our efforts are crude yet and the signs of our progress far from beautiful, but we'll do better by and by. Well, I'm glad you're not daunted, though I don't think I really feared that." He paused for a moment with a smile of deep content. "To-day has banished my last anxiety; I'm a wonderfully lucky man!"

"Not altogether lucky, Jake, I think. Character counts for more than fortune, and you really won success by the stubbornness you showed in the Border bogs. It would have come sooner or later, if you hadn't met Hulton."

"I'm doubtful," Foster answered. "What I meant to win was you; but in a way, that's wrong. If you hadn't given yourself to me, it would have been impossible. Well, it has been a day of triumph, and now, if you are willing, we needn't wait very long."

Alice blushed and looked up with a shy smile. "When you want me, Jake, I will be ready."