

WHEN
THE FIGHT
BEGINS

HOLMAN DAY



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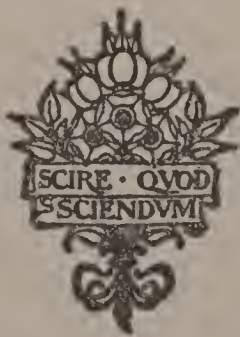
BY HOLMAN DAY

Author of

“The Rider of the King Log,”
“Clothes Make the Pirate,” etc., etc.

*When the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something.—BROWNING.*

*Those who inflict must suffer, for they see
The work of their own hearts, and this must be
Our chastisement or recompense.—SHELLEY.*



BOSTON
SMALL, MAYNARD & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

P73
D. S. W. C.
W. C. W.

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(INCORPORATED) Y

Second Printing, March, 1926



Printed in the United States of America

THE MURRAY PRINTING COMPANY
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.
THE BOSTON BOOKBINDING COMPANY
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

APR-9'26
© CIA 890257

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WHEN
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CHAPTER ONE

THE TEST OF LOVE



DURING the week of John Lang's absence from the city, affairs for his attention had piled up. Clients had become aware of his unexpected return and had come crowding into his waiting room. However, at four o'clock that afternoon, he abruptly shut off conferences and ordered his secretary to turn away those who were still in line. He hastily dragged on his topcoat, took hat and stick and left his office suite by the private exit. He trotted down the stairs, avoiding chance meetings in the elevator.

Opposite the towering office building was the mid-urban park of the metropolis, and he headed straight across, treading along the broad, gravelled path, taking the most direct route to the county buildings. Outwardly, he was quite himself—the dominant John Lang, the doughty defender in the State's most notable criminal cases, a particularly well recognized figure in the city's life. Inwardly, he was conscious that he was not at all his usual self; he was ashamed of the quest which he had undertaken on uncontrollable impulse. He was ashamed, too, because this quest involved sentiment. He had never before allowed that emotion to divert him from serious affairs.

As he marched past them, men saluted him deferen-

tially. Women turned to give him an admiring survey after he had passed on.

"He will be our next mayor," was the gist of masculine comment by those on the inside of affairs as the situation was developing. "The office will be handed to him on a silver platter—like everything else that has come his way."

The women's estimate took account of personality, not politics. First of all, his bachelorhood at thirty-five presented a problem for strictly feminine consideration. There were detractors, of course. Some women did not approve his bold features, almost heavy; and they found his eyes disconcerting under the out-thrust bristle of brows which met above his nose. On the other hand, his defenders found his facial aspect in complete harmony with his rugged physical architecture.

All women were agreed on the interesting quality of one characteristic; it was revealed when Lang lifted his hat in respectful response to smiling greetings: a lock of white hair sprayed upward from the middle of his forehead, contrasting oddly with the rest of his shaggy mane of dead black.

Women insisted on perceiving in that white lock the memento of some buried sorrow. For men it had an entirely different meaning, especially for prosecuting attorneys against whom John Lang battled in his rôle as the State's most astute, most aggressive counsel for the defense in criminal cases. He had the habit of twisting that white lock into a veritable horn just before he arose to attack the tender spots in the flanks of circumstantial evidence.

As he swung along in the first shadows of the autumn's late afternoon, he seemed to be exulting in his physical well-being and in the consciousness of

fortune's favor. His inner, secret humiliation was his own affair and he concealed it. He had stopped arguing with himself, however, and was going to the job, hateful as he found it. He did relish the nip of the frost in the air; he would have been glad if the snows of the north woods had swept far enough to the south to hide the sere raggedness of the park. He was freshly down from those woods, out of those snows where he had been satisfying his virile zest for muscle-wearying exertion.

He had intended to take at least two weeks for his annual hunting trip, but he had cut in half the vacation to which he had looked forward all the year. Now he was rasped by the wire edge of resentment though he did not know whether to blame himself or others.

He had impressed upon Reba Donworth that he would be away from the city for two weeks. To fortify his spirit in what he was now doing he tried to convince himself that she was in fault, provided gossip, and his own suspicions were well founded.

In the past he had been punctilious in his methods of meeting Reba. There had been none of the betraying, uncalculating, obvious fervor of a lover and none of his friends had construed his attentions as love making. He always apprised her by telephone of his intention to call at her home of an evening. His reserved delicacy in the matter of springing surprises squeezed all the spontaneity out of his affair with the girl, such as it was. Undoubtedly, if she were asked bluntly what were John Lang's intentions, Reba would have been unable to tag them accurately.

As a lawyer, he had occasion to drop into the office of the clerk of courts where she was first assistant.

When he walked up the court house steps this afternoon he felt helplessly incapable of assuming the mask

of an offhand caller attending to business. His conscience was working. Straightforwardness was a principle of action with him. His sense of shame told him he had come sneaking on her—a week ahead of the time he had set. He was demeaning himself, as if he had come to play a game of peek-a-boo, squawking at her childishly. He resented his actions and his state of mind; they were something new and foreign in the nature of John Lang, whose custom it was to go boldly and serenely straight at any objective.

Among the other apothegms which Lang, keen lawyer, had hammered out on the anvil of court experience was this: "Let the mouth speak the story; but let the eyes tell the truth."

Lang wrathfully beat his cane against his leg as he walked down the corridor; whether to drive himself along to the job or to flog himself as a fool and a spy he did not bother to consider.

His chief thought was on what he might surprise in her eyes.

Reba rose from her desk when he called to her over the rail barrier. She came to him without haste or visible evidence of surprise, her hand outstretched. Avidly Lang sought in her eyes; they were clear pools of composure. Her tone was placidly noncommittal when she answered his first question.

"Why, no!" she told him. "You haven't surprised me, John! I've been thinking the politicians wouldn't allow you to stay two weeks at this time."

His bristle of brows crawled down in a scowl. "I don't intend to take the nomination; I've come back to tell them so."

"Don't try to make out that you're not human, John!" She laughed at him, frankly, disconcertingly.

Walking across the park he had come to realize with

chagrin how human he was—human in a cheap and childish way!

All at once, in his new temper, he found himself demanding something from her in the way of love demonstration although in the past he had never tried to evoke it. Nor had he given her any reason to think that he was seeking from her anything except the unsexed friendliness based on office association and casual calls on her at her home.

Naturally he did not expect that she would display an inclination to fall into his arms, there in a public office! But her eyes were too serene!

“May I walk home with you?” he blurted abruptly. His glance at the clock preceded the query.

“But it’s nearly an hour before the office closing time!” she protested. “Come and see us, some evening soon! That will be better. Mother wants to know the latest about politics.”

He no longer was satisfied with this mere friendliness, so matter-of-fact, so casually imperturbable. He had come freshly from out of the forest. The woods, like the sea, develop in a man hunger for love of woman. In his case this new yearning for her was wire-edged by a growing fear. Devilish gossip had given her a lover.

He stared hard at her. In the past her straightforward candor had been for him her chief charm. She was tall above the average, with the contours of hale and vigorous youth; her handclasp was almost masculine. All these qualities, with none of the tricks of mere femininity, had attracted him.

Gossip had now hinted at some sort of an attachment between her and young Trask—the nephew, namesake and heir of Serenus Skidmore Trask, baron of timberlands. Lang, attorney for the elder Trask,

could not remember how many vulgar harpies he had bought off, settling cases to clear the little bounder on whom his bachelor uncle had enjoined idleness as part of a plan to "make a gentleman of him."

"Skiddy" Trask—tolerated by Reba Donworth, with the blood of old General Donworth in her! Surely she must have inherited the caste and spirit of her father, even if she and the widow received nothing else! Lang vigorously shook his head, busy with his thoughts of negation.

"Do you mean you will not call?" questioned Reba, awaking him from his ponderings.

"No—no! Surely I'll come! Grateful for the invitation!" He started away, fearing to trust himself further. But he turned hastily back to her.

He refused to call his new feeling jealousy, though he was conscious of something tearing wickedly at him within. He knew he was growing bitter. No longer did he admire her composure; it was now a perfectly damnable aggravation. He wanted to grasp the round, firm neck and beat his palm against her cheek and command her to come out with all the truth. He satisfied the animal impulse by reaching out with an abrupt motion, giving her cheek a sort of love pat.

She flushed and backed away from the rail, looking around in sudden trepidation, fearing lest his act had been observed by others in a public office.

In his mood he did not view her retreat as a proper precaution in that place; he was conscious of the same rancor which would have been developed if he had detected her in unmistakable aversion for his personality. He did not solicit her pardon. His temper of the moment was too rudely vicious to permit politeness. He went out into the dusk; he was settled into

the sullen determination to find out for himself how much of truth there was in gossip.

Lang threw his scruples to the wind. The consciousness of doing so for the sake of a woman—for what was called love—torched his temper still more. He made up his mind to place Reba under espionage—to do for himself the same kind of sneaking work which paid agents did in criminal cases—agents whom he excoriated in court. He knew Reba's orbit well enough. At five-thirty each day she left the office and, rain or shine, walked briskly home by way of the boulevard and the park. No longer did John Lang march with head up and shoulders swinging. He stole stealthily by unfrequented ways.

He hastened to post himself in the park where he could observe Reba's usual route from her office, concealing himself behind a boxed-in fountain.

The girl's preoccupation helped his precautions when she appeared and after he had started to trail her. And the shadows were deep except where the park's lights shone in the early twilight. A thickset hedge shielded the route he chose—a narrow path paralleling the avenue along which she was walking.

When he saw Trask waiting for her—Trask too much taken up with adoring contemplation to see aught else than the girl who was approaching—Lang made a quick detour and posted himself behind the other man. There was a spruce bough shelter for tender shrubbery and it served excellently. Trask was waiting in the radiance cast by a pole light.

The lawyer was able to look directly into Reba's eyes, when she came close to Trask, and he recognized instantly what he saw in those eyes. For himself, what he had found previously in Reba's gaze had been only the pellucid candor which pleased him. But he had

never seen this veiled softness with which she was regarding young Trask.

It was confession, compliance, surrender. Mere physical surrender of herself, an embrace, a kiss, would not have stirred Lang so profoundly as that visual caress in the uplifted eyes. He knew what it meant in the case of a woman. He was not pausing to diagnose his emotions—to determine what was impulse of love and what was rage at being robbed of a prize which catered to his personal pride and fed his passion for possession. He did not pause to look longer.

“Just a minute!” He called harshly and he followed his words, striding close to them. He jabbed his cane past Trask’s face in mute command for that person to be off.

“Seeing you’re here, we may as well settle it,” blustered the young man, desperately courageous.

Lang, too, felt his own spurring emotion in the presence of the female—the brutal urge of the ownership he was now at last claiming. He was clinging to that ownership. He declared it, disregarding the lack of her sanction of any such pact. “Do I need to remind you that this young lady and myself are engaged to be married? Away with you!”

“I won’t go!”

The girl put one hand against the cane when it came back as if Lang were poising it for a blow. With the other hand she waved dismissal to Trask, and he turned and went away obediently. It was complete and instant subservience to her wish and she was unable to keep her feminine satisfaction out of her expression when she turned to Lang.

Just then a woman passed with a fuzzy dog trotting obediently at the end of a leash. Lang pointed his cane in the direction of the retreating woman, dog

and Trask. "Oh, it's what they want in these days—ballots instead of babies—lap dogs in lieu of real, he men!"

"Don't you want to leave it just as it is?" she pleaded. "I'm going to find it hard to explain to you. You're the kind who won't understand very easily."

"I wouldn't say a word if you had gone over to a real man. But when you drop me and take up with a chow pup, I must be in a bad way without knowing it. I demand information."

"I may be the one who's in a bad way," she declared earnestly. "Perhaps you should seek and find the right woman to mate with the real man, as you like to call yourself."

He caught her up on the note of bitterness which he detected. "Well, am I *not* the real man?"

"I suppose so, seeing you are so positive on that matter as well as on others where you claim to know it all."

"Reba, what has come over you?"

"Call it rebellion against a real man, if you like," she replied listlessly. "I don't know. I'm tired trying to figure it out. Perhaps the times are making the women into something they ought not to be, as part of the general punishment the human race is getting. On the other hand, perhaps the ideal life for women is to drudge for the household boss, with a dole of pocket money which he counts down with a sigh or scowl."

"You know I'm not that sort, Reba. Tell me——"

"John, I don't want to tell you what you are. You wouldn't believe it. As for myself, I have worked all my life. Now I want to play. Skiddy Trask knows how to play."

"Do you think I'd make you work?"

“But you don’t know how to play!” She almost wailed her complaint. “One can’t learn how—one must just feel that way. It spoils it all to be obliged to argue about every hop, skip and giggle of life to prove it isn’t silly business. You look at me as if I had gone out of my senses. Maybe I have, but I’m only a girl who wants to play, after all the work. Skiddy Trask has nothing to do except play.”

Lang gritted his teeth. “I saw the look you gave him a few minutes ago.”

“I wasn’t conscious there was anything special in my look.” He opened his mouth—but he promptly closed it. Her unconsciousness of having made a revelation stopped all argument on the matter.

“I don’t understand the kind of looks *you* are giving *me*,” she said. “But I suppose it’s all because of my weak folly. You’re calling it by that name—and I’ll agree. So much for that! You don’t want a fool for a wife.” She was pleading wistfully. “Skiddy will be a fool along with me—hop, skip and dance and giggle.”

“Don’t try to make a fool of *me* any longer,” he commanded irefully. “You’re secretly a domineering sort. You want a man who will kowtow. You’ve probably been reading this sentiment slop on how to be lovers though married, and have picked a mushy, love-cracked fool who’ll attend to it as his regular business instead of going to an office every day and making something of himself.”

“Perhaps it’s that way,” she said resignedly. “But I do value your good opinion of me, John, as you have expressed it in the past. I don’t want you to think the fault is all mine. I don’t want anything to happen to you through me to spoil your good opinion of yourself.”

“What about this thing that’s happening?”

“My confession of my frivolous longings must have cured you in regard to me.”

“I’ll say it ought to. But——” he narrowed his eyes and surveyed her, from the brown hair under her toque down over her shapeliness to the very toes of her shoes—“I am not cured. I’m not going to give you up.”

“I have something to say for myself on that point, John.”

“Well, let’s narrow my declaration for the present. I’ll not give you up to Skiddy Trask. If it were a case in which I would not be insulted by your choice——”

“There speaks your selfish vanity.”

“I won’t allow you to arraign my honest consideration for you, Reba,” he retorted with heat. “I won’t permit you to be soiled and debased by what that poisoned renegade calls love.”

“I’ll confess openly I want a gay life and travel and clothes and not much of anything except mere fun to think about,” she cried with a sort of desperate urgency. “You ought to despise me for admitting it. Please do. I want Skiddy Trask for a husband.”

“There’s something the matter with you. I’ll cure it,” he declared grimly.

“I am breaking our engagement, as you have called it, at this moment—though I must confess that I didn’t know there was an engagement.”

“The matter is not so easily disposed of, Reba. You listen to me! Before God, I swear you shall not marry Skiddy Trask. I won’t suffer hell’s torments thinking of you in his possession. I take my stand in regard to that one man. If you persist, it’s going to be bad—bad! Now, may I walk along with you?”

“I prefer to go alone.”

“Very well, Reba. I have other matters to attend to, anyway.” He lifted his hat. “This has been an unpleasant topic. Let’s forget it. I’ll not refer to it again.”

He spoke mildly and smiled. After he had started away he turned and smiled again, but she did not seem to be reassured by that smile.

CHAPTER TWO

A JUDGE DEFINES LOVE



LANG left the park and strode on his way to the Talisman Club, seeking its exclusiveness as his haven. His progress along the street at that juncture was torture for him. He tried to smile at those who greeted him, but he accomplished only a series of grimaces. He was thankful when the door of the club clicked shut behind him.

He snapped back into something like his normal self when venerable Judge Anderson struggled out of his deep chair in the lounge, both hands out in cordial welcome. "Heard you were back from the woods, boy! The campaign needs you."

"I don't intend to take the nomination, sir!"

Judge Anderson was unruffled. "Oh, yes, you will! You are solidly conservative, a director in two banks, and we don't propose to have Demagogue MacMurray win out and have the spending of the money in that million-dollar condemnation of buildings for the new traffic avenue. If there isn't confidence in the next mayor, may God help the city's bonds—the banks won't!"

"I hate the pawing, gripping hands! I won't be like the knob on a post-office door!"

The judge's wrinkled face was creased into a smile of mock compassion. He was hampered by no repressions in his dealings with John Lang. John had been the judge's protégé ever since the death of the young man's father; Cyrus Lang and Anderson had been associate justices of the State's supreme bench.

"John, old Doc Anson was psycho-analyzing you here in the club the other night, taking advantage of your trip to the woods, so you couldn't eavesdrop. So I eavesdropped for you, as a loving mentor should. Doc says you're as selfish as hell!"

Flame mounted in Lang's face. His scowl was portentous.

"Oh, come along upstairs and dine with me, youngster. Probably Anson was half right. It's a good thing for you to have his expert opinion—and without a fee. You can take thought and correct your nature." He pushed Lang along ahead.

"But this politics thing is driving me mad, Judge!"

"Then we'll immediately get as far away from politics as we can, my boy! In our talk at dinner, I mean!"

When they were seated privately in a corner of the club dining room Judge Anderson, still smiling, said, "We'll let the politics rest with this one statement from me: you're to be our next mayor. You have been drafted for the financial good of your city. You're a fighter and can stand up against the grafters. Your persecution by the admiring public is already significant of your coming success. Well, then! To get to another and a pleasing topic! The mayor of this city ought to have a wife. That fact gives me a good excuse to ask what I've wanted to ask before-times. Why don't you get married, John?"

That was truly a leap to another extreme in the way of a topic! Lang was usually ready for the judge, who delighted in jumping his intimates by such bombshells in conversation. On this occasion the young man was tongue-tied.

"For instance, there's Minna Kennedy, my ward!" pursued the other. "A half million goes with her,

John! I'm revealing a secret of my trust, to be sure, but this is a way to make her happy. She likes you!"

Lang was able to reply then; he was defending a principle which he had adopted. "You oblige me to say something, sir! I have promised myself most solemnly never to marry a woman who has money. I have been obliged to listen to too many dreadful stories in my law practice. So have you, Judge Anderson! Twits, troubles, and jealousies! If I marry, it will be a girl who must depend wholly on my pocket-book."

"Making sure of rule and domination, eh?"

He apologized when Lang flushed. "Oh, I don't agree wholly with Anson about you, John. I'm joking rather roughly. I see your point—I have listened to the same kind of stories. I reckon parsons are the only real optimists in regard to matrimony. They are in on the gay launching. The lawyer later views the wreck. But are you so much of a pessimist you don't intend to get married?"

Then Lang blurted an admission. He had half-mockingly threatened Reba to clinch matters by an announcement. Now, harried by his doubts, he wanted to put himself on record, at any rate.

"I'll confess I'm very much interested in Reba Donworth—you know her, of course!"

"Why, John, I make errands for myself in her office just to have a peep at that fine young woman. Distinguished ancestry! All noble qualities of self-reliance! Not a silly notion in her, is there?"

"I'm sure there's not one!"

"When? Soon?"

"We haven't decided definitely." The afterthought which followed the admission rebuked Lang's sense of delicacy. But he had been impelled to seek anxiously

confirmation of his judgment from one in whom he trusted.

“In these safe days of rectitude—in public, at least, we cannot pledge in anything but this,” smiled the justice, raising his glass of water. “But here’s my earnest hope for all happiness, John!”

The young man returned his thanks composedly, showing no trace of love’s enthusiasm. Judge Anderson surveyed this matter-of-fact placidity with an interest which was somewhat quizzical and he seemed about to comment in a jocose spirit but held his peace. Then his countenance softened into a reminiscent smile.

“I suppose there’s just as much love in the world as ever, John—unselfish love, uncalculating love. But when I look on the young folks these days I wonder, sometimes! Probably I’m not as good a judge of modern love as I am of equity law.

“I married very young, John. Borrowed money to take the honeymoon trip. Eliza did scold me for that! But I insisted to her we could have a honeymoon only once. I was a bit wrong—the honeymoon has lasted all these years. I would not be maundering along on the subject if I did not feel as if you’re now in a mood to understand what I’m talking about. A man does know when he’s really in love. It has come to you late—but it’s a great awakening, isn’t it? You haven’t been realizing there is any such wonderful thing in the world, till it comes!”

Lang was woefully aware that he was not following the topic with real clarity of understanding.

The old man’s eyes brimmed with tears, his voice trembled. “Sometimes it just bursts on a chap! But more often, I think, it springs from a true man’s innate desire to protect. All the race of women appeals

to his chivalry. Then he singles out one. Not merely to possess—that isn't love. To protect—that's love. Of course you know what the feeling is!"

Lang, puzzling over the matter, knew he had never been conscious of the presumption of desiring to protect Reba, except to interfere in the case of Skiddy Trask. It did seem like presumption in her self-sufficient case.

"I know what I am talking about," insisted the justice. "I've had a good many years to test out the thing in my own case."

If Judge Anderson, to whom men ascribed all qualities of discernment and ability to value, did know, as he seemed to know, what he was talking about, what then was the matter with the love of John Lang for Reba Donworth? Lang gave quick, alarmed thought to the subject. Then he put it away from himself, declining to consider it seriously as a problem. He had said he loved Reba; when he said a thing he meant it. There was no room for argument at that stage. His natural dogmatism asserted itself in this affair.

"You are fortunate at last, John!" Judge Anderson rose as he spoke. "Many go through life and never wake up to know what love is!"

The young man had an opportunity to ponder, following his old friend down to the lounge, and he was more than ever disquieted. What was this quality in him which Doctor Anson claimed to be able to diagnose? Was it selfishness which was keeping him from perception and participation where the finer qualities of human relationship were concerned? He was not complacently the satisfied lover at that time, and he knew it.

He saw Skiddy Trask in the lounge and fatuously

hung the blame for his muddled ideas upon that insignificant thorn in his affairs. And he found his unreasoning anger springing from doubts of which he was ashamed.

He swung abruptly from the judge and other members who formed a group. He went to his favorite rocker in a corner of the lounge; his isolation was always respected when he sat in that chair and slowly clapped palm upon a nested fist, deep in cogitation.

In another corner of the lounge, alone because nobody seemed to care for such companionship, sat young Trask, a member who did not tally in the Talisman's exclusiveness; he was merely tolerated.

Hoping that the environment and association with men of standing would cure certain developing tendencies in his heir, Uncle Serenus had turned the trick of Skiddy's admission by donating a new wing which housed squash and tennis courts. Larry Devon, the Talisman satirist, averred that the club paid a big price for the wing. Skiddy never seemed to be at ease in the club. But he was obliged by his uncle to live there after Serenus had yanked the young roisterer out of bachelor quarters which the old woods baron had characterized with profane and vulgar bluntness.

This evening Skiddy seemed both fascinated and frightened, looking across the room toward Lang. Every now and then he ground the coal of a cigarette in the tray and hitched forward in his chair as if he had finally mustered the courage to act. But after each false start he slumped back and lighted another cigarette. Finally, Skiddy was helped by the ogre himself. Lang caught the young fellow's eye without difficulty. Skiddy obeyed an uplifted finger and hurried across the room; the monitory finger pointed to a

chair close beside the rocker, and Skiddy took his seat.

"I'll do the talking," said Lang, "because I've given the matter careful thought and thinking is entirely out of your line."

The other gulped, trying to cork down speech.

"We're not going into any discussion of selfishness or generosity or love or sacrifice," pursued Lang. "I'm not going to argue with you. When I argue cases in court my strong point is, first of all, peremptorily challenging prejudiced jurors. They must step down!

"I'm going to tell you something, Trask, and I ask you to look straight into my eyes while I say it—and see whether you think I mean what I say. So long as I draw the breath of life, you never shall have Reba Donworth as your wife. You have plenty of others to choose from—as you have been choosing in the past."

Lang, speaking in low tones, was exhibiting all the tenseness of a challenger who expected a comeback and was prepared to meet it.

"I wonder if you won't let me say just a word," Skiddy appealed, wistfully, bashfully. "It may give you what you lawyers call new evidence."

"I never exclude real evidence. Go ahead!"

"You know what I have been. You've had a chance to be in on every slip I have made. It's hard for you to believe in me, I know. Perhaps I can't cash in on my word of honor with you."

There was no softening indication in Lang's eyes that the word of honor had value.

"I expected you'd feel this way." Trask was even more contritely humble. "I deserve it. But I'm going to swear by the memory of two good folks who are dead—my mother and my father! I have never been serious enough before in my life to take such an oath to bind anything."

Lang nodded, but his countenance was noncommittal.

“I love Reba in the right way. I swear to it. And I swear if I have her for my wife I can go straight. I haven’t been arguing with myself about that—I know it in here!” He pounded his fist on his breast. “It comes to a man after a time. She feels it just as I do. And that’s why she is being noble in this thing—to make a man of me.”

“She told me,” Lang drawled, “that she’s out for a good time from now on, and thinks you’re able to give her one.”

“She said it because she thinks you’d make fun of her for marrying me to reform me.”

“You show an intimate knowledge of her thoughts on the subject,” said Lang, his eyes glittering; he was remembering the especial intimacy of the revealing look he had detected in the park.

“Perhaps she and I are only poor fools for feeling the way we do. But we do feel it, and it can’t be explained to cold-blooded folks. It’s love—and outsiders always make fun of real love.

“I don’t know what to say,” he went on helplessly, “only this: If you don’t let me marry her you’re taking away my life chance to be a good man. I can’t be a smart man, like you and the others. Uncle Serenus has spoiled me for that! He wouldn’t let me make something of myself in business, or anything. But I can be a good man with Reba, from now on. For God’s sake, John Lang, give me my chance.”

It was a wail.

“Lower your voice,” snapped the lawyer. But in spite of the harshness of his tone his expression revealed that the pitiful plea was attacking his jealous and bitter resolution. “And stop right there and let

me think. Don't look at me! With that hound-dog face of yours, I don't know whether to kick you or to be sorry for you."

To make sure he would not be troubled by the woe-begone countenance, he swung in his chair and turned his back on Trask. In the silence which followed, Lang was taking counsel with himself, so he assured his soul. He found he was dealing with evidence he could not weigh with any surety. If Reba Donworth wanted to marry Trask to reform him, it was only that usual, threadbare, commonplace folly which Lang's cynicism rejected.

If she really wanted idle pleasure with an abject slave for a husband, she was heading toward ruin. That sort of a woman would not be able to reform any weak man. He wondered how much of falsehood there was in her declaration on this point, in her feminine desire to hide from Lang the trail of a real love, in order to save the feelings of a rejected lover.

And at that point in his ponderings he found himself torn by a strange, ugly, animal determination to have her for himself! His imagination painted her in the arms of another, with that upward look—— A club attendant was obliged to tap him on the shoulder in order to bring him back to the realities. "You are wanted on the telephone, sir! The gentleman says the call is important."

Lang felt relief. He was conscious that he was ready to whirl in his chair and grab Trask by the throat and wring out of him a pledge to let the girl alone. Without apology to the young man, Lang hurried to the telephone.

"This is Serenus Skidmore Trask speaking," he was informed by a voice, sonorously important; it rolled the name with a suggestion of admiration for it.

"Lang, please come out to my house this evening. I want to consult you, as my attorney."

"Can the matter be postponed, Mr. Trask?"

"I don't want to postpone it. Why can't you come?" It was imperious demand.

"I have an engagement at eight." Lang had made up his mind to go to Reba; he would hammer this matter while it was hot!

"For how long?"

Lang hesitated. Under the peculiar circumstances he was not prepared to say how long he would remain with Reba.

"Keep your appointment, whatever it may be, and come as soon as possible after it. No, you'll not be keeping me up, Lang! I shan't be able to sleep, anyway, until the matter has been attended to." Trask spoke with the manner of one who expected to be obeyed when his commands had been given; he clicked back the receiver without waiting for Lang to assent.

The lawyer shoved his hands into his trousers pockets and returned slowly to the lounge. He faced the dumbly appealing young man, and stood with legs apart, hands still in his pockets. "You'll have to be contented with what you have—idleness, money you haven't earned and the sort of girls on your level; you can't add Reba Donworth to your gallery. Keep away from her or I'll make you sorry."

There was no compromise in the countenance into which young Trask stared, looking for some hope. He came slowly to his feet and once more Lang braced himself.

But there was no belligerency in the other. "You're the one who'll be sorry." He whimpered the prediction. Weak lamentation often has the effect of developing more rancor in some natures.

“I really *would* be sorry if I let fool sentiment ruin a girl like Reba,” growled Lang. “Don’t make any threats to me. You can’t carry them out!”

“You don’t know yet what I can do.”

“There’s one thing you can do, if you don’t mind your eye! You can get me into a state of mind where I’ll put you on to the rocks, financially, as far as your allowance is concerned. Your uncle takes a lot of stock in what I tell him!” Lang’s anger was carrying him far and he realized it with a touch of shame, for the young man at that moment seemed more than ever a puny antagonist.

The lawyer turned and walked away. When he was aware that Trask was following he turned and grasped the flaccid arm of the idler. “Not only do I order you to keep away from her—you keep away from me, as well. What you said a little while ago is pure folly. However, if there comes a time when you really have something important to say to me, come and say it, like a man.”

Trask showed fire. “There’s coming a time, damn you, and I’ll say it!”

CHAPTER THREE

REBA AND MAVIS



RIOR to this evening, John Lang's calls upon Reba and her mother had been entirely without formality, either in manner or apparel. He had always carried along his pipe, this being by the mother's insistence; the pipe's fragrance brought back fond memories of her husband, she said, and she seemed to find in the blue smoke an aura of past happiness.

Was Reba rebelling against his careless, too complacent placidity? Queerly enough the idea hit him a moment after the temperamental Skiddy's half hysterical outburst.

Young Trask, confronting the declared tyrant, was plainly divided between a determination to defy and an impulse to duck; Lang's arm had jerked upward in instinctive ire. But the arm was lowered immediately and Lang's brow was corrugated in thought instead of in wrath. He surveyed Skiddy's smart evening garb appraisingly; the young whelp's smooth exterior was certainly attractive, no matter how disheveled were his inner qualities, as Lang knew them in his capacity of confidential counsel!

Reba's confession, if she were telling the truth, indicated that she was not looking forward with rapture to an unending succession, after marriage, of the sort of evenings Lang had been contentedly enjoying with her before marriage. He was now willing to admit that even such a steady-going young woman as she had seemed to be in times past undoubtedly had

her moments of flareback to the elemental, feminine zest for novelty and thrills.

But to throw over a man like John Lang for—well, a Skiddy Trask!

The girl must be afflicted with temporary neurosis and should be saved from the folly of action at such a time, so Lang reflected loftily. At this moment he would not admit that there was any selfishness in keeping her away from Skiddy Trask.

“Get out of my sight!” he warned the young fellow.

Lang sauntered behind Trask when the latter passed out into the lobby. It looked like implicit obedience because Skiddy secured his topcoat and hat at the cloak room counter and hastened out of the club.

Pondering upon another method of procedure with Reba, Lang went up to his apartments in the club house and dressed with the care he would have shown in attiring himself for a public function. He walked leisurely to the apartment house where the Donworths were quartered in a modest flat. On his way he wondered whether young Trask would have the effrontery to go again to Reba after what Lang had said!

Once more he found himself acting the part of a spy seeking to surprise evidence, and fresh shame nagged him. After he had pushed the button in the vestibule of the apartment house he did not take down the telephone in order to announce himself. Some time elapsed before the latch clicked, admitting him. He walked slowly up the stairs instead of ascending by the elevator. This ruse, as he expected, brought Reba out into the corridor to investigate the caller's delay in making an appearance. When he confronted her, the girl's discomposure under his stare was markedly noticeable.

“I hope I'm not intruding, Reba!”

But his calmness, with its forced quality, disquieted her; she stammered when she assured him that he was welcome. "As you always are!" she added placatingly. Instantly his mask of composure was whisked from him. He had manœuvred for this situation which enabled him to meet her away from the presence of her mother. He gathered her to him in a violent embrace and kissed her repeatedly. His ardor had a touch of ferocity in it; when he held her in his arms he fell to thinking that she wished to give those lips to another man.

She set her palms against his breast and strove to break from his embrace; her amazement was tinged with a bit of terror.

"It's going to be different from now on!" he muttered, his lips close to hers. "I know at last what you have missed in me. But I love you! I'm going to make *you* love *me*!"

While she struggled he held her to him; her physical resistance, now pointing up her previous mental rebelliousness, gave him something tangible to grapple with and conquer. But when she became passive he immediately released her.

She walked ahead of him into the hallway of the flat. There he hurriedly took her into his arms again; he seemed to feel as if a second demonstration of ardent passion might prove the authentic nature of the first essay in his new rôle. When he crushed her to him, her head against his shoulder, he saw her face in a double reflection in the hall mirrors. Her countenance expressed cold resignation as if she were enduring and politely humoring a strange freak. Again he loosed his clasp, his transports chilled, his resentment hot. He started to voice his protests but stopped in the middle of a sentence.

Somebody was singing; his sudden interest was potent enough to distract his attention even from Reba at that juncture of tense emotions. "Gods!" he muttered. "What a voice! Who is she?"

"A girl who has taken a room with the Stewarts on this floor. She has come here to study music. Somebody from the Canadian country, so Mrs. Stewart told Mother."

He stood in his tracks, thrilled by the voice, till the song was finished.

"I've never supposed I'd be of a mind to divide my allegiance, especially when I have you standing before my eyes," he told Reba, dropping into his usual manner of free and easy camaraderie. "I trust I'm still staunch, but I'll not answer for myself if I hear that voice many times."

"What a wonderful idea you have given me! I'll beg, coax, plead until Mavis Duncan comes in and sings to you. I'll go now and fall on my knees to her."

But he seized her arm when she started away. "Confound it, Reba, you sound just as if you mean that!"

"I do!" She smiled, but there was no jest in her tone.

He grumbled, "Reba, I think I'll hold you for the higher court by having our engagement announced." She led the way into the apartment, making no reply.

Lang was not wholly prepared to find Skiddy Trask ahead of him, but he had admitted the possibility of the contretemps, taking thought on the other's hysterical flash of defiance in the club.

The newcomer nodded casually to young Trask and crossed the room and paid his respects to Reba's mother. There was no mistaking in which direction the mother's favor lay. She welcomed Lang with

warmth and urged him to get out his pipe quickly. "Faugh!" she whispered when Lang sat down beside her on the divan. "Those dreadful cigarettes of his!" Her nod was directed toward Skiddy.

At Trask's elbow was a tray already heaped with half-burned fags. He was smoking nervously, inhaling deeply, lighting a fresh cigarette after a few puffs. His fingers trembled noticeably and he did not look at Lang who sat and surveyed the rival with a steady, level stare.

Again Lang was feeling his gorge rise and his ire flame—it was the same ugly resentment that surged in him when he had seen Reba dancing with young Trask at balls; Lang did not dance.

John Lang had never been able to win against Skiddy with Reba when he protested—not consciously from the standpoint of a jealous lover, for he scorned to admit that he was jealous. But he had insisted that association with Skiddy Trask, even on a ballroom floor, was contamination. And Reba had merely smiled, in her superior way, and had demanded of Lang why he intimated that she belonged in his catalogue of the weak sisterhood!

More than ever did Lang wonder what the matter was with him. He had been able to analyze emotions pretty well till then. But now there was a peculiar, pervasive rage in him which he could not understand. He could not bring his reasoning faculties to bear on the problem. He was feeling a strange sense of apprehension, as if he were not sure of his hale, normal self. He glowered at young Trask. Was he, John Lang, tripping over this twig in his stride of a man headed toward his object?

Under the circumstances the conversation was embarrassingly spasmodic. Lang, calling on the Don-

worths, was never very talkative; he liked to smoke his pipe and be talked to.

A tap on the door was a welcome interruption. Reba ran and flung the door wide open and was insistent even to the point of what seemed almost like desperation when the callers apologized and were about to go away. "We thought you were alone!"

Lang gathered from the words at the door that the visitors were the Stewarts. As soon as he understood that Reba was urging them to enter he disregarded conventions; he joined her at the door. "May I not add my own appeal? I'm eager to know the singer who held me in my tracks, eavesdropping a little while ago!" He was then presented to Mavis Duncan.

At first, when they were seated, he did not concern himself particularly with the personal appearance of the girl; he looked upon her with interest as the possessor of a marvelous voice. When Mrs. Donworth asked her to sing she assented, not self-conscious, not deprecating, but sweetly compliant, with the desire to please if she were able. Lang found her ready consent as natural as if the song thrush, her namesake, had responded. Mrs. Stewart took her seat at the piano.

Mavis turned to Lang. "If you would care for it, I'll sing again the song you were kind enough to compliment."

"It was on my tongue to ask you!"

For a moment her eyes lingered with his, without a hint of coquetry. Then he was more fully aware of her charm. The eyes were blue, but dark eyebrows gave her countenance peculiar distinction because her hair was wondrously fair—a nimbus for her beauty as she stood against the mellow radiance from the floor lamp. Then she sang.

Young Trask nervously sought another cigarette in

his case. He put back the case when Lang swept an imperious gesture.

The song was a ballad with French words. Though the air was simple, an arrangement enabled her to display a charming voice to great advantage. Lang leaped to his feet in his enthusiasm when she had finished. "It's the Chaudiere boat song—I recognize now the strain running through it. I have heard it up there."

"I'm from the Chaudiere valley, sir. I have ventured to take some liberties with the song."

"And you wrote it as you have sung it?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you have written others, have you?"

She smiled and bowed, wistfully pleased by his frank admiration.

"One more, then!" he pleaded.

It was a bit of a love chanson—a lilt with piquancy and verve.

She broke in, deprecating his praise. "I accept only a bit of it myself. The rest is for the valley of the Chaudiere. You are fond of it, if you have been there, is it not so?"

"I saw it while you sang! The hills sweeping up from the river, the willows at the shore, the little houses all so white! I want to go back, some day."

While they talked eagerly, young Trask was taking thought. The discomposing stare of Lang was no longer fixed on Skiddy and the latter was employing the respite, endeavoring to evolve something which could mollify this man whom he feared—the man who was closest to a tyrannical uncle as adviser, aid and right hand executive where delicate negotiations were concerned. Praise seemed to be in the air. Therefore, Skiddy resorted to praise, dragging in a topic

malapropos, having a childish impulse, also, to jump his listeners with fresh news.

"Being praised by the next mayor of our city is something worth while," he blurted.

He produced an effect—it was amazed silence.

"It's a straight tip," said Trask. "There he sits—the mayoralty is going to be handed to him on a silver salver." His finger wavered when he pointed at Lang; his grin was intended to convey fulsome flattery; he was burning obsequious incense as best he was able.

Lang, looking away from Trask, as if he feared to trust himself, beheld the face of Mavis Duncan; his interest was promptly concerned with her instead of with Trask. She was pale, troubled, distraught. Her eyes were wide and her lips trembled. Lang could hardly believe the evidence he was beholding. It was inexplicable, any such interest as this in him or in the political affairs of a city in which she was a stranger. Lang felt a worthy impulse to calm her, provided the inopportune news had roused the emotions which were so apparent. He talked to all of them, so they might fix their attention on him instead of on her.

"You have heard only some silly gossip," he drawled, smiling and making light of the matter.

"I was in the club and heard the big fellows settle on it finally," insisted Skiddy, desperately anxious to make his flattery stick—determined to assert his importance as a news bureau. "They're going to make you take the nomination!"

"You—shut—up!" commanded Lang menacingly. Then he went on with mild and indifferent manner. "To be the mayor of this city means to be sentenced to a four years' term in a cage where anybody can

come along and poke a sharp stick between the ribs of the man who is fool enough to take the job. If I say I don't want any such a job I may sound like a conceited ass, but I know that in here"—he patted his breast—"I'm not a hypocrite. I don't want to be the mayor—I don't think there's any chance that I am going to be. Now, let's talk about something sensible!"

"But allow me to say," ventured Stewart who had taken a peculiar interest of his own in the topic, "there's nobody who stands much show against you if you want to be the next mayor."

"It's my idea, too—it's what they all say," proclaimed young Trask—then under the glare of Lang's eyes he rose, made his adieus awkwardly and departed.

"Mr. Stewart, you have my assurance that I do not care for the position," stated the lawyer. Mavis was at the door, having taken advantage of Trask's departure to signify her own intention of retiring. Lang could not see her face.

When he was left alone with Reba and her mother he did not sit down. He looked at the cigarette butts piled in the tray, snatched up the holder and dumped the fags into the grate fire; his manner was eloquent.

"I'm sorry to be leaving so abruptly!" His tone was curt, his manner as abrupt as the apology. "But I have been called to a conference with an important client." He marched out into the hall and snatched his coat from the rack.

Reba followed him. Muting her voice she said, "I'm afraid you're making business a pretense. I wish you would stay for a while. We should talk over our affairs without anger."

"That would be impossible—this evening—without anger—on my part," he returned roughly.

"But I have done nothing—not at this time—to make you angry, John! You must pardon me for being startled for a moment."

He was remembering the apathy in her face, as revealed by the mirror.

"It's the other thing—afterward—it made me angry. Oh, I see you don't understand. No matter. Listen! I'm going to give you a chance—if it's as bad between us as it seems to be. Choose a *man*, Reba. He can have you if he's somebody who doesn't insult my pride and self-respect. Slur in your thoughts what you call my vanity if you choose. But that must be the bargain between us! You look at me as if I were crazy. Perhaps I am, seeing what this devilish thing has developed into. I'm just crazy enough to tell you that Trask can't have you. That nasty little animal shall not defile the girl I have loved. I'll have myself under better command the next time I come here. Oh, yes, I'm coming! Perhaps it's only an unpleasant dream we're having, anyway! I think we're going to be sensible after a little, and wake up. Good night!"

He did not offer any more caresses. He was calm again and she copied his calmness, walking with him to the elevator.

"You're looking extremely well tonight, John! Is the important client a lady?"

"Jealous?"

"No, John."

"I'm sorry! I had a moment's flash of hope." The retort was charged with sarcasm.

The elevator came and he left her.

CHAPTER FOUR

OLD TRASK OF THE DOUBLE T



LANG found a cab at the street corner and was taken to the home of Serenus Trask in the suburbs of the city. As usual, the great gates of the extensive grounds were closed, but after he had sent away the cab, he used his knowledge of the place by entering between granite posts which flanked the narrow walk. The home of Trask was a stone mansion well back from the street. The other houses of the neighborhood were shielded by deciduous trees; at that season the leaves were stripped off and the houses could be seen. But the stone mansion was concealed, embowered in spruces and Norway pines and hemlocks—evergreens brought down from the North country—"black growth" from the timberlands of the Double T.

In the north they usually called Trask "Old Double T" on account of his registered logmark cut into the end of every stick of the millions of his spring drive.

The grounds of the stone house were not well cared for. Trask was habitually in the woods more than he was in the city and he liked a rough outdoors and hated the slickness of smooth lawns. The stones of the mansion's walls were rough, too. Fastened like some sort of armorial shield on the outside of the big door was a cantdog, handle and all; the hinged iron dog made a passable knocker. But Lang knew where the button of the bell was and he pushed it.

The caller had his mouth open to greet the door-

man familiarly. For years Trask had employed an old man whose rheumatism had unfitted him for his ancient job as a timber cruiser. But a strange, smart young chap in buttons pulled open the door and he did not step back when Lang started to enter.

"Beg pardon, sir! But Mr. Trask will see no one this evening except a gentleman who is to call late."

"Don't you know who I am?"

"No, sir! It's my first day in the house, sir."

"I'm Mr. Lang. Your master is expecting me."

"But not so early, Lang. Not so early!" It was the rasping voice of Trask within. "Come along! I'm glad you're here. And I'll be cursed glad to get the business through with before any such ungodly hour as you hinted at." In his associations in the city, the woods tyrant did not try to modify his manner of speech.

Lang walked in, saying as he stepped forward to greet Trask, "But I didn't hint at any late hour, sir!"

"Oh, I guessed at it since hearing the pretty stories about the lass, son!"

Then Lang stopped short and stared almost aghast at Trask because, when the old man had fairly tittered what he said in a jocosé tone, full of sly significance, he winked. Lang found this hilarity as amazing as if the stuffed loup cervier that decorated the newel post of a staircase near them had begun to sing a dulcet song out of the mouth set wide in a vicious grimace. Serenus Trask, blatantly a confirmed bachelor, ready at all times to express his contempt for women, had just mentioned one of the sex and had giggled and grinned!

Lang decided that the grin was more discomposing than the habitual scowl Trask carried around. The smirk did not belong with the countenance it was

adorning. The lawyer had never been particularly at ease when Trask was looking at him, nor was any other man comfortable under the gaze of Double T. One of his eyes "toed out" instead of having a twist inward after the usual manner of strabismus. The affliction kept one nervously trying to guess which eye was the right one to catch in a conversation.

Other circumstances were putting Lang into a flabbergasted state. The lawyer had seen Serenus Trask in all sorts of attire, through the gamut of tweeds, slouchy frocks, belted jackets and larrigans, but he had never seen him garbed in what Old Double T was wearing then.

He was swathed in a flowered silk dressing robe, with a silk sash knotted about his waist. Out of the folds projected a wattled neck stained to dull red hues by weather exposure; set on the neck was that seamed face—with the grin. He stuck back into his mouth an obtrusively new ivory holder in which was tilted a big cigar, and then he shuffled along and poked a gnarled thumb into Lang's abdomen. "All alike, eh, Lang? Men are all alike!"

He did not bother to await a reply but turned and started back from the hall toward the room from which he had come and Lang promptly followed, for it was the sanctum where he always conferred with Trask. It opened off the main hall and was spacious. It was wainscoted high with massive logs highly varnished. Above the wainscoting were walls made of peeled saplings set perpendicular to the logs below. Those walls were decorated with crosscut saws, looped bind-chains and with axes arranged to form huge rosettes. Other adornments were maps which showed great stretches of country with splashes of blue lakes and striations of streams and rivers.

“Send me an invitation to the wedding, Lang,” pursued the host, kicking around a chair for the accommodation of the caller and showing red morocco slippers under the robe. “You have always handed me a good brand of law in return for my money and I want to do something handsome for you when you join drives with the lass. Maybe I’ll come to the wedding.” He tittered again.

Lang had laid off his overcoat before sitting down.

“Stand up and turn around slowly,” commanded the master of men. “Who’s your tailor?”

“I haven’t got your set-up and figure,” he went on after Lang had given the information, “but a good tailor can probably hide faults as well as a Soubungo farmer can deacon a barrel of apples for market. I’ll drop in on your man tomorrow and tell him if he doesn’t do as well for me as he has for you on a dress suit, I’ll lace him with a trace-chain.”

Such frank amazement as Lang was showing could no longer be disregarded by a man with the acumen Trask possessed. “You don’t find me harmonizing tonight with the style of my old den, I take it! Find me a little different, eh?” He patted the flowered robe.

“I’ll admit it, now you have brought the subject up!”

The client was immensely tickled by thoughts which he did not impart. However, he did say, “Perhaps I’ll harmonize better after I’ve had these logs ripped out of this room, and some genteel plastering done.”

Lang gazed around him. “That seems to be quite a change for you to make, sir, after all the satisfaction you have expressed about this style.”

“We change, son! We change!” confessed Trask amiably. “What we like early, we don’t like later—some of us. It’s lucky our natures change. The world wouldn’t be what it is if we didn’t shift ’round

and view things in a new light. You see, I have been sticking to the woods much too close! Yes—yes, much too close.” He flicked off his cigar ash. “So, I’ve been away—South. Made a long trip of it. Nice time. Picked up new ideas. Haven’t seen the North woods for months.”

Lang tried hard to get Trask’s eyes into some sort of a line so he could study them; Trask was apparently looking squarely and frankly at his lawyer but the eyes did not focus in a way to reveal anything.

“I got back from the woods only this morning—I have been hunting on some of your timberlands,” stated Lang, and he paused a moment, trying to make up his mind to inform Trask that, according to reports current in the North country, the baron of the Double T had been on his lands within the week of his attorney’s stay.

While the other hesitated Trask inquired casually, “Any especial amount of snow up there yet?”

“Not much! A foot or two, but I think it’s too soft to stay.” His tone was as indifferent as Trask’s had been. Lang cooled suddenly in the matter of his enterprise of tasking Trask with having been in the North country inside of a few days.

“I’ll get the walking bosses’ reports, of course, but I’m glad to have a tip from you that there’s no chance to start hauling logs yet. I’d like to hang around home here a few weeks to arrange for interior improvements in this house. I’m going to make quite a job of it. How long were you up country, Lang?”

“About a week. Mostly in the Brassua region.” In that region was located the log castle which served as Double T headquarters in the winter.

Then Lang got the range of Trask’s eyes and swapped real stares with Old Double T.

The host relighted his cigar, and took his time about it. While his face was wreathed with smoke he said, "I'm glad to hear that, too. I may get another tip from you. Did you happen to hear about, or lay eyes on, a certain stranger up there who looks so much like me they're taking him for me?"

"If you mean a double, Mr. Trask, I'll say no—I heard nothing about one."

Lang's legal mind felt like probing this matter—but with care. He put as much significance into his tone as he dared.

Apparently, Trask did not notice the significance or was too well grounded in conscious innocence to be disturbed. "There is such a fellow, so one of my walking bosses writes me. But I haven't found he's trying to cash checks with my name or to borrow money—so I guess I won't need your legal advice on that thing—not now, at any rate. I didn't call you up here for that. By the way, you're quite a society bird, I suppose."

"No, I'm not, sir."

"Well, you must have made it your way to go into a lot of good houses and you probably understand the genteel styles of furnishings."

"The only thing I ever notice about a chair is whether the legs are strong enough to hold me up."

"Well, no matter if you don't know. I can hire men who make it their business. I didn't call you up here to talk about furniture, either. Seen my nephew Serenus Skidmore Trask, Second, lately?"

"Yes, sir! I see him pretty regularly."

"Don't you think it's about time for him to hitch up—I mean a marriage—with a real woman?" demanded the uncle bluntly.

Wondering just how much the elder Trask knew,

Lang was laconic in the interests of subtlety. "I think he's willing to get married."

"And settle down?"

"That's the way he has talked."

The lawyer was dreading the next question. Trask was going to ask just as bluntly who the woman was!

But Trask pulled the stub of the cigar from the holder, blew violently through the stem and tossed the holder on the table. "There's some comfort, Lang, in making an investment, and controlling the investment—being able to have the absolute say about it. I control all my investments. I've bought and paid for Serenus Skidmore Trask, Second. Have been wondering just what I'd do with him when the time came to use him. Have thought sometimes I had wasted my money. But no! Now I'm ready to use him and he's just the tool I want. I'm going to use him in buying something where cash can't be used." He pulled out a drawer of the desk-table, and fumbled there. "I'm going to marry him off."

"Without consulting him about the woman?"

Trask levelled his wall-eye at Lang from under a knotted brow. His expression was one of amazed wrath. "What the hell has he got to say about a wife, any more than he's allowed to yap against anything else when I'm giving him his orders? Look at her!" He scaled a photograph across the table and Lang caught it. It portrayed a woman's face, broad, pudgy, with little eyes, deep-set, and a simpering mouth. "Awful for looks, eh? Yes, I know it. I'm a better judge of women than I used to be." Again that peculiar titter. "But that's Maravista Blake, son. Does the name, Blake, tell you anything?"

"You mean Jonas Blake who——"

"I mean Jonas Blake, and I hope there's a night-

and-day shift sticking red-hot stove covers under him in Tophet. That's his daughter. Heiress of the Tulandic townships. That's where she has lived under old Jonas's thumb, and now she wants to see the world and shine in society." Trask spat with a sort of explosion of disgust. "See the point now, don't you, Lang?"

"Yes! But does she forget the old feud and take your nephew——"

"She hasn't brains enough to know there was a feud. I guess she thinks her father and I were blowing up each other's dams all those years in fun, like boys rolling marbles. I'm going to run the Tulandic for her from now on—whilst she's running my nephew. She and I have a perfect understanding. She wants to marry a real gent—and I want to save a hundred thousand dollars a year by joining drives; that saving for me will come from merely joining her hands to my nephew's. Good investment when I made him a gent, eh? Had a hunch I could use a thing of that sort when old Jonas could be got out of the way!"

"It's lucky for you somebody hasn't grabbed her up before this," said Lang drily.

"Wait till you see her! She has been perfectly safe, even in Tulandic. But the marriage matter isn't what I called you up here for. Fixing it up ahead with the girl was the main thing—the marriage is self-operating from now on."

He pulled out another drawer and began to fumble.

Trask brought out a thick packet of papers and shook it. "Here are the schedules of my properties and the old will you drew for me, Lang. I've called you up here to draft a new will—an air-tight one—not a legal hole in it. Understand? Then, as I told you, I'll sleep better tonight. No man knows what

may happen to him after he's past seventy. But wait a moment!"

He laid the packet on the table and made a long survey of the lawyer, wrinkling his forehead, clawing at his shaggy eyebrows, pondering.

"I didn't intend to do it—but I'm going to. I didn't intend to take any chances—not yet awhile." He rose slowly, and then he plumped back into his chair. His face had worn a sly, satisfied, proud smirk. Now it hardened while he looked Lang up and down. "No, damn you, I won't—not whilst you're wearing those clothes. Danger comes from starting new ideas!"

Lang's convictions were settled: the simple, Tuldandic heiress was in the house and Trask was apprehensive lest the nephew's monopoly might be endangered. The lawyer smiled grimly, reached out and turned the photograph face down while Trask stared.

"Your eyes are easily hurt, eh, where women are concerned?" demanded the old man.

"Something like that."

Once more Trask rose. He banged his fist on the table. "I may as well make the break now as any time. I reckon you'll come back into this room and put more power into that will. Better have you understand. Come along!" He strode away, his head shoved forward, his silk robe swishing, making a strange figure of a man in that interior of rugged plainness.

Lang followed into the hall, up the stairs past the ironical grin of the stuffed loup cervier, and was ordered to wait a few paces from a closed door. Trask opened the door and went in.

The lawyer, waiting, smiled at his thoughts. Undoubtedly, he was to be called upon to be polite to Maravista Blake, the *dea ex machina* in the general

solution of the difficulties that ranged all the way from the elder Trask's long warfare in the North to the troubled love affairs of Lang himself and Trask, the younger, and Reba. It would be easy to be polite to such a woman.

"Come in!" called the old man, appearing in the doorway.

The room which Lang entered was only dimly lighted. He stumbled over the end of a roll of rugs.

"New ones!" said Trask. "Thousand-dollar ones! Haven't had time to spread 'em. Thought of ordering you to wear smoked glasses in here, on account of those eyes of yours. But maybe just as well! You must take a chance."

There was no one except the two men in the room. Trask went to a portière, a heavy velour affair that closed in a large alcove; there was plenty of light beyond the curtain; radiance streamed under the edge. Without preface or pause, the old man pulled the drapery aside. It was not merely the light-flood which made Lang close his eyes for a moment.

Reclining on a broad divan was a young woman in an elaborate negligee, if a heavily embroidered mandarin jacket could be called such. The massed pillows, the extravagance of colors almost garish, the pomp of too many jewels sparkling and glittering on fingers and breast, and even in her hair, furnished a setting which Lang found Oriental, pagan, almost unreal. It was like some sort of a tableau in a show; Trask's dramatic drawing of the curtain helped that illusion.

But the face at which the visitor stared with widening eyes was not the pudgy face of the photograph. He found even more unreality in the face he saw than in the bewildering sumptuousness of the setting.

The girl was young and wonderfully beautiful, with the beauty so alluring when it is free from apparent sophistication. She gazed back at Lang with the absolute composure which a baby or a kitten displays in the presence of strangers. She did not have the air of consciously vaunting her charms. She seemed to be content because she was as she was, and to feel the world was kind to her. A slow smile drew her lips a bit away from her white teeth—an ingenuous smile. She quite frankly showed her interest and approval when she looked at the tall chap in evening dress. As if her expression did not suit his ideas, Trask stepped between her and Lang and bent and kissed her fervently.

He turned from her and dropped the portière and came and stood before the lawyer with the air of proud, jealous, triumphant possession.

“Now you can see why I want a new will that all hell can’t break. She’s going to have everything my money can bring her, Lang.”

“Yes, but who is she?”

“You infernal fool, what do you think? She’s my wife.”

CHAPTER FIVE

NEW LOVE AND OLD WINE



At midnight, Trask and his lawyer were finishing a job whose details and side-issues had required patient attention. It was not merely framing the new will, the rough draft of which was tucked into Lang's pocket to be put into formal manuscript on the morrow; there also was a plan of procedure to be devised in regard to the marriage of Trask the younger.

In arranging the methods of control of the Tulandic properties, they considered in addition the control of the nephew in case he might show rebelliousness. Old Double T ridiculed the idea when Lang suggested that the nephew might not obey.

"Damn it, I own him," the uncle blurted arrogantly.

"Even so! And you have owned a good many colts, head, hide, and hoofs. But you have to break a colt before you can use him."

"You're a good lawyer to have in the family, Lang. You always tie things up solid. Yes, a good lawyer!"

Lang was wondering just how honest a lawyer he was at that moment. He was not in the habit of lying to himself. He knew how much rancor was in him. Only a few hours previous the rancor had driven him to brandish over Trask the threat of antagonizing the uncle. The lawyer had not realized how soon the opportunity would present itself. He was in a bitter mood and felt the impulse to grasp such an oppor-

tunity. He put the thought of legal ethics away from him and went at the matter on the plane of man to man, in a very human conflict for the possession of a woman. He told himself this was no time to be a fool in regard to niceties of conduct.

The attitude of the elder Trask was making the opportunity more tempting. "If this particular colt is going to need a twist bit, Lang, I'm depending on you to rig one for him. By the way, all prices are up, these days. Is that retaining fee, ten thousand a year, enough for the time being?"

It was merely Trask's usual bluntness in his talk of money matters and Lang knew there was no suggestion of a bribe. Nevertheless, conscious of his secret and his ulterior motives, he was also conscious of a twinge in his professional sense of pride.

"I don't want to feel as if my retainer has anything to do with this case of your nephew," he declared, showing a flash of resentment. "I'm not doing it for pay. It's wholly from my interest in a family which I have served as counsel."

"That's it! I like that. And I'm going to let you go ahead with him, according to your own notions of what's best. Call on me for authority and I'll back you up. But be sure your twist bit is a good one."

"I'll attend to that, sir," promised Lang, setting his jaws.

Working out the details of the pressure to be brought on young Trask, in case the nephew showed contumacy, Lang was occupied for some time. He wrote while Trask puffed a cigar, this time disdaining the effeminacy of the ostentatious ivory holder.

It was the final matter of business in the session of client and lawyer that evening. The only light in the big room was the circle of glow on the table under

the shade of the lamp. The walls and the corners were banked with gloom. There was no sound in the great mansion of stone.

In spite of his concentration on his task, Lang's thoughts kept drifting to that radiant girl above-stairs. The old man had not referred again to her or his marriage since his declaration of her identity in front of the portière after he had dropped it to eclipse her beauty.

The lawyer found it somewhat easier to credit Trask's calm assurance in regard to the trip south; the singular air of the girl suggested such past environment. Lang was even inclined to place some stock in Trask's fantastic statement about that double of his in the North country. The story was far-fetched, but it was more credible than the supposition that this girl had come out of the snows.

Sometimes, in the course of his writing, the lawyer paused and pondered, as if meditating exclusively on the intricacies of the matter in hand; but he was thinking of the girl upstairs. Her smile lingered with him. There was something elusive about the attraction she exerted.

Lang, whose business it was to delve into human hearts and emotions, had studied sex attraction on its higher plane—the psychic quality of certain rare female types, a mystic dominance of men by influences above and beyond those bonds which mere physical senses weld on a captive. He perceived something of this in the conquest of the aged and confirmed hater of women.

In a whimsical effort to recall verses which he had read in that connection, he used the blank side of a sheet of paper on which he had jotted some of his legal notes, and sought to aid his memory by writing out the

words. Old Double T was staring at him through smoke clouds, but saw only a prosaic lawyer working for a client.

“For Love has saved that perfect mold
In which fair Helen’s form was cast;
With passion’s heat he melts the gold
Of beauty of the storied past,
And once again, with art, he pours,
And then, with glory of the morn,
In other climes—on other shores—
Transcendent Helen is reborn.”

Lang had been reading aloud, as he progressed, the various clauses of the agreement young Trask was to be forced to follow.

“That one seems to be a corker, judging from the attention you’re giving to it,” suggested Trask. “How does she read?”

“It’s too strong—altogether too strong,” said Lang, and he shuffled the sheet among his papers, folded them and put them into his pocket. His comment agreed with the sudden secret disgust with which he was viewing the strange obsession he had just been allowing to take control of his thoughts.

“Sir, I think the other stipulations will do the work, if your nephew accepts them.”

“I’m leaving it to you, Lang, to see to it he does accept them—agrees to do exactly what you tell him to do, and in all respects.”

“Don’t you think,” paltered the lawyer, “you’d better tell him, yourself?”

“I have always let you act for me in fixing up those girl affairs of his,” stated Trask with decision. “You’ll have to do the talking to him in this matter. He and I can’t get to anything sensible when we talk—never

could. Always a devil of a row! I don't do anything except cuss him—and I swear too much, anyway. Going to cut it out! Sounds like hell, now there's a lady in the house." Making this, his first reference to the girl upstairs following their meeting with her, the old man's eyes lighted up. "I'm not asking you what you think of her. Don't intend to. I know well enough. Didn't introduce you, eh? Didn't intend to." He pulled his lips away from his teeth and edged out the words. "Don't propose to have any young fools ducking and dancing around her. I've got her and she's mine. And you keep my marriage damn mum! Understand?"

It was only more of Trask's coarse arrogance and customary self-complacency—Lang had grown accustomed to his client's habits in speech and action. However, on this occasion the attorney found something peculiarly rasping in this triumphant pride of possession.

"Envy me, hey?" Trask sneered and grinned, scrutinizing Lang's dour countenance. "Oh, well, I can't blame you. But I can trust you—that's why I showed her to you. Now, well, you've seen what's upstairs! The new wife! I'll do the usual honors!"

He pulled a bunch of keys from a drawer and shuffled out of the room, telling Lang to wait. One after the other, two doors banged, announcing that Trask had gone far into the bowels of the house. The attorney, assorting a stack of loose sheets on the table, heard no sound in the room, but he became aware of some sort of sheen near his elbow, at the edge of the circle of radiance from the lamp. He glanced and saw the embroidery of the mandarin coat, shimmering. He lifted his eyes to the girl's face.

She smiled. There was no longer blank ingenu-

ousness in her smile, he sensed. Her face was partly in the shadow. He was not able to assure himself absolutely as to any subtlety in her expression; but he noted that the smile was for the lips only; her eyes were steady and wide and searching.

"I tiptoed down. I have been over there in the shadows, listening." She made no apology for eavesdropping.

He rose hastily and faced her.

"No doubt you find me as—as peculiar as my husband! But that is as it should be if he and I are to get along together—and we shall. What I have heard has been very interesting. I thank you, Mr. John Lang, for being such a thoughtful lawyer. I'm glad to know how well my affairs will stand!"

She was undeniably in control of the situation just then. Lang, running over in his mind what had been said in the room, was awkwardly unable to reply to her.

"You have told him to do many things and he has agreed. I have a great admiration for men who can give advice."

"Pardon me, madam! I don't tell Mr. Trask what to do—I'm merely his attorney."

"It is the same—you have power. And I'll be very glad to call you my good friend from now on. We must excuse his lack of politeness a little while ago." She made a moué of scorn and pointed into the shadows. "It's ridiculous, isn't it, hiding me? And showing me off like a lay figure when I was trying on my jewels? But he is a dear old man—and you must help me in ridding him of his silly notions."

He bowed stiffly.

There was the bang of a distant door. Lang had been trying to frame something in the way of a sensi-

ble reply but that boding bang sent his thoughts scurrying.

“I suggest—it might be wise—it might appear——” he stammered, apprehensive in regard to this tête-à-tête in the shadows.

“Not so perfectly innocent as we know it to be, sir!” she broke in mischievously. “But I have expressed my gratitude and now——” She put her finger to her lips and hastened into the dark corner.

Trask came shuffling, bringing a dusty bottle and two glasses. He poured the liquor carefully. “Here’s to the lady above us! She’s making it enough of a heaven up there to suit me for the time being!” was the uxorious toast proposed by Double T. Lang could not help turning a glance toward the dark corner when he drank. The wine was manifestly having its effect on Trask when he escorted his lawyer to the door a bit later. The old man’s eyes were humid, his titter was more hilarious.

“It’s too bad, Lang, I can’t go into the market and buy years off some young fool like I’d buy stumpage off timberlands. I could make it worth while for somebody with more time than money. I’ve just begun to live.”

The new wife took advantage of his absorption in that declaration; his back was turned on the hall. She hurried noiselessly out of the den and ascended the stairs. Lang was guilty of betraying her by his gaze—he tried to keep his eyes off her and failed. Trask saw the lawyer’s distraction and whirled.

The girl, looking over her shoulder, was too quick for the husband. When the old man sighted her she was standing as if she had just started to descend the stairs.

“Anita!” he chided, scowling.

“But you have left me all alone for so long, my husband!”

Trask turned slowly and leered at Lang. “You see!” muttered the old husband. “That’s the way to have ’em!” As if he felt easier in his mind about her loyal allegiance he called her down and presented Lang.

“I’ll have to mind my manners a little better because I’ve got such a wonderful wife. New joy and old wine—they go to a fellow’s head, hey, what, Lang?” He poked his forefinger against the lawyer’s ribs and tittered again. “He knows what it is, Anita! He’s got his own girl. Love makes the world go round—and the arms go round!” Trask hooked her to his side in a rough embrace.

Considering that this was Serenus Skidmore Trask, Lang found the tableau amazing—and distinctly unpleasant. He made a perfunctory little speech of well-wishing and got away as quickly as he could.

CHAPTER SIX

THE GIRL WITH A PLEA



LANG went to bed with the sense of an ominous creak in the machinery of his settled philosophy of life. He was not relishing his state of mind and he was not able to define what seemed to be an alarm-signal in his conscientiousness.

He rose in the morning with the unhappy conviction that the machinery was still squeaking. The principal trouble seemed to be in the region of the sense of self-approbation. He went forth to the tasks of the day and scowled when he saw his reflection in the shop windows. By this expressed disfavor he felt he was answering, somehow, a certain critic who had given the questionable title of vanity to what he considered to be manly and proper pride.

And she had called him selfish! So had Doctor Anson.

On an eminence in the city park which he was crossing on his way to his office, the workers for a national charity had erected a great clock face, its hands marking the growth of the quota solicited.

When he arrived at his desk he drew a check, wrote a note and summoned a messenger. The check was for the charity—and the sum he gave was ten thousand dollars. He considered he was answering taunts as to his selfishness. Furthermore, the amount was the sum of his annual retainer from Serenus Skidmore Trask.

With that check Lang was answering, too, his own

conscience in some measure—telling the quizzing conscience that by giving away the money he was now free to deal with Young Trask without incurring the self-imputation of handling a presumptuous ingrate for the wage involved. This was for his private comfort; if the world did not know and understand, so much the worse for a meddling world!

Skiddy Trask had reported correctly as to the meeting of the puissant politicians in the Talisman Club. They made no secret of the affair, having decided definitely to capture John Lang for their purposes.

Judge Anderson had taken it upon himself to hole the fox this morning in Lang's law office. The elderly justice seemed to qualify as the most effective intermediary.

But a vivid memory of what he had said the evening before in a group wholly outside the pale of politics was continuing with Lang. He had not made a pledge—it was a silly thought, holding his words spoken in the Donworth circle as having any real bearing on his decision or his movements.

Nevertheless, he did not feel just then like tying himself up to politicians by an actual pledge. He heard the judge through with interest and respect and was frankly earnest in his gratitude when he received from the spokesman a report of a meeting of city leaders the night before.

“But give me a little more time,” he pleaded. “Judge, you can understand better than the rest of them what this step means to me as a lawyer in active practice.”

“Means sacrifice, John! Now go ahead and disprove what old Doc Anson barked out. Says he's willing to say the same thing to your face! That you're selfish as hell!”

The patriarch grinned when he repeated the statement, treating it as a jest. But Lang was convulsed by sudden and raging resentment. The lawyer kicked back his chair and stamped up and down the office, cursing roundly.

"I didn't realize you had any sore spot of that kind in you, John!" The judge wagged his head in mild reproof. "I can't believe you truly have, either. I guess we're hammering you a little too fast and hard in this matter. I told the boys we ought to give you more time, but they know how close you and I are and they thought they'd get the worry off their minds."

"I'm a fool to act and talk like this! I'm sorry, Judge Anderson. I don't know what the matter is with me!" He had controlled his emotion. "I'll talk sensibly with you a little later. I'll come to you. I'm sorry I taxed your convenience and your dignity by making you feel that you must come to me."

"I was glad when they asked me—glad to have the opportunity to sound the duty call, my boy! Now think it over quietly—don't get fussed up by it—drop around on me as soon as you see your way clear to do so." He shook Lang's hand and trudged out.

The lawyer sat down and wondered why he had flashed into fury so precipitately. He had promptly quieted that riotous disturbance in himself to be sure, but his rancor still lingered. It even occurred to him to call Doctor Anson on the telephone and ask him what he meant by such a jibe. But he refrained. He was not just sure what retort he would make to the doctor if the latter repeated the statement. There were clients waiting in the reception room; he was not in a mood to receive anybody at that moment.

The newspapers had got hold of something—reporters had besieged his office early. Obeying his instruc-

tions, his secretary had turned them away so they might not have any excuse on which to hang an alleged interview.

For the sake of distraction, Lang picked up a morning newspaper. He read a report of one of Andrew MacMurray's meetings. That headlong aspirant had not waited till other candidates had announced themselves; for months he had been canvassing and campaigning.

Lang knew MacMurray by court association only; the young man was a lawyer who was as fiery in speech before the bar as he was violent in his forensics in the city's rally halls.

He was an of, by and for the people champion. He was making a great handle of the fact that all the vested interests were against him and he made it a point to declaim word for word all the newspaper slurs aimed at him. He told his auditors he was afraid they might miss something, otherwise! He made an especially strong point in declaring that the newspapers, owned by the rich as all men knew, were trying to kill him off because he was determined to stand for the poor against the tyranny of the rich.

Demagoguery! It was in every line of MacMurray's speech, as Lang ran through it. But in his thoughts Lang was doing MacMurray justice as a vote-getter; that crackling, compelling personality who opened his arms, his mouth—his heart, apparently—before the people, MacMurray did possess the genius of leadership!

Lang doubted his own ability to warm up adherents in the class of voters to whom MacMurray was making an especial appeal. He was not conscious of any inherent priggishness, but he remembered with distaste his experiences when he campaigned for a friend—

going into saloons and beer clubs in the old days when there were such institutions for the herding of the proletariat in convenient roundups.

He threw the newspaper into the wastebasket and pushed the button which signalled to his clerk that he would receive a client. A person was promptly ushered in.

Lang uttered an ejaculation and leaped from his chair when he saw Mavis Duncan. That morning, as usual, he had admitted himself to his private office from the corridor, using his pass key, avoiding clients. To be the first in line she must have been waiting a long time. She admitted it when he inquired, placing a chair for her close to his desk.

The soft radiance of the floor lamp, the evening before, had not flattered her beauty, he noted, when he surveyed her in the frank light of the morning. She was more interesting because her eyes revealed troubled thoughts, because there was a suggestion of awed fright in her manner. John Lang was a skilled examiner. He knew the art of putting client or witness at ease—in order to extract more surely what he was after.

“I have come——” she stammered. She tried to hurry her words, she choked.

“Not on business of law, surely!” he cried, laughing.

She shook her head.

“Of course not!” His cordiality was tuned by the peculiar interest he felt in this unusual girl. “You have dropped in to talk some more with me about the Chaudiere—you have thought of—well, let’s say about the broad water above the falls of the Racing Horse. You must have been there—where the pines sing. I camped there once. I’m homesick, too, when I think of it.”

"I don't dare think too much about it—not now, sir. I am too bold in coming to you as I have done! I am not like myself, as I was at home." It was plain enough that the long period of waiting had had its full effect on her morale. She glanced around her in that formal, four-walled pen of tiered books, and trembled. "Now that I'm here, I don't dare. It's insane. You will pity me for my folly if I dare tell you."

"Miss Duncan, I am more sure of your courage than you appear to be. You will tell me why you have come to me."

"It's on account of what you said last night, Mr. Lang. About the mayoralty. You spoke as if it means nothing to you."

"Nor does it, when I consult my personal inclinations." He was displaying acute interest and considerable astonishment.

"But it has a tremendous interest for me, sir. Oh, I know nothing about politics," she hastened to assure him, anticipating his question. "I'm a stranger in this city—an alien, as you know. But Mr. Stewart says you'll be elected if you become a candidate."

"I'm grateful for such a compliment."

"But what you are tossing away as of no account—it's greater than life or death for—for somebody else. Mr. Lang, I cannot explain fully to you. It might seem silly because I place so much importance on my personal reason. Set against the big matter, it might seem a trivial thing. But because it's my own——" She looked away from him to hide her tears. "I don't intend to make it that sort of an appeal, however. I beg your pardon, sir!"

"It is my business to listen when folks are in any trouble. I can understand if you'll explain, Miss Duncan."

“If I tell you my real reason I’ll seem to you like a wheedling cry-baby, making an appeal to your generosity. They talk so much about that quality in you, sir! You have defended so many poor folks in court! I’ll not take advantage of it.” She showed pride and fresh courage. “What you said last night did, at the time, give me an excuse to come to you—at any rate, I have been feeling that it did. I’m not so sure, now when I’m here! Did you mean what you said?” she asked anxiously.

“Yes, I don’t care to be mayor of this city.”

“If you stay out, doesn’t it mean that Andrew MacMurray will be elected?”

He pulled himself forward in his chair and regarded her with grave, frowning intentness. He was rather puzzled by his quick twinge of resentment; why should he resent her interest in MacMurray, a man from her own North country? He felt he understood now, in spite of her reticence in regard to motives. He had uncovered a love affair—but he was in no mood to offer best wishes! Her woman’s clairvoyance detected the nature of his mood.

“Don’t misunderstand, Mr. Lang! He is my brother. No, not my own brother. But we call him that. He is my cousin and my father took him into our family when he was a little boy—an orphan. But it isn’t simply on this account I’m hoping he’ll be the mayor.”

“I must tell you I’m finding this perplexing, Miss Duncan. Cannot you be more straightforward?”

“The other matter—my reason—has nothing to do with politics, sir. I repeat—if I make any appeal to you from my personal reasons it would seem like a woman’s unfair appeal to a man’s chivalry—I cannot do it!”

“You are asking me to give up the field to your cousin—that is, so far as I may do so by declining to run?”

“I am taking you at your word. I thought, if you do not care for the honor, you might not allow them to influence you to be a candidate if you knew how—if you realized——” She was stammering. Again she looked away from his keen, appraising stare. She rose suddenly. “Now that I’m here, I understand how much of a fool I have made of myself, Mr. Lang. But it seemed so different after what you said—when I spent half the night going over the thing in my mind,” she confessed plaintively. “Desperate folly—it’s nothing else.” Her next words stirred vivid memory of his own weakness of the night before. “It is strange, isn’t it, sir, how we allow our little personal affairs to loom up and hide the big ones? And how ashamed we’d be to confess the real truth! I’ll hurry away. I’m sorry. I have only puzzled you and taken up your time.”

He suddenly felt a warmer spirit of fraternity—her confession made her one of his own sort when he thought on how he had turned his back on affairs of moment in order to follow unworthy impulse. “Will you please come back and sit down, Miss Duncan?” It was earnest appeal. He was gentle with her—disarmingly so; but he went relentlessly ahead to get facts, using his talent as the best cross-examiner at the bar of his State. “You came here today wholly on your own initiative, did you?”

“Yes, sir!”

“I am not going to pry into your secret reasons, after what you have said to me. But where your cousin is concerned—that’s in the field of politics. Does he know you were coming here to——”

“No—no!” she cried, her denial convincing.

“Has he discussed me with you?”

“Never, Mr. Lang. He does not talk to me about politics. He knows I do not understand—and you know it, now!” Her distressful grimace was not without humor.

He sat in silence for some time. He wanted to attack that barrier of her personal reasons in spite of his promise. His zeal as an investigator was roused. He was aware of taking a lively interest in this girl. It occurred to him, trying to estimate her motives, that her ambition was prompting her—her desire to pursue her studies. Was she depending on her cousin to finance her projected career?

This was a singular situation—this injection of the personal element into a municipal campaign. Under other circumstances he would have viewed it as belonging in the class which she had termed “desperate folly.”

But he was sympathizing with her—once again he was allowing a small affair to cloud his judgment in regard to a greater matter. He felt an impulse, looking on her distress, touched by her courage in venturing so valiantly, to offer his services, even if it should be to the rash extent of justifying her belief in his word about the mayoralty.

For the first time in his life he was moved by a distinct yearning to comfort a woman, even as he would offer to relieve the sorrow of a child—to caress her cheek, to encircle her with a consolatory arm—and he was not conscious of any disloyalty to what he termed real love in the case of the self-sufficient Reba Donworth.

He was sure he could not allow the girl to go away without a more complete understanding. He was still

insisting in his inner thoughts that the proffered honor meant little to him—would mean less if he could understand why she found the matter so vital in her affairs. To put the great question of a mayoralty campaign—

He was interrupted in his ponderings by a disturbance in the outer office—a man was shouting demands to be admitted immediately to the presence of Lang.

Mavis turned ghastly white and terror flamed in her eyes. It was Andrew MacMurray outside—there was no mistaking his voice; his tones had rung in court, on street corners, in rally halls, till all the city knew the timbre.

Lang went to the door and flung it wide. “You may come in, sir!”

MacMurray’s naturally florid face was colored more deeply by the hues of anger. His pale eyes glittered; his shock of sandy hair was rampant like a mane. He addressed himself to Mavis, who was standing when he stamped in. “You will go home—at once!” He swung arm, head, his whole body in his gesture of dismissal. But Lang closed the door.

“Keep your voice down, if you please!”

“Mavis, why did you dare to come here—to submit yourself to snubs? I know the nature of John Lang!”

Lang walked slowly to the vociferous rebuker.

“It is not exactly essential—but I’d like to be informed how you happen to be here, MacMurray?”

“A friend came to my office and said she was waiting to see you—he saw her here. It’s without my sanction, sir.”

“She expressly informed me to that effect,” stated the lawyer. He made himself her protector and warmed with the thought that he could shield her. “Miss Duncan and I began a very charming acquaint-

ance last evening and some words I uttered then gave her a good excuse to have business here with me today in my office."

"I know what's afoot in this city in politics. I won't have it that one who is as dear as she is shall be misunderstood for my sake. Mavis," he went on, his voice breaking, "I realize—but it's not the job for a girl! Where's the pride of your race?"

"I should not have come—I know it, Andy! But it seemed—I thought——"

"I know! The blood of the clan spoke in you. But I won't stand for any sacrifice of that sort."

He turned to Lang. "Sir, I'm putting the very life of me into this campaign. I owe a debt—I can see a way to pay—but though you drag my tongue from its roots I'll not explain that side to you or to any other man in this city. I'll fight fair—I'll win fair! I want no odds of sentiment. You know well I'm a candidate!"

"Nobody in this city has any doubts about that!" retorted the lawyer.

"It's a fair question, then! Are you also a candidate, according to reports?"

The girl's eyes were pleading.

But arrogance, defiance and challenge were bristling in the antagonist who had stormed in—standing there, snapping his eyelids, breathing noisily through distended nostrils. Nevertheless, Lang hesitated, unwilling to allow resentment to bias his judgment or drive him to wound the girl.

"I demand an answer," went on the challenger uncompromisingly. He was unable to change, even in the privacy of that office, the tactics which he had adopted for his campaign—"his fight" he insisted on calling it. He had found that the people responded

with more fervor when he said he was fighting for them. "I am out in the open, John Lang. My candidacy was not hatched out of a golden egg laid by a capitalistic goose in a back room. I am not afraid of the selfish interests. I ask no odds, I say. The people are with me."

"Just a moment!" Lang protested. "A stump speech will not impress me."

"Let us go, Andy!" the girl urged.

"Not till I'm answered! Not till he comes out in the open! Are you still hiding in the back room, Lang?"

"MacMurray, you have gone far enough!" Lang was baited in the presence of one whose good opinion he sought, so he was now owing to himself. The bumptious Scotchman was imputing cowardice. "You, yourself, have failed to come into the open, as you call it. I beg your pardon, Miss Duncan! But I still remain in the dark. If there's a good reason why politics should take second place at this time I ought to be informed for my guidance."

"You shall speak to him no more of private concerns," commanded the cousin, rolling the r's sonorously. "You'd be bending the knee. Where's your pride, I say? Lang, I've never been fooled by the nickname that calls you generous." MacMurray was going rapidly to extremes. "You got good advertising when you didn't get fees!"

Again the hateful taunt of selfishness! The second time that day—once in jest and now in earnest! Lang's eyebrows met and red flared on his cheeks. He addressed Mavis. "I'm sorry, but you're most unfortunate in having this sort of a relative."

"I take the brunt!" cried the irreconcilable. "Do you announce yourself?"

"Not to you, sir! My friends have the exclusive right to my confidence."

"Very well! Good morning!"

MacMurray put his hand on Mavis's arm. She shook off his hold and went close to Lang. "I am coming back into my saner senses, sir. I must have been insane when I came down here. I hope you'll pardon me—and forget me and my poor affairs."

She put out her hand and he took it and retained it while he replied. "It's easy to obey you, in part of your request. But I shall not forget you, and my hope is I may be able to help you in your affairs some day. I talked rather recklessly last evening. There are duties and obligations——"

"I understand better, sir."

"Come, Mavis! There's nothing to be gained," stormed the cousin.

"It's my pledge—that I will help you!" Lang was deeply earnest. "I shall find the opportunity—that's prophecy!" He smiled at her and released her hand.

MacMurray banged the door after them.

Lang blinked, as if the slam had been an explosion of a weapon. Then his frown settled into an expression of grim determination. He called Judge Anderson on the telephone.

"I'm starting for your office, sir. I'm giving you this bit of notice because you may wish to call in our advisers to help in framing an announcement for the newspapers. I'll be glad to serve as a candidate for mayor."

After he hung back the receiver he gazed down at the floor for a long time. The flame of his anger faded out of his cheeks. He wagged his head with the air of a man who was regretting a rash decision. "Damn MacMurray!" he muttered. "Damn his tongue!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE TWIST BIT



LANG did not bother to reflect that it was a peculiarly infelicitous time, on the heels of MacMurray's call, to attend to Serenus Trask's commands in regard to the disciplining of a nephew. On the contrary, the attorney felt in exactly the properly violent mood to jam the young man's nose down hard on to the grindstone of circumstances.

The lawyer let all scruples go by the board. He lumped his personal animosity in with the more legitimate business of the lord of the Double T, deciding that by his check to charity he had thrown off the fetters of Trask money and could act according to the promptings of ordinary human nature.

He called the Talisman Club, got in touch with young Trask and ordered that half-reluctant gentleman to make haste in getting to the Lang law office. After he had arranged his papers in the case, Lang laid them on the table in the centre of the office, planted his hands, palms down, on either side of the little stack of sheets and sat in his chair and waited, as stiff and grim as a wooden idol.

There had been urge, menace and bodefulness—all three—in Lang's tone when he commanded Trask to hurry, and the lawyer was not kept waiting long. There was no hold-up in the outer office—the clerk had been apprised. A chair had been placed for the caller at the table, opposite Lang. Trask sat in it at

the lawyer's curt request, and endeavored to copy the stiffly upright attitude of the other; but under Lang's ominous stare, the younger man began to slump, propping his elbows on the arms of the chair. The attorney wasted no time.

"Our business today has nothing to do with what we have been discussing lately. We have wasted altogether too much time on that nonsense. It is not a matter to be mentioned between us again."

He paused. He had just paid well, he felt, for the privilege of being free to handle Skiddy Trask as inclination prompted. His mood had no mercy in it. He decided to strike with the bludgeon of facts—to stun his man and tie him at leisure.

"Your Uncle Serenus is married!"

Serenus, the Second, blinked dizzily; but it was immediately evident that his scepticism was too hard a shell to be cracked by any such blow. He shook his head and started to say something, but Lang hit him again, with the information-cudgel, while Trask was still groggy. "And you're going to be married—at once—to a woman he has picked out for you!"

"It's all something you have rigged up, as you threatened you'd do."

"I knew nothing about either matter till your uncle informed me."

"You lie!"

Lang promptly satisfied an itching which had been in his palm for several days—for weeks, in fact, ever since he had seen Skiddy Trask talking so earnestly to Reba at the dances. He half rose, leaned across the table and slapped Trask across the face with a vigor which nearly stunned the assaulted man. The lawyer had his hand poised again when Trask straightened himself in his chair.

“Do you care to follow the discussion any farther along the lines you just chose, Mister Trask?”

“I can’t believe——”

“You *can* believe—I’m telling you!” Lang slapped his breast with the admonitory palm. “I’m telling you because I’m directed to tell you, acting as your uncle’s attorney. I repeat—and I propose to have no more comments on my authority or my truthfulness—your uncle is married.”

“I didn’t mean what I said to you—but you jumped me,” quavered the nephew. “May I ask who she is—his wife—where she came from?”

“I know nothing about that. But I have seen her. She’s his wife, all right!”

The attorney proceeded briskly with the duty imposed on him. “As to your chosen wife—the woman you’re going to marry—she is the daughter of the late Jonas Blake, so many years your uncle’s rival in the North country. The marriage settles the feud and unites great interests. So, you see how impossible it will be for you to squirm out of it.” He noted how thoroughly he had Trask cowed and Lang sat back in his chair. “We may consider all the marriage stuff settled.”

“I’m not talking now to you, Lang—keep your hands off me! But I’m saying to all, I’ll never marry that woman, whoever she is. I’ll never——”

Lang put up his hand in compelling fashion and checked the outburst. Then he shuffled the papers on the table.

“I had a long conference with your uncle last evening, sir. The matter of possible stubbornness on your part was considered. I just spoke the whole truth when I said the marriages—both of them—are your uncle’s arrangements, and he did not consult me. But

as to certain other procedure in regard to you, he did consult me, and I advised him, as his lawyer, how you could be constrained to obey, and that part of the thing is my doing. This is a day for the truth!"

There was satisfied malevolence in Lang's manner. He said coldly, "You ought to have known better than to trespass, Mister Trask. You're getting what's due to come to you!"

"And that's how you're using your power in the law, is it?"

"That's how I'm using it in this case. Your uncle has invested money to make you what you are, and now, so he says, he intends to use the investment. Are you sufficiently grateful to obey him?"

"I won't marry the woman."

"Very well! We'll assume that you continue to persist in such ingratitude!

"In the new testament which I have drafted and which will be executed today, you are formally mentioned to cover the law and to guard against attempts to break the will. You receive one dollar in cash. You'll recollect, possibly, how your uncle exacted notes from you each time he settled those affairs for which your allowance did not suffice. The notes are scheduled in the will and the cancellation of them will constitute your inheritance, on the ground that you have received your share of the estate. Legally sound, and proof against shyster lawyers!

"Therefore, as you stand before the world just now, you have one dollar coming to you—when your uncle dies. He's looking extremely healthy. Unless, by tomorrow, your engagement to Miss Maravista——" he dwelt on the name, and Skiddy winced—"Maravista Blake is announced, your allowance stops. It seems she has agreed to let your uncle make the

announcement. When your engagement is settled upon, one-quarter of the allowance starts. After the day of the wedding you'll get one-half the allowance, being on probation to see whether you're making her happy. The rest of the money for your support will be given you by your wife from her estate, your uncle managing the estate for her, and handing her the money.

"But you must ask your wife for the money, doing so in writing, and she must turn the letters over to your uncle in order that he may judge of your devotion by their style. The idea is, young man, that when the Double T and the Tulandic are joined by your marriage there must be great harmony, and no possibility of a divorce. If your wife is still happy at the time of your uncle's death, a codicil lets you in for a share of his estate. If she isn't happy, you will be in a bad way, young Mister Trask! For you'll have nothing from your uncle. And an unhappy wife will not be generous with you. Understand, do you?"

"And you say you planned it?"

"I planned it—and all legal safeguards will be attended to. The whole thing affords you an opportunity to show your uncle how much you value the easy life he has given you—and will continue to give you, if you come half way with him." The lawyer's new, suave and patronizing tone did not agree with the triumphant, challenging glitter in the gray eyes. "Your uncle directs me to tell you this! If you go storming to him he'll break all relations with you, switch off the Blake marriage and leave you flat. You know him too well to take chances. So, if you have any rebellious talk to make, let me have it, here and now."

Trask grasped the edge of the table and slowly pulled himself up out of the chair. "Yesterday in the

club you told me to wait till I had something to say before talking to you."

"That was my proposition. I have no time to waste."

Trask stumbled to the door and turned there, his hand on the knob. "I'll not take up your time right now, Mr. Lang. Perhaps what I have to say isn't of any importance, anyway. And I don't seem to have the words handy. But I can say a little!"

He had been twisting his Fedora hat in his hands while he sat at the table. He held it tightly rolled in his clutch. He shook it at Lang.

"When I do talk to you, Lang, it will be at the right place and time, and then you'll wish to God you had torn my tongue out here today instead of only slapping my face. You're going to be sorry!"

John Lang was not discomposed by the hysterical threat. After Trask had gone away, the lawyer allowed himself a moment to take account of stock. He did admit to himself his human animus in the affair of Reba, but he was sure that, as the elder Trask's attorney, he had a right to make the younger Trask amenable to the wishes of a benefactor. He could not bring himself to believe that the tongue of Skiddy Trask could harm John Lang, professionally, politically or socially, or that anything Trask could say would harass the conscience of a man who was so certain of his own rectitude in his profession. Therefore, he promptly closed his mental door on Skiddy's affairs.

He pushed a buzzer, summoned his stenographer and proceeded to put the will of Serenus Trask into legal shape. In the late afternoon that important client walked into Lang's office.

"Let's see! It was sort of agreed, wasn't it, how you'd bring the will and the papers out to the house

this evening?" Trask, asking the question, gave the lawyer a searching stare.

"Yes, sir!"

"Perfectly willing to come?" The trick eye was boring Lang.

"Entirely willing!" There may have been a touch of too much fervor in the lawyer's consent. At any rate, old Double T did not look very hospitable just then.

"I'm not going to bother you to that extent, Lang. I'm willing to do a part of the running—and besides, I've had to come down town to order a flock of suits from that tailor. I'll execute the will and get my copies of the other documents."

Lang understood; more than ever was the old man's jealousy assuming the nature of senile mania. They went through with the routine of the business in hand. Even when they were checking up the stipulations in regard to young Trask, the old man continued to be reticent on the question of his nephew's state of mind. The uncle had put no questions in regard to the nature of the lawyer's session with "the investment."

Lang finally approached the topic by asking whether young Trask had ventured to break over the strict orders and intrude on the honeymoon privacy of the mansion.

"Oh, yes! He ran out to see me after his chat with you," stated Trask with much serenity. "As I was telling you last night, you're a great lawyer. You earn your money."

"I'm wondering why you didn't mention his call till now."

"Nothing special to mention! Boy seemed to be all right. Said he was much surprised, but hoped I had a good wife. Didn't let him see her, though. He's

too foolish where girls are concerned. Young fellows are inclined that way these days." He gave Lang another sharp glance. "Even fellows who are well balanced other ways!"

"Look here, Mr. Trask, do you mean to tell me he came out to your house and was sensible?"

"He must have had all his tantrum out here with you. You tamed him. Knew you could. Glad I left it to you. Had a drink and nice chat, and I gave him a thousand so he can make a regular pleasure trip of it."

"A trip to where?" demanded Lang with considerable violence.

"North country! Tulandic, I suppose, seeing I took a lot of pains in telling him how to get there. Got to court a girl before you can marry her right, you know! Seemed to be anxious to get away. Took the noon train. Oh, he knows a good thing. Didn't show him her picture, though. No need of dulling the pleasure he'll take while making the trip up-country. Marriage is in the air these days, eh?"

The old man reached out his stubby thumb and prodded Lang and reminded the lawyer that gossip gave him a lass of his own. There was sly malice in Trask's joviality. Lang perceived that gossip had been generous in its giving.

"You tackled your end of the log mighty well—*mighty* well, Lang!" chuckled the old lumberman. "It was a case of needing the two of us to roll it, each having a damn good reason for spitting on his hands and using a lot of muscle."

He paid no attention to Lang's scowl of protest; the lawyer had done his best to lift himself out of the plain dirt of the business; he had gone to extremes to ease his conscience—making that donation to char-

ity. This coarse tyrant had a viewpoint that took account only of the natural motives of jealousy. His thrust had touched a sore spot in Lang.

Trask swung away and started for the door. "If anybody tries to steal your woman, hell-rasp him! What else can he expect, Lang? Hell-rasp him!"

Anxious though he was to be rid of this human file on a raw conscience, Lang called entreatingly, detaining old Double T. This sudden supineness of young Trask was distinctly not reassuring; furthermore, old Trask had not uncovered the situation frankly. Lang knew the style of his client and believed there must be something behind the uncle's airy assurance that Skiddy was reconciled.

"And you say he has gone to Tulandic?" persisted the attorney.

Old Double T confronted Lang and squinted the wall-eye in a particularly evil grimace. "Damn it, I've sent him there—and you ought to be devilish glad to have him out from under your feet. Now smooth off that sour look, my friend! He won't be coming back to bother you, because——"

Serenus Trask dropped all his playful guile and came out with the brutal facts. "That young whelp had the impudence to stand up to me! The infernal nerve to tell me what he wanted! Wants your girl, Lang! Why didn't you beat him up before this? But I can hit hard, even if you can't. I took no chances when I sent him North. I sent along with him a couple of keepers! That's what they are—*keepers*. *My* men follow *my* orders! If he goes and does the proper high-betty-martin tiptoe to Maravista Blake—all well and good! I can then cash in on him as the gentleman my money has made him. If he bucks up, those keepers have my orders to make him anything they

feel like making him. A potato peeling cookee! A manure heaver in a hoss hovel! He had the gall to stand up and tell *me* what he wanted!" raved the uncle. "Only heir of the Double T, hey? Well, by God, I'll have him dragged through all the muck and mud of the Double T lands till he does what *I* tell him to do—and be damnation glad to do it!"

He stamped out of the office, flourishing his hands over his head. An impulse surged in Lang, a decent and manly impulse. He rose and followed Trask, urging him to mitigate the ferocity of the sentence. But the tyrant flung an oath over his shoulder and departed.

Lang went back to his desk and tried to put the whole thing out of his reckoning, as an affair wholly between uncle and recalcitrant nephew. But remorse troubled him; and with remorse was mingled a queer, prophetic apprehensiveness, based on his lawyer's study of weak characters under the pressure of intolerable conditions. Were Skiddy Trask more of a man he might be able to endure. But in the unstable qualities of the fellow who had always followed his fancies and had yielded to his bent, John Lang perceived the possibilities of reckless mischief later on.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE NEW MAYOR



ACCORDING to appearances, John Lang regarded the mayoralty campaign as a rather inconsiderable affair and roused extremely varied emotions among the voters by his attitude. He was willing to make only one speech—in the city's largest hall, saying he would declare his policies at that time, on the eve of the election.

Everybody considered the campaign a peculiar one. Some persons found it pathetic. One man was struggling so frenziedly to clutch something upon which a rival plainly placed not a farthing's value!

One man urged and pleaded and ran his legs off. The other smiled and allowed his friends to do his talking for him. It seemed to be simply another case of the Fate-favored man who had everything and was getting still more in spite of himself.

Lang was not as easy in his mind as he appeared to be, but that was not because of any worry about the election. He wondered why one especial matter disturbed him so constantly. His experience as a criminal lawyer might account in part, he pondered. Any mystery which involved his attention kept troubling him until it was solved. The personality of Mavis Duncan had interested him, though he was far from admitting his concern for her and her affairs to be anything more than rather lively curiosity to know exactly what peculiar and specific interest in the mayoralty matter had urged her to venture into his

office. He was sure her reasons were interesting and were not sordid, and he pondered much on the thing—unable to put her out of his thoughts. One day he seized upon an opportunity, anxious to rid himself of distracting puzzlement.

Rain or shine, it was Lang's custom to go vigorously afoot about his affairs in the city, his hale strength disdaining vehicles. He saw MacMurray often, also on foot, as a true friend of the plain people should go. There was no hint of compromise in the hard features of the fighting Scot. After a time something like hatred was mingled with MacMurray's air of defiance.

One day Lang stopped his rival on the street—he was obliged to put out a barring arm to check MacMurray's rush past him. It was a quiet street—there were no eavesdroppers, and Lang took advantage of the opportunity offered.

"I'm sorry to have any animosity playing a part in this thing, MacMurray. I'm sorry——"

"And you hate to be sorry, eh? Sorrow annoys you, does it? A selfish man does flinch when anything disturbs his peace of mind, Lang! Bah!"

But Lang held his temper and preserved his smile; this tolerant and patronizing demeanor served to infuriate the rival still more. He clinched his fists and damned Lang roundly. Lang, intrepid, insistent, put his hand on MacMurray's shoulder. "I don't intend to talk politics with you. You are not in the right state of mind. But this affair doesn't seem to me important enough to rouse all the hatred you are showing."

"It isn't important to you—so you keep saying—and that's why you've got me going, Lang."

"Ah! You admit you're on the run?"

"Yes! You're taking something as carelessly as

you'd accept a cigar—something as precious to me as a drink of ice-water in hell would be.”

“But if I could understand better—— It's a delicate subject, MacMurray, but if you would intimate why your cousin——”

“Lay off that, Lang! Right now I'm in a devilish state of mind where she's concerned. Don't you dare talk to me on the subject. I'll forget myself!”

He jerked his shoulder from under Lang's restraining palm and went on his way, muttering. And the lawyer was left with a deepened mystery to consider. Therefore, Mavis Duncan persisted in his thoughts even more distractingly.

Whenever he called on Reba Donworth, and he had dropped back into a tolerant and tacit truce with Reba, he lingered in the corridor in the hope of hearing the voice which had charmed him. Occasionally he was fortunate. Then he heard her no more.

He did not venture to allude to Mavis when he was with Reba; he kept off the subject just as sedulously as he refrained from mentioning young Trask or discussing the rival's protracted absence from the city. His questionable standing with Reba was not to be further imperilled by rash topics.

One evening in the course of conversation he gossiped on the safer subject of the current campaign and mentioned the fact that MacMurray was spending considerable money, more than a man in his circumstances could afford, so folks thought.

“He may have more to spend on himself,” suggested Reba drily. “Mavis Duncan has given up her studies and has gone home. It's a shame—she had wonderful prospects.”

He was glad because the subject had been opened—troubled by the news he heard. “Then MacMurray

was paying her way—and too selfish to spare enough for her from his foolish campaign!” he blurted with some heat.

“I think it’s hardly the right way to put it,” corrected Reba, surveying him with no especial degree of favor. “I have only a few hints—which the Stewarts dropped, but—she called on you in your office, didn’t she, John?”

He bowed.

“It was a very bitter experience, so I should judge, from what I hear about her grief and her regret because she allowed herself to do anything like that.”

“I resent your blame, if that’s what you’re trying to convey. She would not explain to me—I could do nothing for her.”

“It seems what you declared here one evening misled her,” stated Reba, her composure unruffled. “She seemed to be a naïve girl. She believed, probably, that you meant what you said. I’m sorry she and I were not better friends. I could have warned her. I wish you would not blame poor MacMurray. As I gather from what little the Stewarts say on the subject Miss Duncan went away without any word to her cousin. She felt, probably, he needed all the money for his own ambition, so she gave up hers. I judge there’s been considerable mutual sacrifice in the family for some time.”

Lang was able to understand better what the hatred in MacMurray’s face signified. He did not relish the expression he saw on Reba’s countenance. He abruptly made his adieus to her and her mother and went away.

On the night before election day a gale drove a sleety winter rain athwart the city. There was cheer in the ranks of the MacMurray followers. The poor folks believed the kid glove voters would stay away

from the polls, fearing to get wet. The weather bureau predicted that the rain would continue during election day.

But the clouds were raced away by the morning gale and election day was crisply bright.

John Lang was elected.

He dodged away by himself in the late evening and took a long walk. He was not elated. Apprehending the difficulties of the task ahead of him, he had known he would not be elated! He was prepared for the mood of dull resignation which settled on him as he strode along the streets, his face hidden by the ulster collar which he had turned up as a shield against the nip of the air.

But there was some sort of a regret deeper than that which he had anticipated and was prepared for. He was admitting, for one thing, that MacMurray was honest enough and, even as he had spent his hard-earned money, would have given himself unstintedly to the duties of the office—knew more people and could understand their needs better.

Lang did not feel the supporting consciousness of having made any noble sacrifice.

MacMurray, when he had launched into his spending career, had placarded the city's dead walls and billboards with his portrait. The wind and rain had played queer havoc with the pictured face. The twisted sheets distorted his features; Lang saw MacMurray sneering, scowling, making up faces of suffering in defeat because he had been bulwarked by faith in himself and in the promised support of the masses.

But mostly, in spite of the ridiculous idea that a girl's affairs could be permitted to influence politics in a big city, Lang found himself once more weighing the mysterious interests of Mavis Duncan, and he was

plagued by the problem and oppressed by what he knew was the denial of some vital need in her life.

The face, the mien, the tones of that girl absorbed his thoughts. He wondered what such persisting obsession signified! He made it merely a matter of mental calculation, oblivious to any self-hint that this might be something which concerned the heart instead of the brain.

John Lang was still pitifully ignorant in matters of the heart!

CHAPTER NINE

AT HOME WITH THE TRASKS



ERENUS SKIDMORE TRASK, baron of the Double T, openly, even flamboyantly, brought his wife to the stone house in the city! This was in March. He tendered a formal "At Home" reception. Motor cars trailed in slow procession to the radiant entrance of the canopy, and fur-wrapped figures alighted and were engulfed in the maw of the striped canvas corridor stretched from the mansion's broad portal to the curb.

Music throbbed within doors. All the windows of the house shed glory into the night. The arriving guests, curiously staring, buzzing *sotto voce* comments, were evidently finding an element of the bizarre in the affair, rather than viewing it as a reception on the conventional plane. From what was said in the confidence of the limousines, it seemed as if curiosity rather than social favor for the host had influenced many of those who had responded to invitations.

One humorist, gazing at the glowing mansion from the window of his car, averred that it reminded him of a night-blooming cereus party assembled to watch the plant perform its first, last and only turn in the blossoming line.

Since late autumn there had been rumors in the city that Trask had been married, somewhere, and had brought his bride on at least one fleeting visit to the stone house. But the bleak mansion, behind the black-growth trees, had given no sign during the winter that

it housed a bride, and nobody in the roster of Trask's acquaintances had been able to get much definite information.

Then had followed weeks when the only folks in the house were carpenters, painters, decorators and other workers of the guilds of refurbishers. There was no concealment of the work of making over the house. All the pines and the spruces masking the structure were leveled by the axe. The cantdog was ripped off the front door. The logs which had wainscoted the master's den were pushed out of the windows and were hauled away. Everything in the house which suggested Trask's interest in the forest had been cleared out. A carpenter lugged off the stuffed loup-cervier; he did not care particularly for its hideous physog, but the thing did not cost him anything and he had a weakness for loot of that sort.

The rumor about a bride having been in the house before the work of renovation was begun was swept entirely out of sight by the known fact of the return of the Trasks from the South.

If Serenus Skidmore Trask had once believed in concealment of the treasure he had found, he held to such a belief no longer. He flaunted the possession of the glorious young creature who had become Mrs. Trask. The Trask limousine daily traversed all the principal streets and went slowly, and the ravishing face behind the polished glass was seen by all. Posted beside the wife was Trask, always. He glanced from side to side, enjoying the stares of the multitude. His wall-eye glowed with pride.

In that transformation of his whole nature, in his shift from secretiveness to prideful publicity, he was as prodigal with his invitations to the "At Home" as the patronesses of a charity ball would have been.

Mayor John Lang received his own personal surprise in connection with that reception: Reba Donworth wrote him a little note, saying she would like to attend, asking his escort for herself and her mother. She did not intimate that she would esteem the honor; she wrote as a friend who was still on terms of a sort with Lang.

She had been refusing Lang's invitations for a long time, in fact ever since his election to the mayoralty. She had not declined curtly. She exhibited no absolute dislike for him or his company. She had been even apologetic in her refusals to go anywhere with him.

He had called on her as the weeks passed, but less often than had been his custom. He would not admit to *himself* that he loved her less. Occasionally he bluntly told *her* he loved her more. But for the most part they kept off the topic of love. Neither of them ever mentioned Skiddy Trask.

Lang's sense of pride was pricked deeply when her patient submissiveness informed him that he was endured rather than welcomed. But his resolve to win her—to tire out the folly which had turned her toward young Trask—made him persist. It was his nature to go grimly ahead toward any goal which he had set as a worth-while objective.

When Reba was presented to Mrs. Trask, she greeted the hostess with warmth, the tactful fervor of which was refreshingly contrasted with the rather chary and circumspect compliments previously offered by the society inspectors who had come to peer and pry. The girl wife responded to Reba's gracious manner. It was a rift in the cloud of smothering conventionality.

Lang had been studying Anita as he and his com-

panions made their slow advance in the line. He was remembering her protests against being kept in a corner, in the dark. Her beauty was now framed with jewels, her cheeks were flushed, her charm was supremely glorious. But he perceived in her an inquietude akin to terror. She seemed to be awed as well as frightened. She had demanded all this, Lang knew. He understood how she had swayed the uxorious Trask to give what she desired. But she wore the air of a child who had demanded a genie's wand as a plaything and was mortally in fear of what she had summoned up. She shared with Lang the smile she gave Reba, and his presence seemed to give her courage. He was closer to the Trask affairs than anybody else.

Lang winced when old Trask gave him the prod with the thumb which so often pointed Double T's coarse jocosity. "What are you waiting for, Lang? After my setting you an example, what are you waiting for, I ask? I reckoned on you being married by the time I got back from the South!"

Reba hastily released the hostess's hand and passed on. Lang, looking into Mrs. Trask's eyes, wondered what her change of expression meant. He was accustomed to depend on the eyes for revelations of the truth, he told himself. But he was finding it hard work to believe he saw reproach, regret and protest dimming the luminous gaze lifted to his.

"I hope to know you much better," Reba had told the young wife.

When Lang joined her, Reba repeated that wish to him. "She will find no real friends among such women as are flocking here tonight. Notice how they look at her! Hear them buzz behind their fans—the hornets! Won't you help me to know her real well?"

"How can I do that?"

"You're her husband's attorney—a friend of the family!"

"And you would have me clear a path so you may serve as the nephew's attorney, eh?"

"Is your suspicion kind?"

"Possibly not. But it's correct. I don't feel inclined to help you, Reba. Do you mean to tell me you're still clinging to a coward who has run away from you and from his duty to do as his uncle requests?" In accusing the innocent victim of a tyrant, Lang was seizing this opportunity to test Reba in her fealty to an apparent absconder.

"I thought it was understood between us we'd let the topic sleep."

"You have stirred it up—it's awake!"

"I simply wish to be a friend to a girl who——"

"I ask pardon—but you must remember I am a lawyer, and my mind instantly leaps to analyze the motives behind any wish."

"You're too much of a lawyer—in everything," she retorted.

"Possibly! And as attorney for Trask, the elder, I'm going to oblige Trask, the younger, to obey his uncle's commands—that is to say, make him obey as soon as we can catch him," he hedged, to conceal what he knew. "I went to some pains to put the legal teeth into those commands."

"John, are you sure you haven't gone out of your way to wreck another man's life?"

"I have only stayed in my path of duty, and have gone straight ahead for the good of all concerned. I'm sorry you have brought the matter up in this place, and at this time."

"Why, I merely——" But she checked her outburst of protest and turned away from the cold eyes

challenging her motives in seeking friendship with the aunt of Skiddy Trask.

The embarrassment was relieved by a social chatterer. "Oh, Mr. Lang! You are so close to the family! But the rest of us are all at sea! Do tell me from what part of the South Mrs. Trask comes."

"I have not been informed, Mrs. Barron."

"Oh, you lawyers are so secretive!"

"I assure you I am not secreting any information from you in this instance, my dear madam. I simply do not know!"

The gossip-gleaner was not put off by his apparent sincerity; she gave him a simultaneous tap with her fan and a dig with her tongue. "But I just heard Mrs. Trask confide to somebody who was discussing you. She says you are her dearest friend, helper and confidant. But I suppose you lawyers must guard the sanctity of your confessional." She went away.

Lang from his height could look over the heads swaying between himself and his hostess. As if she were drawn by the potent influence of his stare, she turned and looked his way and smiled. But he felt a sense of irritation; this new gossip suggested that Mrs. Trask was indiscreet and might imperil his standing as her husband's attorney. The old man's tinder of jealousy was dangerously inflammable. Lang had adopted a manner of extreme reserve in the presence of Mrs. Trask, not out of any caddish doubt of her wifely integrity but because her apparent ingenuousness took embarrassing advantage of any slight show of camaraderie by him.

"Your client is wonderfully pretty," observed Reba drily. "Are you sure you did not dress for her sake on a certain occasion I have not forgotten?"

"I did not know I was to see Mrs. Trask that eve-

ning—I did not know then there was a Mrs. Trask. I have seen her only a few times. We seem to be bothering with a great deal of idle talk. I'll take you and your mother in where the refreshments are."

In the crowded buffet there was the customary riot of chatter, above the clash and clatter of ware. But above all other sounds one woman's strident tones carried. "She is deliciously Southern, that's obvious enough! I really can't make out whether she is over-shy or too shrewd to say a great deal about herself. Oh, I'm perfectly aware it isn't nice to discuss the hostess—but she invites discussion—one simply can't help talking about her. I just told her so! Even if she won't talk about herself, I just said to her, she must expect everybody else in the city will talk about her! She really seemed glad to know it. So, with that warning to her, I'm excused. She's so delightfully pagan!"

The voice ceased and then began again, evidently replying to a question. "What do I mean? Why, she's a pagan, though she doesn't seem to realize it. Ingenuously so, and in somebody else than in such a perfectly glorious creature her ways would be rude. However, we must forgive everything in a divinity. Am I not generous to one of my sex? But she refused to take the hand of Carlos Roccardi this evening—she looked at his twisted moustache and shivered—actually! Well, I don't like his style much, myself, even though Carlos is far from being a devil. She turned away and wouldn't look at him. I asked her about it, after Carlos had shrugged his shoulders and was gone. She said she always lets instinct rule her. Now isn't that pagan?"

Reba looked over her ice at Lang, and her gaze was so long and intent that he turned at last and faced

her. He was very solemn and seemed to be striving with uncomfortable thoughts.

“What’s the matter?” he demanded, as if her stare had affected him like some sort of intrusion upon reflections he was hiding.

“I was merely wondering! Wondering what yonder lady with the police-siren voice would have detected if she had intercepted the look the pagan gave you when you came to her this evening. If Mrs. Trask allows instinct to rule her dislikes, I suppose the same quality attaches to her likes.”

“I don’t enjoy that sort of humor,” he said quite roughly.

“Aren’t we good enough friends so you’ll allow me to joke with you?”

“Trask’s wife has about the same interest in me as I have in Trask’s wife. And if you think it’s more than surface interest and if you can be complacent enough to joke me, you hurt my feelings. Don’t you know men any better than you seem to know ’em?”

“You haven’t allowed me to know one man very well—that man being you!”

“You’re too sure of me—that’s the trouble! You take me for granted. I haven’t raved and promised enough! There have been no tags hitched to me in the woman line. Confound it, Reba, I’m afraid women don’t really value a man unless he has been well advertised as a lover. Do you love Skiddy Trask, as you’d like to have me believe, for himself or for his reputation?”

She stiffened. “It isn’t like you, John—that way of talking!”

“There you go! You think you know me so well you have my ways and my manners all catalogued. I think the way to handle you, or any other woman,

is to keep 'em guessing! What'll you do, if I really make you jealous—or try to?"

"There's no telling what a woman will do, John," she replied placidly.

Again the high-pitched voice sounded over the rest of the sounds in the buffet.

"I'm quite sure she has lived in the country districts in the South—not in any city. She knows too much about nature to be a city girl. She knows all about spiders!"

There was a pause, indicating the interjection of another question.

"Oh, I came early before the rush and I made it my way to talk with her. She tells me the lady spiders eat up the gentlemen spiders when they get in the way. And she said it as if she believes the plan to be a mighty good one. *There's* a new-woman slogan for you! 'Be a spider! Eat 'em up!'"

General laughter drowned out the strident tones.

"Do you care to stay longer, and dance?" Lang inquired.

"No, I think I have seen enough."

He wanted to taunt her—to ask her whether Skiddy's absence was keeping her from the dance. When he followed Reba in taking leave of the hostess, the girl-wife clung to his hand. "You give me courage—when I look at you," she said in low tones. "It's strange here! It's so big in this world—I'm afraid."

"You have nothing to be afraid of—in your position, Mrs. Trask."

He relaxed his fingers, but she continued her clutch of his hand. Old Double T was no longer at her side—men had cajoled him into the smoking room.

"Will you be my friend—always? Always willing to help me? You don't understand how I feel—but

I saw you first of all the great folks when I came out of the—when I came from the South.”

“I will help you to the limit of my powers, if ever you should need help in my line. Remember! I am your husband’s friend.”

In spite of the secret and rather cheap feeling that his masculine vanity had no reason to be flattered by her endeavor to enlist a helper, he put considerable cold significance into his reminder that he was Trask’s friend.

“It’s a pledge!” Her eyes were now pleading with him. “And I know something else about you, Sir Mayor! My husband says John Lang never broke his pledged word.”

It was fairly early when he left Reba and her mother at their door. He decided to go to the Talisman Club and sit in his corner for a time. He re-entered the cab and was driven to the club.

CHAPTER TEN

A SPECTER FROM THE NORTH



LANG found quite a convention of members in the Talisman Club's lounge when he strolled in; most of them were in evening garb. Remarks, mingled with the greetings given him, left him to understand that these birds of a feather had merely skimmed through the Trask mansion in order to have a peek at the bride and a peck at the food and to satisfy curiosity. The remarks were not indiscreetly pointed; Lang's position as attorney for the Trask interests was respected. But the human impulse to make gay comment on the extraordinary was not to be curbed among those who had so recently viewed the near-apotheosis of the girl-wife by the tyrant of the Double T. Lang endured tolerantly, though he did not smile.

"And the advance notices inform us that your address to the Bar Association next week will cover 'The Ethics of Protection of Client by Counsel,'" drawled Larry Devon, the club satirist. "John, old Double T has a good case against you! Criminal neglect! Where was your protection?"

Lang shook his head protestingly.

"There may be a sensible way of getting old Serenus out of his scrape even yet!" Devon insisted. "Send for Skiddy, wherever he may be! Have him do the Lochinvar act with the bride. A little late for real romance. But it's a worthy job—a job for a professional, and Skiddy has qualified!"

Even venerable Judge Cleaves, of the Supreme

Bench, was stirred to shoot an arrow of humor with the rest.

"I really supposed Serenus, as master of the Double T drives, had learned about the dangers of January freshets and would build his dams more strongly in the winter of old age. However," admitted the judge, with an arch smile, "when pulchritude pleads its cause, common sense is often tongue-tied."

Larry Devon audaciously persisted in his own line of jest. "It's too bad old Double T's nephew hasn't his regular feminist business better organized, with a competent staff. Then an assistant could attend to the second-rate eloping job which Skiddy is on now, and the chief could be free for this really important case. There's no telling what a new wife may do to an old will!"

Lang showed irritation. "Why do you infer that young Trask has eloped with anybody?"

"Well, hasn't he?"

Lang did not reply. He and Serenus Trask, the elder, had been keeping off the topic of Trask's shanghaied nephew. When old Double T had started to describe the details of the treatment accorded in the North to a persisting rebel, Lang had protested with profane violence. But Trask, in order to excuse his implacable mercilessness, did turn over to the attorney letters from the heiress of the Tulandic. The heiress frankly revealed that she was in a rebellious state of mind of her own and was not in a mood to wait much longer for the fulfilment of the promise to deliver to her one wooer, guaranteed, as per schedule, to become a husband able to give her social prestige. She had tried to be patient, she wrote, but between a dancing master and a modiste, both imported from the city, she was "completely tuckered out." She demanded

to know whether she had been wasting time and effort and her money. Trask, rabid because the business coalition might fail, was urging his attorney to go north and tackle the affair. Therefore, circumstances were not making Lang especially tolerant of club persiflage.

“What else besides girls does Skiddy have for a business?” quizzed Devon. “That’s my reason for mentioning a new elopement to you, John!”

The men who surrounded Lang were entirely absorbed in the mild baiting the lawyer was undergoing. Again Lang refrained from replying to Devon. But the jester was answered. A man shouted from the archway entrance of the lounge. The reply was in a falsetto which cracked and quavered with the emotion of one who was near the extremity of mental strain.

“I’ll ’tend to questions about my business without any help from John Lang, the sneaking thief!”

The new arrival at whom they gazed, when they whirled on their heels with a surge of excited interest, had mentioned “his business.” But there was not a man in the room who recognized Skiddy Trask, at first sight of him.

In that interior of decorous elegance, contrasted with those men in evening clothes, the interloper presented a strange figure of jarring incongruity. He was apparently a rough lumberjack, bearded and shaggy. From his worn moccasins to the frayed Scotch cap aslant on his head, he was unkempt, ragged and dirty. The fist he was shaking at Lang was roughened and grimed by work-a-day toil. When he drew his lips back from his yellow teeth, blood showed because the lips had been cracked by exposure to the cold of the North woods.

“I have come, just as I am, to show you what you

have made of me, John Lang. How do you like your work? You told me to come when I had real business with you. I'm here, damn you!"

Judge Cleaves walked out of the group of men, both hands aloft in protest at this profanation of the sedate Talisman Club. The judge had finally recognized the intruder, and was distinctly horrified by the aspect of Skiddy Trask, a member of the club. "Hush! Hush!" pleaded the jurist. "Young Trask, remember where you are! And you're insulting the honorable Mayor of our city."

But the vengeful intruder was not deterred by one who had formerly awed a nonentity in the club. Trask had come straight out of the winter woods; out of a hard school where blows and insults marked association with his fellows; a fugitive escaped from the Double T jailers! Berserker rage, torched by many an hour of flaming meditation, was in him. And mania gleamed in his eyes. He flung his arms about in menacing gestures. "Get out of my way, you drooling old fool! I've got business with only one man here."

"Call the porters!" advised somebody. "He's crazy and must be taken care of."

Trask drove his hand into the breast of his faded mackinaw jacket and pulled out a revolver. He began to rave, and threatened those who sought to lay restraining hands on him.

"Just a moment, gentlemen!" Lang pushed his way close to Trask and the calmness of his demeanor and the evenness of his voice helped to quiet matters. He stood in front of the young man, serenely contemptuous of the threat of the revolver; he turned his back on Trask and faced the club members. "I entreat the indulgence of the club, gentlemen. I may be partly responsible for this disturbance because Mr. Trask

has come to me here on business. He and I will retire and attend to our affairs."

But Trask stepped back a few paces and raised his gun. "We'll talk that business here—here and now! You told me to come to you. Didn't you promise to listen?"

"I said I would listen when you had anything of importance to say to me."

"I belong to this club—my dues are paid—and I'm going to give these members a chance to decide whether what I've got to say is important or not. I'll shoot the man who tries to stop me. But you'd better listen, all of you! And after I'm done, go ahead and expel me."

He shook his weapon at the attorney. "You don't dare to keep your promise, and listen to me, John Lang! That's what the matter is with you!"

"I dare to listen!" The lawyer straightened; he surveyed his fellow members. "Gentlemen, it may save the situation from becoming worse if we allow Mr. Trask to say what he has to say to me, according to his own choice in the matter. He is much overwrought, it seems, and is armed."

The men nodded their agreement. Their curiosity, it was plain, was stronger than their desire to preserve club decorum.

"I am keeping my promise to you, Mr. Trask," suggested the lawyer quietly. "Go ahead."

Trask did not remove his cap. He brandished his weapon while he talked. "I stood outside my uncle's house tonight in these rags—it was open to everybody—and I didn't dare go in—and that's what you have done to me. You gave him law to make a slave of me, and you bragged to me about your putting teeth into that law? Wasn't that your brag?"

"Yes!" admitted Lang, without emotion of any sort.

"He has made a will—and it leaves me one dollar—and you drew that will for him. Didn't you?"

"I did."

"My uncle made me what I am—he wouldn't let me be anything else than a loafer. You know he wouldn't!"

"I know it."

"Yes, you knew it—and you helped him make that will. And look at me! I stand here a pauper! and I had my one chance to be made decent, and you wouldn't help me to that chance. Would you help me? No! You stood up and told me I could not have that chance. Didn't you tell me?"

"Yes!"

In the breathless silence men murmured—a note of wonder in their tones. What was this which John Lang was admitting in the way of the ruination of a man?

"And even now you won't give me that chance, will you? You won't ask my uncle to see the right way, and you won't do the one thing which will give me back my happiness and start me on the way to make a man of myself—you won't do it, will you? I can see by your damned hard face that you won't do it!" He snarled the taunt.

"Trask, I have explained the whole thing calmly to you in the past—and you can't expect this play-acting trick to make a fool of me after my best judgment has influenced me to make up my mind for good and all."

"Play-acting!" shrieked the other. "You call this play-acting, after I have been wallowing through hell? My God, Lang, haven't you eyes to see when a man is so earnest that it's life or death for him?"

"I'll talk with you when you are calmer, Trask."

“And talk the same as you have in the past, eh?”

“Undoubtedly! The conditions have not changed. They seem to be much worse,” stated Lang, looking the ragged man up and down. “I shall not allow hysteria to turn me from what I consider is right.”

Trask slowly lowered the gun and aimed it at the lawyer. The men in the room gasped protest. The threatened target did not move.

“Oh, I’m not going to kill you, John Lang! I’ve had too long a time to think things over to let you off as easy as that. But right in line with the aim of this gun I’m going to shoot something into you with my tongue. Let the word go out of this club—and it will—that you have made me what I am, and wouldn’t give me my chance. You’ve got a conscience, even if you haven’t any mercy. And that conscience is going to take you by the neck and put you on to your knees—on to your knees, Lang, just as I have been on my knees to you. Stay alive! I’m not sure about there being a hell hereafter. But I know there’s one on this earth—I’ve been through it. Stay alive!”

He started toward the archway of the vestibule. He waved the revolver over his head.

“Stay alive!” he repeated over and over, in a sort of frenzy.

He halted and whirled suddenly, to the dismay of the distressed clubmen who were hoping that the dreadful scene was ended. He returned a few steps toward Lang who stood calmly in his tracks. “I didn’t intend to drag a woman’s name into this,” squealed the intruder in hysterical falsetto.

There was only one woman who belonged in the affair, so Lang’s first flash of frenzied thought told him! He broke out of the stolid composure which he had imposed upon himself. He started toward young

Trask, snapping fierce oaths as the preface for his command to be silent. But Skiddy's piercing tones carried above Lang's voice.

"That gets you, hey? And it ain't any damned wonder it does! I'm out of the North country! I got facts up there while I was getting hell! Listen, everybody here!"

He darted away from Lang's clutches at him; he ran around the room, dodging behind divans and chairs while he delivered himself.

"You went up into the woods a-hunting! Yes, you were hunting all right! You helped the gang plaster her on to my uncle! The damnation ——!" He screamed the vile name.

Lang ceased his pursuit of young Trask. He was wondering, himself, what Skiddy had dug up in the North country in the way of information about Serenus Trask's wife. Feeling his absolute innocence in that affair he resumed his calm manner, allowing the club members to think what they chose to infer from his sudden outburst. The accuser ran and stood in the archway.

"She's your pet and your tool, that's what she is! You helped her get her claws into my uncle. What did you do with Mack Templeton? Did she kill him or did you hire it done? I guess I'll go and ask her. You won't tell—but maybe she's fool enough to do it! Yes, if I jump her with the name of Mack Templeton!"

He paused in the archway and faced toward the man whom he had accused, reckless in his virulence. "You have left me nothing to live for, Lang! But—stay alive! And see what it gets you!"

He jammed the revolver into a pocket and hurried out of the club house.

“In the case of anybody but Skiddy Trask I should say some of his friends ought to follow him and stop him from committing suicide,” averred Devon, the first to get his voice after Trask’s dramatic departure. “But, somehow, you don’t give Skiddy credit for having the courage.”

“I don’t think the word courage is at all felicitous when used in connection with suicide,” protested Judge Cleaves.

He was surveying Lang with interest. The lawyer was showing less composure than he had displayed when he had been menaced by the gun. “If you are convinced that our friend, young Trask, is an utter coward, Devon, you ought to follow him and save him. Cowards kill themselves!”

But Devon lighted a cigarette and sat down.

“It’s the brave man who plays out his hand, no matter what cards Fate has dealt,” pursued the judge. “That’s trite, but I feel like emphasizing it at this moment. We know how shocking it would be for a petulant player to throw his whist hand on the floor in the card-room, yonder. When a man blows out his own brains, he makes a great deal of trouble for other folks and dodges his own misfortunes.

“Brother Lang,” he continued, with the formal speech characteristic of his manner on the bench, “I noticed that your legal training held you to answers of yes and no when you were on the stand, so to speak, a few moments ago. It was wise, perhaps. However, considering in what an unfavorable light you have been put by your plain disinclination to provoke an insane man to bring scandal upon the club, I’m sure your friends will be glad to listen to any explanation you have to offer.”

“I thank you, Judge Cleaves, but I do not feel as

if this were a case which should go to trial at this time—at any rate, not in the Talisman Club.”

In spite of the calm tone in which Lang spoke, the judge reddened perceptibly and the listeners felt the lawyer's retort to be unjustifiably discourteous, considering the jurist's manifest spirit of friendly helpfulness. Lang immediately walked out of the lounge, secured his hat and coat and left the building.

“There may be nothing in Skiddy's threats or laments,” admitted Devon. “Most likely not, because his wits seem to be off the hooks entirely. But if there is, John Lang ought to be currying popular favor instead of turning the cold shoulder to it. The whole blamed world is sour in these times when folks seem to be out hunting for a good excuse to kick a fellow—and the bigger the fellow, the more surface he spreads for kicking purposes. Damn it, Lang is our mayor! He can't afford to let a smirch stick to him.”

Justice Cleaves had not regained his good nature. He selected a cigar from his case, gnawed off the end and expelled the bit of tobacco with vigor. “If what Lang admitted to young Trask is any indication of the facts in the case, we ought to find Brother Lang's address to the Bar Association particularly interesting, providing I recollect the nature of the subject. Is it not——” he hesitated, looking from face to face of the attorneys who were in the group.

“‘The Ethics of Protection of Client by Counsel,’” stated Larry Devon ironically.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WHY THE MUSIC STOPPED



WHILE his club friends were mildly disparaging Lang's suitability for the theme assigned to him, the lawyer was putting those ethics of protection to a practical test. He was hastening in a cab to the mansion of the elder Trask, late as the hour was.

Lang had devised a twist bit, following the client's orders, and the bit was not operating according to expectations. It was a new Skiddy Trask who had come from somewhere out of the night. It was a wild colt—the intruder who had reared and kicked recklessly in the Talisman Club. Lang was still discounting the ability of the nephew to make serious trouble for his betters, but was admitting the possibilities of damage by a runaway fool.

Activities at the mansion were still in progress. There was music, and the young folks were dancing. Departing elder guests were filtering out from the front entrance; at the rear doors the caterers were removing the *débris* of the feast.

Lang noted how much of open opportunity there was if a desperate man wanted to invade the place. But his practical mind would not admit that young Trask was lunatic enough to attempt any actual sortie of violence on his uncle.

Lang reassured Serenus, the elder, on that point when they were closeted in Trask's den on the upper

floor. The lawyer did not mention Skiddy's ravings about the uncle's wife.

"So that's what he said, and that's how he looked, eh?" commented old Double T after Lang had succinctly reported on the affair at the club. "I heard he had got away from the keepers—damn the lunkheads! Did he say where he has been lately?"

"In hell."

"Meaning, perhaps, he was over on the Tulandic and got a look at Maravista Blake when she didn't know it! Considering what he has been able to pick in the past in the line of girls, the sight of her as his sentence for life may have had the effect on him it seems to have had. But the thing is going through as I have planned it, Lang. He's back here where he can be handled. Use the twist bit."

Skiddy Trask had raved about a conscience—had conjured it up, as he would summon a demon. Lang threw a sop to that conscience. "You are absolutely set upon the Blake marriage, are you, sir?"

"Absolutely!" Trask brought down both palms on the arms of his chair. He twisted his neck till he was able to train his wall-eye on the lawyer. "And I am just as absolutely set against his making a fool of you, of himself and of that girl he has been trying to tole away from you. What's the matter with you, Lang?"

"We won't drag in that side of the thing, if you please!"

"It's already dragged in. I've attended to that. I've made it my business to ask a lot of questions about this girl affair of my nephew's. He always has something of the kind on—and it was only a case of my finding out what the latest one was. Lang, what do you suppose I'd do to a man who tried to cut in on

the girl I had picked out? Gad, if you're getting weak enough to lie down in a case of love, next thing you'll be lying down in a case of law! Wake up!"

Neither of the men had heard the sound of the door when it was opened. The voice of Mrs. Trask startled them. "Was I wanted here?"

"No!" snapped old Double T before he had recovered his poise. Then his eyes moistened as he gazed on the charming picture framed in the doorway. "Yes, you are! You're always wanted by me, honey! Come here!" She went to his side and he put his arm about her, pulled her close to him and kissed her. Her side glance was with Lang while the old man pressed his lips to hers.

"And now trot along," commanded the husband, looking around at Lang and flaunting the triumph of one who was able to control and command this glorious creature. "But what made you think I wanted you?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I do." He squinted at her.

Lang was astonished when her forced smile was succeeded by an expression of terror.

"Well, for the love o'—what—what are you scared about?" demanded Trask.

"I'm not frightened."

"I should hope not, when I'm only going to explain about its being the little bird of love that's always telling you I want you. I'm afraid this evening is rather too much strain for you, Anita. I'll send away those devilish fiddlers. They're getting on my nerves, too."

"No, no!" she pleaded. "Let them play for a while. It's fun. And you will stay here in this room for a time, dear old husband?"

"Yes! I have business. Run along for now."

She hurried out and shut the door. Down the corridor was her maid. Anita beckoned to her.

“And you’re sure—sure this queer man wants to see me—doesn’t he want my husband?”

“He’s rough, like so many men who come to see the master. But he says he has a message from the North woods for you—you alone, madam. So, I told him to wait in your little sitting room.” She indicated the door of the room, farther along the corridor.

Anita went slowly toward the door. When she reached it she held her hand on the knob for some moments. She turned and saw the maid still observing her. She impatiently waved dismissal and the maid went on her way. While the servant was hurrying down a rear stairway, she heard the door close behind her mistress. On the lower floor the maid nudged the butler who was bossing the caterers packing up in the serving room.

“That man who came in by the back door!” she whispered.

“I didn’t pay any special attention. Who is he?”

“The mistress seemed frightened when she went to him. We’d better go and stand outside her door.” There was a hint in her tone and manner. The two servants appeared to be very good friends.

“She seemed frightened, eh?” The butler narrowed his eyes. “Then you’re right! We have had jobs in other places where we have cashed in on what we heard. Ye-ah! We’d better go and stand outside her door.” He winked at the maid when he echoed her suggestion.

In the den, the lawyer and his client proceeded to consider the case of the intractable nephew. Belowstairs, the music sounded, and there was the rippling laughter of dancing girls.

Trask's mood, in spite of what he had said about fiddlers, apparently was mellowed by the music, or softened by his recent scene with his girl-wife. "Of course, Lang," he proceeded, after a period devoted to musing, "we've got to consider all sides of the thing. Love is a touchy mess to handle. I've found that much out late in my life, and the swagger girl you were beaving around tonight has probably made you feel the same way. I'm not changing my mind about my nephew marrying the Blake girl. That's business! The Double T and the Tulandic, hitched together, make a property worth four times what it's worth divided. And he's carrying my name! The only Trask left! We've got to nurse this thing more or less. If I didn't know more about love than I used to know, I'd have had him standing with the Blake girl before a parson weeks ago. I'd have held him by the scruff of the neck and choked him until he said yes and kissed the bride. But I'm a little lenient these days. He must come to the net, though! After the hook has been set, you've got to let your fish do about so much scooting and threshing. We'll go ahead now and reel him in, Lang—reel him——"

Then the old man leaped out of his chair. "Name o' hell, Lang, what's that?"

A firearm had cracked—somewhere in the house. A moment later a woman screamed in the corridor.

Trask flung open the door of the den. His wife's maid was scampering toward him. Down the corridor the butler stood near a door at which he pointed his finger significantly when the master appeared.

Lang ran along with Trask to the door, but allowed the latter to open it. He went in after Trask. "Keep everybody away from here," the lawyer commanded the servant, and shut the door.

“Who is that—who’s that man?” quavered Trask. The man lay on the floor, face up.

“It’s your nephew,” stated the lawyer, remembering his own hesitant recognition of young Trask in the Talisman Club.

Lang stepped forward to make an examination, showing no tremors. He exchanged looks with Mrs. Trask. She was huddled on a divan, peering at the lawyer from over her forearm which she held before her face. From the fingers of her uplifted hand dangled a revolver.

Lang turned his back on her when he rose from his knees. He faced Trask. “I’m sorry—he’s dead, sir!”

The girl on the divan had been making unintelligible sounds. They were exhalations of breath, hoarse, rattling gaspings.

The form of the old man seemed to slump in his evening clothes; the garments hung on him in folds. He doubled forward and staggered to and fro. Then, with his feet pounding heavily on the carpet, he lurched along to the divan and snatched the revolver from his wife’s limp fingers. “What are you doing with that thing? What has happened here?”

She fell face downward and pulled a cushion over her head. “He’ll kill me! He’ll do what he threatened to do! He’ll get up and kill me!”

The husband pulled off the pillow which was muffling her voice. “That poor boy is dead. He can’t hurt you. Speak up! What has happened here?”

Lang touched Trask’s arm. “I advise you to wait till she’s calmer before you ask questions.”

But the wife straightened up on the divan and clutched the men, both of them, with hands that shook as if with ague. She held the two close to her, sliding her hands into their grasp, welding her

clasp with theirs. Plainly, she was fighting off hysteria. "I want to tell you now—now—now! I want you both to understand. He came and wanted to see me. I don't know him. Who is he?"

"He is your husband's nephew."

Her eyes filmed for an instant. "He said so. I didn't believe him. He threatened me. He pulled out a pistol. He said I must do as he told me to do. He said he would kill himself unless I promised. He held the pistol to his head. I don't know how—how—but perhaps he didn't mean to do it. But his hand was shaking—like mine are shaking now. And the pistol went off. He fell down!" Then she allowed her feelings to conquer her. She screamed.

"You'd better wait," Lang advised when the husband started to speak.

"I've got to know it all now, before I go crazy," the old man insisted. "You had the pistol in your hand, Anita. I took it away from you. How did it happen—that you had the pistol?"

"He fell. I was afraid he would get up and hurt me. He had threatened. I wanted to live. He moved and I was afraid he would get up, I tell you! I picked the revolver from the floor. Yes, that's how it happened."

"Where was it lying?" asked Trask.

"Right beside his hand—there on the floor." She released Trask's hand and pointed. "I was afraid he would take it and shoot me."

The husband gave Lang a sidelong look. "I'll put it back, where she got it from. As I understand it, the law doesn't want any evidence disturbed." He laid the revolver carefully on the floor near the dead hand.

The wife had imprisoned Lang's hand in the frantic

clutch of both of her own. He was obliged to unclasp her fingers one by one in order to free himself. He turned to watch Trask's disposition of the weapon, but he made no comment.

"It's all right to do it, eh?" demanded the old man. "It's the law, isn't it?"

"Conditions must be left as they are until a medical examiner arrives, Mr. Trask."

"Then you and I must not say a word about my wife picking up the gun. It's terrible—terrible, Lang! But the poor girl had a right to protect herself."

"I thought he was getting up again," wailed Anita.

"Yes, the poor girl had the right to protect herself." Trask went over to the divan and sat down and took his wife in his arms. She hid her face against his breast. Trask looked over her head and caught Lang's eyes. "He made threats in the club about killing himself, didn't he? You told me so!"

The lawyer hesitated.

"Speak up! Didn't he say before witnesses that he was going to commit suicide?"

"He said I had left him nothing to live for, Mr. Trask."

"Well, the others heard him, didn't they?"

"He shouted it." The attorney seemed to be weighing matters in his thoughts.

"You said you would help me always—in everything. You said it to me tonight," Anita whispered. "You are my true, dearest friend, John Lang. When you tell them what he said to you they'll believe you."

Once more, under Trask's basilisk, demanding stare, Lang felt a sense of helpless rage at this woman's provoking assertions as to intimacy.

"It looks to me as if there are some matters in my family I haven't been let in on," remarked Trask

with considerable insolence. The tragedy had unnerved him, and he was beginning to let himself go, after his first show of fortitude.

"Your wife is not herself, just now, as I have warned you, sir. You must take her to her room—away from this. And when she is calm she can explain, no doubt, that she and I exchanged a few jests this evening, at the reception, about my position as counsel and adviser to the Trasks. And I trust you'll both take my advice now. Help her to her room and stay with her, Mr. Trask. I'll handle matters, as your attorney."

He ushered them out.

Lang set the butler on guard at the door of the room of tragedy.

He went to the group of lingering guests who had crowded on the main stairway, venturing as near the scene as they dared.

"I'm obliged to give you some very painful news. Mr. Trask's nephew arrived in the city tonight, showing by his dress and his actions and words that he was suffering from serious mental disturbance. He forced himself into the presence of Mrs. Trask and, though she is not sure he really intended to use his weapon on himself, it was discharged, and he is dead."

"Then it's a case of suicide?" inquired one of the group.

"Undoubtedly."

The guests conversed in low tones among themselves. A spokesman then did service for them. "Please tell Mr. and Mrs. Trask for us that we are immeasurably shocked and extend our condolence, one and all."

"I will tell them and I thank you in their behalf."

He stood there at the top of the stairs until all

had departed, hushing their voices and tiptoeing out of the mansion where the silence of death had replaced music and laughter.

By telephone he notified the medical examiner, the police and the newspapers. Lang received the reporters in the drawing room, gave them a statement covering the affair and said that Mr. and Mrs. Trask were too unstrung by the tragic happening to be interviewed. The reporters were plainly not satisfied when Lang courteously informed them that he was not able to add anything further to what he had said. One of them talked for the others—and was bold.

“The newspapers have had a tip—and that was before this suicide story broke for us! It’s said you and young Trask had a run-in at the Talisman Club after he struck town. We have been trying to locate you or him.”

“My suggestion to you is that a conversation between two men at a club, no matter what the topic might have been, may prove to be delicate material to be handled by newspapers,” advised the lawyer coldly.

“That’s right, sir, without something else for a hook to hang it on. This case here at the house seems to furnish the hook and we’d like a statement from you.”

Lang knew well enough what the reporter was hinting at, but he hedged, asking the speaker to be more explicit.

“As we get the story, he said he was desperate enough to kill himself, and accused you of being responsible for the fix he was in.”

“Yes?” suggested Lang with rising inflection.

“You must have known him especially well, seeing how you handled all affairs of his, as attorney. Would you give it as your judgment that he was insane, and not responsible for what he said?”

"I am not an alienist."

"But you stand so high, Mr. Mayor, that any man who said what he said about you must have been crazy."

"You must supply your own inferences. I have no statement to make."

"These nuts who get touched up with this persecutorial mania can bring a lot of trouble on to innocent parties," suggested the reporter. "We'd like to say for you, on your statement, that you have not given the victim any cause for this wild talk."

Lang shook his head with decision.

"Now he has killed himself and we've got to print the whole story, club feature and all," persisted the newspaper man, "it leaves you open to cheap talk behind your back. You may as well protect yourself, Mr. Mayor."

Lang showed temper. "I have never hidden behind living men—I'll not try to hide now behind a dead man. That's all I have to say about the case. Good night, gentlemen!"

He left them and went to the chamber to which young Trask's body had been removed by orders of the medical examiner. Doctor Jephson was there.

"I'm reporting it as suicide, John! Of course, there's no doubt about it. The gun was held so close that the ear is peppered with powder marks. And his desperate talk to you at the club has been pretty well circulated! Too bad! But we doctors and lawyers do get it handed to us—and only for doing our duty!"

Just then, groping in the maze of his doubts, John Lang would have welcomed such a definition of duty as would furnish him with a practical basis for action. The fact that Anita Trask held the lethal weapon

when he entered the room, was only trivial circumstantial evidence, as Lang looked at it.

Skiddy Trask had displayed the demeanor of a man who contemplated suicide. He had motives for suicide—and Lang, in his cases, always employed the battering-ram of motive to break down the circumstantial evidence which the hireling sleuths built up against the accused whom Lang had defended. The girl had no motive to prompt her to kill the nephew, the lawyer assured himself. The doting husband, Lang knew, had told her about the new will which secured her interests.

Could a weak, frightened girl wrest a weapon from a desperate man? It was suicide! Lang knew all the reasons young Trask had for utter despair.

But even while the lawyer urged to himself that it must have been suicide, the consciousness rankled in him that the newspaper man was right about the wagging tongues. And some tongues would even stab—accusing him of methods which had done a despairing man to death!

The last words Lang had heard Skiddy utter this side of the grave were, "Stay alive! And see what it gets you!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

A WOMAN'S WHIM



HE beast of scandal roared on the day following the tragedy. But after a few days the volume of the raucous voice ebbed. Lang had set his jaws, purposing to meet the situation face to face, firm in his tracks, as he would have waited the onrush of a charging moose in the forest.

He discovered, however, in course of time, that he was called on to battle futilely with wasps. The rumors buzzed. He heard the sound of them. Every now and then one of the swarm ventured boldly to approach and sting.

For the first time in his life he found his choice of movements urging him to stick closely to his duties, making himself as private as he could; he was telling himself he could not spare the time to go about town—and he knew he was lying to his soul. He had never followed such tactics with his conscientiousness before. It was the first indication that the foundation stone of his self-respect was undermined.

Mayor of the city! But he was more at ease when he walked along the side streets instead of on the main thoroughfares. He urged in his reflections that he did not care a continental how folks looked at him or what they said behind his back. But his man's pride answered him, whimpering under the lash, and almost confessed that it was vanity disguised, and was not able to endure wounds. He shortened his daily

stay at City Hall and he appeared at public functions only when the need was imperative.

After a time he kept away from the Talisman Club. Men were demurely polite to his face, but there was no more of the copious outpouring of warm, personal regard. There was a queer look in men's eyes.

Lang knew well what was captaining the wasps of rumor, and was marshalling disparagement, suspicion, rebuke and actual aspersion of motives. It was the ghost of young Trask! Not in the sense of an actual visitation. Lang was too much of a cynic in matters psychic to look on the situation in that light.

But around the personality of the victim had been flung the mystic garment of the awe of death—the white samite which human charity drapes over the imperfections of the flesh. Skiddy Trask, when he was breathing, eating and loving, had been a weak ne'er-do-well whom any real man could scorn as an antagonist. But Skiddy Trask, after his sacrifice to despair, had become a potent force, though invisible. He was dealing sure and effective blows at pride, reputation, professional standing and peace of mind—and Lang could not strike back. It was as if Skiddy Trask were standing in the shadows, forging weapons and whetting knives, giving them into the grasp of human beings who could wield them.

Lang even avoided Reba Donworth in spite of his despondent longing to be with her. He felt he could confess to her, at any rate, his realization that he had dealt too harshly with a weak man. She understood the matter better than any one else. He was helplessly confessing to himself that he had been wrong—but only in limited measure.

She wrote to him a few days after the tragedy. He had hoped she would extend some sort of woman's

sympathy. He had believed that a person of her nature would be able to rise above the prejudices of the others, in spite of the wound he had dealt her. He had faith in woman's expansive forgiveness.

If her letter to him had been filled with bitter reproach, he would have had an excuse to seek her for an explanation and to strive for a better understanding between them. But she had been calmly cold and judicial in her mention of his part in the affair of Skiddy Trask. She offered her pity to Lang, leaving it to his conscience to do the direct accusing.

And conscience did accuse! Her letter was the prompting force. He wanted to tear the letter up. On the contrary, he saved it and read it several times.

Anger alternated with his grief. He had fought for his own, even if pride had been the mainspring of his efforts! When, in his shifting moods, he was sorry, he did not feel like trying to set matters right with himself and the world; when he was angry, he had sense enough to keep from making a bad matter worse, and held his peace.

He was fighting against a dead man and the world's derogatory opinion, and against his own conscience. "Stay alive! And see what it gets you!"

When Lang looked at his desk motto, "Be Right and Go Straight to the Job," the letters seemed to fade into misty blankness and then to wriggle again into view, phrasing young Trask's taunt.

One day Serenus Trask called Lang on the telephone. He curtly commanded the lawyer to come out to his mansion.

Just as curtly Lang answered, "You must come to my office, sir. City affairs keep me here!"

The attorney, at this time, was avoiding Anita Trask as much as possible. He dreaded the interviews at the

mansion. She intruded upon them nonchalantly. Her manner and her injudicious tongue seemed to rouse unjust jealousy in her husband.

When Trask arrived, hurrying in his car, he flung his fur coat across one chair and sat in another. His expression changed from sour resentment to anxiety etched deeply into his wrinkles. "Lang, I'll double your retainer if you'll resign your cursed political job and give me your attention as you used to do. I need you—must have you! Lang, there's hell to pay in my house!"

The attorney smiled ruefully, and replied with acrid bitterness, "There's some personal satisfaction in hearing there's a worse place than a mayor's office."

"This last is worse—even worse than losing my namesake, the only one to carry down the Trask family. I have lost him, but now I'm in danger of losing my mind, if things can't be straightened out in my house."

"I'm listening!" suggested Lang, after he had waited for some moments for Trask to get himself in hand.

"I'm harboring thieves in my house, Lang. My wife has lost jewels—thousands of dollars' worth. My private safe has been robbed, not only once but several times. And I have the thieves dead to rights! I have done a little robbing on my own hook. I have broken open trunks and ripped mattresses. I have got back a lot of the loot, and I know just where I found it. It was in the rooms of Dudley, the butler, and my wife's maid, Rena."

"You surely don't need legal advice from me on a matter of that sort, Mr. Trask. It's a case for the police and the district attorney."

"It is, is it? By gad, it isn't, the way the thing stands," retorted Double 'T with violence. "My wife

won't let me have those crooks arrested. She fairly wound herself around me, as tight as the warp on a snubbing post, and made me promise her I wouldn't put 'em in the jug."

The lawyer pondered. "Mrs. Trask's way may be the better one, sir. You'll be avoiding more of this damnable newspaper notoriety." His tone was resentful. "If you have recovered the stolen stuff, you can discharge the pair and——"

"My wife won't stand for it to have 'em discharged—she has made me promise her I won't discharge 'em."

"What reason does she give for that attitude?" Lang demanded, his interest stirred.

"About a thousand reasons!" raged the old man. "I can't remember 'em all! She hung on to my neck and kissed me till I couldn't breathe and she begged for 'em. Said she would reform 'em. Said a lot of things. I'm just about crazy. I know board measure, and I can estimate stumpage, but I'll be cussed if I know anything about a woman. Dod whang it, Lang, do you think I can sit in my dining room and eat a meal of victuals with relish, having that damnation thief in front of my eyes or behind my back? I'd rather be in hell with the covers on! What shall I do?"

"Be master in your own house, Mr. Trask."

"I can't go against Anita when she is as much worked up as she is now. She was in hysterics till she had swung me round." There was pitiful perturbation on Trask's countenance.

"Your wife is a rather high-strung person, isn't she?"

"Listen, Lang!" The old man leaned forward and spoke in a cautious undertone. "She isn't like common folks. No girl could have caught me, if she was

just a girl, and nothing else. There's something about her that isn't wholly human. I'm only an old woodsman, and I don't know how to put it in language—the thoughts I have about her. But aren't there women born—they aren't witches—that's a poor word—or—or well, I give it up! But they're born with a power, aren't they—some women—to make fools of the best of men?"

"I believe the poets do say so."

"I'm no damnation poet!" blurted Trask. "But I love that girl. I love her even when she doesn't notice me, but sits in a trance and looks up toward the sky and says she sees her lady mother, of high degree. It would sound crazy in somebody else. But she's so handsome it seems natural for her to say it. If she told me a fairy was her mother I guess I'd believe it. You have never noticed in her anything to hint as how her mind isn't right, have you, Lang?" he pleaded earnestly.

"I must remind you that my acquaintance with Mrs. Trask is very limited."

"I love her," fatuously insisted the old husband. "I suppose it's love. It must be. But when she begged those renegades off she twisted herself around me. It wasn't like a man's wife asking something sensible—and being sensible whilst she asked it. I couldn't tell her no. I couldn't help myself. But I had an awful feeling as if I'd like to pry her away from me, same as I'd push off a snake. My God, Lang, I was—I—I was *afraid!*"

Trask "suffled" his breath with his blue lips.

When he had surveyed his client for some moments, Lang spoke. "You have been a master of men for a good many years, Mr. Trask. You are accustomed to command and to be obeyed. I'm going to talk very

frankly to you—meaning no disrespect to your wife. But you must not allow her to control you as she is doing. It means breaking down the will power which has kept you well and strong in spite of your age. You will find yourself in an exasperated spirit of rebellion.” Trask nodded affirmation. “You are apt to lose your mental poise.”

“Go crazy?” gasped the old man.

“We won’t put that name on it, if you please. But you mustn’t permit any human being to do your thinking for you at your time of life. Your mind is your mainspring. Keep it wound up. Your wife seems to be indulging in a whim. All pretty women allow whims to sway them, without much regard for the feelings of others. Mr. Trask, you go back home and kick those two servants out of your house! Then you’ll throw back your shoulders and feel ten years younger and you’ll sleep well tonight.”

“I can’t do it. I promised her I wouldn’t,” bleated Trask.

“But you can’t endure having ’em in the house any longer!”

“No!”

“Instruct me as your attorney to attend to their case.”

“I can tell her how you insisted—as my lawyer.”

“You may tell her that. I’ll go along with you, right now. You simply keep Mrs. Trask in her room, out of the way.”

In the stone mansion, after the master had gone upstairs to attend to his part of the performance, Lang made a conference office of the dining room and summoned the butler and the maid before him. In a dozen curt words he expressed his opinion of them and discharged them, ordering them to leave at once.

They showed no signs of being abashed or contrite. Dudley spoke for both. "Does madam know we are being thrown out?"

"This is not madam's affair, my man. I am acting for your master."

"We have an understanding with madam," Dudley insisted.

"I don't recognize any such understanding. Get out!"

"We demand that madam be notified of what you're trying to do," said the butler insolently.

"What I'm *trying* to do!" echoed Lang with venom. For a long time his hands had been itching to meet something solid in the way of opposition, instead of that shadowy antagonist with whom he had been battling. He leaped for the man, seized him by the collar and swept him around in a circle on the floor. Then he raced Dudley through the rear part of the house and kicked him out by way of the tradesmen's door.

"I'll tell one of the servants to bring your belongings to you! If you try to communicate with Mrs. Trask, now or hereafter, I'll have you in jail."

He informed the maid to the same effect, allowing her to go to her room under the escort of the mansion's man-of-all-work, giving her a quarter of an hour to pack.

Lang sent for Trask after the premises were clear of the offending servants. He waited for the master at the foot of the main stairway. "They are gone, bag and baggage, Mr. Trask. I'm sorry you did not choose to have them arrested."

Then it was immediately plain that the wife did not intend to be left out of any colloquy between her husband and John Lang. The lawyer glanced up and

saw her half way down the stairs, where she had halted.

“You have not sent Dudley and Rena away!”

“I have. I assume the responsibility, Mrs. Trask. I prevailed on your husband.”

“Send for them,” she urged with frenzy. “Call them back.”

“They can never enter this house again. If they try it or molest you in any way, I shall have them arrested.”

She descended two steps, beating her hands together. “You pledged yourself to be my friend and helper. You did! You promised!”

“I will help you in case of need. I have helped you in this matter.”

“Help? Help?” Though she shrieked the words, she was not appealing. There was a frantic irony in her tones. She fell and rolled limply down the stairs, and lay motionless at the feet of the two men.

When she did not revive, they lifted her between them and carried her to the boudoir on the upper floor and laid her on a divan. Lang did not remain. He started for the door.

“You called it a whim. What do you call it now?” lamented the old man.

Lang had a trenchant phrase for use in the case of silly women who were determined to have their own way; but he went out of the house without confiding the description to the doting husband.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

EARS AND EYES



AN opportunity for an investment was offered to Serenus Skidmore Trask. A man secured audience with him in his den in the stone mansion by making an appointment over the telephone. The man had assured him that this was a really exceptional opportunity for an investment! Trask was not especially impressed and was in the way of turning down the request for the interview. Every day he had all sorts of salesmen chasing him—every day his mail was filled with attractive propositions.

When he was curtly informing this solicitor-by-telephone that he was not interested, the man's tone became urgent and significant. Mr. Trask would be very sorry, said the speaker, if Mr. Trask did not look into this matter above all others.

Therefore, the timber magnate permitted the man to come to the mansion and he looked into the proposition as far as the other would allow him to look. After the man had gone away, Trask ordered his car and was driven in a rush to Lang's law office.

"I was in here two days ago and told you hell was to pay out at my house! I'm here today to say damnation has been added," raved the old man, unable to express the tumult of his emotions except by the emphasis of words verbiage.

Closeted with Lang in the private office, he stamped to and fro, clacking his hard fists together. "I ought to have known better than to tie up with any damned

woman, no matter who or what she was. I always played my hunch of hating 'em—and I was all right till I got to be a blasted old fool. I have lost my grit and my grip—and I've lost the only relative who can carry down my name. It's on account of a woman, Lang—it's all due to a woman!"

The attorney did not interrupt Trask by questions while the old man relieved his high pressure by declamations against his own folly, against women, and particularly against a man who had come to him that day. "But, oh, my God, Lang, I'm guilty as hell, myself, in poor Skiddy's case!"

"So am I!" declared the lawyer bitterly.

When the old man began to lament the loss of his nephew, he became calmer and sat down and surveyed Lang with a woebegone stare. "I've got to see it through, I suppose, now 't my hand has been set to the plow. You've got to help. The two of us started the log a-rolling. I've got to dodge scandal and save what little peace of mind is still left to me. As I've said, an infernal rat came to me today, Lang, and he wants to sell me something. He says there are two witnesses—Dudley and that maid—who heard the talk between my wife and my nephew. Good God, Lang!" His larynx bulged and shuttled in his withered neck. "It's a terrible thing to put my tongue to! But he says the two of 'em saw my wife kill my nephew!"

"They're liars, Mr. Trask," Lang declared with reassuring earnestness. "It's only the familiar story of blackmail because you're rich and because certain circumstances help such renegades."

"Do you really think so?" Hope gleamed in Trask's dull eyes.

"It's mighty evident. What did the sneak ask for—how much?"

"One hundred thousand dollars. Said he was a lawyer representing Dudley and the woman."

"All going to show it's blackmail. They're offering to hide criminal evidence and compound a felony for pay."

"Is it evidence—did she——"

"No, no, Mr. Trask! Put it out of your mind that she could have done anything of the sort. She knew about your will giving the estate to her—she had no motive—she could not have wrested the gun away from a man so wholly crazed as your nephew was that night."

"I want to believe it. I can't believe it the other way. But the rat told me the butler and the maid did not steal the jewels and rob the safe. My wife was paying 'em hush money, so they say—so the rat said."

"Naturally they'd say that. They're protecting themselves as much as possible in their blackmail scheme."

"But she admits it—Anita owns up she gave 'em the stuff!" The sweat of agonized mental strain was trickling down the channels of the wrinkles on the old man's face. "Lang, I had to have courage from some source, after that man left the house—agreeing to give me time to think. I went to Anita. I wanted to hear her swear on her oath that they are liars. She does swear she didn't kill my nephew—even though I found her with the gun in her hand. I did find her holding it, Lang! What do you think about it?"

"Her statement seemed reasonable to me at the time. I'm not inclined to doubt it now," returned the lawyer, soothingly. The husband needed some sort of consolation at that moment. He was showing signs of being about to collapse.

“But she admits to me she gave ’em the money and the jewels. She says she did it for my sake. They had threatened to make up a lie about her! She knows I’m old and love her, she said, and she wanted to hold any more awful trouble away from me.

“Anything to keep their tongues still, she said! She seems to have the right idea of the thing, doesn’t she, Lang?” His voice shook with tremulous eagerness; he was fortifying his faith in the girl. “And you and I are guilty, too, and we’ve got to save her! But it was an awful foolish thing for her to do, without talking with me, first.”

“She does seem to lack judgment in many things, Mr. Trask,” admitted Lang drily.

“But she’s only a young girl! She isn’t used to the world. She has never known any life except what she saw in the North woods, where I found her!” In the fervor of exculpation, Trask had forgotten what he had told Lang about the girl’s southern origin. The husband remembered suddenly and gulped. “But I’ve got to be open and honest with you, Lang, from now on, so you can help me. I did find her in the woods. I saved her from a hellion. She told me her story. I helped her get free from him—he is her brother.” He looked away from Lang’s keen gaze and stammered when he added, “I gave her the money to go to him and fix him forever—and he has left the country.”

“I hope it’s one case where fix-it money has really bought the goods for you, sir. But I place no faith in such a method of handling scoundrels. It’s only trying to put out a fire with kerosene.”

“Then you don’t think I’d better hush up those two with more money?”

“Absolutely — positively — no! If you deal with them on such a basis I’ll drop your affairs, sir.”

“And if I tell 'em to go to the devil, what then—what will you do?”

“I'll fight to the last legal ditch for you and Mrs. Trask. I give you my word of honor to do it. But I don't think there'll be any fight. Stand up to them, sir! Tell them you won't be bled for one penny by liars. Tell them you'll have 'em sent over the road for blackmail. Fight, Trask, fight!” He beat his fist on the arm of the chair.

“All right! If you'll carry the burden of the thing, I'll fight. You're a good lawyer, Lang, a good lawyer! And you'll pull us out, won't you? It's awful! I need to be encouraged. All of a sudden I'm feeling old—old!”

The lawyer looked on his client and was struck by the new demeanor of Trask; he was bowed and shrunken.

When the bridegroom had bought that “flock of suits,” the art of the tailor had fitted a man who stood straight, complacent in his love and filled with authority as the head of the Double T. But from the moment when he had slumped into the hanging folds of his evening garb, looking on the form of his dead namesake, Trask had been as Lang saw him then in the office—merely a withered simulacrum of what Double T had been in the days of potent sway.

“It will be good to tell Anita what you say—she has a lot of faith in you, John Lang!” In that extremity of his troubles, the husband had no more fire in him to supply the torch of jealousy. “But all the fight seems to have gone out of me. I'll send the rat to you. I'll leave it to you to tell him what's what!”

The go-between came to Lang the next day. He was one Farnum, a disbarred lawyer, a flabby individual whom Lang knew and despised. Trying to

beat any sense of the enormity of blackmail into a person of that sort was like trying to get reaction by pounding one's fist into a mass of freshly mixed putty—and Lang realized it and forbore. He threw down the gauge of battle and reminded Farnum that a man with his record could not hope for mercy from the court if another charge of attempted extortion should be made.

“Oh, we don't intend to push the matter any more, so far as selling anything goes, if your side feels that way about it,” demurred Farnum. “If Trask doesn't want to buy something, to save his peace of mind and a wife, we say nothing more to him. Make the most out of it, if that's blackmail. But my parties heard a good deal through the keyhole, in addition to what they saw. You being confidential counsel, I suppose you know all about the inside of things in the Trask family.” Farnum was showing the assurance of one who held something in reserve.

“I know enough to serve me.”

“All about Mack Templeton, eh?”

He jabbed the query at Lang and the latter was not able to hide his surprise. Here seemed to be an angle entirely new.

“That name started the trouble in the death room,” persisted Farnum. “Wouldn't it be a wise notion to get Mrs. Trask to explain to you who Mack Templeton is before you let the case go before the grand jury?”

“I'll judge the wisdom of that notion after you tell me how this Mack Templeton fits in.”

But Farnum merely parried back with the statement that what he knew about Mack Templeton he was keeping to himself. “Ask the lady—she knows. And she'll probably give you a reason why it's better to buy than to bluster in this case.”

Lang was not especially impressed. He had a good eye for the manner of a witness. Farnum's shifty tactics indicated only imperfect knowledge on his part, at the most. The fellow was endeavoring to work a "shoe-string bluff," so Lang believed.

He tried on a little bluff of his own, keenly observing his man. "I thought I'd give you a chance to hand me your version of what you are trying to sell. I see you can't tell me." Lang took a flyer, working on the admission which Trask had made regarding a persecutor in the shape of a brother. "Information squeezed through a keyhole is pretty slimy stuff, Farnum. Mr. Trask knows all about his wife's family, including her brother, so you may as well throw away that ammunition; it's spoiled."

The bluff had worked; Farnum's face showed he was receiving what he considered real information which Lang's manner clothed with convincing authority. Mack Templeton's value as a weapon, no matter what the keyhole revelations had promised, seemed to be much diminished.

"All right! Let the thing go to the grand jury!" Farnum rose. "A lot of trouble could have been saved by using a little cash in a sensible way. But some folks seem to think it's foolish to spend money for anything except clothes and grub." He went out slowly—waiting at the door to give Lang a chance to suggest a compromise. The lawyer turned his back.

Lang, alone, ran over the matter in his thoughts. He was paying no heed to Farnum's threat that the case would be presented to the grand jury. It was a death which had been officially labelled as suicide. There was no motive to prompt the girl wife to kill her husband's namesake nephew on sight. Accusation of a young and beautiful woman in Mrs. Trask's posi-

tion would receive little consideration in the district attorney's office, Lang was certain. And he was more certain that they who attempted to blackmail would not dare to accuse.

He did not make any inquiries in the Trask family regarding one Mack Templeton. He was not interested in such a person. He did not want to stir up any more unpleasant topics in the stone mansion which had lately been the scene of tragedy and attendant, persisting unhappiness.

But, after a time, Lang became aware of a certain ominous stirring under the surface of matters in the law courts. On account of his own troubled affairs he had become more sensitively acute in the case of rumors.

There's a grape-vine telephone in legal circles in any city. When Lang had become partially convinced that certain things were so, in spite of his past skepticism as to possible procedure, he went to see the district attorney, and did not relish the undertaking. On account of Lang's triumphs as a regular champion of parties accused he was not on very good terms with the prosecutor whom he had outwitted so often.

Lang was precipitantly blunt. "I don't expect you to tell me the secrets of your office, Wilkinson! I'm not here to ask questions. I'm here on account of a tip. Somebody says you're thinking of digging up the Trask suicide case. As you know, I was in the Trask mansion that night and I have personal knowledge to back me. You're depending on two witnesses."

"Possibly more," drawled Wilkinson.

"Is it also possible you're seriously thinking of bringing the case before the grand jury?"

"I thought you said you didn't intend to ask questions."

"I beg your pardon! I'm going to tell you that those two witnesses have attempted to blackmail the Trask family on account of the case."

"You're sure of that?"

"I am."

"You don't love the district attorney's office, do you, Lang? Why didn't you turn in your evidence and have such rascals prosecuted?"

"I defend—I don't prosecute."

"Yes, that's your frequent boast."

"It's a wicked thing, Wilkinson, to attack the reputation of a woman and the happiness of a home on any evidence such knaves can give in."

"The knaves, as you call them, Brother Lang, are not yet on trial, thanks to your reticence. But whatever their moral character may be, they are human beings, with eyes and ears, and as such are capable of being witnesses."

The prosecutor broke in on more protestation from Lang. "Just a moment before we get into too heated argument, Lang, about what's right or wrong or possible proof. I'm not going to act in this matter—admitting that I may act—out of any savage desire to break up a home or persecute a woman. But this thing is getting out of my hands, and out of yours, too. Somebody has been leaking. Somebody has been slipping just enough to the newspapers to start 'em digging around the edges. It may be Farnum's fine hand—I see you know the skunk just as well as I do. But you know the newspapers, too!"

Lang offered the comment of a grunt and made a sour grimace.

"When the newspapers can't print the whole, they're quite likely to hint at a little, in order to start things," the prosecutor went on. "I don't need to instruct you,

Lang. And if the thing goes far enough, and I don't act, what's the answer?"

"No one can impugn your motives for giving decent people a square deal, when they're attacked by blackmailers who are going after revenge because they have been turned down."

The district attorney shook his finger at Lang. "Don't you believe it, Lang—not when a millionaire like Serenus Trask is in the case! We have a general election in this State this year. I don't intend to run the chance of having opponents sneer behind my back, saying I have taken money to keep a millionaire's wife out of court. If she is innocent and is the victim of slander, she'll be better off when she has been cleaned and acquitted. But she'll only stay year after year in hell-fire if the tongues keep wagging."

"You have taken me further into your confidence than I expected, Wilkinson. I thank you!" said Lang coldly. "Now after you have been so frank in admitting what your real motives are in trying the case, I can understand how wholly useless it is for me to argue with you. Go ahead and get your election advertising."

He was at the door when the district attorney spoke. "Just a moment, Lang! If this case does come to trial you're going to appear for the defense, I take it?"

"I am."

"I'm much obliged for your advice to me to go ahead and get advertising. That's in your line, too—advertising! But in the way of gratitude I'm going to advise you to keep out of the case. The advertising you'll get this time won't help you."

"Do you think I'm afraid of the damnable hornets buzzing behind my back? No! Nor of one who buzzes before my face, as you're doing."

"I was sort of honest in what I just said, Lang. I note I don't get any thanks! The talk about what Skiddy Trask said has been hurting you like the devil! If you go in and defend a woman who is accused of killing him, you're going to get an awful tongue-razooing."

"You go ahead, Wilkinson, and have her indicted." He came back a few steps into the room and shook an admonitory finger. His resentment was flaming. Now he was able to brave one of those who was using a weapon which the shade of young Trask had whetted behind the veil! "By God, I'll have her acquitted!"

"All right! The fight is on!" was the prosecutor's grim acceptance of the challenge.

His rancorous remembrance of Lang's past victories was evident in his countenance when he looked at the latter. It was no longer an affair of considering a woman's peace of mind or the happiness of a family. The two legal gladiators had set foot against foot, shield counter to shield, and proposed to fight their battle, even if the trophy of the conflict were trampled into the mire as they fought.

The wheel of events began to whirl.

The grand jury returned an indictment against Anita Trask, charging her with the murder of Serenus Skidmore Trask, the second. She was held without bail for trial at the April assizes.

Though her arrest made a tremendous sensation, the astonishment of the public had been discounted in some measure. Tongues had been busy. Slander had attributed sinister motives to this girl who had come out of nowhere. People did not know about the new will of Serenus Trask, the elder. It had been evident enough that this dazzling beauty had married a man like Trask for his money. The natural corollary

seemed to be that to this desperate venture she was willing to add murder of the blood heir in order to secure that money to herself. Human nature is too ready to credit abominable suspicions!

There was also a well circulated rumor that her mind was not just right, anyway. It was said she entertained queer ideas, primitive ideas, pagan ideas. A certain Mrs. Barron had a great deal to say about the pagan whom she had quizzed at the notable reception in the stone mansion. The spider story was dressed up as a declaration of Anita's code in the case of men. John Lang was amazed to find even so discriminating and fair a man as Judge Anderson inoculated with the virus of the popular feeling against the accused woman. The judge said as much to Lang in the Talisman Club.

Lang had resumed in some degree his club relations, almost in bravado. He was showing by his brusque manner a mental attitude which informed his detractors they might go to the hot place for all he cared—thereby not winning any more favor for himself.

“Though the question of her guilt, as it appears, is not the point I desired to make when I brought the subject up,” pursued the judge, “I want to remonstrate with you, John, for undertaking the defense.”

“I could not do otherwise, considering my relations with Serenus Trask.”

“But from the point of professional ethics it is equally necessary to consider what were your relations with the nephew of Serenus Trask. And his wild talk in the club that night has winged far, John! Frankly, you cannot afford to defy public opinion to this extent.”

“I shall defend Mrs. Trask. My word is pledged, sir.”

“But the prejudices you’ll stir up may injure her cause as much as they harm your career. Be sensible, my boy! Show more delicacy! Even if we call your stand by no harsher name than bad taste—a flaunting display of it affects a professional man to his hurt.”

“I shall defend Mrs. Trask—even if I’m obliged to take to the woods for the rest of my life after I have secured her acquittal,” declared the attorney. He bowed and walked away from the jurist.

Though there was a finality of decision in Lang’s assertion, there was none of his ironical curtness which had offended members on a previous occasion in the club. The attorney had replied rather mildly, and had shown deep feeling. Some of his sentiments in regard to Anita Trask had been considerably modified.

As her counsel he had been obliged to interview her frequently, in the women’s quarters in the county jail, always in the presence of her husband. Previous to that distressing event he had been obliged to break to her the news of her impending arrest. Having made, as he thought, a fairly accurate estimate of her emotional character, as she had shown it in the affair of the butler and the maid when Lang had brought that matter to a climax, the attorney had prepared himself for a real ordeal. He had even counselled Trask to have a physician in waiting.

But there was only a pathetic drooping of the red lips of the girl wife. “Yes! I have thought it all over. I supposed they would go away and lie. I tried to pay them not to lie. You say I was wrong. Yes! I don’t understand such things very well. But you will help me, Sir Mayor! After this, I will not try to do anything for myself; I shall certainly do something wrong. I shall not worry. I know you can make everything right.”

In all the other interviews, in the jail, she was the same—resigned, but hopeful—sorrowful, but unafraid, ingenuously trusting in his powers, surrendering everything into his keeping as her approved champion. It was like a child courageously going through a dark lane, confiding in a hand of strength in which her fingers were clasped.

His sense of chivalry was stirred. He could not explain his feelings to any person, even to such a charitable man as Judge Anderson. He could only hide the steel of his determination under the velvet of politeness, knowing all the time he was being blamed for obduracy, understanding that the tongue of scandal was busy.

Trask's wealth secured many comforts for his wife in the house of detention. Much was accomplished in hiding the things suggesting restraint. But repeatedly she went to the window and pulled aside the draperies and touched with piteous fumblings the bars which made a captive of her.

The first time she did so, the old husband screwed up his wrinkled face and wept with the frank abandon of a child. It is not a pleasant sight when an old man blubbers! "I found her in the woods, Lang! Just like a beautiful bird! And this is how they have caged her. Oh, my God! It's awful!"

"We'll have her out, Mr. Trask. I promise you!"

"Yes!" agreed the wife. "We leave it all to you; I am safe. It's only a dark night, now. I have slept under a tree all night, often, so I could see how pretty the morning was when the sun came up. It'll be morning very soon, and it will be prettier because the night has been so dark."

"I'm not crying because I'm afraid for you, with Lang on the job," averred the husband, trying to reas-

sure her by apology for breaking down. "I'm crying because Skiddy Trask is dead. I'm missing him dreadfully these days! He was blood to me, Lang, blood kin!"

It was apology—excuse, but there was a great deal of feeling in the declaration, nevertheless. The lawyer knew how hideously the recollection of tyrannical injustice must be clanging in the conscience of Serenus Trask; the echo made a dreadful discord in Lang's own conscience.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AT THE BAR OF JUSTICE



VEN when the trial of Anita Trask, charged with the murder of her husband's nephew, was well into the second week, the district attorney had not been able to tear away much of the veil in which her personality and her antecedents were wrapped.

There were witnesses called by the prosecution from the North country, but the witnesses were few and their revelations were vague; under cross-examination by Lang those statements became contradictory. There was slurring rumor to the effect that the baron of the Double T had used his money and his might in the North country to bribe and intimidate.

The defense admitted that the accused wife had been in the North country. Counsel Lang cut in ahead of the prosecution by introducing a witness to prove that she had been married to Serenus Trask up there.

The witness was a strange and interesting figure who attracted general attention. The newspapers were filled with descriptions and pictures of him. But he resolutely declined to talk to reporters.

He appeared in court garbed in a frock woven of natural wool edged with white rabbit fur. His wool boots were white. His hair and beard matched the color of his garments. He gave merely the name of Ashael—Ashael of Angel Knob.

He was calm, patriarchal, serene, and with intelligent dignity resisted the efforts of the prosecution to secure his family name.

When he was challenged as to his right to perform

marriages, he pleaded the permission of special privilege to preserve his anonymity and laid before the eye of the presiding justice, going alone to the bench, a paper. The court allowed his plea, after listening to Ashael's *ex parte* statement delivered in tones too low for the courtroom to hear. The marriage was established as legal.

On the stand, Ashael acknowledged that he was known in the North as "The Charmer Man." He avowed, under examination, that he helped Nature in making cures, asking no fee. He said he felt it to be a matter of true duty; he claimed to possess no mysterious, personal gift, no uncanny power. He demurred when he was attacked as a charlatan.

"Ever since white pioneers began to struggle with the forests on this continent, sir, the remote lumber camps have been visited by men who had the power to aid in healing without surgery or medicaments. I am only one in a long line."

He also combated the allegation that he was a faith healer. "It is a common human error to give the mysterious works of Almighty God a specific name and to claim for this sect or that creed or this or that procedure a monopoly of divine blessings. The Spirit of God is in all things and is not to be controlled. But even by the weakest it can be invoked and only the really humble can be blessed."

This figure in white, this calm patriarch of the North, was a picturesque interlude in the tragic drama of the trial. He appeared, and then he disappeared.

But all who heard him remembered his words of promise regarding the mystic quality in God's blessing of well-being and of being well, a free measure given in answer to an honest, meek and contrite appeal. And especially did they ponder on his statement that no

human being should presume to name or limit, analyze or monopolize, a fundamental truth as wide and deep as the Universe.

Even John Lang's cynicism was impressed! He was sorry when he learned that old Ashael had gone away from the city, as soon as his testimony was finished. Lang vaguely promised himself that some day he would search out this quaint personage in the North country and investigate a philosophy which promised comfort to both body and spirit.

In that trial Lang knew he was fighting prejudice. Therefore, he did not hasten the affair. He played the thing on a shrewd, psychological basis, as best he could manage.

Day by day, the young wife sat before the eyes of her accusers and the court, her aged husband loyally at her side. She was garbed plainly. Not a jewel was displayed. While the prosecutor flung his verbal stones of accusation, her wistful beauty silently appealed. When the chief witnesses blustered with bravado and lied brazenly about their blackmail plot, her eyes timidly sought the faces of the jurymen and made earnest protest. To what extent she was playing a part was not easily discernible.

But Serenus Trask was patently not acting his part. Day by day, he stumbled weakly to his chair—he staggered when he walked out of the court room. A dreadful shadow clouded his countenance. His jowls sagged, his hands trembled. Every little while, when there was an opportunity, he pulled at Lang's sleeve. "No matter what it costs, I'm staying with her."

On one occasion he added, "I'm with her to my last dollar, till this trial is over."

"What do you mean—'till this trial is over'?" Lang demanded, giving the old man sharp scrutiny.

"I don't know. Perhaps that isn't the right way to put it. But it mustn't be said I harbored a woman who would kill my only relative. You must get her acquitted."

John Lang had already made up his mind on that point, as he had never done in any other case of his career at the bar. The hornets ceased their buzzing and were watching. He perceived this to be a case for the hearts, not the heads, of the panel. It was not one of his battles where success lay in battering down the fabric of carefully built, but mere circumstantial, evidence.

There were the two actual eye-witnesses who doggedly and desperately insisted, in spite of his cross-examination, that they had seen what they had seen. The prisoner, they testified, stood in range of the keyhole; she had cajoled the victim with honeyed speech; they had seen her arms go around his neck—she kissed him—and then the fatal shot!

Lang was resolved to turn his back on State's evidence, on the blue-black revolver and the other exhibits on the table in the bar enclosure. He decided to stand before the rail of the jury box and go straight to the hearts with all the power and persuasion of his eloquence—his two exhibits for the defense a broken old man and a girl whose beauty was like a flower against the dark background of the tragedy.

In the stress of the trial, Lang was not reading the newspapers with any care, not even the reports of the progress of the case, as the writers viewed it. He did skim headlines at his breakfast table. Therefore he noticed the report of the finding of the body of one Mack Templeton on the slope of a hardwood tract in the Brassua region. The papers did not respect the sanctity of death in this case. They exposed the lurid

record of Templeton as a Border blackleg. The report stated there had been no arrest in connection with the affair; there was no intimation of anybody being under suspicion. The item merely hinted that Templeton, from the nature of his iniquities, had made many enemies.

The name of Mack Templeton, whoever he might be, had not been brought into the trial of Anita Trask, though Lang had waited for it, after the sly suggestion made by Farnum. But Lang's guess as to Farnum's limited knowledge of Templeton had seemed to be justified by the silence of the State.

The counsel for the defense had not asked the Trasks privately about a man named Templeton. Lang was barred by a rather curious reluctance to pry into the matter. As a matter of fact, his attitude toward Anita had been to know as little of her past as possible. The more he could idealize her as a beautiful creature of circumstances, he felt, the more he could do for her in the line of defense which he had decided on. He realized how strange this whim was in the conduct of a practical lawyer.

But he was not dealing coldly and practically with this case. When he stopped to wonder what had come over him to make him alter his methods as a careful lawyer, he was confused and gave up the study of his mind. However, not knowing what Farnum had revealed about one Mack Templeton to the prosecution, the appearance of this dead man in the public prints that morning prompted Lang to arm his cause against possibilities. He closeted himself with Anita and her husband before the hour set for the resumption of the case.

"He was her brother," stated Trask, when the matter was broached by the lawyer. "I brought the news-

paper this morning and broke the news. It has been an awful shock to her. I told you about him."

Lang turned away from the strange brilliancy he had found in Anita's eyes.

"You spoke, as I remember it, of paying him money to go out of the country."

"Anita paid him. I gave her the money. She could handle him best." Trask muttered the statement and gazed at the ceiling.

"I paid him the money," she declared.

Lang did not look at her. He had the curious feeling, in more intense degree, that he ought to preserve all his illusions in regard to the girl.

"The money may have been the prompting inducement for the murderer. The paper says not much money was found on the body," suggested the lawyer.

"He was a general renegade," declared Trask. "He was a bad man on the Border."

"He tried to make me cheat people," supplemented the girl. "At first, he said he wouldn't go away. He wanted to stay so he could keep on getting money from my husband."

Lang was looking at the floor, meditating. He swung his gaze slowly and saw Anita's feet, crossed, peeping from under her black skirt. She had hooked them, ankle over instep, and he noted a tremor in her limbs. He looked at her hands, which were clasped in her lap. They were locked tightly, the fingers whitened by the pressure. But when he looked at the face it was immobile, though the light in her eyes had grown more brilliant.

Emotionally, at the moment, she was a cord stretched to the breaking point; when she had spoken, there was a high-pitched twang in her tones.

"I'm very, very sorry," said Lang as soothingly as

he would have addressed a child. "It's a distressing matter to come at this time when you need all your strength. Hold to your grit, Mrs. Trask, with all your might. You have won a great deal for yourself by your manner in court. This is the day when you must be absolutely the mistress of your soul! The prosecutor argues today and he will say bitter things about you. But while he is speaking hateful words you must keep in mind that he talks because the State pays him a salary. Keep thinking of the jurymen as kind men who will listen to reason."

"They will listen to you—they will listen to you!" she cried.

"I hope so. I'm going to talk to them with all the power that is in me."

She leaped from her chair, ran to him, flung her arms about his neck before he recovered his wits sufficiently to prevent, and kissed him. He had some difficulty in bending back her arms and freeing himself from her clutch.

"I am not afraid! I am not afraid!" she kept saying. "You can save me!"

"I don't care what it costs," mumbled Trask. He was swinging his head to and fro on his outstretched, scraggy neck. "I don't care—for money or anything else, now! Get her out of it, Lang."

Lang was free from that frantic embrace. He was thinking on what the old man had said weeks before: "I wanted to pry her away, like I'd push off a snake."

Lang was not conscious of any sort of abhorrence, but he fervently wished that another man's wife had not made such a display of emotion in the presence of the man. He looked at his watch. It was time to go into the court room. He ushered the ill-assorted pair ahead of him.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE VERDICT OF THE JURY



COMMANDING strained attention and attended by tense interest, the counsel for the defense was finishing his plea. Another speaker might have tried to secure his effect by volume of voice. Lang's peroration was in a tone solemnly hushed. The listeners in the crowded court room leaned forward to catch his half-whispered words—his speech tremulous with the intensity of his appeal. Previously, in assailing the motives and the methods of the State's witnesses, his voice had been a trumpet clarion of invective.

But when he referred to the devoted husband he gently, reverently dwelt upon an old man's sorrow. When he pointed to the prisoner, extolling her wifely affection as partaking also of the nature of filial love, he made it plain that outsiders' mischief and wilful distrust often meddle with the affairs of a union which a cynical world suspects of being dominated by ulterior motives.

The chamber was dim with the approaching twilight. No bailiff had the hardihood even to tiptoe to the switchboard and turn on the lights. The speaker was dealing with the sanctity of wedded love, even though youth had mated with age; his respectful reserve seemed to call for the shadows of the vanishing day.

"A play for the jurymen's hearts, not their heads—

and damn me if it isn't a peach!" whispered the State's attorney-general to Wilkinson.

"The only thing to save us is the night-recess between his plea and your summing up, General! Of course, the court will adjourn after he's finished," predicted the district attorney.

But it proved to be a day of new features in the court room! The justice broke the profound silence which followed Lang's last words.

"You may proceed, General Phair," he directed the State's chief prosecutor.

Then came the lights—dome-chandelier and all the bracket lamps—flooding the chamber with prosaic radiance. The spell was gone. The attorney-general had his own keen sense for effects; he must stand forth in the hard lights and deal cruel blows in the name of the State, and he realized that all the psychology of the thing was to his prejudice. He hesitated.

The justice apparently supposed the hesitation to arise from the lateness of the hour. "If we were merely dealing with evidence, General, I would observe the usual procedure, and adjourn till morning. But this case has been long before the court on trial. Anxiety on both sides is now acute. Proceed, sir! My charge will be brief. The gentlemen of the panel shall have this case for their consideration tonight."

The counsel for the defense paid only scant heed to what the attorney-general was saying in the summing up of accusatory evidence. Lang did note, with pencil and pad, but rather indifferently, certain portions of the judge's charge to the jury to which the defense might file exceptions if there should arise occasion to move for a new trial.

The judge charged briefly. He was not friendly to the defense. There were listeners, among the members

of the bar, who felt as though His Honor were endeavoring to negative in some degree the emotional appeal of the trial—to show the panel that facts alone should govern their findings.

Lang felt singularly calm while he smoked his pipe in the anteroom after the jury had retired. He had looked into the eyes of those jurymen—and eyes had always had a real message for him!

When bustle at the doors and the crier's call announced the jury as ready to report, Lang smiled. The panel had been out a scant hour. That brief deliberation signified much to him; apparently there had been no long arguments in that locked room to bring soft-hearted jurymen into line for a conviction.

The verdict, therefore, was accurately discounted in advance by the defense's lawyer who stood composedly awaiting it. The court room was crowded though the hour was late; the people had remained.

Replying to the demand of the clerk of the court, the foreman shouted with a sort of triumphant note in his voice, "Not guilty!"

There was applause! It was kept up persistently notwithstanding the customary and conventional threats by the court officers. While the applause continued Anita leaped from her chair, avoided the hands her husband reached to her, and threw herself upon Lang's breast, sobbing hysterical gratitude. He found her utter abandon distressful. It was like a rescued animal expressing gratefulness, attaching itself devotedly to a newly adopted master! Only by considerable force did the attorney manage to unwind her arms from around his neck.

"It's truly a great and kissful day for our celebrated Champion of Innocence!" observed Larry Devon to a confrere. "I can hardly blame him for taking his time

in handing the salvaged lady back to her husband! It's a popular verdict, at any rate. Wilkinson was a damn'd fool to butt in and have her indicted."

That sentiment, expressed more mildly, ran from mouth to mouth in the court room.

When Lang placed the girl wife in the arms of her old husband and, a moment later, led them out of the chamber to an anteroom, women sobbed frankly as the united pair passed along the aisle which the spectators formed; there were earnest congratulations, and gloved hands patted Anita comfortingly.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE VERDICT OF THE HUSBAND



WHEN Lang had shut the door of the conference room Anita again embraced her savior, clinging to him in spite of his remonstrance and resisting his efforts to free himself. As Lang had discovered long before, her power of expression by speech was limited; in times of mental stress words failed her and she strove to interpret her emotions by actions. This physical demonstration of her gratitude was now especially embarrassing under the eyes of the husband.

Trask wore a peculiar and complex facial aspect which the lawyer was not able to understand, exactly. Mere jealousy would have been obvious and the old man's bodeful scowl would have been divided between the two. However, he was plainly centering all the venom of his gaze on Anita.

"I'd thought we'd wait in here for a few minutes until the crowd has scattered," explained the counsel to Trask.

Lang was unclasping Anita's fingers, one by one, from his arm and she was continually renewing her frantic clutch on him. "Then you can send for your car and take Mrs. Trask home."

Trask gritted his teeth and mumbled something.

"And I wish you'd prevail upon your wife to be seated and to quiet herself," urged Lang. "Please step over here, Mr. Trask, and calm her."

Old Double T had posted himself on the opposite

side of the table in the room. In this manner there was a suggestion of retreating behind a barricade. What Lang found puzzling in Trask's demeanor was the expression of some kind of fear and abhorrence mingled with his glowering rage. He made no move to come and take his wife to himself. In spite of what his face hinted in the way of resoluteness, the old man's physical weakness was apparent. He tottered, swaying from heels to toes as he stood there. It was more evidence of the failing powers he had been revealing in the court room during the progress of the trial.

When he spoke it was with the thick utterance of a paralytic who was trying to manage a stiff, wobbly and unwieldy tongue. "She's acquitted, eh? You've got her free, Lang? Good lawyer! Always said you were. Sounded like I said 'Good liar.' Oh, no! I didn't say it. Something's the matter with my tongue." He set his fingers on the refractory member and waggled it in his mouth, as if he were trying to break its fetters.

"I wouldn't undertake to talk much now, if I were you," urged Lang.

By exertion of main strength he managed to seat Anita in a chair and he quickly stepped away from her. He hoped to calm Trask by separating himself from the woman. In the mania of jealousy it was likely enough that the aged husband had been wrought upon by her show of gratitude expressed by extravagant blandishments and kisses. Trask braced himself against the table and managed speech more coherently.

"Now is the time to talk. I've been bottling it up! Trial's over, hey? She's all free and clear! They can't say she killed my nephew—only heir—my namesake—and that I harbored her after the job. Law says she is innocent. Damned good law, eh? I stood by

her. Right to the end! Good point you made about me in your plea! It worked well with the jury. I did my part to the letter, hey?"

Trask's excitement was increasing. He lunged forward but recovered his balance and again propped himself on the table by his shaking arms.

"I protest, Mr. Trask! You must get home. There has been too much excitement for all of us today."

"There's got to be a little more—right now. You can't stop a runaway sled-load of logs on a ramdown after the snubbing warp has parted. Let her run! That's the way! I'm a lumberman, and I know! I'm a good lumberman—I ought to have stuck to that line and nothing else!"

The old man was swinging his head slowly from side to side. His eyes were very bright, but the impediment in his speech made him appear like a babbler who was not just sure of his wits.

"Mrs. Trask, prevail upon your husband to go home with you. Talk to him. Urge him!"

"You wait till I tell you to talk to me," commanded Trask, extending a wavering finger to emphasize his command to his wife. "Who is running my family, Lang? You've had her sent scot-free—that's your job. But I'll run my family. Good God, I haven't any family!" He almost screamed that, but his voice dropped at once into the husky babbling. "Nobody to be Serenus Skidmore Trask of the Double T! Skiddy said it was a homely name. But it has stood for something! He wasn't killed by the wife I married—the law says he wasn't. So, that's locked away. No more about that."

He leaned further over the table, his hard eyes searching his wife's face.

"I helped the trial to go on all smooth even when the

piece came out in the newspapers about the dead man in the Brassua woods. I wouldn't do a thing to put a cloud over that pretty face you showed to the jury. Must have you acquitted! That's the kind of a stayer I am! But now—now—we're going to try a case of our own—right here! I gave you money so you could pay it over to Mack Templeton. Did you pay him?"

"Yes!" As on a previous occasion her voice had the twang of a taut bowstring.

"Where did you pay him?"

"He came in his canoe to the Brassua Deadwater. I paid him in the woods, at a place he and I knew and where I had told him to come."

In spite of her tense manner, she spoke quietly as if she were copying the style of the witnesses in the court room where she had been listening for so many days.

"Where did he go after you paid him?"

"I don't know."

"Where did you think he went?"

"Away—to leave the country."

Lang had folded his arms and was listening intently; these were the questions which he, himself, wanted to put to Anita Trask.

"And you committed no crime against him?"

"No!"

Trask broke out into hideous profanity—then he checked himself. "I don't say but what he deserved to be killed. He was a renegade. But you didn't commit a crime against him, hey, and now you will commit one against me?"

"No, no!" she expostulated.

"I say yes! And it's a crime next to the biggest one a wife can commit against a husband. You're

lying! Lying to me—that's your crime—and I don't deserve it."

"I'm telling you the truth."

Again he cursed her. "Now you're lying about a lie! Any woman who will do that will go on to the bigger crime when she gets a chance. Right here, a few moments ago, before my face and eyes——"

"Trask!" cried Lang with a veritable explosion of sound.

"Anita, say it again—tell me you paid him the money," insisted the old man, abandoning a line which seemed to be dangerous.

"I did pay it to him."

Trask paused for a full half minute.

Then he went on, his tongue running away in the stampede of doubts and emotions which he had been holding in leash, "There are good reasons why you shouldn't have paid the damnation scoundrel. I have been ready and waiting for you to come across, of your own accord, and tell me what happened. Ever since we've been married I've been waiting! Ready to understand! You might have stood up to him and said you wouldn't allow your husband's money to be wasted on him. You might have told him how sure you were of me—how I would protect you against anything he could do in the way of a grudge if he didn't get the money. There was even the chance of your coaxing him to be decent and go away satisfied with the money he had stolen from others. I was explaining to myself! I was giving you all those chances in my thoughts. I didn't dare to think anything else of you, except what was on the square. I wouldn't admit to myself that you would lie to me. I say, I was waiting for you to get ready to offer me the truth on your own hook. Then I would have stood by you to

the limit. But you have lied! By God, you didn't pay that money." He shrieked the accusation.

"I did," she wailed.

"I told you how your satchel was lost off the sledge when we came down from the woods. You were watching that satchel close, too! But I got into it. And I found this in it!"

Out of his breast pocket, tugging hard because the packet bulked largely, he pulled something neatly tied and carefully sealed. He broke the seals. He showed the contents. There was much money in bills of large denominations. "That's what I found in the satchel before I threw it away—and you thought it was lost in the woods and would never come to light to bother you. Damn you, you didn't pay him!"

Whether she was innocent or guilty, a frank liar or a mere opportunist who had shirked a task and avoided the awkward truth, Lang was not able to decide while he surveyed her. She had control of herself again. She was impassive. She sat straight in her chair. Her round eyes did not flinch under Trask's rage.

"I thought it was as well to tell you I had paid him. He said he was going away. He said he had been thinking it over and would not persecute a sister when she had a chance to be happy with a good man."

There was a sneer of incredulity in the next question.

"So Mack Templeton pushed away the money and went off, and you didn't see him again?"

"He said he was leaving the country."

"And on the night of the same day—on that night, all of a sudden, you changed your mind and said we could get married, eh? And I had taken out a marriage license a month before, but you wouldn't go ahead till that night!"

"I didn't know what my brother would do—till all

had been arranged with him. I was afraid of him. I told you so."

Trask came around the table to her, the packet of banknotes in his clutch.

"I never saw your Mack Templeton! You asked me to write my orders to him when I gave you that money. I suppose there *was* a Mack Templeton! At any rate they have found his body in the woods. Why were you so devilish afraid of what he would do? Who was he?"

Her impassivity was disturbed. The old man again shouted the question. There was a significance in his tones.

"My brother!"

"If you're lying to me again, I'll see you in hell before I'll put out a hand or a dollar to get you out of more trouble. And trouble probably is coming!"

She winced.

He raved on. "By the Almighty God, I'll get to the bottom of this thing. I'm going into the North woods. I'll take my lawyer, here, with me. If we find you in another lie, after you have had this chance to tell us the truth so we can help you, look out for yourself!"

This sudden move of Trask in taking John Lang into the thing as a partner in truth-seeking produced a sort of galvanic spasm in the woman. "I wanted to tell the truth. But I tried to keep you happy," she cried.

"Who was that man, I ask you!"

She looked straight at Lang. She was defending herself in his eyes; if he were to probe in the North it would be with surety—this potent man—and a quick impulse urged her that she would best serve her need by laying her secret in his hands instead of waiting to have it dragged from her to her shame!

With her eyes entreating Lang, she replied to Trask. "He was my husband. He wanted me to make believe marry you. He wanted to keep his hold on me. Then he would take the money I coaxed from you! Keep on taking more and more! That's the kind he was."

"You were *that!*" rasped the old man, a rattle in his throat.

"I had the right to marry you, after he was dead!"

"How did you know he was dead?" squalled the husband shaking the packet of money over her head.

"There was a man—he followed us through the woods. He was waiting. I think he knew about the money—he—he—must have killed Templeton!"

Trask was staggering to and fro. She rose hastily and put out her hands to him, trying to steady him.

He retreated, his face rigid with hideous fear. He stumbled back against the table and swung his arms violently to keep her away. "You damnable snake! I've felt it before. I'm afraid. I'll be the next you sting! Keep away!"

In his frenzy and his weakness when she kept trying to get closer to him, he employed the only thing at hand as a weapon of defence, hardly realizing what he did use. He flung in her face the packet of money. The banknotes filled the air like a cloud of leaves blown by the puff of a sudden gale. They fell upon her head and drifted down over her, sticking to the beads and the fabric of her gown.

Before Lang could reach Trask to stay him and to put himself between the old man and the woman whom the husband so bitterly feared in that horrible reaction from slavish love, Trask slumped downward, his elbows and back scraping slowly against the edge of the table. There was a dull gritting of his teeth; and a sluggish, ominous convulsion twisted his limbs till the

joints cracked. Then he pitched forward and fell heavily.

The wife screamed and hid her face against Lang's breast, seeking a shield behind which she could avoid the dreadful spectacle. It was a natural impulse on her part, and Lang did not repulse her; he even put his arm about her, appealing to her to be calm. He strove to draw her away from that scene; at first, there seemed to be no mistaking the grim nature of the collapse of the old man.

Therefore, when bailiffs came running and flung open the door, summoned by the thud of the fall and the scream of the woman, they found Serenus Trask motionless on the floor, with money scattered about him and over him, and his wife clasped in another man's arms—according to the evidence furnished by what their startled gaze beheld.

"He's still breathing," reported one of the officers, kneeling, his hand on Trask's breast.

Then for three days and nights Trask went on breathing, lying on his bed in the mansion which he had so joyously fitted for his bride. He did not open his eyes or move his hands, and his jaws were rigidly set.

Lang, looking down on him, could not wholly put away the grim suspicion that Serenus Trask was conscious, that he was using his will to subjugate a body which rebelled against death and that he was dying because he had resolved to do so to get away somewhere, just as he would have made up his mind to take a trip to his barony in the North country.

When Anita was in the room he breathed stertorously, a long pause between each breath, as if he strove to starve his lungs.

On the third night he stopped breathing forever.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ONE, AS AN EXAMPLE



ON the day after the funeral of Serenus Skidmore Trask, John Lang marched into the county court house, passed through the law library with the manner of one pursuing a matter of especially urgent business, and strode into the attorneys' lounge, a smoking room connected with the library.

A dozen lawyers were in the room, and Larry Devon, as was quite his habit, was doing most of the talking. He stopped talking when Lang swung through the door.

The new arrival's countenance revealed how significant he found that cessation of speech. He went straight to Devon, and more than ever he conveyed the impression of having come for a special purpose and of intending to make a quick job of his business.

"Still at it, Devon, are you?" he queried crisply. He tossed his hat on a table and took his stand in front of the attorney. "Sorry to interrupt you! But I'm claiming the right to grab in when my private affairs are tongue-lashed."

"There's no particular discussion of your affairs going on here, John," protested Devon. But his embarrassed tone was unconvincing.

"By *your* calling it a discussion you have narrowly escaped having *me* call you a liar. However, you're a lawyer and are dodging the truth by your choice of descriptive words. I'll admit it's not a discussion. It's a monologue by you! You ought to have it down pat

by this time. You have been rehearsing it enough. I have been on your trail. I'm here!"

"But *here*—this room—is not a suitable place for settling any trouble, Mr. Mayor," averred one of the bystanders.

There was no misunderstanding the mood of Lang or the manner in which he had planted himself in front of Devon. All the men in the room were well aware of the provocation, in case Lang had eavesdropped and caught the tenor of the attorney's latest remarks.

"Admitted! But this is the place where all of you have been condoning slander of myself and my affairs. Such slander has been going on for weeks in this room and in plenty of other rooms of this city. The talk has been behind my back. I have decided to face one representative of the band of slanderers—and that is now and here, and I don't care what the room is."

"Lang, you're going too far!" objected another lawyer.

"I'm going farther! I propose to take this one man right here before the rest of you and make a test case which will cover the situation. After that, slanderers in general may get to know how to govern themselves in the matter of my affairs. Hold on, Devon! You stand where you are!"

"I don't propose to be a party to a brawl in public."

"You have been making your talk about me in public. Don't be so shy, all of a sudden. Do you dare tell me what you have just been saying to these men?"

Devon's face was pale. "This is brawling, I insist, and I stand on my dignity as a gentleman!"

"Do so! I stand here on my two feet as a man—a man who has been reviled and lied about, all his motives misconstrued and his innocent acts twisted into deeds of infamy. You're head and front of the

gang, Devon. That's why I'm taking you. You have run the whole gamut from innuendo to accusation. You have held me responsible for the wreck of the Trask family. You have said young Trask committed suicide because I drove him to it. You have helped to spread the slander that old Trask died after a fit of jealous rage because he found me embracing his wife. The dirty slur that I am after the Trask millions—the whole estate, including the widow, is a part of your alleged humor, I suppose! You haven't wasted any time in setting me out as a fast worker! You have pitched the tune, and the others are singing it from one end of the city to the other. No real man can calmly discuss such things with you, or get anywhere by denying and damning. So, *here!* I start with you!"

He imprisoned the lawyer's neck in the grip of his left hand and with the flat of his right hand he beat Devon up, threw the detractor from him and dusted his palms.

"Any remarks?" he demanded truculently, whirling to face the other men.

"I'd merely like to inquire what you think a performance of this sort gets you?" blurted one in the group.

"You're next!" declared the violent defender of a reputation.

But another stepped between the attacker and the intended victim. The intermediary was Judge Anderson who had come hurrying from the law library, his finger closed in a big volume as a bookmark.

"John, please step this way with me!"

The infinite gentleness of the venerable jurist prevailed. Lang went along, but clearly he was still vindictive and was nerving himself to argue the case to his own advantage. However, Judge Anderson kept en-

tirely away from the case—he did not mention the subject of the quarrel.

“My son, why don’t you go away from town for a time? Go where it’s quiet—go fishing!” he advised.

“I’m going! I’m leaving this afternoon.”

“I wish you had gone this forenoon!”

“I waited in order to toss a little clarifier into the situation,” was Lang’s grim rejoinder. “It will work while I’m away. If it doesn’t, so much the worse for those who drive me to extremes.”

“Go into the woods,” insisted the judge. “I used to go there in my young days and fight with myself, instead of staying in town and fighting with others. I understand the fire that’s in you, John. It was a long time before I could put out the fires in myself.” The pat of the old man’s hand was like a benediction. “It makes a hot blaze—the wrong sort of pride! Deep down in your heart, John, don’t you feel as if you need to go away and fight fires?”

The tears which dimmed Lang’s eyes were not those of sudden conversion. He was not a man to be speedily converted by another. But in the mental torture of the past weeks he had wrung from his own soul an acknowledgment of fault and passionate regret. His emotions were in line with the gentle jurist’s searching understanding.

Lang had begun his argument with himself by the vengeful thought that unless he did go away he might turn on some malignant gossip and kill him as an example for the others.

Then remorse had battled with his rancor. Although he was not ready to confess that he had been wholly wrong, he was conscious of a poignant yearning to square himself generally—but first of all to come into candid, honest peace with his own soul. His emo-

tions were too complex to admit of a definite understanding with himself. Remaining there in close contact with affairs, facing the folk of the town, he was wofully, utterly unable to rise to a clear view of his own nature—uncertain whether to arraign his pride on the charge of selfishness or to find it honest in intent and acquit it of blame.

He was homesick for the silent aisles of the great forests of the North. He wanted to mount into the high places and to be alone and weigh himself in the balance of self-judgment. Over and over he had murmured the lines,

“And o’er the hills, and far away
Beyond the utmost purple rim,
Beyond the night, across the day—”

He had stopped right there, balking at the suggestion of a woman’s companionship. He was not ready to own up to any fear of women. But his recent association with them seemed to be exerting a particularly malign influence on his affairs.

He was pertinaciously insisting that his love for Reba Donworth was enduring. He was honest enough at last to realize that the insistence partook of desperate anxiety to prove to himself that he was not a weak vacillator. However, he felt a strange disinclination to go into her presence.

That day the widow of Serenus Trask had summoned him, beseeching his aid in her business affairs. He realized fully his duty; it was to go to her and assume the burden of the great estate, as the Trask attorney. But he was remembering the dreadful scene when Trask was stricken and the lament, “I’m afraid!” Something of the same quality of thought was in Lang’s

consciousness when he had sent the widow a message, declaring he must go away to the woods for a few days, pleading the need of rest after the strain of the trial.

He was dealing with all these mental processes while his mentor waited with understanding patience in the private chamber of the court house.

When Lang finally shook himself free from these thoughts and determinations, and looked up at Judge Anderson, the younger man did not try to conceal his new emotion. He put out his hand and slowly set it into the understanding grasp the jurist gave him.

“Go on as you are going! You’ll come out into the sunlight farther along the path, my son!”

Outdoors the spirit of May was sending her balmy breath ahead of her coming. Lang could shut his eyes and behold in vision the budding woods of the North and hear the tumbling of the spring floods—the laughter of the little brooks of the Brassua and the hilarious roar of their big brother, the river.

He started for the North that afternoon, with a certain comforting sense of having more than one reason for going there.

That he was mayor of the city, and was turning his back on his duties—this fact merely counted as one among his reasons for desiring to escape. Inwardly he was still disparaging the honor which had come to him. In his present situation he loathed an office that constantly exposed him to hateful contact. The city, under its revised charter, had a council of five. The president of that council became automatically the acting mayor, in the absence of the mayor himself.

In his disgust, Lang was sourly minded to allow the politicians to do as their inclinations prompted—he would not hamper them—he intended to send his res-

ignation down from the North country, to be acted on as political expedient or as the city's best interests required. Personally he wanted to be done with politics.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

AS OTHERS SEE US!



THE walls between the chambers of Debois's house on the Brassua's remote upper waters were thin—only matched boards which had spread and split when the building settled. Eavesdropping was easy—was unavoidable when guests did not whisper. Therefore, John Lang heard the news that he had gone into the North country to wait for Anita Trask in order that a good understanding, which had started before the death of Old Double T, might be cemented by marriage up there where society meddlers could not peer and pry.

There were two men in the next chamber; one of them had arrived by buckboard after Lang had retired to his room. The attorney had tramped to far brooks that day and he was healthily weary.

Lang had been staying for a week at Debois's place. He dressed in rough clothes, had allowed his beard to grow and gave his name as Lane. He had the feeling that he wanted to be another man for a time. It was a relief, considering the state of his mind in regard to humanity.

The men in the next room were fishermen from the city; they had been discussing metropolitan affairs. The new arrival had come to join his friend at Debois's.

"They wouldn't have the nerve to get married so soon," objected the man to whom the news had been imparted.

"Do you know Lang?"

"I have heard about him. I never saw him."

"Don't you worry any about his not having nerve. Nerve is his main asset. The story goes now that he dug that girl up and sicked her on to old Trask—made the match so as to turn a trick with the money, as he's doing. It's certainly an easy way for a lawyer to make a few millions."

"Say, look here! I don't believe any such thing of a man with the reputation John Lang has had."

"The best of 'em cash in on a reputation when the right time comes and if the stakes are big enough! I don't know Lang either—not personally. But it's a fact that he stood up in the Talisman Club and admitted how he had driven young Trask to commit suicide—and be damned to such a coward—or words to that effect!"

Lang gritted his teeth. The snowball of gossip does roll rapidly down the slope of credulity; it gathers muck of slander and stones of false accusation unto itself, and becomes an avalanche unless it is stayed!

"He wouldn't eliminate the heir and brazen the thing out, would he, unless he had designs on the estate? In estimating motives and what a man really is after, you've got to link together the things he does in going after it. Have you ever seen the girl old Trask married?"

"No!"

"Well, I *have*! I've seen her riding along the street in her car. And if she can't make a man chase his grandmother with an ax—at any rate with a stockingful of wet sand, simply by lifting her finger and promising a kiss, you can consider my judgment a dead one, and can call the coroner."

"And that accounts for Lang sitting in as he has done, eh?"

“That girl and the millions, yes! We’ve got to be good to ourselves in this world, man! Dad hammer it, I’m for sale, myself, for a cussed big-sight less than what Lang is raking in. He could have got away with it in a lot smoother style—and the smooth way *is* his style—if the girl hadn’t made so much of a public fuss over him and hadn’t gabbled so much to women about how dear and close he was to her. Not much in the shape of think-works up here, I’m afraid!” The sound-carrying quality of those walls was such that Lang could hear the chap rap his forehead with his knuckles. “But when they’re married and arrive back from—well, Europe, we’ll say, then everybody will kowtow! It’s what money can do when there’s money enough!”

In the experiences of his legal practice, John Lang had been obliged to examine carefully the seamy side of human nature instead of doing what the majority do, accept the fabric of personality as it looks and as it fits according to outward show. He understood fully the infinite and secret meanness of the human mind when the smaller natures which make up the great herd perceive an opportunity to join in a mass attack on one whose manifest probity in the past has been a subtle rebuke to meanness, malice and moral turpitude.

There had been a time when he would have considered the tattle in the next room as of no account—as the mere haphazard of gossip—as the sniping by hit-or-miss slander.

In his newer enlightenment, he knew well enough that these two men, who confessed that they did not know him personally, were revealing what the general public was saying—they were phonographs playing a popular selection. He was not astonished by the enor-

mity of the current abuse of him. He had had occasion in the past to unsnarl the skeins of slander in the cases of his clients. He knew the nature of the impulse that was operating. He could name it in the language of the mob: "They had got John Lang on the run!"

"There's a friend of mine who is a lawyer. He's a chum of Larry Devon. Do you know Devon?" pursued the man who was opening the package of information.

"No!"

"Well, Devon is a Turk when he goes on the war-path. He's after Lang. Lang came into his place, drunk, and tried to make Devon take back something which Devon knew was so. Lang even pulled a gun. But Devon stood up and said he'd go through and prove what he said. So, my friend tells me, Devon has hired a dick to chase up the Trask widow and nail the truth to the cross when she joins Lang. She doesn't know enough to spot a detective. They're letting Lang run loose, wherever it is he's waiting for her. Lang would be wise to a trailer. Watch the newspapers. You'll see big headlines a little later."

Having played that gossip selection through to the bitter end, the phonograph started a new popular record, raspily raking another victim of the public's tongues.

There was only one thing to do, according to Lang's customary straightforward policy of face-to-face in a fight! He would go back to the city and pitch into the mêlée. He got out of bed and rammed his possessions into his duffel bag.

He was making his pack ready that night in order to be able to start with the first peep o' day. He would let 'em know in the city that John Lang was back with his sleeves rolled up! He would give them no oppor-

tunity to work a frame-up on him in the North woods, stalking him from behind that woman!

Therefore, in the gray of the dawn he was up. He wakened Debois and paid the score. Lang had resolved to walk, feeling the need of calming his mind by tiring his body. Dawn had smeared her first brushful of color along the eastern sky—a modest, subdued test of the rose hues of her palette. There was a tingle in the air.

The birds were waking. The chickadee, a perennial and settled resident of the North woods, winter and summer, was already singing his love-song for the entertainment of some of the fresh avian arrivals from the south. His clear, sweet “dee-dee, dee-dee” echoed among the trees.

A busy hairy-woodpecker was clinging to the dead stub of a pine, rapping with his beak to make a dozing grub believe that he was wanted at the door of his retreat on special and urgent business. The bird gave Lang a sociable and approving “ki-yeep,” complimenting another early riser on knowledge of the really best time to be abroad in the woods. And the hermit-thrush was carolling. No one has ever heard the song of the hermit-thrush at dawn or twilight, that flute-like, deliberately drawn-out note broken by effective rests, without feeling the mystic charm of the forest in more intense degree.

A robin, very brisk, extremely optimistic, with breast painted in bright hues which had not yet been faded by the cares of hunting for family food, called “cheer-up, cheer-up!” when the thrush was not soothing the troubles of the world with melody.

For a time bitterness raged in Lang as he strode over the mosses and trod the soft duff beneath the trees. After a time he realized that a very keen pang in his

bitterness was caused by the thoughts that he must leave all this peace of the woods. He loathed the prospect ahead of him—he hated the very idea of the paved streets and the roar of traffic and the touch of the elbows of the throngs. He dreaded to go back to town and walk on the pavements already hatefully glossed by the stropping of many shoes. Indulging a sudden whim, he stepped off the path and went into a thicket and stood there, assuring himself that his feet were on virgin spots of Mother Earth—the exact spots where no other feet had been pressed.

Not far from him a pair of golden-crested kinglets were starting a home. The male was genially advising with “tsee-tsee, ti ti ti ti!” and the female was “chippering” her complete agreement. Lang found them mighty companionable. He must leave such company and such a scene, to go back and meet those faces which he had been avoiding!

He had been guessing for a long time at what was said behind his back. After listening to the clapper-tongue in the next room at Debois’s he had become fully aware of the infamous nature of the scandal now pursuing him; his dread of meeting the faces of men was intensified into something like a mania of resentment; he wondered if he would not find himself slapping faces on the streets, as he had slapped Devon’s face in the comparative privacy of the lawyers’ lounge!

He strode on his way. The upper limb of the sun was quivering through the grid of the trees, like the stirred coals of a breakfast fire. All the birds were in full voice. The idea of leaving all this cleanness and honesty to return and fight filth in the pack of humanity, became intolerable torture.

There arose from his wiser reflections—listening to the birds, sniffing the balm of springtime among the

trees—the conviction that he was not yet in the proper mental condition to go back and fight with men. He had not had his promised fight out with himself. Until he was more sure of the honesty of his soul, he had no right to take on the bigger conflict!

He remembered what his handclasp had pledged to Judge Anderson.

He had been getting into a state of mind where he was looking at John Lang's character squarely and frankly in the mirror of Nature, up there. He was admitting grudgingly that he was not impeccable. There was some sort of a sin on his conscience—and he was not just sure how guilty he was, or whether he was merely morbid.

He came to higher ground. He could look forth and see the rim of the purple hills. They lay to the north—they invited him. He wanted to look over that rim. But toward the south—only flat country! He wanted to get beyond the rim which hemmed his honest judgment of himself as a man! So, after he had stood for a time on the height of land and had pondered, he drove his fists into the air in silent declaration of a fresh determination to be sure of himself before he ventured forth to force other men to make an equitable estimate of him as a man.

He turned his back on the flat country which lay to the south. He shifted his pack to an easier position, like a traveler who was headed toward a distant destination. He swung away from the road which followed the river and he turned into a path which led toward the purple rim of the hills.

The frown left his face.

He had sandwiches in his coat pocket, food bought from the drowsy Debois. He trudged on and munched his breakfast and tossed the crumbs to the birds who

were furnishing music along the way. The birds had helped to make the springtime woods coax him to stay; his inclination had placed fetters on him that he could not break just then. Therefore, he paid the birds. He put it in that selfish way, whimsically, in his thoughts. He felt better there in the candor of the woods because he was making an admission of selfishness at last, frankly and without any mental reservations.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

ON ANGEL KNOB



FOR a time, John Lang, tramping into the heart of the woods of the North, kept looking behind as the twisting path took him among the trees. It was like a man making sure that the doors which ensured his privacy were closed as he passed through. He felt a comfort in beholding the trees sifting together to barricade the aisles in the rear, as he turned into new vistas.

He did not hurry. He had decided to put the lapse of time out of his thoughts as nothing with which he was especially concerned. Time was for the city man. He had been a slave of the clock. He was dismissing the matters of the town for the peace of his soul. He had no particular destination except the hills—the rim of the hills. He shared the swagon-stew of the woods-folk whom he happened upon. He lingered here and there, o' days, when he found new friends who perceived in him only the usual voyageur. He was sociable with them in reserved fashion.

There were trappers, curing the winter's spoil and making it ready for the auction market. There were gum pickers and ship knee hewers, and there were scattered camps of pulpwood choppers. Also there were men who seemed to have nothing to do except to exist—men who looked askance at him, this stalwart stranger, as if they were wondering whether at last somebody had come to claim them in the name of the

law. He found lodgings for his nights with all sorts of men.

He did not know whether the woods through which he tramped belonged to the Double T or not. He asked no questions. He did not care. He was keeping his worries about the affairs of the Trasks as much out of his mind as possible.

He did not know whether this newer comfort which had come into his mind was peace or merely animal contentment in leaving to the day in hand the matters belonging to that day. He marched on toward the looming hills.

He found a sick man sitting on a log, panting. The fellow had a story of trouble to relate. He said he was the lone fire warden in charge of the station on Borestone—he pointed to the craggy peak which overshadowed the glen where they were. It was his duty to report any fires he could locate from his eyry—a post which commanded thousands of acres.

A sudden tempest, shot through with lightning shafts, had swept across Borestone, his cabin had been set on fire by a crashing bolt, he was left stunned and scorched; his heliograph had been destroyed. He could not report his plight by a message to be relayed from station to station. Therefore, he had come stumbling and sliding down, going for help for his hurts as best he could.

“I’ve got to hurry to the Charmer Man’s,” he told Lang. “He can cure me!”

The name had no significance for the lawyer at first.

“He’s Elder Ashael of Angel Knob. It’s yonder. I have done my best, but I guess I can’t get there without help.”

An old man in a white frock that matched his hair and beard—a patriarch who was serenely indifferent to

the stares of a court room crowd—the lawyer remembered old Ashael. And remembering, he was reminded of his vague resolve to seek out the strange man of the woods when occasion offered an opportunity.

Lang put out his hands and helped the stricken warden to his feet and supported him as they walked along.

“I’m thanking God because you came to me,” said the man almost whimpering. “I’ve had an awful tug of it alone. But I knew I’d be all right if I could only get to the Charmer Man! Have you heard of him?”

“No!” Lang was hiding his identity; he trusted to his new beard and his rough garments to make him another personage than the one whom Ashael might remember as the counsel for the defense in the Trask trial.

“Then you’re sure a new one in these parts! He does good to all men, without money and without price. That’s the wording of the writing on his door! There’s lots of folks who don’t believe in faith and good works healing the ills of the body,” chattered the sick man.

He had repeated, in his own style, a phrase which had become familiar to him. He stumbled on, taking his mind off his pain by confession of his beliefs. “I always read my Bible every day. There’s a lot of time for reading and for thinking, too, up on the peak of old Borestone. I don’t mean to say as how Elder Ashael has got a monopoly on healing. Nobody has got a monopoly, Mister. God didn’t fix the thing that way when He planned. The blessing is open for all who know how to go and get it.

“Once the elders of the church came and prayed beside the sick bed of my mother when the doctor had given her up—and she got well. The Bible tells all

about how to do it with the help of the elders of the church. And there's another book that tells how. I'm going to buy it when I can get to where they sell 'em. You never know what's going to happen. There I was, sitting all calm, and the lightning hit me."

In spite of his garrulity the man was very weak. Lang halted, to get a firmer grip on the patient whom he was half carrying. What Lang was terming in his thoughts "ordinary horse sense" prompted him to suggest, "How far is it to a regular doctor, my friend?"

"I don't know, and I don't care. If a regular doctor stood right there where that bush is I wouldn't let him lay a finger on me. The only way he could get a look at my tongue would be when I stuck it out at him to say 'Bah!' Take me to old Ashael. That's the path."

The trees were very clearly blazed on a trail which led off from the road the two men were following. Each blaze-mark was a cross cut into the wood through the bark; the mark was painted white. "You can see 'em in the darkest night," said the warden. "And day or night, it's all the same to Ashael, where his welcome is concerned. 'Come to me by The Way of the Cross,' he says. That's what he calls it—'The Way of the Cross'."

They struggled up the slope. On the poll of the hill there was a log camp surrounded by trim white birches. "There's fifty of 'em. He calls 'em his angel band. But he isn't a nut," stated the man earnestly.

Lang agreed with that dictum, out of his memory of the dignified witness who testified that he had married Anita Templeton to Serenus Trask.

Ashael came from his door as the two approached the camp. He hastened to help Lang with his burden, but after a few steps the warden pushed away their

hands. "Let me try to walk alone! I feel better just because I have laid my eyes on you," he assured Ashael.

But his weakness overmastered his will. He staggered and the old man saved him from falling. "Brother, there are times when faith has the wings of an eagle, but there are other times when faith needs good crutches," he warned, and he turned on Lang a very sensible and understanding smile. He gave no indication of any remembrance of the lawyer. He listened to the recital of the sufferer's tale of trouble.

"I thought perhaps I could make myself well. So I stayed up there in a brush shelter. But I had to give in—and I have been thanking God because the woods are still wet and safe from fires, even though He couldn't see His way to curing me."

"We'll see what can be done, not presuming to ask God for anything except what He may grant in His own good time. Come in with me!"

Lang sat on the porch of the camp to wait and rest himself. He pulled out his pipe, but he put it back into his pocket before he lighted it. He heard the mumble of a voice within the camp as if an earnest prayer were offered up, and he had the queer feeling that burning tobacco might be profanation of some kind of a service.

After a time Ashael came out. "The poor fellow is asleep," he reported. "He needs it. His pain is not so bad, at any rate!"

"Then he isn't all well and kicking, eh?" The lawyer's cynicism was revealed in his tone. He looked away from Ashael, expressing bantering surprise. A few moments later Lang was conscious of astonishment that was not of the simulated sort. The Charmer Man had not replied. Lang turned his head and looked into

the full blue eyes which were regarding him with a twinkle of undisguised humor.

"I am only a counsel for the plaintiff, appearing before the Court of the Most High God, my friend. In your practice you are accustomed to wait patiently for the action of the court, aren't you?"

"You know who I am, do you?"

"You are John Lang."

"You were in court for so short a time——"

Ashael went on when the lawyer hesitated. "Perhaps we were mutually interested in each other, though the time was so short."

"I'll confess to being greatly impressed by you, sir. This meeting is more or less by chance, but I'll own up it's very pleasing. It was in my mind to hunt you up some day."

"For what reason?"

"I don't know."

Ashael had no comment to make on that blunt reply.

"I'll also confess, as you realize must be the case, that my profession makes me curious in regard to men and their affairs," pursued the lawyer. "I'd like to know how it is you're here in these woods, a man of your apparent intelligence, doing what it is you're doing, according to reports."

"And because I have recognized you, you would also like to know, I presume, what my rightful name is."

"I certainly would."

"Before you leave my camp, you're going to ask me, aren't you, to tell nobody that John Lang is in these parts?" pressed Ashael.

"Yes! I am not a fugitive, you understand!" The lawyer twisted his mouth into a smile which had no humor in it. "But there are persons who want to hurt me; they would like to locate me!"

“Exactly! I understand, and I agree with you as to the good judgment a man may use in avoiding enemies. I’ll keep *your* secret because I want to help you. And you’ll keep *my* secret—because I’m not going to tell you anything about myself.”

Ashael voiced his declaration mildly. But the calm finality in his tone made the answer a rebuff and it irritated his visitor. Lang pulled out his pipe and lighted it and did not mind because the smoke, while he puffed vigorously, went trailing across the face of his host. There was a long silence. A tufted caterpillar crawled along the floor of the porch. Lang scuffed a ruthless foot across the worm.

“You should have allowed it to go along till it had preached its little sermon, sir.”

“What do you mean?” demanded the lawyer.

“It would have turned into a butterfly a bit later. In this life we have eyes which can see the winged creature of beauty rise from the worm; in the other life we have an enlightened vision which can see the soul separate from the corruption of the body.”

Lang grunted.

“You are tempted, these days, to grind all things under your heel, aren’t you?”

“Why do you think that of me?”

“You plainly showed your feelings when you angrily set foot upon the worm.”

“Let it stand that way. You may be right!”

“And yet you helped that poor fellow to my door!”

“He helped me, too, by being my guide. I had a curiosity to see you again. We have all three split even.” He rose. “I’m going along. Good-bye!”

“A moment, please! Have you lost your real and honest desire to help others in this world? Are you no longer ‘Generous John’?”

"Don't call me that! I never was. I'm not now. I have had authoritative statements on that point from those who claim to know me best. I wouldn't turn my hand over to help any man alive!"

"The man in there, asleep, is on his way to be healed. But I am worried about you, sir."

"You needn't be. I'm feeling quite healthy."

"You are very ill, my brother."

"Do you propose to offer your services?"

"You are sick with a trouble which you yourself must heal. By putting aside your own will and giving honest help to humankind you could win back to health. Make real friends and help them unselfishly."

"I have no real friends," insisted Lang, stubborn in his revolt against all mankind.

But all at once he turned from the recluse and showed acute and friendly appreciation of a thrush's lilting song.

"Hold on! I spoke too quickly, Mister Ashael! There's one of my friends—that thrush! The other morning I shared my breakfast with some of the bird's relatives." Lang gave the old man a whimsical smile. "It was my thank-offering! The birds coaxed me to stay on longer in the woods—and I'm glad because I stayed."

"Ah! Good! You confess yourself a brother of the birds, at least," commended Ashael. "You are in a sad state in respect to your brotherhood with man, however. You must begin at the foot of the ladder of love and work your way up. Why not be humble to that extent, friend, and be no more at the first than a brother of the birds? But more of a practical brother! I can think of a way."

"I don't follow you!"

When Ashael talked further Lang was more per-

plexed; the topic seemed to have nothing to do with what the old man had been talking about a few moments before.

“If you know anything about the woods, sir, you understand that May is a dangerous season. The dried slash of the winter choppings is everywhere. The Spring hurries as fast as she can to offset the carelessness of man. She places her fire-breaks. She coaxes up the patches of the box-berry greens and puts leaves on the witch hobble and the moose wood. But the work takes time, the best she can do! Then a fool with a pipe or a campfire lights the fuse of the bomb! Away the conflagration goes! And in your present mood in regard to men—and women, too, maybe—I don’t suppose you would care how many acres of the Widow Trask’s lands are burned, or how much the barons of the Great Northern lose in the way of pulp-timber or whether the fat and homely heiress of Jonas Blake is obliged to buy a husband on the cut-price bargain counter because of her loss in standing timber! You don’t care, eh?”

“No, I don’t care,” returned Lang sourly. But he was looking with new interest at Ashael, wondering what the old man was driving at and impressed by the hermit’s shrewd knowledge of the news and conditions in the North country.

“Perhaps not, for you’d know that the Widow Trask and the others would not lose all. But there are many—there are thousands who would lose everything—homes and their lives. No, no! Don’t say again that you don’t care. I’m not talking about human beings. I’m talking about the birds, your brothers.”

He returned Lang’s unfriendly stare with composure. “I’m talking of only humble friends, but I am not jesting with you, sir. I have told you how you

must start at the foot of the ladder of love in order to make yourself well again. I'm merely giving you a prescription—you must fill it and take it of your own volition. All these thousands of acres in this immediate region are left unguarded by a fire warden until that poor chap in there can go back to Borestone or can get word to another warden. If you would take his place on the mountain for a time, you could keep watch and report the little fires and summon help before the little fires could grow to conflagrations."

Lang thought upon the matter, immediately interested in spite of the rather fantastic reason the old man had put forward as a call to the service.

"You think, Elder Ashael, it would be a mighty good thing for me to go up on that mountain and look out over the world and do some hard thinking in regard to myself. That's your idea, isn't it?"

"I compliment your astuteness, my friend!"

"The man told me that his house was burned."

"He spoke, however, of a brush shelter. You have boasted of your health of body. You'll feel the heart-beat of Mother World if you lie on the ground. I have tried it. You'll see farther into the heart of the heavens if you'll stay out from under a wooden roof for a time."

"He said his heliograph had been destroyed."

"I have one here in my camp. I have used it to send messages of good cheer to the lonely chaps on the mountain tops. I will lend it to you."

"I'll say this," admitted Lang frankly. "You're a good operator—getting at me as you have done. Your name, 'Charmer Man,' fits you. I see what you hope is going to happen in my case. But I'm distinctly telling you that when I take this job, I'm doing it only for the sake of the birds. Let that be understood between us."

"It was my own suggestion, friend. I'm not going back on it!"

Ashael went into his camp. When he came out, bringing the heliograph, he said, "The poor chap is awake. He tells me he managed to save his supplies in the lean-to. They are cached near the brush shelter. Do you understand how to operate this instrument?"

"We learned all those things at Plattsburg," snapped Lang. He picked up his pack, adjusted it and started away, the instrument under his arm.

"Your trail to the mountain is plain," called Ashael.

"Thank you."

"If you feel like flashing me a morning hello when the sun is bright, or winking a sunset word or two to say that all is right up there, I'll be glad."

"I'll probably have nothing to say."

Lang was feeling irritation which he did not understand very well. He was in the mood of one who had had something put over on him. The pretext of the service for the birds was a very thin veneer for Ashael's success in being rather informally a physician of the soul. Lang was not then humbled to the extent of admitting to himself that an old hermit, up in the woods, could do anything sensible in the way of real help.

The lawyer preferred to keep on clinging to his bitter grudge against all men. He took that grudge up the mountain with him. He wanted to stay on the mountain for a time in order to avoid the whole pestiferous pack of humanity, he told himself.

It was a tough climb, and it took up his full attention when he came to the ledgy cliffs. In places there were sapling hand-rails to help him up the V-shaped gutters of the rocks. There were cliffs so steep that

ascent was possible only by using some rude ladders, clamped to the ledges. He came across several lethargic spotted adders sunning themselves on the warm rocks. He was glad to note all the difficulties and deterrents of the ascent. They assured him his privacy.

That night, from the peak of Borestone, he watched the sunset die and saw the flashing waters of the wind-swept lakes fade in the obscurity of the twilight.

When the stars came out he slept peacefully on a bed of spruce boughs under the brushwood roof.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THOUGH THE KING WAS DEAD, THE QUEEN LIVED



THE headquarters camp of the Double T was on the Hagas waters, a lake whose inlets and outlets made it look like a great octopus sprawling in the forest. The camp was the center of a web of tote-roads and streams. There were numerous buildings—horse hovels, cook and bunk houses, wangan or store camps, shelters for machinery—for the log-haulers and the tools for the operations.

On a hill crowned with towering spruces was a big, eight-sided house of logs, a sort of a fortress in the forest, the home and office camp from which Serenus Skidmore Trask had administered his affairs through all the years.

There was a new tyrant on the throne in the octagon house. Anita Trask sat in the big chair at the broad table, and the various operating bosses of the Double T came to her and reported and received their orders and went away. Some of them, visiting headquarters for the first time after she took charge, had swaggered a bit before they went in—had cocked their heads and had had something to say in asides about taking orders from a girl, even though she did own the Double T. They were prepared to be condescending, out of their knowledge of the practical side of lumbering.

They came out from her presence, blinking with the uncertainty of those who were not just certain of

themselves and were considerably humbled. They had come up against a mistress who fixed their attention firmly with her round, unwavering eyes and who let it be known that she was of the woods, the same as they were. She said she did not understand the minuter details of the lumber business and should not interfere with any man who was producing results. But she was just as frank in informing her subalterns that she should keep an eye on them by the employment of walking bosses who knew their business and who would report to her regularly.

When one man ventured to remonstrate, saying he did not need any "spy" to keep him straight, she immediately told the man that he was through with the Double T. There was another boss in the office at the time and after the crestfallen objector had gone away she ordered the boss to pass the word that her agents were not to be called spies.

A hardness showed under the mask of her beauty. Her manner had the bold, calculating self-reliance which even young and pretty women display after they have been obliged to deal on defensive terms with men and have become disillusionized.

One of the men who visited her on business informed himself (though he was very careful about telling anybody else after learning how quick she was on the trigger in the matter of discharging men) that unless something very serious was the trouble with his eyesight he had seen that same girl across the Border at Portage Lewrie, helping a black-moustached chap to run a raffle game at a carnival.

The new head of the Double T had dispensed with skirts in the woods. She wore riding breeches. She showed no feminine self-consciousness when she strode about the camps on Hagas waters. The bosses had

always a fresh story to tell about her domineering methods with men; therefore, her hirelings settled into a mood and mien of deference.

John Lang, with more subtle analysis of her nature than the woodsman could compass, had recognized in her the avatar of that compelling quality which had raised Jane Shores and Du Barrys from the ditch to despotism, all through the ages. But the story told often by the head cook of the Double T camps revealed even a stranger quality in her. The cook described the affair with considerable awe.

She one day, soon after coming to the castle, espied cats clustered about the funnel of the cook house where it emerged through the roof; the animals were gathered there to warm themselves in the nip of the May evening; May has its night chill in the North woods.

The cook warned her against being sociable with those cats. He explained that all domestic cats grow wild after they have been in the woods for a time. He said they would come to no one of their own accord; if a person tried to pick one up, the person would be clawed into ribbons.

“But she looked up at them cats,” said the cook, “and she twittered a funny call and after a few minutes, down they came a-straggling; and they humped up their backs and leaned against her legs, and purred and meowed all sociable and free. And she picked up the two toughest old toms and marched off to her camp with one under each arm. And any day you step into the office you’ll see ’em setting on the table, admiring her, but always ready to gouge a whole clawful of meat out of any hand but hers if they can reach that hand. This world is full of mysteries, and that’s one of ’em.”

The cook was re-telling the story, informing a new

man in camp. It was the rosy time o' day just before the twilight began to deepen.

"And to prove it, there she comes and there are the cats!"

Anita was walking down slowly from the octagon camp. In the hook of each arm she carried a cat. The animals were big and black and in their sooty faces their green eyes showed lustrously large.

At the edge of the fringe of woods, the stump of a great pine had been sawed level and fitted with a back and chair arms; Serenus Trask had used it for his outdoor throne when the weather invited. His widow took a seat there, holding the cats on her knees. They seemed to be expecting something in the way of diversion. Their tails were jerking and their whiskers twitched.

The cook swore under his breath. "It seems to be her notion of a good way to settle her dinner—but I'll be damned if I like it—seeing it every evening!"

A few rabbits, venturing in single file, came hopping from the undergrowth, emboldened by the twilight to seek the fresh herbage of the clearing. Anita loosed the black cats. They leaped lithely and silently and each pounced on a fleeing rabbit. They showed sagacity and the advantage of practice. Setting strong jaws, they broke the backs of their victims so that the rabbits were deprived of the only defense which those timid beasts possess—their sturdy hind legs. But the cats did not slay the rabbits at once. They cuffed the animals about the sward. A terror-stricken rabbit wails as piteously as an infant in pain. The awful cries continued after the cats had dragged the wounded animals under a camp's porch. Anita was laughing aloud. At a little distance from her a man stopped, awaiting audience. He was one of the field agents.

“Why are you scowling like that?” she demanded sharply. “Don’t you enjoy good sport?”

“Yes—oh, yes!” he said, obsequiously apologizing by tone and manner. “But I hate to hear ’em take on so bad!”

“In the woods you must go by the laws of the woods. The big trees crowd out the smaller ones, the big animals eat the little ones. It’s the same outside the woods among men and women, only they gloss over their doings. Why lie about it? It’s all the same thing. We’re more honest about what we do here in the woods.” She caught herself up and apologized aloud to her sense of reserve, showing no regard for the man’s feelings. “You mustn’t think I’m getting confidential with an understrapper. I was only saying things to myself. What’s the business?”

“We have located that Lawyer Lang according to your orders, madam.”

She was jarred out of the pose of autocratic dignity she had assumed since she had come into the woods of the Double T. She leaped from her stump-throne. “Where is he?”

“On the top of Borestone!”

“Did you go there? Did you find him there?”

“No, madam! But a message was helioed from the station on top of Borestone to the station on Spencer. Spencer phoned to Castonia settlement that it was a telegram to the city—a telegram to a Judge Anderson to have him tell Onesimé Oullette—the Canuck they’re holding for the Templeton murder—not to worry but to keep waiting all patient and he would get free.”

He misinterpreted the expression which made even her handsome face ugly at that moment.

He hastened to add, “The helio didn’t say who was sending the message, I’ll admit. But I’ve got friends

to give me tips as to messages in this section and I reckon you're paying me to use my brains and put two and two together. The papers all reported that Mr. Lang had taken the Ouellette case to defend—and who else but Mr. Lang would be sending that word from Borestone?"

She was now in command of herself. "This Lawyer Lang would do better to send a message to *me*, explaining why he ran away and left my husband's legal affairs to take care of themselves."

"We all understand how you feel about him, after what you have told us, if you'll allow me to say as much, madam! He's only wasting his time on that Frenchman—and I don't care how good a lawyer Mr. Lang is."

"I don't care to hear the case mentioned, sir. And the only interest I have in Lang is to find him and oblige him to attend to his duties. I must go to the top of Borestone, wherever it is."

"It's an awful climb, madam!"

"I'm not afraid of mountains or of men, when the business of the Double T is to be attended to, sir. I hope that's well understood. I will start at daybreak with you as a guide. Have the horses ready."

He flourished an obedient hand and bowed and walked away.

She called to the black cats and they came from under the porch, licking blood from their lips, and followed her up the slope to the octagon camp. She hurried in and closed the door behind her and leaned against it, jealous of her privacy. She was trembling; her face was flushed; her red lips were apart. "John! John!" she whispered over and over, caressing the name with soft fervor.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

ON THE MATTER OF THIEVES



HE mistress of the barony of the Double T rode across her lands in the glory of the May sunshine. The single squire whom she had appointed to be her guide followed at a respectful distance. The two were on horseback. They had not made their start in the early dawn, according to Anita's commands of the evening before; the squire had brought the horses to the octagon camp before sunrise but he was obliged to wait for a long time.

Finally he ventured to ask a woman, who appeared and set about her work of tidying the screened porch, if she would tell her mistress that he was waiting.

"She knows you're here. She has been getting ready for an hour!"

Then, making a pretense of being very busy with her dust-cloth on the frame of the screen, the domestic inquired in tones apprehensively low, "Where is she going?"

The squire was cautious, on his own part. "If she hasn't told you, it isn't for me to say anything."

"I can't help wondering," pursued the woman. "She's primping as if she had a fashion party on her mind."

The squire, trailing behind later, had plenty of opportunity to study the attire of the lady of the Double T as they rode along. He had accompanied her before on tours of inspection when the suggestion that she was the lady of the demesne, instead of merely

his boss, was not so pronounced as it was this day. She rode astride, to be sure, but she wore divided skirts of rich, green fabric; the squire decided that it must be velvet. Her hat was green of the same material as the habit, and the hat had a broad brim; a drooping white plume hung as far as her shoulder. The feather was a bit archaic, like the rest of the garb, according to modern fashions, but it was peculiarly effective in her case.

According to the man's humble opinion her rig was a most extraordinary one for mountain climbing—and he had warned her of the climb as a particularly tough one. She had probably given up that idea, he told himself.

She turned in her saddle to speak to him. He was a matter-of-fact individual, bronzed and bearded, and was not subject to especially vivid emotions. But the beauty of that glowing face under the green brim of the hat sent a thrill through him. It did not seem like anything real—a girl of that sort, thus attired, in the woods—he told himself.

“Dawson, how far is it to Borestone?”

“A matter of ten woods miles, madam.”

“And after we leave the horses it's not an easy climb, you say?”

“Only for squirrels, ma'am!”

She did not appear to be at all discomposed by the information. For a considerable distance they followed one of the main tote-roads and she put her horse into a canter. When they came to any sort of an elevation affording a view of the stretch of forest, she stopped and asked if what they beheld was her land. Every time, when he assured her again that they could not as yet see beyond the boundaries of her territory, she raised her chin proudly.

"And one can look for a long distance from the top of Borestone, I suppose?"

"For miles and miles, madam!"

"And much of what one can see from up there is still my land, eh?"

"Most of it! Borestone is yours, though a hunk of rock like that isn't worth anything."

She flashed a rebuking glance which conveyed disagreement with his opinion. He did not understand the nature of this new pride of possession—this glorying in what was her own. She seemed to have an especial reason for demanding to be told that all these acres were hers, to do with as she wished.

When they were well along on their way they arrived at a main depot camp. She dismounted and inspected the stores in the various buildings. The keeper of the camp escorted her and explained. Many cats trailed him. He said he treated them well because they kept the mice from the stores.

"And I wish I had cats big enough to keep away other kinds of critters than mice," he confided with surly emphasis. He was a man who had been affected by the isolation of his lonely job and had become misanthropic and inclined to make much of small matters. "Those critters I'm speaking of are what's knocking the profits off the Double T operations for you, ma'am."

She turned on him, her eyes blazing. "If anything is taking profits from the Double T, my man, I should have been told. I have my own reasons for wanting profits to be very large from now on."

The two men perceived only a mercenary spirit.

On her ride through her possessions she had been meditating deeply. She had her own estimate of the nature of man—an estimate which had been pounded

into hard conviction on the anvil of experience after having been put through the fires of her trials.

Now she was on her way to test covetousness.

There was a man on the top of Borestone—and he was only a man she told herself, even though he had shown toward her a reserve such as no other man had ever displayed when she invited. He had resisted her. But would he resist the offering she now was going to lay at his feet? She was going up to that god on the mountain with a votive gift.

She had met many men who professed not to be covetous, but she had powers of persuasion such as most women did not have, and she had made them strip their souls and confess that even crime was not too high a price for them to pay for what they were determined to possess. Her views had been narrowed by her experiences. She had never met the sort of men who could broaden those views. Even John Lang had his price! She knew it—she was going with it in her hand. But here was a lackey who was telling her that her possessions were in a way to be diminished.

“It’s this way!” he said when she angrily demanded facts. “We have a lot of small depots—scattered camps—where it ain’t good sense to pay for special guards. And the squatters come and steal from those camps.”

“Put on guards—with guns!” she commanded.

“I beg your pardon, ma’am,” ventured Dawson. “But Mr. Trask didn’t think it was worth while. He reckoned on a certain amount of stealing. Paying men to guard small stocks would come to more than what the stealing amounts to—twice over. Jim, here, has grown to be sort of cracked on the subject. I have talked with him before. The trouble is, he doesn’t

have enough to think about, and dwells too much on one thing."

"I'm for the interests of the Double T," insisted the keeper.

"I don't care if it's only pennyworths they're stealing," declared the mistress sharply. "I'll have it stopped. I must have all my money. Get guns! Shoot!"

"Kill 'em?" queried the keeper, squinting his eyes evilly and showing satisfaction.

"Yes!"

"You're the kind after my own heart, ma'am! You're a boss to be proud of. Will you back me up in all I do?"

"I will."

"I'd like to have you feel a little proud of *me*, humble though I am, ma'am. So I'm going to tell you how I have done something to one gang, and it's fixing 'em without spending money on guards and guns. I dosed a fifty-pound box of bulk cooking soda with arsenic and let 'em steal it."

"You devilish son of a bobcat, that's murder!" exploded the indignant Dawson.

"Did it kill them?" inquired Anita, unperturbed.

The keeper cackled laughter. He was emboldened by this approving mistress. "I didn't go out to kill 'em! I'm a slicker operator than that! I made the dose middling light—enough to make 'em sick and keep 'em growing sicker—and they don't know yet what's the matter. It's the rat-poison idea—don't let 'em die in the house! They'll move away because they'll come to think the locality isn't healthy—or else they'll get awful sick and then the State pauper overseers will come and get 'em. Same thing—good riddance! I'll keep on and drive out all the thieves

who are taking away profits from the Double T."

"This is going to make a lot of trouble if it isn't stopped, Mrs. Trask," declared Dawson.

"For whom? For me? For the Double T? Dawson, the thief is the only guilty party. We are not responsible if he is hurt by what he steals. My man, you are not telling this to anybody else, are you?" she asked the keeper.

"Only to you, ma'am!"

"And to Dawson," she added crisply, and said with meaning, "therefore, it's a matter that will not be talked about." She went out of the camp and mounted her horse.

"What are we paying you?" she asked the depot guard who stood in the door, smirking at her.

"Thirty-five a month—and my keep, of course!"

"I'll tell the pay clerk to make it fifty from now on."

"Ma'am, I'll promise you results. If you're so minded, and want to see how a good plan is working, you might swing around by the way of the Pugwash road and that takes you through the settlement I'm speaking of. But I'm advising you against sampling any hot biscuits!"

"Dawson, show me how to go by way of the Pugwash road," she commanded. As she started away, the keeper had another bit of information for her.

"Old Ashael of Angel Knob is trying his hand on 'em, so I hear, making regular trips. But I guess he's beginning to figure as how the devil is beating him to it."

Her countenance did not reveal that any news about Elder Ashael interested her though he had joined her in marriage to Trask from whose bounty she had received the lands of which she was so proud.

She had nothing more to say to Dawson as the two

rode on. He had been keeping at a respectful distance behind her; now he was even more a laggard, as if he were avoiding anything like companionship.

The settlement to which they came was a straggling hamlet of shacks and small log huts. It was one of those squatter neighborhoods so familiar in the woods of the North, a community of consanguinity where interbreeding had had its results. It was a family, rather than a village. The keeper who had dosed the soda with arsenic understood well how the loot would be used as a common supply as long as it lasted.

Most of the men, women and children who were in sight were sitting stolidly in the sunlight as if they were hoping that the rays might give them back their health and strength. They were pathetic spectacles—so shrunk, wasted and cadaverous that they were fairly hideous. They looked at the radiant woman who rode past, but there was no particular expression in their sunken eyes.

Slow poisoning by arsenic is attended by certain characteristic results. The flesh melts away. The muscles become atrophied. Here was a community of living skeletons.

The mistress of the Double T pulled her horse to a slow walk and scrutinized the exhibits which had been commended to her attention by the man in the depot camp. She displayed a great deal of interest but very little concern.

Dawson averted his gaze from them; he looked sick.

“Do I own this land?” Anita asked him.

“Yes, madam. These folks are only squatters.”

She stopped her horse opposite one log house where several persons were collected just outside the door. “I own this land,” she informed them. “This is not a good place for you to live. I ask you to move away.”

They showed no sign of interest; they made no reply.

“Wake up, you fellows!” she cried sharply. “Why doesn’t one of you speak to me—answer me?”

“I reckon they’re too near dead to do much talking, madam,” Dawson suggested, putting into his tone as much rebuke of the new punitive tactics as he dared. “They don’t pay any attention to orders to move away. I’ve heard your husband tongue-lash ’em in good shape—and be sure he could handle his tongue! But they wouldn’t move even for him.”

She showed some incredulity when she received this information.

“That’s right!” insisted Dawson. “There’s some kind of a law about squatters. Driving ’em off is more expensive than letting ’em stay.”

“But I—I propose to drive them off!” She raised her riding crop. “I own the Double T. I order you—all of you—to get off my lands. I don’t want to have my lands cluttered up with such buildings. When I bring people to look at my property I want them to see how well the Double T is managed.”

Dawson wondered, finding it a bit strange because she was taking those pitiable nondescripts into her confidence even to that extent. If he could have understood better he would have known that Anita was bearing a gift to a man on a mountain top and was passionately desirous of having that gift without blemish; it was going to the extreme of meticulous mania in a certain matter, but she was in the mood to go to extremes. She railed at the squatters; her voice was shrill.

Elder Ashael came slowly from the door of the log house. He was very grave, and he raised his hand in protest. “There’s death within-doors, here, Widow Trask!” The rebuke did not calm her; the emphasis

he had put on the title which he applied to her roused her ire like a taunt, for just then she was exulting in her youth, her beauty and her power.

"Do you have any influence over these wretches who are trespassing on my lands?"

"I have been trying to influence them."

"Have you ever told them that it is wrong to steal my land?"

"I have told them it is wrong to steal anything. I have tried to show them the way toward the truth and the right. I have told them they would certainly be punished for doing wrong things."

Men, women and children rose and dragged themselves nearer the scene of the colloquy. They were not surveying Ashael with any sort of amity. They had not relished his past arraignment of them for doing wrong. Some of the men were muttering in surly fashion. One raised his voice.

"You, Charmer Man, you've always been saying as how God ain't willing to let us do something for ourselves against them as is trying to grind us down; and now here comes another one who says the Double T won't even let us have a quillpig's chance in these woods! But you don't herd quillpigs and drive 'em off, even if they do girdle the trees!"

This thinly-veiled rebelliousness angered Anita still more; she even included in her hostility the man who had wedded her to Serenus Trask. She was not grateful for having had such odious fetters placed on her, even though a quick release from them had brought to her this power which she was wielding.

"If you have any influence at all in this settlement, sir, I'm going to ask you to use it and get these people away. If they will go quietly, I'll send horses to cart them and their belongings to some other locality,

off my lands. If they don't agree to go, I'll send men here with dynamite to blow these shacks up and make these persons shift for themselves. That's final!"

She whirled her horse with intent to go on, but Ashael put his hand on the reins. "You are young and impetuous, Widow Trask, and are new to your task and its responsibilities. Therefore, I will tell you something for your guidance."

"I don't care for your advice, sir!"

He preserved his mildness; he kept his hand on the reins. "It isn't merely advice. It's the law. One should be warned against breaking the law." He gave her keen and shrewd scrutiny. "If you were in closer touch with the attorney for the Trask estate at this time I would not be called on to give you the law. These persons in this settlement are, to a certain extent, State paupers. You have no right to use force and set them and their belongings down on the lands of somebody else. You'll be liable under the pauper laws."

She did not try to urge her horse away from him; his reference to John Lang had had a quieting effect on her.

"You haven't the right, even, without due process of law, to evict them from your lands. Your husband knew better. He did not care to go to the expense. This poor chap's reference to the porcupines is enlightening on that point—it costs money to exterminate wild animals.

"The State law protects squatters who have been on lands long enough to make what are called 'improvements.' The settlers cannot be thrown off unless those improvements are paid for by the actual owner of the land."

"Do you call this an 'improvement'?" she asked

scornfully, with a sweep of her crop to indicate the scene.

“In the eyes of the law, yes! Even the scratching of the soil around yonder stumps, where they have put in their poor crops, that’s a legal improvement of the land. You must respect the rights of these people, Widow Trask.”

She looked as if she would like to lash him across his face because of his insistence on that title. “And this is the kind of influence you’re using on these squatters, is it—influencing them to oppose me?”

“I am determined to render unto Cæsar all things due to Cæsar. But I am just as determined to have these folks hold to the rights which the law gives them.”

“Do you live on my lands?”

“I do.”

“A squatter?”

“I am in exactly the same position as these settlers—and all the settlers in this region are suffering from the wicked injustice of things as they stand!” He showed a flash of righteous anger.

She welcomed his indignation as if it gave her an opportunity to indulge in her own resentment which had been dulled momentarily by his mildness of tone and demeanor. “How do you dare say it is unjust for me to keep my own for myself?”

“I offered Serenus Trask money—I begged him over and over again to take his pay for the little acre on which I live. He would not sell to me. He would not sell land in these woods to anybody else. None of the timber barons will sell. They will not allow a squatter to buy his honest rights.”

“And for a blamed good reason!” volunteered Dawson. “Our crop is timber, and we don’t reckon to have

it in danger all the time from the fires of these devilish, lazy fools who'd rather clear a tract by burning the trees than by using enough elbow-grease to chop 'em."

"And if you are encouraging such business you are not a safe man to be allowed on my lands," declared Anita hotly. "You say you are in the same class with these others! You seem to glory in it! I order you to leave, too—and if you'll lead away your friends, it will be better for the whole of you."

She struck her horse and the animal leaped forward, crowding past Ashael.

When they were well on their way Dawson spoke. "If you'll allow me——" then he hesitated.

"You talked good sense a little while ago. Go on! I hope you're going to talk more sense!"

"I'm not standing up for those squatters, madam! But I'm advising you to go slow and sure."

"I'm going to drive them off my lands."

"They're a dangerous bunch, right now. They have always been ugly. Now they're worse than ever on account of what's happening to make 'em sick. Your husband never took chances with 'em."

"Don't refer to my husband! He's dead! I'm alive!"

"Those people can be stirred up to make trouble for most anybody without specially caring who the party is, madam!"

"That statement gives me an idea! I thank you, Dawson!"

"But they're always threatening to start a fire in these woods—a blaze that'll make hell seem like a refrigerator in comparison. I beg pardon for the language, madam, but that's the idea!"

"I'll make sure they start no fires on my lands, sir! I can handle rabble such as they are, if they're not led

by a troublemaker. But when a man stands up in front of me, on my own lands, and defies me and encourages a lot of ignoramuses to stand out against my orders, I'll attend to his case, and I don't care how white his whiskers are," she declared roughly, with venom. "When I start to fight for my own, Dawson, and for what I claim is my own—" she paused and turned in her saddle and surveyed him, narrowing her eyes.

"I just thanked you for an idea, Dawson! I'm thanking you again for some handy words! When I'm fighting for what I want, I can make hell seem like a refrigerator!"

The woodsman was accustomed to vigorous man-talk in the forest, but this sentiment, issuing from between those red lips, rasped his nerves.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE APPARITION ON BORESTONE



WHEN Anita and her squire arrived at a place on the Borestone trail where the upward tilt of the ledges was too steep for the horses, she dismounted. Dawson had been wholly cowed by what he had discovered in her nature. He was chary about making more suggestions. But he did offer to climb the mountain alone in order to induce Lawyer Lang to come down. He ventured to suggest that any gentleman would undoubtedly be offended if a lady were allowed to put herself to all the trouble of climbing up there for an interview.

Anita made no reply but proceeded to gather the skirts of her habit about her knees by means of tapes.

“And your rig isn’t fit for such a climb, madam! I told you last evening——”

She turned angry eyes on him from under the brim of her hat. “You told me, a moment ago, Dawson, that the trail is straight up and can’t be missed! That’s enough. You told me all you can tell me. Now I’ll tell *you* something! You stay here with the horses!” His jaw sagged. He had not reckoned on her intention to go alone. “Don’t you leave here to come up on this mountain, no matter how long I am gone. Don’t allow yourself to get into a foolish state of mind because you think I may have fallen or am in trouble. You stay here! Do you understand?”

“Yes, madam!”

She turned away and began the ascent, leaning for-

ward, pulling herself up by the bushes and saplings, moving swiftly and surely. A moment later he got one of the starts of his life! She picked up something from the sun-warmed face of the cliff, turned quickly and flung it down at him.

It was a big writhing snake, and the missile narrowly missed his head when he ducked. It was only a harmless serpent, he knew—a reptile with dirty brown spots and known as a milk-adder. But he turned up at the girl a face suddenly pale under the tan.

“There’s a playmate for you, Dawson, so you won’t be lonesome when I’m gone!”

After she had disappeared among the ledges, he sat down and filled his pipe and smoked composedly. He was not worrying any longer—he had no fear about that kind of a girl! She was truly able to take care of herself!

* * * *

The volunteer fire-warden of Borestone was not thoroughly attuned to his surroundings this day. His tenure of office was in the way of being terminated.

For many days he had been conscious of a growing content with things, as they were. His conscience was less troublesome. The sense of the waiting duties did not weigh on him so heavily. The bonds which linked him to the world of men were less oppressive and he did not bother to wonder just what the nature of this new indifference was.

He did not reproach himself for allowing his general regrets to be wrapped in torpor. The regret which was now acutely awake had been aroused by the knowledge that the warden would soon get back to the job. Then Lang would be deprived of this excuse of service. The feeling that he ought not to leave Borestone until the man was well again had been comforting him.

There was a real duty on the mountain top in those days of danger; the May tinder had not been deluged.

The substitute warden sat on the gray moss and looked out over the mighty stretch of lakes and forest.

It was a peculiarly delicious sort of a day. May often borrows the framework of such a day from her sister June, just to try an experiment, and trims that framework to suit the whim of the earlier season. That is to say, the languorous warmth is there and the sun is brilliant in the sky. But the trimmings veil the horizon in pale and misty drapings, and the sunlight, when it reaches the landscape, is like dusted gold-flakes.

And on account of the wondrous quality of this day, Lang was sorry because the warden was coming to dispossess the substitute. Lang had been a more or less regular visitor to the camp of Ashael.

The trail had become familiar, and was easy for him even when he had only the moon to light his way up the mountain. After his long, sunlit hours as a sentinel, he welcomed the exertion which the trip to Ashael's house demanded.

He and the old man would converse on the porch in the twilight. Ashael did not preach. But he had a subtle way of probing, and after he had touched the sensitive spot, he allowed Lang to go away and nurse the hurt with his own means of alleviation.

The attorney, unable to rid himself of his habit of questioning a witness, had made attempts to probe on his own account! It was no longer mere curiosity; he was aware that the old man's honest sincerity had dulled the point of what at first was a lawyer's cynical inquisitiveness. Lang wanted to know the man better—to understand by what experience and on what foundation of faith he had been able to erect the structure

of his implicit belief in God's healing bounty—a blessing for soul and for body, if either were ailing.

Ashael could not be induced to give a name to this bounty. Man had no right, he declared, to bound by a designation any truth everlasting and illimitable.

With just as much decision the old man forbore persistently from telling his own name to Lang. On one occasion he definitely locked the door of his anonymity. He proceeded to do it in this way: "Who was the judge who presided at the Trask trial?" he asked.

"Justice Deland."

"Is he a man of his word?"

"Scrupulously so."

"You are a shrewd man—a persistent man, my friend. You know how I was obliged to reveal to Judge Deland enough to prove my right to perform a marriage. It is in your thoughts to ask him, some day, what he knows about my identity. Isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"He promised not to tell any man what I told him. I am glad to hear you confirm his trustworthiness. Won't you assure me that you will never mention the matter to him—will not tempt a trustworthy man? This is not a whim. The matter concerns others who must not be troubled by the knowledge that I am alive."

"You have my word on the matter, sir. I'll never mention it to Judge Deland."

On this especial occasion Ashael loaned to Lang a book whose title was "Charity." The lawyer had been getting his reading from the old man's lean library for his tedious hours of vigil on Borestone.

It was not a connected and profound treatise. Charity was not dissected but was presented in thoughts which the author had gleaned from others.

Lang took the book with him when he perched himself this day on a moss-padded crag of Borestone. He slowly read the sentiments, one by one; while he pondered on them he looked abroad over the outspread panorama of the hills and forest.

The mountain was one great block of stone, a massive obelisk, rooted into the granite of Earth's foundations. The words of one of the wisest of man's counsellors seemed especially pointed when Lang read:

"Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing."

He laid the book, opened, face down on the moss. He had heard the rattle of falling stones; some one was climbing up the path. It must be the warden, coming to take back his job; the man had been getting restless, though Lang had urged him to stay with Ashael a while longer. He beheld the face of Anita Trask. She stopped before she came into full view over the edge of the rimrock. She seemed puzzled and a bit frightened.

"I am looking for John Lang."

He rose. He was not exactly astonished, beholding her. The widow of Serenus Trask truly had a good business reason for seeking out the attorney for the estate. "I'm afraid you're finding this beard a little—perplexing!" He stroked his hand over his face.

She came slowly and stood in front of him, appraising, disapproving. "Why are you staying up on this mountain—looking as you do?"

"I have taken a poor chap's place as fire-warden till he gets well."

She was panting after her climb. Her cheeks were flushed. Manifestly, her fatigue had provoked resentment because she had been forced to make all that effort to come to him. Her sharp tone revealed her

feelings. "But you left nobody to take *your* place—to attend to the affairs of the estate—to look after *my* interests."

"I'm sorry! I have been very unprofessional. But after the trial I was completely unnerved by—well, I prefer not to discuss the reasons I had for going away for a few days."

"A few days!" There was more of mournful reproach than irritation in her tone then.

"When I went away I had no idea of staying in the woods so long."

He spoke coldly. There was no welcome in his manner. There was a long silence between them. Tears welled up in her eyes. It was not her nature to hold back her emotions when they were deeply stirred.

"You're not helping me! I thought you would be surprised. I thought you would cry out when you saw me—away up here! I came—came alone so I could make you jump out of that shell of yours, John Lang!"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Trask, I truly am. It has been a hard climb for you. I ought to be astonished because you have taken all this trouble. I mean, I ought to be ashamed of having been the cause. But as to jumping, I'm afraid I'm not so easily affected by surprises."

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded with a forceful directness that effected what her sudden appearance on the mountain failed to provoke; he was genuinely startled and much embarrassed for she came along and grabbed his arms and shook him.

"Aren't you going to ask me to sit down? I'm a wreck!"

The tears were gone from her eyes. All at once she was exhibiting a breezy pertness—more of that

naïveté which he had experienced in the past. "Where is your house, Mister Hermit?"

He pointed to the brushwood shelter, pulling one of his arms free.

"That accounts for your terrible looks. I wouldn't know you for the same man I saw that night—that first night in the city." She dabbed her hand in an impulsive caress across his bearded cheek and stepped back, away from him. "Unless you stop being foolish, and fix yourself up and come to town, I'll discharge you as my lawyer."

"I have decided to give up the position I held with Mr. Trask."

"You shall not do it!" Her protest had both alarm and decision in it.

"I have absolutely made up my mind on that point. I'll recommend somebody else, or you may have an attorney in mind."

She stamped her foot. Then she whimpered like a child. "It is all in your hands. You're the only man who knows about the estate. It will be betraying me—handing me over to somebody who will rob me because I don't know about my own business. You shall not be so wicked, John."

He did not venture farther in his refusal to serve her, not knowing what to do or say just then. While he was wondering what sort of consolation he ought to offer, she smiled at him—a smile which glimmered through tears like sunshine flashing through raindrops.

Her swift-shuttling moods were beginning to wreck his self-poise. He was accustomed to the ways of Reba Donworth—he had spent more hours with her than with any other woman he had ever known. Reba was self-contained, equable in her temperament, consistently pursuing any topic to its logical end.

He was now realizing that this beautiful visitant's appearance on that mountain top was a more surprising event than he had been willing to admit at first.

"Well, Mister Host, if you don't ask me to sit down, I shall invite myself. I have a perfect right to sit down on my own mountain. You know I do own it, don't you?"

She seated herself on the moss and began to unfasten the tapes which bound her skirts to her knees; she went at the work leisurely as if she had no intention of hurrying away down the mountain.

"I haven't asked to find out who owns the lands, Mrs. Trask."

"I own them, as far as you can see. So, by being fire-warden up here you have been working for me without knowing it. Queer, isn't it?"

She smiled mischievously. "You see! You can't really get away from working for me."

She shook out the folds of her habit, settled herself into a comfortable posture and looked up at him archly from under the brim of her hat. "Now what have you been doing up here except think and think? Sit down and tell me what your thoughts have been."

He did not sit down. He avoided the query regarding his thoughts. "I have taken up most of my time by reading." He pointed to the book lying close beside her; she had taken the place from which he had risen to greet her.

She craned her neck and looked at the volume, not offering to disturb it. "Charity! Did somebody write a whole book about charity?"

"A great many persons helped write this book—it is made up of folks' ideas of what charity is."

"Those who make books must know a great deal

—must be very wise in regard to what they write about.” She picked the volume up, handling it gingerly. “I have never read a whole book through,” she confessed artlessly. “I never could seem to understand books. What were you reading just now—when I came over the ledge?”

“I was merely reading in the book, here and there.”

“But *what?*” she insisted with some petulance. “Just what thing did you read last? Here are the pages open to the place. Take the book and tell me.” He stepped toward her and took the extended volume from her hand.

“I’m sort of superstitious about books,” she explained. “Sometimes I open them, just hit or miss, and take the first words I see and make them a hint on how to act. I’ll try it this time in another way. I’ll take the last words you just read. It will be funny!”

He lent himself to her whim and read slowly in the voice which had held his auditors spellbound in a court room.

“‘Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.’”

She pondered for some moments. She put her hands on the moss and pressed down as if to make sure of the vast bulk of stone on which she was elevated above the world. Her mood had changed again. She was very grave. Her lip trembled.

“John Lang, tell me! Did the man who wrote those words know a great deal? Did he mean what he wrote?”

“He knew a great deal—and I’m sure he believed what he wrote.”

“Give me the book, please.”

He placed it in her hands. He thought she wanted

to corroborate the statement by using her own eyes.

But she immediately closed the book, and clasped it in her hands. "Won't you sit down, John Lang? I want to say something to you."

He obeyed her request.

She looked at the cover of the book and murmured its title over and over.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE WAY OF THE WOODS



LANG waited a long time, respecting the meditation of the girl. She was tracing slowly with a forefinger the lettering of the title on the cover of the book. Her silence gave him an opportunity to do some thinking for himself.

He was quite resolved to give over the legal affairs of the Trask estate to another lawyer. He felt armed against any appeal she might make. He wondered whether her persistent efforts, dating back to their first meeting, to knock out from under him the props of his poise, were subtle tactics or merely the out-cropping of her erratic nature. He was quite sure he would not allow her to startle him again.

He expected he was to be called on to combat her pleadings and protests in regard to his connection with the estate. He set his teeth together firmly and his lower jaw was out-thrust. But immediately his tenseness relaxed. Her first words were a query whether he did not think the view from the mountain was very lovely. He agreed.

"I suppose, looking out on it day after day, you have grown to like it so well you hate to go away and leave it?"

"I am excusing in such a way my neglect of my duties."

"You must be in love with this region, surely, to feel as you do. I don't believe you know why I have come all the way up here to this mountain top."

"You have come to ask me some very proper questions about your business. I'm sorry you were forced to do so. I'm truly guilty."

"No! You're guessing wrong. I'll be very calm in what I say because I know I have made you angry in the past by saying things you didn't expect me to say. If I'm calm, I hope you won't think I'm trying to jump you." She stretched forth her arm and swung it in a slow arc. "I have come up here to offer to you all you see and all that is beyond the rim of the hills. I want you to take it for yours. I want you to take me, too! Because I love you."

He leaped up and strode to and fro. Of what sort was this woman who had declared, only a moment before, that she was finished with surprises?

"You are not like a certain foolish old man who whined about being afraid of me, are you, John Lang? I did not love him. There's no need of talking about any such thing as that."

Into his reply he put the resentment he felt on his own account. "I understood the situation very well, Mrs. Trask. It was perfectly plain to everybody."

"But, please sit down! I can't talk to you when you are galloping about in front of me. I don't expect you to say, right off sudden, you'll take what I'm offering. That isn't your nature. You're different from the other men I have met. They have all begged me to take them. I love you because you're strong and honest. I need you to lift me and all my troubles on to your shoulders. It will be only a light load for a man like you. Won't you sit down? You don't understand right now. After I've told you something you will not scowl at me, perhaps."

Suddenly she broke out of the wistful placidity. She doubled her fist and beat upon the cover of the book.

“Is that where charity is—is it only in a book? The man was wise and knew the truth of what he wrote, you said! But is charity only something to read about? Haven’t you any charity in you? I tell you to sit down! Are you afraid to be tested as to your charity?”

That exhortation of his courage prevailed; he sat down.

“You’re big and honest, and you’re not like the rest I saw outside in the world. But you’re human. You have been curious about me. I have seen that much in your eyes. You want me to tell you just who I am. I can’t do that. I don’t know, myself. But the time has come for me to open my heart to you, John. Will you be patient and listen?”

He nodded his assent.

“I only know I was a little girl in the woods, as far back as I can remember,” she continued after a long study of the distant hills. “I lived in a log cabin with folks. But my father and mother weren’t there. They were never there. When the woods woman was ugly because I didn’t slave for her, she twitted me about my lady mother. And I have always had dreams and visions about my lady mother.”

She paused and looked up into the sky, raptly. Lang remembered what Serenus Trask had said about those visions, hushing his tones and entreating to be reassured as to her sanity.

“I did have a lady mother! I did not belong with that scum. But they would never tell me why I was there. They did not dare abuse me. Somebody was watching over me. I’m sure I did not dream all the dreams. I have seen my lady mother in the night. I know I was awake. She put her hands to my cheeks and kissed me!”

She studied his face for some time. "But you're a lawyer and you don't believe in a girl's dreams, or in what she only thinks she knows. So, I'll say no more about being a little girl in a log house in the woods.

"But in the woods I saw only one way to get the things one wants to have. It's the way of the woods! The weaker must give up to the stronger. Even the trees fight with each other for dirt to cover their roots and for the sunlight to make them grow. The hunter shoots the innocent animals. The traps are set everywhere. When I was a very little girl I hated my fur coat and my cap because I had seen the poor minks waiting in the traps with broken paws—just waiting and suffering till the man of my house came and killed them with a club. But when I grew to be a bigger girl I stopped caring. I fell into the way of the woods!

"Then there came a young man who was handsome, and I ran away with him and we were married.

"He believed in the way of the woods, too. And I helped him to set traps for other men, because he made me do it—and I didn't care. I might tell you how sometimes I used to think about my lady mother—and then I did care. I might tell you some of my thoughts, and how I hated myself for a little while, and then, perhaps, you'd feel more kind toward me. But there isn't time to tell you all those things—and I might seem like trying to take advantage of what I'm not really entitled to."

He followed her gaze toward the west when she paused in her recital. The sun was getting low. He found himself confronted by a situation which he did not know how to handle. He felt like sparring for time.

"No, there is not time for much more talk just now, Mrs. Trask. It will not be safe for you to go down

the mountain after dark. It's getting dim in the valley, even now."

She paid no attention to his suggestion. "So it came to the time when he set a trap for the old man of the Double T. Of course, I had to help him with the trap. I had done so much in the past, when he commanded me—and he thought I wouldn't care what next I did. But I had clung to one thing, John Lang—my honesty as a wife, no matter what else I had done. I don't need to explain all to you, do I?"

"No!"

"When he tried to make me let go the one thing I had clung to—when he wanted me to make a lie of a marriage with the old man so the real husband could have his clutch on me always——"

She turned inquiring gaze on the attorney. "There's a name in the law for the crime, John Lang. I've forgotten!"

"Bigamy."

"Perhaps the crime of killing a man who tried to force a wife to do a thing like that would not be so terrible—judging from the way of the woods!" She was again looking away from the lawyer, into the red of the sunset.

"It would be murder."

"I did not kill him. I have told you! I was following him to the place where I was to give him the money. There was a man who was following both of us. Mack Templeton had made enemies everywhere. I had often heard men threaten to kill him. So I was frightened that day. I did not wait to pay the money—I was afraid the other man would take it. I ran away!"

Even though his legal mind made him an unwilling skeptic to some extent, his heart was enlisted for her

in the battle she had made against odds in her life. But he wanted to end the distressing interview. Abruptly, he changed the subject. "We must be starting down the mountain. Come! I will assist you."

"We have not settled the business which has brought me here," she said stubbornly.

"We cannot talk any more about it."

She stood up before him. She spread her arms to indicate the stretch of her possessions. In the last red glare of the sunset, against the lurid screen of the sky, she was the incarnation of the Spirit of Temptation, and he was honest enough to admit that he was not altogether immune from the influence she was exerting.

"There it lies, John Lang! All the miles of it! I don't know what to do with it. All the time I'm fighting men who want to steal it from me. I'm giving it to you. All you need to do is to care for it—and take me with it. See how little I am, standing here in the middle of it! So small a thing as I am won't be any extra burden!"

"I cannot take any such gift! I can't even discuss such a matter sensibly."

"Do I spoil it all because I want you to take me with it?"

He was not sure whether it was anger that pricked him then—it was some sort of sentiment of revolt. "I don't know what to say to you! You're putting me in a perfectly damnable position!"

"Well, suppose we wait till we're calmed down," she suggested meekly. "It's an important matter, and we must talk it over."

"At some other place—at some other time! We must get off this mountain before night settles."

"There's no place in the whole wide world where we can be as honest with each other as up here. I came here because I knew it would be so! I have been honest with you."

"I purposed to be honest with you, also, Mrs. Trask. I must tell you——"

She hurried to him and placed her hand on his lips. "I took plenty of time to think it all over before I came to you. I have surprised you. It isn't right and just for you to answer me back until you have taken plenty of time to think. Isn't that the way it is in the law—don't you all take a lot of time so you may come to the right judgment? Of course you do!"

She stepped away from him. "I'll allow you to think. I'll not bother you. There's plenty of time. If you speak too quickly I shall be angry because you will be slighting my offer. I shall not believe you when you speak unless you take a long time to think."

"There is no time to waste, I tell you! You know what that mountain-side is!"

"It's terrible. It's too dark now to think of going down."

"I'll go down for help—we'll make some sort of a litter——"

"No—no! I'll not risk my neck that way. And I'll not be left alone here. I'm going to sit down." She resumed her seat on the moss.

"John Lang, what right have you to tell me I can't sit on my own mountain just as long as I want to sit here? If you're willing to say it's yours, I'll allow you to drive me off. But until you do say the word, this mountain is mine. Sit down and be good, and do your thinking." Her determination clicked.

He went apart from her and sat on a boulder and watched the colors fade in the west.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

TWO ALONE ON BORESTONE



JOHN LANG, sitting in the peace of the evening, was promptly aware that he was not harboring anger in spite of the girl's amazing procedure. He gazed long in her direction. She did not speak to him.

Her humble patience, yonder in the shadows which now were wrapping the summit of Borestone, made softening appeal to him. There was a piteous quality in what she had told him of her life. She had made her struggle against besetting conditions, with her own poor weapons, even as he had done with his broader understanding of men and the ways of men.

After all his ponderings in the loneliness of his existence on Borestone, he was less inclined to sit in judgment. In his defense of her in court, he had quite convinced himself of her innocence of the death of young Trask. Lang was inexorably impelled, in his newer mental enlightenment, to blame himself for that catastrophe; in fact, his conscience was accusing him bitterly, even as poor Skiddy Trask had predicted.

As to what had really happened in Templeton's case in the Brassua woods——

John Lang, in those days, was filled with sympathy for other sinners. He was almost ready to credit her vague statement that she did not know what had happened. At the worst, admitting that she was concerned in the taking off of Templeton, she had defended the one thing to which she clung—the honor of her womanhood!

He looked again in her direction; she had not moved.

The light was dim but he could see that she had picked up the volume entitled "Charity" and was cuddling it at her breast. He felt the swift grip of emotion's unseen fingers at his throat. He wanted to offer her some sort of consolation. There was something childlike about her, after all—in her changing moods, her disregard of conventions, her grotesque forwardness. But he could not console her as he would comfort a grieving child; he was afraid she would not understand the new mildness which he entertained in regard to her.

With the common, masculine impulse in the way of cheering children, he decided to give her something to eat. While he was starting his little fire with fagots in the stone oven built against the side of a ledge, she came close and watched him.

"I am used to cooking in the woods," she said. "I'm homesick when I see you puttering with the fire. Bring me what you have to eat and let me make supper! Please do!"

He was glad because she could occupy herself with work instead of thoughts. Therefore, he brought utensils and the food, opened the tins and gave her full charge. She was deft and nimble and she understood the woods art of making plain materials tasty with a new touch. She even prevailed on him to bring the sheet iron oven and she fashioned biscuits small and puffy and nicely browned when they were done—each one hardly more than a delicious mouthful; they were a great improvement on the sprawly affairs he had been turning out.

All this work took time and it was late when they had sipped the last pannikin of tea. They turned their backs on the fire flare and looked up at the sparkle of stars in the heavens.

"I won't apologize for the brushwood shelter. You are used to the woods and will understand," he ventured. "It's yours for the night."

"I have slept many nights in the open without a shelter, John Lang. I did it because I liked to do it. But tonight I don't intend to sleep. I'm going to sit here. I'll have a good time looking up at the stars. I'll not trouble you with my chatter. I have said what I had to say. We have now broken bread together. We are friends, at any rate. And when you are ready to talk to me I'll listen. I know you will not talk to a friend till your best judgment has told you what to say!"

Somewhere down the mountain a whip-poor-will flicked the air with its staccato notes. Away off on some placid water a loon wailed its oboe call in prolonged diminuendo.

"So many people never really know what the night is," she murmured. "The city folks don't know. Even if they were up here, as we are, they wouldn't understand. They'd be lonesome. I am not."

He did not speak, and there was a long silence.

"Do you know the names of the stars?" she queried after a time. "The big ones! I have often wondered, but I have never had anybody to tell me. The folks I have been with in this life have never been willing to look up at the stars."

He found inexpressible pathos in that simple statement.

Glad because she was again able to busy herself with something beside her introspection, he pointed out the constellations and named the stars as far as his limited knowledge would permit.

He had been dreading this night, but somehow it did not seem long. He had feared more of those out-

bursts of hers—the embarrassment of those amazing demands—the statements which had put him at such a disadvantage, when he had recourse to anger in default of any sane rejoinder.

There were times when they did not converse. He heard her crooning the word “Charity,” repeating it over and over as if she were invoking the spirit of the virtue.

Lang was not sure of his thoughts. He tried to follow some consecutive plan of reasoning this thing out, but every time he builded his little edifice of the-right-thing-to-do, some mental devil frisked in and knocked the whole business down.

He had come to the point where he was admitting that his hard and fast resolution to quit her service was less stern; it was willing to reopen the case and listen to arguments. But he realized all his general bitterness against humanity, and was afraid lest rancor had influenced him to make a more lenient allowance in her behalf.

He might be able to please the cocksure scandal-mongers, he reflected sourly, if he should go obediently along according to the plan they had mapped out for him. He would not be astonishing a world which had already discounted the future in his affairs.

He kept assuring himself earnestly that his affection for Reba Donworth was unchanged in spite of her attitude toward him. He liked to think his was a nature of stability and purpose, not to be swerved from the straight-ahead by obstacles which would check other men. He placed her estimation of him as a man above all other prizes he sought in the way of worldly commendation just then.

He was not in the mood to set much value on approbation by the general run of mankind. He had

always told Reba about getting what he went after; he had been especially emphatic in his declaration that he would win her. He had the queer feeling of not wanting to have her think of him as a quitter.

In the other, and practical, affairs of his life he had been able to work out problems to his satisfaction. But this love thing seemed to be a jumbled-up business. He was not able to arrive at definite conclusions. He had the dim notion that he was pretty much wrong, anyway, in trying to make love a matter of the head, exclusively, instead of leaving it all to the heart. But he was aware, even then, of pursuing the folly of analyzing sentiment, weighing it pro and con.

He wondered if there could be a woman somewhere in the world who would ever make him realize with all the power of his being that he was in love—unquestioningly and devotedly in love! He looked at the girl who sat near him in the shadows of the mountain's loneliness and he was conscious of a surge of pitying tenderness. The feeling helped him, cleansed him, filtered the grosser elements from the attractions she undeniably exerted.

There came the usual wind before dawn, a slow, chilling draught across the mountain top. He saw she was huddled with arms linked around her knees.

"Are you cold?"

"Yes!"

"Won't you sit under the bough shelter?"

"No!"

A few minutes later he heard the soft clicking of her teeth as she shivered with indrawn sighs of discomfort. Lang brought a blanket from the shelter and knelt beside her and wrapped it around her shoulders. She helped him, drawing the folds close; she took off the broad hat and scaled it away; she asked

him to pull the blanket high about her face. Then, before he had risen from beside her, she nestled close to him and laid her head against his shoulder. If he had removed himself she would have fallen on the moss.

"I am all right, now—I am all right!" she murmured. "Let me sleep a few minutes—I am so tired!"

He did not move.

"Yes, I'm so tired—thinking—thinking!" she went on. "I haven't any head for it. You know best, and you must think for both of us. I trust in you. I know it will be all right after you have thought."

He did not require that adjuration of hers—to think! She had shifted to him the burden of taking thought for both of them.

After a little while he set his arm gently about her shoulders; there was no suggestion of an embrace of affection; it was in the way of protection. He pulled the blanket closer about her. She responded by relaxing her muscles, lying against him with the trustfulness of a child who was surrendering herself to an approved guardian.

His thoughts which had been rioting like a mob began to marshal themselves into more orderly ranks as he concentrated on his affairs. And naturally, in that marshaling, he began to take account of stock of friends and enemies, separating those who were for him from the mass of those who were against him. As he visualized his thoughts he saw the faces of only a few whom he could call loyal friends. Even Reba—he carried the memory of her face when he saw it last. Imperturbably indifferent! He wondered why he was making such a fetish of his own loyalty, carrying to such an extent his pertinacious stubbornness in the achievement of what he had started out to do!

"We seem to be pretty much alone in this world, don't we?" murmured the girl in the clasp of his arm.

Yes, alone and alike, he reflected with bitterness. The hand of humanity was raised against the two of them. He had fought those who tried to take from him what he had held to be precious—Anita had battled in the same way—and both of them had suffered. He admitted the selfishness of which they had accused him! Why not make the most of selfishness, as the others did? Once more he pondered on the persistent scandalmongers—why astonish them by failure to fulfil their predictions?

His attitude of an impeccable Launcelot began to wear a somewhat ridiculous aspect as he pondered. Who was thanking him for his righteousness? He was aware of gaps in the armor of defense he had put on. Through one of them the wistful patience of Anita at that moment entered and touched him.

Then he remembered what Judge Anderson had said about love—and that memory brought up a vision of Mavis Duncan, because he had wondered what sort of sentiment it was that had made him yearn to offer her his protection. But he instantly put away the thought of Mavis—she had taken herself out of his life.

Then, in the dead ashes of what he had put behind him, stirred a flame. What was love, anyway? Was this it? Was love something which suddenly urged a human being to toss away all caution and regard for conventions, all consideration for the speech of people? In his desperation he was quite willing to go to that extreme—testing this new and strange emotion which had attacked his nature, self-centered till then. He gave up the problem—in those woodland wilds it was easy to succumb to the primitive!

Slowly he lifted his free hand to Anita's cheek and raised her face till he could look into her eyes which flashed back to him the reflection of the starlight—and something else which thrilled him.

“Love!” she whispered. “I knew it was waiting for me. It's—this!” She put her arms about his neck and met his kiss when he lowered his face to hers. “Take me—John!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

HE WHO CAME IN THE MORNING



LOWLY the dawn filtered through the gray mesh of the east and the wind died and the tints of pearl in the skies were supplanted by the hues of the rose. And with the dawn came Ashael, toiling up over the rim rock. He was alone.

Anita merely opened her eyes when the old man greeted Lang. She did not offer to move from her protector's arm nor did Lang take himself away from her. There was something akin to defiance in Lang's persisting in his embrace of the girl. It was as if his night ponderings had decided him to defy the world in general, beginning with the first one who laid eyes on his new association with Anita.

"I came up here because I was afraid something had happened," said the old man with a hint of apology.

"Nothing has happened," returned the lawyer, conscious within himself that a great deal had happened. "Mrs. Trask was very much exhausted by her climb yesterday and was afraid to go down the mountain after dark. It became night before we realized."

"Her man came to my camp last evening and reported. He dared not disobey her orders. He said you told him not to come on the mountain," he informed Anita.

"Yes, I ordered him to stay with the horses."

"That's why I came—and if everything's all right I'll go away again."

Lang released the girl and struggled upon his feet. He was numbed and his cramped muscles refused him service for some moments. He stood in his tracks, getting control of himself.

Anita arose. She went close to Lang and whispered, "*Is everything all right?*"

"I hope so," he paltered. His thoughts were not clear; the shadows of the night were still involved with his attempts to arrive at the proper solution of the problem which had confronted him again in the frank light of day.

"You have had a long time for thinking, John Lang."

"But the matter is tremendously important—for both of us."

She smiled up at him. "You say 'for both of us'! You have put me into your thoughts along with yourself! I thank you, John! That's enough for now—it's sweetly enough for now! I know everything will be all right!"

The smile faded on her face when she turned on Ashael. Here was not merely an interloper who had broken upon a tête-à-tête—here came an influence which she instinctively feared. She believed that she had been near the realization of all her hopes. Lang's earlier manner of the morning signified much, when she had looked up into his face. But her experiences in life had taught her to be apprehensive when success was only half won. She had been obliged to play life as a game and knew how often inconsiderable accidents caused Fate to turn the wrong card.

However, after the joy of the night, she felt a fresh confidence in herself. She swaggered when she strode in front of the old man. She peremptorily ordered him to go away.

“And you twitted me yesterday of not being in close touch with my attorney! You now see in what close touch I am, and I don’t need any more advice from you about law. I order you off my lands—you and all the scum you’re encouraging to steal my property.”

“It’s the matter of the squatters, Lawyer Lang!” explained Ashael quietly, noting the attorney’s perplexity. “If you want me to explain to you——”

“I will explain,” she broke in rudely. “I propose to take Mr. Lang this very day to look at one of the horrible places you’re keeping on my lands. ”

She turned to Lang. “It’s on the way to the home camp at Hagas. I ask—yes, I must insist on your going with me to Hagas. There’s much business to look after and I need your help. You can send to the city for the papers of the estate. You must come with me.” She was exerting all her power. “There’s a horse for you at the foot of the mountain. Dawson can walk back.”

In the sanity of sunlight Lang looked at Ashael and flinched; she noted the new expression with anxious suspicion. Lang turned to face her.

“I have made a promise and I must respect it; I told the warden I would stay on the mountain until he is able to climb up and take back his job.” He smiled slightly, aware of the puerility of the excuse and pricked by her manifest scepticism. “I’ll admit it’s rather a minor job, considering the other work waiting for me. But I’m protecting your lands by staying here.”

“I’ll relieve you from this work, John Lang. No matter if the fire does come and rage. There’s a bigger thing to look after. You know! I need you!”

“The warden is coming back to Borestone today,”

announced Ashael, paying no heed to Lang's frown. "Dawson told him that the Widow Trask had come to hunt up her lawyer."

Lang in his sudden spirit of resentment was tempted to pick up the heliograph and fling it over the cliff; news of Anita's quest would go winking from station to station, to be translated into gossip which would reach town all too soon.

"So there's no excuse for you to stay," affirmed Anita. Entreating, she patted Lang's arm.

His eyes left hers and he looked over her head in an earnest stare and, as she had done before, she turned to follow the direction of his gaze. Ashael folded his arms and returned the stare.

She was between the two. She was conscious of some mysterious element beyond her comprehension in that man-to-man conference with the eyes. But she believed she did know something about what Ashael was conveying by his expression. His sombreness seemed like a rebuke. She was convinced that the recluse was unfriendly to her. Yet she could hardly believe that a mere old man of the woods could have any effective influence over John Lang.

However, Lang proceeded to address the hermit and in a manner which deepened the mystery for Anita; it seemed as if there were some kind of an understanding between the men. "Do I get you right, Ashael? I sort of pledged myself to you when I came up here. Haven't I stayed out from under a roof long enough? Do you think I need to look further into the heart of the heavens?"

"I do."

It was a solemn declaration, pregnant with deep significance.

Anita's quick, apprehensive glance found bodeful

surrender in the man on whom Ashael bent his meaning gaze.

After a few moments of thought Lang took Anita's hand and led her across the small plateau, away from the old man. The morning sun shone full on their faces; there were no more night shadows on Borestone; the candor of daylight brought saner counsel to a man who strove with a problem.

"When you talked with me last night about yourself you gave me a chance to understand you better than I ever hoped to do. You were honest with me. I want to be honest with you."

She felt acutely the new reserve in his tone.

"But you loved me in the night—when you put your arm around me—you did love me!"

He looked steadily off into the wholesome radiance of the morning. "You had a right to tell me what you did—about your feeling toward me. Every woman who cares for a man tells him so—though not always with words. But words are honest, and better, when one is sure! I'm grateful to you for your frankness. I will come to you a little later. I'll come like a man."

"Come with me now."

He shook his head, inflexibly firm.

"I must stay up here for a time—a few days—for my own sake."

"Then you will never come," she wailed.

"I promise you I will. But this is not a matter to be settled upon suddenly. I'm respecting your right to be made happy after all your troubles of the past. When I come to you I shall know! We must build upon that sort of a foundation."

"I'm afraid to leave you with that man—that old man who looks at you the way he does. He will lie about me. He doesn't like me. He will turn you from

me. You were loving me till he came and stood and looked at you."

"I will not allow him to say anything against you."

"But he will say something—something—I don't know what he will say—but it will take you from me," she quavered.

Her understanding was dim, but her instinct was keenly bright. She had seen the same queer look pass between men before and it had worked against women who were weak. Something which was called honor—she had heard it challenged and had witnessed the response! She sensed some of the deeper qualities in John Lang—and she was afraid!

"Tell him to go away," she commanded in a tense whisper. "I don't want you to talk with him. If you will tell him to go away I'll not be foolish and urge you to come along with me now—not till you know—and can tell me! If you'll order him to go I'll feel sure of you—you'll think only of yourself and myself—and it's between us two the matter lies, John."

He called to Ashael. "I'll stay up here a while longer, even if the warden does come back. Mrs. Trask and I are grateful for your thoughtfulness. We won't detain you any longer."

"Very well!" said Ashael, and he went down over the rim rock.

As soon as the old man was out of sight Anita flung her arms around Lang's neck and kissed him. "Yes, stay here!" she urged. "A few days, will you stay? Yes! It's best. You'll be lonely here. I'll be glad of that. You will look down on where we sat together all the night—and you'll sit there after I'm gone and you'll wish I were back here. I know you'll wish that. Then you'll come to me! Come to Hagas. I'll be waiting. And then everything will be all right."

She hurried away from him. He was a bit surprised by her hasty departure. It was rather tantalizing, but it was adroitly feminine in its effect on him. He knew he was sorry to have her go. He followed after her and offered to help her down the mountain.

"But I don't want you to go," she insisted. "I want you to stay up here and think about me after I'm gone." She flung a kiss to him from her fingertips and disappeared among the lower ledges.

When she saw Ashael on a ladder far below, she stopped and picked up a big rock. She did it quickly, as if by impulse. But she slowly laid the rock down as if second thought had rebuked instinct and had suggested a better way.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE SPARK IN THE TINDER



ON her journey back to Hagas waters from the foot of Borestone, Anita rode alone. She knew the road home, she told Dawson, and did not need his services. Her manner toward him plainly showed little relish for his companionship.

After they had started and when they were a few rods along on the road she had turned suddenly on him, detecting his expression before he had time to mask it.

“Where is the location of the trouble which has been reported between the Double T and the Tulandic?” she demanded curtly.

“On the Whirlingstone, madam. It’s the old row and it has broken out again because the Blake heiress has gone away to Europe and left her bosses to do as they want to. Just now they’re blowing our splash dams to steal our waters for their drives.”

“Which way is Whirlingstone?”

He pointed toward the north; they were headed south.

“Have we plenty of dynamite, Dawson?”

“Lots of it, madam.”

“You don’t feel as gentle, do you, toward the bosses of the Tulandic as you do toward the squatters who are stealing from me?”

“The bosses are able to stand up and make it a fair, square, man fight,” he said, setting his jaws.

“All right! You go up there! Take charge. Go now!” She flourished her crop in a gesture of dismissal. “When they blow one of our dams, go ahead and blow two of theirs—then buy more dynamite.”

She did not proceed on her way until he was out of sight. Then she sighed, indicating relief because she was alone, and struck her horse and hurried him. Once more the mistress of the Double T rode into the squalid settlement of Pugwash, walking her horse slowly and studying the melancholy faces upturned to watch her progress.

Near one cabin a cow, whose ribs showed like slats under canvas, was cropping herbage among stumps of trees. In a patch of shade cast by the shack a dispirited woman was feebly working up and down the stick of the dash-churn. Several pairs of rusty shears were stuck into the ground around the churn; the woman called querulously and a neighbor came and brought more shears and stuck them down.

“Ride! Ride, all so proud and gay and look down on the poor folks!” squalled the woman of the churn, resting her dasher. “We’re not afraid of you! We’re down to where nothing you can do to us can hurt us more’n what has been done.”

“I’m sorry for what I said yesterday,” returned Anita, hypocritically humble. “I spoke without realizing what dreadful trouble you are in. Dawson and my other agents lied about you. What is the matter here? I want to help you all.”

The woman was softened immediately; this bit of sympathy from one of the lordly oppressors tripped her emotions and she began to cry in sniffling fashion. In the still air Anita’s voice had carried far and the attention of the community was attracted. Men and women and children, they rose and staggered toward

the cabin where Anita had paused. Incidents of interest were all too few in that neighborhood, and their curiosity was stirred. But the promise of help was so novel that their hope was also stirred—and hope had long been moribund in that place. Each had personal appeal to offer; however, in their lethargy, they allowed the woman of the churn to do the talking for all.

“The butter won’t even come!” she wailed. “Everything has been bad, but now it has come to this. My Gawd, the butter won’t whey! The ’chanter don’t mind the shears! The devil and his witches come right past the shears!”

“I don’t understand,” protested Anita, wrinkling her forehead.

“Don’t you know what everybody knows—that when you stick shears around the churn they keep the ’chantment away?”

The bystanders endorsed this accepted truth, mumbling their affirmation.

“But this ’chantment is so wicked that even the shears can’t keep away the devil and his witches. Look at us! We’re all ’chanted with the hellish tick-de-loorum that has been put on us. Sumac tea even ain’t good any more. All the time we’re growing worse.”

“The ’chanter has gofered us,” boomed a shrunken old man in sepulchral tones.

“Who is this—whatever you call him?” Anita inquired, showing profound interest.

“We want to know—that’s what we want to know!”

Another man spoke, his tones sharp with the rage of suffering helplessness past the stage of endurance. “But we’re going to find out, and we’ll know what to do with him.”

"It ain't a him—it's a her—it's a witch," declared another in the group of superstitious misery.

Then there was a chorus of clamorous argument—shrill cries of insistent women and hollow barking of dissenting men. Manifestly, the topic was one which had engrossed the settlement for a long time. It had been talked so much that opinions were fixed and nobody paid any attention to the reasons of anybody else in that bedlam of contention.

Anita studied them while they raved at each other. The pack had no leader, she perceived. Lacking a leader, they merely snapped and snarled in aimless fashion. She knew the natures of such mongrel communities in the North woods, out of her personal experiences. She had seen similar natures employed as tools by those who had the wit to guide them.

When she had looked down on Ashael's head, on the Borestone trail, and had laid aside the rock which she had impulsively picked up, she knew where more efficient weapons awaited her use. The desperate and mysterious illness afflicting them, their fears, their despair, their rankling sense of injury made them tinder for a kindling suggestion. In Ashael's case, her enmity had become settled—even a bit ferocious.

She raised her hand and stilled the pack.

"If there is an enchanter at work here, it must be somebody who keeps in close touch with you."

They agreed with her; matters were continually growing worse, they said. There had been no spells of respite.

"He must be somebody who is not like anybody else in these parts," she hinted craftily. "Who is there about here, some one strange—and different?"

They did not reply; they looked up at her as if they were willing to trust to her knowledge and guidance.

"Who is that peculiar old man—the one who was here yesterday and who talked to me?"

A fellow on the outskirts of the crowd, a man low-browed and heavy-jowled with a withered neck sagging in folds, squinted at her. "I've said all along as how it's him—I've said it over and over, and they won't agree with me!"

"I won't let it be said it's him," a woman screamed. "No, I won't. He healed my father years ago. He stopped my brother's blood when the axe gashed him."

"Yes—years ago!" snarled the low-browed man. "Fooling folks along—it's the way the devil always takes!"

"He preaches God and goodness to us," said another woman. "It would be better for some of you men if you'd listen to him. God punishes wickedness."

"God ain't doing this to us, and the critter lies who says so!"

Again Anita secured silence. "I have talked with wise folks about witchcraft—about bad men who put spells on poor folks. There are tests which can be made to prove whether a man is a sorcerer or a wizard. Those names are the ones wise folks have for men who are in league with the devil."

"You're right! Put 'em in the fire! That's the test!" declared the low-browed man.

"No, no!" she expostulated. "You must not use fire. That's very dangerous." She looked around apprehensively at the stretch of the Double T forest.

"They hold 'em under water and count the bubbles," averred a man in the throng. "If there are thirteen bubbles, he's a witch."

"Listen to me," said Anita with decision. "Men who go about on my lands, stirring up folks like you to do this or that against me, are bad men. They get

you into trouble. You men can manage your own business without advice. I can see well enough you are all right, if others will leave you alone."

They brightened under her praise. They surveyed her with increasing favor.

"The bad men should be forced to go away from these parts. I think the wise folks told me something about the test by water. I don't remember exactly. But you seem to understand about witchcraft." She pointed to the shears stuck around the churn. "I'll leave it to you to know what to do. It's a matter to be attended to right away. If a wizard finds out by his spells about your plans of punishment, he may do something much worse than what he has done, if you give him a few hours' start of you."

So far as their benumbed intellects were concerned, she had, in those words, indicated the culprit and had set the time for action. Their expressions told her that she had prevailed. The pack had been running in circles, seeking a trail. In their fury, they merely needed to be directed and encouraged.

"Remember, I'm your friend!" she urged. "When the bad man has been made to go away, you and I will get along very well."

She beckoned to the low-browed man and he came through the crowd to the side of her horse. She had found more venomous resolution in him than in the others. All of the men and women edged closer when she produced her purse and gave money to the man whom she had chosen for her leader. "This is to be spent for the good of all of you," she warned. "For food and medicine. I shall keep watch. I shall come here again very soon. If the bad man has gone away by that time, and you are getting better, I shall do something else to help you."

"His case will be attended to tonight," promised the leader, clutching the money.

"I hope it will be tonight so he can't harm you any more. Make him go away. But take warning! My name is not to be used. Understand that well! It's wholly your affair, and I'm simply your friend. If I hear that anybody has named me in this case I'll do no more to help you."

They gazed at the money in the man's hand. They promised with an eager chorus to do their best to please her in all things.

Then the mistress of the Double T rode on toward Hagas Waters. Her resentful reflections comforted her.

The old man of Angel Knob would not be able to put into spoken words of dissuasion the sentiments which he had so plainly expressed by his rebuking gaze on the top of Borestone.

There was nobody except Ashael in all the North country—on her barony—who would dare influence John Lang against her. John Lang had promised to come to her. She had confidence in the power of her own influence, after what she had perceived in his eyes when she hurried away from him, leaving him unsatisfied.

She believed that her woman's alluring persuasion would be left free to work, provided the old meddler were removed from further contact with John Lang, challenging that hateful sense of honor which men prized among themselves in such a foolish way!

She had employed good and subtle strategy, she was certain. She smiled, cantering her mount toward her Hagas castle. It should be made ready for the lord of her heart and her lands!

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE LAW



At twilight John Lang came down off Borestone, his few belongings in his pack. The warden had returned to take over the job. There was no excuse for the substitute to stay longer, an extra mouth helping to exhaust the scanty stores. That was what Lang told himself, excusing his hasty departure.

But when the sun went down toward the west in the afternoon following the morning of Anita's tantalizing leave-taking, he was conscious of a sense of uneasiness not connected with the food supply. He was lonely. The spirit of wanderlust urged him.

He fell to wondering what abnormal impulse had kept him so long a recluse, stupidly cogitating day after day on that mountain top, neglecting his affairs, shrinking from the world, fearing to go out among men.

He felt a new uplift of boldness—and there was considerable anger in the feeling. There was fight in him! In the rush of his emotion he did not stop to analyze his sentiments further.

In order to have plenty of occasion and excuse for fighting he was almost willing to allow the world to misconstrue the relations of client and counsel—even to gossip about his prospective marriage to the widow of Serenus Trask, if the world insisted on taking that attitude.

He refused to admit, still unable to be squarely honest with himself, that he did intend to marry her or that his new attitude was paving the way to the

marriage after the usual decorous interval had elapsed. He had simply resolved, so he told himself, not to be backed down in any proposition which might come up in his affairs.

He knew Anita Trask better—he would not allow anybody to slander her. He had championed her in court—he would go on and champion her in any other place where she might be assailed or threatened. He pitied her. She had been like a grieving child on the mountain top, sheltered by his arm and trusting herself and all her affairs to him. There was only one manly and truly honorable thing for him to do now—stay by her till those affairs were straightened out.

He felt less lonely the moment he was on the forest level, off the ledges of the mountain where he had been elevated above the world. He belonged in the world. His interests were in the affairs of men.

But he was in no hurry to go to town. He had mapped his first plans of action; he would have Anita send a messenger to the city for the papers of the estate in order that client and counsel might go over them carefully in the quietness of the home camp on Hagas Waters. There were many other matters awaiting his attention in the city, and there he would be distracted from the application which the Trask affairs required.

He had decided to lodge with Ashael that night. He had a book to return, and he wanted to say his farewell. He was not owning up to another consideration, that is to say, not with frankness. But he knew well enough he was going forth to give battle on all points affecting him. He was in a hurry to begin. It was in his thoughts that Ashael might have something to say to him about the morning scene on the top of Borestone. Lang was in a mood to have a trial

clash of weapons with anybody in the matter of Anita Trask, even with a placid old hermit.

It was dim in the woods where the trail to Angel Knob snaked along; but "The Way of the Cross" was well blazed. There were mists in the low places—the veils of Spring's night gear.

Lang was not superstitious, nor easily alarmed. But when he was crossing a clearing he saw what he could not readily explain to himself. He beheld gaunt figures retreating into the depths of the vapor. He was almost positive he perceived faces; they were countenances hollowed into the similitude of skulls. It was as if he looked on walking skeletons. He hailed, but he was not answered. The forms fled and became mere shadows and were hidden by the mists.

When he arrived at the camp on Angel Knob he did not mention to Ashael what he had seen, or thought he saw. He was quite sure he had been deceived; the mists even made the white birches seem like stalking ghosts.

Lang and Ashael sat on the porch for a time. Then a night wind, a bleak blast for that time of year, whipped away the mist and lashed the tree tops back and forth across the stars. The men went indoors and Ashael kindled a fire on the hearth, kneeling and fanning it with the wing of a hawk.

Their talk on the porch had been mere random chat about the season and the woods.

Ashael, busy with the fire, asked, "Now that you are going home to the city, do you feel you're taking back what you came up here to find?"

It was an opportunity to make a first test of that new blade of his championship, and Lang drew promptly. "I'm not intending to hurry back to the city. Tomorrow I'm going to the Hagas camp of

the Double T to assist Mrs. Trask in the affairs of her estate. I've been neglecting my duty to her."

Ashael offered no comment. His fire was blazing brightly and he seated himself on a high stool and looked down at the flames.

Lang endured the silence as long as he could. "I suppose you have something to say about that decision and about what you saw on Borestone this morning!"

"No, I have nothing to say."

"You spoke about my taking something back with me—coming up here to find something. What do you mean?" Lang demanded, making a pretence of obtuseness.

"We'd better let the matter rest. You answered me to my satisfaction."

"I didn't answer your question, sir. I merely made a statement about my plans."

"Your statement was sufficient for my understanding. You are not taking the thing back with you, and you don't feel as if you were taking it back."

"Take *what*? I don't like riddles."

"Your peace of mind."

"I'm not to blame because I haven't found anything of the sort in these woods. It isn't here!"

"I found it for myself. It was here when I came seeking for it."

"Oh, I know what you mean. I've been studying you and your system. It's to do all for the other fellow—trying to suit the other fellow's notions of what it's right for you to do, instead of pleasing yourself," said Lang irritably.

"When one thinks merely of pleasing himself he is quite likely to be out of tune with a certain great harmony which was pitched to the keynote of Truth

when the spheres began to revolve. There is no joy in being out of tune."

"You've got to live the life of this world according to the human code, or you'll get nowhere."

"This life is given us so we may put ourselves in tune with the infinite and the eternal. The great harmony eventually drowns out all the discords. But each human discord is simply wreaking punishment upon himself."

"Oh, I know your philosophy all right enough!" The irony in Lang's tone indicated how much he disparaged that philosophy.

"But it's not mine," Ashael remonstrated. "Any more than the universe is mine!"

He got off the stool and pulled down a volume from the mantel. Kneeling close to the firelight he read aloud.

"'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?'"

The recluse closed the volume and looked up at Lang. "Do I need to tell you who voiced that philosophy?"

"No."

"The trouble with men is this: they take that, and the rest of the universal philosophy voiced by the Great Way-Shower, as merely pleasant prattle from

the parson's lips of a Sunday morning. But it is just as much a practical, working, fundamental law, John Lang, as the deepest legal truth on which your common-law statutes are founded. And you don't use human law merely to make pretty sounds with. You use that law as a working tool. But your judges and your juries are not infallible.

"I'm only a poor old moss-grown stick up in these woods. I might call myself a sort of hollowed, wooden gutter leading from an everlasting spring in the hills to a trough beside the dusty way along which men pass. Nothing much, of myself! But just as long as I serve for a channel—conducting down only a trickle of God's goodness according to my limited capacity—I am right! I serve! And I know I am right!"

"And how about the infernal ingratitude of men who get something for nothing?"

"John Lang, their ingratitude harms only them—not me. I am right, obeying the great law. It's a pretty trite statement—that virtue is its own reward! But God Almighty knows how true it is—and He sent a Messenger to this world to put it in words—and because it is in mere words of human invention—the words I have read to you—most men let the parson babble to make a pretty sound and don't delve for the truth that's in them."

Lang did not reply. The hermit remained on his knees, mending the fire. The lawyer was meditating on that declaration of Ashael's in regard to the law, his interest piqued from a professional standpoint. He was still wilfully resisting the suggestion that infraction of the Divine Law was certain to bring punishment. The Bible said so, to be sure, but the Bible was the parson's code. It was what the judge on the bench said, executing man-made statutes! That

passed-down judgment did the business for law-breakers.

He did not dwell on the matter with anything like exhaustive analysis. He was not in a mental state where he cared to employ thought too laboriously. The fire leaping up to the stones was a comforting sight and influenced him to relax mind and body. He looked into the flames and became drowsy; the vigil of the night before was having its effect.

The remembrance of that vigil reminded him sharply of Anita; he decided to start for Hagas Waters in the first light of the dawn. He looked ahead to the morning with zest, telling himself how much he would enjoy his walk in the freshness of a new day. Even the wind outside lulled him; it swept through the trees and whined in the crack of the window sashes.

A shout, raucously loud, startled him. A man was demanding with oaths that somebody come out! When Ashael went forth Lang followed. It was not black darkness outdoors; the stars were bright in the sky from which the wind had swept the clouds. The two men on the porch could see many persons among the white birches.

“What is wanted of me?” asked Ashael.

“You go away from this place. Light your lantern and start now. Never come back. Will you go?”

“I will not go. I know you, Ase Tuttle. Have you lost your mind?”

“I know you, too, you damnation old witch! That’s the name for you! We all know you now for what you really are. You go away and you won’t get hurt.”

“What does this mean, you people?”

“It means we’ve found out how you have ’chanted us. We’re all dying! *You* have done it!”

“And even the butter won’t whey on account of

your bewitching the churn," declared a woman shrilly.

"Once again I ask you—will you go away?" bawled the man.

"No!"

"Then you're going to get what's coming to you!"

"You'll have to stand 'em off with a gun," warned Lang. "There's no mob so senseless and dangerous as a pack of superstitious half-wits."

"I have no gun. You must not use yours, my friend."

The crowd was advancing. The men howled threats, working up their courage of mania, and the women shrieked, hysterically urging their males to catch the wizard and tear him to bits.

"God o' mercy, man! You're not going to stand here and let those lunatics have their way with you, are you?"

"They are not to blame. Somebody has lied and has set them against me."

Lang leaped off the porch and walked toward the crowd. Over his shoulder he informed Ashael: "This 'turn the cheek' business may be all right according to your code, but it doesn't fit mine."

A man was running, leading the pack. He swung a club at Lang, but the lawyer snatched it away, set his hands against the man's breast and pushed him back. The others stopped. This stalwart stranger had complicated matters for them.

"You ain't in this. We don't want you. It's him we're after," yelled the leader.

"I don't think you would know just what to do with me, if you did get me," stated Lang drily. His calm fearlessness daunted them more effectually than bluster. "What's the matter with you?"

"He has witched us."

"You're all kinds of a liar, man! There's no such thing as witchcraft."

"We're here to get him, and you can't bluff us back with your talk."

"In about one minute I'll stop using talk and lay into your gang with a club in each hand. Get away from here!"

They did not retreat, nor did they advance; they were huddling closer together, getting up courage by contact.

"Who has put you up to this by lies?" Lang demanded, with his court room manner of bullying a witness.

"It wasn't any lie. She knows! The queen lady of the Double T knows!" In this crisis the spokesman was desperately trying to win a proselyte who otherwise might wreck the band's project.

Anita had trusted too much to those shallow minds from which information could be easily spilled. The interference by this bold man had stampeded their wits and put their timid prudence to flight. Lang was assured by a chorus of voices that they had good advice on how to deal with the wizard of Angel Knob; they wanted to make this man understand that a more important personage than he—whoever he might be who withstood them—had told them what to do to save themselves from evil.

The lawyer did not answer them. Rancorous choler was in him. Just why he was so furiously angry he did not exactly understand. Somehow, the wretches were defiling something which had value in his eyes; it was something very new—something that was in his heart a few moments before when he looked into the dancing flames in Ashael's cabin.

He threw away his club and struck Tuttle between

the eyes and dropped the man; he had been railing with profane obscenity. Lang picked up the limp form and flung it against a group of other men and they ran away. After a few moments, Tuttle staggered to his feet and followed his pack. Lang went back to Ashael.

“Excuse me for desecrating Angel Knob, and going against your New Testament ideas! But I reckoned a little of the Old Testament stuff was needed,” stated the victor. “I don’t remember the texts or the ancient parties who were concerned, but I remember something about using the jawbone of an ass; I used the whole animal.” He walked into the camp and Ashael followed. “I’ll turn in pretty soon, I reckon,” said Lang. “I want to make an early start for——”

He turned away from Ashael and did not name his destination. He sat down in front of the fire and resumed his study of the flames. In a hollow off the trail of “The Way of the Cross,” the pack gathered around Tuttle.

“That ain’t a man, though he talked like one,” the leader stated with decision, excusing his discomfiture. “He was ’chanted up by that old hellion and was sicked on to me. He was a demon. I smelt brimstone. There ain’t nothing left for us but the fire test!”

“She said not to,” protested a man.

“If she was here she’d change her mind. She wasn’t cal’lating on a demon being ’chanted up to stop us. She don’t want to be euchred. She ordered something done. By the blue blazes, it’s going to be done, too!”

“She’s entitled to her money’s worth,” agreed another.

“I have come prepared—that’s the kind of a man I am to depend on,” said Tuttle. He dredged his

pockets and produced handfuls of matches. "They're from her depot camp," he chuckled. "I reckon if she knowed how they're going to be used she wouldn't be mad because we stole 'em."

"Ain't a fire resky, with this wind?"

"It's going to be a different kind of a fire. I've got my plans. It's a witch-test fire. Come along!"

When they had trod with stealth back among the white birches he set all men at work with their knives, stripping the bark, the outer, crisp, white integument of Ashael's "angels." Into the ends of split sticks they set great wads of the bark. And when the word was given they all lighted the improvised torches. Men and women, they began to run in a circle around and around the camp, the fires streaming over their heads.

It was a senseless performance, a juvenile prank by witless grown-ups with a crack-brain leader who entertained some fantastic notion about the efficacy of a ring of fire in the case of a witch.

But the torches, rudely contrived, hastily put together, dropped petals of flame as the excited carriers went leaping about the building. Some petals went scaling off on the wings of the wind. Some of them alighted in clumps of resinous undergrowth and torched the tinder into sudden flame. Some bits of the blazing bark, swirling upward on the gusts of the gale, lodged in the larger trees—the spruces and the hemlocks.

After a few minutes, all about in the lurid woods, there was a noise like the rush of falling waters; the sound was the roar of fires streaming up through the needles and the tassels of the cones of the black growth. From tree to tree the flames leaped. The crested tops seemed to explode instead of burn. Such

is the dreaded "crown fire" of the North country when the flames mount the galloping winds.

They who had done the mischief ran into the woods; they knew fires and the ways of fires; they had had practice in the squatter art of burning tracts to form blueberry barrens. They dropped their torches and the flames set back-fires which raced to join the first ranks of the growing conflagration. The fugitives of Pugwash were going into the eye of the wind and were safe.

The two men of the camp had become fugitives, too. They were forced to flee ahead of the fires—they could not pierce the wall of red ruin which lay to the southward. The camp was burning before they left it; they had used a little time to gather some of their possessions.

"Borestone!" gasped Lang. "We'll go up there!"

But the draft of wind in the valley between them and the mountain was like that in a chimney flue; the flames were roaring and rolling there.

"I have always depended on 'The Way of the Cross,'" vouchsafed Ashael. "But we must take another trail." He set away and Lang hurried at his heels.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE MAGIC OF A VOICE



THE Black Dragons had said to the charging, red-plumed ranks, "You shall not pass!" That name, The Black Dragons, was long ago given by the woodsmen to the serrated, battlemented heights of the Border watershed. The ranks of the racing fires faltered on the rocky slopes to the south and died against the flinty breasts of The Black Dragons.

On the second night after the torches had made that horrid circle about Ashael's camp—after the seeds from those torches had been sown on the winds and had raised with magical suddenness a crop of chaos that was tipped with flowers of the flames—one saw only scattered lights in the smoky gloom, stubs of trees that were vertical, glowing embers. When the eyes gazed forth on the vast tracts where destruction had raged, the panorama seemed, in the obscurity, like cities dimly lighted.

The big smoke had rolled over the cliffs of the watershed, though the fires had been kept back.

On the day following the second night of the conflagration, the skies were hung with a sombre pall of saffron hue and the sun overhead was like a dull-red lozenge laid on a yellow screen.

On the L'Islet waters the men who were working down the pulp timber drive, on its way to the Canadian mills, breathed acrid air and looked over their shoulders toward the south and wondered how much dam-

age had been done. They scarcely expected any messenger from out of that hell to report the damage.

However, near the time when twilight was merging with the dun light of the day a man did come, and his appearance showed that he had been through the hell. He came down the river, paddling with a broken oar, a voyageur in a leaky bateau which was evidently some ancient, condemned craft left to rot on the shore.

The man was blackened and blistered; his eyes were closed; the fires had seared them. He paddled only feebly—the current of the river was the chief motive power in bringing the bateau along. The man was crying aloud. But when the rivermen hurried out to him, their sweeps forcing along a frothing bateau, they learned that he was not making appeals in his own behalf; he was incoherently calling for help for somebody who was back there in the woods from which he had come.

When the rivermen hailed, and after they caught hold of the craft, their brown hands clinging to the thwarts, he addressed men whom he could not see but whose voices gave him a new impulse to summon aid for the one who was lost. The rivermen could not understand very well because he kept contradicting himself in his delirium. He said a good old man had run away into the fires so he might not be a burden to the younger man who had a chance to escape.

He said the good old man must be alive, because God would not allow a man like him to die in fires set by lunatics and renegades. But then the stranger went on to say that the old man had been burned in the flames because he would not be the cause of sacrificing another man. He had carried the old man on his shoulders; then the old man would not allow him-

self to be carried any longer! The boss of the rivermen tapped his forehead and shook his head when he swapped glances with his crew.

“Whoever is up yon in the smoke, he is still there, what’s left of him. This man must be taken to the village of Boisvert.”

They lied to the stranger when they said they would send for the old man. But they did not lie to themselves when they averred in low tones that there was no need of searching for anybody who had been left yonder.

The stranger threw away the broken oar after they had promised to send aid. When they lifted him into their bateau he lay limply on the wool jackets which they spread for him; he was motionless and silent. While the bateau swept on down the river and through the smoky twilight and into the night which followed the twilight, the man gave no sign of life. Every little while the boss kneeled and put his ear to the stranger’s breast and listened for heart-beats. Each time he looked up and nodded encouragingly to his rowers.

Those rivermen made up a part of the crew handling the rear of the pulp-wood drive—and they had been located far up the L’Islet waters. It was morning before they came to the settlement of Boisvert.

The boss had dipped water in his palms as the bateau drove on and had bathed the face of the unconscious man and had cleared away the soot and grime as best he could. But the cruelly seared eyes he did not dare to touch.

“It’s for Doctor Lebel—that job!” he told his men. “One of you must go on to St. Beauce and bring Doctor Lebel.”

The rivermen were not wondering because the boss

had taken all this trouble for a stricken stranger and was willing to go to more pains. On the L'Islet waters they all called him "Generous Jock." And the house of Jock Duncan at Boisvert, an open house for all who came and went along the watery thoroughfare, had a weatherstained board above its door with letters carved deeply. It was a tribute to Jock Duncan, though Duncan shook his head and grinned disparagingly when old Dominie MacMath nailed up the board which he had patiently carved in the period of his recovery from a broken leg; Duncan had taken in the aged lay preacher who had suffered injury on a tour among the camps. This was the verse on the board:

"But deep this truth impressed my mind:
Thro' all His works abroad,
The heart benevolent and kind
The most resembles God."

"I'm leaving it where the dominie nailed it," Duncan was wont to explain, "for it's a bit verse frae Bobby Bur-rns, and I'd no lay my rough paw on any o' Bobby's jingle."

Duncan led the way when the men bore the stranger from the bateau to the door where the verse proclaimed the character of the house's hospitality. "It comes at a good time," he said. "Mavis has no call to be busy with the village bairns, for the school is closed. And she aye must needs tend and do for somebody."

He called to his daughter before he reached the door. "I'm bringing one of our ain kind, lass. For he wouldna let the clutch of his sufferings close his throat or make him lose the hold on his oar till he told what he had come to tell—of the other man he

tried hard to save and couldna. So, be good to him. He has earned it!”

Therefore, John Lang, who had been lodged in the house of Jock Duncan of Boisvert, proceeded to collect what Duncan considered had been earned. But Lang did not know he was collecting. He did not revive even to know his own identity for days. He knew not night from day, for he was in a darkened room, his eyes bandaged by the skilful ministrations of Doctor Lebel from St. Beauce.

Just how a man whose lungs had been shrivelled by the fires and choked by the smoke, whose eyes were blinded and whose throat was scorched within and without, had been able to keep on so persistently till he had made known to men the peril of another man, was a source of marvel to the doctor, and he made that astonishment known to Duncan. And the more the doctor wondered, the more was Duncan convinced that his first judgment in regard to the stranger was justified.

“He must be one o’ my ain sort—and it’s good to gi’e hand o’ help to such. I’d like to know his name—but there’s no hurry. Dumb and blind ye say he’ll be for many a day? Oh, well! I’ll shift the name o’ Generous Jock to him. I’m tired of carrying it, and he’s welcome to its use.”

After a long time, after days of which he did not know the lapse, John Lang became conscious of a voice. It was faint and far away, it seemed, at first; his ears had suffered from the flames and his dulled hearing came back to him slowly. It was a girl’s voice. After he began to hear it more plainly he was aware, for his own comfort, that he was back in a safe world.

He had been battling with the phantasmagoria of

flames—flames which were leaping and limitless. He had fought through them—he had fled from before them. He was everlastingly struggling with a burden which resisted his efforts. He tried to drag along an old man who had urged him to go on and make the most of the years that were still ahead of a young man.

At first, in the vagaries of his delirium, the distant voice—the girl's voice—seemed to be calling to him to come forth, away from the torturing fires. It was the call of youth, summoning the spirit of youth. So, he turned his back on the flames and answered the call of the voice. He was escaping from the torture—it was the beginning of his convalescence.

Day by day he depended on the voice to guide him, because his way was still beset by visionary obstacles, as if by the smouldering stumps flanking him on that day when he staggered up the mountain side and groped his way to the L'Islet waters.

He seemed to come into clearer air where he could see the cool purple rim of the hills—the boundary which had always stimulated his yearning to go on and seek. He trusted in the voice. He waited for it—he loved it when he heard it. So gradually did the twilight of bewilderment develop into the dawn of reality, he scarcely knew when it was he came to realize that the voice of the girl, who had tenderly nursed him, was not merely a sound which was a part of his troubled visions.

Even when he had begun to stammer words for the first time, asking anxious questions, he made no attempt to learn her identity. The voice sufficed for his comfort. Other women had approached him by way of his eyes; he remembered Reba Donworth swinging along the boulevard—he recollected how

Anita Trask had looked when her old husband disclosed the tableau by pulling aside the portière.

Now his eyes were bandaged and his ears gave him uncertain evidence still—but that voice went straight to his heart. Sometimes when he was restless, the voice read the verses of Bobby Burns, sympathetically and with all the delightful characterization of the dialect. Sometimes the voice crooned the Scottish songs. The voice comforted him, from time to time, reassured him, encouraged him. It told him he would surely see again when Doctor Lebel considered it advisable to take the bandages away.

Then there came a day when strong arms helped him out of the room where he had been lodged so long, the precious voice directing the helpers and urging them to be tender and careful.

He was in the open. He heard the mellow murmur of a river's current and sniffed the odor of summer's flowers.

They seated him in a big chair and he listened to the rustle of leaves above his head. In the dark room he had felt a listless indifference about the lapse of time. Now he asked questions and the girl with the blessed voice of comfort told him it was the last week of June. She indulged his awakened curiosity and explained how he had been brought down the river out of the smoke of the flaming forest.

A little hand was laid upon his where it rested on the arm of the chair. He heard another voice, then. "I have sat almost every day beside your bed, sir, when my sister could not be there all the time. I have given to you water and your medicine."

"It makes me very sad to know you have stayed in that dark room for my sake."

"But it has made me happy, sir, because there are

so few things I can do to help anybody. I have to sit in my wheel chair all the time, just as you do now. I am twelve years old. I have sat five years in my chair. But it's not so very bad when one can see!" Her voice was cheery. "The doctor will take the cloth off your eyes some day. Then I'll bring my games, and you and I can play them, and we shall not mind much because we have to sit in our chairs."

Under the bandage he felt the healing tears moisten the eyes which the flames had seared. "I don't know much about what I've said or done since I have been in the dark room. I hope I've seemed grateful, all the time. Before I was brought here I did not know there was so much unselfish generosity in the world. My name doesn't matter now. Names mean nothing—I'm glad you have not told me yours. It will be time to know such things when I can stand up like a man in front of you both and look into your eyes."

"You must not trouble your thoughts till that time comes," said the voice of the elder sister. "Think only this—it is June, and you can come out here every day when it's fair and can listen to the river and catch the scents of the flowers; they are all about you, because I tend them and love them. And it won't be long before you can see them and look at the fields in the sunshine. Now, I must go into the house and attend to the baking."

The child, meekly waiting for a hint that he desired any talk, broke a silence which had been prolonged. "You'd rather think your thoughts than listen to me! Isn't that so, sir?"

"I have had too much time for thinking, my dear!"

He was wondering why his curiosity was continuing to sleep, as he realized it did. He had asked no questions about them, the Samaritans who harbored him.

He was conscious of a strange reluctance about digging for facts—his investigator nature was numbed. The previous realities had been so bitter that he encouraged this new state of mind—prolonging it as a comforting dream. Not only did he refrain from asking the name of this family which had taken him in—he was acutely unwilling to know it just then, and he was grateful because they, too, seemed to consider names as of small moment—humoring his notion.

Mentally, he was regarding the situation as a locked casket, of which he held the key. He was dreading to expose the hope which was hidden away. He did not insult his sagacity by pretending that he could not guess—but it was a comfort to nurse a childish vagary in his weakness. He was holding to the dream until the claim of reality became too insistent to be denied.

He swept his hand in a slow gesture in front of his face, directing his companion's attention. "As you see it—what's out there? Please tell me how it looks."

The child chattered joyfully, grateful for the commission entrusted to her. She was eyes for the man who sat beside her. She described all that could be seen from where they sat—the river, the logs rolling along its flood, the broad tillage fields and the little white houses.

"It's too bad your sister must stay indoors on such a beautiful day," he ventured; he was hoping the child would assure him that the stay would not be for long. "And it's too bad because she has to work at baking when it's warm."

"Oh, she only keeps an eye on old Joan and the other girl—and sister makes just the pies because it's fun for her. Mamma used to make the pies before she

went away to heaven, and my sister is mamma of our house now. And she teaches our school.”

Lang rested his head on the back of his chair. The little girl patted his hand.

“Maybe you’d like to go to sleep. I’ll hush my tongue, sir.”

“No, no!” he protested. “Your dear tongue is helping me so much, and I’m not missing my eyes just now. Tell me more, please!”

“I think I’ve told you all about everything in sight. Oh, here comes Blind Lebaude—he’s tapping past with his stick. He’s a jolly man. Hey, Jules Lebaude!” she called. “You must tell this gentleman who is just now the same as you are, how it’s not so very bad to be without eyes. He’d like to be made jolly, as you are all the day long!”

The sightless man who sat in the big chair heard a very jovial chuckle. “*Mais, non!* she was not so very fonny dat day when de grin’ stone she bus’ on me at de meel. I grin’ de axe on de power-stone, m’sieu’! Sometime, dem stone she bus’. *Oui!* So, I’m blind. But I don’ stay sad. I can make fon for maself. I have one leetle farm. I have de wires all stretch to hen pen, pig house—to my barn—and I go along so sweef’ about ma work, by put ma hand on de wire. And dey come pas’ and la’f and call me de ’lectric car on de trolley, eh! So, I la’f and I don’ care.”

Then the cane tapped on its way.

“So, you see, even if you have to sit on the chair all the time, or if you can’t look at the sun and the flowers, there’s always something left for fun if you’ll make up your mind to be happy,” said the little girl. “Now, let’s see what else there is in sight to tell about! Oh, there’s my own self, right here! Well, you’ll know

the color of my hair when I sing you the bit of song that papa Jock jokes me with.

“ ‘Lassie wi’ the lint-white locks,
Bonnie lassie, artless lassie,
Wilt thou wi’ me tent the flocks,
Wilt thou be my dearie, O?’ ”

While she was laughing merrily after her little song, he reached in her direction and patted her locks.

“But I don’t think I’m really very good looking,” she went on. “Papa Jock says he likes my mouth because it’s big like his. He says it’s a good sign of generosity. That’s his nickname all along the river—‘Generous Jock’.”

“I’m sure it belongs by rights to your father.”

“Oh, yes!” she agreed serenely. “It fits him. But now I must tell you how my sister looks. She is——”

“Hush!” he warned. “I think I hear her coming.”

“No. She isn’t anywhere in sight.”

“Please! Please, dear child!” he urged. “Don’t tell me how she looks—not now! It’s a whim. Sick men have queer whims, don’t they? I’m—I’m guessing how she looks. You enjoy working out riddles, don’t you? Well, I’m childish right now—and it’s like a sort of a riddle—guessing how she looks. It takes up my mind. I don’t want the answer right now.”

“Then you must be thinking about my sister a whole lot,” she said, surprise in her tone.

“Yes!” said John Lang meekly. He had enshrined a voice—he had pictured an image, and for the time being he was keeping the shrine sacred from invasion by a human visage because that face might not be the counterpart of the one which had been glorified by his dreaming hopes.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

WITH THE EYES OF A MAN



JOHN LANG broke his resolve regarding anonymity. He talked about himself to the girl of Boisvert before the bandages were off his eyes. In his thoughts, while he talked, he accused himself of weakness and folly. He knew he ought to wait till he was hale and strong, finding his poise with the aid of honest eyesight. But he succumbed to the usual temptation which assails a sick man in the presence of a nurse who is tender and patient. He reached out for understanding, womanly sympathy. He even told her about Reba Donworth.

Somehow, he wanted this girl of the North to feel that he was loyal and dependable in his affections. As he acknowledged to himself, his impulses were of a mixed quality, but he desired to have his listener know about the faults which had turned Reba from him. It was in his thoughts that this girl was the one of all others who might be able to reassure him.

“My vanity, my pride, my selfishness, my lack of real and understanding tenderness!” This was his theme. Daily he brought the matter up and dwelt upon the subject of repentance. He was finding inexpressible comfort in her reiterated belief that he had been cleansed of those errors.

Then he was troubled because he could not prove his new spirit by acts, not merely by his protestations. He fell to wondering what he could do, in the way of that proof. His doubts in regard to them, his anxiety

to perform, were the natural developments of a sick man's vague protests against hampering conditions and of his restlessness as convalescence progressed.

"It will be easy for you to show it by some act, because now you have the will to perform," the consoling voice had assured him, over and over. "The way will present itself. God always puts the means within the reach of those who simply and honestly want to show goodness."

"And humility!" he urged.

"Yes! Otherwise, the show is all for parade. Some way will be provided, and then she will know!"

"Best of all, I, myself, will know!" he added soulfully.

Through long days, under the rustling leaves, he talked with the child, also. Her cheerful patience touched his heart. The doctors had told her father nothing could be done to cure her of the paralysis which fettered her feet. She and Lang had discussed often the strange old man who had died in the flaming woods.

"I wish I might have seen him," the child confessed. "I have heard about other 'charmer men' of the woods—the rivermen have told me. I am good, I hope. I trust in God's goodness. Do you believe the old man could have made me well, so I could walk? If I could only stand and walk a little, I would be happier. I'd never care, even if I couldn't run about like a child. Are there such blessings as being healed without doctors—just because God wants you to be well?"

"I'm afraid I don't know very much about it or how to talk to you, my child. I wish now I had studied that matter instead of wasting so much study on other things. But I do believe God wants every-

body to be well. Strange cures are made in the way of healing—I do know that!”

“A riverman told me he was once at the great church of Beaupré, on the Feast Day of Sainte Anne—that’s in July, the twenty-sixth day.” She dwelt upon the date wistfully. “He said while the procession was moving and the chimes were ringing and the people were singing the chant to good Sainte Anne, he heard a child scream very loud and say, ‘I can walk!’ And a little girl got out of her wheel chair there in the yard in front of the church, where all the people were, and she walked off. The riverman said he got down on his knees with the rest of the people and cried—and he said he had never been on his knees before like that because he was so wicked. I’m afraid he was—I have heard him swear.”

“Yes, there are strange things in this world,” murmured Lang. Previously he would have found his statement banal. Now his reverent tone blessed the thought. He pondered for some time.

“I used to be very curt and cross, my child, when folks told me there were such things. But I don’t have as much faith in my own notions these days as I used to have. I want to listen with respect to what other folks say and to believe in all good things which happen to other folks. The shrine you speak of is not so very far from here, is it?”

Her tone had revealed to him how carefully she had gleaned information and how, in her hopes, she had treasured all she had learned.

“After one goes down the valley of the Chaudiere it’s not so very far, sir,” she answered with breathless eagerness. “And the road is broad and smooth—they call it The King’s Highway. And one goes to a place called Levis and there’s a ferry across to the

city of Quebec and then it's twenty-one miles down to the church of Sainte Anne.

"Oh, I have asked so many questions, sir! It seems as if I can shut my eyes and see the broad road and all the white houses, and then I come to the place where the church rises so grand! And there's the statue of the good saint in the courtyard! She holds her little grandson, Jesus, in her arms. And in the church there's another great statue of her, and they say she looks down, very sweet and tender, on the sick folks and the cripples who come and kneel and ask for help. And there's a bit of bone from her wrist—and it cures folks!"

She paused, and he could determine from her voice, though it was brave, how very near to tears she was.

"Have you asked your father to take you there, child?"

"No! No!" He heard the indrawn breath of apprehensiveness.

"But why not?"

"He's a Presbyterian, sir! He's Scotch!" There was no reproach in the child's tone. She gave her statement as if it were a cogent, final, absolute and unanswerable explanation.

Lang's thoughts went back to what Ashael had said in the court room on the day when he had been called to the stand as a witness. Men did insist on putting tags upon God's mysterious bounty! Men in the quarrels of human belief insisted on choosing the channels of their own blessings and, if those channels were dry, scornfully refused to partake of the overflow of another channel to which other men had given a specific name!

He wanted to burst out into protests against making the infinite God a creature of creeds, even though

he had only a child for an auditor; but he respected this child's simple faith in a goodness which for her was still undefined. Especially was he unwilling to disturb her deference to a father's settled opinions.

But an idea was born in John Lang. He set his thoughts to the elaboration of that idea as day succeeded day. Sometimes he was afraid he was putting his own affairs ahead of the child's in the matter; for his own case became inextricably involved with the child's as he proceeded with his plans.

One day the elder sister gave him a bit of news; she had served as his information-monger in regard to the little happenings of the settlement of Boisvert. She said some of the folks were going to make the pilgrimage to Sainte Anne de Beaupré for the great Feast Day. They were going in their carts and their buckboards to the Chaudiere valley and down the broad highway. There were the men, wives and children of the families of Etienne Laurendeau, of Phillippe Montreuil, of Maxime Filteau and of Ubalde Duplisse.

"Are all of them sick?"

"Oh, no! They are going for the trip, to see the sights, to ask the blessing and to bring back the holy water from the fountain after a father has blessed the bottles they fill."

"Do you believe persons have been healed at that shrine?"

"I only know what I have been told. There are many thousands who go there, as pilgrims, each year, and I have talked with folks who say they have seen sick people made well."

"They call themselves pilgrims—and they ride in trains and carriages and motor cars," he burst forth with some bitterness. "Away back in the old days of the world there were real pilgrims—and they walked,

and then they received their blessings. In these times, it's all show and mock with most folks. They haven't the true and humble spirit to be real pilgrims. If they really knew how to ask for blessings, in all humility, they'd get them." He was declaring with as much sincerity as Ashael had shown!

Later, in other talks, he referred to the matter. He indicated how much it occupied his thoughts.

Then there came the day which brought Doctor Lebel for the final and the crucial visit. The doctor, in the darkened room, on his other calls, had tested Lang's eyes to an extent which assured them both that the recovery was sure, though it had been slow.

Therefore, when the bandages were taken off for the last time, John Lang saw! It was in the twilight! He was seated in the big chair under the rustling leaves, his head on the back of the chair, and he looked up into the foliage, a soothing, comforting canopy ruffled by the evening breeze.

Jock Duncan was at home these days. The rear of the drive was down.

"Your hand, man!" he cried, reaching for Lang's. "Gi'e me your honest grip! I'm greeting ye as ye come frae the mouth o' the covered bridge! A sunlit way for ye frae noo on!"

Lang looked slowly around. He was not hearing the voice he longed to hear. He saw nothing but a girl's wide and luminous eyes at first, so it seemed to him. His gaze did not stray from the eyes. They belonged with the voice. They were big and honest and soothingly, restfully blue, like the hue of the sky seen through the leaves above his head. Happy tears filled her eyes but did not dim them.

Lang rose slowly. He had regained his strength

of body for he had been walking for many days, guided by her hand.

"He would never let me tell him about your looks, sister Mavis," cried Jessie, laughing and sobbing with a touch of a child's nervous hysteria in a moment of crisis. "I wanted to break the news of how homely you are."

At that prod John Lang forgot reserve, tactfulness and the delicacy of conventionality. He declared with a childishness that quite matched Jessie's emotion of the moment, "Hush, child! Your sister is the handsomest girl I have ever seen!"

Jock Duncan's shouts of laughter broke the tension of the little party and helped Mavis to control her swift confusion.

"It's what I'd always say to your mither, lass, my first day out frae the choppings in the spring! But she was ne'er unco set up by any such silliness—so she aye ca'ed it!"

Lang walked to Mavis, his hands outstretched, and she took them in her warm clasp.

"Did you expect I would be astonished when I opened my eyes and saw your face?" he asked, and answered the question with earnest conviction. "No, I'm sure you understand me better! I have been dwelling with the voice which called me back from the dark places. The dream has been glorious—I hated to break in on it till I could open my eyes on reality. I was sure what the reality would be. I'm not trying to remember when the revelation came to me that you were Mavis Duncan. To linger along with the make-believe has been a sick man's whim, I suppose, but I hope you do not think it was silly." In her reply she was as earnest as he had been.

"I have been sharing the same whim with you.

Yes, and Jessie and my father have helped me, because I coaxed them."

Though she had been cordial in the joy of beholding him restored, he detected in her manner and expression something that was a mixture of embarrassment and reserve; she was trying to take her hands from his grasp.

"I beg you to forgive my—my explosion a few minutes ago. It was before I thought how it—how I would sound, and——"

"Man, don't spoil a compliment, even if it did somewhat o'er-praise my lassie," rebuked Duncan, laughing.

"I didn't intend—I stick to what I said—I—I——" He released her hands and joined with her in the laughter which echoed Duncan's robust efforts in that line. "I think I won't try to juggle any more words just now—not even the words with which to thank you for what you have done through all the long days. I don't know just what to do with words, it seems!"

"Nor would I know what to do with them if you should give them to me." Her restraint in tone and manner was more marked and chilled his ardor.

He wished he had the courage to ask her to walk with him along the river bank. The reflection that he lacked such courage in her case suggested that he would do well to tone up a faltering spirit by a little exercise of it in another quarter.

He turned to Duncan. "Will you take a short walk with me along the river, sir? I want to have a talk with you."

They were a long time away from the house. Mavis and Jessie sat without speaking and watched the moon come up. It was broad and white in a tranquil sky. Silhouetted against the quivering pathway which the

moon laid across the water, Duncan and Lang walked up the slope from the river, returning.

"Lassies, we've had a long, long talk, John Lang and I," said the father mildly. "I might say it's been about beliefs, pro and con. But the argument is ended without either of us being the wiser! Only agreeing, the two of us, with the spirit o' the gude friends, that there are many things beyond the ken o' mortal man. So, we'll say nowt about the arguments. We agreed on anither matter—and it's for me, as master o' my house, to speak of it." He drew a long breath—a breath of resignation.

"John Lang tells me he has pleaded mony a case in court, but he has given no compliment to himsel'. He needs not to do so. I compliment him!" He bowed to Lang who stood at a respectful distance from the family group, listening.

"In due season, so we may be there on the day o' the Great Festival, we start for Sainte Anne de Beau-pré. And if God or any of His saints bend down closer that day, so they may hear the prayer of my puir bairnie, here, I care nowt whether it's in the yard o' papistry or in the yard o' the true kirk. I shall bless the Father o' the wor-rl'd for the mercies He may see fit to grant."

There was a long silence there under the moon. Then the child began to sob softly. Her father went quickly to her, kneeled beside her wheel chair and took the head with the lint-white locks upon his shoulder. He talked to her comfortingly in low tones.

When Mavis moved toward John Lang he hurried to meet her.

"It has been one of my dreams," she whispered. "I had heard of the others—I had hoped—but I wasn't sure——"

"None of us are sure," he returned when she hesitated. "We can only hope."

"It's a long road—it's rough for a part of the way." Her motherly solicitude for the child was stirring. "But we must arrange, somehow, to make the wagon comfortable for Jessie—and there are many villages so we need not hurry."

"We need not hurry," he assured her. "But as for the wagon! I have been giving this matter long thought. It was not sudden impulse when I asked your father to go with me for a talk. I had made some plans for myself. I know there are bicycles in the village. I shall buy some wheels. The child is wonted to the chair. She can be very comfortable in it if it is pushed with care over the rough places."

"You surely don't mean that you——"

"I have begged the privilege from your father. It is more than a privilege. It is for the peace of my own soul. Understand me, Mavis!" In the eagerness of his appeal he blurted her Christian name. "It's not to parade my humility or to crucify my vanity. When I can say so much, and can be so absolutely honest in saying it, I feel I am well along in my cure of self. But, so it seems to me, after I have gone on foot, in the dust of the highway, being of real service to an innocent child in making the way smooth for her, I can look up to God and plead her cause and mine with a better understanding of the Law—the Great Law which I'm only beginning to grasp and know for my good. I hope you don't think it's a whim!"

"No!" she assured him. "It's what you have been wanting to show by act instead of word—it's your proof!"

That night, in her chamber, the daughter of "Generous Jock" Duncan made a test of her own gener-

osity; the spirit of sacrifice was truly dominating the household in those days! Even a Scotch Presbyterian had put aside the tenets of his creed!

The moonlight flooded a table set close beside her window—it was light enough to serve Mavis.

She wrote a letter to Reba Donworth. The girl of Boisvert told the girl of the city that the man who would be at Sainte Anne de Beaupré on the twenty-sixth day of July would be worthy of all her love, after having been through the fires of penitence and sacrifice. She urged Reba to go to Sainte Anne. She declared that John Lang deserved such a reward—a blessing in answer to the appeal from his contrite spirit.

Mavis waited for a time before she sealed the envelope. She was resolving to lay away forever a sacred love and with it all unworthy regrets for that love. She was determined to put into the act of sealing this letter her surrender of a beautiful dream—she had never acknowledged that she hoped for an actuality!

Sitting there in the wan light she endured her Gethsemane! Then she drew her finger across her tear-wet cheek and moistened the edge of the flap and held her hand closely pressed there for many minutes.

Some letters are sealed with a kiss; that letter was sealed with the tears of renunciation. The act was generosity, purely conceived, honestly uncalculated, with no after-thought of the reward promised by Divine Justice to those who cast bread upon the waters.

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE REVELATION OF A DREAM



His eyes open, face to face with duty and the world, dealing once more with the verities, Lang was harassed by a gnawing desire to know what impelling motive had brought Mavis to his office to plead for the cause of Andrew MacMurray.

He had been assured by both of them that there was a deeper reason than relationship. She had refused to admit him to her confidence when she made her call on him; he had deferred to her then, unable to urge more than the vague claim of curiosity and short acquaintance. In his new state of mind he craved to be admitted to the plane of closer friendship. In the flood of his gratitude he both feared and yearned. What had his refusal wrought for her injury? He shrank from knowing. However, if he did know he might be able to repair his fault.

Daily, as he became more sure of himself, grappling the problems of the world of light into which he had emerged, he sought information from her, awkwardly and tentatively. She did not respond to his hints. When he was more direct she avoided his questions. At last he besought her to tell him.

It was the evening before the morn of their projected pilgrimage. All the preparations had been made. He had wheeled Jessie about the village in the afternoon, happy as a boy when he found how his wheeled contrivance ensured her comfort. He made it constantly manifest how much his heart was set on the

expedition. Mavis referred falteringly to this new, buoyant mood of his when she gave signs that she was weakening under his insistent appeals.

"I'm like a child waiting for Christmas dawn—I'm expecting a wonderful gift," he told her with fervor. "I'm going down on my knees tonight and pray for sunshine."

"If I tell you what I did not intend to confess it will not seem now like an appeal to your generosity—for I know you are sincere in this plan which is all your own. But to tell you what was only a dream—" She hesitated.

"Remember — I'm very tender on the point of dreams!"

"I came back to my sane senses in your office. I saw my folly; you recollect. But you encourage me to speak out about my dream because you have now volunteered in a service which was a part of what I dreamed months ago in the city. We wanted to make Jessie well again." She caught her breath. "You can understand now, when you know her so well, how our sorrow for her made other matters seem small. And even the mayoralty of a city! I look back and wonder because I was so bold! So foolish, even! It's hard to tell you! But living here in the little circle of this home—and seeing her——" She choked and was silent.

"I have lived here in the little home—I know now!"

His answer was pregnant suggestion of his understanding sympathy and she went on with more confidence. "I came home from my school in Montreal when Jessie became ill. My father and I—and Andy—we gave all we had for the sake of having Jessie well again. Think! The most of her life ahead of her—and a prisoner in a chair!" A sob choked her

and she turned away from his sympathetic gaze. She strove with her mingled emotions when she went on with her confession.

“We took her here and there to the best doctors, not counting the cost. I felt I might earn money with my voice—Andy thought so, and that’s why I was studying in the city. I was desperate enough to leave Jessie to be cared for by others—she understood and was happy while I was away. The truth was, she had lost all hope for herself. She had suffered bitterly because I had given up my ambitions—she pretended she wanted me to go away and earn money for her sake. You can realize how such a pretense of selfishness tortured that honest child!”

In order to be safely distant from Jessie’s quick ears, Mavis and Lang were walking to and fro along the river’s sands which the summer’s drought had left broad and white and firm. She stopped and faced him.

“If we were now in the city I could never confess to you. The city is so great, and the affairs of this one and that seem so small. But up here”—she put out her arms in a gesture which spoke for her more eloquently than words.

He turned from the brooding peace of river and fields and looked at the little home whose problem in the person of one poor little girl had dwarfed other affairs in his own case.

“You have seen!” In her simple, wistful declaration there was poignant suggestion for him in his new enlightenment. “I’ll say nothing to you about my cousin’s ambition to be mayor. Of course, he had his personal reasons from the man’s standpoint. But he did sympathize with my dream. I had read so much about the great surgeon in Europe who per-

formed such miracles. It was hinted he might come over the sea to this land, but it was said only those of power and influence could interest him. How could poor Jock Duncan's daughter hope for a hearing? But the foster sister of the mayor of a great city—you see now, sir!" she owned plaintively, shrinking as if she feared his comment on this amazing hope of hers. "A wise man has advised us to hitch our wagon to a star—but ours was such a frail little wagon—and the star was so high! It was only a girl's folly—but now I have told you!"

"If money and influence can prevail even at this late day——"

She hastened to forestall his repentant offer. "While you were very ill—weeks ago—the newspapers reported the death of the great surgeon. Oh, it was only my dream, sir!"

"But it might have been realized!" he insisted. He regarded her gravely, with such intentness that she avoided his stare. He went on, earnestly sympathetic, as frankly repentant, as if his fault had been calculated by him.

"I stepped between you and a dear hope—I did it blindly, of course, but none the less it was done. There was a chance for your sister to find her life more worth the living except for me! You took me in and nursed me back into a life that is now worth living! I have been thanking God for these eyes restored to me. I'm now repeating all my thanks because my eyes enable me to see you, my living lesson of unselfishness."

When he stepped toward her his fervor alarmed her and she retreated.

"No, no! Don't misjudge me. It's only this I want to do!" He dropped on one knee, took her hand

and kissed it. "Please understand! I'm venerating unselfishness, you know. I need visible symbols, as a child does in its kindergarten lessons. Be patient with me."

He obeyed the slight lift of her hand and rose to his feet.

"The stars promise a fair tomorrow," she said, visibly embarrassed by his impulsive act, seeking to change the subject.

"Yes—it's as far as I dare look ahead—to tomorrow! My eyes are still dim, you know!" he faltered. "But the stars are bright!"

There was pathos in his tone, there was a strange wonderment in his expression when he looked up at the heavens.

She took advantage of his preoccupation and started on her way toward the house. He overtook her a few moments later, but there was no more conversation between them.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE MAN ON THE BROAD HIGHWAY



MEMBER MATHISON banged into the somnolent noon hush of the Talisman Club on a July day. The few members who were lounging in the club found Mr. Mathison's irruption startling; he was as noisy as a dog with a tin can tied to its tail.

Mr. Mathison brought a couple of sensation-tin-cans. One was visible in his hand. The other was a piece of news hidden in his noddle. The article in his hand was an interestingly sagging leather bag. The convivial manner displayed by Mr. Mathison suggested the nature of the contents of the bag—but Member Mathison proceeded to leave nothing to the imagination.

“Come along, boys! All up for the buffet! I’ve got a whale of an excuse for buying drinks! I’ll tell you in a minute what the excuse is. Come along—it’s right from good old Quebec, and fresh across the Border!” He shook the bag at them. “Whisky is food! Have a lunch on me!”

Member Mathison was just in from a motor trip; he wore dust coat, cap and goggles. He was followed to the buffet by a fairly representative delegation of the club members who were present.

On the way, Mr. Mathison chatted. “If Benedict Arnold was on earth again and was trying to get an army to walk all the way to Quebec, he could collect his patriots damn sudden! We’d all walk if we had

to! But it's too slow, considering what's waiting for us up there! It's hard to count autos on account of the dust! But I did see one thing! Just a minute till I get this bottle open!"

When the glasses were filled Member Mathison had something to say.

"Toast! To all saying John Lang has run away, is dead or married! They're damn liars! Drink hearty! Go ahead, Devon! Hope it doesn't choke you!"

"I don't know why you should especially pick me out of the crowd here," protested the lawyer sourly.

"Oh, yes, you do!" insisted Member Mathison cheerfully, in no condition to be perturbed by scowls. "I'm not saying John didn't give you plenty of reason to make a lot of talk against him. We all know you've made it. But there's been a different feeling growing among the boys since John was driven away by lies and slander. I helped to start the new feeling and I'm mighty glad to see it going so well. John wouldn't be a man unless he had made his mistakes, just the same as the rest of us. I don't know how it would seem to associate with angels—never did meet any! I like men who ain't so blame perfect they make you ashamed of yourself. Fill up again! Toast! Here's to giving John Lang the glad hand when he comes home!"

"Say! Look here, Mathison!" suggested one of the group. "Suppose you let us in on this. Have you seen Lang? Do you mean to tell us that?"

"You can see most anything on the road—coming *from* Quebec," growled Devon.

"You bet I have seen John Lang. Talked with him. Met him face to face and I stopped my car so sudden it turned somersaults and fetched up, headed the

other way, toward Quebec. Instinct and homesickness! That's the kind of a trained auto I own."

Then Mathison, having teased curiosity to the proper pitch, dropped banter.

"Yes, I did see John, boys! When I tell you where I saw him, and what he was doing, you're going to look big-eyed at me. But don't any more of you tell me I'm lying—not even you, Larry Devon, no matter how hard it may be to swallow back words.

"I was coming up the big road of the Chaudiere—headed home. I know John Lang as well as I know my own brother—but I looked into his face and I went on a half mile before I could make myself believe I had really seen him. Then I turned around and drove back.

"Don't blame me for not making sure of him at first sight, boys! Wait till I tell you! He was wearing a suit of clothes picked off the pile in some Canuck village. He was footing it along the dusty road. He was pushing a wheel chair with a little girl in it—a cripple.

"Now don't say it, Devon!" he warned, brandishing a monitory forefinger. "I'm convincing the boys, here, and I'm telling the truth! I talked with John. He introduced me to a party of everyday farmer folks going along with him; they were in a big wagon. I don't remember their names. There was one girl who could coax me to let a Wop push me along on my hands, wheelbarrow style! They were bound for the shrine at Sainte Anne.

"And he stood up straight and aimed his eyes at me steady as guns, and he says, 'Jake, I suppose you'll be making the Talisman Club along around tomorrow noon, if you keep going at the clip you were hitting when you went past me just now?'

“When I said my clip was about according to the schedule planned, he says, ‘As you happen to run up against the boys, tell ‘em where you saw me, what I was doing and say I am having the best time of my life and will be back on the job, sooner or later, a new man!’ And, believe me, he put a devil of a lot of emphasis on the word ‘new.’ He looked at the blue-eyed girl when he said it!

“Fill up again! Can’t use good stuff in a better cause! Here’s to John’s coming back! And here’s to the wonderful girl with the big blue eyes, whoever she may be!”

Then Member Mathison squinted at the depleted bottle, decided it was not worth carrying away and departed breezily.

Devon did not take part in the discussion of the strange news. He went into the grill alone and ordered his lunch. While waiting for it, he hurried to the telephone. He called the Trask mansion and gave his name and was able to get in touch with Mrs. Trask, herself. For some weeks, since the return to town of the mistress of the Double T from the North country, the law firm of Blake, Devon & Walsh had been attending to certain legal matters connected with the settlement of the estate. There were new complications demanding prompt action by attorneys.

Over the telephone he informed her of his desire to see her on a matter of business, and she granted him permission to call on her within an hour.

He devoured his lunch with the air of a man who was too deeply absorbed in thought to take any interest in food. Devon had been guessing, and he had spent some money in securing information.

His agent had trailed certain squatters of the North country after they had scattered to the four winds,

following the affair of the conflagration which had swept over the Double T acres.

He was not sure of having been able to winnow the truth from the lies. But, so the squatters asserted, they had been ordered to drive away a meddlesome old witchman. They said Anita Trask had given those commands. The story had become common property in the North country, and the Trask estate might be mulcted.

Devon had been apprised that other land-owners, whose timber had been destroyed, were threatening to bring suit, under the law which permits damaged abutters to collect from an owner who has allowed fires to be set. But what was more vital information for the needs of Larry Devon was the description of the stranger who had held off the mob which attacked the man known as The Charmer of Angel Knob. The squatters had been explicit on that point.

The lawyer was sure in his own mind that Anita Trask understood well enough who the stranger was—the man who had joined Ashael in flight and had been swallowed by the flaming forests.

As opportunity offered, Devon had been studying Anita Trask, and estimating her situation since she had arrived in town from the North country. Her coming away had been flight, he was told. Not all the statements of the squatters found credence up there, but enough was believed to make the threats against her open and vicious. In the city she had become a recluse, except for the interviews she had granted her attorneys.

Devon not only had guessed—he began to hope, at last! He was a bachelor, he was covetous. He was giving her time to recover from the shock of Lang's disappearance—a matter about which all sorts of

stories were afloat. The general belief was that his charred bones were somewhere in the region laid waste by the racing holocaust.

Devon resolved to be the first to give her the news which Mathison had brought. As long as Devon had believed that Lang was dead he perceived an opportunity which he might be able to grasp, eventually. Lang, alive, was manifestly allowing Anita to suffer on in her uncertainty; he was in the North country in the company of a handsome girl.

Devon had been hoping for his success after Anita's sorrow should be dead! Now he was hoping for quicker good fortune after he had been able to fan jealousy into life—making it so keen that her resentment would turn her from Lang to himself. Therefore, Devon rushed to her after his lunch.

When she came into the room where he waited for her, he reflected sourly that though her black garb might be the conventional mourning for Serenus Trask, an unloved husband, her white face was a tribute to her fears or her despair in regard to John Lang.

Devon had been wondering how long her nature would remain true to a man who had gone away, or who was dead. Some women were persistent fools on that point! But, so he was quite sure, all women were alike after they had been flouted and scorned.

With malicious emphasis he told the news which Mathison had related at the club. She had seated herself, showing the lassitude of hopeless woe, when he began to talk. But the instant she understood what his message was, she leaped up and beat her hands together, crying out to him, "It's a lie!"

"But it's the solemn truth! He's on the Chaudiere road, wheeling that chair, making slow work of it, so Mathison said—and Mathison can be depended on.

Lang is stringing out the job because he has that handsome girl with him. It's plain enough what has happened."

He was glad when he noted the flush which now began to color her cheeks; he welcomed the new brilliancy sparkling in her eyes. He talked more about the girl and of Lang's enjoyment of the trip, elaborating what Mathison had reported on the thing.

Anita, not speaking, was transfigured. From the pallor of listless despair she flamed into the hues of fervid emotion. Devon told himself he had seen jealousy afire, before in his life, but nothing so lurid as that!

He was tempted to take advantage of the situation and to put himself forward as a man who could give her the real devotion she deserved. She was saying nothing—she walked up and down the room and he waited for the outburst which would confirm his convictions that he had done a good job.

But when she turned and addressed Devon her tones were low and thrilling. "The man you speak of—when did he see John Lang?"

"Yesterday, around about this time, I should say. It's a straight road—he came right along."

"It's wonderful news you have brought to me, Mr. Devon, this news that John Lang is safe and well. I thank you." She spoke softly, but her suppressed emotion was visible. She paid no more attention to Devon. She rang and a servant promptly came.

"Have my car brought to the door! Tell the driver we are going to Quebec! Send my maid!" With the air of one to whom moments were precious, she ran away, leaving Devon standing there.

He waited in the room, thinking she would return. But when she came down the stairs she hurried across

the hall and out to the car without a glance in Devon's direction.

After a few moments, he managed his gaping jaws, got his voice, swore hot oaths and kicked an ottoman. Then he rushed out to his cab, picked up a few belongings on his way to the railroad station and bought his reservation on the Canadian express. He intended to be in on the "grand wallop," so his thoughts termed it, whatever it might be!

Through the glare and the dust of the July afternoon, through cities and villages, across rivers and over hills, Anita's car flashed on its way. All night, by the main highway winding through the wooded mountains which divide the Atlantic slope from the Laurentian valley, the tireless motor purred. In the dawn they crossed the line between the countries. They halted there only for the observance of the regulations of the customs posts.

Anita had kept vigil through the night, making sure the driver did not doze, though he assured her he was not weary.

When at last they came to the rolling farms and the villages of the broad Chaudiere valley and swept along the smooth turnpike, her eyes were wide, her lips apart and her pose was of strained intensity.

She was on the watch for a man who was trundling a wheel chair in which a crippled child was riding. She was frenziedly seeking to solve a mystery which had been torturing her by visions at night and making hideous her waking fears by day.

For she knew, to her anguish, that the flames which ravaged the North country and kept John Lang from keeping his solemn promise to come to her at Hagas, were as criminally her own responsibility as if she herself had set match to tinder.

She had believed him dead!

Devon had brought to her tidings more glorious in her case than annunciation by a herald angel.

John Lang was alive! What he was doing mattered naught!

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE PILGRIMS IN THE DUST



HE unalloyed joy of the child who rode in the wheel chair was the keynote for the harmony which attended on the pilgrims from Boisvert. In her circle so pathetically narrowed by her misfortune, she had seen only the little white houses, the river and the domed hills which penned in the limits of her village. "And I have always wondered what was behind the hills," she confided to Lang.

"So have I, every time I have looked up at them, no matter what hills they were." He repeated to Jessie his well conned lines from Tennyson, his eyes studying Mavis's face as they walked along. He dwelt with special tenderness on the words, "Through all the world she followed him."

For most of the way Mavis walked with Lang.

It was a leisurely pilgrimage for which they had allowed plenty of time. Duncan wrapped the reins about the whipstock and lounged on the wagon seat and hummed songs. Old Joan rode in the wagon. She had brought hampers of food. They ate their lunches by the wayside, under the trees. Nights they lodged at little inns or at farmhouses where they were welcomed.

During the heat of the day they rested; they travelled in the early, fresh mornings or in the cool dusk. They held humbly to the edge of the broad highway, leaving plenty of room for the tourists in the rushing motor cars.

There were many others who went slowly—farmers and Canadian carters and vegetable venders bound for the open-air markets of Quebec. The pilgrims made friends among those who plodded, and the plight of the child in the wheel chair attracted much sympathetic interest.

Beside the highway, here and there, were outdoor shrines, and the humble new friends o' the road often went and knelt before the figures in the niches and offered honest prayers for the sake of the child.

Jock Duncan ventured no comment on what he had been wont to term papist idolatry; he looked on and listened tolerantly. All this quest and journey of his little flock seemed to be for the child's sake and he was in the mood to welcome aid of any sort. He constantly quizzed the Canadians, having a smattering of their *patois* at his command, asking about the wonders alleged to have been wrought at the shrine of Sainte Anne.

Every turn of the road, every house, every village developed new features of delight for Jessie. The lint-white locks fluttered, so quickly did she constantly turn her head, eagerly observing all objects in order that she might not miss anything.

At one place there was a railroad crossing and they waited patiently until at last a train came clattering along the "*chemin de fer.*" She had never seen such a spectacle, and she marvelled.

"We'll come back on the train of cars as far as the iron road will bring us," Lang promised her. "But we must get all the good we can out of the pilgrimage, going on foot down to the shrine."

He was lingering with fond delay over the hours of their journey, passing them through his thoughts with the same reverent deliberateness displayed by

those who knelt at the wayside shrines and told the beads of their rosaries.

Often he found Mavis regarding him with an expression whose meaning he could not fathom. He was not flattered; the expression certainly did not convey any sentiments of fondness. On the contrary, there seemed to be some sort of fear in her. One day, when they were nearing the river, he succumbed to the impulse to question her. She made no reply even when he pressed her earnestly. Her fear seemed to become more acute.

"I have been grateful for the sunshine all the way," he told her. "I have been more grateful for the happiness. But that happiness is clouded when you look at me as you do."

"I have only good thoughts for you—please understand that! But I'm growing to be afraid because my friendship may have led me to do something which will seem like going too far—and then you will not understand how I meant it."

"There's nothing your friendship could do for me—absolutely nothing I wouldn't heartily approve, Mavis." After the first day of the pilgrimage he used her name frankly, without embarrassment. "And I have had every proof from you that you're my kind, true friend. Tell me your trouble, and see how quickly I'll laugh it away."

"I'll tell you at Sainte Anne. I'll dare tell you then because I'll be obliged to tell you."

"If you'll be obliged to tell me it will not be so very daring! I'd rather you'd do things, where I'm concerned, that haven't any flavor of obligation about them."

"Not till Sainte Anne!" she insisted firmly.

"It seems as though a great many wonderful events

are looked for at Sainte Anne! Well, I'll wait just as patiently as Jessie is waiting. I hope what you have to tell me will be my own personal blessing at the shrine. I'll pray for it."

She turned and left him with a swift excuse and went to the wagon, before he had time to note her pallor.

"Child, have you any idea what it is your sister means to tell me?" he asked Jessie.

"No, sir! And how about the promise you just made to her? If I didn't love you so much I'd be telling her you don't mean to keep your promises when you make 'em to her."

"I am well scolded!" he laughed. "And I impose sentence on myself, here and now. Yonder is a sign which tells me that a certain Madame Belliveau sells ice cream. Procession, halt!" He brought the ice cream out to them, along with some of Madame Belliveau's little cakes, and they ate under a wayside tree.

It was there Anita Trask came upon Lang in her rush down the broad highway. He paid no attention to the limousine when it swung to the side of the road and stopped; he was teasing the child by pretending to rob her of her little cakes. He did not heed Anita even when she beckoned from the window of her car and called to him.

But he did take note when Mavis spoke to him; he glanced up quickly at her, alarmed by her choking tone. When he saw her white face and the expression in her eyes he was thoroughly frightened. He started to go to her but she directed his attention with a gesture and he turned and saw Anita. But he promptly whirled about and faced Mavis again, filled with solicitude in her behalf. He did not understand. He wondered what the girl of Boisvert could have heard

about his association with Anita. He had never mentioned the widow of Serenus Trask.

“What is the trouble? What has happened, Mavis?”

“I wanted to do something to help you—to help more. And now I’m afraid! I had no right to meddle.”

She hurried away, and he stood in his tracks, staring at her. Then he was aware that Anita was calling his name over and over, sharply insistent. She was some distance away and was obliged to call loudly.

He went to the side of her car and greeted her with cold politeness; his puzzled fears were so persistently engaged with Mavis’s strange demeanor that he was having hard work to take interest even in a visitation so astonishing as the arrival of Anita Trask!

“You’re alive! I heard of it. I hurried here!”

“Yes!” he returned, his tone noncommittal.

“I know why you look at me that way. You believe the lies those wretches told about me that night on Angel Knob. I know what they said. I hunted some of them down and I lashed them with my whip for their lies.”

“The matter is of no further importance to me, Mrs. Trask, one way or the other.”

“But you were put in danger of your life and you have been thinking I was the cause.”

“Will you pardon me when I say I have not been devoting any thought to you?” By stressed hostility of tone and manner he was doing his best to fend her off. He tried to barricade himself against her dangerous hysteria of abandon. He was guarding the shrine in which he had placed Mavis.

“But your looks show you are hating me for what you may have believed I did! I can read your mind!”

"If you really could read my mind," he returned mildly, "you would know I no longer have any hatred for any person in this world. I speak the truth!" He was convincing.

"Why have you been hiding from me? What has happened to you?"

"So much has happened I have no time to tell it now, and if I ever did tell it to you I'm afraid you would not understand."

"But you must tell me! Something, at any rate, John Lang! I demand it! I have the right to know! You promised to come to me. It was a pledge. It has been said of you that you never broke your pledge."

"I intended to keep my word to you, Mrs. Trask. I had started to come to you. I stopped for the night with Ashael—and at dawn I was to begin my journey to Hagas." He was looking hard into her wavering eyes. "But in the night a raging conflagration drove me north—away from you."

"I know what you mean," she insisted. However, the spirit was gone out of her. Her lips were trembling. "But you told me you intended to stay on Borestone."

"And on Borestone, you'll remember, I told you I intended to be honest with you! I'll be honest, now, as we meet again.

"I left Borestone suddenly because I was lonely there—because you had touched my heart—because I wanted to talk with you once more. But now—keeping straight on the track of honesty—I tell you I hope I may never see you again in this life. That's brutal—but it may put you into a proper state of mind toward me. It will not be good for us to see each other again."

"Oh, God—my punishment!" she wailed.

He was gentle with her. "I have been punished, too, by my own acts. It has been bitter business. But after the punishment, when one knows it has been deserved, the way back to peace is open. Understand, please, I'm talking only about myself! I have no intention of preaching to anybody else. I'm not fit to be a preacher."

She saw he was about to leave her; she reached swiftly and held him by the sleeve, the rough cloth of the toiler of the North country. "John Lang, there has never been any other man in this world who could talk good advice to me. I'd never let a man advise me. My whole soul told me I needed you. I'll not allow you to leave me like this! I swear you shall not! Come with me! Talk to me!"

"No, I cannot go with you. I have undertaken a task. I must go on with it."

"What kind of a task? What is it you're doing? Think of it—an important man like you are in the world, going on foot in the dust and wheeling a little girl!"

"I am a very small—a very humble man these days, Mrs. Trask. I have no time for more talk. I must go on."

"Where? Where are you going?"

"To the shrine of Sainte Anne de Beaupré."

"For what?"

"I am taking that crippled child there, hoping for a blessing. I'll admit I'm hoping for a blessing for myself."

"But it's only for Catholics—I have heard of that place."

He smiled—there were patience and wistfulness in the smile. "As a lawyer I know that our human

judges have no prejudices in regard to creeds when petitioners come before them. I certainly do not believe that the Eternal Judge of the Universe is less broad in His consideration of cases."

He bowed, took her hand and lifted it from his sleeve, then clasped it cordially. "I must say good bye!" He walked away.

"No, it is not good bye, John Lang," she called after him defiantly. "If there's a place where there are blessings for everybody, I'm glad to know of it! I'll go there, myself. I'll be waiting for you at Sainte Anne."

She did not order her car to proceed; she sat and observed him with curiosity.

He went straight to Mavis and gazed long into her troubled countenance. "You must not misunderstand for a moment. Do you know who that is, yonder?"

"It is—it is—I could not see her face, but she is ——" she was not able to go on.

"It is the widow of Serenus Trask, the rich man who owned the timber company known as the Double T. I was his attorney."

Her frank astonishment informed him that this information was real news. More than ever was he puzzled as he reflected on her demeanor when Anita had arrived and on the words Mavis had uttered. He ventured to ask some questions. But she would not answer them. Her expression of fear returned. "I'll explain at Sainte Anne!"

"Very well!" he agreed indulgently. "Everything is to be made clear for all of us at Sainte Anne, so it seems! Therefore, let's hurry!"

Again he started on with the wheel chair, and the slow wagon rumbled behind. After they had pro-

ceeded for a little distance Anita's car overtook them. It rolled slowly past and the mistress of the Double T, framed in the window, frankly stared at the girl who was walking at Lang's side.

Mavis returned the gaze. She perceived something outside the bounds of the conventional relations between client and counsel. After the car had gone on, the girl cast glances at Lang as if she were hoping he would comment on the affair. His manner indicated that he was thinking deeply.

"She is very beautiful," suggested the girl.

"Very, indeed!"

"And she is very rich, is she?" There had been a long silence before she had ventured with this question.

"Yes!" Then there was a longer silence.

"I should think there would be many admirers!"

"I know of none."

"I should like to hear a great deal about her. Won't you tell me?"

"It may be," he drawled, with a perverse and rather childish suggestion of having been irritated by her tenacity in holding to her own secret, "that the matter will come up when hearts are generally opened at Sainte Anne. We need to wait only until day after tomorrow."

That was the afternoon of the twenty-fourth day of July, and they were near the end of the journey.

In the dusk they crossed on the big ferry from Levis and, while the boat drove on, Jessie, raptly silent, wore the expression of a child who had arrived in wonderland.

It was a calm night; the linked lights which were strung from the Lower Town to The Heights flashed against the soft gloom like jewels on black velvet and the reflections trembled in the swirling current of the

great river. Faint and far, a band pulsed music for the pleasure of the promenaders on the Frontenac Terrace, and the majestic Chateau, with its lights, was like a fairy palace, so the marvelling child found it.

They lodged for the night in humble quarters in The Lower Town and were on their way next morning at sunrise.

Lang purposed to make two stages of the journey to Sainte Anne, down the river. He could not hurry because he was reserving one especial spectacle for Jessie's eyes, keeping his plans from her.

When at last they came to the edge of a great gorge and heard the thunder of falling waters, he lifted her in his arms and carried her to the cable car and they descended to the foot of the magnificent cataract of Montmorency.

The pilgrims of Boisvert sat for a long hour and gazed up at the white flood which veiled the cliffs; they listened to the mighty monotone of tumbling waters. They uttered no words to each other. The child braided her trembling fingers with Lang's, and he wondered at the thoughts which were behind those enthralled and earnest eyes.

It might well be, he pondered, she was thinking, hopefully, that Nature's God who had fashioned this tremendous work at which she stared could easily give strength to the stricken limbs of a poor little girl—and only a puny miracle this would be beside the miracle of Montmorency!

One more night—the hither side of Sainte Anne—they lodged in a farmhouse whose whitewashed walls invited them to the cleanliness they found within-doors.

Again in the early morning they went on their way, ahead of the flood of the pilgrims who would later

crowd the narrow road between the rows of little houses. After a time, softened by distance, they heard the chimes of Sainte Anne, signalling her Feast Day, promising the beneficence of her especial bounty to those who should come and kneel in humility and faith.

Lang kept his eyes from the child's face, then. He could not endure an expression which had become veritable agony of hope. He walked on without speaking. A great sob was crowding in his throat and dammed back words.

His eyes were not so well guarded. Every time he looked at Mavis and caught her responsive gaze, his tears welled and dripped frankly upon his cheeks.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE MYSTERY OF THE NIGHT



ON the night when the pilgrims from Boisvert lodged humbly in Quebec's Lower Town, the mistress of the Double T was installed grandly on The Heights in the city's most palatial hotel.

She had been defiant when she made her declaration to John Lang that all was not over between them. The spirit of defiance was persisting in her. She always had been able to assume such an attitude with men, even when she was merely a slip of a girl in the woods, meeting her first ardent wooers, her chin uplifted, her narrowed eyes flashing her disdain, her lip curling with scorn—as naturally a protector of herself as one of the wild things of the forest would be, repelling an undesired mate.

In the matter of Lang her mood was of a mixed quality. She was defying the conditions with which he had surrounded himself, because this impulse helped the new determination to win him for herself.

She was proceeding according to the code of those materialists who are convinced that nobody will think well of a person unless the person thinks extremely well of himself! She was putting herself into a condition of mind where she would be able to cope with this amazing, new personage whom she had overtaken on the Chaudiere highway.

She was encouraged, being no keen analyst of the deeper mental qualities, by his new spirit of humility. In the back of her head she was patronizing this man

whom she had seen trudging in the dust; she held to that last mental photograph of him, for her own stimulation of purpose. He was going through some sort of a period of folly and she was sure she would be able to make him see the way back to common sense.

She knew she was the mistress of much wealth; she did not know how much—she had never asked! She was waiting for John Lang to tell her, desiring to share with him the joy of complete realization.

She was not able to grasp the idea of great amounts—it would have meant little to her to know in detail her holdings and their totals. Money was for the day—what it would buy for the enjoyment of the day, the jewels to flash radiance into her admiring eyes, the comfort of attire and surroundings, the subservience of underlings.

Exploitation of wealth made her conscious of its value—of her own importance as its possessor. And if she were important, desirable, powerful, who was John Lang to deny her influence and repel her, when his mind and his natural desires were brought back to normal? In Anita's judgment, being pretty much a pagan, a man who would persist in putting aside such love and riches as she could offer was merely suffering from a mania, and it must be cured!

Therefore, she nursed her mood of magnitude and catered to her sense of power and possession. She was glad because she had ordered her maid to pack several cases.

A trail of lackeys followed her when she walked from her car into the hotel, each lackey with a case. She demanded the best suite available. She took no thought about what custom prescribed for a woman who had been recently widowed. She had been in

mourning only for John Lang—and that period of mourning was over.

Therefore, she attired herself for dinner in resplendent fashion, with the aid of a hotel maid, sorry because she had not brought her own attendant from home. But it had been in her hopes that John Lang, at sight of her, would desert his folly of the dusty road. She wanted no maid to share the intimacy of the limousine.

She dined in the public hall and was proud of the attention she attracted. But when she was back in her suite, alone, and had put off the rich garb and the jewels, and while she sat beside the window, looking out on the river and the lights and up into the starred heavens, she set herself to ponder on the manner of John Lang when he had last talked to her.

At first, there was only a vague, undefinable uneasiness which hovered over her meditations. She had never bothered her head much with introspection or with reflection on the subtler incentives for human action. She had seen the visible objects of desire—had promptly desired, had reached out, had employed the beauty which is always powerful in the winning of the ordinary run of men, and had prevailed.

But it was borne in on her that John Lang had been fortified this day by something against which she had thrown herself only to her own hurt. Her vague uneasiness grew swiftly into anguish of apprehension, as dull ache increases to lancinating pain. There was something deep, strange, compelling, which actuated men at times, and she did not understand it.

Her sense of power and confidence of ability in persuasion were slipping from her, in spite of all the efforts to assure herself. She clenched her fists and tried to put away such thoughts. She moaned when

other thoughts came to her. She had been able to keep them down in the past, when she had been dealing with only material matters—holding her mind on her desires and confident of her ability to proceed in accordance with those desires.

What was this wall against which she was vainly beating—and what was the mystery of Sainte Anne—the thing that was calling John Lang to go on foot, wheeling a cripple in a chair?

The next morning she adventured forth, seeking a solution. She did not call her limousine; she went in plain attire and walked to a railroad station to which her inquiries directed her. She alighted later from the train along with many other women and men.

She beheld the twin towers of the basilica and went near enough to the door to hear the pulsing roll of organ music and the chant of voices. She did not enter. She had never been inside a church. She had heard lay preachers in the woods and they did not interest her. According to her notions, church services consisted of prosy talks about goodness, and most of the folks she had known went to church only for the looks of the thing.

She strolled about the village of Sainte Anne, along the narrow board walks, past the little shops crowded close to the street, elbowing strangers and wondering what there was in the place to attract so many persons. She ate lunch in an inn where the linen was spotted and the dishes were nicked and the food was greasy. Constantly her depression of spirits, her sense of importance, went lower and lower. She walked slowly past many booths where folks were buying little images and crucifixes and other strange knickknacks.

There was a great statue in the yard before the

church—the statue of a woman who held a small child in her arms. Flanking the doors of the basilica were other statues in robes. She felt no interest in them.

She did take a moment's interest, however, in a man who was crouched at the gateway of the yard, a man with reddened, empty eyesockets. He was rattling a few Canadian coppers in a tin cup. She carelessly threw a bill into the cup. But the soft money made no sound and he did not thank her as he had thanked the others who dropped pennies and gave with them a word of sympathy.

There was a hill up which whiplashed a broad gravel walk along terraces. By the side of the walk were groups of statuary, the figures molded in heroic size. She stood long in front of one of these groups and found it very dreadful, according to her way of thinking. A man with a savage countenance of bronze, an expression of malice hardened everlastingly into fierce determination, was driving a nail into the foot of a man who lay on a cross.

After a while she came to a building where a broad stairway led directly up from a porch. Men and women and children were slowly climbing those stairs on their knees. She wondered what there was above to attract them, and she started to walk up. A cassocked priest halted her and told her politely she must go up on her knees. She would not do that, and she turned away and left the place.

She saw many persons going into the church by way of the wide doors, but her prejudices against going to church persisted.

Then she walked far into the places where the houses were fewer, along the road which led to Quebec. She sat for a long time beside a wayside trough where

the water came plashing down from the high hill. She was looking for a man to come along, wheeling a crippled girl in a chair. But when she took thought on distances, she realized he must still be far from Sainte Anne.

There was nothing in the place for her—she was growing more lonely and heart-sick every moment.

There was her grand suite in the big hotel! She wanted to go back to it—to recover her poise and her sense of power!

However, when she arrived at the railroad station in the village, she remembered the supreme misery of her night thoughts in the hotel and was afraid to go back to the scene where those reflections would be revived.

The afternoon had nearly dragged its length, and she found food in another inn and sat for a time in the tawdry parlor of the place, looking at the pictures of holy personages on the walls.

In the twilight the chimes sent their slow melody over the village and the countryside. From the inn window she beheld a movement of the people in one direction and she went out and joined the throngs. While the chimes played, and the organ pealed, a long procession came out of the door of the church, and swung with slow and solemn tread and went up the walk along the terraces. There were many torches above the heads of the marchers. Constantly the cassocked priests, and the men who followed them, chanted. The slow pulsations of their voices echoed back and forth between the walls of the great church and the steep hillside. The smoke of the torches swirled up among the branches of the trees and the hill was veiled in a mystic shroud.

Anita asked somebody what all this meant and she

was told it was the solemn procession which made the stations of the cross on the night before the Feast Day of the good Sainte Anne.

She began to be aware of an emotion that had never entered her soul before. It was something issuing from her anguished uncertainties of the night in the hotel on The Heights.

She had never known there was any mystery in religion. She had merely viewed the outside of a matter which seemed to be reserved for folks who liked to listen to sermons or hear a choir sing hymns. Her emotions, if ever they had possessed any especial depth, had only been concerned with human affairs. But now she found herself swayed by new and strange and vivid agitations which she could not understand.

When the slow procession returned and reëntered the church, she followed. With John Lang in her thoughts, she was seeking what she had come to Sainte Anne to discover, if she could.

Just inside the broad door there was a display of crutches and canes and all sorts of evidences of human infirmities. She saw a man add another crutch, thatching it with the rest; he went hobbling along up the aisle of the church.

Anita sat down in a pew near the door. With wide eyes she stared steadfastly at the crutches and other melancholy gear which had served crippled humanity. The monument of woe bulked hugely and reached far up toward the roof of the church. A large center rod of iron supported metal circlets in which these grim votive offerings had been placed, stuffing each circlet to capacity.

She did not understand the matter very well; the man who had recently added his crutch was now far

up the aisle, barely able to make his way by holding to the ends of the pews. Anita questioned a person beside her.

"He is going to pray to the good saint for his healing. He is showing his faith by walking as best he can."

Then Anita rose and tiptoed around the sombre monument, touching some of the objects. She shuddered. She had never been conscious of such a queer feeling before. A woods wiseacre had once talked to her about the strange sensation a human being has, stepping on earth which later is to cover that being after death. The remembrance flashed into her mind—she knew not why; she was not treading on soil!

Nor did she understand the full significance of the great pile. Neither did she comprehend what the person had said about faith. Anita shook her head and sat down again in the pew.

Splendidly illuminated, far up the nave near the marble rail of the chancel, loomed a replica of the statue which she had seen that day in the yard—the woman who held the infant in her arms. Jewels gleamed on the statue's head.

The organ, hidden from Anita, rolled great volumes of sound through the vast interior. Melodious voices chanted. Everlastingly people came and went. They bobbed at the entrances of the pews with respectful genuflections. Others passed into the arched entrances of the chapels which flanked the main body of the church.

It was the night before the Feast Day. Pilgrims were constantly arriving. Train-loads were poured out at the station.

All the forty confessional chapels were crowded; men and women were awaiting their turn. A priest mounted into the pulpit and solemnly dwelt upon the

need of telling one's sins to God through the intercession of a tender church and he rendered reverence to the saints who pitied those who had sinned through human weakness.

Hour by hour, the girl who had never known the mystery of the Divine searching of the heart, sat there and listened.

At midnight the confessionals were still crowded, the masses were going on. She saw all those thousands owning to their sins and coming away with faces calmed by peace or brightened by new hope.

In the past she had seen other persons come out of the woods camp or from a wayside schoolhouse, of a Sunday, their countenances smoothed by the same contentment which marked these folks coming from the chapels of confession.

What did it all mean?

She ventured to put questions to a woman who knelt in the pew and was telling her beads.

"I don't know so as to explain. But God forgives all sinners through the saints and the blessed Mother. Ask the priest. He will tell you."

Something was awaking in Anita, creature of impulse who had been always a feather on the tide of strong emotion. The music of the organ, the chanting voices did not soothe her; the sounds stirred more deeply her longing for help from somebody—somehow—till that longing became agonizing. She had been depending on John Lang—he had refused to help her.

She rose and went to a confessional but she had not the courage to kneel and appeal to the unseen. She wanted to look into somebody's eyes when she told her story. Her spirituality was too benumbed to understand any other way of confessing.

She did not dare remain longer in that place, the

influences of which seemed to be tearing the secrets from her soul. The feeling that she must tell somebody—ask help from somebody, had become an obsession which was forcing her to a state of hysteria. She was afraid she would leap upon the seat of the pew and cry aloud her appeal for help; in that throng there must be somebody who would know how to aid her. The feeling which had come over her was so new and strange that she had not provided weapons in her armory of self with which to resist it. She fled from the church and was amazed to note that dawn was gray in the eastern sky. Breathing the fresh air, she felt the relief of one who had escaped from danger and she was resolved to put the danger behind her.

Therefore, she made hasty inquiry of a person whom she met in the village street. He told her there would not be any train for Quebec for many hours. She decided to walk; exertion, physically, might help to dull her sharp-edged thoughts.

She was glad to be headed away from the place whose effect on her had been so mysterious—where her secrets had been imperilled. But, as she walked on, despondency overtook her and kept step with her. She had not found what those others had seemed to find at Sainte Anne; and she realized how bitterly she needed counsel and consolation.

She knew she would not find those aids in her lonely suite in the grand hotel. There were no friends awaiting her there. The woman in the pew had said the saints were friends. However, Anita hurried on along the narrow road. There was danger back there where the words had been striving to rush out past the sobs in her throat.

Borne to her ears on the morning breeze came the mellow clangor of the chimes of Sainte Anne. She

strove to hurry faster, but she could not. They all had said it was back there where one could find peace!

She stopped and listened and wavered. Then she turned and slowly retraced her steps.

Advice—and counsel and consolation!

Some mysterious power had broken down the strong resolution which till then had enabled her to keep certain thoughts tamed and in their allotted places in the dark cells of her conscience. She felt self-control leaving her. She was dominated by an influence against which she had no further will to fight.

She remembered that once Serenus Trask had asked her if there ever had been insanity in her family. His query had followed on prolonged scrutiny of her after one of her fits of emotionalism provoked by some happening.

She did not know anything about her family. Now she was wondering. Her temples throbbed. She wanted to shriek there in the morning silence of the countryside. The sound of bells—mere bells—had obliged her to turn and go toward them in spite of what, she considered, was a definite resolve to keep on to a place where she would never hear those chimes again. She shuddered when she remembered those confessionals and the men and women kneeling at the wickets and murmuring into unseen ears the recital of their sins.

But she kept on toward Sainte Anne!

Every little while she looked anxiously over her shoulder, seeking the expected coming of a man of much human wisdom, who was wheeling a crippled child in a chair.

She was between the magnets of the mystic and the mortal; she was wondering whether it would be the mystic or the mortal which might render the aid she so cruelly needed.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE TRUTH FROM THE EYES



THAT morning peculiar constraint marked the manner of Mavis with Lang, and his mood matched her own. Knowing Anita, he did not permit himself to hope that she would not fulfill her implied threat, and he glanced up nervously whenever a motor car whirred past them on its way to Sainte Anne.

Sight of her, and his approaching and inevitable return to that world of his former activities—a return already heralded by the declaration he had made to the clubman in the valley of the Chaudiere, was stirring into uncomfortable activity the self which had been John Lang! It was a self which jeered at this incredibly childish and superstitious thing the new John Lang was doing. It was insisting with diabolical plausibility that this new thing was merely a phase of the old, self-advertising instinct of the Lang who had sought selfish ease of mind and personal advancement by a show of generosity.

Now, so he was honest enough to acknowledge, it had mocked the real thing. He wondered whether all his new impulse of tenderness and penance might come from the weakness of weary nerves and a blind man's thoughts and paralyzing fears.

Then, mentally canvassing all the reasons which had sent him faring in the open along the broad highway, he was almost willing to cast aside all the casuistry and admit, man-fashion, that the compelling motive of his action was the deepest motive of human life—

strong, earnest, self-effacing love of man for maid. In offering to help one who was dear to her, he realized that he had looked forward to these days of close companionship and levelling intimacy.

Mavis walked silently, intent on the woman conflict that woke in her as she neared the place where she had promised to reveal her secret. Therefore, brooding and depression beclouded them within sight of the town and in hearing of those bells which should have lent poignancy to their joyful expectation.

Jessie, sensitive to their mood, huddled in her chair, silent and wide-eyed. Even Jock Duncan was dour and silent that morning, wearing the air of a man who had allowed a will-o'-the-wisp to lead him, but who had set himself to carry through a fool's errand.

They were going down the long slope into the village of Sainte Anne when a woman rushed from the wayside and clutched at Lang's arm, halting him. A woman so haggard from sleeplessness and fear, so dishevelled and dusty and distraught that it took his unready wits a few seconds to make sure this was really Anita Trask who beat on his breast with her clenched fists while she raved from command to accusation.

"You planned it to get me here, you John Lang, you tool of the law! And their devilment has got me and pulled up into my throat all the words I had hidden—and they're choking me—choking me, do you hear? Once you helped me to hold back the words. Now you've got to help me to get rid of them! You thought those clever ones would get me to talk with the rest of the fools who were doing that thing they call confessing—but I'm afraid, I'm afraid! Only I've got to get rid of these words in my throat and find peace again. You put an iron band around my throat—you did all

the talking in the courtroom! Now you must take away that band!"

She bared her teeth and struggled with her fingers at an invisible circlet on her neck. "I've got to feel the way those people felt last night—not afraid any more, not covering things any more! And you know how to help me, you know how to speak for people to get them free, and you shall do it for me—get me free again, do you hear? Else I'll——"

He had protested earnestly during her vehemence. Now he gripped the hands which pummelled him and forced them to stillness while he strove to warn and quiet her by his steady look. When he broke in on her with a sharp command to be quiet till time and place were suitable she wrenched herself free, with a shrill, short cry of mounting hysteria.

"*Now*—I tell you, *now!*" she raved. "I will not suffer like this. You worked on me to get me here, and you sent those hidden men to frighten me all through the dark, dark night. You want to be rid of me and get out of me what I owe to your law! I've got to let you do it. I can't stand any more. I can't keep my head steady any more. Now I'm letting you do as you want to! You must do it now. Hear me and let me have my peace again or I'll scream to all this town—I'll run up and down the streets screaming about you and what you want of me!"

"Stop! Listen to me a moment!" Beyond all doubting Lang knew that this was no mere whirlwind of Anita's temper, unstable though he found her nature in the past. This half-demented creature, worked upon by some impulse at whose whole scope he dared not guess, was bent on making a confession which he shrank from hearing, even though he felt there would be no surprise for him in what she had to say.

Crazed she was, to be sure, but in a flash of realization he perceived the working of the Great Law which he was beginning to understand—the Law which evil unwittingly invokes for its own undoing. He felt that he was a servant of that Law.

“I will listen to what you have to say,” he assured her. “But you must come with me into the village to the proper place. Another must listen along with me. I’ll arrange it. If you are determined to speak out, it must be as the law provides.”

With impulse to put a check on her speech he directed her attention to his companions whom she had been ignoring. “These friends——”

“Friends?” She flashed a glance at them. “Thieves!”

There was utter contempt in her tone. There was fury in her mien. She turned her back on the others. “These people all work together, you poor fool, to steal honest selves away and sell them to whatever it is that rules in this place and makes people afraid. They’ve worked on you, and you’re not yourself any more than I am myself. Do you dare tell me you’re the man I used to know? Don’t you know you are different, John Lang, and can you tell me what has changed you?”

In the stress of the moment there was no utterance possible save the simple truth. “Admitting that you find a change in me, I can only tell you what started the change!” He did not intend to be cruel; he was in no mood to bare his soul before this distracted girl. But he felt she would understand, out of her knowledge of her plot with the squatters, the full significance of the rift between him and her. “I am changed by the words and example of the old man who was called Ashael.”

"I knew it! I saw what he could do—and I hated him—hated him! He meant to put me away from you. It is his spell that's making me say the words I don't want to say. But he is too strong for me. I can't fight any longer. Come—wherever it is we must go. Hurry, hurry!"

Disregarding the others she caught at Lang's arm and jerked him along with her for a few paces. With a reassuring nod to Mavis he pushed away the clinging hands, strode back to Jessie's chair and grasped the handles again, calmly taking a pace which forced Anita to a normal gait.

At first she repeatedly darted ahead, spurred by the thoughts which kept her whispering and glancing from side to side; then she came sidling back and remained close to him as they entered the main street of the thronged village.

"About that old man—Ashael?" she questioned with crafty repression. "Do you believe the lies about me? Do you believe I told them to set that fire?"

Over her shoulder, as she stood, he noted on a window the sign, "Raoul Grivois, Avocat"; and early though the hour was he saw a man at a desk inside. Lang went on, his face grim with distaste for what was before him to do. Anita repeated her question, her tone sharp with demand.

"Ashael is gone," he parried quietly, "and there will be words enough to speak without troubling his name in this matter. Be quite sure he would wish you no ill, and that he would bid you have no fear of him, whatever the manner of his taking had to do with you."

He talked on, doing his best to quiet her. "I feel sure of what I say. Even at the last he was calm—he had no reproaches. As I have told you, his words

and his example urged me to make a test of the comfort and philosophy in humility. So, I have taken this road. And the road ends here!" He halted with the subdued throng at the church itself, as he spoke, gesturing Jock Duncan to wait with the wagon; and turning the chair from the highway he wheeled it into the yard, close to the statue of Sainte Anne in the grassy park.

"You and Jessie are safe here," he assured Mavis, gently. "I will tell your father where to put up his horses, and then he will come to you. I will be back as soon as I have done what I must do for Mrs. Trask. You are not afraid?" His solicitude was profound; in her eyes there was a wistful dread which he was not able to interpret.

Under his compassionate gaze her courage came back to her. "I am not afraid!" This was Mavis with her former poise; she looked up at him with clear and confident straightforwardness; and John Lang permitted himself one long second's refreshment in the blessedness of her eyes before he turned away to guide Anita to the ordeal of Raoul Grivois, Avocat.

That individual, a brown, gnome-like old-young man, looked over his shoulder at their entrance, pushed his chair back hastily and came forward with a profound salutation.

"An honor—I am honored, Monsieur Lang!"

"You know me?"

"When I was taking a special course in your city, Monsieur, I went to court always when you pleaded a case."

"Thank you! That you know me will make my business more easily done. This is Mrs. Trask."

The discreet Grivois permitted himself to see the

evidently fearful woman for the first time; he made her welcome with a profound bow.

“Mrs. Trask,” Lang proceeded, “is the widow of a former client of mine and she is—she desires——”

Anita flung out her hands so suddenly that Grivois jumped. “I killed a man. That is why I am here—you! I am here to talk to your law and make peace with it. I killed Mack Templeton. I killed him. There!” She hurried on. “And I killed another man—I suppose your law would say that—though it was not as I killed the first. The second man was a fool——”

“You will take down this statement, Attorney Grivois,” cut in Lang. The steadiness of his tone brought the dismayed avocat to himself and set him at his desk before pen and paper.

Rapidly but with dreadful coherence Anita Trask told of the killing of Mack Templeton.

“Then a fool came to me in my home that I had bought with blood and had given my soul for, and he kept saying to me, ‘Mack Templeton! Mack Templeton!’ Kept saying it and threatening what more he had to tell, and how could I know he was only guessing? He had a revolver to hush me with, or to kill my husband with—I don’t know which. He was promising dreadful things! But I got my arms around him before he knew what I meant to do and I—the thing was done somehow. I don’t know how! It killed him—somehow I pulled the trigger.

“And there was the old man Ashael! It was not with him as with the other! Only I hated him and was afraid; but I did not set the fire with my own hand. Only he is the one who wants me to tell everything,” she cried, her mania again overwhelming her.

“And I want to get it over with—all of it—all—all——”

With a quieting hand on her shoulder Lang checked her rising voice and sketched to the dumbfounded avocat the essentials of the confession, briefly and dispassionately. When Lang halted and devoted himself to deep thought there was silence in the room until he went on. “In the affair of young Trask I am, morally, more to be blamed than this poor girl. Yet the law leaves me to work out my responsibility without interference.”

“*Oui*—yes, Monsieur Lang,” stammered Grivois. “It is—it is—a sad business!”

It was plain that Lang lacked words with which to express his own convictions on this point.

He walked across the room; then he came back and faced the attorney. “This girl has been tried and set free on the Trask charge. Now you can understand, sir, the spirit in which I attempted her defense. I, myself, was on trial before Almighty God,” he declared with deep feeling, “while she was before the bar of human justice. As you and I understand, her life cannot be put in jeopardy again on that charge. As to Templeton, he was a renegade who forced this wife of his to the thing she did.” His voice broke when he cried, “My good Grivois, the boundaries of true justice lie wide outside the limits of our statute law!”

Avocat Grivois gestured helplessly.

Then the attorney set a chair at his desk. “It is true, Monsieur! But meantime—if Madame will be so kind—she is to sign here and make oath!”

Anita grasped at the pen which he proffered with a bow; she signed with frantic haste. When she had cast the pen from her she waited, looking expectantly

from one man to the other. The office clock ticked off ominous seconds. In the street outside the windows, the jostling throngs chattered and laughed.

"Well——" her hand went to her throat and her roving eyes stayed on Lang at last, widening and growing wild. "Where is my freedom for telling this? Where is my peace again? I have told the truth and all the truth. I have signed it before the law. I have looked into a face and spoken. But I am the same—and the whispering devils in me are the same. Have you lied to me? Is there some more to do? Is there somebody else to tell?"

"Your peace will be given to you in good time, Anita," Lang answered gravely; "but it is not a gift in the power of men."

Her grief-stricken wail was so keen and despairing that both men winced. "Where do I go for it, then?" She turned to the timid Grivois. "Is it only those in the church who know how to find the help? And how do they find it, and who will tell me? Is that where the old man is driving me? Is it in churches that the dead folks want us to make our peace with them? Then I will go there to them—I will tell this over again there—I have gone too far to stop now, and still the words choke me."

Before either man could move or lift a hand she had rushed to the door; she tore it open and was away, running.

"She must not!" Grivois spun around in a circle, seeking his hat, straining toward the door.

"She will go to the church," Lang assured the lawyer with a certainty which stirred his own wonder. "Send a man—or go, yourself, to watch her, if you will, but let us show all the consideration we can.

It may be—there is always a chance, you know, that she may find the peace she seeks.”

Grivois crossed himself unobtrusively and began hastily to put away the papers before leaving the office. “As you say, Monsieur Lang, she may—and today of all days. You will come again later—when?”

“After the Feast Day procession is over.”

The crowd in the narrow street had settled to a slow-creeping mass, and automobiles were lined close to the board sidewalks as Lang stepped down from the notary’s office.

There was no sign of Anita. So rapidly had moved the sequence of her coming and her confession, and so nightmarish the distress of her story and her danger, that when a gloved hand was thrust from a touring car to bar his way, he had a flicker of apprehension. He almost expected to behold Anita’s face, dispelling what seemed like a dream! He would not have been surprised to see her face, laughing and mischievous once more, as he remembered her fluctuating, fantastic moods.

But Reba Donworth smiled at him, greeted him and quickly stepped from the car to join him. She nodded an apology to her friends, took his arm and led him away through the crush. She chatted composedly, her topic the picturesqueness of the occasion which had brought the throngs to the village of Beaupré.

After a few rods a tree-shaded lane invited Lang’s volunteer guide and she led him off the street and halted him beneath a big willow. As he stopped in obedience to her pressure on his arm she stepped in front of him and threw her veil back over her hat.

Her poise was perfect—he lacked self-control lamentably. “The advantage is with me, John. I

have surprised you. But I knew you would be here today. Is all well with you?"

It was like her to face him squarely, like her to disdain the revealing strong light which showed unfamiliar shadows faintly laid in under her eyes, and the delicately indicated threat of lines running from nose to mouth, betokening old pain and enduring courage. A handsome woman still; fit mate for a man at his finest, a woman capable of unusual determinations and their determined carrying-out.

Once he had loved her by the standards of the man he then was. Now, giving full due to the splendid poise and grace and womanliness of her, he felt nothing save an all-masculine dread of her reason for seeking him; her declaration that she was seeking him had been frank.

"How did you know you would find me at Sainte Anne?"

At that she laughed delicately, but with such unfeigned amusement that John Lang blushed like a boy at his gaucherie and grinned back at her with a twinkle of shamefaced apology.

She patted his arm with a friendly palm. "It's all right, John! We're simply agreed at last on a most essential fact. But it may set your final qualm at rest if I tell you something about myself, even though you won't see at once why I tell you. Remembering what you said to me on one occasion in the way of certain permission as to my choice, what I have to tell you may comfort you. Some day—but in my own good time—I shall marry a man who is as strong as you are, so wise that he knows he needs my sort of woman to help him, and kind enough to take—what I have to give him and be content. I am beginning to

hope I shall give him more than I now suspect I have to give."

She smiled into his wondering, questioning eyes.

"May I know—is it simply a hazard of the future—is it——"

"It's a present reality—back there in yonder car with my friends, John."

"Thank God!" he blurted with a sincerity which stirred her amusement again.

"Enough of me and my affairs! I came here to speak to you of this." She opened her wrist bag, took out a travel-worn letter and put it into his hand, holding it there between both her own. "If you were not a changed John Lang you could not have inspired this letter, nor should I have travelled many miles to get it to you. But you are changed. I heard. Now I see! Tell me—do you want me to say I forgive, fully and freely, any unhappiness that may have come to me through you?"

Lang clenched his free hand about the small ones that were holding his. "Reba, it's one of the things I had set myself to work for——"

"All forgiveness is yours, John! It's the sort of gift that is a responsibility; and I have learned its value through suffering! I have learned, too, that only in giving do we get. This bit of paper between our palms is a token of that truth! It's a wonder the holy flame of it doesn't burn our hands! It's my blessed privilege to give you this letter with its message of love; because only a woman who loves in full measure could write such a letter. You love her, don't you, John?"

"Mavis?" The question came from him almost in a cry.

Reba nodded in full understanding, answered by his

tone. "Yes—you love her! Never forget to tell her so. The gift of love is a tremendous thing to receive, also—the greatest to give! And so—this is good bye between us, John, my dear friend, and God bless you both!"

What John Lang tried to stammer of protestation and gratitude he hardly knew, so choked he found himself with joy and wonder and humility. He stood in his tracks, allowing her to go on her way.

"Oh, you women—you women!" he marvelled, watching the graceful figure pass along the dapplings of sun and shade. "You keep a key to heaven and the password to hell. The wonder is that you abuse your power so seldom."

He held his right hand, palm up, in blessing and farewell, as Reba turned to wave before she was lost in the throng. Then he was free to read the letter from Mavis! At the end he reverently pressed the paper to his lips.

He read the letter once more while he stumbled up the lane, his groping feet serving instead of his eyes to direct his way; his eyes refused to leave the words with which Mavis had proved the greater love.

Alternate light and shadow played across the paper as he walked under the trees, just as the mood of Mavis had changed in the writing of her renunciation; her sorrow had been lightened by the joy of sacrifice for the sake of the man she loved!

Then a broader and a persistent shadow fell upon the paper. Lang looked up. He was gazing into the saturnine countenance of Larry Devon.

As had been the case in the other meetings with persons concerned in the closely linked drama of the past months, Lang was conscious of no especial astonishment when he saw Devon in front of him.

Had Lang not accepted the village of Sainte Anne de Beaupré as the scene of the grand climacteric in his affairs? Why should not all the parties most vitally concerned be present on that day?

Larry Devon was truly an important figure, in Lang's estimation. To Devon of all others—the man whom he had insolently buffeted in public—Lang owed some sort of reparation, making of his convalescent conscience the most crucial test of all! He had been wondering if he were truly cleansed! Without analyzing the source of his all-enveloping joy of the moment, he was inexpressibly cheered by the feeling of wanting to hug Larry Devon! Therefore, the cure must truly be complete! Lang restrained himself to a radiant smile. He put out his hand.

“Will you give me the grip of forgiveness, Larry?”

“Not by a damned sight!” raged the astonished lawyer.

“Well, Larry, that only hurts *you*, not *me*! You and I are too hard boiled to do any blubbering over what's past and gone—I realize that! But I only wanted to give you a look at the new hand I've dealt to myself! Four aces, Larry! Unselfishness, so I hope—honesty of intent, forgiving faith in my fellows and humility!”

“Huh! Well, you've got to have five cards in a poker hand! Which queen do you hold?”

It was Larry Devon's customary, caustic sarcasm. For an instant Lang flinched but he controlled himself and smiled again; not fatuously but with the candor of honest joy.

Devon went on acridly, “I've been standing on the sidelines today, watching you, Lang! You walked into this village with a pretty girl. Mathison brought down some news about that young lady!”

"I hoped he'd say something about her," returned Lang gently.

"He did—and, like a damned fool, I went and told Anita Trask!" rasped Devon. "She came chasing up here—and I've followed her. And you've been *beau-ing her* 'round today!"

"She and I have finished all matters between us, for all time," replied Lang, refusing to be provoked.

"And just now I had to wait till Reba Donworth—"

"That will be enough, Larry!" Lang's gaze was direct, but there was none of the old belligerency in his manner. "This day I have come into a wonderful understanding with all my friends." He stepped forward and laid his palms gently on Devon's shoulders. "I'm placing you in the list of those friends, in spite of yourself! That's all for now, old man! I have something of the greatest importance to attend to. Forgive my rushing away!"

With his shoulders squared proudly, head erect and eyes triumphant, he strode to the maid of his heart where she waited at the foot of the statue of Sainte Anne; he gently had put away the myriads in his path without being aware that they were humans who gave place before him. The girl looked at him quickly, apprehensively, and whitened.

She had marked his joy when he was at a distance. "Something—something pleasant—has it happened?" she asked. There was a pathetic upcurve of her lips—she meant the grimace for a smile.

"Yes, something!" Then the conventions of the commonplace were swept away in the rush of his yearning.

"Mavis! Mavis!" He gripped her hands in his, disregarding the ears and the eyes of the curious throng massed about them. "The love that desires,

seeks selfishly, is common enough, but the love that steps aside for the greater happiness of the one beloved is rare on this earth. Have I won that? I have seen the one to whom you wrote. When she read these words her true woman's soul saw what you did not write on this paper. She knew what the letter meant and she guessed what it might mean to me. Just now she asked God to bless us—her last words before she went away to her own happiness. She was right, wasn't she? Mavis, just for now, let me have something to live on till we are by ourselves and I can show you how I welcome the glory that has come into my life—the glory of real love. Look at me—Mavis!”

He knew that to his last day he would carry the sacred memory of the slow upward lift of her eyes—brave and appealing, pure and passionate, taking his breath with their revelation of utter surrender. Tears stung his own eyes and speech left him as he pressed her tight-held hands to his breast. Over their heads, over the hushed throngs, over the broad meadows and the sparkling river, the chimes were calling the devout to come and receive the blessing of *La Bonne Sainte Anne*.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

A GLANCE BEYOND THE RIM



HERE had been clouds in the night when the solemn procession had wound its way up the hillside, past the stations of the cross; the clouds had made a fitting pall for the ceremony of the penitential devotion. But for the glory of the Feast Day the clean heavens were blue and the sunshine sparkled through crystal air.

Sainte Anne, in massive and sacred effigy, blessed the throngs from her station on high between the basilica's twin towers. They who came up the river's sunlit flood could see her from afar; they who streamed from the trains and who came along the highway gazed up at her reverently.

The great crowd packed the church's park, overflowed into the street outside the gates, and people were tiered along the hillside under the trees. All sorts and conditions of humanity were there. Inside the church the procession was forming. The pilgrims from Boisvert, fortunate in being early arrivals, remained beside the statue in the yard; they had been told that the procession would pass close by along the gravelled walk.

There were others who had been brought in wheel chairs; the respectful throngs parted and gave the sufferers passage to the edge of the walk where the hoped-for blessing would not be intercepted. Lang talked with some of these suppliants. Infirm old men and aged women said they had been coming year after

year, on the Feast Day, and did not despair because they had not been made hale and whole.

He saw two men who particularly attracted his attention; one was aged, with a white beard; the other was a young man whose eyes were sightless. They were robed in the fashion of Trappist monks—it was penitential garb especially donned for that day.

Lang put some questions to the blind man when the two pilgrims took their stand near him. The young man said he had been coming there for a number of years and explained that his companion was his friend, a celebrated surgeon who had sought with all professional means to restore his sight but could not.

“And do you hope to see again?”

“Yes, I hope! That’s my comfort. I have faith. Without faith nothing can be accomplished. But for me the matter of seeing has at last become a small consideration since I have been coming here. I make my pilgrimage every year in order to hear the cries of joy from those who are healed. Those sounds stay with me for the whole year until I am allowed to come again. They make up a large part of my happiness.”

“He will never see again,” confided the surgeon aside to Lang. “But he tells the truth about the joy of coming here. Look at his face!” The smile which wreathed the young man’s countenance marked his serene and comforted contentment with things as they were.

After a time the great organ thundered behind the basilica’s façade and the mighty volume of music rolled out through the open doors. In the church nave the slow chant of the canticle began, *adagio*, raised by a thousand voices of singers as yet invisible to those who stood without in the sunshine.

Some of the more reverent who were near Lang

sank to their knees, and he could hear their mutterings, "*Prie pour nous! La Bonne Sainte Anne, prie pour nous!*" There was a clutch at his throat. He pulled off his hat and crumpled it in his hands.

The sunshine slanted across the ranks of vested priests who came from the gloom of the church, through the broad doorway, swinging to the slow movement of the sacred harmony.

There were flashes of rich color from their robes. The sunshine glinted on holy vessels borne aloft, and on the tassels of banners. There came canopies, the bearers supporting the staffs of the corners, and under the canopies marched dignitaries of the church, their hands crossed upon their breasts or elevated in attitude of prayer.

The sacred solemnity of centuries of human devotion in that little village at the foot of the Côté de Beaupré—the aura of holy thoughts and concentration—wrapped the scene and made for mystic tenderness and the stimulation of faith and new purpose.

Out into the sunshine and along the broad walks of the park went the procession, swaying to the majestic tempo of the chant. Acolytes swung their censers and faint veils of smoke rose in the still air. Behind the ecclesiastical pomp of the vested priests and the dignitaries, behind the banners and the canopies, came the long ranks of the pilgrims who had been healed beforetimes and who visited Sainte Anne on her Feast Day to render grateful thanks for mercies.

There was the Holy Relic of the saint, a bit of bone in a medallion—like a fleck of gray moss on its velvet bed.

The Host—with its mystery!

The ranks of the crowded thousands swayed and, section by section, they went down on their knees,

with the effect of a grain field being swept by the stroke of a mighty scythe.

Lang and Mavis and Joan—they knelt.

Jock Duncan stood erect. His features were grimly set. He was smoothing emotion from his countenance by a mighty effort. He folded his arms and looked up into the sky, keeping sedulously from contemplation of the images of the procession's pomp; it was as if he were saying by his pose, "There's the one God. He is here, over all. I will worship Him."

The child, in her wheel chair, was between Lang and Mavis.

All the tense expectancy had departed from Jessie's face. Her lips were apart in wistful wonderment; there was no element of reality in all this, for her! The head with the lint-white locks swayed slowly, in time with the chanting voices. She had forgotten self and the infirmity which fettered her.

For a time, when the procession moved, she could see only the great statue of the saint between the towers of the basilica, raised there above the heads of the men and women who were pressed about the chair. When the people knelt she could behold the rich treasures of the church under the moving canopies.

"Pray, child!" whispered a withered old woman who was crouched just behind Mavis. "The Holy Relic is going past you."

A moment later Lang was holding his breath, steady-ing with both hands the wheel that was near him.

The child was rising slowly.

Mavis, frightened, was about to put out her hand to assist Jessie but Lang made a dissuading gesture. Jock Duncan, his steady gaze on the sky, did not behold.

For a moment the child stood on her feet. Then

she sank down slowly and made a pathetic little figure, crumpled on the turf, her head bowed on her clasped hands.

They did not disturb her.

The long procession passed and reëntered the broad doorway and the chant was mellowed by the distances of the interior and the organ music died down into silence and the chimes announced that the great event of the Feast Day was over.

But the child did not move.

Mavis went to her and gently lifted Jessie's head from the clasped hands. Lang nerved himself to see the tears of despairing grief. But when he looked into Jessie's face he found a smile which greeted both him and Mavis and her father.

"I stood!" she said in low, thrilling tones of joy. "Did you see me? I stood!"

No one was able to make any reply to her.

"I don't feel as if I can stand now," she went on. There was no trace of mournfulness or regret in her voice. "But I am happy! I did stand! Will you help me back to my chair?"

Mavis and Lang lifted her between them.

"I have dreamed of coming here so many times," said the child. "I longed to come. I have wondered what would happen, and I have been very sad because I could not be taken here. I'll tell you that much now, Papa Jock, because you have been so good. I thank you all. I shall never wonder and worry any more."

"But I've been praying to my God that ye could walk, lassie. And noo ye canna walk," mourned Duncan, the tears on his cheeks.

"But I did stand!" insisted Jessie. "And it made me happy. I don't need so very much to make me happy. If I never do walk I can never forget how

good you all have been to me—and that will always make me happy. I'm ready to go home, now!"

"There's a blessing at this shrine that's greater and more wonderful than being able to walk—and she found it," said Lang to Mavis. He took her hand in his. "We have found it, too," he declared earnestly.

The young man who was without sight came to them, led by the surgeon.

"Child, I have heard many utter thanksgiving," he assured her, "but what you have said is the humblest, sweetest word of hope I have heard at Sainte Anne. I shall never forget it. It will brighten my darkness. And I believe—I know—that you have received a promise. You have stood on your feet. You will stand again, and walk and be strong; for God keeps His Word!"

"'First the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear,'" quoted the surgeon, his caressing hand on the child's head. "Forget what you have heard us doctor men say, and expect the best—honestly expect it; with all your faith, dear child, hope—hope on!"

"That we will!" said Jock Duncan huskily. "Amen!"

With the child in their midst they were irresistibly caught in the throng that had begun to mill, with a mighty din of chattering, toward the gates, and they had been forced on a dozen paces when, cutting sharp and high through the babel, came a woman's eerie outcry. Struck in his tracks, John Lang turned and all the moving hundreds faced again to the wide door of the basilica.

Anita Trask was framed there against the inner gloom, crying out so incoherently that her words were indistinct to him, though their import ran back to him, relayed by mouth to mouth from the front ranks.

“A crazy woman . . . she has been troubling the priests and the sisters . . . she says she must suffer . . . saints of mercy! Murder? . . . is it murder she has done?”

Lang caught some of her broken shrilling as he forged through the press toward her. She was wailing that she could not speak into the dark through a little hole—that some one must look her in the face and help her—help her; and she beat upon her breast and besought the very world.

Lang saw Avocat Grivois foremost among the men who sought to restrain her, but with her innate and long-suspected madness now at its climacteric she fought off their hands, her outcry rising to a veritable shriek of agony.

Within and without the church the masses pushed toward her, the front ranks driven off their footing by the pressure of the curious farther back. It was Avocat Grivois first, then John Lang, who saw the danger that threatened, and shouted—one stridently, the other in a roar of warning.

The persons in the vortex near Anita were helpless against the thrust of those coming from behind.

Just inside the church door, thatched in a heap a score of feet high, planted on the iron standard attached to an unsecured pedestal, were hundreds of crutches, trusses, canes and other aids for ailing bodies—votive offerings from devotees who had left them behind. The pedestal was joggled by the throng.

From the top a crutch launched itself into the crowd, and the people, dodging, surged wildly. They were forced against the grim monument. The mass of crutches swayed and toppled; the men and women herded back on their companions, howling, “*Les bequilles—les bequilles! Prenez garde!*”

Hands were out-thrust in futile snatches at Anita who remained heedless of all save her own obsession. Then with a crash those impedimenta of human infirmity piled over the distracted creature, burying her where she was pinned down by the iron standard.

Leaping over the crutches that went scaling down the church steps into the sunshine, Lang reached her and lifted her while Grivois pried away the sticks above her. The surgeon-companion of the blind young man had hurried on the heels of Lang and was beside the rescuers when they laid the bruised body gently on the proffered wraps and coats which had been tossed to the floor of the vestibule.

The skilled fingers searched deftly for a few moments; then the surgeon rose, stepped back without a word and gestured gravely to the Redemptorist sisters who had gathered to give aid.

And the crowd melted away from the spot to which death had lent sanctity.

It was Avocat Grivois, voluble and sympathetic, who gave what information was necessary and who saw to it that Lang was no more beset with questions than was unavoidable.

Finally, it was Grivois, the discreet and observant, who in his comings and goings had seen, understood and had a pregnant suggestion to make to Lang who had remained in the church in conference with the Father Superior's secretary.

The nerve-wracked counsellor of the Trask estate followed Grivois into the sunshine.

"Monsieur Lang, all has been done that may so far be done for the poor madame. I shall be at your call, while you remain here, to do all else that's needed." He ventured a bit of his philosophy. "While it is not for me to know, one is permitted to

hope that because of her great need and suffering she has found the peace which she sought."

The avocat hesitated a moment—then he voiced that pregnant suggestion, glancing toward the statue in the park. "The friends with whom you came—I have seen to it that the little lame angel and the others are at their luncheon yonder in the arcade in comfort—but it remains, Monsieur Lang, that Mademoiselle waits!" He bowed and walked away.

Lang ran across the greensward and drew Mavis along with him—away from the arcade where many pilgrims were eating from their hampers.

She was patient, tender, with an understanding of his mood. That blessed perception held her silent while he walked beside her for many minutes. Therefore, it was good for the soul of a penitent man because such a woman as Mavis had been waiting for him.

By the broad gate, out into the street and past the little booths, they took their way. At the hillside chapel which housed the Scala Santa—the Holy Stairs—he shook off the morbid memories and turned to her with the smile his lips had learned for her alone. Still Mavis, not presuming to question his mood, waited his pleasure, tranquilly watching the devout pilgrims who ascended the steps on their knees to bow, at the top, before the representation of Jesus and Pilate—the humility which knew how vain the judgments of mortals.

"Haven't you questions to ask me, Mavis?"

"None!" Her gaze, water-clear, soothed and quieted him like a draught from a pool in the woods.

"You wonder among women! But, Mavis—you'll have to take my past along with my future, and when I have told you that part which you deserve to know you'll wonder whether or not I have been pretending

a lie, these weeks past, to win you. For I'm confessing to my soul that it has all been, for the most part, to win your love for me!"

She reproached him gently. "It's not that way, dear! I'm loving the true John Lang, that's all! Because I can't help loving you!"

"Mavis, if this is the real John Lang at last, it was you who found and stirred my better self——"

He paused; he looked bewildered, like one coming out from darkness into a flare of light. Mouth agape, eyes wide in amazement, he gasped, "My God! Why—why—*that's* what love *is!*"

Holding tightly to her hand, he stared into the heavens, murmuring, "Christ, pity the fools and the blind!"

After a time he humbly confessed, "I learned much from the old man, Ashael—he set me on my way. But all the ghosts of a man's nature are not laid in a matter of months. I have a fight before me—out there!" He waved his hand to indicate the rim of the hills along the southern horizon. "All the more do I need you! I'll keep you from too much unhappiness on account of me. I give myself into your keeping, Mavis, my own girl! I have walked with you in the dust of the long highway—and I treasure every moment of that journey even as these folks on the stairs, telling their beads as they climb, treasure their rosaries. I've half a mind to go up those stairs on my knees with the rest of the Seekers. Anything to be else than the John Lang I used to be! Shall I do it?"

"Together—if you wish it," she made answer, mother-tender; his heart throbbed in his throat as he realized more fully with every word and look she gave him how he had found the true complement which made his nature whole and sane.

“You girl-greatly-to-be-loved—Mavis, I’m still only a poor earth man—don’t leave me too far behind! Walk beside me still—as you walked down the Chaudiere—still side by side! Because—because I want the woman you are. I want my mate!”

Now, no longer was John Lang making the test of human trustworthiness by cautious study of the eyes. Her eyes had long before completely assured him. But he yearned for another draught of that blessed promise she had given him when he came to her in the park of the church. “Mavis—look at me!”

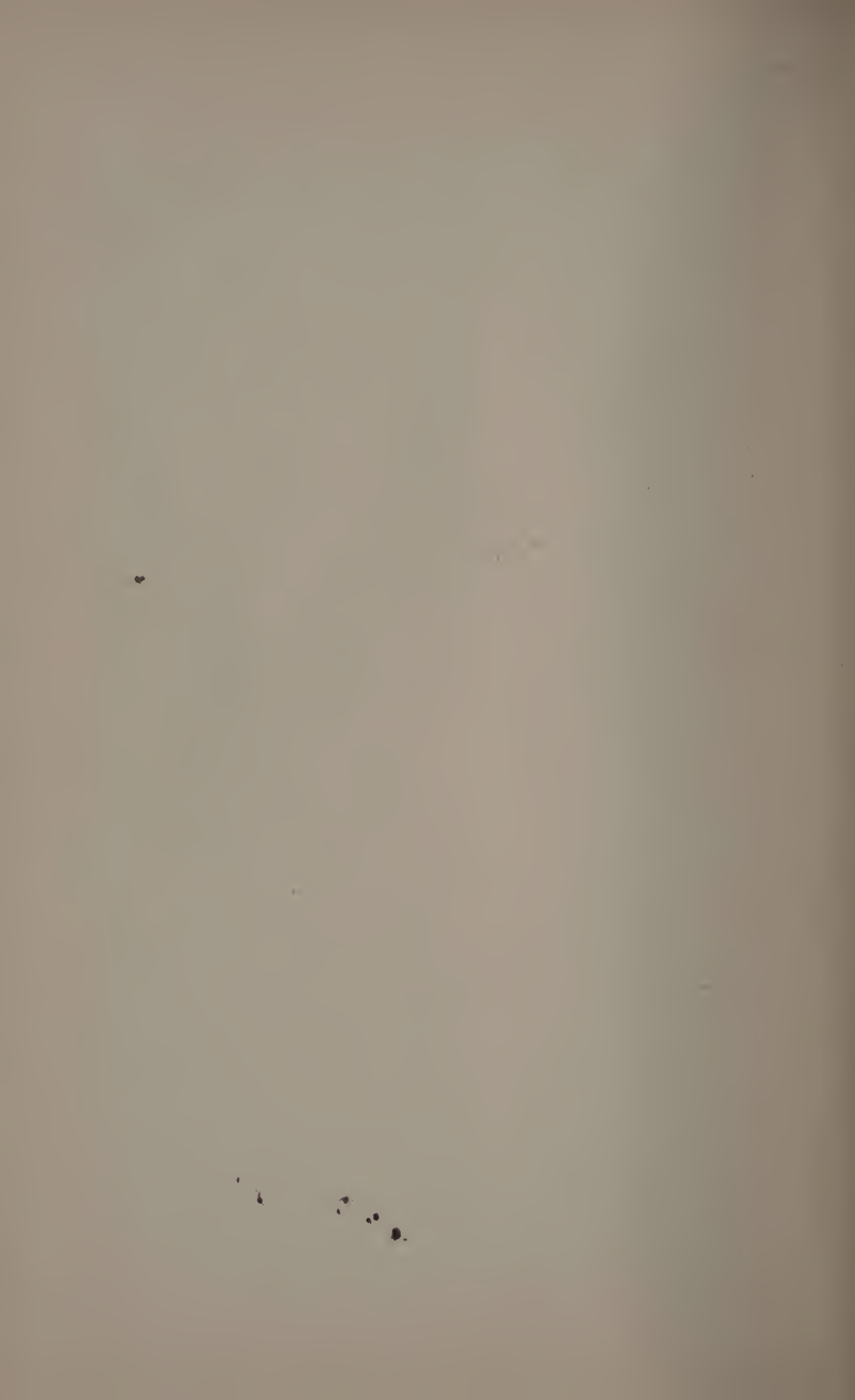
And because he bravely commanded, beseechingly, she looked at him . . . And after an immeasurable space the glory ceased blinding him and his heart took up its steady beat again.

With impetuous tenderness he faced her about, away from the penitents who were dragging their slow way up the stairs glossed by many weary knees.

He pointed to the quiet, tree-crowned heights cupped about the village of Sainte Anne. “Mavis, come with me up there—and so far as my soul is concerned I’ll be climbing on my knees up nearer—near enough to thank the Good Giver. I want my first kiss under God’s sky, with the honest trees for witnesses. Just for our one hour out of the world! Come with me!”

Her hand reached for his and rested in his clasp—tender, clinging, trusting, ardent; and they turned to the hills.

THE END



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