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CHAPTER XVII
ANN'S disgust and bitterness of self accusation wore away as she faced the resolving sunlight and measured her scars against the breast of mighty Mogalyon. In the dawn of the second day the incident, having lost much of its shame and terror, was debatable, and under Matt's kindly counsel she reached a certain resignation.

"No one but ourselves need know what took place," he said in conclusion. "Woo is no talebearer, and when the woman herself sobs off she'll not remember a word of it. Furthermore, I warned her that Jack would wring her neck if he knew what she had done. So I wouldn't give another thought of it—not one."
"I'll try to forget it," she promised humbly, but she could not at once put the experience out of mind. She could only wait for that besotted face to fade into a grisly apparition. In the end she pitied the poor woman who loved and was willing to defend her love.

Raymond was chilled by the change in Ann—a return to the cold aloofness of her manner at Barnett's—and was profoundly troubled by it. The day following the woman's visit Munro rode down as usual to call and seemed amazed when Mrs. Kelly greeted him coldly. "Ann does not want to see you or any one else this morning—you least of all."

Munro whistled. "Another cold blast. It's sure drafty up here on the side hill, isn't it? What do you suppose is the cause of it?"
From the inner room a clear, low voice, icy as a mountain stream, replied, "Miss Rupert is not receiving Captain Munro today or at any other time."

He took a step toward the door. "What have I done to get a crack like that?"
The door closed with a decided jar and a bolt slid.

Munro bowed. "I understand. I take the hint. But some day when you are feeling jolly I'd like to know what has frosted the air down here among the aspens."

"I can tell you," said Nora, with the directness of a woman who has known rough men all her life. "Ann has learned the kind of life you live, and she despises the sight of your face."

For the first time in his life Munro was confounded. He stood for a moment revolving an explanation. At last he said, "You mustn't take an enemy's report of me."
"We do not," said Nora calmly. "Your wife has called on us."

"My wife?"
"The woman who calls herself your wife. 'Tis all one so far as we are concerned."

Munro frowned. "Claire called! Here? Then with a leer that was characteristic of him, he added, 'I hope you had a pleasant chat.'"
"Ask her. She did all the talkin'."

Munro became very serious and very winning. "Now, see here, Nora—"
"Call me Mrs. Kelly," she interposed shortly.

He was not smiling now. His heart was in his voice. "You tell Ann not to misjudge me. She must give me a chance to square myself. I don't claim to be a saint, but I've been open and aboveboard with every man or woman I've ever had any dealings with. Whatever my past has been, I'm living on a different plane now. I've cut off all my old habits for her sake. I'm trying to live up to her standard of things. I know she's better than I am, but I can climb. My family is as good as hers. I started right, and with the help of a good woman I can get back to where I was. I claim the work I'm doing here is worthy her approval. Ask her to let me see her again."
Nora turned her face toward Ann's door and both waited in silence, but no sound came from the inner room.

PAIN

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and Nora, seeing suffering in the lines of his face, said more kindly: "Ye may as well go. The door will not open to you this day nor any other."

Munro turned and went out with bowed head, and Nora could not doubt the sincerity of his pain.

One morning Ann rose to a singular light. In place of the clear, golden sunshine which had so often glorified her room a blue-gray mist lay thick against her window pane. Raising the sash, she put her hand into it—it was like smoke, dry and cold! Dressing hurriedly she entered the sitting room, where Matt was helping his sons to dress.

She stepped to the door and looked out with vague alarm. The vapor had blotted out the world. Nothing could be seen but the faint ferns of one or two cabins and a clump of nearby trees, and she went back shivering and a little depressed. "I don't like to leave the peak on such a day," she said at last. "I think I'll stay till the sun comes out. I want to think of it as it has been—radiant and inspiring."

The cloud hung motionless for hours, impenetrable, yet resisting. A hubbub in the air as though some disaster, concealed as yet, was about to be discovered. About 10 o'clock as she stood on the steps wondering whether to cross to the bungalow or not Raymond burst from the obscurity.

"Good morning," called Ann. "Isn't this a strange effect?"
His eyes were shining, his face pale and his voice vibrant as he abruptly said: "Come with me, the time has come. I want to talk with you."

"What has happened?" she asked in alarm.
He took her by the arm. "You promised to listen. You are not afraid of me, are you?"

"No, but I do not understand. Where is Louis? Has anything happened to him?"
"Louis is safe with Kelly. I want to see you because things have happened to me. Come, I must see you alone."

They moved off up the path toward the overlook, and, notwithstanding her brave words, the girl wavered in the gust of this man's overmastering excitement. The mist closed round them, all signs of other human presence disappeared, and they soon stood alone in a world of gray light wherein neither sky nor horizon line appeared. All that remained of the earth was a little strip of ground beneath their feet.

Raymond stopped at last and held toward Ann a small, irregular piece of rock. "Do you see that?" he hoarsely inquired.

She took it wonderingly. "Is it ore?"
"Yes, and it's heavy with gold. Kelly's luck has won again. We've opened a vein that will make us both rich." There was no tremor or doubt in his tone.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried out, with unaffected pleasure. "Now Mrs. Kelly can go to live in the valley."
"Never mind the Kellys now," he cried out impatiently. "I have a great deal to say to you, and I want to say it here. I'm going to try and win you. His manner was exultant, his voice tense with passion. "I am bold to recklessness today."

He had never been humble. Now he rose above her, masterful, an avowed lover, and his eyes burning down into hers made her shrink and shiver as if from cold.

"Are you warm enough?" he asked tenderly. "I hope you are, for I want to tell you—explain to you—why I am here. Let us sit here." He indicated a flat rock. "This is our only opportunity. No one will know—no one can see us. Will you listen?"

"I will listen," she said quietly and took a seat, drawing her cloak about her.

He took a seat a little in front, so that he could see her face, which was radiant as a rose in the mist. "I've been trying to write you a letter ever since you came. I wanted to set myself right with you on Louis's account. I love the lad, and I wanted you to know that I was trying to do him good."

"I know that. I trust you now."
"That assurance is sweet to me, but I want to tell you now that the only mystery in my life is this: I am a West Point cadet—I mean, I was—"
"Were you, really?" She looked at him with such unmistakable relief and gladness that he faltered.

"Wait. I was only there two years. I was court martialed for breach of discipline and gross insubordination at the beginning of my third year."
He hastened on. "You mustn't judge me hastily. It came on my return after furlough. That's the time when the routine and discipline pinch hardest on the men. After two years of grind that I hated I had a visit home—a delicious free time—and to get back into school, back into those cold, gray barracks, was like going into a strait-jacket. The first few weeks after the vacation are times of disorder, a period of boyish devilry, and I took my share in it. My breach of discipline was nothing more than a boy's frolic. I should have been punished for it, and that would have ended it, but I hated one of the officers, the disciplinarian,

and when he rounded me up he rasped me till I lost my head. Being a quick tempered youth, I answered him. He abused me shamefully, and I struck him in the face, and that ended my stay at West Point."

"Oh, how foolish! How wrong!"
"No, it was not wrong. I would do it again. The small sneak used a tone in addressing me which no man has a right to use to another. You wouldn't suppose a tone could hurt, but it did. It cut like a lash. Well, that ended my career as a soldier. My home was on the Ohio river, not far from Cincinnati, and my family still lives there. Our whole country is rich in traditions of General Grant, and my father had selected me out of all his sons to be the soldier of his family. You know how some men try to map their sons' careers. Don't you see, I couldn't go home?"

"Yes, I can see it was hard for your father. Was your mother living?"
"Yes, she's living yet. I write her every week, but not one word has passed between my father and me since my dismissal. Naturally enough, I drifted west and into cattle ranching. I liked the excitement of it, and I'd been trained to ride and to shoot. I gradually became cow boss and foreman, and so you found me, with a few thousand dollars saved up. Your coming changed every current in my life. I became ambitious to do something, to be rich. I came here, I bought this mine, and there shines my gold." He held it toward her again. "Now I can go home. My court martial becomes a joke. Don't you see? My father is human. He would not receive me poor and disgraced. With a big mine behind me the case will be different."

"Are we all purchasable with gold?" she asked.

His high mood sank a little. "Don't misjudge me. It's not so clear in my mind as when I met you at the door. Money does help—you know it does. It extends a man's power; it makes him effective for good, if good is in him. I was a rancher when you met me; we stood in a different relation from that which we occupy now. Isn't that true?"

"Yes," she slowly answered, "but it isn't because of your mine."
"What is it because of?"
"It is because you have been kind and considerate of my brother."

He looked disappointed. "Is that all? I hoped you liked me for myself."
"I do—like you," she answered. "Can you not love me?"
"Do not press me." She spoke sharply, a flash of resentment in her eyes.

"I didn't intend to do so," he humbly replied. "I fear I've made a mess of it, just as I have with all the rest of my life. But this morning when we uncovered that vein it seemed as though I had a chance to recover my place in the world. I've wasted ten years of my life masquerading here and there, but that is finished. Since I saw you life began to be serious business with me. You smile, but you know what I mean, and if you would only give me time I would make you proud of me." He paused and looked about him. The mist seemed lightening, as if infiltrated with a golden vapor. It was in motion also, and far to the westward small patches of blue sky showed momentarily. "It is clearing," he said in a quiet voice, though his eyes were wet. "The west wind is setting in."

The beauty of the girl as she faced him there in the mist was shining, all conquering in its pulse and glow. "I love you, and I want you to know it. Some time I will ask you to be my wife."

"You must not do that," she cried out. "You will only lead up to disappointment. Don't you see how impossible it is? You are of the west, I am a city dweller. I am not fitted to help you. My whole life and training have been such that I am totally unfitted for the life you would lead. Please do not misread me. It is not a question of your wealth or your poverty. It's my own way of life, my own mind. I don't want to hurt you, but I must tell you that it is impossible to think of—"

"Now they've done it!" he called in a



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quite impossible!" and she turned away toward the cabin, now half disclosed.

The door was open and Kelly and the two lads were on the floor picking at a small sack or ore. Mrs. Kelly looked up at Ann, laughing, with tears on her cheeks. "I don't believe it, not one word of it! And if it's true, Rob, I want you to keep it for us."

"Yes," said Kelly, "I've been of use to you in finding it; now do you be of use to me in keeping it."
"I will, Matt!" said Raymond, and the two men shook hands on a new compact. Both Matt and Nora were too engrossed with their new found riches to observe the deep sadness of Raymond's face.

"Now," said Kelly, "watch out for Curran. He'll bate us out of it if he can. I depend on you to stand off the lawyers and the gamblers."
"The mist is rising," called Ann from the doorway.

As she spoke a tremendous report arose from the obscurity where the fog still clung.
"Now, what was that?" queried Matt, and all stood transfixed with surprise and vague apprehension.

Another and duller report followed—one that shook the ground. Kelly rushed

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"I love you, and I want you to know it."

ed to the door just in time to see a vast balloon shaped cloud of smoke rise majestically above the mist, bulging into the blue sky above.
"Now they've done it!" he called in a

curiously reflective tone that was almost comical.
"What was that?" asked Ann.
"Some crazy devil under cover of the mist has dynamited the Red Star shaft house."

Even as they waited, listening to faint cries, the wind swept the hillside clear, and Kelly's fears were verified. Mist has dynamited the Red Star shaft house and mill lay scattered over its dump, and toward it the whole camp seemed hastening.

"Oh, the unholy jackasses!" muttered Kelly. "They've opened the door to the witches now. Come, Rob. We may be the next to suffer."

(To be Continued.)

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