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Ann followed her into a minute bedroom which opened off the dining room. The old woman began to clatter. "Put off your things here. My, but them's fine furs! Did ye drive up from the Springs? Are you going on to the camp?"

"Yes."

"Waal, you'll find it lively up there! As near as I can learn they mean biz!" she whispered. "Some o' Jack Munro's men are in there now eatin'. They keep a mighty sharp watch on who comes in these days. Soon's you're ready I'll put you and your man down at my end of the table and I'll look after ye."

Ann laid aside her furs, but retained her hat, and as she re-entered the room made a dazzling appeal to those rough fellows, who eyed her with sly side glances.

Braide, already seated, rose to meet her. "We have reached an outpost of the guard and will be interrogated before we leave, I fear."

"I am quite ready to meet them," she replied, bending to her plate. "They can't refuse to let us pass."

The talk at the table was not illuminating. Each man apparently strove to fill his paunch before his fellow. Only one of them seemed to study Ann and her companion with candid interest. This was a small man with a chin beard and an eye as keen as that of a blue jay. As the other men filled up and left the table he came down and carelessly took a seat near Braide.

"I reckon I've seen you before," he began pleasantly.

"I shouldn't wonder. I'm Dr. Braide of Valley Springs."

"Where you aimin' to go now, if it's a fair question?"

"To Skytown."

"Goin' to treat somebody?" asked the old woman, who was hovering near.

Ann interposed. "Yes, he is going up to treat my brother Louis, who is lying ill at Mr. Raymond's cabin."

The stranger glowed again. "Didn't see nothin' of the sheriff's army on the way, did ye?" Here he winked at Braide.

The doctor smiled. "Not a thing. I don't think they've left the valley yet."

"I'd advise 'em not to. I'm going over to the camp myself, and if you don't mind I'll jest nacherly jog along a rod or two ahead of you—to show you the road."

As he rose to go the stranger said: "If so be it you folks have any influence with Rob Raymond, preach him into joining the movement. It'll be a mighty sight safer for him and a big help to the miners."

After the miner left the room Braide said: "We're in the enemy's country. He was plainly warning us, and his going along is in the nature of an armed guard."

"His escort may be of use to us," replied Ann. "Who was that man?" she asked of the old woman, who fairly whispered her answer.

"That's old Steve Adams. He's boss of this squad. All six o' them men are Munro's pickets."

As Ann and the doctor drove on the clouds began to lift, rolling slowly, ponderously, reluctantly upward from the timbered slopes.

Their guide rode rapidly, signaling the doctor now and then to keep pace with him, and after nearly an hour of fairly level ground the road entered another canyon and crawled upward along a prodigious wall, which beat back the clashing roar of a small but very swift stream of water.

It must have been about 5 o'clock when they rounded the great base of the Black Cone at the head of the canyon and looked away across the big camp and far out upon the valley to the west.

Adams, their guide, was a considerable distance in advance when a couple of horsemen encountered them. After a moment's conference one turned back, and the other came on swiftly.

Ann's heart glowed with the hope that it might be Raymond with a message from the sick one, but it proved to be Munro. He came up swiftly and, setting his horse upon his haunches, leaped cavalierly to the ground.

"Good evening, lady," he called as he approached the wagon. "Have you journeyed far?"

"How is Louis?" asked Ann quickly, with instant revolt of his assurance.

He felt the impersonal rebuke of her manner and replied simply: "He is better this afternoon, so I hear. I have not had time to call. It is a pleasure to see you again." He fixed his eyes on her companion. "I don't think I know you," he said, with a challenging inflection in his voice.

"I am Dr. Braide of Valley Springs." Ann explained, "Dr. Braide comes to attend my brother."

Munro's face lost its reckless smile, and he looked worn and pale. "Doctor, I'm glad to meet you."

"We must hurry on," interrupted Ann, warmly impatient of Munro's glances.

Braide chirped to his horses and Munro swung to his seat and followed after. At the foot of the hill he called: "Keep that winding road. It will bring you to the top near Kelly's. I'll meet you there."

The peak was more than quiet—it was silent. It was as if a palsy had fallen upon every ablebodied workman, causing a swift devouring decay to set in.

"What a change!" exclaimed Braide. "I was here just before this trouble began and these hills teemed with men"—

"There is one smoking chimney. It must be the Raymond & Kelly mine." Ann pointed away up the hill.

"How do they keep going?"

"The strikers fear them, and, besides, Munro and Raymond are old acquaintances. I think he protects them."

Raymond was standing at the Kellys' door as they drove up, his face somber, his eyes clouded. He could not speak, so deeply was he moved, but with a nod at Braide and without a word threw back the robes and reached a hand to help her. "How is he?" she asked, with a catching of the breath.

"He is very ill, but I think"— His voice failed him for a moment. "I'm glad to see you, doctor. He needs you."

Everything whirled before Ann. "If he should die—oh, if he should die! It's all my fault!" she wailed. "It's all my fault!" and her numb limbs refused to move.

"Don't say that," he urged. "I've gone over it a thousand times. I don't see that any one is to blame. I know you are not. Come, we must go to him."

In that instant something seemed to pass between them—some invisible, intangible bond was established. Ann put out her hand, and he took it gently between his palms. "Be brave, dear girl," he said tenderly.

She suddenly roused herself and hurried toward the cabin. Mrs. Kelly came to meet her with arms opened wide, her sweet face pale with pity. "Oh, Ann, darlin', we're needin' ye!"

Ann went to her for an instant, then put her aside and knelt beside the bed. Her heart grew icy cold with the horror and the pity of seeing that blithe, boyish face set and livid, the brows grave with the gravity of battle. His eyes were closed, and, at the moment, he appeared to be dying. She caught his lax hand and kissed it passionately. "Louis, speak to me! Speak to sister!"

Her low cry pierced Raymond's heart, and while he stood helpless, sick with sympathetic pain, the doctor took Ann gently by the arm. "Please leave me alone with Louis for a few minutes. Trust him to me."

Raymond turned comforter. "The doctor is right. His case is not decided yet. You must remember how strong and well he has been. He's not the pale slip he was when he came here. Please go over to the house and let Nora make some tea for you," he pleaded, and at last she yielded and, with a final look at the sick boy, went out with Mrs. Kelly.

(To be Continued.)

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