

The World For Sale, Volume 3.

Gilbert Parker

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THE WORLD FOR SALE

By Gilbert Parker

BOOK III

- XX. TWO LIFE PIECES
- XXI. THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER
- XXII. THE SECRET MAN
- XXIII. THE RETURN OF BELISARIUS
- XXIV. AT LONG LAST
- XXV. MAN PROPOSES
- XXVI. THE SLEEPER
- XXVII. THE WORLD FOR SALE

CHAPTER XX

TWO LIFE PIECES

"It's a fine day."

"Yes, it's beautiful."

Fleda wanted to ask how he knew, but hesitated from feelings of delicacy. Ingolby seemed to understand. A faint reflection of the old whimsical smile touched his lips, and his hands swept over the coverlet as though smoothing out a wrinkled map.

"The blind man gets new senses," he said dreamily. "I feel things where I used to see them. How did I know it was a fine day? Simple enough. When the door opened there was only the lightest breath of wind, and the air was fresh and crisp, and I could smell the sun. One sense less, more degree of power to the other senses. The sun warms the air, gives it a flavour, and between it and the light frost, which showed that it was dry outside, I got the smell of a fine Fall day. Also, I heard the cry of the wild fowl going South, and they wouldn't have made a sound if it hadn't been a fine day. And also, and likewise, and besides, and howsomever, I heard Jim singing, and that nigger never sings in bad weather. Jim's a fair-weather raven, and this morning he was singing like a 'lav'rock in the glen."

Being blind, he could not see that, suddenly, a storm of emotion swept over her face.

His cheerfulness, his boylike simplicity, his indomitable spirit, which had survived so much, and must still face so much, his almost childlike ways, and the naive description of a blind man's perception, waked in her an almost intolerable yearning. It was not the yearning of a maid for a man. It was the uncontrollable woman in her, the mother-thing, belonging to the first woman that ever was-protection of the weak, hovering love for the suffering, the ministering spirit.

Since Ingolby had been brought to the house in the pines, Madame Bulteel and herself, with Jim, had nursed him through the Valley of the Shadow. They had nursed him through brain-fever, through agonies which could not have been borne with consciousness. The tempest of the mind and the pains of misfortune went on from hour to hour, from day to day, almost without ceasing, until at last, a shadow of his former self, but with a wonderful light on his face which came from something within, he waited patiently for returning strength, propped up with pillows in the bed which had been Fleda's own, in the room outside which Jethro Fawe had sung his heathen serenade.

It was the room of the house which, catching the morning sun, was best suited for an invalid. So she had given it to him with an eagerness behind which was the feeling that somehow it made him more of the inner circle of her own life; for apart from every other feeling she had, there was in her a deep spirit of comradeship belonging to far-off times when her life was that of the open road, the hillside and the vale. In those days no man was a stranger; all belonged.

To meet, and greet, and pass was the hourly event, but the meeting and the greeting had in it the familiarity of a common wandering, the sympathy of the homeless. Had Ingolby been less to her than he was, there would still have been the comradeship which made her the great creature she was fast becoming. It was odd that, as Ingolby became thinner and thinner, and ever more wan, she, in spite of her ceaseless nursing, appeared to thrive physically. She had even slightly increased the fulness of her figure. The velvet of her cheeks had grown richer, and her eyes deeper with warm fire. It was as though she flourished on giving: as though a hundred nerves of being and feeling had opened up within her and had expanded her life like some fine flower.

Gazing at Ingolby now there was a great hungering desire in her heart. She looked at the sightless eyes, and a passionate protest sprang to her lips which, in spite of herself, broke forth in a sort of moan.

"What is it?" Ingolby asked, with startled face.

"Nothing," she answered, "nothing. I pricked my finger badly, that's all."

And, indeed, she had done so, but that would not have brought the moan to her lips.

"Well, it didn't sound like a pricked finger complaint," he remarked. "It was the kind of groan I'd give if I had a bad pain inside."

"Ah, but you're a man!" she remarked lightly, though two tears fell down her cheeks.

With an effort she recovered herself. "It's time for your tonic," she added, and she busied herself with giving it to him. "As soon as you have taken it, I'm going for a walk, so you must make up your mind to have some sleep."

"Am I to be left alone?" he asked, with an assumed grievance in his voice.

"Madame Bulteel will stay with you," she replied.

"Do you need a walk so very badly?" he asked presently.

"I don't suppose I need it, but I want it," she answered. "My feet and the earth are very friendly."

"Where do you walk?" he asked.

"Just anywhere," was her reply. "Sometimes up the river, sometimes down, sometimes miles away in the woods."

"Do you never take a gun with you?"

"Of course," she answered, nodding, as though he could see. "I get wild pigeons and sometimes a wild duck or a prairie-hen."

"That's right," he remarked; "that's right."

"I don't believe in walking just for the sake of walking," she continued. "It doesn't do you any good, but if you go for something and get it, that's what puts the mind and the body right."

Suddenly his face grew grave. "Yes, that's it," he remarked.

"To go for something you want, a long way off. You don't feel the fag when you're thinking of the thing at the end; but you've got to have the thing at the end, to keep making for it, or there's no good going--none at all. That's life; that's how it is. It's no good only walking--you've got to walk somewhere. It's no good simply going--you've got to go somewhere. You've got to fight for something. That's why, when they take the something you fight for away--when they break you and cripple you, and you can't go anywhere for what you want badly, life isn't worth living."

An anxious look came into her face. This was the first time, since recovering consciousness, that he had referred, even indirectly, to all that had happened. She understood him well--ah, terribly well! It was the tragedy of the man stopped in his course because of one mistake, though he had done ten thousand wise things. The power taken from his hands, the interrupted life, the dark future, the beginning again, if ever his sight came back: it was sickening, heartbreaking.

She saw it all in his face, but as if some inward voice had spoken to him, his face cleared, the swift-moving hands clasped in front of him, and he said quietly: "But because it's life, there it is. You have to take it as it comes."

He stopped a moment, and in the pause she reached out her hand with a sudden passionate gesture, to touch his shoulder, but she restrained herself in time.

He seemed to feel what she was doing, and turned his face towards her, a slight flush coming to his cheeks. He smiled, and then he said: "How wonderful you are! You look--"

He checked himself, then added with a quizzical smile:

"You are looking very well to-day, Miss Fleda Druse, very well indeed. I like that dark-red dress you're wearing."

An almost frightened look came into her eyes. It was as though he could see, for she was wearing a dark-red dress--"wine-coloured," her father called it, "maroon," Madame Bulteel called it. Could he then see, after all?

"How did you know it was dark-red?" she asked, her voice shaking.

"Guessed it! Guessed it!" he answered almost gleefully. "Was I right? Is it dark-red?"

"Yes, dark-red," she answered. "Was it really a guess?"

"Ah, but the guessiest kind of a guess," he replied. "But who can tell? I couldn't see it, but is there any reason why the mind shouldn't see when the eyes are no longer working? Come now," he added, "I've a feeling that I can tell things with my mind just as if I saw them. I do see. I'll guess the time now--with my mind's eye."

Concentration came into his face. "It's three minutes to twelve o'clock," he said decisively.

She took up the watch which lay on the table beside the bed.

"Yes, it's just three minutes to twelve," she declared in an awe-struck voice. "That's marvellous--how wonderful you are!"

"That's what I said of you a minute ago," he returned. Then, with a swift change of voice and manner, he added, "How long is it?"

"You mean, since you came here?" she asked, divining what was in his mind.

"Exactly. How long?"

"Six weeks," she answered. "Six weeks and three days."

"Why don't you add the hour, too," he urged half-plaintively, though he smiled.

"Well, it was three o'clock in the morning to the minute," she answered.

"Old Father Time ought to make you his chief of staff," he remarked gaily. "Now, I want to know," he added, with a visible effort of determination, "what has happened since three o'clock in the morning, six weeks and three days ago. I want you to tell me what has happened to my concerns--to the railways, and also to the towns. I don't want you to hide anything, because, if you do, I'll have Jim in, and Jim, under proper control, will tell me the whole truth, and perhaps more than the truth. That's the way with Jim. When he gets started he can't stop. Tell me exactly everything."

Anxiety drove the colour from her cheeks. She shrank back.

"You must tell me," he urged. "I'd rather hear it from you than from Dr. Rockwell, or Jim, or your father. Your telling wouldn't hurt as much as anybody else's, if there has to be any hurt. Don't you understand--but don't you understand?" he urged.

She nodded to herself in the mirror on the wall opposite. "I'll try to

understand," she replied presently; "Tell me, then: have they put someone in my place?"

"I understand so," she replied.

He remained silent for a moment, his face very pale. "Who is running the show?" he asked.

She told him.

"Oh, him!" he exclaimed. "He's dead against my policy. He'll make a mess."

"They say he's doing that," she remarked.

He asked her a series of questions which she tried to answer frankly, and he came to know that the trouble between the two towns, which, after the Orange funeral and his own disaster had subsided, was up again; that the railways were in difficulties; that there had been several failures in the town; that one of the banks--the Regent--had closed its doors; that Felix Marchand, having recovered from the injury he had received from Gabriel Druse on the day of the Orange funeral, had gone East for a month and had returned; that the old trouble was reviving in the mills, and that Marchand had linked himself with the enemies of the group controlling the railways hitherto directed by himself.

For a moment after she had answered his questions, there was strong emotion in his face, and then it cleared.

He reached out a hand towards her. How eagerly she clasped it! It was cold, and hers was so warm and firm and kind.

"True friend o' mine!" he said with feeling. "How wonderful it is that somehow it all doesn't seem to matter so much. I wonder why? I wonder-- Tell me about yourself, about your life," he added abruptly, as though it had been a question he had long wished to ask. In the tone was a quiet certainty suggesting that she would not hesitate to answer.

"We have both had big breaks in our lives," he went on. "I know that. I've lost everything, in a way, by the break in my life, and I've an idea that you gained everything when the break in yours came. I didn't believe the story Jethro Fawe told me, but still I knew there was some truth in it; something that he twisted to suit himself. I started life feeling I could conquer the world like another Alexander or Napoleon. I don't know that it was all conceit. It was the wish to do, to see how far this thing on my shoulders"--he touched his head--"and this great physical machine"--he touched his breast with a thin hand--"would carry me. I don't believe the main idea was vicious. It was wanting to work a human brain to its last volt of capacity, and to see what it could do. I suppose I became selfish as I forged on. I didn't mean to be, but concentration upon the things I had to do prevented me from being the thing I ought to be. I wanted, as they say, to get there. I had a lot of irons in the fire--too many--but they weren't put there deliberately. One thing led to another, and one thing, as it were, hung upon another, until they all got to be part of the scheme. Once they got there, I had to carry them all on, I couldn't drop any of them; they got to be my life. It didn't matter that it all grew bigger and bigger, and the risks got greater and greater. I thought I could weather it through, and so I could have done, if it hadn't been for a mistake and an accident; but the

mistake was mine. That's where the thing nips--the mistake was mine. I took too big a risk. You see, I'd got so used to being lucky, it seemed as if I couldn't go wrong. Everything had come my way. Ever since I began in that Montreal railway office, after leaving college, I hadn't a single setback. I pulled things off. I made money, and I plumped it all into my railways and the Regent Bank; and as you said a minute ago, the Regent Bank has closed down. That cuts me clean out of the game. What was the matter with the bank? The manager?"

His voice was almost monotonous in its quietness. It was as though he told the story of something which had passed beyond chance or change. As it unfolded to her understanding, she had seated herself near to his bed. The door of the room was open, and in view outside on the landing sat Madame Bulteel reading. She was not, however, near enough to hear the conversation.

Ingolby's voice was low, but it sounded as loud as a waterfall in the ears of the girl, who, in a few weeks, had travelled great distances on the road called Experience, that other name for life.

"It was the manager?" he repeated.

"Yes, they say so," she answered. "He speculated with bank money."

"In what?"

"In your railways," she answered hesitatingly. "Curious--I dreamed that," Ingolby remarked quietly, and leaned down and stroked the dog lying at his feet. It had been with him through all his sickness. "It must have been part of my delirium, because, now that I've got my senses back, it's as though someone had told me about it. Speculated in my railways, eh? Chickens come home to roost, don't they? I suppose I ought to be excited over it all," he continued. "I suppose I ought. But the fact is, you only have just the one long, big moment of excitement when great trouble and tragedy come, or else it's all excitement, all the time, and then you go mad. That's the test, I think. When you're struck by Fate, as a hideous war-machine might strike you, and the whole terror of loss and ruin bears down on you, you're either swept away in an excitement that hasn't any end, or you brace yourself, and become master of the shattering thing."

"You are a master," she interposed. "You are the Master Man," she repeated admiringly.

He waved a hand deprecatingly. "Do you know, when we talked together in the woods soon after you ran the Rapids--you remember the day--if you had said that to me then, I'd have cocked my head and thought I was a jim-dandy, as they say. A Master Man was what I wanted to be. But it's a pretty barren thing to think, or to feel, that you're a Master Man; because, if you are--if you've had a 'scoop' all the way, as Jowett calls it, you can be as sure as anything that no one cares a rap farthing what happens to you. There are plenty who pretend they care, but it's only because they're sailing with the wind, and with your even keel. It's only the Master Man himself that doesn't know in the least he's that who gets anything out of it all."

"Aren't you getting anything out of it?" she asked softly. "Aren't you --Chief?"

At the familiar word--Jowett always called him Chief--a smile slowly stole across his face. "I really believe I am, thanks to you," he said nodding.

He was going to say, "Thanks to you, Fleda," but he restrained himself. He had no right to be familiar, to give an intimate turn to things. His game was over; his journey of ambition was done. He saw this girl with his mind's eye--how much he longed to see her with the eyes of the body --in all her strange beauty; and he knew that even if she cared for him, such a sacrifice as linking her life with his was impossible. Yet her very presence there was like a garden of bloom to him: a garden full of the odour of life, of vital things, of sweet energy and happy being. Somehow, he and she were strangely alike. He knew it. From the time he held her in his arms at Carillon, he knew it. The great adventurous spirit which was in him belonged also to her. That was as sure as light and darkness.

"No, there's no master man in me, but I think I know what one could be like," he remarked at last. He straightened himself against the pillows. The old look of power came to a face hardly strong enough to bear it. It was so fine and thin now, and the spirit in him was so prodigious.

"No one cares what happens to the man who always succeeds; no one loves him," he continued. "Do you know, in my trouble I've had more out of nigger Jim's affection than I've ever had in my life. Then there's Rockwell, Osterhaut and Jowett, and there's your father. It was worth while living to feel the real thing." His hands went out as though grasping something good and comforting. "I don't suppose every man needs to be struck as hard as I've been to learn what's what, but I've learned it. I give you my word of honour, I've learned it."

Her face flushed and her eyes kindled greatly. "Jim, Rockwell, Osterhaut, Jowett, and my father!" she exclaimed. "Of course trouble wouldn't do anything but make them come closer round you. Poor people live so near to misfortune all the time--I mean poor people like Jim, Osterhaut, and Jowett--that changes of fortune are just natural things to them. As for my father, he has had to stretch out his hands so often to those in trouble--"

"That he carried me home on his shoulders from the bridge six weeks and three days ago, at three o'clock in the morning," interjected Ingolby with a quizzical smile.

"Why did you omit Madame Bulteel and myself when you mentioned those who showed their--friendship?" she asked, hesitating at the last word. "Haven't we done our part?"

"I was talking of men," he answered. "One knows what women do. They may leave you in the bright days, not in the dark days. On the majority of them you couldn't rely in prosperity, but in misfortune you couldn't do anything else. They are there with you. They're made that way. The best life can give you in misfortune is a woman. It's the great beginning-of-the-world thing in them. Men can't stand prosperity, but women can stand misfortune. Why, if Jim and Osterhaut and Jowett and all the men of Lebanon and Manitou had deserted me, I shouldn't have been surprised; but I'd have had to recast my philosophy if Fleda Druse had turned her bonny brown head away."

It was evident he was making an effort to conquer emotions which were

rising in him; that he was playing on the surface to prevent his deep feelings from breaking forth. "Instead of which," he added jubilantly, "here I am, in the nicest room in the world, in a fine bed with springs like an antelope's heels."

He laughed, and hunched his back into the mattress. It was the laugh of the mocker, but he was mocking himself. She did not misunderstand. It was a nice room, as he said. He had never seen it with his eyes, but if he had seen it he would have realized how like herself it was--adorably fresh, happily coloured, sumptuous and fine. It had simple curtains, white sheets, and a warm carpet on the floor; and yet with something, too, that struck the note of a life outside. A pennant of many colours hung where two soft pink curtains joined, and at the window and over the door was an ancient cross in bronze and gold. It was not the simple Christian cross of the modern world, but an ancient one which had become a symbol of the Romanys, a sign to mark the highways, the guide of the wayfarers. The pennant had been on the pole of the Ry's tent in far-off days in the Roumelian country. In the girl herself there was that which corresponded to the gorgeous pennant and the bronze cross. It was not in dress or in manner, for there was no sign of garishness, of the unusual anywhere--in manner she was as well controlled as any woman of fashion, in dress singularly reserved--but in the depths of the eyes there was some restless, unsettled thing, some flicker of strange banners akin to the pennant at the joining of the pink curtains. There had been something of the same look in Ingolby's eyes in the past, only with him it was the sense of great adventure, intrepid enterprise, a touch of vision and the beckoning thing. That look was not in his eyes now. Nothing was there; no life, no soul; only darkness. But did that look still inhabit the eyes of the soul?

He answered the question himself. "I'd start again in a different way if I could," he said musingly, his face towards the girl. "It's easy to say that, but I would. It isn't only the things you get, it's how you use them. It isn't only the things you do, it's why you do them. But I'll never have a chance now; I'll never have a chance to try the new way. I'm done."

Something almost savage leaped into her eyes--a wild, bitter protest, for it was her tragedy, too, if he was not to regain his sight. The great impulse of a nature which had been disciplined into reserve broke forth.

"It isn't so," she said with a tremor in her voice. All that he--and she--was in danger of losing came home to her. "It isn't so. You shall get well again. Your sight will come back. To-morrow; perhaps to-day, Hindlip, the great oculist comes from New York. Mr. Warbeck, the Montreal man, holds out hopes. If the New York man says the same, why despair? Perhaps in another month you will be on your feet again, out in the world, fighting, working, mastering, just as you used to do."

A sudden stillness seemed to take possession of him. His lips parted; his head was thrust forwards slightly as though he saw something in the distance. He spoke scarcely above a whisper.

"I didn't know the New York man was coming. I didn't know there was any hope at all," he said with awe in his tones.

"We told you there was," she answered.

"Yes, I know. But I thought you were all only trying to make it easier

for me, and I heard Warbeck say to Rockwell, when they thought I was asleep, 'It's ten to one against him.'"

"Did you hear that?" she said sorrowfully. "I'm so sorry; but Mr. Warbeck said afterwards--only a week ago--that the chances were even. That's the truth. On my soul and honour it's the truth. He said the chances were even. It was he suggested Mr. Hindlip, and Hindlip is coming now. He's on the way. He may be here to-day. Oh, be sure, be sure, be sure, it isn't all over. You said your life was broken. It isn't. You said my life had been broken. It wasn't. It was only the wrench of a great change. Well, it's only the wrench of a great change in your life. You said I gained everything in the great change of my life. I did; and the great change in your life won't be lost, it will be gain, too. I know it; in my heart I know it."

With sudden impulse she caught his hand in both of hers, and then with another impulse, which she could not control, she caught his head to her bosom. For one instant her arms wrapped him round, and she murmured something in a language he did not understand--the language of the Roumelian country. It was only one swift instant, and then with shocked exclamation she broke away from him, dropped into a chair, and buried her face in her hands.

He blindly reached out his hand towards her as if to touch her. "Mother-girl, dear mother-girl--that's what you are," he said huskily. "What a great, kind heart you've got!"

She did not reply, but sat with face hidden in her hands, rocking backwards and forwards. He understood; he tried to help her. There was a great joy in his heart, but he dared not give it utterance.

"Please tell me about your life--about that great change in it," he said at last in a low voice. "Perhaps it would help me. Anyhow, I'd like to know, if you feel you can tell me."

For a moment she was silent. Then she said to him with an anxious note in her voice: "What do you know about my life--about the 'great change,' as you call it?"

He reached out over the coverlet, felt for a sock which he had been learning to knit and, slowly plying the needles, replied: "I only know what Jethro Fawe told me, and he was a promiscuous liar."

"I don't think he lied about me," she answered quietly. "He told you I was a Gipsy; he told you that I was married to him. That was true. I was a Gipsy. I was married to him in the Romany way, when I was a child of three, and I never saw him again until here, the other day, on the Sagalac."

"You were married to him as much as I am," he interjected scornfully. "That was a farce. It was only a promise to pay on the part of your father. There was nothing in that. Jethro Fawe could not claim on that."

"He has tried to do so," she answered, "and if I were still a Gipsy he would have the right to do so from his standpoint."

"That sounds silly to me," Ingolby remarked, his fingers moving now more quickly with the needles. "No, it isn't silly," she said, her voice

almost as softly monotonous as his had been when he told her of his life a little while before. It was as though she was looking into her own mind and heart and speaking to herself. "It isn't silly," she repeated. "I don't think you understand. Just because a race like the Gipsies have no country and no home, so they must have things that bind them which other people don't need in the same way. Being the vagrants of the earth, so they must have things that hold them tighter than any written laws made by King or Parliament. Unless the Gipsies kept their laws sacred they couldn't hold together at all. They're iron and steel, the Gipsy laws. They can't be stretched, and they can't be twisted. They can only be broken, and then there's no argument about it. When they are broken, there's the penalty, and it has to be met."

Ingolby stopped knitting for a moment. "You don't mean that a penalty could touch you?" he asked incredulously.

"Not for breaking a law," she answered. "I'm not a Gipsy any more. I gave my word about that, and so did my father; and I'll keep it."

"Please tell me about it," he urged. "Tell me, so that I can understand everything."

There was a long pause in which Ingolby inspected carefully with his fingers the work which he was doing, but at last Fleda's voice came to him, as it seemed out of a great distance, while she began to tell of her first memories: of her life by the Danube and the Black Sea, and drew for him a picture, so far as she could recall it, of her marriage with Jethro, and of the years that followed. Now and again as she told of some sordid things, of the challenge of the law in different countries, of the coarse vagabondage of the Gipsy people in this place or in that, and some indignity put upon her father, or some humiliating incident, her voice became low and pained. It seemed as if she meant that he should see all she had been in that past, which still must be part of the present and have its place in the future, however far away all that belonged to it would be. She appeared to search her mind to find that which would prejudice him against her. While speaking with slow scorn of the life which she had lived as a Gipsy, yet she tried to make him understand, too, that, in the days when she belonged to it, it all seemed natural to her, and that its sordidness, its vagabondage did not produce repugnance in her mind when she was part of it. Unwittingly she over-coloured the picture, and he knew she did.

In spite of herself, however, some aspects of the old life called forth pictures of happy Nature, of busy animal life of wood and glen and stream and footpath which was exquisite in its way. She was in spirit at one with the multitudinous world of nature among which so many men and women lived, without seeing or knowing. It was all undesignedly a part of herself, and she was one of a population in a universal nation whose devout citizen she was. Sometimes, in response to an interjection from Ingolby, deftly made, she told of some incident which revealed as great a poetic as dramatic instinct. As she talked, Ingolby in his imagination pictured her as a girl of ten or twelve, in a dark-red dress, brown curls falling in profusion on her shoulders, with a clear, honest, beautiful eye, and a face that only spoke of a joy of living, in which the small things were the small things and the great things were the great: the perfect proportion of sane life in a sane world.

Now and again, carried away by the history of things remembered, she visualized scenes for him with the ardour of an artist and a lover of

created things. He realized how powerful a hold the old life still had upon her. She understood it, too, for when at last she told of the great event in England which changed her life, and made her a deserter from Gipsy life; when she came to the giving of the pledge to a dying woman, and how she had kept that pledge, and how her father had kept it, sternly, faithfully, in spite of all it involved, she said to him:

"It may seem strange to you, living as I live now in one spot, with everything to make life easy, that I should long sometimes for that old life. I hate it in my heart of hearts, yet there's something about it that belongs to me, that's behind me, if that tells you anything. It's as though there was some other self in me which reached far, far back into centuries, that wills me to do this and wills me to do that. It sounds mad to you of course, but there have been times when I have had a wild longing to go back to it all, to what some Gorgio writers call the pariah world--the Ishmaelites."

More than once Ingolby's heart throbbed heavily against his breast as he felt the passion of her nature, its extraordinary truthfulness, making it clear to him by indirect phrases that even Jethro Fawe, whom she despised, still had a hateful fascination for her. It was all at variance to her present self, but it summoned her through the long avenues of ancestry, predisposition; through the secret communion of those who, being dead, yet speak.

"It's a great story told in a great way," he said, when she had finished. "It's the most honest thing I ever heard, but it's not the most truthful thing I ever heard. I don't think we can tell the exact truth about ourselves. We try to be honest; we are savagely in earnest about it, and so we exaggerate the bad things we do, and we often show distrust of the good things we do. That's not a fair picture. I believe you've told me the truth as you see it and feel it, but I don't think it's the real truth. In my mind I sometimes see an oriel window in the college where I spent three years. I used to work and think for hours in that oriel window, and in the fights I've been having lately I've looked back and thought I wanted it again; wanted to be there in the peace of it all, with the books, and the lectures, and the drone of history, and the drudgery of examinations; but if I did go back to it, three days'd sicken me, and if you went back to the Gipsy life three days'd sicken you."

"Yes, I know. Three hours would sicken me. But what might not happen in those three hours! Can't you understand?"

Suddenly she got to her feet with a passionate exclamation, her clenched hands went to her temples in an agony of emotion. "Can't you understand?" she repeated. "It's the going back at all for three days, for three hours, for three minutes that counts. It might spoil everything; it might kill my life."

His face flushed, crimsoned, then became pale; his hands ceased moving; the knitting lay still on his knee. "Maybe, but you aren't going back for three minutes, any more than I'm going back to the oriel window for three seconds," he said. "We dreamers have a lot of agony in thinking about the things we're never going to do--just as much agony as in thinking about the things we've done. Every one of us dreamers ought to be insulated. We ought to wear emotional lightning-rods to carry off the brain-waves into the ground."

"I've never heard such a wonderful story," he added, after an instant,

with an intense longing to hold out his arms to her, and a still more intense will to do no such wrong. A blind man had no right or title to be a slave-owner, for that was what marriage to him would be. A wife would be a victim. He saw himself, felt himself being gradually devitalized, with only the placid brain left, considering only the problem of hourly comfort, and trying to neutralize the penalties of blindness. She must not be sacrificed to that, for apart from all else she had greatness of a kind in her. He knew far better than he had said of the storm of emotion in her, and he knew that she had not exaggerated the temptation which sang in her ears. Jethro Fawe--the thought of the man revolted him; and yet there was something about the fellow, a temperamental power, the glamour and garishness of Nature's gifts, prostituted though they were, finding expression in a striking personality, in a body of athletic grace--a man-beauty.

"Have you seen Jethro Fawe lately?" he asked. "Not since"--she was going to say not since the morning her father had passed the sentence of the patrin upon him; but she paused in time. "Not since everything happened to you," she added presently.

"He knows the game is up," Ingolby remarked with forced cheerfulness. "He won't be asking for any more."

"It's time for your milk and brandy," she said suddenly, emotion subsiding and a look of purpose coming into her face. She poured out the liquid, and gave the glass into his hand. His fingers touched hers.

"Your hands are cold," she said to him. "Cold hands, warm heart," he chattered.

A curious, wilful, rebellious look came into her eyes. "I shouldn't have thought it in your case," she said, and with sudden resolve turned towards the door. "I'll send Madame Bulteel," she added. "I'm going for a walk."

She had betrayed herself so much, had shown so recklessly what she felt, and yet, yet why did he not--she did not know what she wanted him to do. It was all a great confusion. Vaguely she realized what had been working in him, but yet the knowledge was dim indeed. She was a woman. In her heart of hearts she knew that he did care for her, and yet in her heart of hearts she denied that he cared.

She was suddenly angry with herself, angry with him, the poor blind man, back from the Valley of the Shadow. She had not reached the door, however, when Madame Bulteel entered the room.

"The doctor from New York has come," she said, holding out a note from Dr. Rockwell. "He will be here in a couple of hours."

Fleda turned back towards the bed.

"Good luck!" she said. "You'll see, it will be all right."

"Certainly I'll see if it's all right," he said cheerfully. "Am I tidy? Have I used Pears' soap?" He would have his joke at his own funeral if possible.

"There are two hours to get you fit to be seen," she rejoined with raillery, infected by his cheerfulness in spite of herself. "Madame

Bulteel is very brave. Nothing is too hard for her!"

An instant later she was gone, with her heart telling her to go back to him, not to leave him, but yet with a longing stronger still driving her to the open world, to which she could breathe her trouble in great gasps, as she sped onward through the woods and by the river. To love a blind man was sheer madness, but in her was a superstitious belief that he would see again. It prevailed against the doubts and terrors. It made her resent his own sense of fatality, his own belief that he would be in darkness all his days.

In the room where he awaited the verdict of the expert, he kept saying to himself:

"She would have made everything else look cheap--if it could have been."

CHAPTER XXI

THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER

The last rays of the setting sun touched the gorgeous Autumn woods with a loving, bright glow, and the day stole pensively away into a purple bed beyond the sight of the eyes. From a lonely spot by the river, Fleda watched the westering gleam until it vanished, her soul alive to the melancholy beauty of it all. Not a human being seemed to be within the restricted circle of her vision. There were only to be seen the deep woods, in myriad tints of bronze and red and saffron, and the swift-flowing river. Overhead was the Northern sky, so clear, so thrilling, and the stars were beginning to sparkle in the incredibly swift twilight which links daytime and nighttime in that Upper Land. Lonely and delicately sad it all looked, but there was no feeling of loneliness among those who lived the life of the Sagalac. Many a man has stood on a wide plain of snow, white to the uttermost horizon, or in the yellow-brown grass of the Summer prairie, empty of all human life so far as eye could see, and yet has felt no solitude. It is as though the air itself is inhabited by a throng of happy comrades whispering in the communion of the invisible world.

As a child Fleda had often gazed upon just such scenes, lonely and luminous, but she was only conscious then of a vague and pleasant awe, a kindly confusion, which, like the din of innumerable bees, lulled wonder to sleep. Even as a child, however, something of what it meant had pierced her awe and wonder. Once as she crossed a broken, bare mountain of Roumania she had seen a wild ass perched upon a high summit gazing, as it were, over the wide valley, where beneath, among the rocks, other wild asses wandered. There was something so statue-like in this immovable wild creature that Fleda had watched it till it was hid from her view by a jutting rock. But the thing which made a lasting impression, drawing her nearer to nature-life than all that had chanced since she was born, was the fact that on returning, hours after, the wild ass was still standing upon the summit of the hill, still gazing across the valley. Or was it gazing across the valley? Was there some other vision commanding its sight?

So a young wife not yet a mother loses herself for hours together in a vista of unexplored experience. Fleda had passed on, out of sight of the

wild ass on the hills, but for ever after the memory of it remained with her and the picture of it sprang to her eye innumerable times. The hypnotized wild thing--hypnotized by its own vague instincts, or by something outside itself--became to her as the Sphinx to the Egyptian, the everlasting question of existence.

Now, as she watched the day fleeing, and night with swift stealthiness coming on, that unforgettable picture of the Roumanian hills came to her again. The instinct of those far-off days which had been little removed from the finest animal intelligence had now developed into thought. Brain and soul strove to grasp what it all meant, and what the revelation was between Nature and herself. Nature was so vast; she was so insignificant; changes in its motionless inorganic life were imperceptible save through the telescopes of years; but she, like the wind, the water, and the clouds, was variable, inconstant. Was there any real relation between the vast, imperturbable earth, its seas, its forests, its mountains and its plains, its life of tree and plant and flower and the men and women dotted on its surface? Did they belong to each other, or were mankind only, as it were, vermin infesting the desirable world? Did they belong to each other? It meant so much if they did belong, and she loved to think they did. Many a time she kissed the smooth bole of a maple or whispered to it; or laid her cheek against a mossy rock and murmured a greeting in the spirit of a companionship as old as the making of the world.

On the evening of this day of her destiny--carrying the story of her own fate within its twenty-four hours--she was in a mood of detachment from life's routine. As at a great opera, a sensitive spirit loses itself in visions alien to the music and yet born of it, so she, lost in this primeval scene before her, saw visions of things to be.

If Ingolby's sight came back! In her abstraction she saw him with sight restored and by her side, and even in that joy her mind felt a hovering sense of invasion, no definite, visible thing, but a presence which made shadow. Suddenly oppressed by it, she turned back into the woods from the river-bank to make for home. She had explored nearly every portion of this river-country for miles up and down, but on this evening, lost in her dreams, she had wandered into less familiar regions. There was no chance of her being lost, so long as she kept near to the river, and indeed by instinct and not by thought or calculation she made her way about at all times. Turned homeward, she walked for about a quarter of a mile, retreading the path by which she had come. It was growing darker, and, being in unfamiliar surroundings, she hurried on, though she knew well what course to take. Following the bank of the river she would have increased her walk greatly, as the stream made a curve at a point above Manitou, and then came back again to its original course; so she cut across the promontory, taking the most direct line homeward.

Presently, however, she became conscious of other people in the wood besides herself. She saw no one, but she heard breaking twigs, the stir of leaves, the flutter of a partridge which told of human presence. The underbrush was considerable, darkness was coming on, and she had a sense of being surrounded. It agitated her, but she pulled herself together, stood still and admonished herself. She called herself a fool; she asked herself if she was going to be a coward. She laughed out loud at her own apprehension; but a chill stole into her blood when she heard near by--there was no doubt about it now--mockery of her own laughter. Then suddenly, before she could organize her senses, a score of men seemed to rise up from the ground around her, to burst out from the bushes, to drop

from the trees, and to storm upon her. She had only time to realize that they were Romanys, before scarfs were thrown around her head, bound around her body, and, unconscious, she was carried away into the deep woods.

When she regained consciousness Fleda found herself in a tent, set in a kind of prairie amphitheatre valanced by shrubs and trees. Bright fires burned here and there, and dark-featured men squatted upon the ground, cared for their horses, or busied themselves near two large caravans, at the doors or on the steps of which now and again appeared a woman.

She had waked without moving, had observed the scene without drawing the attention of a man--a sentry--who sat beside the tent-door. The tent was empty save for herself. There was little in it besides the camp-bed against the tent wall, upon which she lay, and the cushions supporting her head. She had waked carefully, as it were: as though some inward monitor had warned her of impending danger. She realized that she had been kidnapped by Romanys, and that the hand behind the business was that of Jethro Fawe. The adventurous and reckless Fawe family had its many adherents in the Romany world, and Jethro was its head, the hereditary claimant for its leadership.

Notwithstanding the Ry of Rys' prohibition, there had drawn nearer and ever nearer to him, from the Romany world he had abandoned, many of his people, never, however, actually coming within his vision till the appearance of Jethro Fawe. Here and there on the prairie, to a point just beyond Gabriel Druse's horizon, they had come from all parts of the world; and Jethro, reckless and defiant under the Sentence, and knowing that the chances against his life were a million to one, had determined on one bold stroke which, if it failed, would make his fate no worse, and, if it succeeded, would give him his wife and, maybe, headship over all the Romany world. For weeks he had planned, watched and waited, filling the woods with his adherents, secretly following Fleda day by day, until, at last, the place, the opportunity, seemed perfect; and here she lay in a Romany tan once more, with the flickering fires outside in the night, and the sentry at her doorway. This watchman was not Jethro Fawe, but she knew well that Jethro was not far off.

Through the open door of the tent, for some minutes, her eyes studied the segment of the circle within her vision, and she realized that here was an organized attempt to force her back into the Romany world. If she repudiated the Gorgio life and acknowledged herself a Romany once again, she knew her safety would be secured; but in truth she had no fear for her life, for no one would dare to defy the Ry of Rys so far as to kill his daughter. But she was in danger of another kind--in deep and terrible danger; and she knew it well. As the thought of it took possession of her, her heart seemed almost to burst. Not fear, but anger and emotion possessed her. All the Romany in her stormed back again from the past. It sent her to her feet with a scarcely smothered cry. She was not quicker, however, than was the figure at the tent door, which, with a half-dozen others, sprang up as she appeared. A hand was raised, and, as if by magic, groups of Gipsies, some sitting, some standing, some with the Gipsy fiddle, one or two with flutes, began a Romany chant in a high, victorious key, and women threw upon the fire powders from which flamed up many coloured lights.

In a moment the camp was transformed. From the woods around came swarthy-faced men, with great gold rings in their ears and bright scarfs around their necks or waists, some of them handsome, dirty and insolent;

others ugly, watchful, and quiet in manner and face; others still most friendly and kind in face and manner. All showed instant respect for Fleda. They raised their hands in a gesture of salutation as a Zulu chief thrusts up a long arm and shouts "Inkoos!" to one whom he honours. Some, however, made the sweeping Oriental gesture of the right hand, palm upward, and almost touching the ground--a sign of obedience and infinite respect. It had all been well arranged. Skilfully managed as it was, however, there was something in it deeper than theatrical display or dramatic purpose.

It was clear that many of them were deeply moved at being in the presence of the daughter of the Ry of Rys, who had for so long exiled himself. Racial, family, clan feeling spoke in voice and gesture, in look and attitude; but yet there were small groups of younger men whose salutations were perfunctory, not to say mocking. These were they who resented deeply Fleda's defection, and truthfully felt that she had passed out of their circle for ever; that she despised them, and looked down on them from another sphere. They were all about the age of Jethro Fawe, but were of a less civilized type, and had semi-barbarism written all over them. Unlike Jethro they had never known the world of cities. They repudiated Fleda, because their ambition could not reach to her. They recognized the touch of fashion and of form, of a worldly education, of a convention which lifted her away from the tan and the caravan, from the everlasting itinerary. They had not had Jethro's experiences in fashionable hotels of Europe, at midnight parties, at gay suppers, at garish dances, where Gorgio ladies answered the amorous looks of the ambitious Romany with the fiddle at his chin. Because these young Romanys knew they dare not aspire, they were resentful; but Jethro, the head of the rival family and the son of the dead claimant to the headship, had not such compulsory modesty. He had ranged far and wide, and his expectations were extensive. He was nowhere to be seen in the groups which sang and gestured in the light of the many coloured fires, though once or twice Fleda's quickened ear detected his voice, exulting, in the chorus of song.

Presently, as she stood watching, listening, and strangely moved in spite of herself by the sudden dramatic turn which things had taken, a seat was brought to her. It was a handsome stool, looted perhaps from some chateau in the Old World, and over it was thrown a dark-red cloth which gave a semblance of dignity to the seat of authority, which it was meant to be.

Fleda did not refuse the honour. She had choked back the indignant words which had rushed to her lips as she left the tent where she had been lying. Prudence had bade her await developments. She could not yet make up her mind what to do. It was clear that a bold and deep purpose lay behind it all, and she could not tell how far-reaching it was, nor what it represented of rebellion against her father's authority. That it did represent rebellion she had no doubt. She was well enough aware of the claims of Jethro's dead father to the leadership, abandoned for three thousand pounds and marriage with herself; and she was also aware that while her father's mysterious isolation might possibly have developed a reverence for him, yet active pressure and calumny might well have done its work. Also, if the marriage was repudiated, Jethro would be justified in resuming the family claim to the leadership.

She seated herself upon the scarlet seat with a gesture of thanks, while the salutations and greetings increased; then she awaited events, thrilled by the weird and pleasant music, with its touches of Eastern

fantasy. In spite of herself she was moved, as Romanys, men and women, ran forward in excitement with arms raised towards her as though they meant to strike her, then suddenly stopped short, made obeisance, called a greeting, and ran backwards to their places.

Presently a group of men began a ceremony or ritual, before which the spectators now and again covered their eyes, or bent their heads low, or turned their backs, and raised their hands in a sort of ascription. As the ceremony neared its end, with its strange genuflections, a woman dressed in white was brought forward, her hands bound behind her, her hair falling over her shoulders, and after a moment of apparent denunciation on the part of the head of the ceremony, she was suddenly thrown to the ground, and the pretence of drawing a knife across her throat was made. As Fleda watched it she shuddered, but presently braced herself, because she knew that this ritual was meant to show what the end must be of those who, like herself, proved traitor to the traditions of race.

It was at this point, when fifty knives flashed in the air, with vengeful exclamations, that Jethro Fawe appeared in the midst of the crowd. He was dressed in the well-known clothes which he had worn since the day he first declared himself at Gabriel Druse's home, and, compared with his friends around him, he showed to advantage. There was command in his bearing, and experience of life had given him primitive distinction.

For a moment he stood looking at Fleda in undisguised admiration, for she made a remarkable picture. Animal beauty was hers, too. There was a delicate, athletic charm in her body and bearing; but it added to, rather than took away from, the authority of her presence, so differing from Jethro. She had never compared herself with others, and her passionate intelligence would have rebelled against the supremacy of the body. She had no physical vanity, but she had some mental vanity, and it placed mind so far above matter that her beauty played no part in her calculations. At sight of him, Fleda's blood quickened, but in indignation and in no other sense. As he came towards her, however, despising his vanity as she did, she felt how much he was above all those by whom he was surrounded. She realized his talent, and it almost made her forget his cunning and his loathsomeness. As he came near to her he made a slight gesture to someone in the crowd, and a chorus of salutations rose.

Composed and still she waited for him to come quite close to her, and the look in her face was like that of one who was scarcely conscious of what was passing around her, whose eyes saw distant things of infinite moment.

A few feet away from her he spoke.

"Daughter of the Ry of Rys, you are among your own people once again," he said. "From everywhere in the world they have come to show their love for you. You would not have come to them of your own free will, because a madness 'got hold of you, and so they came to you. You cut yourself off from them and told yourself you had become a Gorgio. But that was only your madness; and madness can be cured. We are the Fawes, the ancient Fawes, who ruled the Romany people before the Druses came to power. We are of the ancient blood, yet we are faithful to the Druse that rules over us. His word prevails, although his daughter is mad. Daughter of the Ry of Rys, you have seen us once again. We have sung to you; we have spoken to you; we have told you what is in our hearts; we have shown you how good is the end of those who are faithful, and how

terrible is the end of the traitor. Do not forget it. Speak to us."

Fleda had a fierce desire to spring to her feet and declare to them all that the sentence of the patrin had been passed upon Jethro Fawe, but she laid a hand upon herself. She knew they were unaware that the Sentence had been passed, else they would not have been with Jethro. In that case none would give him food or shelter or the hand of friendship; none dare show him any kindness; and it was the law that any one against whom he committed an offence, however small, might take his life. The Sentence had been like a cloud upon her mind ever since her father had passed it; she could not endure the thought of it. She could not bring herself to speak of it--to denounce him. Sooner or later the Sentence would reach every Romany everywhere, and Jethro would pass into the darkness of oblivion, not in his own time nor in the time of Fate. The man was abhorrent to her, yet his claim was there. Mad and bad as it was, he made his claim of her upon ancient rights, and she was still enough a Romany to see his point of view.

Getting to her feet slowly, she ignored Jethro, looked into the face of the crowd, and said:

"I am the daughter of the Ry of Rys still, though I am a Romany no longer. I made a pledge to be no more a Romany and I will keep it; yet you and all Romany people are dear to me because through long generations the Druses have been of you. You have brought me here against my will. Do you think the Ry of Rys will forgive that? In your words you have been kind to me, but yet you have threatened me. Do you think that a Druse has any fear? Did a Druse ever turn his cheek to be smitten? You know what the Druses are. I am a Druse still. I will not talk longer, I have nothing to say to you all except that you must take me back to my father, and I will see that he forgives you. Some of you have done this out of love; some of you have done it out of hate; yet set me free again upon the path to my home, and I shall forget it, and the Ry of Rys will forget it."

At that instant there suddenly came forward from the doorway of a tent on the outskirts of the crowd a stalwart woman, with a strong face and a self-reliant manner. She was still young, but her slightly pockmarked countenance showed the wear and tear of sorrow of some kind. She had, indeed, lost her husband and her father in the Montenegrin wars. Hastening forward to Fleda she reached out a hand.

"Come with me," she said; "come and sleep in my tent to-night. To-morrow you shall go back to the Ry of Rys, perhaps. Come with me."

There was a sudden murmuring in the crowd, which was stilled by a motion of Jethro Fawe's hand, and a moment afterwards Fleda gave her hand to the woman.

"I will go with you," Fleda said. Then she turned to Jethro: "I wish to speak to you alone, Jethro Fawe," she added.

He laughed triumphantly. "The wife of Jethro Fawe wishes to speak with him," he bombastically cried aloud to the assembled people, and he prepared to follow Fleda.

As Fleda entered the woman's tent a black-eyed girl, with tousled hair and a bold, sensual face, ran up to Jethro, and in an undertone of evil suggestion said to him:

"To-night is yours, Jethro. You can make tomorrow sure."

CHAPTER XXII

THE SECRET MAN

"You are wasting your time."

Fleda said the words with a quiet determination, and yet in the tone was a slight over-emphasis which was like a call upon reserve forces within herself.

"Time is nothing to me," was the complete reply, clothed in a tone of soft irony. "I'm young enough to waste it. I've plenty of it in my knapsack."

"Have you forgotten the Sentence of the Patrín?" Fleda asked the question in a voice which showed a sudden access of determination.

"He will have to wipe it out after to-morrow," replied the other with a gleam of sulky meaning and furtive purpose in his eyes.

"If you mean that I will change my mind to-morrow, and be your wife, and return to the Gipsy life, it is the thought of a fool. I asked you to come here to speak with me because I was sure I could make you see things as they truly are. I wanted to explain why I did not tell the Romanys outside there that the Sentence had been passed on you. I did not tell them because I can't forget that your people and my people have been sib for hundreds of years; that you and I were children together; that we were sealed to one another when neither of us could have any say about it. If I had remained a Gipsy, who can tell--my mind might have become like yours! I think there must be something rash and bad in me somewhere, because I tell you frankly now that a chord in my heart rang when you made your wild speeches to me there in the hut in the Wood months ago, even when I hated you, knowing you for what you are."

"That was because there was another man," interjected Jethro.

She inclined her head. "Yes, it was partly because of another man," she replied. "It is a man who suffers because of you. When he was alone among his foes, a hundred to one, you betrayed him. That itself would have made me despise you to the end of my life, even if the man had been nothing at all to me."

"It was a low, cowardly thing to do. You did it; and if you were my brother, I would hate you for it; if you were my father, I should leave your house; if you were my husband, I should kill you. I asked you to speak with me now because I thought that if you would go away--far away--promising never to cross my father's path, or my path, again, I could get him to withdraw the Sentence. You have kidnapped me. Where do you think you are? In Mesopotamia? You can't break the law of this country and escape as you would there. They don't take count of Romany custom here. Not only you, but every one of the Fawes here will be punished if the law reaches for your throat. I want you to escape, and I tell you to go now. Go back to Europe. I advise you this for your own sake--because you are

a Fawe and of the clan."

The blood mounted to Jethro's forehead, and he made an angry gesture. "And leave you here for him! 'Mi Duvel!' I can only die once, and I would rather die near you than far away," he exclaimed.

His eyes had a sardonic look, there was a savage edge to his tongue, yet his face was flushed with devouring emotion and he was quivering with hope. That which he called love was flooding the field of his feelings, and the mad thing--the toxic impulse which is deep in the brain of Eastern races bled into his brain now. He was reckless, rebellious against fate, insanely wilful, and what she had said concerning Ingolby had roused in him the soul of Cain.

She realized it, and she was apprehensive of some desperate act; yet she had no physical fear of him. Something seemed to tell her that, no matter what happened, Ingolby would not wait for her in vain, and that he would yet see her enter to him again with the love-light in her eyes.

"But listen to me," Jethro said, with an unnatural shining in his eyes, his voice broken in its passion. "You think you can come it over me with your Gorgio talk and the clever things you've learned in the Gorgio world. You try to look down on me. I'm as well born or as ill born as you. The only difference between us is the way you dress, the way you live and use your tongue. All that belongs to the life of the cities. Anyone can learn it. Anyone well born like you and me, with a little practice, can talk like Gorgio dukes and earls. I've been among them and I know. I've had my friends among them, too. I've got the hang of it all. It's no good to me, and I don't want it. It's all part of a set piece. There's no independence in that life; you live by rule. Diable! I know. I've been in palaces; I've played my fiddle to the women in high places who can't blush. It's no good; it brings nothing in the end. It's all hollow. Look at our people there." He swept a hand to the tent door.

"They're tanned and rough, as all out-door things are rough, but they've got their share of happiness, and every day has its pleasures. Listen to them!" he cried with a gesture of exultation. "Listen to that!"

The colour slowly left Fleda's face. Outside in the light of the dying fires, under the glittering stars, in the shade of the trees, groups of Romanys were singing the Romany wedding melody, called "The Song of the Sealing." It was not like the ringing of wedding bells alone, it sealed blessing upon the man and the woman. It was a poem in praise of marriage passion; it was a paeon proclaiming the accomplishment of life. Crude, primitive, it thrilled with Eastern feeling; a weird charm was showered from its notes.

"Listen!" exclaimed Jethro again, a fire burning in his face. "That's for you and me. To them you are my wife, and I am your man. 'Mi Duvel' --it shall be so! I know women. For an hour you will hate me; for a day you will resent me, and then you will begin to love me. You will fight me, but I will conquer. I know you--I know you--all you women. But no, it will not be I that will conquer. It's my love that will do it. It's a den of tigers. When it breaks loose it will have its way. Here it is. Can't you see it in my face? Can't you hear it in my voice? Don't you hear my heart beating? Every throb says, 'Fleda--Fleda--Fleda, come to me.' I have loved you since you were three. I want you now. We can be happy. Every night we will make a new home. The world will be ours; the

best that is in it will come to us. We will tap the trees of happiness --they're hid from the Gorgio world. You and I will know where to find them. Every land shall be ours; every gift of paradise within our reach --riches, power, children. Come back to your own people; be a true daughter of the Ry of Rys; live with your Romany chal. You will never be at home anywhere else. It's in your bones; it's in your blood; it's deeper than all. Here, now, come to me--my wife."

He flung the flap of the tent door across the opening, shutting out the camp-fires and the people. "Here--now--come. Be mine while they sing."

For one swift moment the great passion and eloquence of the man lifted her off her feet; for one instant the Romany in her triumphed, and a thrill of passion passed through her, storming her senses, like a mist shutting out all the rest of the world. This Romany was right; there was in her the wild thing--the everlasting strain of race and years breaking down all the defences which civilized life had built up within her. Just for one instant so--and then there flashed before her a face with two blind eyes.

Like a stream of ether playing upon warm flesh, making it icy cold, so something of the ineradicable good in her swept like a frozen spray upon the elements of emotion, and with both hands she made a gesture of repulsion.

His eyes with their reddish glow burned nearer and nearer to her. He bulked over her, driving her back against the couch by the tent wall. For an instant like that--and then, with clenched hand, she struck him in the face.

Swift as had been the change in her, so a change like a cyclone swept over him. The hysterical passion which had possessed him suddenly passed, and a dark, sullen determination swept into his eyes and over his face. His lips parted in a savage smile.

"Hell, so that's what you've learned in the Gorgio world, is it?" he asked malevolently. "Then I'll teach you what they do in the Romany world; and to-morrow you can put the two together and see what they look like."

With a Romany expletive, he flung back the curtain of the tent and passed out into the night.

For a long time Fleda sat stunned and overcome by the side of the couch, her brain tortured by a thousand thoughts. She knew there was no immediate escape from the encampment. She could only rely upon the hue and cry which would be raised and the certain hunt which would be made for her. But what might not happen before any rescue came? The ancient grudge of the Fawes against the Druses had gained power and activity by the self-imposed exile of Gabriel Druse; and Jethro had worked upon it. The veiled threats which Jethro had made she did not despise. He was a barbarian. He would kill what he loved; he would have his way with what he loved, whether or not it was the way of law or custom or right. Outside, the wedding song still made musical the night. Women's voices, shrill, and with falsetto notes, made the trees ring with it; low, bass voices gave it a kind of solemnity. The view which the encampment took of her captivity was clear. Where was the woman that brought her to the tent--whose tent it was? She seemed kind. Though her face had a hard look, surely she meant to be friendly. Or did she only mean to betray

her; to give her a fancied security, and leave her to Jethro--and the night? She looked round for some weapon. There was nothing available save two brass candlesticks. Though the door of the tent was closed, she knew that there were watchers outside; that any break for liberty would only mean defeat, and yet she was determined to save herself.

As she tried to take the measure of the situation and plan what she would do, the noise of the music suddenly ceased, and she heard a voice, though low in tone, give some sort of command. Then there was a cry, and what seemed the chaotic noise of a struggle followed; then a voice a little louder speaking, a voice of someone she remembered, though she could not place it. Something vital was happening outside, something punctuated by sharp, angry exclamations; afterwards a voice speaking soothingly, firmly, prevailed; and then there was silence. As she listened there was a footstep at the door of the tent, a voice called to her softly, and a hand drew aside the tent curtain. The woman who had brought her to this place entered.

"You are all safe now," she said, reaching out both hands to Fleda. "By long and by last, but it was a close shave! He meant to make you his wife to-night, whether you would or no. I'm a Fawe, but I'd have none of that. I was on my way to your father's house when I met someone--someone that you know. He carries your father's voice in his mouth."

She stepped to the tent door and beckoned; and out of the darkness, only faintly lightened by the dying fires, there entered one whom Fleda had seen not more than fifty times in her life, and never but twice since she had ceased to be a Romany. It was her father's secret agent, Rhodo, the Roumelian, now grizzled and gaunt, but with the same vitality which had been his in the days when she was a little child.

Here and there in the world went Rhodo, the voice of the Ry of Rys to do his bidding, to say his say. No minister of a Czar was ever more dreaded or loved. His words were ever few, but his deeds had been many. Now, as he looked at Fleda, his old eyes gleamed, and he showed a double row of teeth, not one of which was imperfect, though he was seventy years of age.

"Would you like to come?" he asked. "Would you like to come home to the Ry?"

With a cry she flung herself upon him. "Rhodo! Rhodo!" she exclaimed, and now the tears broke forth, and her body shook with sobs.

A few moments later he said to her: "It's fifteen years since you kissed me last. I thought you were ashamed of old Rhodo."

She did not answer, but looked at him with eyes streaming, drawing back from him. Her embrace was astonishing even to herself, for as a child Rhodo had been a figure of awe to her, and the feeling had deepened as the years had gone on, knowing as she did his work throughout the world for the Ry of Rys. In his face was secrecy, knowledge, and some tragic underthing which gave him, apart from his office, a singular loneliness of figure and manner. He was so closely knit in form; there was such concentration in face, bearing and gesture, that the isolation of his position was greatly deepened.

"No, you never kissed me after you were old enough to like or dislike," he said with mournful and ironical reflection.

There crept into his face a kind of yearning such as one might feel who beheld afar off a promised land, and yet was denied its joys. Rhodo was wifeless, childless, and had been so for forty years. He had had no intimates among the Romany people. His life he lived alone. That the daughter of the Ry of Rys should kiss him was a thing of which he would dream when deeds were done and over and the shadows threatened.

"I will kiss you again in another fifteen years," she said half-smiling through her tears. "But tell me--tell me what has happened."

"Jethro Fawe has gone," he answered with a sweeping outward gesture.

"Where has he gone?" she asked, apprehension seizing her.

"A journey into the night," responded the old man with scorn and wrath in his tone, and his lips were set.

"Is he going far?" she asked.

"The road you might think long would be short to him," he answered.

Her hands became cold; her heart seemed to stop beating.

"What road is that?" she asked. She knew, but she must ask.

"Everybody knows it; everybody goes it some time or another," he answered darkly.

"What was it you said to all of them outside?"--she made a gesture towards the doorway. "There were angry cries, and I heard Jethro Fawe's voice."

"Yes, he was blaspheming," remarked the old man grimly.

"Tell me what it was you said, and tell me what has happened," she persisted.

The old man hesitated a moment, then said grimly: "I told them they must go one way and Jethro Fawe another. I told them the Ry of Rys had said no patrins should mark the road Jethro Fawe's feet walked. I had heard of this gathering here, and I was on my way to bid them begone, for in following the Ry they have broken his command. As I came, I met the woman of this tent who has been your friend. She is a good woman; she has suffered. Her people are gone, but she has a heart for others. I met her. She told me of what that rogue and devil had done and would do. He is the head of the Fawes, but the Ry of Rys is the head of all the Romanys of the world. He has spoken the Word against Jethro, and the Word shall prevail. The Word of the Ry when it is given cannot be withdrawn. It is like the rock on which the hill rests."

"They did not go with him?" she asked.

"It is not the custom," he answered sardonically. "That is a path a Romany walks alone."

Her face was white. "But he has not come to the end of the path--has he?" she asked tremulously. "Who can tell? This day, or twenty years from now, or to-morrow, or next moon, he will come to the end of the path. No one knows, he least of all. He will not see the end, because

the road is dark. I don't think it will be soon," he added, because he saw how haggard her face had grown. "No, I don't think it will be soon. He is a Fawe, at the head of all the Fawes; so perhaps there will be time for him to think, and no doubt it will not be soon."

"Perhaps it will not be at all. My father spoke, but he can withdraw his word," she urged.

Suddenly the old Gipsy's face hardened. A look of dark resolve and iron force came into it.

"The Ry will not withdraw. He has spoken, and it must be. If he spoke lightly he is not fit to rule. Unless the word of the Ry of Rys is good against breaking, then the Romanys are no more than scattered leaves at the will of the wind. It is the word of the Ry that holds our folk together. It shall not bless, and it shall not curse in vain."

Pitying the girl's face, however, and realizing that the Gorgio life had given her a new view of things; angry with her because it was so, but loving her for herself, he added:

"But the night road may be long, though it is lonely, and if it should be that the Ry should pass before the end of the road comes to Jethro, then is Jethro freed, since the Word is gone which binds his feet for the pitfall."

"He must not die," she insisted.

"Then the Ry of Rys must not live," he rejoined sternly. With a kindly gesture, however, he stretched out his hand. "Come, we shall reach the house of the Ry before the morning," he added. "He is not returned from his journey, and so will not be troubled by having missed you. There will be an hour for beauty-sleep before the sun rises," he continued with the same wide smile with which he greeted her first. Then he lifted up the curtain and passed out into the night.

Following him, Fleda saw that the Romanys had broken camp, and only a small handful remained, among them the woman who had befriended her. Fleda went up to her:

"I will never forget you," she said. "Will you wear this for me?" she added, and she took from her throat a brooch which she had worn ever since her first days in England, after her great illness there. The woman accepted the brooch. "Lady love," she said, "you've lost your sleep to-night, but that's a loss you can make good. If there's a night's sleep owing you, you can collect the debt some time. No, a night's sleep lost in a tent is nothing, if you're the only one in the tent. But if you're not alone, and you lose a night's sleep, someone else may pick it up, and you might never get it again!"

A flush slowly stole over Fleda's face, and a look of horror came into her eyes. She read the parable aright.

"Will you let me kiss you?" she said to the woman, and now it was the woman's turn to flush.

"You are the daughter of the Ry of Rys," she said almost shyly, yet proudly.

"I'm a girl with a debt to pay and can never pay it," Fleda answered, putting her arms impulsively around the woman's neck and kissing her. Then she took the brooch from the woman's hand, and pinned it at her throat.

"Think of Fleda of the Druses sometimes," she said, and she laid a hand upon the woman's breast. "Lady love--lady love," said the blunt woman with the pockmarked face, "you've had the worst fright to-night that you'll ever have." She caught Fleda's hand and peered into it. "Yes, it's happiness for you now, and on and on," she added exultingly, and with the fortune-teller's air. "You've passed the danger place, and there'll be wealth and a man who's been in danger, too; and there's children, beautiful children--I see them."

In confusion, Fleda snatched her hand away. "Good-bye, you fool-woman," she said impatiently, yet gently, too. "You talk such sense and such nonsense. Good-bye," she added brusquely, but yet she smiled at the woman as she turned away.

A moment later she was on her way back to Manitou, but she did not get to her father's house before the break of day; and in the doorway she met Madame Bulteel, whose pale, drawn face proclaimed a sleepless night.

"Tell me what has happened? Tell me what has happened?" she asked in distress.

Fleda took both her hands. "Before I answer, tell me what has happened here," she said breathlessly. "What news?"

Madame Bulteel's face lighted. "Good news," she exclaimed eagerly.

"He will see--he will see again?" Fleda asked in great agitation.

"The Montreal doctor said that the chances were even," answered Madame Bulteel. "This man from the States says it is a sure thing."

With a murmur Fleda sank into a chair, and a faintness came over her.

"That's not like a Romany," remarked old Rhodo. "No, it's certainly not like a Romany," remarked Madame Bulteel meaningly.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RETURN OF BELISARIUS

Grey days in the prairie country do not come very often, but they are very depressing when they arrive. The landscape is not of the luscious kind; it has no close correspondence with a picture by Corot or Constable; sunlight is needed to give it the touch of the habitable and the homelike. It was, therefore, unfortunate for the spirits of the Lebanon people that the meeting summoned by local agitators to discuss with asperity affairs on both sides of the Sagalac should, while starting with fitful sunlight in the early morning, have developed to a bleak greyness by three o'clock in the afternoon, the time set for the meeting.

Another strike was imminent in the factories at Manitou and in the

railway-shops at Lebanon, due to the stupidity of the policy of Ingolby's successor as to the railways and other financial and manufacturing interests. If he had planned a campaign of maladroitness he could not have more happily fulfilled his object. It was not a good time for reducing wages, or for quarrelling with the Town Councils of Manitou and Lebanon concerning assessments and other matters. November and May always found Manitou, as though to say, "upset." In the former month, men were pouring through the place on their way to the shanties for their Winter's work, and generally celebrating their coming internment by "irrigation"; in the latter month, they were returning from their Winter's imprisonment, thirsty for excitement, and with memories of Winter quarrels inciting them to "have it out of someone."

And it was in October, when the shantyman was passing through on his way to the woods--a natural revolutionary, loving trouble as a coyote loves his hole--that labour discontent was practically whipped into action, and the Councils of the two towns were stung into bitterness against the new provocative railway policy. Things looked dark enough. The trouble between the two towns and the change of control and policy of the railways, due to Ingolby's downfall, had greatly shaken land and building values in Lebanon, and a black eye, as it were, had been given to the whole district for the moment.

So serious had the situation been regarded that the Mayor of Lebanon, with Halliday the lawyer and another notable citizen, all friends of Ingolby, had "gone East"--as a journey to Montreal, Toronto, or Quebec was generally called--to confer with and make appeal to the directorate of the great railways. They went with some elation and hope, for they had arguments of an unexpected kind in their possession, carefully hidden from the rest of the population. They had returned only the day before the meeting which was to be held in the square in front of the Town Hall, to find that a platform had been built at the very steps of the Town Hall with the assent of the Chief Constable, now recovered from illness and returned to duty. To the Deputy Mayor and the Council, the Chief Constable, on the advice of Gabriel Druse, had said that it was far better to have the meeting in front of the Town Hall where he could, on the instant, summon special constables from within if necessary, while the influence of a well-built platform and the orderly arrangement of a regular meeting were better than a mob oration from the tops of ash-barrels.

The signs were ominous. In a day of sunshine the rebellious and discontented spirit does not thrive; on a wet day it is apt to take shelter; on a bleak, grey day men are prone to huddle together in their anger with consequent stimulation of their passions.

It was a grey enough day at Lebanon, and dark-faced visitors from Manitou felt the need of Winter clothing as they shiveringly crossed the Sagalac by Ingolby's bridge. The air was raw and searching; Nature was sulky. In the sharp wind the trees shook themselves angrily free of leaves. The taverns were greatly frequented, which was not good for Manitou and Lebanon. Up to the time of the meeting, however, the expected strike had not occurred. This was mainly due to the fact that Felix Marchand, the evil genius of Manitou, had not been seen in the town or in the district for over a week. It was not generally known that he was absent because a man by the name of Dennis, whose wife he had wronged, was dogging him with no good intent. Marchand had treated the woman's warning with contempt, but at sight of her injured husband he had himself withdrawn from the scene of his dark enterprises. His malign influence was

therefore not at work at the moment.

The tactics of the Lebanon Town Council had been careful and wise. So that the meeting should not be composed only of the roughest elements, they privately urged all responsible citizens to attend, and if possible capture the meeting for law and order and legitimate agitation. That was why Osterhaut, the town-crier, went about with a large dinner-bell announcing the hour of the meeting and admonishing all "good folks" to attend. No one had ever seen Osterhaut quite so cheerful--and he had a bonny cheerfulness on occasion--as on this grisly October day when Nature was very sour and the spirit of the winds was in a "scratchy" mood. But Osterhaut was not more cheerful than Jowett who, in a very undignified way, described the state of his feelings, on receiving a certain confidence from Halliday, the lawyer, and Gabriel Druse, by turning a cart-wheel in the Mayor's office; which certainly was an unusual thing in a man of fifty years of age.

It was a people's meeting. No local official was on the platform. Under the influence of alien elements who, though their co-operation was directed against the common enemy, were intensely irritating, the meeting became disorderly. One or two wise men, however, were able to secure order long enough to have the resolution passed for forming a Local Interests Committee whose duty it would be to see that the people were not sacrificed to a "soulless plutocracy." While the names of those who were to form the Committee were being selected, in a storm of disorder arising from the Manitou section of the crowd, the sky overhead grew suddenly brighter and the sun came out, bringing an instant change. It was as though a hand, which had hypnotized them into anger, restored them to good-humour once again.

At this moment, to the astonishment of all, there appeared at the back of the platform between Jowett and Halliday the lawyer, the man with a tragic history who had been as one buried for weeks past, who had vanished from their calculations. It was their old champion, Ingolby. Slowly a hush came over the vast assembly as, apparently guided by his friends on the platform, he was given a seat on the right of the Chairman's table.

A strange sensation, partly pleasure, partly resentment, passed through the crowd. Why did Ingolby come to remind them of better days gone--of his own rashness, of what they had lost through that rashness? Why had he come? They could not say and do all that they wanted with him present. It was like having a row in the presence of a corpse. He had been a hero to all in Lebanon, but he was not in the picture now. His day was done. It was no place for him. Yet it was a pleasant omen that the sun broke clear and shining over the platform as Ingolby took his seat. Presently in the silence he half-turned his head, murmured something to the Chairman, and then got to his feet, stretching out a hand towards the crowd.

For one moment there was silence, a little awestricken, a little painful, and then as from one man a great cheer went up. For a moment they had thought him inconsiderate to come among them in this crisis, for he was no longer of their scheme of things, and must be counted out, a beaten, battered, blind bankrupt. Yet the sight of him on his feet was too much for them. Blind he might be, but there was the personality which had conquered them in the past brave, adroit, reckless, renowned. None of them, or very few of them, had seen him since that night at Barbazon's Tavern, yet in spite of his tragedy there seemed little change in him.

There was the same quirk at the corner of the mouth, the same humour in the strong face, not so ruddy now; and strangely enough the eyes were neither guarded by spectacles, nor were they shrunken, glazed, or diseased, so far as could be seen.

Stretching out a hand, Ingolby gave a crisp laugh and said: "So there's been trouble since I've been gone, has there?" The corner of his mouth quirked, his eyelids drooped in the old quizzical way, and the crowd laughed in spite of themselves. What a spirit he had to take it all that way!

"Got a little deeper in the mire, have you, boys?" he added. "They tell me the town's a frost just now, but it seems nice and warm here in the sun. Yes, boys, it's nice and warm here among you all--the same good old crowd that's made the two towns what they are. The same good old crowd," he repeated, "--and up to the same old games!"

At this point he could scarcely proceed for laughter. "Like true pioneers," he went on, "not satisfied with what you've got, but wanting such a lot more--if I might say so in the language of the dictionary, a deuce of a lot more."

Almost every sentence had been punctuated by cheers. His personality dominated them as aforesaid with some new accent to it; his voice was like that of one given up from the dead, yet come back from the wars alive and loving. They never knew what a figure he was until now when they saw and heard him again, and realized that he was one of the few whom the world calls leaders, because they have in them that immeasurable sympathy which is understanding of men and matters. Yet in the old days there never had been the something that was in his voice now, and in his face there was a great friendliness, a sense of companionship, a Jonathan and David something. He was like a comrade talking to a thousand other comrades. There was a new thing in him and they felt it stir them. They thought he had been made softer by his blindness; and they were not wrong. Even the Manitou section were stilled into sympathy with him. Many of them had heard his speech in Barbazon's Tavern just before the horseshoe struck him down, and they heard him now, much simpler in manner and with that something in his voice and face. Yet it made them shrink a little, too, to see his blind eyes looking out straight before him. It was uncanny. Their idea was that the eyes were as before, but seeing nothing--blank to the world.

Presently his hand shot out again. "The same old crowd!" he said. "Just the same--after the same old thing, wanting what we all want: these two places, Manitou and Lebanon, to be boosted till they rule the West and dominate the North. It's good to see you all here again"--he spoke very slowly--"to see you all here together looking for trouble--looking for trouble. There you are, Jim Barager; there you are, Bill Riley; there you are, Mr. William John Thomas McLeary." The last named was the butt of every tavern and every street corner. "There you are, Berry--old brown Berry, my barber."

At first the crowd did not quite understand, did not realize that he was actually pointing to the people whom he named, but presently, as Berry the barber threw up his hands with a falsetto cry of understanding, there was a simultaneous, wild rush forward to the platform.

"He sees, boys--he sees!" they shouted.

Ingolby's hand shot up above them with a gesture of command.

"Yes, boys, I see--I see you all. I'm cured. My sight's come back, and what's more"--he snatched from his pocket a folded sheet of paper and held it aloft "what's more, I've got my commission to do the old job again; to boss the railways, to help the two towns. The Mayor brought it back from Montreal yesterday; and together, boys, together, we'll make Manitou and Lebanon the fulcrum of the West, the swivel by which to swing prosperity round our centre."

The platform swayed with the wild enthusiasm of the crowd storming it to shake hands with him, when suddenly a bell rang out across the river, wildly, clamorously. A bell only rang like that for a fire. Those on the platform could see a horseman galloping across the bridge.

A moment later someone shouted, "It's the Catholic church at Manitou on fire!"

CHAPTER XXIV

AT LONG LAST

Originally the Catholic church at Manitou had stood quite by itself, well back from the river, but as the town grew its dignified isolation was invaded and houses kept creeping nearer and nearer to it. So that when it caught fire there was general danger, because the town possessed only a hand fire-engine. Since the first settlement of the place there had been but few fires, and these had had pretty much their own way. When one broke out the plan was to form a long line of men, who passed buckets of water between the nearest pump, well, or river, and the burning building. It had been useful in incipient fires, but it was child's play in a serious outburst. The mournful fact that Manitou had never equipped itself with a first-class fire-engine or a fire-brigade was now to play a great part in the future career of the two towns. Osterhaut put the thing in a nutshell as he slithered up the main street of Lebanon on his way to the manning of the two fire-engines at the Lebanon fire-brigade station.

"This thing is going to link up Lebanon and Manitou like a trace-chain," he declared with a chuckle. "Everything's come at the right minute. Here's Ingolby back on the locomotive, running the good old train of Progress, and here's Ingolby's fire-brigade, which cost Lebanon twenty thousand dollars and himself five thousand, going to put out the fires of hate consuming two loving hamulets. Out with Ingolby's fire-brigade! This is the day the doctor ordered! Hooray!"

Osterhaut had a gift of being able to do two things at one time. Nothing prevented him from talking, and though it had probably never been tested, it is quite certain he could have talked under water. His words had been addressed to Jowett, who drew to him on all great occasions like the drafts of a regiment to the main body. Jowett was often very critical of Osterhaut's acts, words and views, but on this occasion they were of one mind.

"I guess it's Ingolby's day all right," answered Jowett. "When you say 'Hooray!' Osterhaut, I agree, but you've got better breath'n I have. I

can't talk like I used to, but I'm going to ride that fire-engine to save the old Monseenoor's church--or bust."

Both Jowett and Osterhaut belonged to the Lebanon fire-brigade, which was composed of only a few permanent professionals, helped by capable amateurs. The two cronies had their way, and a few moments later, wearing brass helmets, they were away with the engine and the hose, leaving the less rapid members of the brigade to follow with the ladders.

"What did the Chief do?" asked Osterhaut. "Did you see what happened to him?"

Jowett snorted. "What do you think Mr. Max Ingolby, Esquire, would do? He commandeered my sulky and that rawbone I bought from the Reverend Tripple, and away he went like greased lightning over the bridge. I don't know why I drove that trotter to-day, nor why I went on that sulky, for I couldn't hear good where I was, on the outskirts of the meeting; but I done it like as if the Lord had told me. The Chief spotted me soon as the fire-bell rung. In a second he bundled me off, straddled the sulky, and was away 'fore you could say snakes."

"I don't believe he's strong enough for all this. He ain't got back to where he was before the war," remarked Osterhaut sagely.

"War--that business at Barbazon's! You call that war! It wasn't war," declared Jowett spasmodically, grasping the rail of the fire-engine as the wheel struck a stone and nearly shot them from their seats. "It wasn't war. It was terrible low-down treachery. That Gipsy gent, Fawe, pulled the lever, but Marchand built the scaffold."

"Heard anything more about Marchand--where he is?" asked Osterhaut, as the hoofs of the horses clattered on the bridge.

"Yes, I've heard--there's news," responded Jowett. "He's been lying drunk at Gautry's caboose ever since yesterday morning at five o'clock, when he got off the West-bound train. Nice sort of guy he is. What's the good of being rich, if you can't be decent. Some men are born low. They always find their level, no matter what's done for them, and Marchand's level is the ditch."

"Gautry's tavern--that joint!" exclaimed Osterhaut with repulsion.

"Well, that ranchman, Dennis What's-his-name, is looking for him, and Felix can't go home or to the usual places. I dunno why he comes back at all till this Dennis feller gits out."

"Doesn't make any bones about it, does he? Dennis Doane's the name, ain't it? Marchand spoiled his wife--run away with her up along the Wind River, eh?" asked Osterhaut.

Jowett nodded: "Yes, that's it, and Mr. Dennis Doane ain't careful; that's the trouble. He's looking for Marchand, and blabbing what he means to do when he finds him. That ain't good for Dennis. If he kills Marchand, it's murder, and even if the lawyers plead unwritten law, and he ain't hung, and his wife ain't a widow, you can't have much married life in gaol. It don't do you any good to be punished for punishing someone else. Jonas George Almighty--look! Look, Osterhaut!"

Jowett's hand was pointing towards the Catholic church, from a window

of which smoke was rolling. "There's going to be something to do there. It ain't a false alarm, Snorty."

"Well, this engine'll do anything you ask it," rejoined Osterhaut. "When did you have a fire last, Billy?" he shouted to the driver of the engine, as the horses' feet caught the dusty road of Manitou.

"Six months," was the reply, "but she's working smooth as music. She's as good as anything 'twixt here and the Atlantic."

"It ain't time for Winter fires. I wonder what set it going," said Jowett, shaking his head ominously. "Something wrong with the furnace, I s'pose," returned Osterhaut. "Probably trying the first heatup of the Fall."

Osterhaut was right. No one had set the church on fire. The sexton had lighted the furnace for the first time to test it for the Winter's working, but had not stayed to see the result. There was a defect in the furnace, the place had caught fire, and some of the wooden flooring had been burnt before the aged Monseigneur Lourde discovered it. It was he who had given the alarm and had rescued the silver altar-vessels from the sacristy.

Manitou offered brute force, physical energy, native athletics, muscle and brawn; but it was of no avail. Five hundred men, with five hundred buckets of water would have had no effect upon the fire at St. Michael's Church at Manitou; willing hands and loving Christian hearts would have been helpless to save the building without the scientific aid of the Lebanon fire-brigade. Ingolby, on founding the brigade, had equipped it to the point where it could deal with any ordinary fire. The work it had to do at St. Michael's was critical. If the church could not be saved, then the wooden houses by which it was surrounded would be swept away, and the whole town would be ablaze; for though it was Autumn, everything was dry, and the wind was sufficient to fan and spread the flames.

Lebanon took command of the whole situation, and for the first time in the history of the two towns men worked together under one control like brothers. The red-shirted river-driver from Manitou and the lawyer's clerk from Lebanon; the Presbyterian minister and a Christian brother of the Catholic school; a Salvation Army captain and a black-headed Catholic shantyman; the President of the Order of Good Templars and a switchman member of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament slaved together on the hand-engine, to supplement the work of the two splendid engines of the Lebanon fire-brigade; or else they climbed the roofs of houses, side by side, to throw on the burning shingles the buckets of water handed up to them.

For some time it seemed as though the church could not be saved. The fire had made good headway with the flooring, and had also made progress in the chancel and the altar. Skill and organization, combined with good luck, conquered, however. Though a portion of the roof was destroyed and the chancel gutted, the church was not beyond repair, and a few thousand dollars would put it right. There was danger, however, among the smaller houses surrounding the church, and there men from both towns worked with great gallantry. By one of those accidents which make fatality, a small wooden house some distance away, with a roof as dry as wool, caught fire from a flying cinder. As everybody had fled from their own homes and shops to the church, this fire was not noticed until it had made headway. Then it was that the cries of Madame Thibadeau, who was confined to her

bed in the house opposite, were heard, and the crowd poured down towards the burning building. It was Gautry's "caboose." Gautry himself had been among the crowd at the church.

As Gautry came reeling and plunging down the street, someone shouted, "Is there anyone in the house, Gautry?"

Gautry was speechless with drink. He threw his hands up in the air with a gesture of maudlin despair, and shouted something which no one understood. The crowd gathered like magic in the wide street before the house--the one wide street in Manitou--from the roof and upper windows of which flames were bursting. Far up the street was heard the noisy approach of the fire-engine, which now would be able to do little more than save adjoining buildings. Gautry, reeling, mumbling and whining, gestured and wept.

A man shook him roughly by the shoulder. "Brace up, get steady, you damned old geezer! Is there any body in the house? Do you hear? Is there anybody in the house?" he roared.

Madame Thibadeau, who had dragged herself from her bed, was now at the window of the house opposite. Seeing Fleda Druse passing beneath, she called to her.

"Ma'mselle, Felix Marchand is in Gautry's house--drunk!" she cried. "He'll burn to death--but yes, burn to death."

In agitation Fleda hastened to where the stranger stood shaking old Gautry.

"There's a man asleep inside the house," she said to the stranger, and then all at once she realized who he was. It was Dennis Doane, whose wife was staying in Gabriel Druse's home: it was the husband of Marchand's victim.

"A man in there, is there?" exclaimed Dennis. "Well, he's got to be saved." He made a rush for the door. Men called to him to come back, that the roof would fall in. In the smoking doorway he looked back. "What floor?" he shouted.

From the window opposite, her fat old face lighted by the blazing roof, Madame Thibadeau called out, "Second floor! It's the second floor!"

In an instant Dennis was lost in the smoke and flame.

One, two, three minutes passed. A fire-engine arrived; in a moment the hose was paid out to the river near by, and as a fireman seized the nozzle to train the water upon the building the roof fell in with a crash. At that instant Dennis stumbled out of the house, blind with smoke, his clothes aflame, carrying a man in his arms. A score of hands caught them, coats smothered Dennis's burning clothes, and the man he had rescued was carried across the street and laid upon the pavement.

"Great glory, it's Marchand! It's Felix Marchand!" someone shouted.

"Is he dead?" asked another.

"Dead drunk," was the comment of Osterhaut, who had helped to carry him across the street.

At that moment Ingolby appeared on the scene. "What's all this?" he asked. Then he recognized Marchand. "He's been playing with fire again," he added sarcastically, and there was a look of contempt on his face.

As he said it, Dennis broke through the crowd and made for Marchand. Stooping over, he looked into Marchand's face.

"Hell and damnation--you!" he growled. "I risked my life to save you!"

With a sudden access of rage his hand suddenly went to his hip-pocket, but another hand was quicker. It was that of Fleda Druse.

"No--no," she said, her fingers on his wrist. "You have had your revenge. For the rest of his life he will have to bear his punishment --that you have saved him. Leave him alone. It was to be. It is fate."

Dennis Doane was not a man of great thinking capacity. If he got a matter into his head it stayed there till it was dislodged, and dislodging was a real business with him.

"If you want her to live with you again, you had better let this be as it is," whispered Fleda, for the crowd were surging round and cheering the new hero. "Just escaped the roof falling in," said one.

"Got the strength of two, for a drunk man weighs twice as heavy as a sober one!" exclaimed another admiringly.

"Marchand's game is up on the Sagalac," declared a third decisively.

The excitement was so great, however, that only a very few of them knew what they were saying, and fewer still knew that Dennis Doane had risked his life to save the man he had been stalking for weeks past. Marchand had been lying on his face in the smoke-filled room when Dennis broke into it, and he had been carried down the stairs without his face being seen at all.

To Dennis it was as though he had been made a fool of by Fate or Providence, or whatever controlled the destinies of men; as though the dangerous episode had been arranged to trap him into this situation.

Ingolby drew near and laid a hand upon Dennis's arm. Fleda's hand was on the other arm.

"You can't kill a man and save him too," said Ingolby quietly, and holding the abashed blue eyes of Dennis. "There were two ways to punish him; taking away his life at great cost, or giving it him at great cost. If you'd taken away his life, the cost would probably have been your own life; in giving him his life you only risked your own; you had a chance to save it. You're a bit scorched-hair, eyebrows, moustache, clothes too, but he'll have brimstone inside him. Come along. Your wife would rather have it this way; and so will you, to-morrow. Come along."

Dennis suddenly swung round with a gesture of fury. "He spoiled her--treated her like dirt!" he cried huskily.

With savage purpose he made a movement towards where Marchand had lain; but Marchand was gone. With foresight Ingolby had quickly and quietly

accomplished that while Dennis's back was turned.

"You'd be treating her like a brute if you went to prison for killing Marchand," urged Ingolby. "Give her a chance. She's fretting her heart out."

"She wants to go back to Elk Mountain with you," pleaded Fleda gently. "She couldn't do that if the law took hold of you."

"Ain't there to be any punishment for men like him?" demanded Dennis, stubbornly yet helplessly. "Why didn't I let him burn! I'd have been willing to burn myself to have seen him sizzling. Ain't men like that to be punished at all?"

"When he knows who has saved him, he'll sizzle inside for the rest of his life," remarked Ingolby. "Don't think he hasn't got a heart. He's done wrong and gone wrong; he has belonged to the sewer, but he isn't all bad, and maybe this is the turning-point. Drink'll make a man do anything."

"His kind are never sorry for what they do," commented Dennis bitterly. "They're sorry for what comes from what they do, but not for the doing of it. I can't think the thing out. It makes me sick. I was hunting for him to kill him; I was watching this town like a lynx, and I've been and gone and saved his body from Hell on earth."

"Well, perhaps you've saved his soul from Hell below," said Fleda. "Ah, come! Your face and hands are burned, your hair is scorched--your clothes need mending. Arabella is waiting for you. Come home with me to Arabella."

With sudden resolve Dennis squared his shoulders. "All right," he said. "This thing's too much for me. I can't get the hang of it. I've lost my head."

"No, I won't come, I can't come now," said Ingolby, in response to an inquiring look from Fleda.

"Not now, but before sundown, please."

As Fleda and Dennis disappeared, Ingolby looked back towards the fire. "How good it is to see again even a sight like that," he said. "Nothing that the eyes see is so horrible as the pictures that come to the mind when the eyes don't see. As Dennis said, I can't get the hang of it, but I'll try--I'll try."

The burning of Gautry's tavern had been conquered, though not before it was a shell; and the houses on either side had been saved. Lebanon had shown itself masterful in organization, but it had also shown that that which makes enemies is not so deep or great a thing as that which makes friends. Jealous, envious, narrow and bitter Manitou had been, but she now saw Lebanon in a new light. It was a strange truth that if Lebanon had saved the whole town of Manitou, it would not have been the same to the people as the saving of the church. Beneath everything in Manitou--beneath its dirt and its drunkenness, its irresponsibility and the signs of primeval savagery which were part of its life, there was the tradition of religion, the almost fanatical worship of that which was their master, first and last, in spite of all--the Church. Not one of its citizens but would have turned with horror from the man who cursed his baptism; not one but would want the last sacrament when his time came. Lebanon had

saved the Catholic church, the temple of their faith, and in an hour was accomplished what years had not wrought.

The fire at the church was out. A few houses had been destroyed, and hundreds of others had been saved. The fire-brigade of Lebanon, with its two engines, had performed prodigies of valour. The work done, the men marched back, but with Osterhaut sitting on one fire-engine and Jowett on the other, through crowds of cheering, roaring workmen, rivermen, shantymen, and black-eyed habitants. When Ingolby walked past Barbazon's Tavern arm in arm with Monseigneur Lourde, to the tiny house where the good priest lived, the old man's face beaming with gratitude, and with a piety which was his very life, the jubilant crowd followed them to the very door. There the sainted pioneer expressed the feeling of the moment when he raised his hands in benediction over them and said:

"Peace be unto you and the blessings of peace; and the Lord make his face to shine upon you and give you peace now and for ever more."

CHAPTER XXV

MAN PROPOSES

Before sunset, as Ingolby had promised, he made his way towards Gabriel Druse's house. A month had gone since he had left its hospitality behind. What had happened between that time and this day of fate for Lebanon and Manitou?

It is not a long story, and needs but a brief backward look. This had happened:

The New York expert performed the operation upon Ingolby's eyes, announced it successful, declared that his sight would be restored, and then vanished with a thousand dollars in his pocket. For days thereafter the suspense was almost more than Fleda could bear. She grew suddenly thin and a little worn, and her big eyes had that look of yearning which only comes to those whose sorrow is for another. Old Gabriel Druse was emphatic in his encouragement, but his face reflected the trouble in that of his daughter. He knew well that if Ingolby remained blind he would never marry Fleda, though he also knew well that, with her nature, almost fanatical in its convictions, she would sacrifice herself, if sacrifice was the name for it. The New York expert had prophesied and promised, but who could tell! There was the chance of failure, and the vanished eye-surgeon had the thousand dollars in his pocket.

Two people, however, were cheerful; they were Ingolby and Jim. Jim went about the place humming a nigger melody to himself, and twice he brought Berry the barber to play to his Chief on the cottonfield fiddle. Nigger Jim, though it was two generations gone which linked him with the wilds of the Gold Coast, was the slave of fanatical imagination, and in Ingolby's own mind there was the persistent superstition that all would be well, because of a dream he had had. He dreamed he heard his dead mother's voice in the room, where he lay. She had called him by name, and had said: "Look at me, Max," and he had replied, "I cannot see," and she had said again,

"Look at me, my son!" Then he thought that he had looked at her, had

seen her face clearly, and it was as the last time they parted, shining and sweet and good. She had said to him in days long gone, that if she could ever speak to him across the Void, she would; and he had the fullest belief now that she had done so.

So it was that this dreadnought of industry and organization, in dock for repairs, cheerfully awaited the hour when he would be launched again upon the tide of work-healthy, healed and whole. At last there came the day when, for an instant, the bandages could be removed. There were present, Rockwell, Fleda, and Jim--Jim, pale but grinning, at the foot of the bed; Fleda, with her back against the door and her hands clenched behind her as though to shut out the invading world. Never had her heart beat as it beat now, but her eyes were steady and bright. There was in them, however, a kind of pleading look. She could not see Ingolby's face; did not want to see it when the bandages were taken off; but at the critical moment she shut her eyes and her back held the door, as though a thousand were trying to force an entrance.

The first words after the bandages were removed came from Ingolby.

"Well, Jim, you look all right!" he said.

Swaying as she went, Fleda half-blindly moved towards a chair near by and sank into it. She scarcely heard Jim's reply.

"Looking all right yourself, Chief. You won't see much change in this here old town."

Ingolby's hand was in Rockwell's. "It's all right, isn't it?" he asked.

"You can see it is," answered Rockwell with a chuckle in his voice, and then suddenly he put the bandages round Ingolby's eyes again. "That's enough for today," he said.

A moment later the bandages were secured and Rockwell stood back from the bed.

"In another week you'll see as well as ever you did," Rockwell said. "I'm proud of you."

"Well, I hope I'll see a little better than ever I did," remarked Ingolby meaningly. "I was pretty short-sighted before."

At that instant he heard Fleda's footstep approaching the bed. His senses had grown very acute since the advent of his blindness. He held out his hand into space.

"What a nice room this is!" he said as her fingers slid into his. "It's the nicest room I was ever in. It's too nice for me. In a few days I'll hand the lease over again to its owner, and go back to the pigsty Jim keeps in Stormont Street."

"Well, there ain't any pigs in that sty now, Chief; but it's all ready," said Jim, indignant and sarcastic.

It was a lucky speech. It broke the spell of emotion which was greatly straining everybody's endurance.

"That's one in the eye for somebody," remarked Rockwell drily.

"What would you like for lunch?" asked Fleda, letting go Ingolby's hand, but laying her fingers on his arm for a moment.

What would he like for lunch! Here was a man back from the Shadows, from broken hopes and shattered career, from the helplessness and eternal patience of the blind; here he was on the hard, bright highroad again, with a procession of restored things coming towards him, with life and love within his grasp; and the woman to whom it mattered most of all, who was worth it all, and more than all where he was concerned, said to him in this moment of revelation, "What would you like for lunch?"

With an air as casually friendly as her own, he put another hand on the fingers lying on his arm, patted them, and said gaily, "Anything I can see. As a drover once said to me, 'I can clean as fur as I can reach.'"

In just such a temper also they had parted when he went back to his "pigsty" with Jim. To Gabriel Druse he had said all that one man might say to another without excess of feeling; to Madame Bulteel he had given a gold pencil which he had always worn; to Fleda he gave nothing, said little, but the few words he did say told the story, if not the whole story.

"It's a nice room," he said, and she had flushed at his words, "and I've had the best time of my life in it. I'd like to buy it, but I know it's not for sale. Love and money couldn't buy it--isn't that so?"

Then had--come days in his own home, still with bandaged eyes, but with the bandages removed for increasing hours every day; yet no one at all in the town knowing the truth except the Mayor, Halliday the lawyer, and one or two others who kept the faith until Ingolby gave them the word to speak. Then had come the Mayor's visit to Montreal, the great meeting, the fire at Manitou, and now Ingolby on the way to his tryst with Fleda. They had met twice only since he had left Gabriel Druse's house, and on the last occasion they had looked each other full in the eyes, and Ingolby had said to her in the moment they had had alone:

"I'm going to get back, but I can't do it without you."

To this her reply had been, "I hope it's not so bad as that," and she had looked provokingly in his eyes. Now she knew beyond peradventure that he cared for her, and she was almost provoked at herself that when he was in such danger of losing his sight for ever she had caught his head to her breast in the passion of the moment. Many a time when he had been asleep, with gentle fingers she had caressed his hands, his head, his face; but that did not count, because he did not know. He did, however, know of that moment when her passionate heart broke over him in tenderness; and she tried to make him think, by things said since, that it was only pity for his sufferings which made her do it.

Ingolby thought of all these things, but in a spirit of understanding, as he went to his tryst with her at sunset on the day when Lebanon and Manitou were reconciled.

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He met her walking among the trees, very near the place where they had had their first long talk, months before, when Jethro Fawe was a prisoner in the Hut in the Woods. Then it was warm, singing Summer; now, beneath

the feet the red and brown leaves rustled, the trees were stretching up gaunt arms to the Winter, the woods were no longer vocal, and the singing birds had fled, though here and there a black squirrel, not yet gone to Winter quarters, was busy and increasing his stores. A hedgehog scuttled across his path. He smiled as he remembered telling Fleda that once, when he was a little boy, he had eaten hedgehog, and she had asked him if he remembered the Gipsy name for hedgehog--hotchewitchi was the word. Now, as the shapeless creature made for its hole, it was significant of the history of his life during the past Summer. How long it seemed since that day when love first peeped forth from their hearts like a young face at the lattice of a sunlit window. Fleda had warned him of trouble, and that trouble had come!

In his mind she was a woman like none he had ever known; she could think greatly, act largely, give tremendously. As he stood waiting, the wonderful, ample life of her seemed to come like a wave towards him. In his philosophy, intellect alone had never been the governing influence. Intellect must find its play through the senses, be vitalized by the elements of physical life, or it could not prevail. There was not one sensual strain in him, but with a sensuous mind he loved the vital thing. He was sure that presently Gabriel Druse would disappear, leaving her behind with him. That was what he meant to ask her to-day--to be and stay with him always. He knew that the Romanys were gathering in the prairie. They had been heard of here and there, and some of them had been seen along the Sagalac, though he knew nothing of that dramatic incident in the woods when Fleda was kidnapped and Jethro Fawe vanished from the scene.

As Fleda came towards him, under the same trees which had shielded her from the sun months ago--now nearly naked and bare--something in her look and bearing sharply caught his interest. He asked himself what it was. So often a face familiar over half a lifetime perhaps, suddenly at some new angle, or because, by chance, one has looked at it searchingly, shows a new expression, a new contour never before observed, giving fresh significance to the character. There was that in Ingolby's mind, a depth of desire, a resolve to stake two lives against the chances of Fate, which made him look at Fleda now with a revealing intensity. What was the new thing in her carriage which captured his eye? Presently it flashed upon him--memories of Mexico and the Southern United States; native women with jars of water upon their heads; the erect, well-balanced form; the sure, sinuous movement; the step measured, yet free; the dignity come of carrying the head as though it were a pillar of an Athenian temple, one of the beautiful Caryatides yonder by the AEgean Sea.

It smote him as a sudden breath of warm air strikes a face in the night coolness of the veldt. His pulses quickened, he flushed with the soft shock of it. There she was, refined, civilized, gowned like other women, with all the manners and details of civilization and social life about her; yet, in spite of it all, she did not belong; there was about her still something remote and alien. It had not to do with appearance alone, though her eyes were so vivid, and her expression so swift and varying; it was to be found in the whole presence--something mountain-like and daring, something Eastern and reserved and secret, something remote--brooding like a Sphinx, and prophetic like a Sibyl. But suppose that in days to come the thing that did not belong, which was of the East, of the tan, of the River Starzke; suppose that it should--

With a great effort he drove apprehension and the instant's confused

wonder far away, and when, come close to him, she smiled, showing the perfect white teeth, and her eyes softened to a dreamy regard of him, all he had ever felt for her in the past months seemed concentrated into this one moment. Yet he did not look like a languishing lover; rather like one inflamed with a great idea or stirred to a great resolve.

For quite a minute they stood gazing as though they would read the whole truth in each other's eyes. She was all eager, yet timorous; he was resolved; yet now, when the great moment had come, as it were, like a stammerer fearing the sound of his own voice. There was so much to say that he could not speak.

She broke the spell. "I am here. Can't you see me?" she asked in a quizzical, playful tone, her lips trembling a little, but with a smile in her eyes which she vainly tried to veil.

She had said the one thing which above all others could have lifted the situation to its real significance. A few weeks ago the eyes now looking into hers and telling a great story were sealed with night, and the mind behind was fretted by the thought of a perpetual darkness. All the tragedy of the past rushed into his mind now, and gave all that was between them, or was to be between them, its real meaning. A beautiful woman is dear to man simply as woman, and not as the woman; virtue has slain its thousands, but physical charm has slain its tens of thousands! Whatever Ingolby's defects, however, infinitely more than the girl's beauty, more than the palpitating life in her, than red lips and bright eye, than warm breast and clasping hand, was something beneath all which would last, or should last, when the hand was palsied and the eye was dim.

"I am here. Can't you see me?"

All that he had regained in life in her little upper room rushed upon him, and with outstretched arms and in a voice choked with feeling, he said:

"See you! Dear God--To see you and all the world once more! It is being born again to me. I haven't learned to talk in my new world yet; but I know three words of the language. I love you. Come--I'll be good to you."

She drew back from him, and her look said that she would read him to the uttermost word in his life's book, would see the heart of this wonderful thing; and then with a hungry cry, she flung her arms around his neck and pressed her wet eyes against his flushed cheek.

A half-hour later, as they wandered back to the house he suddenly stopped, put his hands on her shoulders, looked earnestly in her eyes, and said:

"God's good to me. I hope I'll remember that."

"You won't be so blind as to forget," she answered, and she wound her fingers in his with a feeling which was more than the simple love of woman for man. "I've got much more to remember than you have," she added. Suddenly she put both hands upon his breast. "You don't understand; you can't understand, but I tell you that I shall have to fight hard if I am to be all you want me to be. I have got a past to forget; you have a past you want to remember--that's the difference.

I must tell you the truth: it's in my veins, that old life, in spite of all. Listen. I ought to have told you, and I meant to tell you before this happened, but when I saw you there, and you held out your arms to me, I forgot everything. Yet still I must tell you now, though perhaps you will hate me when you know. The old life--I hate it, but it calls me, and I have an impulse to go back to it even though I hate it. Listen. I'll tell you what happened the other day. It's terrible, but it's true. I was walking in the woods--"

Thereupon she told him of her being seized and carried to the Gipsy camp, and of all that happened there to the last detail. She even had the courage to tell of all she felt there; but when she had finished, with a half-frightened look in her eyes, her face pale, and her hands clasped before her, he did not speak for a minute. Suddenly, however, he seemed to tower over her, his two big hands were raised as though they would strike, and then the palms spread out and enclosed her cheeks lovingly, and his eyes fastened upon hers.

"I know," he said gently. "I always understood--everything; but you'll never have the same fight again, because I'll be with you. You understand, Fleda--I'll be with you."

With an exclamation of gratitude she nestled into his arms.

Before the thrill of his embrace had passed from their pulses, they heard the breaking of twigs under a quick footstep, and Rhodo stood before them. "Come," he said to Fleda. His voice was as solemn and strange as his manner. "Come!" he repeated peremptorily.

Fleda sprang to his side. "Is it my father? What has happened?" she cried.

The old man waved her aside, and pointed toward the house.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SLEEPER

The Ry of Rys sat in his huge armchair, his broad-brimmed hat on his knee in front of him. One hand rested on the chair-arm, the other clasped the hat as though he would put it on, but his head was fallen forward on his breast.

It was a picture of profound repose, but it was the repose of death. It was evident that the Ry had prepared to leave the house, had felt a sudden weakness, and had taken to his chair to recover himself. As was evident from the normal way in which his fingers held his hat, and his hand rested on the chair-arm, death had come as gently as a beam of light. With his stick lying on the table beside him, and his hat on his knee, he was like one who rested a moment before renewing a journey. There could not have been a pang in his passing. He had gone as most men wish to go--in the midst of the business of life, doing the usual things, and so passing into the sphere of Eternity as one would go from this room to that. Only a few days before had he yielded up his temporary position as chief constable, and had spent almost every hour since in conference with Rhodo. What he had planned would never be known to his daughter

now. It was Rhodo himself who had found his master with head bowed before the Master of all men.

Before Fleda entered the room she knew what awaited her; a merciful intuition had blunted the shock to her senses. Yet when she saw the Ry on his throne of death a moan broke from her lips like that of one who sees for the last time someone indelibly dear, and turns to face strange paths with uncertain feet. She did not go to the giant figure seated in the chair. In what she did there was no panic or hysteria of lacerated heart and shocked sense; she only sank to her knees in the room a few feet away from him, and looked at him.

"Father! Oh, Ry! Oh, my Ry!" she whispered in agony and admiration, too, and kept on whispering.

Fleda had whispered to him in such awe, not only because he was her father, but because he was so much a man among men, a giant, with a great, lumbering mind, slow to conceive, but moving in a large, impressive way when once conception came. To her he had been more than father; he had been a patriarch, a leader, a viking, capable of the fury of a Scythian lord, but with the tenderness of a peasant father to his first child.

"My Ry! My father! Oh, my Ry of Rys!" she kept murmuring to herself.

On either side of her, but a few feet behind, stood Rhodo and Ingolby.

Presently in a low, firm voice Rhodo spoke.

"The Ry of Rys is dead, but his daughter must stand upon her feet, and in his place speak for him. Is it not well with him? He sleeps. Sleep is better than pain. Let his daughter speak."

Slowly Fleda arose. Not so much what Rhodo had said as the meaning in his voice, aroused her to a situation which she must face. Rhodo had said that she must speak for her father. What did it mean?

"What is it you wish to say to me, Rhodo?" she asked.

"What I have to say is for your ears only," was the low reply.

"I will go," said Ingolby. "But is it a time for talk?" He made a motion towards the dead man. "There are things to be said which can only be said now, and things to be done which can only be done according to what is said now," grimly remarked Rhodo.

"I wish you to remain," said Fleda to Ingolby with resolution in her bearing as she placed herself beside the chair where the dead man sat. "What is it you want to say to me?" she asked Rhodo again.

"Must a Romany bare his soul before a stranger?" replied Rhodo. "Must a man who has been the voice of the Ry of Rys for the long years have no words face to face with the Ry's daughter now that he is gone? Must the secret of the dead be spoken before the robber of the dead--"

It was plain that some great passion was working in the man, that it was wise and right to humour him, and Ingolby intervened.

"I will not remain," he said to Fleda. To Rhodo he added: "I am not a

robber of the dead. That's high-faluting talk. What I have of his was given to me by him. She was for me if I could win her. He said so. This is a free country. I will wait outside," he added to Fleda.

She made a gesture as though she would detain him, but she realized that the hour of her fate was at hand, and that the old life and the new were face to face, Rhodo standing for one and she for the other. When they were alone, Rhodo's eyes softened, and he came near to her. "You asked me what I wished to tell you," he said. "See then, I want to tell you that it is for you to take the place of the dead Ry. Everywhere in the world where the Romanys wander they will rejoice to hear that a Druse rules us still. The word of the Ry of Rys was law; what he wished to be done was done; what he wished to be undone was undone. Because of you he hid himself from his people; because of you I was for ever wandering, keeping the peace by lies for love of the Ry and for love of you."

His voice shook. "Since your mother died--and she was kin of mine--you were to me the soul of the Romany people everywhere. As a barren woman loves a child, so I loved you. I loved you for the sake of your mother. I gave her to the Ry, who was the better man, that she might be great and well placed. So it is I would have you be ruler over us, and I would serve you as I served your father until I, also, fall asleep."

"It is too late," Fleda answered, and there was great emotion in her voice now. "I am no longer a Romany. I am my father's daughter, but I have not been a Romany since I was ill in England. I will not go back; I shall go with the man I love, to be his wife, here, in the Gorgio world. You believed my father when he spoke; well, believe me--I speak the truth. It was my father's will that I should be what I am, and do what I am now doing. Nothing can alter me."

"If it be that Jethro Fawe is still alive he is free from the Sentence of the Patrín, and he will become the Ry of Rys," said the old man with sudden passion.

"It may be so. I hope it is so. He is of the blood, and I pray that Jethro has escaped the sentence which my father passed," answered Fleda. "By the River Starzke it was ordained that he should succeed my father, marrying me. Let him succeed."

The old man raised both hands, and made a gesture as though he would drive her from his sight.

"My life has been wasted," he said. "I wish I were also in death beside him." He gazed at the dead man with the affection of a clansman for his chief.

Fleda came up close to him. "Rhodo! Rhodo!" she said gently and sadly. "Think of him and all he was, and not of me. Suppose I had died in England--think of it in that way. Let me be dead to you and to all Romanys, and then you will think no evil."

The old man drew himself up. "Let no more be said," he replied. "Let it end here. The Ry of Rys is dead. His body and all things that are his belong now to his people. Say farewell to him," he added, with authority.

"You will take him away?" Fleda asked.

Rhodo inclined his head. "When the doctors have testified, we will take him with us. Say your farewells," he added, with gesture of command.

A cry of protest rose from Fleda's soul, and yet she knew it was what the Ry would have wished, that he should be buried by his own people where they would.

Slowly she drew near to the dead man, and leaned over and kissed his shaggy head. She did not seek to look into the sightless eyes; the illusion of sleep was so great that she wished to keep this picture of him while she lived; but she touched the cold hand which held the hat upon the knee and the other that lay upon the chair-arm. Then, with a mist before her eyes, she passed from the room.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE WORLD FOR SALE

As though by magic, like the pictures of a dream, out of the horizon, in caravans, by train, on horseback, the Romany people gathered to the obsequies of their chief and king. For months, hundreds of them had not been very far away. Unobtrusive, silent, they had waited, watched, till the Ry of Rys should come back home again. Home to them was the open road where Romanys trailed or camped the world over.

A clot of blood in the heart had been the verdict of the doctors; and Lebanon and Manitou had watched the Ry of Rys carried by his own people to the open prairie near to Tekewani's reservation. There, in the hours between the midnight and the dawn, all Gabriel Druse's personal belongings--the clothes, the chair in which he sat, the table at which he ate, the bed in which he slept, were brought forth and made into a pyre, as was the Romany way. Nothing personal of his chattels remained behind. The walking-stick which lay beside him in the moment of his death was the last thing placed upon the pyre. Then came the match, and the flames made ashes of all those things which once he called his own. Standing apart, Tekewani and his braves watched the ceremonial of fire with a sympathy born of primitive custom. It was all in tune with the traditions of their race.

As dawn broke, and its rosy light valanced the horizon, a great procession moved away from the River Sagalac towards the East, to which all wandering and Oriental peoples turn their eyes. With it, all that was mortal of Gabriel Druse went to its hidden burial. Only to the Romany people would his last resting-place be known; it would be as obscure as the grave of him who was laid:

"By Nebo's lonely mountain, On this side Jordan's wave."

Many people from Manitou and Lebanon watched the long procession pass, and two remained until the last wagon had disappeared over the crest of the prairie. Behind them were the tents of the Indian reservation; before them was the alert morn and the rising sun; and ever moving on to the rest his body had earned was the great chief lovingly attended by his own Romany folk; while his daughter, forbidden to share in the ceremonial of race, remained with the stranger.

With a face as pale and cold as the western sky, the desolation of this last parting and a tragic renunciation giving her a deathly beauty, Fleda stood beside the man who must hereafter be, to her, father, people, and all else. Shuddering with the pain of this hour, yet resolved to begin the new life here and now, as the old life faded before her eyes, she turned to him, and, with the passing of the last Romany over the crest of the hill, she said bravely:

"I want to help you do the big things. They will be yours. The world is all for you yet."

Ingolby shook his head. He had had his Moscow.

His was the true measure of things now; his lesson had been learned; values were got by new standards; he knew in a real sense the things that mattered.

"I have you--the world for sale!" he said, with the air of one discarding a useless thing.

GLOSSARY OF ROMANY WORDS

Bosh----fiddle, noise, music.

Bor----an exclamation (literally, a hedge).

Chal----lad, fellow.

Chi----child, daughter, girl.

Dadia----an exclamation.

Dordi----an exclamation.

Hotchewitchi----hedgehog.

Kek----no, none.

Koppa----blanket.

Mi Duvel----My God.

Patrin----small heaps of grass, or leaves, or twigs, or string, laid at cross-roads to indicate the route that must be followed.

Pral----brother or friend.

Rinkne rakli----pretty girl.

Ry----King or ruler.

Tan----tent, camp.

Vellgouris----fair.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Agony in thinking about the things we're never going to do
I don't believe in walking just for the sake of walking

It's no good simply going--you've got to go somewhere
Most honest thing I ever heard, but it's not the most truthful
Women may leave you in the bright days

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