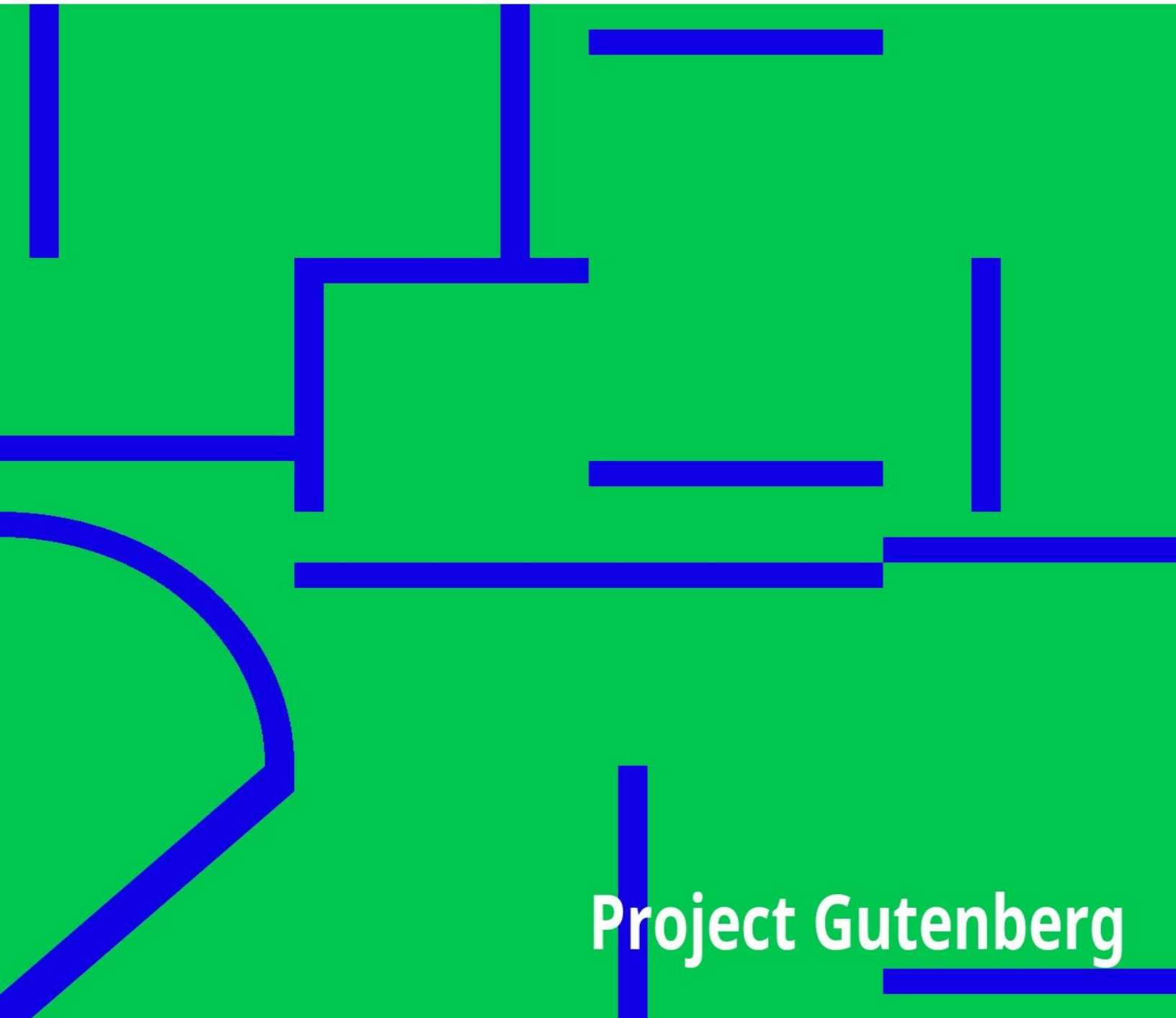
The Forbidden Trail

Honoré Morrow



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THE FORBIDDEN TRAIL

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"The Heart of the Desert,"
"Still Jim," "Lydia of the Pines," etc.

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THE FORBIDDEN TRAIL

CHAPTER I

THE DREAMER

Roger was only seven. He was tall for his age and very thin. He had a thick crop of black hair and his eyes were large and precisely the color of the summer sky that lifted above the Moores' back yard. These were the little boy's only claims to beauty, for even at this time Roger's face was too much of the intellectual type to be handsome. Beauty is seldom intelligent. Roger's long, thin jaw, his thin, thoughtful mouth, his high forehead, were distinctly of the thinking, dreaming type.

It was midsummer and Roger's tanned legs and feet were bare and scratched and mosquito bitten. He wore a little blue gingham sailor suit, which was much rumpled and soiled.

Charlotte was five. She was tall for her age too. In fact at five she was nearly as tall as Roger. But she was not as thin as he. She had large brown eyes of astounding depth and softness and bronze brown hair that was short and curly. There were lovely curves in her scarlet, drooping lips and a fine arch to her head above the ears. There was a dimple in her round chin. She sat in front of Roger who was astride one end of a great plank that was up-ended on a barrel.

"You go over and get Ernie and Elschen, Charley," commanded Roger in a deep, boyish voice.

"I won't!" returned Charley, succinctly, crowding closer to Roger, as she spoke.

"Well now, do you think I'm going to play alone all the afternoon with a baby?" roared Roger. "You're too little to work this teeter-tauter with me. I'm not going to stand it, I'm not. You get off!"

"I won't," repeated Charley, none the less firmly that the red lips trembled. "I

runned away from our house to play with you and I'm going to play, I am."

"You ain't going to play alone and Mamma says I gotta take you home in half an hour if nobody doesn't come for you."

"I won't go home." Charley ended this time with a sob.

"Now don't bawl!" exclaimed Roger, in alarm, twisting the little girl's head around so that he could peer into her face. He kissed her in a paternal manner. "Don't bawl! I'll take care of you."

Charley wiped the kiss off on the sleeve of her checked gingham dress and smiled. Roger left the see-saw and climbed to the top of the board fence.

"Ernie!" he shouted in a tone that sounded through the quiet village like a siren horn. "Ernie! You and Elschen come on over!"

Mrs. Wolf appeared at the back door of the house next door.

"Ernie and Elschen are doing the dishes. When they finish they will be over."

"Will it take 'em long?" asked Roger. "I got all my chores done."

"They're nearly done. Here's Elschen ready to go now."

"It was my turn to wipe, so I got through quick. Ernie's awful mad," cried a small girl, scrambling hastily over the fence.

Elsa was six. She was short and plump, an almost perfect miniature of her pretty mother, who stood smiling in the doorway. Her hair was true gold. While it was not curly it was full of a vitality that gave it the look of finely spun wire as it stood out over her head in a bushy mass. She was red of cheek and blue of eye, a jolly, plucky little girl, much more enterprising and pugnacious than Ernie, who followed her shortly over the fence.

Ernest was Roger's age and he looked so much like Elsa that a stranger might have thought them to be twins.

He landed with a thud. "Where'd you get the teeter-tauter, Roger?" he cried.

"Don't you see, you old ninny? I heaved up the plank Papa put down for the walk to the clothes-reel, and the barrel, I sort-of—now I kind of borrowed that out of the Sauters' barn. I guess they wouldn't care. I left a penny on the barn floor to pay for it. It's the strongest barrel I most ever saw. You go on the other end and Charley and I'll stay here. Elschen, you can be candlestick."

"I ain't going to be candlestick very long, I ain't. Not for you old boys," said

Elsa, climbing, however, to the place assigned her, where the board balanced on the barrel.

The children see-sawed amicably for perhaps five minutes when Roger roared—

"Hey! All of you get off! I got to fix this better."

"I'm not agoing to move," replied Elsa.

"I ain't agoing to move," agreed Charley.

"Come on, you girls, get off," cried Ernie. "What you going to do, Roger?"

"I'll show you! If you girls don't get off, I'll dump you," suiting action to words, as he tilted the plank sidewise. Elsa got a real bump, from the barrel to the ground. Charley's end of the see-saw was on the ground so she scrambled up laughing. Not so Elschen. She was red with anger. She flew at Roger and slapped him in the face.

Roger turned white, and struck back, the blow catching Elsa in the stomach. She doubled up and roared. Roger's voice rose above hers.

"I'll kill you next time! I'll kill you, you low down old German pig, you."

Slow moving little Ernie ran to put his arm round Elsa.

"Don't you hit my sister again, Rog Moore!"

Roger jumped up and down and kicked the barrel. "You get out of my yard! I hate you all!"

"Not me, Roger?" cried Charley, anxiously, running up to take his hand.

Curiously enough even in his blind passion, the boy clung to the childish fingers, the while he continued to kick the barrel and to roar,

"I'll kill you, Elsa!"

The screen door clicked and Mrs. Moore hurried down the back steps. She was very tall and slender, with Roger's blue eyes and a mass of red hair piled high on her head. She carried one of Roger's stockings with a darning ball in the toe in her left hand and the thimble gleamed on the middle finger of her right hand as she put it on Roger's shoulder.

"Roger! Roger! You're rousing the whole neighborhood!"

Roger struck the slender hand from his shoulder. "I hate you too. Let me alone!"

Mrs. Moore turned to the others. "Children, take Charley over in your yard for a

little while. Roger is being a very bad boy and I must punish him."

Roger hung back, still roaring, but his mother dragged him into the kitchen. Here she sat down in a rocker and attempted to pull him into her lap, but he would have none of her. He threw himself sobbing on the floor and Mrs. Moore sat looking at him sadly.

"I don't know what we're going to do about your temper, Roger. This is the third spell you've had this week. I don't see why the children play with you. Some day you *will* murder some one, I'm afraid. I used to have a temper when I was a child but I'm certain it was nothing like yours. One thing I'm sure of, I never struck my dear mother. Thank heaven, I haven't that regret."

Roger wept on.

"I've tried whipping and I've tried scolding. Perhaps I'm the wrong mother for you—" A long pause, during which Roger's slender body did not cease to writhe in sobs. Then his mother continued: "Poor little Elschen, that was an awful knock you gave her! I shall have to apologize to Mrs. Wolf again. She's always sweet about your badness."

She began work on the stocking once more. Roger's sobs lessened and his mother rose to wet a towel-end and bathe his face. But when she returned from the sink, the child was asleep, his head pillowed on his arm. It was thus that his temper storms always ended. Mrs. Moore had observed that when she had whipped him for one of his explosions, he always slept much longer than when she merely allowed him to sob himself quiet. So though his father still advocated whipping, she had concluded that whipping led only to further nerve exhaustion and she had stopped that form of punishment.

Half an hour later Roger rolled over on his back and stared for a moment wide eyed, at the ceiling. Then he got up quickly and running over to his mother, he threw his arms about her neck and kissed her passionately.

"Oh, Mother! Mother! I love you so! I'm so sorry I slapped your hand. I will be good! Oh, I will be good!"

He took the hand which he had struck in both his own and kissed it.

"Poor hand," he half sobbed, "poor hand!"

"All right, dear," said his mother, freeing her hand gently. "Now, go make up with the other children."

Roger darted out the door and his mother heard him shouting to his playmates.

It was an hour later that she went to the back door, to send Roger home with Charley. What she saw there sent her flying once more to interfere with the children's play. Fastened by bits of rope and twine to the plank were her three choicest sofa cushions, of white silk which she herself had embroidered. A child lay on its stomach on each of these, wildly gesticulating with legs and arms while Roger played the garden hose on them.

The four culprits in a sodden row before her, Mrs. Moore sought counsel from Mrs. Wolf, who had come hurrying at her neighbor's call.

"What shall I do with him? It was his idea, he says."

"Sure it was," exclaimed Roger stoutly. "We were shipwrecked sailors. The tempest had raged for three days like in 'Swiss Family Robinson.'"

"But why did you get the sofa cushions?" asked Mrs. Wolf.

"Oh, that was my invention to make the teeter-tauter more comfortable. Then they made nice waves for us to rest our stomachs on when we swam."

"You knew how I prize those cushions. That one with the roses took me all last winter to do," said Roger's mother sternly.

"I—I—yes, I kind of knew, but I forgot. I always forget when I'm inventing. Don't I, Ern?"

Ern nodded and put his arm over Roger's shoulder.

"I must try to help you to remember, little son." Mrs. Moore sighed. "For three days you cannot play with Ernie and Elschen."

Instantly a howl rose from the two little Wolfs. "We can't play without Roger! It was our fault too!"

"Indeed, that's too hard on all of them, Mrs. Moore. We'll have bedlam for three days," protested Mrs. Wolf.

"But he's always losing his temper and hurting your children," exclaimed Mrs. Moore.

"But he keeps them interested, anyhow," replied the little German mother. "They never ask to go away when Roger is with them. There's something so lovable about him in spite of his temper."

"He hit me in my poor little belly—" began Elschen.

"Elschen!" shrieked her mother.

"Stomach," Elschen substituted hastily. "My poor little stomach. But I don't care, I love him anyhow."

"But how about my sofa pillows?" asked Mrs. Moore.

"We'll give you the money out of our banks," said Ernie.

Elsa jumped up and down. "So we will! And you too, Roger!"

"Sure I will. And I'll iron the roses out for you."

The two mothers looked at each other with a glimmer of a smile in light and dark blue eyes.

"You can each put a quarter in the Sunday School contribution box next Sunday and we'll call it square. Do you agree, Mrs. Wolf?" Then as her little neighbor nodded, Roger's mother went on. "Go change your wet suit, Roger, and take Charley home. Lend me some of Elschen's little things for her, Mrs. Wolf. The child is soaked."

"Mamma! That's a *mile* out to Prebles'," roared Roger.

His mother looked at him, completely out of patience. "Well, *Roger*! after this afternoon's various performances!"

"Oh, I'll go!" cried Roger hastily. "I was just talking, that was all!" and he fled to the house.

Roger and Charley, hand in hand, trailed up the street in the haphazard manner of childhood. The Prebles lived on a farm half a mile beyond the limits of the town of Eagle's Wing. The board walk ended not far beyond the Moores' house and the children automatically chose the center of the road where the dust was deepest. By scuffling their bare feet continuously they managed to travel most of the distance to the farm in a cloud of dust which Roger explained was a deep sea fog.

Dick Preble met them at the door of the farm house. Dick was a stocky boy of ten with a freckled face surmounted by a thatch of sandy hair.

"Charley! Where have you been? We thought you were asleep upstairs. Mamma was just getting scared. And whose clothes have you got on?"

Charley rushed headlong past her brother, shrieking for her mother, while Roger struggled with his explanation of certain of the afternoon's complications.

"Gee!" was Dick's comment, "I'll bet Charley gets the paddle whacks for running away."

"You weren't thinking of driving into town, were you?" asked Roger.

"Naw, lazy bones! You can just foot it, after half drowning my sister."

"You better keep your old sister home then," replied Roger, starting for the gate.

It was a long walk for seven-year legs. Roger was considerably less active on the return trip than he had been plowing through the sea fog on his way out. But his mind was hard at work.

"It would be nice to have a railroad all the way out to Prebles'. One that just us children could use—under the road. And I'd have little doors that would open up in the road and we'd peek out. And if we saw any grown ups coming we'd close the door quick. I'd be the engineer and Ernie the fireman. And we wouldn't have that old Dick at all. He's too big and cross. The girls could ride if they'd behave and run errands for us. Let's see. We'd have to dig it out first. Then we'd want ties and rails and a little engine. I wonder how much it would cost. But it would be very useful. 'Specially if we let Mr. Preble send his corn to town on it. He wouldn't have so much trouble with his hired men if they could ride on my engine, I bet."

This delectable dream, with infinite variations, carried Roger home. Supper was on the table and Mr. Moore was already in his place. A thin man, Roger's father, with a deeply lined face and good gray eyes, under a thatch of iron gray hair. He was a master mechanic, now owner of a little factory which turned out plowshares. Moore had devised machinery which enabled him to turn out plowshares of a superior quality, in greater quantity and at a cheaper rate than any of his larger competitors in neighboring states. His was only a small concern, employing twenty-five or thirty men, but even this made Moore the chief manufacturer of the town of Eagle's Wing, whose only other glory was that it housed the state university. The members of the college faculty did not recognize many of the town people socially. But Dean Erskine, the young new dean of the School of Engineering, had visited the plow factory and had been so enthusiastic over Moore and his work that he had come a number of times to the house, bringing Mrs. Erskine with him. Factory management was a new theme in these days and Dean Erskine found Roger's father open minded to his theories.

"Well, old son, have you been a good boy to-day?" asked Mr. Moore as Roger slid into his place at the table.

"No, sir. I've been pretty bad. Say, Papa, how much would it cost to build a railroad, under the ground, from our house to Prebles'?"

"A good deal of money. What way were you bad, Rog?"

"Oh, about every way, temper and all. Papa, I guess I'll build that railroad. I got a big piece of pipe and a gauge that might work. Guess I might begin to make a engine. Aren't I a pretty good inventor, Papa?"

"I don't know, Son. Nothing you've ever said or done makes me think you're one yet. In the first place an inventor is the most patient animal in the world. An inventor just can't lose his temper. Why don't you begin by inventing a way to control your temper, Son?"

Roger subsided into his bowl of bread and milk.

Mr. Moore was smoking on the front porch when Mrs. Moore joined him after putting Roger to bed. She sat down on the steps beside him while she told him of Roger's day.

"He's so contrite and so sweet, after one of his passions!" she said. "And yet, well, maybe it's his age, but he's so sort of casual about his temper. To-night, for instance, after he'd said the Lord's Prayer, he added, 'And please God, help me to find some pipe to make that engine and some rails too. And bless Charley, she's so little. And bless Mamma and Papa. And Lord, you might do something about my temper if you have time. Amen.'"

The father and mother laughed together, then Mr. Moore said, "I do hope the boy will keep up his interest in mechanics. It's the coming game for real he-men. The world's going to turn into a big machine. The way things are going now with me, I'll have a real place for the boy when he finishes school. Dean Erskine's about persuaded me to let him go to college. I've been dead set against a college engineer until I met Erskine. He's made me feel as I'd have had less of an uphill pull if I'd gone to engineering school, and he says I've made him feel as if he never had enough shop practice."

Moore stopped to chuckle. Then he went on, after refilling his pipe, "Yes, machinery is the greatest thing in the world. I took on five more men to-day, Mamma. All union men. I've decided to give in on that point and have a strictly union shop."

"I think you're right," said Mrs. Moore. "After all the union is the working man's only protection."

Moore grunted. "I don't care so much about the right of it as I do the expediency. And I haven't time to buck the union."

"You've changed a lot since you left off working with your hands," commented his wife, noncommittally.

"A man has to change his point of view when he becomes an employer instead of an employee. Old girl, we're on our way up the ladder and nothing but old Grim, himself, can stop us. And when I came in from the old farm, when I was twelve years old, I had only my two hands and the clothes I stood in."

"You've been wonderful!" murmured Mrs. Moore. "Do you know, Mr. Wolf has done well too. His wife said he couldn't speak a word of English when he came to this country—at just twelve, too, and now he's manager of the Grand Dry Goods Company."

"He's a nice fellow with a mighty pretty wife."

It was Mrs. Moore's turn to grunt, which she did, in the manner of a wifely sniff. And the two sat in silence, hands clasped in the lovely summer night.

After all, Roger did not get beyond a first attempt at the railroad building. He began the tunnel the next day, he and the two little Wolfs digging vigorously until a hole as large as a bath tub was completed. While resting from this toil, Roger conceived the idea of making a wading pool, with the aid of the hose. Some vague lesson won from previous experience made him ask permission of his mother and this given, the three children spent an ecstatic, though muddy, day in the improvised pond.

Roger's father suggested that evening that the pool be gradually enlarged to make a swimming pool. He enlisted Mr. Wolf's aid for the summer evenings and in a couple of weeks a very creditable pool, brick and concrete lined, made a summer heaven of the back yard for the little friends.

It was the pool that made this summer perhaps the most memorable one of Roger's childhood. It was the one, anyway, to which in after years his mind harked back with the most pleasure and with the greatest frequency.

Even little Charley learned to swim. Roger never was to forget her slender beauty, as she stood ready for her dive on the pool edge. This was his last memory of the little girl, for the Prebles gave up farming that fall and moved away. Somebody said that Mr. Preble drank up his farm, which at the time seemed mere nonsense to Roger.

Roger's tenth summer was memorable too. But he ceased to think of himself as a child then, because that was the summer his mother had typhoid fever and all summer long he was practically his own man. His father could give him no time,

for there was a strike in the factory that lasted during the six weeks that Mrs. Moore was the sickest. The night that his mother was passing through her crisis, men threw stones in the kitchen windows.

Mrs. Moore believed that she was going to die. One day when her mind was clear, despite her deathly weakness, she made them leave the little boy alone with her while she told him of her consuming anxiety over his temper. And she talked to him too about a motherless young manhood and how he must try to keep clean and straight. She made him promise that if any of the facts of life puzzled him, he would go to his father and not let naughty minded little boys tell him bad stories. Then while Roger sobbed, she fell asleep and when she woke she was definitely better. But Roger never felt like a child again. He felt that he knew all that men knew about life, and death as well.

Mrs. Moore never was really strong again. Their keeping a servant dated from that summer and so did a little electric car, the first one in Eagle's Wing. Yes, perhaps this was as memorable a summer as Roger's seventh. Yet it lacked the magic and the beauty that made imperishable the joy of the swimming pool summer.

And then came his fourteenth summer.

Roger was a strapping big lad at fourteen. He was as tall as his father, who was five feet ten, and was still growing rapidly. He was thin but hard-muscled, with good shoulders that were not as awkward as they looked. After a year of pleading, his father agreed to let him spend his vacation in the plow factory; and Roger in overalls, his dinner pail in hand, was his father's pride and his mother's despair. She did like to see her only child well dressed.

Ernest's father wanted Ernie to come into the store that summer. But after his years under Roger's tutelage, Ernie was all for mechanics, so he too acquired overalls and a dinner pail and went into the plow factory. Elschen was broken hearted because there was no way in which she also could become a wage earner.

The university lay at the south end of the little town. The plow factory, now employing two hundred men, lay at the north end. Jim Hale, the chief engineer, blew the whistle every morning at seven o'clock and again at five o'clock. There was an hour off for dinner pails at twelve. A nine hour day, a few years ago, was not considered a long day, that is, not by employers of labor. That the employees were beginning to feel differently, Roger was to learn that summer in a manner that was to shape his whole life.

The workmen were of a type little known now in our big industrial centers. Without exception they were North Europeans: Germans, Norwegians, Swedes and Danes. About fifty per cent. of them were foreign born. The rest of them were American born. A good many of the German born had not taken out first citizenship papers, but the Norwegians and Swedes had done so, so had the Danes. Enough of them had a certain amount of pride in their work to make the factory an interesting and profitable place for a boy to serve his first apprenticeship in. Practically all married men in the factory wanted to settle permanently in Eagle's Wing and send their children through the town's splendid schools. A majority of them planned to send their sons through the State University.

John Moore had a good eye for men. He had built up an apparently solid and permanent organization. Yet for all his keen eye, the more successful he became, and the larger his business, the more incapable he grew of winning his men's liking. He had worked unbelievably hard from his boyhood up. He had given himself to his work without stint. He had no sympathy with any of his employees who would do less. His wage, as a mechanic, had never exceeded two seventy-five a day. He bitterly resented any man's wanting more.

Moore was the entire brains of his factory. He was his own manager, his own superintendent, his own purchasing and sales agent—a man of splendid mind, hidebound by the egotism and prejudices of the self-made man. At fifty, he was going at his highest speed, every nerve taut, ready to break at the least disturbance of the load.

Roger admired his father with a blind idolatry that was quite foreign to his ordinary mental attitude. He was naturally critical of men and things. To be a forge boy in his father's factory was to Roger to be touching the skirts of real greatness.

"Father," he said one night at supper, "I had a row with Ole Oleson to-day."

"Which Ole Oleson?" asked his father. "There are nine of them in the factory."

"The second forge foreman. His girl Olga is in my grade at school."

His father nodded. "What was the row about? As I warned you, Rog, if I catch you with the lid off that temper of yours, I'll treat you exactly as I would any other employee."

"But you didn't catch me, this time!" Roger grinned. He had fine white teeth and his eyes were still the wonderful sky blue of his childhood. "Ole said you were

as hard as one of the plowshares and that some day the men would soften you like they take temper out of steel and that then you'd never be any good again."

John Moore snorted. "And you let the fool get a rise out of you, of course!"

"I knocked him down."

"And what did he do?"

"He knocked me down."

"Then what?" asked Moore.

"We shook hands and went to work again." Roger grinned at his mother's horrified face.

"I'd have fired you both if I'd seen it," said his father. "You were late again this morning, Son. Remember you're docked for that."

"Anyhow," Roger went on without noting apparently his father's warning, "he got confidential, while we were eating dinner, and told me that if you didn't give them an increase they were going on a strike that would make you sit up and take notice. He says you won't give the increase so the strike's due about the middle of July."

"Oh, the fools!" exclaimed John Moore. "I can't have a strike now with that big Russian order to fill. That order makes or mars me."

"Then you'll give 'em the raise! That's good!" Roger gave a sigh of relief.

"Raise nothing! Why, I can't raise them! Roger, you're old enough to begin to understand these things. The only way I'm able to compete with the trust is by working on such a narrow margin of profit that it makes their overhead look like Standard Oil profits. So far they've let my patents alone, chiefly, I suppose, because my machinery is efficient only for the comparatively small output. I never have been able to accumulate much working capital. A protracted strike would put me out of business. On the other hand a material increase in wage would kill that Russian contract and I've already borrowed money on it."

"Roger, you shouldn't have told your father that when he was tired," said Mrs. Moore, handing her husband his third cup of tea.

"Don't be a goose, Alice," returned Roger's father. "What are they going to ask for, Son?"

"A minimum of three dollars a day and eight hours."

"Then I'm finished!" exclaimed Moore, setting his lips.

"Why don't you tell them when they come to you just what you've told me?" asked Roger. "They'll understand."

"They won't believe a word of it. Nobody knows so much about a business as one of the workmen. And the poorer the workman the more he knows. I think I'll go up to see the Dean."

Roger and his mother sat late on the porch, while Mr. Moore conferred with his friend. Mrs. Moore summed up her own feelings on the matter of the strike when she said just as Roger started for bed:

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, I've never been so happy as I was when your father was just a plain mechanic, earning his two and a half or so a day and with no responsibility except to do his work well. Ever since he's been his own boss, he's been changing. I don't feel as if he were the same man I married. And what does he get out of it? Worry, worry, fuss, fuss. I tell you, Roger, my dear, I've come to the conclusion that the more complicated life gets, the less happiness there is in it."

Roger bent and kissed his mother. "Maybe I'll feel like that when I'm older," he said, "but I don't now. And I guess Father likes the worry. It's like playing a game. I'm going to get into it, you bet, just as soon as I get through school."

His mother made no reply.

On the morning of July fifteenth, a delegation of three workmen waited on John Moore in his office. They made exactly the demands that Roger had reported and they received the same reply that Roger had received, with just about the same amount of detail as to the running of the business. The strike was scheduled to begin on the first day of August.

Roger and Ernest, plugging away at the forge, heard the men's side constantly. At night Roger heard his father's. At first, naturally enough, both boys' sympathies were all with Roger's father. Then, because he was now a working man himself, Roger began to notice that his father had brutal ways with the men. Three or four times a day Moore always went through the factory. A careless mechanic would receive a cursing that, it suddenly occurred to Roger, no real man ought to endure. The least infringement of the factory rules was punished to the limit by a system of fines. Moore drove the men as relentlessly as he drove himself. This aspect of his father Roger naturally never discussed with his chum, but he spoke of it to his father on the morning of the first of August as they made

their way to the factory.

"They think you feel to them just like you do to a machine and it makes them sore, all the time," said the boy.

"Heavens! what do they want? Must I kiss them good morning?" exclaimed Moore.

Roger laughed. "No, but I know what they mean. I've seen you when you talked as though you owned them—and not that either. It's sort of like if you could recollect their names, you'd hate 'em."

"Shucks, Rog! You're getting beyond your depth!" said his father.

The seven o'clock whistle did not blow that hot August morning. All the neighborhood of the factory was full of lounging men with clean faces and hands. It was like Sunday. Ernest went to work in his father's store. Roger spent the morning in the office with his father. In the afternoon he circulated among the men. At first many of them resented this. Naturally enough they looked on the boy as his father's spy.

But Moore had nothing to conceal nor had the men. Roger was intelligent and thoughtful far beyond his years, and little by little the men got in the habit of debating with him the merits of the case.

Roger forgot that summer that he was a boy. Even at Saturday afternoon baseball, his mind was struggling with a problem whose ramifications staggered his immature mind.

Ole Oleson, the forge boss, talked more intelligibly, Roger thought, than any of the others. There was a bench outside the picket fence that surrounded Ole's house, and Ole's house was not a stone's throw from the forge shed. Here nearly every afternoon Ole, with some of the strike leaders, would gather, and when not throwing quoits in front of the shed, they would talk of the strike.

Roger, his heavy black hair tossed back from his face, his blue eyes thoughtful, his boyish lips compressed in the effort to understand, seldom missed a session. The strike had lasted nearly a month when he said to Ole.

"My father says that if the strike isn't over in two weeks, he's ruined."

"That's a dirty lie!" exclaimed a German named Emil.

Before Roger's ready fist could land, Ole had pulled the boy back to the bench.

"What's the good of that!" said Ole. "Emil, this kid's no liar. Don't be so free with

your gab."

There was silence for a few moments. The group of men on the bench stared obstinately at the boy Roger and Roger stared at the group of factory buildings. Unpretentious buildings they were, of wood or brick, one-story and rambling. John Moore had bought in marsh land and as he slowly reclaimed it by filling with ashes from his furnaces, he as slowly added to the floor space of his factory. Roger could remember the erection of every addition, excepting the first, which was made when he was only a baby. He knew what the factory meant to John Moore and with sudden bitterness he cried,

"I don't see what good it will do you to ruin my father!"

""Twon't do us no good," returned Ole. "He ain't going to be ruined. Look here already, Rog. I got a girl, your age. She goes in your class. What kind of girl is she?"

"She's a smart girl. Smart as lightning," answered Roger.

Ole nodded. "Sure she is. Now Emil, he's got two boys and three girls. Canute, over there, you've got three little girls, ain't you? Yes—and Oscar, you got one boy, and John Moore, he's got one boy. Now, listen once, Rog. I tell you about myself and that tells you about all of us here.

"I am born in Norway, the youngest of nine, and when I am ten years my folks come to America. They come to give their children a chance to live comfortable and not have to work like dogs all the time, just to keep alive. All right. They come here to this town. My father gets a job and my big brothers get a job and we all do fine. They put me into school and my father says I can go clean through the University. Then he dies and my brothers all marry and when I have just one year in the High School I have to quit and go to work.

"All right! I get a job in a machine shop where a fellow named John Moore has a machine next to mine. He's a good smart fellow. We're good friends, many years. But he has a good education."

"He has not!" interrupted Roger, flatly. "He's never been in school since he was twelve and he's supported himself ever since he was twelve."

"He's educated all the same," insisted Ole.

"He taught himself everything he knows," Roger cried.

"All right! All right! Anyhow, he makes a new kind of a machine and takes his savings and starts to make plowshares, ten a day, over in that little brick house,

there. And he works like the very devil. Why? Why, so that little Roger Moore that's come along can have it easier than he had. Same as I'm working for my little Olga and same as Canute and Emil and Oscar is working."

"That's only part of it, with father, anyhow," Roger exclaimed. "Of course, he's ambitious for me, but, you see, he has these ideas inside of him that have to come out. He'd have done it if I'd never been born."

"He does it so's his children gets ahead. Every married man's that way. Otherwise, why work?" This was Emil's contribution.

"All right," Ole pushed on. "Anyhow first thing I know I'm working for John Moore and he's getting ahead while I'm staying in the same old place, same old pay. And now listen. Already, when he gets ahead he changes. He gets bossy and ugly. Seems like a man can't be a boss without changing, without getting so he curses the fellow he bosses. And Emil and Oscar and Canute and I and all of us say, 'Here's Moore getting ahead. His boy goes through the university on what Moore makes us earn him. He has a hired girl for his wife. Now our children can't go to the university on what Moore pays us. And our wives can't keep a hired girl. Moore couldn't earn a cent without us. He's got to give us enough of what we earn him so's we can live easy as he does.'"

"He don't live easy," retorted Roger. "You ought to see him. He works harder than any of you, day and night, he never stops. My mother's always complaining that she's lost him. And if he's your age, Ole, he looks ten years older. I tell you carrying that factory is an awful load. None of you folks could run it. You haven't got the brains. Father ought to be the big earner. He's got the big brains."

"He can be the big earner," said Canute, a thin, slow speaking Dane, "if he gives us a chance to save and enough time to enjoy a little every day the sunshine and make gardens or bowl or play with our children. That's what we came to America to get and, by God, we're going to get it."

"He doesn't get it." Roger spoke with an unboyish sadness in his voice. "That factory has him body and soul. I don't see what's the use."

Again there was silence. Then Ole said, "I guess the thing that makes me hate him is how he's changed already. Look, Rog, I'm an American citizen. I can't have any man curse me like I was a slave. No money can pay for it. And one reason this strike's going to hang on till your father gives in is because he don't know how to boss men. And they all hate him."

"And envy him!" cried Roger.

"Sure," agreed Emil. "Envy him, we do. That's why we're striking."

"And supposing the factory goes out of business?" Roger asked. "You'll all have to move away or take any old job. This is the only factory in this town."

Ole laughed. "Your father's got you bluffed too, Rog."

"You'll see!" returned Roger, through his white teeth. "You'll see." And he started abruptly for home.

The first week of September slipped into the second. The night of the fourteenth, John Moore said at the supper table, "I bought the old Preble place, to-day. Traded in this place for it, so we'll have that free and clear out of the wreck."

"What do you mean?" faltered Mrs. Moore.

"What I say," he snapped. "The Russian contract has been canceled. Money never was so tight in thirty years as it is now. Wolf says he thinks there's a panic coming, and so does the bank. I can't borrow a cent more. I'm through with my fling, Alice, and I'm going back to a farm."

Roger choked a little on his tea. His mother said, unsteadily, "John dear, if going back to the farm brings you back to me, I shall thank God for the strike."

Roger's father scowled at his wife for a moment, then suddenly something, perhaps the gentleness of her voice and the sweetness of her eyes, caused him to push his chair back and going around to her side to kneel with his head against her shoulder.

Roger slipped out of the room, blowing his nose. He went into the back yard and sat scowling at the swimming pool until he heard the front door click on his father, then he went to bed.

The following day when Roger went into the office, his father's coat was hanging on the accustomed hook, but his father was not there. Vaguely alarmed, Roger started a search through the factory. His alarm proved unfounded, for he discovered his father in the little building that had been the original factory. He looked up when Roger came in.

"Look, Rog," he said. "I'd like to take this old machine up to the farm with us. We could store it somewhere. It's the first machine—the one I started business with."

Roger nodded but could not speak. Moore looked around the room.

"Well, I've had a good run for my hard work," he said, bitterly. "An old man at

fifty and a worn out farm to spend my old age on."

"You've got Mother and me. And why don't you start again, Father? I'd help."

"I'm too old, Roger. I've lost my vim. We'll close the shop, to-day. A man's coming up from Chicago to buy in the machinery."

A half hour later, Moore posted a great sign on the office door. "This factory goes out of business to-day." Then with the various keys of the buildings in his pocket, he went home. Roger hung about to see how the men took the news.

By noon, the two hundred employees of the factory with many of their wives and children were gathered in the factory yard. At first they seemed cynically amused by what they called Moore's bluff. By mid-afternoon, however, after repeated assurances from Roger that his father was going to be a farmer, the crowd became surly. A strange man got up and made a speech. He said that capitalists like Moore should be destroyed, that men such as he were a menace to America. Roger, standing by Ole's side, saw suddenly in his inner mind his father's gray head on his mother's shoulder.

"You lie, you dirty anarchist!" he roared, and heaved a brick at the speaker's head.

There was an uproar. Some one helped the speaker wipe the blood out of his eyes and tied his head up, while Ole pinned both Roger's arms behind him.

"They say that's Moore's boy threw that brick," cried the speaker. "Come up here, you hell cat, and show yourself to these downtrodden workmen."

"Let me go, Ole," said Roger, with sudden calm. "I want to say something."

Ole looked into Roger's blue eyes. "All right," he said, after a moment, "only if you get mad again, I can't answer for this crowd. They're sore."

"I'm all right," muttered Roger, and he pushed his way to the office steps where the speaker stood. "Here I am," he cried; "what about it?"

"Here he is," roared the stranger, pulling Roger round to face the crowd. "If he tries murder now, what'll he do when he has a factory of his own?"

Roger thrust his trembling hands into his trousers pockets. "Don't you think it!" he shouted. "What do I want of a factory? To let a crowd of ignoramuses like you ruin me—just out of ignorance and envy? Not on your life! My father's going onto a farm and I'm going with him. I hope you're all satisfied."

"Farm!" sneered the stranger. "Why, he'll have a bunch of scabs up here to-

morrow. I know Moore!"

What Roger might have said, one cannot know, for at that moment a man drove up in an automobile and shouldered his way up to the office door. He pulled a bunch of keys from his pocket as he mounted the steps.

"Who are you?" asked Roger. "I'm Mr. Moore's son!"

"I'm Mr. Wrench of Chicago. Trouble serious?"

"No," replied the boy. "Just a lot of hot air."

"One moment please," said the strange speaker. "There'll be serious trouble here if some questions aren't answered. What is your business here?"

"I'm to see to the dismantling of the factory," answered Mr. Wrench, indifferently.

A long breath seemed to rise from the listening crowd. Automatically it broke up into little groups and the best efforts of the strike leaders could not pull it together again. Roger felt that the excitement was all over and he made his way slowly home.

At midnight that night a terrific explosion shook the little town of Eagle's Wing. Roger had not finished pulling on his clothes when the fire bells began to ring. He caught his father rushing out of the front door. Ernie and his father joined them and they followed other hurrying groups toward the factory.

It was all ablaze, as well as several of the workmen's houses, which with the main factory building had been demolished by the explosion. Everybody asked questions at once and a hundred pairs of hands tried to help unreel the hose and bring it to bear on the main blaze.

"Turn on the water!" shouted a fireman.

"No! No!" roared a voice, and a man in his undershirt rushed up and tried to tear the hose away from those that directed it. It was Oscar.

"No! Let her burn! Let her burn! We'll show that infernal hound of a Moore if he can take our chances away from us!"

"Oh, then 'twas you!" cried Moore, and he leaped for Oscar.

A dozen men sprang to pull them apart, but Roger was there first. He hung onto his father in desperate silence, while others pulled Oscar away. Mr. Wolf and Ernest followed the Moores as Roger led the way to a seat on a heap of débris.

"There, old friend, there!" said Wolf. "Don't take it so hard! I know! I know! If it was my store it would break the heart of me. But we cannot break. We cannot."

Roger kept his hand on his father's shoulder. Moore rested his head on his hand and said nothing.

"It's all right, Daddy! You walloped him a good one," said Roger.

"His old snoot was all over his face," added Ernest in a cheerful voice.

"Hush, boys, come away for a little bit," said Mr. Wolf. And he led the two back toward the hose. But Roger would not go far. He loitered behind lest some one should molest that silent figure on the heap of débris. All the vicinity was brilliant with firelight. And standing waiting thus he saw a sight that he never was to forget. It was his father, bowing his head on a piece of the twisted, wrecked machinery—the machinery into which he had put the passionate hopes and dreams of his manhood. And moving nearer lest some one else should see, Roger saw that his father was sobbing as if indeed his heart was broken.

That picture was to direct the entire course of Roger's life. For it never left him. And at first it filled his boyish mind with such bitterness that he could not hear of labor and its strivings and troubles without seeing red.

But as the years on the farm slipped by and the atmosphere of competition and of feverish ambition gave place to the sweet silences, the quiet plodding, the placid sureness of farm living, the bitterness gave way to a dream.

Gradually Roger ceased to blame the factory workmen who had destroyed his father, or to blame his father for the egotism and selfishness that had driven his employees into reckless stubbornness. He saw behind both the urge of the inevitable, unquenchable desire of human beings for happiness; for the happiness that comes only when men have sufficient leisure in which to expand their minds and souls.

And as he grew older and read deeper it seemed to him that the solution lay only indirectly in any system of government. It seemed to him that until man had learned how to use directly and freely the power sources of nature, inequalities of wealth would always persist. And he had learned in one bitter lesson that unhappiness and economic inequality go hand in hand.

And so Roger dreamed his dream. For many years it was such a mad seeming dream that he was ashamed to speak of it, even to Ernest. And yet it was simple enough in its first outlines.

This was, Roger told himself, a machine age. The more perfect became man's use of machinery, the more leisure could he have and the more wealth. Ultimately man's efforts must concentrate on the effort to find power with which to drive the world's machinery. Coal was disappearing, water power was coming into its own. Was there not, however, some universal source of power that could be harnessed and given to the use of man? Some power that capital could not control nor labor misuse and destroy?

It was thus that Roger came to study the possibilities of Solar Heat utilization. It was thus that he became the world's first and greatest pioneer in a new field of engineering—a field so mighty that it was to become the dean of all other fields of power engineering.

He dreamed a dream of solving the problem of labor versus capital. He was to learn through years of heart breaking endeavor that neither capital nor labor has use for a dreamer of dreams no matter how practical the dreams may be, unless the dreamer is selfish enough, is grasping and ruthless enough to trample over other men to the top.

Roger was to learn, before he achieved success, that a man's genius can go no higher than his character permits it to go. He was to learn that only out of a man's will to conquer himself can come the finest accomplishment of his work. And he was to learn that for most of us fate works with curious indirection. So that the story of Roger's dream deals not with a struggle between capital and labor, but with a man's struggle with solitudes; it deals not so much with machinery as with nature; and not so much with scientific facts as with human passions.

Thus for most of us, if we could but see it so, life is not a matter of colorless and naked straight lines but is a rich mosaic made up of a thousand seemingly unimportant items.

CHAPTER II

HOPES DEFERRED

Although John Moore never became reconciled to the failure of his factory, still he was not really unhappy on the farm. There is something too normal, something too entirely natural about a return to the soil after middle age, to permit a man broken and worn, as was Roger's father, really to be discontented when working in his own fields.

The farm never paid very well. After the first year or so they were obliged to mortgage it, and sometimes the interest was hard to meet. But after the stormy factory years, these anxieties seemed innocuous enough and Roger and his mother, anyway, were deeply happy.

Roger made an old corn crib over into a laboratory. During his High School period, with his faithful henchman, Ernest, he spent all his free moments on various and mysterious experiments in the patched-up little shack. Many were the vile smells and the outrageous noises that floated out over the farm, but nobody complained, except Roger's mother, and she only mildly. No startling results were forthcoming from these experiments, but John Moore encouraged the boys in their attempts.

"Chemistry was my weak point," he would say. "Get all you can of it, Rog. Perhaps you'll succeed where I failed."

"All the chemistry in the world couldn't have run Ole Oleson for you," Roger would reply.

"No, but it would have made a real engineer of me," his father would say thoughtfully.

When Roger was a freshman and sophomore in college, he suffered a complete

relapse from his interest in experimental work, and his father was very much depressed, but both his mother and Dean Erskine laughed at Mr. Moore's fuming.

"Let the poor child have his play time," said Alice Moore. "Between the farm work and that nasty laboratory the boy hasn't known anything but work since we came out here. If you'd had more chance to play, John dear, your nerves would be in better shape now. I'm glad he's learned to dance, bless him."

"Give him his fling, Moore," said the Dean. "He was getting one sided, and he's way ahead of his class now, as a result of all his corn crib grinding. Football and girls won't hurt him at all for a year or so. I'll see to it that he doesn't neglect his work. If I'm any judge of men at all, that boy of yours is going far. You've no cause to worry."

So Roger was not nagged at home. Somehow his father raised the money to pay a hired man so that except in the long summer vacations Roger was relieved from farm work. Until well into his junior year, he merely carried the required work in college and devoted all his excess energy to football and girls. He was notably successful in both fields. He was six feet tall, lean and muscular and a splendid half back. He was eager and chivalrous and had a charming smile and was a famous schemer of things to do, and places to go. The University was co-educational and Roger had no rival with the girls except perhaps Ernest. Ernest was whimsical and sweet and very musical, and he took the girls seriously, which Roger refused to do.

But all the playing came to an end in Roger's junior winter. A venomous epidemic of La Grippe swept over the world that year and Roger's mother succumbed to it. A month after her death, John Moore gave in to pneumonia and early in February Roger found himself alone in the world.

Roger escaped with only a mild attack of the disease, but the shock of his loss left him for a time, it seemed, spiritually and physically bankrupt. There was nothing left. The worn out farm was eaten up by mortgages. The stock and implements would only just pay food bills, the doctor, the funeral expenses.

One cold gray afternoon Roger closed the gate for the last time and, suitcase in hand, started down the road to town. He had not covered half the distance when he met Ernest.

"Hey, Rog, old man, I was just coming up. Where are you going?"

"To Mrs. Winkler's. Got my room there for taking care of the furnace, walks, and

any old thing."

"Forget it!" exclaimed Ernest. "You're coming home with me until you get braced up. Mother and Dad said so."

"That'll make it harder when I do get back. Besides, old lady Winkler might not hold the place for me." Roger spoke firmly. Nevertheless he allowed Ernest to help him with the suitcase and made no objection when his chum turned off Main Street toward the Wolf home.

Mrs. Wolf kissed him and put him to bed, while Elsa brought a hot water bottle and a cup of hot milk. He hung about the house for several days, dreading the return to college and Mrs. Winkler. But Mrs. Wolf knew Roger almost as well as his own mother had known him. She left him alone until one snowy afternoon, after a prolonged absence in his room, he came into the kitchen with traces of tears about the eyes. Mother Wolf was paring apples for mince meat. Papa Wolf would eat no food not prepared by hers or Elsa's hands.

"Help me with these nut meats, Roger, there's a good boy," she said.

Roger sat down by the table with a long sigh and began to pick at the hickory nuts.

"Elsa's gone to Choral Union practice," volunteered Mother Wolf. "Ernie is doing some laboratory work he said he was behind in. You must be getting somewhat behind, too, Roger."

"I guess so," agreed Roger, indifferently.

"Papa met Dean Erskine in the Post Office yesterday. The Dean said you were the most promising man in your class."

"What good does that do," asked Roger, "when they're gone and can't know?"

"How do you know they can't know?" asked the little woman sharply. "Older and wiser people than you believe otherwise. One thing is sure, that the only real thing you can do for your parents now is to carry on what they began. Life is short and there's no time to waste, Roger dear, no time to waste."

"Are you getting tired of me here?" asked Roger quickly.

Mother Wolf's pretty blue eyes filled with tears. "Do you have to be unkind, Roger?" she asked.

"Forgive me!" he exclaimed. "I know you'd let me live here if you thought it would be good for me."

There was silence. The coal range glowed and the snow without sifted endlessly past the window. Suddenly Roger rose and putting on his overcoat and cap went out into the storm.

Dean Erskine was in the little office off the junior laboratory. Roger had not seen him since the day of his father's funeral, but he kept his voice and manner casual.

"Good afternoon, Dean Erskine. How many hours am I behind in lab work?"

The Dean too was off hand. "I've lost count, Roger."

"It's sort of sniveling baby work, anyhow," said Roger. "I did it all once; up in the corn crib."

"I know that," said Erskine. "That's why I've let you neglect it so outrageously. I had hopes too that you'd wake up and ask to do other things. But it seemed that you preferred experimenting with Welsh rarebits at Hepburn Hall and marshmallow sundaes at Allen's."

Roger had the grace to blush. He grinned sheepishly, then said soberly: "I'm through with all that now."

"Oh, it has its place in a normal man's life! Only you seem to have crowded several years of it into two. If you're not in training I don't mind if you smoke. Only close that door into the classroom."

The Dean pulled out an outrageous old pipe. Roger closed the door, then lighted a cigarette. The two smoked in the silence of old friendship for a while, then Roger said,

"Dean, what do you know about solar heat?"

The Dean looked at him suspiciously. "The usual things. Why?"

"I'm not trying to trip you," exclaimed Roger. "I've read all I can find on it, and that's darned little. You know those arrangements of mirrors in an umbrella-like frame, focussing the sun's rays on a point at the center, where the steam boiler is located?"

"Yes," said the Dean.

"Well, I don't believe the fellows that are working along that idea are right. The mechanism is hopelessly complicated, unwieldy and expensive."

Erskine nodded, his gaze on Roger's dreaming eyes.

"Ever since I was a kid," said the boy, slowly, "in fact ever since the factory went

to pieces, I've had a pipe dream. It's sort of nutty, you know, and I suppose you'll think it's childish, but—"

"Let's have it. I accept your apologies," said the Dean, smiling.

And so Roger was launched for the first time on the telling of his dream. He was a little halting and incoherent at times, but his old friend listened attentively. When Roger had finished, he said,

"It's a good dream, Roger, and sound in its general premises. Have you ever got down to brass tacks with it and tried to design a solar engine?"

"No, I've only a lot of notes and sketches. It always seemed to cost so much that I never had courage to go any farther."

Erskine refilled his pipe. "I have a dream too. Only mine is in pretty good working shape. My dream has been to turn out of this school men who were practical engineers but who also had ideas. Men who were never satisfied with a bridge, a motor, a gas engine after they had finished it, but would be forever trying to improve it. Such men, of course, are rare, but in the fifteen years I've been here, I've sent out five or six lads who have given American engineering a real lift. I haven't come across a fellow before though who had any concrete vision of the world's labor problems in relation to the inventing game."

He fell to brooding and Roger waited patiently. Erskine finally looked up. "It's a big dream, boy. Too big for you or any other man to put over in a single generation. But we'll do what we can toward giving it a start. You cut out junior laboratory and get to work on your designs. When you finally get one that seems workable, we'll have the shops make a model." He paused, then rose and Roger rose too while the Dean put a hand on his broad young shoulder. "You've launched on the finest, most thankless, most compelling, most discouraging, most heart thrilling game in the world, Roger. You'll probably be poverty stricken all your life, but Lord! Lord! what riches of the mind will be yours!"

Roger flushed and lifted his head in a gesture that was infinitely young.

"I'm used to poverty, sir."

"I know you are and so am I. Good night, Roger!"

"Good night, Dean! Thank you!" and Roger, in spite of his grief, returned to the Wolfs' with his face set triumphantly toward the future.

The next morning he deposited his suitcase in old lady Winkler's most meager and coldest bedroom and after he had stoked the furnace and shoveled the walks

he bolted for the college drafting room.

It was not until the fall of his senior year that Roger completed a design of a solar engine which Dean Erskine was willing to turn over to the University shops, that a model might be made. Roger had taken Ernest into his confidence and that faithful friend undertook to make all drawings for him. Ernest had no originality of mind, but he was an excellent workman and a first class mathematician and laboratory man. Early in January, the model was completed, and on a cold Saturday afternoon, the test was made. Roger and Ernest came home to the Wolfs' for supper deeply discouraged.

"But why wouldn't it work?" asked Elsa, as the boys wiped the supper dishes for her.

"If I knew that, I wouldn't be blue, would I?" grunted Roger.

"I wish I understood the stuff you talk," Elsa went on. "I don't see how on a cold day like this you'd expect to run an engine with heat from the sun."

"We didn't try to," said Ernest.

"Didn't try to!" echoed Elsa. Then she banged the tea kettle angrily back on the stove. "I do think you boys are disgusting! Here I'm so interested in your work and you treat me as if I were a baby! And I'd like to know who does more for you two great hulks than I do. You simply disgust—"

"Hold on, Elsa," roared Roger. "For the love of Mike! I'll confide the inmost secrets of my being to you if you'll stop jawing. Now listen! You can see that we can't get as high temperatures out of the sun's rays as we can out of burning coal or gasolene?"

Elsa, much mollified, leaned against the sink and fastened her violet eyes on Roger's face.

"I understand that," she said.

"Wonderful!" murmured Ernest.

Elsa made a face at her brother and Roger went on with a grin. "So I'm trying first of all to develop a practical, efficient engine that will run with the temperatures I'm able to get from Sun Heat."

"And won't the model work at all? Not a bit?" asked Elsa.

"She just sits and looks at me without moving a muscle," replied Roger.

"Can't the Dean tell you what's the matter?" Elsa ventured.

"The Dean!" snorted Ernest. "Isn't that just like a girl? Why, Roger knows more about low pressure engines in a minute than the Dean'll know in his whole life. Come on, Rog, if you've finished your kindergarten. Let's go up to see Florence King and her bunch at the Beta house. It will rest our brains."

"Not for me," replied Roger. "I've done enough girling to last me a spell. I'll stay here and educate Elsa till she goes to choir practice, then I'm going home and bone on that design."

"Sorry for you," sniffed Ernest, and was off.

Roger deposited Elsa at the church door, then returned to Mrs. Winkler's. The light burned in his cold little room nearly all night. But when he went to bed, sketches for the complete redesigning of the engine lay on his table. And it was this changed design which he kept through all the vicissitudes of struggling to market his dream.

During his senior year, Roger, with Ernest and other promising men of the graduating class, had several jobs offered him by different manufacturing and engineering concerns. In the earlier days of the University, a young graduate of the School of Engineering had been looked on with contempt by the business men of the state. He was a "book" engineer to them, just as a graduate of the School of Agriculture was a "book" farmer to the farmers of the state.

But, as the years had gone on, it was observed that the minor jobs, obtained with difficulty by the men whom Dean Erskine had trained and recommended, nearly always became jobs of fundamental importance. The observation bore fruit. Little by little "Dean Erskine men" were scattered across the continent until even as early as Roger's graduating year, it was the custom of engineering concerns and manufacturers to watch the Dean's laboratories closely and to bespeak the services long before commencement of every promising lad in the class.

By the Dean's advice, however, Roger did not accept any of these positions. He decided to take an instructorship in the University and keep on with his experiments in solar engineering. Both he and Erskine felt that in a couple of years, at most, Roger would have something practical to offer the world. Ernest also took an instructorship, working toward his doctor's degree. His father was delighted. He was immensely proud of Ernest's work in college, and a full professorship for Ernest would have meant as much to Papa Wolf as the national presidency for his boy.

The two years flew rapidly. The summer that he was twenty-five, Roger, armed with letters of introduction from the Dean, and a roll of drawings, went to

Chicago. He was about to market his dream and he proposed to give the two summer months to the job. After that—well, the possibilities staggered even Roger's imagination, which was an active one.

Haskell and Company, makers of Gas-Engines! The sign was as inconspicuous as the firm was famous in the middle West. Roger, after two days of waiting, was staring at the faded gilt letters until the moment of his interview with Mr. Haskell arrived. He was a little uncertain about the knees, but very sanguine for all that. Mr. Haskell, a small man with a grizzled beard, sat behind a desk in a room that was small and dingy. The desk seemed to Roger an unnecessarily long way from the door, as he advanced under Mr. Haskell's eyes.

"Well, Sir, so you're one of Erskine's men. Ought to be good. Solar engine, though, doesn't sound cheerful. What's the idea?"

Roger unrolled his drawings and began his explanations. Haskell listened with keen interest, asking questions now and again. When Roger, flushed of cheek, had finished, Haskell lighted his cigar, which had gone out.

"Very clever! Very clever! A nice little experiment. What do you want to do with it?"

"I want you to manufacture and sell these solar heat plants," replied Roger boldly.

"I see. But are you sure such a plant is practicable?"

"Absolutely!"

"Where have you had one working?"

"At the University."

"You mean in the laboratory."

Roger nodded. Haskell cleared his throat and looked over Roger's black head for a minute, then he said:

"My dear fellow, I am a business man, not a philanthropist. When you can come to me and say, 'I've got a plant in Texas and one in Mississippi and one in Egypt and they've worked for, say two years, and the folks want more,' why, then you'll interest me. But I don't see putting a hundred thousand dollars into a laboratory experiment, however clever."

Roger's clear blue eyes, still unsophisticated despite his twenty-five years, did not flinch. There was a perceptible pause, however, before he said:

"But, Mr. Haskell, how am I going to get a dozen plants into use unless some one manufactures and installs them for me?"

"Some one will have to do just that. But you'll have to pay for it."

"But I thought great concerns like yours," persisted Roger, "were constantly looking for new developments."

"We are. But frankly, Mr. Moore, your whole idea is too visionary. Some day, undoubtedly, we shall have solar engineering. But that day is several generations away. We have coal and all its by-products and water power is just beginning to come into its own."

"Coal would have to retail at a dollar a ton to compete with my solar device in a hot climate," interrupted Roger.

"Very interesting if true! But you've erected no plant in a hot climate. I'll tell you what I will do though, Mr. Moore. I could very well use your unusual knowledge of heat transmission in my concern. I'll give you three thousand a year to begin with."

Roger got slowly to his feet, rolling up his drawings. "Thank you, Mr. Haskell. But I think I'll stick to my solar engine."

Haskell rose too. "An inventor's life is hell, my boy. Better come in out of the rain."

"But why should it be hell?" asked Roger. "The inventor is the very backbone of the industrial life of the world."

"I know it. But for every good invention offered there are a thousand poor ones. We who pay the piper have to be careful."

"I'm much obliged to you for giving me so much time," said Roger, picking up his hat.

"Not at all. And remember that my offer to you is a permanent one."

Roger grinned, and left the office.

Outside the building he drew a long breath, stared abstractedly at the passing crowd, then drew out his second letter of introduction. James Howe and Sons Company, Marine Engines. Roger decided to walk to his second meeting. It would give him time to collect his thoughts. The walk was a long one and by the time he had covered the distance his hopes had soared again.

James Howe and Sons Company did not seem overjoyed by the letter of

introduction and for some time it seemed as if Roger could not pass the young woman who guarded the main office door. He was finally admitted, however, to the office of Mr. Hearn, the general manager. Hearn was a man of forty, full faced and ruddy.

"I get the idea! I get the idea!" he said impatiently when Roger was about half way through his explanations.

Roger flushed. "You can't possibly, Mr. Hearn. I haven't reached the main idea yet."

"I've got enough to convince me that you're hopelessly impractical. Give it up, young man! Give it up and get into something that'll pay the bill at the corner grocery. Solar power is about as practical as wave power. Fit merely for the dreams of poets. Sorry not to be able to give you more time. Good day! Miss Morris, call in the foundry boss."

Roger found himself in the street before he had finished rolling up his drawings. "Well, I'll be hanged!" he muttered. Then he suddenly smiled. "I think I came down here with an idea that we'd be turning out machines in a couple of months! Gee, if I'm landed by Christmas, I'll be lucky." He pulled out the third letter of introduction, and his head lifted defiantly, started off to present it.

The Dean had been generous with his letters, but by the end of the first week in Chicago, Roger had presented them all. Curiously enough, in all this week of meeting with manufacturers Roger told but one of them his ultimate dream. John McGinnis, maker of kerosene engines, was elderly and Irish and immensely interested in Roger and his idea.

He slapped Roger on the back. "It's a grand idea, me boy! If I wasn't just about to retire, hanged if I wouldn't help you to build one plant. How come you ever to take up solar heat though, with the world all howling for a real kerosene engine?"

They were sitting in McGinnis' pleasant office, the windows of which overlooked Lake Michigan. The old man had cocked his feet up on his mahogany desk and had about him an air of leisurely interest. He gave Roger the mate to the long brown cigar he himself was smoking and after a few minutes Roger said, hesitatingly:

"When I was a kid of fourteen, labor difficulties ruined my father. He owned a little plow factory, employing a couple of hundred men. I got a good deal of the men's side for I worked as a forge boy that summer, but after the crash, for a

long time, I was all for father's side of the matter. Gradually though, I began to think differently.

"I began to be sorry for the men as well as for my father. They were hardworking, ambitious chaps who wanted to get ahead, just as my father did. They took the only way they saw for getting ahead. They didn't believe that just because father was the brain of the concern, he should be well-to-do and they poor.

"I couldn't find any system of government that I was convinced would remove the economic inequalities that were the root of the trouble. So I began to think about sources of wealth. You can see how my mind fastened first on machinery, then on power, then on quantity and accessibility of power; then solar heat."

McGinnis nodded, then smiled. "You're a damn queer inventor. What do you expect to get out of it?"

"All any man can get on the physical side out of anything is a living," replied Roger. "What I am getting and expect to have more of, is some great adventures."

McGinnis smoked for a while and said, "If I were twenty-five instead of seventy, I'd look at it as you do. Being seventy I have to say to you, me boy, that though some day you may work out a practical plant for hot countries, you'll never solve the labor problem. As long as human nature exists we'll have social inequalities. But, after all, as long as you contribute something real to the world in the way of a power idea, devil a bit does it matter what motive put you at the job."

Roger smoked in silence.

"Had any encouragement in Chicago?" asked the older man.

"Not a bit," replied Roger, cheerfully. "But the trip has done me good. I've learned that I can't sell an idea. I've got to sell a working plant."

"Right you are! And with the patent situation fully covered. Those drawings of yours are full of interesting suggestions for makers of any kind of engines. Philanthropic of you to show them about Chicago."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Roger, with a startled air. "I guess I'd better beat it back to Eagle's Wing until I get out of swaddling clothes. I supposed the firm that would take this up would take care of the patents. I don't know anything about patents myself."

"Better learn," said McGinnis. "Many of your ideas are clever and need

protection."

Roger laughed ruefully. "I thought," he confessed, "that I'd have the thing marketed in a couple of months."

"Listen," said the old man. "On the average the man who has an invention that is of fundamental significance gives his life to perfecting and marketing it, then dies hungry. Do you get me?"

"But there are exceptions, aren't there?" insisted Roger.

"Yes, but no such pipe dream as you have there," pointing to the drawings, "could be an exception."

"Would you advise me to give it up?" Roger asked curiously.

"I would not. That's your job. Civilization owes its existence to chaps like you."

Roger, face flushed, black hair rumpled, blue eyes glowing, rose to go.

"I can't exactly thank you," he mumbled. "Only," his voice strengthening, "if I hadn't met you, I'd have gone back home discouraged and almost as ignorant as I left. As it is, I feel in bully fighting trim."

Old John McGinnis got to his feet. "God bless you, my lad. When I'm twanging a harp, up above, I'll be having an interested eye on you."

Roger started back to Eagle's Wing that evening. Ernest and Dean Erskine were both deeply interested in Roger's report, which he gave in the Dean's library the night he reached home.

"Pshaw! I should have told you a lot of things that would have helped you," exclaimed the Dean when Roger had finished. "But one forgets up here in the classroom how the war rages out in the industrial world."

"Will patents cost a lot?" inquired Ernest. "You know I don't use all my salary. Draw at will, old man."

"Thanks, old top," replied Roger. "Since I cut out girls and golf, I've been saving a bit myself."

"The patents won't cost a great deal, if you do the work yourself, Roger," said the Dean. "But it's going to take time to learn the patent game."

"Well," said Roger, with a sigh, "if I've got to become a patent attorney in order to patent my ideas, I suppose I can. But gee, I am glad I don't want to get married. You were wise in not letting me give up that instructorship, Dean, as I

wanted to."

Dean Erskine smiled ruefully. "Seems to have been about the only sane advice I've given you."

"Don't you think it, sir!" exclaimed Roger. "If I ever do get away with this, yours will be the credit."

"And Ernest's," added the Dean.

"You bet, Ernest! And now, I'm going out to the University library and read up on patents," said Roger, with the familiar squaring of the shoulders.

He had need to square his shoulders: a greater need than either he or his two devoted friends could dream. For as the months slipped into years, it seemed more and more obvious that either Roger's ideas were utterly impractical or else that he was actually several generations ahead of his time. In his brilliant, yet thoroughgoing way, Roger studied patent law and registered two years after his trip to Chicago *as* a patent attorney in Washington. He worked constantly on the development of his plant, improving here, discarding there, until he had reached the point, he felt, where he could do no more until he had funds for a practical plant, in a hot climate.

He and the Dean and Ernest estimated that not less than fifty thousand dollars would be essential for such an initial plant. The sum might have been fifty million for all its accessibility to Roger. Most of the wealthy men whom Roger was able to reach admitted the cleverness and the interest of his ideas. None of them could be persuaded that the idea would be a good investment. Once in desperation Roger went to Chicago to a firm whose letter heads read "Bankers, Stocks and Bonds, Promoters, Investments." Roger was turned over to a young man who wore a garnet ring and who was at the head of the Engineering Investments Department. The two had several long sessions. Then the man of the garnet ring proposed that a company be organized for half a million dollars and that his company undertake to sell the stock. Roger was much encouraged.

"That's fine," he said. "How long would it take to raise fifty thousand dollars?"

"Not long," replied the young promoter, whose name was Eaton. "Of course, you understand that the first money will have to go for office expenses and salaries."

"Whose salaries?" asked Roger. "I don't want any and I need only a few day laborers."

"You don't get me." Eaton was patient. "I'm speaking of the Solar Company's

Chicago office."

"Shucks! We don't want an office in Chicago. What we want is a plant in Arizona."

"If you think we can sell stock in a nutty scheme like this without plenty of mahogany furniture and high sounding titles on glass doors, you're even greener than I thought you were," said Eaton.

Roger looked at him thoughtfully. "Oh, I see!" he said after a moment. "When would you want to begin on this work?"

"As soon as you can raise a little preliminary expense money for us, say $1500."

"Oh," said Roger again. "Of course, you realize that the only thing that will give that stock any value is building plants with the money we get from selling it."

"Why, certainly! But we must make a right start. An office in your bedroom may go in Eagle's Wing but not in Chicago."

"Oh!" said Roger for a third and last time. And the conference adjourned sine die.

Something about this interview depressed Roger profoundly.

He went home, locked up his drawings and threw an old canvas over the model of the solar engine that had stood for so many years in a corner of the graduate laboratory. It was six months before he could induce himself to touch his work again. And it dawned on him that his twenties were slipping by and that he was becoming unsociable and grave. But there seemed no remedy for the matter. His dream had become the most vital part of his life, and would not let him lead a normal existence. Such is the price that a dreamer pays for his vision.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW DAY

Roger, climbing the steps to the Science Building on the day that he was thirty years old, wondered if his working life was to end as it had begun within its ugly walls.

The building stood at the western edge of the campus. It was a Gothic, Jacobean, Victorian composite, four stories high, built of yellow sandstone, marble and brick. It boasted a round dome, rising from a Gothic main roof and a little pagoda-like tower on each of the mansard roofs that crowned the two wings. There had been a time when to Roger the Science Building had been beautiful. But he saw its ugliness now and laughed about it with Ernest.

On this December afternoon, Roger stayed late in the laboratory with twenty seniors who for some weeks had been carrying on strength tests of varying mixtures of concrete. The sun was low in the west and the corners of the huge old room were dark. But a red glow from the west window filled its center, turning the concrete briquettes piled on the table in the middle of the room to gold.

Roger stood by the table, examining the students' reports on the fractured briquettes. His black hair, with the sunset full upon it, was like molten bronze. Roger's face had changed in the years since his undergraduate days. His figure was the same, six feet of lean muscle; his eyes were as blue and his face as thin and intellectual as when as a small boy he had dreamed of an underground railway. But there had grown subtly into his face a look of grimness and unhappiness that robbed it of the youth it still should have retained.

A shock headed student came to the table with a briquette.

"How does the thesis go, Hallock?" asked Roger.

"Slow, just now, Mr. Moore."

"What's the trouble?"

"Oh, the best of the information is in German and I'm rotten at scientific German."

"You've taken the required work in German, haven't you, Hallock?"

"Squeezed through by a hair's breadth," the boy answered with a grin.

Roger grunted. "Neglected it, of course, when you've been told time and time again that a reading knowledge of scientific German is essential to research success. I wonder why an undergraduate has to be a fool?"

"I'm not a fool," contradicted Hallock flatly.

"Any man's a fool who's working his way through college and fails to get the most he can out of every course offered him. I know, because I worked my way through my last two years, neglected my German and had to make it up after I graduated. That thesis will make or mar you as far as your first job goes. Who'd you have your second year German with? If I were you, I'd take a semester of it over again."

"I'd rather never get a diploma than go back to old Rosenthal."

"Mr. Rosenthal," corrected Roger sharply. "Speak respectfully of an instructor."

"Aw," exclaimed Hallock, now evidently angry, "why should I speak respectfully of a beer-guzzling Dutchman who sneers at the girls in the class every time they recite?"

There was sudden silence in the room. Hallock was evidently relieving an accumulation of irritation. "If I had been Miss Anderson this morning I'd have slapped his fat face for him."

"Be careful, Hallock! I can't permit you to talk this way to me about a member of the faculty."

"Then you're no better than he!" shouted Hallock. "The damned Dutch run this college and I'm sick of it."

There was a sudden murmur of agreement from the highly edified audience now grouped behind Hallock. This was an old sore that had existed in Roger's own days under Rosenthal.

"Pshaw, I know all about Mr. Rosenthal's peccadillos, Hallock," he said. "But he's a teacher and scholar of the first water. Girls always take general remarks personally. Miss Anderson had better forget it, whatever it was. Girl hysteria, probably."

Hallock suddenly began to cry with rage. "Hysteria, damn you, don't you insult her too!" Then, as an angry sneer appeared on Roger's face, he unexpectedly leaned over the table and punched Roger on the nose.

Roger vaulted over the table and with a rapid clip laid Hallock flat. The boy was on his feet in a moment, crying, but game. The edified audience held the two apart.

"You don't know what the Dutch slob said! You don't know," sobbed Hallock.

Roger did not speak. In fact he could not. He stood white and trembling for some time, a scarlet trickle of blood running from one nostril. His struggle for control was so obvious that even Hallock perceived it and was silent. With the other lads he stood in embarrassment while the laboratory clock ticked and the end of the winter sunset filled the room.

It seemed to Roger that the fight was as difficult now as it had been years before, when he had struck his mother's soothing hand from his shoulder and later had kissed that same hand and had wept his heart out with his cheek upon it. In the brief moment as he stood with clenched fists and bowed head, waiting for the red mist to give way to his normal vision it seemed as if all his life passed in review before him tinged with the hot glare of his mental and spiritual tempests. Then, as many, many times before, he seemed to feel the gentle hand, that he had struck, laid softly on his forehead. He heaved a great sigh and looked up.

"The class is dismissed," he said. "Hallock, hold a snowball to your chin as you go home."

When the class had left the room, Roger washed his face at the sink in the corner, wiping his hands on a towel that was gray with age. Then, he dropped the towel and stood leaning against the table, head bowed, arms folded.

The gloaming increased. A cheerful whistle sounded in the hall and Ernest came in.

"Well, old top? Ready to go home?"

"Ern, do you know a girl named Anderson?"

"Yes, very pretty. Engaged to young Hallock, they say. What about her? Don't

tell me you've begun to be interested again in petticoats."

"I had the deuce of a row with Hallock, just now," said Roger.

"Change your clothes as you tell me about it," suggested Ernest. "It's late."

Roger obediently started for the closet, talking from the door as he dressed. Ernest lighted his pipe and listened thoughtfully under the electric light he had turned on. He was a shorter man than Roger and stockily built. He was still very fair, with soft yellow hair already receding from a broad forehead. His eyes were beautiful, a deep violet, soft dreaming eyes that men as well as women trusted instinctively.

"I'm sure you've seen Miss Anderson," he said when Roger had finished. "She's a funny foolish little thing. Just the kind to attract an unsocialized grind like Hallock. I guess there was a good deal of a row in Rosenthal's class this morning. One of the seniors told me. Rosenthal said to Miss Anderson—say, Rog, you're not listening."

Roger picked up his hat. "I don't care what Rosenthal said. He always was a boor. The point with me is that I've lost my temper in the classroom for the last time. Come on, Ern."

They were crossing the snowy campus before Ernest spoke. Then he laid his hand on his friend's arm.

"The fool kid brought it on himself. I can see how he got worked up. You can be exasperating and he gave you what he'd like to have given Rosenthal. Nevertheless, no man can take a crack on the chin with a thank you, Roger."

Roger did not reply. They turned into River Street where the street lights flashed through the bare branches of the elms. An occasional sleigh jingled by. Lights glowed from pleasant windows where children were silhouetted against the curtains. Ernest stopped before the big, comfortable Wolf house.

"Come in to supper, Roger."

"I'll not be good company, Ern," but Roger's voice was wistful.

"Come along! Mother doesn't mind your grouches, and I guess the rest of us can endure one more."

Roger turned up the brick path that led to the door.

"Hello, boys!" Elsa called, as the front door slammed. "You're late!"

Elschen at twenty-nine was still very pretty in an unobtrusive way. Her yellow

hair was thick and curly. Her eyes were like Ernest's and her skin was fair, with a velvety flush in her delicately rounded cheeks.

"Supper's ready," she went on. "Papa just came in. Don't keep him waiting, children."

Roger and Ernest went quickly into the dining room where Papa Wolf was just sitting down. He nodded to them over his spectacles, then helped himself to a slice of meat.

"Where's Mamma?" asked Ernest, passing the bread to Roger.

"Here, liebchen!" Mamma Wolf came in, carrying a steaming coffee pot. She set it down, then hurried round the table to kiss first Ernest, then Roger.

"You know Rog can't eat without you, Mütterchen," laughed Ernest.

"He doesn't get his manners from the Germans," snapped Elsa.

"Never mind! I've gotten the only home life I've known in eight years from them," returned Roger. He and Mamma Wolf exchanged an affectionate glance.

"Pass the biscuits, Elsa," said Papa Wolf.

"Going anywhere to-night, Elsa?" asked Ernest.

"Yes, we have choir practice every night from now to Christmas."

"The carols are beautiful!" exclaimed Mamma Wolf. "I heard them last night when I stopped by the church for Elsa. Ernest, pass your papa the preserves and put the cake where he can reach it. It's fresh, Papa, never fear. I only finished frosting it as you came in." Mamma Wolf looked at her husband a little anxiously.

"That Smithsonian man telephoned you again this afternoon, Ernest," said Elsa. "He wanted to call this evening and I told him to come along."

"I wonder what he wants," mused Roger. "He's been hanging round for a long time."

"Pass the biscuits, Ernest," from Papa Wolf. "The cake is very bad, Mamma."

"Oh, Papa, is it? And I took such trouble!" The distress in the gentle voice made Roger scowl.

"In America, Papa," Elsa's voice was mocking, "where you have lived for some forty years, it is not considered courteous to criticize the food at the table."

"Hush, Elschen! Papa can say what he wishes, always, to me. Is it not so, Karl?"

Papa Wolf pushed away his plate, wiped his mustache and leaned back in his chair with a smile and a sigh of repletion.

"You spoil us all, Mamma!" he exclaimed. "Elsa, Uncle Hugo comes to-night and we will have a little music. You will give up choir practice, just for once."

Ernest glanced at his sister apprehensively. She flushed resentfully. "But I must go, Papa!" she cried. "I take the salary the church pays me. I must sing well."

"Laughing and flirting with the new bass is not practice," returned Papa. "You stay at home to-night, Elschen."

Elsa glanced at Ernest, who shrugged his shoulders. Then she gave a long look at her father with eyes that were black with anger.

"Papa, I'm going to choir practice," she insisted.

Her father brought his fist down on the table. "Am I or am I not master in my own house?" he shouted. "Elsa, what you have needed was a German upbringing. You will stay at home to-night and make music with Hugo and me."

"Papa," said Elsa slowly, "I am twenty-nine years old and I can't endure this sort of thing much longer. Mother and I are just unpaid servants for—"

"Elsa! Bitte! Bitte sehr!" exclaimed Mother Wolf.

Elsa's dark look went to her mother, then to Roger, who was still scowling. Her lips trembled. She shrugged her shoulders and rising began to clear the table.

The three men went into the library and lighted their pipes. Papa Wolf, having with much difficulty persuaded his meerschaum to draw, parted his coat-tails and settled himself on the piano stool. Then he threw his head back while he touched a few quiet chords. He had a beautiful, massive head. Roger, ensconced in a deep Morris chair, thought, as he had thought many times before, that it was a head that should have belonged to an artist rather than to a dry goods merchant. The chords merged into a quiet melody. Ernest buried his head in the evening paper. Roger let his pipe go out and his face settled into lines that added ten years to his age.

The subdued clatter of dishes from the kitchen finally ceased and Elsa came through the room. Her father stopped her as she passed and put his arm about her waist.

"Sweetheart, don't be cross with me," he said. "It's just that Papa so loves to have

his little girl with him."

Elsa put her hand on his gray head and looked down into his face but said nothing.

"Come now," he went on, "sing a little song of forgiveness with me."

Still with his arm about her he played with one hand and sang as he played:

"Du, du! liegst mir im Herzen!
Du, du! liegst mir im Sinn!
Du! du! machst mir viel Schmerzen
Weiss nicht wie gut ich dir bin."

There was a sudden ring at the doorbell and with a little laugh that was half a sob, Elsa hurried to let Uncle Hugo in. He was tall, thin and blonde, yet his resemblance to Mamma Wolf, his sister, was unmistakable.

"So! We make a little music to-night," he boomed in a rich bass, "and the audience is set," bowing ironically to Roger, still in the clouds, and Ernest, his head still in the paper. "Where is the Mütterchen?"

"Coming in a minute," called Mamma, from the dining room. "I can hear. Go ahead."

Elsa sat down at the piano. Papa Wolf opened his 'cello case. Uncle Hugo put his silver flute to his lips and played a tentative sweet note. In a moment the strains of Schubert's Serenade, exquisitely rendered, filled the quiet house. Roger relighted his pipe and let it go out. Whenever over her shoulder, Elsa cast a quick glance at him, his gaze was fastened intently on the ceiling.

For an hour the music continued without interruption. Then the doorbell rang again and Ernest went to answer it.

"Come into the den so we won't disturb the concert," Roger heard him say. "Rog, come in here, will you?"

Roger obediently made his way into a little room off the dining room, devoted to the men of the household. A short smooth-shaven, sandy-haired man was standing by the reading table. Roger and he shook hands.

"I've been talking to Dr. Austin a good deal about your solar heat apparatus, Rog," said Ernest, "and he's got a proposition to make. Let's sit down and talk it out."

He pushed a jar of tobacco toward Austin and the three men, eyeing one another

with frank interest, settled themselves in the easy chairs which Ernest indicated with a nod.

"I think Ernest said that you represent the Smithsonian Institute," Roger said. "What do you want to do? Put my engine in your museum?" This with a short laugh.

Austin shook his head. "I see you are about as ignorant as the rest of the world as to the real nature of our work. Confess now!"

Ernest smiled. "I suppose I've been reading papers and reports from the Smithsonian for ten years, but until I met you, Mr. Austin, I was certainly vague about who or what the work represented. Go ahead and give Moore the explanation you gave me, will you?"

"Well," began Austin, "an Englishman named Smithson left his estate to his nephew named Hungerford with the stipulation that if Hungerford died without heirs, the state was to go to found the Smithsonian Institution in America. Hungerford obligingly died without issue. It was in 1835, I think, and after a great deal of red tape, about half a million dollars was turned over to the American Congress to go to work with.

"Of course, Congress did considerable false stepping but finally the Institution was organized with the avowed purpose of increasing and diffusing knowledge. Rather a large program, eh! It was proposed to carry this program out by stimulating talented men to make original researches by offering prizes, by appropriating every year a sum of money for particular researches and by every year publishing reports on the progress of difficult branches of knowledge.

"The original bequest has been increased until now the Institution has use of the income on a million dollars. You'll be surprised to know how much real work has been done by this very little advertised branch of our government. For example, out of the system of weather observation developed by the Institution grew the United States Weather Bureau. The United States Ethnological Research is all done by us—as witness the monumental studies of our American Indians. Powell's great explorations were fathered by the Smithsonian and so were Langley's experiments in flying machines as well as his studies of solar heat."

"My word!" exclaimed Roger, "so they were!"

"When I was in the northern part of the state, last summer, studying certain Indian mounds, I ran across one of your fellow instructors who mentioned your

work in heat engineering. I've always been much interested in that line of research, so when I came West again I tried to get in touch with you."

"I'm not hard to reach, surely," said Roger.

"Oh, yes, you are," returned Austin.

"It was this way, Rog," Ernest's lazy, gentle voice interrupted. "I kept Dr. Austin away from you until I felt that there was some hope. I didn't want you to have another disappointment."

"As I got your idea from Mr. Wolf, it seems to me that the Smithsonian might be glad to back you in further experiments," said Austin.

Roger's thin face flushed as it was apt to do when his work was under discussion. "This is mighty kind of you, Dr. Austin, but my work has gone beyond the experimental stage. I'm ready to erect Solar Power Plants if I can find the money."

"Rog, you're not ready!" cried Ernest, with unusual vehemence. "You've no idea of the troubles you'll be up against when you try actually to erect a working plant, in a hot country."

"I'm not afraid," returned Roger shortly. "One thing is certain, I'm not going on experimenting any longer."

"My understanding of your device is, that it is practical only in tropical or semi-tropical climates," said Austin.

"This first device is, yes," answered Roger shortly. "If I can ever get this one launched, I shall take up other climates."

Austin eyed Roger keenly for a moment, then he said suddenly,

"Why don't you let me see your plans? We might possibly have something to say that would interest you."

"Oh, of course! I wish I had some of them here. And it's too late to go up to the laboratory to-night."

"Wait a moment, Roger! Wait a moment," exclaimed Ernest. "Praying that we'd get to this point to-night, I brought down a set of drawings." He unlocked a drawer of the table and pulled out a roll of paper.

Roger spread some of the sheets on the table and the black, the yellow and the sandy heads bent over them.

"This," began Roger, "is the general ground plan of a plant designed to produce about 50 horse power. This detail here, which looks like a design for a glassed-in hot bed for early cabbage, is the heat absorber. It consists of a trough lined with some insulating material, covered with two layers of ordinary window glass. Under this window glass I flow crude oil, which absorbs the sun's heat as it comes through the glass. I get some remarkable temperatures, right here in Eagle's Wing. Here is a month's thermometer readings during July."

Austin studied the table thoughtfully. "The heated oil is the fuel for a low pressure engine. What engine do you use?"

"One of my own design. Here are the drawings."

Austin bent over these with absorbed interest and for an hour Roger answered his questions. At the end of this time, Austin lighted his pipe, which had gone out, and took a turn or two up and down the room. Then he paused suddenly in front of Roger and said, "Why don't you go down into Arizona and put up a small pumping plant as an experiment for the Smithsonian? I know this is not the large way, the commercial way, but I am convinced that this is the careful, practical way. Your friend Wolf tells me that the most popular reason given by the business houses you've visited for turning you down has been that you've never actually erected a working plant. Why not try it for us? Then you'll be in a position to talk business."

Roger, his face a still deeper red, looked from Austin to Ernest and back again. He relighted his pipe with fingers that shook.

"How big a plant?" he asked huskily.

"Big enough to irrigate about twenty-five acres of desert for alfalfa. I'm convinced that when you actually undertake to put such a plant in operation, you'll realize that there are details to be remade that you never dreamed of, on paper."

Roger did not speak for a moment. Five years ago he would have refused such an offer as this, without hesitation. It was very different, this, from turning out say a thousand units in six months. Yet, so long had hope been deferred that Roger hesitated, not for lack of enthusiasm for Austin's offer, but because the sudden joy that rose within him made it difficult to speak. Finally he turned to Ernest, who was watching him with a look of inexpressible satisfaction in his beautiful eyes.

"Will you go with me, Ern?"

"The family will kick, but I'm going," answered Ernest.

"What are the terms, Dr. Austin?" asked Roger.

"We'll buy all machinery and apparatus and pay for labor and living up to ten thousand dollars."

Roger could not believe that his sterile years of endeavor and disappointment were to bring forth even this small fruit. He laid his pipe down, picked it up, then said, "I can't tell you what this opportunity means to me. It's—it's my work, you see, and—and—"

"That's all right," Austin spoke hastily. "When can you start? I know exactly the spot in Arizona that we would wish you to go to—Archer's Springs. Have you a map of Arizona?"

"Yes, some of the Geological Survey maps," said Ernest, opening up a chart case.

"Here's the spot." Austin put his pencil on the map. "It's about twenty miles north of the railroad, a mining country, but we've always believed that the valleys here could blossom if we could get water to them. The Reclamation Service never expects to get in there."

"I know that," said Roger eagerly, "and yet a cheap power would make an inland empire of that section."

"Have you ever seen it?" asked Austin.

"No, Chicago has been my uttermost limit of travel so far. But I've studied hot countries and their resources for ten years."

"My idea is," said Austin, "that we buy all our supplies at St. Louis. I'll go that far with you. You can buy the essentials for making camp at Archer's Springs and by the time you are ready for it, freight will have brought the rest. I believe there is an excellent trading store at Archer's Springs where you can buy a camp outfit. I'll wire down and find out."

"Jove, Rog, doesn't that sound great!" exclaimed Ernest.

"When shall we plan to start?" asked Roger.

"Why not at once, so as to get the plant running by Spring, when the real heat comes on?" Austin looked from one eager face to the other.

"We both are teaching, you know," said Ernest. "I thought next June—"

"Next June!" shouted Roger. "This is the first of December, Dr. Austin. We'll have found substitutes and be ready to travel immediately after the Christmas recess."

Ernest winced. "That's crowding things! But—well, you're the boss of the expedition, Rog. I'll be with you."

"Fine!" Austin rubbed his hands together. "We'll start our purchase list now, eh?"

The concert, which had proceeded during the evening without interruption, now stopped abruptly, just as the clock struck ten.

"How about deferring that until to-morrow?" asked Roger. "I've a number of lists in my desk at the Science Building that will help us."

"That's a good idea," Austin rose as he spoke. "Will you both take dinner with me at the hotel to-morrow evening and we can give the evening to this?"

"We'll be there," replied Roger, following Austin to the door. When he returned, Ernest was locking up the drawings. "Well, Ern, old boy, it's not big business, but thanks to you, it's a real start in that direction, anyhow. How can I thank you?"

"By helping me to break the news to the family. It's most deucedly short notice. We'll have some trouble in finding substitutes for our classroom work."

"I'm sure Benson and Ames will be only too glad of the chance," Roger spoke decidedly. "I thought of them this afternoon. I swear I was in earnest in saying I was through with teaching. And now this! It's like a double answer to prayer."

"Boys!" called Elsa, "the beer is waiting."

Ernest was well into his second stein and his third cheese sandwich before, in response to repeated kicks from Roger, he made his announcement. There was a moment's silence, broken by Elsa.

"Lucky dogs! Take me along!"

"But, Ernest, you cannot go," protested Papa Wolf. "Let Roger go if he wishes. I have nothing to say to that. But, my son, with the chance for a full professorship in a great university—no!"

Roger sighed. He was sorry for Ernest, but he never could understand his docile relationship to his father. Ernest came back, pluckily enough.

"I think I ought to go, Papa. It will be a fine experience and I will come back to teaching with a new interest."

"But why waste time? Why waste time?" cried his father. "You are nearly thirty. Instead of playing in the desert for a year, you should be marrying and starting a home."

"It won't be play, Mr. Wolf," said Roger. "It'll be bitter hard work, but it will add considerably to Ernest's reputation."

"Pah! Pah! *Was ist's!*" snorted the older man. "You are a good boy, Roger, but you are full of foolishness. You are bad for Ernest."

"Pshaw, Papa, don't talk like a goose," protested Elsa, her cheeks crimson. "All the initiative Ernest's got, Roger gave him. Why not let Ernest see a little of life before he settles down forever? Let him have just one adventure, for goodness sake."

"Will you be still, Elsa?" asked her father sternly.

"Hush, Elschen," whispered Mamma Wolf.

"Roger should be settling down and finding a wife for himself," Papa Wolf went on. "He'd soon get over his absentminded ways."

Ernest suddenly laughed. "Why, Papa, Roger looks on women about the way you look on inventors."

"Dry up, Ern," said Roger.

"What sort of a thing is it, this desert machine?" asked Uncle Hugo.

"It's a method of utilizing solar heat for power," replied Roger.

"Ah, yes, the big umbrella-like things. I've seen them in the pictures."

"Not at all," corrected Roger crossly.

Ernest spoke suddenly, very firmly but without raising his gentle voice. "I'm sorry to go against your wishes, Papa, but I'm going, just the same."

His father's mouth opened in astonishment. There was silence for a moment, broken by a sob from Mamma Wolf. Then Papa Wolf roared: "So that's it! You are of age. But disobedience I will not countenance. If you go, never again can you live in my house."

"Oh, Karl!" cried Mamma Wolf.

Elsa sniffed audibly. "What a tempest over a little thing! Uncle Hugo, have some more beer?"

"I must be going," said Hugo, taking the beer nevertheless.

"So must I," exclaimed Roger, rising hastily. "Then it's settled, Ernest?"

Ernest leaned over to take another sandwich. "It's settled. Don't cry, Mütterchen. I'll bring you home a horned toad and you can make me a bed and serve my meals in the garage."

Roger took Mamma Wolf's hand and kissed her cheek. "Good night, dear," he whispered.

Mamma Wolf smiled bravely and clung to his fingers for a moment. "You have made me sad, Roger, but I can't help loving you!"

Roger kissed her again. "I'm not going to let you be sad long. I'll bring Ernie back to you safe and sound. Well, I'm off to bed! Good night, Elsa!" and he was gone with a bang of the front door.

The days to Christmas flew by with unbelievable speed. Papa Wolf washed his hands of the whole adventure, as Elsa continued to call it, and refused to allow any mention of it in his hearing. This was Ernest's first insurrection, and his father seemed to have no tool but silence with which to combat it. Christmas eve and Christmas day were celebrated with all the usual beautiful German customs. It seemed to Roger that he enjoyed them more each year, and this year, with the novel sense of achievement in his heart, the joy of the day was unalloyed.

Although Papa Wolf was obdurate about the adventure, his big heart could not permit him to allow him to let Austin spend Christmas day in a hotel. When he learned that Austin had a wife and child in Washington, nothing would do but that the Smithsonian man should share in a home Christmas. Papa Wolf provided another guest also, a stranger named Adolph Werner. He was a German banker, traveling across America on business, and the Wolf family was instructed to treat him with great deference. Stout and bespectacled, he proved a delightful guest and Dr. Austin displayed a gift for comic songs that brought the house down.

The two guests discovered that they both had studied for several years in Munich and a great meeting of spirits followed, materially assisted by Papa Wolf, Uncle Hugo and a bowl of Glüh Wein. And when it was still further discovered that Werner's next stopping place was St. Louis, he was invited at once to join the Sun Planters, as Elsa had dubbed them. He accepted at once and on New Year's Day, with Elsa and her mother weeping and Papa Wolf blinking back tears but sternly refusing to say good-by, the party pulled out of the little Eagle's Wing station. Herr Werner proved to be a delightful traveling companion and he

became so much interested in the details of the experiment that he insisted that he be invited to visit the plant; an invitation that was given most cordially by Roger.

Thanks to Dr. Austin's experienced presence, the purchases in St. Louis were made in record time and at the end of the second week in January, Roger and Ernest set forth alone for the desert country.

It was their first trip west of the Mississippi and both men were absorbed in watching the changes of scenery as the train whirled from one state to the next. Albuquerque was an hour behind when Ernest came into the smoking compartment where Roger was engaged in drawing on the back of an old envelope.

"Say, Rog, I know you aren't interested in the sex, but there's the most unusual little girl on the train. She's seven years old and traveling all alone. Her name is Felicia. She got in at Kansas City. They checked her through like a pup. She's going out to join her brother and sister on a mining claim near Archer's Springs."

Roger did not stop his pencil. "Seems as if we'd have neighbors," he said.

"I hope this is a sample of Archer's Springs girls!" said Ernest. "Honestly, Roger, she's a lovely kid. Come on back and see her. I'm going to take her out on the observation platform with me."

Roger grunted, and Ernest, with a grin, left him in peace. It was an hour later when Roger, having forgotten about the child, but wanting to ask Ernest a question, made his way to the observation platform. It was so exceedingly dusty that Ernest and his little friend had it to themselves.

"Here she is, little Felicia!" cried Ernest. "And here he is, big Roger!"

The little girl looked up at Roger. He returned the look with a surprised interest. He did not know much about little girls, but it seemed to him that she must be rather unusual. She had large brown eyes of astounding depth and softness. She was tall for her seven years, tall and graceful, in a short soiled blue gingham dress, and socks wrinkling down on stubby Oxford ties. Her hair was brown, curly and short. There were lovely curves in her scarlet drooping lips, and a fine arch in her head, above the ears.

She made a little curtsey and shook hands in the limp manner of childhood. Roger smiled at her, and sat down.

"Ernest, what was the size of the glass you and Dr. Austin were finally able to

get?"

"Eight by twelve. Felicia, tell Mr. Moore where you're going."

"Out to live with Charley and Dick," said the child obediently.

"Have they been there long?" asked Roger, lighting his pipe.

"Ever since Mother died. They left me with Aunt May. But now I'm going out to be with Charley. Dear, dearest Charley, that's what Aunt May says."

"Charley must be your favorite brother," commented Roger, a trifle absentmindedly as he tried to define the disconcerting attraction Felicia had for him.

"Ho! How silly you are!" laughed the little girl. "Charley's my big only sister. Her whole name is Charlotte Emerson Preble and she looks just like me. Aunt May says so."

"Preble!" exclaimed both the men.

"Charley Preble!" Roger went on. "Ern, don't you remember the pretty little girl who used to play with us?"

"Of course I do. That's why Felicia has been puzzling us so. We were just kids, but seems to me Charley looked exactly as she does."

"Did sister Charley ever talk to you about Eagle's Wing?" asked Roger.

"I don't recollect Charley. She went out to take care of Dick when I was so little. Charley's awful good. She'll take such care of me as never was on sea or land. Aunt May says so. And I'll love her more than I do God."

"Was Dick sick? I remember him as a big, husky boy, don't you, Ern?"

Ernest shook his head. "I don't remember him. You were the one who used to go out to Prebles' to play."

"Dicky was sick," Felicia piped on. "Dicky's like Dad. He'll never amount to much, Aunt May says."

"Look at the queer kind of cactus we're beginning to pass, Felicia," interrupted Roger, hastily.

Felicia leaned against his knee. No little girl ever had done so before and Roger looked at her curiously.

"The desert's awful homely, isn't it?" she said.

"It certainly is," agreed Ernest, lighting a fresh cigar.

For a moment the three stared at the unending wastes of brown and gray-green, belled over by a cloudless sapphire sky.

"Homely and hot, but I don't care as long as I'm where Charley is. I don't remember her, but I know how I'm going to feel about her." Here she took a long look into Roger's gray eyes. "I guess I'd like to sit in your lap," she suggested.

Roger lifted her to his knees and she settled back comfortably in the hollow of his arm. A flooding sense of tenderness surprised him into silence.

"You are deserting me," protested Ernest.

"No, I'm not," returned little Felicia Preble. "I like you very much but I feel as if I'd like to sit in Roger's lap."

And in Roger's lap she sat, while the racing purple shadows on the yellow desert gradually grew black, until the yellow turned to lavender, and both gradually merged into a twilight that was silvered by star-glow before the last crimson disappeared in the west. She sat there long after Ernest went inside to read, in the same quiet that enwrapped Roger. It was a strange quiet for Roger; a quiet of sweetness and content that he had not known since his mother's death. With that warm, supple little body pressed against him, his mind for once left his work and paused to ponder on the loneliness of the past sixteen years and on the thrilling promise of the desert star-glow. No human being can be completely sane who does not pause at intervals to express the tenderness that marks humans from animals. But Roger did not know this.

It was six o'clock in the morning when the train pulled in to Archer's Springs and Ernest, Roger and Felicia alighted. They stood for a moment in silence after the train pulled out. They were apparently the only persons awake in the world.

"Where's Charley?" asked Felicia suddenly.

The station door opened and the baggage man, in blue overalls and jumper, appeared. He was frankly interested in the new arrivals and answered Ernest's question promptly.

"Preble? Sure! Dick Preble was here the first of the week. Told me he'd be in next week to meet the little girl. How'd you come a week early, sissy?"

Felicia's lip was quivering. "I don't know! Aunt Mary put me on the train and said Charley would meet me."

"Can we telephone them?" asked Ernest.

The baggage man grinned. "Telephone? Boys, come here a minute."

He led them to the other side of the concrete station where the view was unobstructed by the train shed, and pointed northeast.

"Take a look," he suggested.

The station platform ended in yellow sand. Across an open space were some one-story buildings; beyond these an indefinite level of sand that melted, at what distance one could not say, into a line of mountains that were black and crimson and at last snow-capped against the translucent blue of the morning sky.

"This road," said the baggage man, "goes along pretty good for eight or ten miles north, then it's nothing but a wagon track trail. If you follow it for twenty-five miles you reach Preble's mine. He says he's trying dry farming this spring. There ain't a living human being, except a few Injuns, between there and here. Sabez? And they ain't a brute thing but coyotes, and lizards and maybe wild burros, and so they ain't no call for a telephone."

Roger looked at the group of buildings across the way. "Is this all there is to Archer's Springs?"

"Sure, and it's a pretty good little old town, don't forget it. All the miners in the range south of here trade here. You'd better go across the street to the Chinaman's and get some breakfast."

Preble's claim lay twenty-five miles northeast. So did the government land where the Solar plant was to be built. Roger and Ernest discussed the matter at breakfast and decided to carry Felicia along with them on the morrow when they started for their own camp.

"And think how surprised Charley will be when you drop in on her, Felicia," suggested Ernest.

Felicia blinked back the tears and began to nibble her breakfast.

"It's a darn big desert and a darn small town," said Roger. "I wonder if Austin was right in telling us we could outfit here. Let's ask the baggage man."

The obliging baggage man pointed out the largest of the sheet-iron, adobe buildings across the way. "Best trading in a hundred miles," he said.

With Felicia dancing between them, the two made their way to Hackett's Supply House. The exterior was not promising, but within was everything the desert dwellers could need. Working from Austin's list they were soon supplied with

tents, working outfit and tent boards. Hackett, a stout, slow-speaking man, was not staggered even when Roger asked him to deliver the goods.

"Expect a lot of freight in a couple of weeks, you say? All right, I'll send you up with a team and when your freight comes in you can drive it back again. You can board the horses at Preble's."

Their purchases were complete by noon, but Hackett would not let them start until morning. "No use," he said, "for tenderfeet to try camping on a short trip and it would be hard on the little girl. Get a dawn start and make the trip in one shift."

So they whiled away the afternoon by a tramp over the desert, and after supper turned Felicia over to the landlady at Delmonico's, the adobe hotel, which was clean if it was meager. They were sitting in the office, which boasted a rusty sheet-iron stove, a desk, and a hanging lamp, when a thin, middle-aged man came slowly in the door and walked hesitatingly up to Ernest.

"My name is Schmidt," he said. "I saw you at supper. Mr. Werner, he wrote me you vas coming and asked me to do vat I could for you."

Ernest and Roger shook hands delightedly.

"I come here for my health," Schmidt went on, "and maybe I help you. I vork for my board."

"We'll see how things are after we get settled," said Roger, carefully. "Have a cigar and tell me how you came to know Mr. Werner."

"I clerked by a bank he vas interested in," replied Schmidt, settling himself with the cigar. Roger and Ernest liked him at once, from his stiff brown pompadour and kindly blue eyes behind his spectacles to his strong, capable looking hands. Before they parted for the night it was agreed that Schmidt would come back with them when they came in for the freight. Austin had warned them that help was almost impossible to get in the desert and this seemed a wise thing to do.

The sun had not risen the next morning when the three climbed aboard the heavily laden wagon and started along the trail Hackett had carefully described for them.

It was not a smooth trail. Even the first eight or ten miles, mentioned with pride by the baggage man, were cut with draws and strewed with heavy rocks. But the air was like a northern May. The cactus was full of singing northern birds preparing for their spring migration. The horses plodded steadily without urging.

The mountains lifted in colors ever more marvelous and the Adventure seemed to Roger satisfactory beyond expression.

"I think it's beautiful, Ern," he said at last.

"Gad, I don't," replied Ernest, wiping sand out of his eyes.

"I do!" cried Felicia, jouncing up and down on the wagon seat between the men. She was powdered white with sand. "Charley will c'lapse when she sees me."

The horses were used to desert going. The tenderfoot drivers let them have their own way. Hackett had tried to describe certain landmarks along the route so that they could gauge the distance covered, but with small effect on Ernest and Roger. All points of the desert looked alike to them. They only knew that if they followed the trail north long enough, they would strike Prebles' late that night.

Just at sundown, however, Roger pulled in the horses. "That trail's getting awfully faint," he said.

"Sand's drifted like snow across it," agreed Ernest. "In fact, there hasn't been any trail for the last mile. But we can't miss our way. That white peak with three points is at right angles anyhow to us, as it ought to be."

Roger started the horses on, but after a short time stopped again.

"I'm not going on till we locate the trail," he announced.

"What are you going to do? Not stay here all night," protested Ernest.

"You bet I am. Ernest, we're off the track right now. We won't be able to find the trail until daylight."

Ernest's obstinate chin set. "I'm for going on."

Roger flushed in the fading light. "I'm the leader of this expedition and I say stop."

"Pshaw! I didn't think you were so timid, Roger," exclaimed Ernest. "I'll go on foot and find the trail."

"Don't be a fool, Ernest," cried Roger.

But if a quick temper was Roger's besetting sin, pig-headedness was Ernest's. He jumped down from the wagon and disappeared into the dusk.

Felicia and Roger waited for a time patiently. Then Roger shouted, half a dozen times, "Ernest!" There was no answer.

"Darn chump!" muttered Roger. "Come on, Felicia, let's make a fire of grease wood so he can find us."

They built the fire and an hour passed, then two, but Ernest did not appear.

CHAPTER IV

CHARLEY

Felicia soon grew weary of the game of fire building and begged off. Roger, with the aid of the ax, gathered a huge pile of grease wood, then with Felicia beside him, wrapped in a blanket, he sat down before the fire to wait.

The child, her deep eyes glowing like black rubies in the flickering light, the lovely curves of her mouth drooping, leaned against Roger's shoulder, for a little while, then she turned and looked up into his face for a long minute. Roger returned the look, a little wonderingly. Felicia's attractiveness still puzzled him.

"I love you very much," she said, "more than I do Ernest."

Roger smiled down at her. "But you must love our old Ernest too, even if he has deserted us."

"Oh, I do love him, but it's you I think about, last thing at night!"

Felicia gazed up at Roger with a look of such mysterious depth that he caught his breath. Felicia suddenly shivered.

"The desert's awful big! Oh, why do you suppose Charley didn't meet me? I want Charley," with a sob.

Roger jumped to his feet and brought another blanket from the wagon. He spread it before the fire and urged Felicia to lie down on it. This she was persuaded to do only after Roger loaned his lap for a pillow and she finally fell asleep, her head on his knee, his hand clasped against her cheek.

Another hour slipped by. Cramped and cold, Roger tossed an occasional branch in the fire with his free hand and speculated with uneasiness for Ernest, as to the nature of the faint sounds that came from the eastward. He decided that coyotes

must be in the vicinity and he drew the blanket close over Felicia's shoulders. He was strangely unlonely. The desert silence and space about him, the low-lying stars, the faint cloud of mountain range were not alien to him. They all were the setting for the work toward which his whole life had moved. He knew too little of the desert really to be fearful for Ernest, whose return he expected any moment.

He dozed a little. A sudden sound of hoof-beats roused him. A man jumped from his horse on the opposite side of the fire. He was a stocky fellow, wearing blue overalls and a red sweater. Before he had given Roger more than a quick "Hello!" another horse came up and a woman alighted. Roger laid Felicia's head on the blanket and clambered stiffly to his feet. The young woman gave Roger a quick glance, then ran toward the sleeping child.

"Felicia! Baby Felicia!" she cried. "Did you think Charley had deserted you?"

Felicia sat up with a jerk. "Charley!" she screamed. "Charley! I knew you'd come!"

"Hello, Roger Moore!" exclaimed the stocky young man. "Are you the same young plutocrat who used to own a swimming pool?"

Roger laughed. "The same, except that I'm no longer a plutocrat. How did you recognize me?"

"Oh, we met Ernest Wolf meandering about the desert. Hello, baby, do you remember brother?" kissing Felicia, who was in Charley's arms.

Charley was tall, nearly as tall as Roger, and he noticed as he turned to shake hands with her that she held the child easily, as if she were very strong. Then he was looking into eyes that suddenly seemed deeply familiar.

"I don't remember much except the pool," said Charley. "How are we going to thank you for taking care of Felicia?"

"I don't know how we are going to thank Felicia," Roger replied. "Where is Ernest?"

Preble laughed. "He was pegging for all he was worth in the wrong direction. We had some trouble to persuade him that he was wrong."

"That's Ernest, sure enough!" exclaimed Roger.

Preble went on more soberly. "It really isn't a laughing matter though, a tenderfoot astray in this country. I tried to impress that upon him. It just

happened that Charley and I were out looking for our pet cow and we ran on Wolf about five miles north of here, heading west and going strong. He had picked up a wagon trail I made last week going for adobe."

"Where is he now?" asked Roger.

"Oh, we left him herding the cow. We'll pick him up on the way back. Let's get started. Lord, but you've grown, Felicia! Come here and let me look at you."

Big brother and little sister looked at each other attentively in the firelight. Dick Preble was still red headed and freckled, with only a vague resemblance to his sisters.

"Four years since we left you, little Felicia. Charley, she looks just as you did at her age, only not so tall. I don't see how Aunt Mary could have been such a fool as to have sent her a week ahead of time."

"Aunt Mary never managed anything correctly in her life, bless her heart," replied the older sister. "Help hitch up, Dicky. We're only five miles from home, Mr. Moore."

They were ready for the trail in a few minutes. Felicia delayed the start by refusing to be separated from Charley and finally Charley's horse was hitched to the tailboard of the wagon and Charley mounted the high wagon seat. Felicia, established between Roger and her sister, was in a state of great excitement and at first monopolized the conversation. But after a time, she quieted down and by the time they overtook Ernest, she was asleep, her head against Roger's arm, her hand clasping one of Charley's. Nor did the greetings waken her.

"Well, Ern, old chap, how's the North Pole?" called Roger.

"You go to thunder!" replied Ernest with a laugh. He tied the cow in the place of Charley's pony and mounting the pony rode ahead with Preble.

Roger wanted a number of questions answered. Where had the Prebles gone after leaving Eagle's Wing and what had they done in the interim, were his opening queries.

"We went to a little town, near St. Louis," answered Charley, "and Father did well. Dick and I both went to college. What in the world are you doing out here, Mr. Moore?"

"For heaven's sake don't 'mister' me, old friends and neighbors as we are. Why, we lived on your old farm till Father and Mother died!"

"Did you indeed? And what brought you out here? Mining?"

"No, some experimenting in irrigating for the government."

"Heaven send that you're successful!" exclaimed the girl. "Dick is going to get some alfalfa in this winter, and I know that our well won't take care of it. But he *will* go ahead."

"Felicia is startlingly like you, as a child. I have just one picture of you in my mind—standing on the edge of the pool, ready to dive, but looking around at me and laughing. Felicia laughs just that way."

"Poor baby, coming all this way alone! But there seemed nothing else to be done. We couldn't afford to go back for her nor could Aunt Mary come on with her."

"She got along famously and made friends with every one," said Roger. "Jove, isn't it wonderful, running on you people out here!"

"It's going to be wonderful for us, I know," returned Charley.

The wagon rumbled and bumped, and then Charley asked:

"Where is your camp to be?"

"We don't know, except we're to take up some government land adjacent to yours. But your name isn't on our survey map."

"No, we have the old Ames claim," replied Charlotte. "You must plan to stay with us until your camp is set up."

"You're very kind," said Roger.

"It's a God-send to have neighbors coming to us," the girl went on.

Roger made no reply and the road becoming unbelievably rough, Charley gave her attention to holding Felicia on the seat and nothing more was said until Preble called back,

"Careful through this gate, Moore! Wait till I get a light."

"We're home," said Charley. "Wake up, Felicia dear."

Dick appeared in a moment with a lighted candle stuck within and on the side of an empty can. It threw a long finger of light on the gate posts of a corral.

"We call those candle-lanterns, 'lightning bugs,' down here," explained Charley. "'Bugs,' for short."

"I want one for myself," exclaimed Felicia, suddenly. "Only very small, so's my

doll can use it."

"You shall have a dozen if you want them, baby!" cried Dick, lifting her down carefully over the wagon wheel.

The men unhitched and attended to the horses, then followed a short, winding trail up to the lighted doorway. They entered a long, low room, with adobe walls a muddy yellowish color. The floor was of rough plank with a single Navajo blanket of gray and black before a little adobe fireplace. There were half a dozen camp chairs in the room, a couch in a corner, covered with a blue Indian rug, a homemade table in the middle, several pelts and shelves of books in the walls and more books and an alarm clock on the mantel shelf. It was a crude room, but one felt its harmony of tone and homelike quality at once.

"Put your suit cases in here," said Dick, leading the way through an open door into a candle-lighted room. It was a barren little place, but there was a comfortable cot on either side of the room and a packing box between that was half washstand, half bureau. Charley appeared in the door:

"Supper'll be ready as soon as the kettle boils," she announced. "Little Felicia is in bed and fast asleep. Dick, you'd better go milk that poor cow."

Dick started off obediently and Ernest sat down on his cot.

"I'll wait till the kettle boils. Gee, I walked a thousand miles. Roger, go out and help with the supper, you lazy brute."

Charley laughed. "There's nothing to do unless you want to start a fire in the fireplace."

Roger followed her to the kitchen, where she pointed to a brimming wood-box. He looked with interest at the immaculate kitchen. The walls were whitewashed, the floor scoured to a silvery purity, the stove was shining.

"What a bully camp you have!" he exclaimed, pausing with his arm full of kindling to look at Charley. For the first time, as she stood watching the teakettle with the lamplight full upon her, he got a clear view of his hostess.

She was slender but not thin. Her shoulders were broad and square and her chest was deep and she was slim-hipped like an athletic boy. She gave Roger a curious impression of strength, very unusual to connect with a girl. Yet for all her height and vigor, she was very lovely. Her hair was darker than Felicia's, a wiry, burnished bronze, in a braided mass about her head. Her face was long, with a well-cut short nose and an oval chin. There were lovely curves in her scarlet,

drooping lips. Her eyes were large, a melting brown that was almost black. It was the child Felicia's face, but with a depth of sweetness, a patience and pride in lips and eyes, acquired by what difficulties of living, Roger could not have told, even had he had sufficient understanding of women to have noted the existence of those qualities. He did, however, see her wonderful resemblance to Felicia.

"You are like Felicia, grown up, all of a sudden," he said. "It's hard to rid myself of that illusion. Ernest and I have had a bully time with that small girl."

"I'm so glad to have her here that—well, when you have been in the desert longer, you'll realize what human beings can mean to each other," said Charley. "There! The kettle's boiling. Fly with your wood."

Roger flew. Dick came in with the milk and the four sat down to a supper of baked beans, tea and canned apples. It was a pleasant meal, but Roger and Ernest, weary beyond words, were delighted when it was finished and they could tumble into bed.

Roger was wakened the next morning by the alarm clock in the dining room. Ernest jumped up at once and Roger lighted the candle.

"Six o'clock," he said. "Well, our new job has begun, Ern."

There was a great rattling of the stove lids in the kitchen, above Dick's whistle, then through the windows a light dawning toward the corral. By the time that Roger and Ernest had shaved and were hurrying down the little trail, the red glow in the east had made the "Bug" unnecessary. All the horses were munching alfalfa and Dick was whistling in the cow-shed.

The two men stood a moment at the corral gate and looked about them.

The house faced the west. It had been carefully placed on a broad ledge of the mountain, a few feet above the desert level, yet the few feet were enough to give a complete view of the valley that swept forty miles to the west into the range that held the Colorado within bounds. The sandy levels of the desert swept to the very foot of the mountain, and Dick had fenced in about twenty-five acres. It was not yet under cultivation, but a scraper half-filled with sand near the corral fence testified to Dick's intentions. There were practically no farm buildings: just the cow-shed, with a sheet-iron roof and a canvas covered shelter in a corner of the corral. Shed and corral were on the desert level and a good two hundred feet from the house. As they stood in silence, Dick came up with his pail of milk.

"Great view, isn't it? I'm going to have twenty-five acres of alfalfa here by June."

"I thought you were mining," said Ernest.

"I came to the desert to dry-farm but I got sidetracked with turquoise mining up the mountain yonder. Nothing in that, but alfalfa is thirty dollars a ton and we get five crops a year."

"Which way does the government land lie?" asked Roger.

Dick grinned. "Look in any direction! You'll have no trouble locating yourselves. Let's go in to breakfast."

Charley and Felicia were sitting at the breakfast table and the meal was quickly eaten.

"What do you two do first?" asked Charley as Ernest finished his second cup of coffee.

"Locate the camp site and set up housekeeping, so as not to intrude on you any longer," replied Ernest.

"Shucks! You wouldn't talk that way if you'd lived here a few years," exclaimed Dick.

"You're the first human beings," remarked Charley, "except Dick and a few Indians and old Von Minden that I've seen in six months."

"But don't you ever go to town?" asked Roger.

"Not often. It's a hard trip and some one has to stay with the stock."

Dick looked at Charley with quick reproach. "You know it's always something urgent that takes me in, Charley. And you nearly always refuse to go."

"Nearly always, yes, Dick," replied Charley.

Dick shrugged his shoulders and there was a moment's silence which Ernest broke.

"When are you coming to see us, Felicia?"

"Every day, Ernest," replied the child.

"Mr. Ernest," corrected Charley.

"No! No! We're old friends," protested Ernest.

"And Roger's a friend too," added Felicia. "A dearest friend."

Ernest grinned. "Felicia! How can you forsake me so! Here's Roger, a notorious

woman-hater, and you wasting your young affections on him, when you might have me with a turn of your finger."

"You shut up, Ernest!" exclaimed Roger. "Don't pay any attention to him, Felicia."

"I won't," replied the child. "But I'll keep right on liking him, next to you."

"I see some work ahead for me!" ejaculated Dick.

Charley refilled Dick's coffee cup and smiled at him.

"I'll bet on you, Dicky," she said. "We'll have supper at six, Roger. I've put up a lunch for you two men."

"By Jove," said Ernest, "we'll have to supply water to this ranch for nothing, Rog."

"Right!" answered Roger, rising. "Come ahead, old man."

It was not yet eight when they drove out of the corral, along the line of fence that edged Dick's prospective alfalfa field. There was a monument, Dick said, at the southwest corner of the field that would start them on their way. Neither man spoke for some time, then Ernest remarked in his gentle voice:

"Extraordinarily lovely girl!"

Roger grunted.

Ernest flushed. "Honestly, Roger, you are the limit! She's too fine a woman to be turned off with a grunt."

"Who's turning her off?" demanded Roger. "I don't see why you're always accusing me of hating women. I don't hate 'em. I'm keen about them and you know how I ran after them until I had to cut them out and attend to business. But now, my scheme of life can't include them. You waste enough time and thought every year on petticoats to have made you president of the university. Now, I'm trying to concentrate on one thing, solar heat. It's a full job for any man, that's all. If you want to get up a case on Charlotte Preble, go to it. She's too big for my taste, even if I had time to think about her."

Ernest groaned and once more silence fell until he roused himself to ask: "Would that be a monument yonder?"

They pulled up before a heap of stones, the marker of a mining claim, so familiar to the desert dweller, and spread the government map on their knees.

"Let's see," said Roger. "Here's Preble's claim, and next him, west, is the Mellish claim, and beyond that, still west, is government land. Simple enough if the sand hasn't drifted on their monuments."

It was not difficult. They passed the Mellish workings, a great hole in the ground, with a deserted shack beside the windlass. A short distance on, they located his monument and quickly found themselves on government land.

"Well," sighed Ernest, "it certainly is God-forsaken!"

They looked about them. Far to the west lay a jagged line of blue mountains, against a blue sky. To the east, the barren tortured peaks of Coyote Range, brown and black in the blazing morning sun, so near that they could see the smoke rising from Charley's kitchen chimney, so far that the adobe looked like a doll house against the range. Between them and Coyote Range lay the desert valley, a rich yellow, thick dotted with fantastic growths of cactus and cat's claw.

"Lord, I think it's great!" Roger drew a deep breath. "Let's unload, old man."

They worked without stopping except for lunch, until five o'clock. With ax and shovel they cleared away cactus and drifts of sand for a level space on which to set up their living tent. Austin had given them plans for this. They laid a rough floor and raised around this a four foot wainscoating. They used no tent pole, but stretched their canvas on a frame of two by fours, above the wainscoating. The result was a pleasant airy compartment with headroom even for Roger. They had not finished their tent when suppertime arrived. But they took Dick's word that tools and supplies would be unmolested.

"We may have trouble locating water," said Ernest as they started the team homeward. "Austin thought we'd strike it most anywhere in the valley, you remember, but Dick says Mellish never reached it."

"I'll bet we find water if we go deep enough." Roger lighted his pipe with the sense of comfort of a man whose back is aching from honest toil. "Dick's information is only hearsay. He's got a good spring there at the corral and he told me there was considerable water in the lower workings of the old mine up in the range. We'll dig till we reach water if we have to tap Hades. And the Lord send that we don't have to waste much time on a detail like that!"

"Right-O! Those must be buzzards circling toward the mountains. Rog, what do you suppose the folks at home are doing about now?"

"Thinking about us. It's pretty early to be homesick, old boy."

Ernest smiled in his gentle way. His eyes looked bluer than ever in his parboiled face. "Don't worry about me, old man. I'm not getting cold feet, only your folks were pioneers and mine were not. We Germans are gregarious."

"Shucks!" replied Roger. "Some of the best pioneers in this country were Germans. And you aren't German, anyhow. You're an American. Buck up, Ernest!"

"I will! See what's coming!" Ernest pointed with a laugh to a tiny figure flying toward them along the trail.

"I came further than I dared to come!" screamed Felicia, "but you were so slow. And Charley's got a great big supper for you. Dicky shot some quail. And oh, I've missed you both so!" This last as she climbed up on the wheel and Ernest lifted her to the seat.

"Now, everything's all right," said Ernest.

Eight o'clock the next morning found Roger and Ernest finishing the living tent. By noon the kitchen tent, which really was a fly resting on four poles, was up, and the gasoline stove installed. It required the remainder of the day to knock together a rough table, two long benches and to prepare supper. And at eight o'clock that night both men were glad to go to bed.

The next day they began work on the well. The ultimate success of the plant rested on the premise that not too far below the surface of the valley there was water. Dick was pessimistic on the subject. He came down one evening to view progress when, after three days of toil, the boys had dug to the depth of about ten feet. The three men lighted their pipes and squatted in the sand by the well hole.

"I don't see why you don't establish your plant up in the range and use your power for mining," said Dick. "You'll never strike water here."

"Unless we can develop irrigation plants, the idea would be just a toy here," replied Roger. "There's bound to be water here, if we go deep enough. You tell me the lower levels of the mines up in the ranges on both sides are wet."

"Yes, they are," agreed Dick. "Why don't you fellows get an Indian to help you on this kind of work?"

"Where would we get one?" asked Ernest doubtfully.

"Oh, one is liable to mooch along the desert any time."

"Are they good workmen?" Roger's voice was absentminded as he scowled at

the well.

"Some of them are wonders, but they are no good, unless you get a bunch of them under a chief. Then they're O. K."

Roger groaned. Ernest laughed. "Remember, Rog," he said, "what Austin told us about the unexpected problems in the building of a desert plant."

"You'll get plenty of those," agreed Dick. "Well, I'll be going back. If I see an Indian, I'll send him to you. In the meantime, remember that I'm your first purchaser of water, though my well's a regular gusher and will take care of more than the twenty-five acres I can get in this winter."

"Don't be so sure," Roger chuckled. "You may come and apologize to our well and ask for a drink yet."

Dick joined in the laugh at this suggestion and started homeward and the two Sun Planters went to bed.

As if the desert were determined to show them early in the game a fair sample of its lesser annoyances, when Ernest entered the cook tent the next morning he found it fairly wrecked. All the canned goods had been rolled off the shelves and the labels had disappeared. Flour, sugar, crackers were knocked about in the sand. Ernest roared for Roger, who came on a run.

"Looks as if a burro had been here from the tracks," exclaimed Roger.

"Two or three burros, I should judge," said Ernest. "Why, Rog, the beggars have eaten all the can labels! We'll never know whether we're opening tomatoes or beans. That flour's useless, and so's the sugar. Look at the coffee! I told you not to leave it in a sack. Oh, hang it all! What a country!"

"Let's see where the little devils went." Roger started out of the tent. The small hoof tracks were not difficult to find. Beyond the confines of the camp, the sand lay like untracked snow. When they picked up the trail, it led directly to the Coyote Range.

Ernest suddenly spoke cheerfully. "We'll have to go up and ask Charley for some breakfast. It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good!"

"We'll have to shave if we're going up there and that takes time," protested Roger.

"What are you going to eat? No sugar, no flour, no coffee!"

"Let's be quick about it, then," said Roger, hurrying into the living tent.

The Prebles laughed, but they were very sympathetic and blamed themselves for not warning the boys that stray burros and coyotes were a menace to any stores left unprotected.

"String some wire about six inches apart around your four poles and weave yucca stalks in and out. It makes a bully cool wall and keeps the varmints out," said Dick.

"My heavens, man! I haven't time to do raffia work," cried Roger, half laughing, half serious.

"I'll do it for you," said Felicia. "I can weave like I did in school. And if I do that, Charley won't make me have lessons with her every day."

"Oh, won't I!" returned Charley. "Roger, you get the wires up. That won't take but a few minutes and when old Fanny Squaw comes along in a week or so to sell ollas I'll send her down to cut and weave yucca for you. It can't cost you more than four bits. In the meantime, I can let you have some supplies to tide you over till some one goes to town."

"You see what it means to have brains in the family," said Dick.

"It's lucky some one in this bunch possesses them," laughed Roger. "By the way, how do there come to be stray burros in the mountains?"

"Miners die or desert them and they go wild," replied Dick. "I must try to catch and tame one for Felicia, after the alfalfa is in. Which reminds me that I must get on the job. I've got your barrel of water ready in the wagon, so come along."

The start was late that day and they had not gone down a foot when they struck rock. Another trip had to be made to the Prebles to procure some sticks of dynamite from Dick's little store at the neglected turquoise mine. And still no sign of water.

The evenings were lonely. At first the two went frequently to the ranch house, as Dick, sweating in his barren alfalfa fields, insisted that the house be called. But everybody was too tired for social effort. Dick was grading and plowing all day long and Charley, after her housework was finished, often drove for him in the field. The mid-day heat and the unwonted labor made Ernest and Roger glad to go to bed early. After they had eaten supper and cleared up the dishes, they would build a little fire in the sand outside the living tent and for an hour sit before it. Even on chilly evenings the fire had to be small, for the firewood was bought from Dick's none too great supply. He in turn bought from an Indian who cut mesquite far up in the ranges and toted it by burro pack to the corral.

Ernest, sitting thus, would pluck at his banjo and sing to the stars, finding ease thus for his homesick heart. Roger sat in silent contemplation, now of the fire, now of the stars. In spite of his impatience over petty details, he was happier than he had been since his undergraduate days. The marvelous low-lying stars, the little glow of fire on Ernest's pleasant face, the sweet tenor voice and the mellow plunking of the banjo were a wonderful background for his happy dreams. Roger still believed that a man's work could fill every desire of his mind and soul.

"I have so loved thee,"

(sang Ernest one evening),

"But cannot, cannot hold thee.
Fading like a dream the shadows fold thee,
Slowly thy perfect beauty fades away,
Good-by, sweet day! Good-by, sweet day!"

There was the soft thud of a footstep in the sand and an Indian appeared in the soft glow of the fire. Ernest broke off his song, abruptly. The newcomer was of indeterminate age, with black hair falling nearly to his waist over a bright red flannel shirt. He wore black trousers girdled at the waist by a broad twist of blue silk. His feet were bare.

"How!" he said, nodding and smiling. "I hear music way out. Come see maybe white medicine man."

"Good evening," returned Ernest. "Sit down by the fire."

"How'd you like a job?" asked Roger. "Did Mr. Preble send you?"

"No job!" The Indian shook his head. "Sick!"

"Is that so?" Roger's voice was sympathetic. "My friend's a good medicine man. Where are you sick?"

"In my tooth!" The visitor opened a capacious mouth, displaying a badly ulcerated gum.

"That's easy! Get the peroxide bottle and a teaspoon, Ern. We'll fix him up, poor duck. What's your name, old man?"

"Qui-tha," replied the Indian.

"All right, Qui-tha. Now you take a teaspoonful of this and hold it in the front of your mouth, see!"

Qui-tha looked closely into the faces of the two men, then with touching docility he did as Roger bade him. In a moment he was blowing foam violently into the fire. The two men looked at each other a little aghast.

"You should have held it in your mouth, Qui-tha!" cried Ernest.

The Indian reached for the teaspoon and poured himself another dose. This he held in his mouth for a moment, gazing at his physicians solemnly the while. Then he again blew foam into the fire.

"Heap strong medicine," he said. "Fine, strong medicine. Never saw such strong medicine. You good medicine men. Qui-tha stay work for you. You let keep bottle."

"Sure," replied Ernest, "only be very careful of it. Don't use it up too fast."

Qui-tha nodded. "You give blanket. Qui-tha sleep here by fire."

And sleep he did, rolled up even as to his head, his feet to the dying embers, while his hosts, undressing by candle light, grinned at each other in silent amusement. When Dick came down with the triweekly barrel of water he was astonished to see Qui-tha slowly weaving yucca stalks into the wire that now bound the poles of the cook tent.

"For heaven's sake, Qui-tha, you old bum, you've always refused to work for me!" he shouted.

The Indian grinned, then explained very seriously. "These white men heap smart. Make strong medicine. Qui-tha work one week, pay white medicine men."

Ernest called Dick into the living tent and made him an explanation while Qui-tha looked inquiringly at Roger at the sound of Dick's laughter.

"Do, for the love of all of us, keep feeding him peroxide until he's cajoled into giving me a hand in the field. Won't Charley be amused by this?"

But Qui-tha was not to be cajoled. He prolonged his promised week to two, but would serve only his two medicine men. He was a most erratic workman, but what he did, he did exceedingly well. The cook tent with its woven sides of faded green was a structure of real beauty. Qui-tha consumed a week in the doing of this job, and ate all of three dozen cans of tomatoes, for which he displayed what Ernest called an abandoned passion. After he had finished with the cook tent, he sat for a day at the edge of the well, watching the two white men at their back breaking toil, then he silently undertook to man the bucket hoist for them. At frequent intervals he would refuse to hoist for a time and

would urge Roger and Ernest to rest with him.

"Why work all time, uh? Wind no blow all time. Sun no shine all time. You no dig all time, uh? Sit with Qui-tha and smoke and think."

"He's got a lot of horse sense, Roger, after all, hasn't he?" said Ernest one day after the Indian had laughed at them for their mad driving at the waterless well.

Roger straightened his tired back. "Fine, for an Indian! I like to hear him laugh. On things that don't demand our white sophistication, do you notice what a good sense of humor he has?"

"By Jove, I wish he'd go up and help the Prebles. I think it's a fright for Charley to be working in the fields," exclaimed Ernest.

Roger nodded. "Guess I'll try him on that angle." He clambered out of the well and squatted by Qui-tha on the ever-increasing pile of sand and stone by the well edge.

"Do you see that white girl up there in the field, driving the horse?" pointing over the lifting desert to the distant figure, difficult to see now as the sun sank.

"Yes," replied the Indian.

"Won't you go up and help so the girl can go back to the house and do a woman's work?"

The Indian puffed thoughtfully at his cigarette. "Why?" he asked, finally.

"Because they need help. They'll pay you."

"Would you go help Indian squaw so she no have do hard work?" queried the Indian.

Roger scratched his head.

"Charley Preble, she heap strong, like a man. Work no hurt her. No hurt Injun squaw. Let 'em work."

Roger had nothing more to say. But the fact that Charley worked so hard bothered both men, though Ernest, with his unconsciously German attitude toward women, was much less troubled about the matter than Roger. Roger, for all his neglect of the gentler sex for the past few years, had that attitude toward women, half of tenderness, half of good fellowship, that is characteristic of the best American men. And although he laughed at Ernest's sentimental mooning about Charley, he really was more concerned over the girl's hard life than was his friend.

She was still to him Felicia, grown up, and Felicia was still the little Charley Preble of the swimming pool. It was a confusion of personalities that might easily have grown into romance had not Roger been too completely and honestly preoccupied with his work.

The next afternoon the hoist broke and leaving Ernest and Qui-tha to patch it up, Roger plodded up to the alfalfa field.

The valley sloped very gradually from the mountains. Dick was working with a scraper, carefully throwing line after line of the shallowest possible terraces at right angles to the valley's slope. The irrigating ditch which was to carry the water that was to flow gently over the terraces was already finished.

Charley, who had been driving the horses while Dick handled the scraper, sat on a heap of stones beside the fence. She was very brown, yet in spite of her rough work she looked well. Her khaki blouse, her short skirt and high laced boots were smart and her broad soft hat, though covered with dust, was picturesque and becoming. Roger dropped on the rocks beside her, with a sigh.

"Tired?" asked Charley. "Aren't you off duty early?"

"I came up to labor with you," replied Roger, his blue eyes very clear in his tanned face. "You're working too hard."

"What would you have me do? Sit on the front porch and watch Dicky work? That's not my idea of a pioneer's mate."

"But can you stand it?" asked Roger.

"It's no harder than golf and tennis and a swim all in one day. I've done that many a time. And I'm as eager as Dick is to reclaim this desert. I'm almost if not quite as interested in this as you are in your work."

"I didn't mean to intrude or criticize," began Roger.

"You didn't do either. I appreciate your interest, and I'm just trying to make you see that the pioneer women aren't all dead yet. Some day there'll be pepper trees and peach trees along that ditch, and for miles and miles round here, the green of alfalfa."

"If you get enough water," murmured Roger.

"If we get enough water," agreed Charley.

They both paused and looked from Dick, sweating behind the horses, to the unending yellow of the desert against which Dick and the horses looked like

pygmies. Finally Charley said with a sudden chuckle,

"Roger, one thing I do remember is your spitfire rages—very vaguely, but they must have been rather devastating to have made an impression on my baby mind."

Roger's smile was a little twisted. "Nice thing to remember of me. Where is your tact, woman!"

"Mercy! You aren't sensitive about it after all these years? I thought it funny that your baby temper and the pool were all I could rake up out of our past."

"Where is Felicia?" asked Roger, abruptly.

"She went up to the spring to fill my little canteen with water."

"Thank heaven," said Roger, "that she can't rake up my past. I'm going to stroll up to meet her." And he doffed his hat and was off, feeling that somehow he had not made great headway.

CHAPTER V

VON MINDEN

That evening, after the little fire had burned to a bed of coals, Ernest said: "About time for the stuff to have come from St. Louis."

"I've been thinking of that," returned Roger. "And we've nearly run through the Prebles' extra supplies. Why don't you go in to Archer's Springs and bring a load out. Dick is planning to go day after to-morrow."

"Wouldn't you rather go?" asked Ernest.

"Not if I can help it."

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Ernest. "I was afraid you'd want the job, and even Archer's Springs would look good to me!"

Roger laughed and slapped Ernest on the shoulder. "You homesick Dutchman! Crazy for the mail, aren't you? There must be something there from Austin. I'm glad you want to go, for I'd hate the trip. Let's turn in!"

Wednesday morning, just at dawn, Dick and Ernest, each driving a team, pulled up before the cook tent where Roger and Qui-tha were finishing breakfast.

"Charley says you're to come up there for supper to-night," called Dick. "Felicia has permission to come down to fetch you at five o'clock."

"All right," returned Roger. "When do you expect to be back, Dick?"

"All depends on luck. Perhaps not before Friday noon."

"Take care of Ernest," called Roger as the two teams started on. "He's flighty!"

"Don't get drowned in that fine well of yours, Rog!" shouted Ernest.

Roger lighted his pipe and helped Qui-tha clean the plates and cups with sand and old newspaper.

"Don't know how we'll do dishes when the newspapers give out, Qui-tha," he said.

"Keep burro. He clean 'em," suggested Qui-tha, with a mischievous grin.

"Wah! Go way! We're not Hualapais like you," retorted Roger.

Qui-tha laughed, and followed Roger to the well. The chill of the early March morning was beginning to lift.

Roger pulled off his coat, preparatory to dropping down into the well, then paused. The sun was just lifting over the peaks. The ranch house was in black shadow. No man with Roger's capacity for work could be lonely with that work at hand. No man with Roger's fine imagination could have failed to have felt his pulses quicken at the sudden conception of the desert's wonders that flashed before his mind as his outward eye took in the sunrise. He saw in flashing panorama the desert's magnificent distances, its unbelievable richness of coloring, its burning desert noons, its still windswept nights, and a vague waking of passions he never had known stirred within his self and work-centered soul.

The air was full of bird song. What Ernest called the dawn's enchantment was just ending. Blackbird and robin, oriole and mocking bird, piped full-throated from every cactus. To Ernest this was the one redeeming touch to the desert's austerity. To Roger it was the crowning of an almost unbearable charm. The sun wheeled in full glory over the peaks. The adobe flashed out from the shadow and Roger slid down into the well.

He loaded the bucket with broken rock and called to Qui-tha to hoist away. To his surprise, there was no response. Roger climbed hurriedly out, calling to the Indian. He looked in the cook tent and the living tent and then his eye caught Qui-tha's tall figure already diminished by distance, moving rapidly westward toward the River Range.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "that's cool! I wonder if he took anything with him but the peroxide bottle?"

A quick inventory showed nothing missing, and with a sigh Roger returned to the well.

It was slow work, filling the bucket, clambering out to hoist it, then down again. But at noon, when the sun shone full into the well, Roger noticed a sudden

darkening of the brown rock at the bottom. He seized a pick and worked rapidly. Water! Not a gushing spring, but a steady increase of moisture that, as he dug on, became a trickle, then a slowly rising pool about his ankles.

No discoverer of a noble river ever felt prouder than Roger as, after he had hoisted out the bucket and tools, he stood at the well's edge gazing far down at the dirty pool.

He was standing so, a tall figure, his face streaked with dirt and sweat but with satisfaction radiating from every line of his thin tanned face, when, "Hello!" called a man's voice behind him.

Roger turned with a jerk. A little gray-headed man and a little gray burro were standing by the work tent.

"Perhaps I could get something to eat here," said the stranger.

"Certainly," returned Roger, not too enthusiastically. He did not know desert hospitality, excepting what he had met at the Preble ranch. The man turned promptly to the burro.

"I'll take off your pack, Peter, if you see to it that you don't stray."

The burro looked at his master with the gaze of a wise old dog and, relieved of his pack, moved slowly to the shade of the living tent. Roger, looking his guest over, from faded overalls and blue flannel shirt to battered sombrero, led the way into the cook tent.

"Whew!" said the stranger. "Sun's getting higher. Noons are hot. When did you reach these parts?"

"A couple of weeks ago. My name's Moore,—Roger Moore."

The man nodded. "Mine's Otto von Minden. I'm an engineer. Been in the desert country ten years."

Roger was moving about, making coffee and slicing bacon. "What are you doing, prospecting?" he asked.

Von Minden jerked a quick look at Roger from a pair of small brown eyes. "Yes, I'm prospecting. What are you doing?"

"Experimenting with solar heat. This is the place to get it if this noon is a promise of more to come."

"Heat!" cried the stranger with sudden excitement. "Heat! God! What I have known of heat. Blistering, burning, blinding! Nights when the very star rays

scorch and the moon's a caldron of white lava. Ten years of it, Moore, ten years!"

Roger looked at his guest with interest. "You aren't an American? There's just a little accent in your speech."

"Me? No. I'm German born and bred. What are you going to do with your solar heat?"

"Harness it," replied Roger, "and see if I can make it work for me."

"There's a fool born every minute," said Von Minden.

"You're quite right," returned Roger, cheerfully.

There was no further conversation until Roger had put the coffee, bacon and cold biscuits with a can of pie-fruit on the table. Von Minden fell to voraciously. His table manners were very bad, his hands were dirty but there was something about him that interested Roger.

"I've had great trouble getting water," he said. "Just struck it, this noon. 'Twill be enough for drinking and my condenser, I guess, but nothing for irrigation."

"Can't do anything with a dug well, here," grunted the guest. "Better drive one."

"Is the sand really fertile in this region?" asked Roger.

"Fertile? Friend, there's an empire waiting to be born, right here, if only they can get water and fuel."

"If we can get the fuel we can pump the water," said Roger. "You're right! There is an empire here. Mineral resources beyond the dreams of avarice, four or five crops a year of food-stuffs. Why, man, millions of people could come in here and be self-sustaining."

"What do you mean by 'in here'?" Von Minden spoke sharply.

Roger hesitated. "I mean really something pretty big. A cheap fuel would open up Arizona, New Mexico, Southern California and Northern old Mexico as no one can conceive who's not studied the subject. If I can put over my experiment, I shall add to the potential wealth of this country as no single individual has ever done. I'm going to get some one's ear at Washington, some day, if it's not till I'm a doddering old man. We ought to have Mexico, you know, because when the inland empire begins to grow, we'll overflow into Mexico. But we never can have her, of course. We can only hope that she'll grow into a real nation we can neighbor with, like Canada."

"Ah hah! And how're you going to bring about this millennium?" asked Von

Minden.

But Roger, whose outburst to a stranger had been unprecedented, had nothing more to say on the subject.

"Will your burro eat table scraps?" he inquired.

"Yes, especially bacon rinds. Oh, Peter, come here, liebchen!" he called.

There was a sound of little light footfalls in the sand and Peter's wise gray face appeared in the doorway.

"Come here, sweetheart." The little burro crowded carefully around the table end until his head rested on Von Minden's shoulder. One by one, the old prospector handed up the bacon rinds and biscuits to him and Peter chewed sedately, flopping his ears back and forth.

"You are a good little boy. Now run along out," as the last rind disappeared and the burro trotted sedately out to browse industriously among the roots of the cactus.

"He really seems to understand," exclaimed Roger delightedly.

"He *knows*!" cried Von Minden. "And now, tell me about this solar heat. How are you going to harness it?"

Roger shook his head. "That I won't tell you now. But if you'll come back in three months' time, I'll show you the plant."

"You're afraid of me, eh? Well, perhaps that's a good idea. Afraid of me! Afraid of poor old Von Minden! There was a time when—ach! Well—perhaps you'll let me have a nap here on a bench. Then Peter and I'll go on up into the ranges."

"Make yourself at home," replied Roger.

Von Minden stretched his short length on the bench and closed his eyes. Before Roger had finished the dishes he was snoring. The little burro was standing in the shade of the living tent when Roger came out of the cook shelter. He looked pathetically small and thin and Roger, who had taken a great fancy to him, brought him a pail of water, and scratched his head and talked to him before going on into the tent. Here he was shortly absorbed in sorting his blue prints. He was studying the ground plan of the absorber, when an uncanny sense of being watched made him look over his shoulder. Von Minden, a sawed-off shot-gun aimed at Roger's back, was standing in the doorway.

"You will come down here and open up the world's best empire, will you—for

America, eh? Not yet, my friend!" Von Minden's voice was husky and unsteady.

Roger did not move. In fact, he was incapable of moving.

"Look here," he began. Then as in a mist he saw Peter's gray head appear at his master's elbow and Peter himself, with his pack on his back, thrust his way past his master into the tent, just as Von Minden pulled the trigger. The shot seemed to hit everything in the tent but Roger. The mist before Roger's eyes turned to red and he made a spring for his guest. But Von Minden turned and fled, Peter after him, straight eastward across the desert toward the Coyote Range. They ran with surprising speed. Roger delayed long enough to get Ernest's rifle out of his trunk. By the time he had loaded it, after searching frantically several minutes for the box of cartridges, Von Minden and his little burro were far beyond rifle shot.

Roger started after them, hot foot, swearing viciously as he ran. As he saw the little German turn into the ranch trail a sudden fear for the two girls mingled with his anger. But Von Minden did not stop at the ranch house. As Roger reached the alfalfa field, burro and man veered to the right, around the adobe and rapidly on up the mountain trail, where they were quickly lost to view.

Roger saw Charley come hastily out of the house, followed by Felicia and when, panting and shaken with rage, he reached the house, they were still looking curiously toward the mountain trail.

"What's the trouble, Roger?" called Charley.

"He shot at me, the damned hound! Tried to kill me!"

He would have passed on up the mountain trail, but Charley had hurried down the trail and interrupted him quietly, with a steady hand on his arm.

"It's only Crazy Dutch!" she said. "You mustn't mind him!"

"Mind him!" shouted Roger. "I tell you he tried to kill me."

"You should have kept his gun for him until he was ready to go. That's what we always do. And as for his taking a pot shot at you, why, that's all in the day's work in this part of the country."

She smiled as she spoke, looking levelly into his eyes from her splendid height. Felicia caught his sleeve.

"We were coming down to call on you, Roger, and now you've spoiled it," she said.

"Sit down on the steps and cool off a little," suggested Charley. "You know you

can always kill Crazy Dutch if you want to. He's always around. He's really a dear old man when you come to know him. He's helped me out here many a time when Dick's been sick or away." She was smiling still more broadly as she led Roger to the steps. He felt as if he were being hypnotized.

"But he tried to kill me," he repeated feebly, as Charley stood his rifle in a corner of the porch and sent Felicia for a cup of water.

"Poor child! Did he try to kill you?" Charley patted his arm as if he were a small boy. "Sit down in the shade here. I know you think we're all crazy down here and I guess we are. But you'll get fond of poor Crazy Dutch yourself. Dick loves him and he tried to shoot Dicky, when they first knew each other."

The red mist cleared suddenly from Roger's vision. He drank deeply of the water Felicia brought him and looked at Charley curiously. She was the first person since his mother had died who had been able to ease his outbursts of temper. Felicia was still aggrieved. She looked at Roger reproachfully.

"We were coming down to call on you and now you've spoiled it."

Roger jumped to his feet with a laugh. "I'll go home at once. Come along."

"No, we've got to dress up. It's going to be a regular call," said the child.

"We were coming down about half past four to bring you back to supper with us," said Charley.

Roger was suddenly conscious of the fact that he had a day's beard on his face. He started down the trail, hastily, after retrieving his gun.

"I'll be glad to see you ladies whenever you call," he said, "but I'm not going to promise not to shoot Crazy Dutch if he comes round again."

The call, which was made with due ceremony at the hour mentioned, was a great success. Roger, fresh shaved, and quite recovered from the shock of Von Minden's visit, played host with just enough formality to delight Felicia. Charley was deeply interested in the plans for the Sun Plant. It was the first time Roger had explained his general scheme of solar heating to her and he was surprised by her eager intelligence.

The sun was setting when they started back to the ranch house, with Felicia chatting like a magpie. Roger did the milking and the other chores, by the light of a "bug."

Charley gave them a simple supper, but the beans and bacon, hot biscuit and

canned blackberries seemed extraordinarily delicious to Roger. He and Felicia washed the supper dishes while Charley put a batch of bread to rise.

The evening tasks finished, they established themselves before the living-room fire. Roger lighted his pipe.

"Can't I sit up till quarter after eight to-night, Charley?" asked Felicia.

"You wanted to do that last night," replied Charley.

"And you wouldn't let me. Won't you to-night?"

"No, dear."

"Then," great eyes on the implacable face of the alarm clock, "I've only five minutes to sit up. Charley, I can't bear it."

"Oh, yes, you can," said Roger. "Think how awful it would be if you had to go to bed at half-past seven. That's what happened to me when I was your age."

"Didn't your mother love you? I don't see how she could help it. You must have been a cunning boy."

"I was a long-legged, awkward, freckle-faced brat, but she loved me. Mothers are like that."

Felicia nodded understandingly but did not take her eyes from the clock. "There it goes, that nasty little minute hand! I'm sorry I ever learned to tell time."

"Say good night to Roger, Felicia, and run off to bed. There's a dear."

Felicia rose obediently, put her arms around Roger's neck and kissed him. "I don't like a man's kiss, when it tastes of tobacco," she said, "but I suppose I might as well get used to it for when we're married, Roger."

"I'm sorry," said Roger, meekly. "I'll give up smoking if you really want me to."

Felicia giggled, picked up her doll, then turned to look at the clock. It pointed to one minute after eight. She put out her tongue at her enemy, then dragged slowly into the bedroom which she shared with Charley, and shut the door.

Roger and Charley smiled at each other. "Were you a chatterbox, too, at her age?" he asked. "I can't remember that you were."

"Dick says I was."

"But you're very silent for a girl. What has changed you?"

Charley laughed, then answered soberly: "The desert."

They both sat looking at the fire after this. The silence had lasted some time when Charley said thoughtfully: "And so a big dream will materialize in our valley after all. I can't tell you how glad I am."

"Why?" asked Roger, with interest. "Did Dick come out here with a big dream?"

"Yes, we were going to make the desert blossom like the rose. We were going to have the biggest alfalfa ranch in the southwest."

"Well, you've got a good start, haven't you?"

Charley shook her head and lapsed into silence again. Roger refilled his pipe and replenished the fire. The flames leaped up and turned the gray Navajo to rose color. The night wind which Roger had learned to expect about nine o'clock swooped down the chimney. The faint bark and long drawn howl of a coyote pack sounded from the valley and from behind the adobe rose a whimper that increased to a scream that was almost human. Roger sat forward in his chair.

"Wild cats!" said Charley. "Dick and I both have shot several but we can't get rid of them."

"Look here," exclaimed Roger. "I'm going to stay here all night."

"What's the matter? Afraid to go home?"

Roger grinned. "Yes, but I'm more afraid to leave you two girls here alone."

"My good man, I've been staying here alone about every two months for four years. I'm not a bit afraid."

Roger looked at her keenly, but her deep eyes did not waver. "You may have got used to it," he said obstinately, "but I'll wager anything that when you first came you were just paralyzed with fear."

"I was indeed!" Charley shook her head as if in wonder at that early fear. "I used to barricade myself in the bedroom and slept with the little .22 at the head of the bed."

"I don't see how your brother—" began Roger.

"He *had* to go," interrupted Charley. "Don't you try to prove that Dick isn't devoted to me, for he is. He had to see the doctor because he came out here with bad lungs. He's all cured of that now. No one could be more of a dear than Dick, when he's—well."

She spoke with such vehemence, leaning forward in her chair with such a depth of protest in her wide eyes that Roger was surprised.

"Good Lord, I wasn't criticizing Dick. I think he's a fine chap. Only I don't think a girl ought to be sleeping alone, twenty-five miles from the nearest neighbor."

"I'm safer here alone than I would be in St. Louis or Chicago," exclaimed Charley, leaning back in her chair with a little laugh. "Now tell me what you are going to do after your Sun Plant begins to pump water?"

"Try to get money interested in developing this and other waste countries. There are untold mineral riches in these ranges, if only there were a cheap way to get them out. Now don't get excited as Crazy Dutch did and shoot me up! By the way, he told me his name was Otto von Minden."

Charley nodded. "I believe he comes of good family. He speaks the finest kind of Berliner German. Poor old thing!"

Roger snorted. "I'll *poor* him when I catch him! I'll have him committed to an asylum."

Charley laughed. "You'd have hard work getting that done. Asylums are rare here and every one is fond of the little German. I wish I knew as much as he does about German literature. Some day I'm going to Germany. It must be a wonderful country."

"Did you learn German in college?"

"In High School and the University both. I'd like to have had some French too, but there were no native French teachers and I didn't fancy learning French with somebody's accent plus my own. On the other hand the German teachers and the courses they offered were fine. I feel as if I knew more about Germany than any other country outside the United States."

"So do I," replied Roger, thoughtfully.

"I think that instead of getting Crazy Dutch committed you'd better get to know him," Charley went on. "He's so well connected in Germany, in spite of his forlorn appearance, he might prove a valuable acquaintance for you."

Roger, whose wrath against Von Minden had disappeared much to his own astonishment, nodded his head, and once more silence fell between them.

It was ten o'clock when Roger next observed the inexorable hand of the alarm clock.

"I wish I'd never learned to tell time," he said as he rose reluctantly, "and I wish you'd tell me as much about yourself as I've told you about me."

"There's so little to tell," protested Charley.

"Oh, there's a great deal to tell," contradicted Roger. "The chief thing being why the desert has changed you from a chatterbox to a Sphinx."

"That you'll never know! Run along home now before the coyotes or Von Minden get you."

Roger grinned and said good night.

He was up with the birds the next morning, prepared to give a long day's work to cleaning the well and covering it. It was not yet noon when he saw a curious procession moving toward the camp along the Archer's Springs trail. It appeared to consist of a small string of burros, led by a bright red or pink umbrella.

"I thought somebody said the desert was lonesome," said Roger to himself. "Me—I run a regular wayside inn." He lighted his pipe and sat down on the well curb to wait. Gradually he discerned that the pink parasol, undulating now against the sapphire of the sky, now against the dancing yellow of a sand drift, was upheld by a woman who sat astride a tiny burro. It was ten minutes after he discovered this that the lady rode majestically into the camp and dismounted, with magnificent gesture, throwing one leg over the burro's drooping head. The three burros who were strung behind her stopped in their tracks as though half dead.

Roger rose and doffed his hat. This was the largest woman he ever had seen. She was easily three inches taller than Roger and splendidly proportioned, huge of shoulder, broad of hip, but without an ounce of fat upon her. Her face was gaunt and brown: thin lips, long thin nose, gray eyes set deep, iron gray hair straggling over her forehead from under a dusty pink sunbonnet. She wore a linen duster buttoned close to her chin.

"How do you do, sir," she said in a pleasantly modulated voice. "My name is Clarissa Foster von Minden."

"Mine is Roger Moore. Won't you come into the cook tent and let me get you some lunch?"

"Yes, thank you," looking about her with keen interest. "This is the place."

Roger, lighting the gasoline stove, looked at his caller inquiringly. She smiled at him as she pulled off her sunbonnet and dust coat, revealing a robe of pink calico not unlike an old fashioned "mother hubbard."

"I am a disciple of the Yogis, Mr. Moore. I dreamed that my husband was to be found in such a camp as this and here I am."

"I suppose you're referring to Otto von Minden. Yes, he was here yesterday. He's a genial soul. He tried to shoot me."

Mrs. von Minden nodded. "That's Otto. He had those ways. I've not seen him for five years. No bacon, Mr. Moore. I never touch animal fats. Just some tea, fruit and crackers. Later, I'll unpack some olive oil which you may use when cooking for me."

Roger nearly dropped the tea kettle. His mouth fell open as he stared at his caller.

"Don't be startled, my friend," she cried. "Great things are to come to you if you obey the Voices. And I've brought my own tent and supplies."

"But your husband isn't here, madam," protested Roger. "To tell you the truth, I wouldn't have him about the place. He's just plain crazy."

"Oh, no, he's not crazy. He's had a touch of the sun, undoubtedly. But he's not crazy. He's a brilliant man. I can make him very useful to you."

Roger scratched his head and grinned. "You haven't by any chance had a touch of the sun yourself, Mrs. von Minden?"

The lady laughed. "I must seem so to an outsider. You are still on the first plane while I am on the seventh."

"I'll water the burros while the kettle boils," said Roger hastily. He provided plentifully for the poor brutes, at the same time gazing desperately toward the ranch house. He felt badly in need of advice.

As if in answer to his need he saw a tiny figure come down the trail from the corral. It was Felicia, evidently coming to the Sun Plant. Roger slipped into the living tent and wrote a hasty note to Charley, apprizing her of events and begging her to come to his aid. By the time he had established Mrs. von Minden at her luncheon, Felicia reached the camp. But before his visitor caught sight of her, he had sent the child back with the note. He felt immeasurably relieved when this was accomplished.

"Now, madam," he said, "perhaps you would not mind resting here in the cook tent while I finish covering in the well. It is dangerous to leave it open with all the people that run about the desert in this neighborhood."

Madam graciously gave her assent and Roger fell to work briskly, laughing now and again to himself in a half vexed way. Sooner than he had dared hope, Charley and Felicia appeared. Leaving Felicia to watch the burros, Roger led

Charley into the living tent and gave the details of his predicament. Charley laughed quietly but immoderately and Roger joined her.

"How many crazy people have you in the desert?" he asked, finally.

"Uncle Otto is the only one I've known in my four years here. You're having wonderful luck. And the old boy has always pretended he's a bachelor."

"Perhaps he'll shoot her on sight," said Roger in a hopeful voice.

"Oh, what an awful thing to say!" protested Charley.

"Wait till you see the dame," returned Roger. "Charley, I can't have her staying the night here and I don't dare to send her up to your place. She might run amuck."

"Pshaw, no, she won't! I'll take care of her. Show me the lady."

Roger led the way to the cook tent. Mrs. von Minden sat on a bench, her back against a tent pole, her eyes closed. She opened them, however, when Roger spoke her name and acknowledged the introduction to Charley and Felicia with considerable air. She refused Charley's offer of hospitality, with utter finality.

"Here my Yogis directed me, and here I must stay until my husband comes. I will be no burden, after my tent is set up, if the young man will cook for me. And my gray hairs are sufficient chaperone."

"But I will not cook for you," said Roger very firmly. "My partner and I find it hard enough work cooking for ourselves. We are under great nervous and physical strain, Mrs. von Minden, and I must tell you frankly, it will be extremely inconvenient to have you here. This rough camp is no place for a woman."

"No place for a woman, eh?" repeated Mrs. von Minden. "Why it's paradise compared to some of the places Otto von Minden has kept me in." She rose suddenly and began to pace the sandy floor, a majestic figure in spite of her grotesqueness. "What was I when he found me, an unsophisticated girl of twenty, living in my quiet New Hampshire home. He promised me everything—travel, court life, the emperor's favor. What does he give me but desert camps? Camps where he and I were the only human beings within a thousand miles. Camps where I worked like any squaw—where a bit of tent and a blanket made our entire equipment. Five years ago he left me. I've taught school long enough to save money for an outfit and now I shall not leave till I have found him and given him the message of the Yogis."

"But, Mr. von Minden comes to see me every once in a while. You'll be much more apt to find him at the ranch than here."

"Here I must stay," reiterated the unwelcome guest, with a sudden quaver in her voice that made Roger say hastily:

"Oh, very well! Mrs. von Minden. If you'll show me which is your tent pack, I'll try to make you comfortable."

"I'll stay and help," said Charley.

"So will I," cried Felicia. "I'd love to unpack the burros. All the bundles are so knobby. Are there any doll dishes there, Mrs. von Minden?"

As if she saw the child for the first time, Mrs. von Minden gazed at her in astonishment. "Why, my dear, how much you look like your sister! No, there are no doll dishes there, I'm sorry to say. Come, children!" and her pink robe blowing she led the way to the patient burros.

"Isn't this fun?" whispered Charley to Roger.

"Maybe! But how'll I explain to Ernest?"

The mere thought of this sent Charley off into a gale of laughter that caused Mrs. von Minden to ask sharply:

"What is so funny?"

"I'm just laughing at what Mr. Moore's partner and my brother will say when they get in some time to-night and find a lady established here," answered Charley frankly.

The visitor smiled grimly and set about her unpacking. The particularly knobby bundle which had fascinated Felicia proved to be a rocking chair, enwrapped by the canvas tent. There was a compact little cooking outfit, several large books on Occultism, an air mattress, two pink quilts, a pink pillow and a suitcase of clothing. One burro was loaded with provisions, consisting of olive oil, sugar, coffee, flour and canned cheese.

Roger knocked together a crude tent frame and stretched the tent over it, Mrs. von Minden directing while Charley and Felicia tugged with him. The guest refused to allow Roger to make a bunk for her. The Yogis, it seemed, had told her to sleep on the ground. When the mattress and rocking chair and a box for a table had been established in the tent Madam expressed herself as satisfied.

"You may rest now, children," she said, "while I concentrate."

"By the way," suggested Roger. "How about the burros? With all the good will in the world, I can't feed them, for I have no fodder."

"You have a ranch, Miss Preble," said Mrs. von Minden. "I will pay you for boarding them. What is the charge?"

"My brother will take care of that on his return," answered Charley. "We'll lead them up when we go home."

"You're not going yet, Charley," exclaimed Roger, in alarm. "You must stay to supper."

"I never was so popular in my life," laughed Charley. "Of course I'll stay. Let me have a look at the new well, Roger. Do you think it's going to meet your demands?"

She crossed the camp to admire the new pump, Roger following.

"I don't think it will do more than supply engine and camp needs," replied Roger. "I don't know whether to go ahead, prospecting for water, or to erect the plant first."

"Why don't you erect your plant, then if you don't find enough water after drilling for it, with your engine, move up to the ranch and use our spring. I'm not trying to graft something free. We'll be glad to pay for it. But our old gasoline engine is an awful lemon and it's going to be an awful job to keep up the supply of gasoline."

"Jove! My first customer? Charley, you're a peach!" exclaimed Roger. "I suppose I might put my plant up on your place to begin with. But no, this is the spot the Smithsonian picked, it's government land, and to move now might make endless complications. But you'll have your pumping plant, Charley, before any one else does. And we'll make the alfalfa crops pay for it."

Charley nodded, then gasped, "Look, Roger! Oh, if Ernest and Dick could only steal in now!"

The guest had pulled her rocker out before the tent flap and was seated in it, eyes closed, hands clasped over her stomach, immovable except for a light swaying of her chair.

"Concentrating, I suppose," muttered Roger. "Charley, I'll bet the old bird will never leave me. I have the feeling."

"What on earth does she mean by concentrating?" gasped Charley, through her

laughter.

"Oh, it's some of that occult rot, I don't doubt," groaned Roger. "Charley, stay till the fellows come. I'm frightened."

"On the contrary," laughed Charley, "I'm going to get us all an early supper and put those burros to bed before dark."

She was as good as her word. The afterglow had not faded from the sky when Roger returned to the camp, after helping Charley with her chores. His guest had retired to her tent and Roger withdrew to his and threw himself down on his cot to await the return of Dick and Ernest.

It was midnight when the teams rattled into camp. Roger hastened out at once.

"We'll unhitch and leave both wagons here to unload in the morning," said Ernest.

Dick already was silently unchecking his horses, returning only a grunt to Roger's greeting.

"I'll go with you, Dick, and take our team to the corral," said Roger.

"Don't be a fool!" growled Dick. "I'll take them without any help. If I've got to board 'em, I'll do the work for 'em. Don't you butt in!" He mounted one of his own horses and stringing the others behind, he rode off under the starlight.

"For the Lord's sake!" exclaimed Roger, following Ernest into the tent, "what's the matter with Dick?"

Ernest tossed a pile of mail onto the trunk beside the candle. "I haven't the remotest idea. He was as jolly as usual when we had our supper at sunset. About an hour ago I spoke to him and he took my head off. I haven't tried him since. Sweet for poor Charley."

"I didn't know he was subject to grouches," mused Roger. "Say, Ern, before I read the mail, I've got some news for you."

"Qui-tha done some real work?" asked Ernest with a yawn.

"Oh, Qui-tha! I'd forgotten him. He departed that morning without a farewell. We have, however, another guest, who is at this moment asleep in her own tent, near the cook house."

"Get out, Roger! It's too late for joking. Let me get to bed."

"A regular lady, Ern, six feet two or three in height and as near as I can make out

she's here for keeps. She's Von Minden's wife."

Ernest stopped yawning. "Who the deuce is Von Minden?"

"Oh, I forgot to mention him. He's the man who tried to shoot me yesterday."

Ernest stared at Roger incredulously. "Rog, what's the matter with you? You're positively maudlin."

Roger chuckled. "Next time you want excitement, Ernie, don't go to Archer's Springs. Stay right at home here in the God-forsakenest spot on earth. Now I'll make my story as short as I can, but you've got to hear it to-night. I can't sleep with it on my chest and she's liable to break loose with something any time."

He finished his story as rapidly as possible, Ernest's consternation growing as he proceeded.

"But, my Lord, Rog, she can't stay here!" he cried.

"So I told her. So Charley told her. But she's here. In her tent. On her air mattress. Her rocking chair beside her. Her books on occultism at her head."

"I was going to ask you to read that letter from Washington to-night," said Ernest, feebly, "but I feel that I need immediate rest. I'll go up in the morning to see Dick and if he still has his grouch with him, I'll bring him back to tackle the lady."

Roger yawned. "Guess I will leave the mail until morning. That woman has exhausted me more than any job we've tackled yet."

He blew out the candle and in a few moments the little camp was silent in the star glow.

CHAPTER VI

THE LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

In spite of his weariness, Roger could not sleep. He scarcely had closed his eyes when the memory of Dick's curious ugliness made him open them and stare into the darkness. What in the world could induce a seemingly pleasant fellow like Dick to go off apparently without cause into a deep seated grouch?

Roger shook himself. What a fool he was to lie awake over a thing as trivial as this. All men were moody. Roger told himself that, excepting Ernest, every man he knew had unaccountable grouches. Then he closed his eyes and opened them again. Would Dick row Charley? It was unthinkable that a man should row a woman of her type. Roger had discovered that he admired his old time playmate very much. She was so calm, so clear headed and keen thinking. With all the dignity of her splendid boyish physique added to her splendid intelligence, it was very unpleasant to think of her having to submit to bullying.

Roger turned over with a sigh. After a time of tossing, moved by an unaccountable impulse, he crept out of bed and peered from the tent flap toward the ranch house. A faint speck of light flecked the darkness. He scratched a match and looked at his watch. It was half past two. He went back to bed, where he lay for a half hour, wondering what was going on at the ranch house.

This was an unusual proceeding for Roger. Like most only children Roger had grown up self-centered and more or less selfish. His work had tended to increase these characteristics. Not since his mother's death, with the single exception of his thoughtful affection for Mamma Wolf, had Roger spent so much of himself on another's problem as he now was spending on Charley's.

He rose again. The light still shone from the adobe. He slipped into his clothes and noiselessly left the tent. It was nipping cold and he walked as fast as the

heavy sand permitted. As he neared the ranch, a second light appeared and moved down to the corral. A few minutes later Roger had reached the bars.

"Dick," he cried softly to the dark figure that was pulling the harness off one of the horses. "It's Roger! Anything the matter? I saw the light." The figure dropped the harness and ran over to the bar. As the "bug" light caught her face, Roger saw that it was Charley.

"Oh, Roger!" she exclaimed. "I'm so glad, so glad to see you!"

He vaulted over the bar.

"Hush," she said, "Dick's sick and I've just gotten him to sleep."

"Sick! That accounts for his grouch then! Why couldn't he say so! Shall I go for the doctor, Charley?"

"No! No! He's subject to these attacks. Did—did Ernest mind his being cross?" In the candlelight Charley looked anxiously into Roger's face.

"Not a bit. He just wondered about it because the change came on so suddenly. What is it? His stomach?"

"Yes, his stomach," replied Charley.

"Sure you don't want me to go for the doctor?"

Charley's voice trembled a little. "Very sure! But you can hang up the harness for me while I hold the light." Then, as Roger obeyed with alacrity, she asked: "What made you come up this hour of the night?"

"I couldn't sleep. Then I began to think about your brother's grouch. I got up and took a look in this direction and saw the light. I don't know just why I came. Restless, I guess!"

He tossed the lines over a peg and came back to take the lantern from Charley. As the light flashed on her face he saw that she looked very tired and that her lip was quivering. A wordless surprise swept over Roger. The feeling he had had that Charley was like an interesting boy whom he would wish to keep for a friend was rudely shocked by that quivering lip. Only a girl's lip could tremble so.

"Something *is* wrong," he said, anxiously. "Let me help you."

"You have helped me, more than you can know. Go home to bed now or you won't be fit for work to-morrow. And that work is just about the most important thing in this valley."

Roger could think of no adequate reply. He lowered the bars for Charley and put them up again. The two stood in silent contemplation of the desert night. The night wind was dying as dawn approached. Above and below was one perfect blending of dusky blue, with only the faint fleck of star silver to mark the sky from the earth. Roger's nerves quickened to the wonder of the night. He turned to Charley.

"I don't feel as if I'd ever lived before," he half whispered.

"I know," replied the girl. "I don't believe a person could be a real agnostic in the desert, do you?"

"No," said Roger, simply.

"You must go to bed," repeated Charley. "And you mustn't worry any more about me." She turned to run quickly up the trail to the adobe.

Roger started campward.

He was wakened later in the morning by the sound of conversation.

"I'm sorry, madam, but I'm no cook, and I dislike olive oil, anyhow. If you'll eat the pancakes as I fry 'em, in bacon fat, you're more than welcome to all you wish. But if you want olive oil used, you must fry them yourself."

"Where's the other young man?" asked Mrs. von Minden.

"Hey! Rog!" roared Ernest. "You're wanted."

Roger sat up on the edge of his cot with a yawn. As he did so, his eye fell on the unopened letters on the trunk.

Without waiting to dress he opened the one postmarked Washington. He read it through twice, then very deliberately rose and pulled on his clothing. His face was pale beneath the tan as he stepped out into the morning sun.

"Ernest, here's some bad news!" he called. "Come over to the tent a moment."

As Ernest hurried up, Roger said slowly, "Austin is dead and the Smithsonian Institute says it doesn't know anything about the deal with me."

Ernest dropped the pancake turner he was holding. "Good God!" He read the letter, then looked up into Roger's somber face. "Dropped dead in New York three weeks ago. Poor chap!"

Roger nodded. "But what was he up to? The writer of that letter says that although the Smithsonian was interested in a general way in our work, Austin

had no authority to go ahead. Now, where did he get the money?"

"I suppose he was afraid some one else would get in on it while the Smithsonian was hesitating, so he funded up himself. I suppose they'd have paid him back. You remember his cursing out the delays and the red tape that hampered everything connected with the government. I thought he was hipped on the subject, but now—"

"What makes you think all that?" asked Roger.

"Well, don't you remember in St. Louis, when he was ordering stuff from the Condit Iron Works he said he'd pay the bill himself, to get the stuff started?"

Roger shook his head. "I don't remember. But I guess you're right. Lord, what a good scout he was to have so much faith in me! I wonder how much he spent on us, and whether his wife is provided for?"

"That won't be hard to find out. What we've got to worry about now is the situation with the Smithsonian. They can't realize how far we've gone."

"Yes, they do," replied Roger. "That letter from, what does he sign himself—Hampton?—is in reply to the report I sent Austin from Archer's Springs, two weeks ago. Why, they've got to go on with it!"

"If they won't, we are up against it," groaned Ernest. "I don't want to ask father for money, and you and the Dean have tried every one in the world."

"And who the devil wants you to ask your father for money for me?" Roger shouted. "Haven't we got practically all the material we need, bought and paid for? We don't need anything except food. We'll do the work ourselves."

Ernest's gentle voice interrupted. "But, Rog—"

"Don't *but* me," roared Roger. "I tell you nothing shall stop me now! If it takes twenty years, I'll go through with this. I'd rather cut my throat than not go on with it. I've waited for five years for this chance. The death of one man won't stop me, nor the indifference of some fool government clerk. This plant is going to be built."

"What I started to say," said Ernest quietly, "when you began your brain-storm, was that if you'd sell your laboratory equipment up home it would guarantee us food for six months. The Dean would attend to it for you."

Roger sat down on his cot, rather suddenly. "That's a good idea, Ern," he said, meekly.

Ernest picked up the pancake turner. "I'm with you to a finish in this, Roger. You don't have to jaw me, you know."

"Sorry, old man," muttered Roger.

"It's all right," replied Ernest. "I'll finish getting breakfast. We've got all day to talk this over. One idea occurs to me. Perhaps this man Hampton who signs this letter would be less cold to the project if he had details. Why don't you give him the whole story, both of the plant and of our relationship to Austin?"

"That's a good hunch," exclaimed Roger, immensely cheered up by the suggestion. "Well," with a sigh, "I might have known I was having too much luck."

"It's the old lady. She's a bird of ill omen. I knew it the minute I saw her, this morning. Come out as soon as you can, Rog. I don't dare to be alone with her."

Roger grinned, but did not hasten his shaving. Ernest could be facetious. After all, the building of the plant was not Ernest's dream. Roger was shocked by the news of Austin's death, but the shock was not due to grief. Austin simply represented opportunity to the young inventor. A sudden fear was clutching at his heart lest now the plant would never be completed. Roger had learned much since his arrival in the desert. He had begun to realize that the desert fights ferociously any attempt to subdue her. He knew now that it was going to take much longer than the outside margin he had allowed to build the plant. If a driven well failed, he must try out the Prebles'. Perhaps Dick's knowledge of irrigation would prove to be sketchy and that water supply too would prove inadequate. He believed still that his plans for the plant itself would not have to be changed.

"I heard every word you two said," Mrs. von Minden's voice rose suddenly. "You needn't worry at all. I'll concentrate for you immediately after breakfast."

"In that case, we are ruined," Roger muttered, smiling in spite of himself, as he dropped the tent flap behind him.

The lady visitor was sitting on a bench beside the table in the cook tent, contemplating a cup of coffee and a plate of crackers.

"Was it your idea, madam," said Ernest, attacking a pile of pancakes some ten inches high, "that your husband would find you in this camp?"

"So the Yogis say," replied Mrs. von Minden.

"Why don't you fry yourself some cakes, Mrs. von Minden?" asked Roger.

"Part of my creed is never to prepare food for myself if it is possible to get some one else to do it. A complete inertia is a vital step toward Nirvana."

Roger grunted. "Then you'll never find Nirvana in this camp, I can tell you."

"Good morning!" cried Felicia, appearing suddenly in the doorway.

"Dicky is sick," she announced, "and Charley sent me down here for the day. She said please for you not to come up because Dicky is so cross, she doesn't want any one around."

Ernest and Roger looked at each other.

"I think I'd better go up," said Roger.

"No, I'll go," insisted Ernest.

"Charley doesn't want you," cried Felicia. "She says so and she always means what she says."

"Oh, you've found that out, have you?" asked Ernest. "Well, have a flapjack; my cook is an artist."

"I've had breakfast, thank you," replied the little girl. "I'm going out and look at the things in the wagon."

"Go to it!" exclaimed Ernest. Then to Roger, "I see you've struck water at last. That news evidently impressed you less than other events, last night."

Roger nodded. "There's not much of it and it's vile to taste. But it'll take care of our camp wants and the engine. Charley suggested that if we didn't strike an adequate supply when we drove the well farther, we'd better set the plant up at their place. They'd be our first customers."

"Better not take her up till you've done a lot of experimenting down here," said Ernest, quickly.

"I don't expect to do much experimenting," replied Roger. "But I've started here and I'll keep on here, especially since this unexpected mix up."

Mrs. von Minden, who seemed to have been lost in thought ever since Felicia's appearance, now spoke suddenly, but with closed eyes.

"No, don't leave this spot. You are destined to great good luck here."

The two men looked at each other. Ernest shrugged his shoulders and Roger sighed and asked:

"Did the pump come?"

"Yes, and the hose and the pipe for the condenser. We brought that and the glass, the cement, more lumber, and the drum of sulphur dioxide. There are two more big loads down there."

Roger nodded. "I'll take my turn at it to-morrow. Did you see Schmidt?"

"Yes, and he suggested that if we'd tie Preble's team to our wagon, he'd drive a load back for us, so only you would need to come in."

"We can't afford to have Schmidt come out here now," sighed Roger.

"Let him come!" murmured the visitor, still with closed eyes. "He will be provided for. It's a great work and must go on."

Roger jerked himself to his feet. "Let's go outside, Ern," he exclaimed.

Madam opened her eyes for a moment to say, "Send the child in to wash the dishes!"

Ernest turned a chuckle into a hiccough and followed Roger over to the well. "Roger, it won't cost much to keep him for a week and that provides for getting Hackett's team back and stopping that expense."

Roger nodded. "Let's leave those dishes on the table till she does 'em or we have to get lunch."

"O. K.! There she goes into her tent. Rog, she's plain crazy. Well, what do we tackle to-day?"

"We'd better get the pump ready and then start to build the engine house. I want it big enough to include the laboratory."

"Right-o! Dick suggested we save lumber by making the engine house of adobe. He says the sand storms that'll blow next month will ruin our apparatus if we don't cover it well."

"Where'll we get the adobe?" asked Roger.

"He said that that layer of clay we struck about four feet down in the well is extra fine adobe and that he'll show us how to handle it. I wonder how long he'll be sick, poor chap! Was Dick ever sick this way before, Felicia?" he called.

"Lots of times!" the child called back. "Oh, Ernest, here's a little, little bundle that's so soft it can't be a machine. Can't I open it? It might be for me."

"Go ahead!" replied Ernest.

"If the adobe won't take too long, I like the idea," said Roger. "But with our new financial problem, we're working against time."

"Oh, isn't it awful. Nothing but dish cloths for Charley!" shrieked Felicia.

"She'll have all the small items in those wagons in a hard knot," exclaimed Roger. "Felicia! Come and help unpack the pump, there's a good girl!"

When the wagon had been unloaded, the two men began the installation of the pump. By noon they had not finished the job. Roger had infinite patience with machinery. Ernest practically none.

"You'd have kicked the face off any human being that acted as mulish as this pump, Rog," growled Ernest. "Hang the thing! Let's throw it away and get a good one."

Roger laughed. "And you'd have no end of patience with a pupil as onery as this pump, Ern. It's all right. We'll have it going in a moment."

And go she did, to the excited admiration of Felicia, who had been an attentive audience during the entire performance. Mrs. von Minden did not leave the confines of her tent until mid-afternoon, when she spent some time preparing herself a meal. After lunch, Ernest would have gone to offer his services at the adobe, had not Felicia protested to the point of tears, that Charley would be angry. Somewhat to their own amusement the two men gave in to the vehement small girl, and the ground work for the absorber being complete, they began to clear space for the engine house and consumer. Felicia with a kitchen knife and the pancake turner, toiled away after the two men all the afternoon.

About five o'clock Ernest took her home. He was gone some time and Roger had supper ready on his return. Ernest had fed the horses and milked for Charley, who said that Dick would be around on the morrow.

"Then I'll write my letter to-night and start in with the two teams at daylight," said Roger. "You finish grubbing off for the condenser, Ernest, and make a carpenter's bench. And try not to kill our visitor." But the visitor was invisible all the evening, nor had she appeared before Roger left the next morning. He was well on his way toward Archer's Springs by daylight. The wagons were empty and the horses fresh, so that he reached the railroad station by mid-afternoon and had the wagons loaded by dark ready for the return trip.

At the Chinese restaurant where he went for his supper he saw Schmidt.

"Well!" exclaimed the German. "You vas here at last, nicht wahr!"

Roger nodded. "I hear you are coming up for a visit."

"Visit? No! No! To stay. Ya! To stay!"

Roger shook his head. "Can't feed you, old man!" and then, before he knew it, he was telling the sympathetic German of the Smithsonian's dereliction.

"These American governments!" groaned Schmidt. "Vat a stupidness! In Germany such a foolishness is impossible. Vell, I come for a veek and bring my own grub. I haf a leetle money, enough to feed me. Vat I lack is vork—vork to keep me from going crazy with the heim-weh in this ocean of sand, and some one mit brain to talk to. The baggage-man—the storekeeper—the Chinaman—Gott! I know their every mind like a primer, so long have I talked to them."

There was to Roger something irresistibly likeable about Schmidt's sentimental, jovial face.

"Come ahead, then!" he said. "You'll have to bunk in the cook-tent, and bring your own bed with you, but we'll be delighted to have you with us."

Schmidt rubbed his stubby hands together. "I go at vonce and pack up," he exclaimed. "Ve vill drive by my place in the morning and pick me up," and he started for the door.

At five o'clock the next morning the two heavily laden wagons crawled out on the desert trail, campwards. It was slow going, particularly after they struck the deep sand which began ten miles out of the town. Gustav Schmidt was rather silent when they stopped at noon, to water and feed their horses and to eat the lunch the Chinaman had put up for them. He was heavily coated with dust and his face had burned badly.

Half way through the second sandwich he said: "Ve'll get even with that sun, eh? Ve harness him and make him pump vater on us and on this damn sand, eh? Gott, vat a country!"

"What's the matter with this country?" asked Roger, blowing the sand off a ripe olive. "It's exactly the kind of country I want to make solar power with and it's exactly the kind of country you want to cure your bad lungs. If you don't like it —"

"Vait! Vait!" interrupted Schmidt. "I know vat you vill say. If I don't like it, go back to Germany. Some day I do go back, but not yet. Ven I go, I try to take you and young Wolf mit me. This is the land of nature's opportunity. In the Fatherland, the government gif the opportunity. This is the land for the

adventure, for the exploitation, nicht wahr? Germany the land for the thinker, like you? Nicht wahr?"

Roger shook his head. Nevertheless, his eyes were wistful. Many times during the afternoon he thought of Schmidt's remark. Roger's education and reading had long ago persuaded him that Germany was the land for the thinker, that there a man would not have to struggle for ten years to give birth to an idea such as his. He wondered why he never had cut loose and gone to the Fatherland. Some subconscious sense of obligation to his own country, he supposed. And yet, he thought bitterly what a fool he had been! Surely there could be no passion, not even the love for women, as deep-rooted, as overwhelming and as racially right as a man's desire to express his dreams. And that expression was denied him in his own country unless he put up a fight that depleted his creative force, surely by half.

He sighed heavily and yet his thoughts returned to the little new power plant with a vague heart warming as though already it spelled home to him.

Toward sundown, a curiously picturesque group passed them on the trail. Half a dozen squaws, with bare black heads and capes of red bandannas sewed together, were plodding toward town laden with ollas. Roger pulled up his team and called to them. Dick had told him to buy one of the great Indian water jars at his first opportunity.

"Will you sell me one?" he asked.

The oldest squaw nodded and held up a fine two gallon jar. It was just the color of the desert sand and was ornamented with swastikas and triangles in lines of vivid black.

"How much?" asked Roger.

"Eight bits," she said.

Roger dropped a dollar into her slender brown palm. The squaw flashed white teeth at him and a younger woman pressed forward holding up an olla no bigger than a teacup, a duplicate in design of the one he had just bought.

"I'll take that for Felicia," he murmured. "How much?"

"Two bits."

He tossed her the quarter. "You make 'em camp up there?" asked the old squaw.

"Yes," replied Roger. "Come and call on us, ladies."

"We bring 'em baskets, maybe," replied the squaw.

Roger nodded and started the horses on, looking back from time to time for pure pleasure in the beauty of those scarlet fluttering capes.

They reached the camp about ten o'clock and were vociferously welcomed by Ernest, who, before taking the horses up to the corral, insisted on showing them his day's work.

"Nothing doing on the carpenter's bench," he said, flashing the "lightning bug" toward the site of the engine house. "Look here. Dick came over right after breakfast and we were hard at this all day."

All the lumber in the camp had been requisitioned to make adobe molds. "We mixed the adobe with that clutter of broken hay that the glass came in," explained Ernest. "Dick says the Mexicans use stable scrapings, but I couldn't stomach that. You see you just peg the boards up in the sand, a foot apart and pack them full of the adobe. That'll be the thickness of the house. Then when the strips are dried, we'll cut them the length we want. Two days more work will give us all we need."

"Vat a country!" exclaimed Gustav.

Ernest and Roger laughed. "I take it Dick is O. K. again," said Roger.

"Quite himself. Said Charley was used up, but she came down late this afternoon with Felicia and she said she was feeling fine. Felicia made those little bricks yonder. Charley has put her into overalls. She's simply ravishing in them."

"And how is your guest?" asked Roger. "I've been telling Schmidt about her. He's heard of Von Minden at Archer's. And it seems she outfitted there. Claimed to have come up from Phœnix and said she had an engagement with us."

"Well, she was invisible, practically until noon to-day. Then she brought her rocking chair here where Dick and I were at work and concentrated on us all the afternoon."

"Concentrated? Vat iss concentrated?" asked Gustav.

"Well, she rocks in the chair, holding the pink umbrella till Dick lashed it to the chair back for her. She keeps her eyes closed and doesn't speak, though she did explain that she was talking to her mother, who is on the seventh plane, concerning the successful erection of the engine house. Dick seems quite smitten by her. He gazes on her and gazes as if fascinated, then he goes off behind the living tent and laughs."

"My God, what a country!" groaned Roger.

"I've got a bed fixed up for you in the cook tent, Schmidt," said Ernest. "You'll be safe if none of Mrs. von Minden's spirit friends bother you. She told me that she heard them playing the accordion in the cook tent last night."

"I love music," was Schmidt's response, and the three men went laughing to bed. Roger wakened in the night but once. Through the open tent flap he beheld Mrs. von Minden rocking silently in the starlight before her tent.

"She's going to get on my nerves," he murmured and fell asleep again.

Dawn was just breaking over the mountains the next morning when Roger entered the cook tent. He was greeted by Gustav, who was purple with the cold but grinning cheerfully, and the smell of coffee.

"It vas not so soft, sleeping on Frau Nature's heart in the desert, nicht wahr!" he exclaimed. "Coyotes vere eating the garbage last night mit gulps and snortings and I slept not. It vas not the music I had been promised. So I make the breakfast early."

"I didn't sleep well myself the first night or two," said Roger. "Desert silence makes a lot of noise to a town-bred man. Hey!"—going to the door—"Ern! You lazy Dutchman! The new cook'll leave if you don't get up for your breakfast."

Gustav and Roger were half through the meal when Ernest appeared. "Mud-pie making is hard work," he groaned, sliding stiffly onto the bench beside Roger.

"I certainly hate to make adobe brick when every day counts so," said Roger. "Let's use sheet iron."

"It'll be better to take Dick's advice," insisted Ernest. "He says the dust storms are frightful here and the heat worse. The adobe shelter will be grateful on many counts."

"Ve'll all vork hard," said Gustav, "and the 'dobe vill be up strong, before ve know it. Ven it is done, it is done good, and that is right. I vash the damn dishes. You go make the mud mixing. Then I come."

"We're going to hate to let that chap go when his visit's up," said Roger, as he and Ernest began work on the adobe.

"Maybe we won't have to let him go," replied Ernest. "You stir the mess up, Rog, and I'll put it into the molds. Dick is going on with his grading, but he'll be over in a day or so and show us how to begin the house building."

"The trouble with you is, Ern, that you're flighty-minded. You're tired of making a Sun Plant and all excitement over building a mud house."

"I wouldn't have a single track mind like yours for a million dollars," returned Ernest cheerfully.

Roger grinned and presently began to whistle as he worked. Mrs. von Minden proved to be an exceedingly unexacting guest. After it was evident to her that her hosts had not the slightest intention of doing special cooking for her she did her own. She ate only two meals a day, preparing one at mid-morning and one at sundown. The remainder of the day she spent within her tent, reading or rocking in her chair, concentrating on the camp work. She seldom talked and then only on the matter of what she called Yogi-ism.

Gustav took a violent dislike to her and refused to work if she looked at him. Roger declared that on the next trip to town he was going to telegraph Phœnix and see if she had not escaped from an insane asylum. But Ernest only laughed.

"Poor old soul! She's not crazy except on her religion. Let her alone. She's no expense and no trouble!"

"She gives me the willies," insisted Roger. "I never knew before that I had a temperament."

"Gosh, I could have broken that to you twenty-five years ago," said Ernest. "Only I supposed obvious facts were as plain to you as to other people. Here she comes for her afternoon's work, bless her, pink umbrella, pink nighty and all. What a lucky dog Von Minden is."

Roger chuckled and joined Gustav, who moved hastily to continue his brick making back of the lady's chair.

Working so, he was facing the ranch and presently he saw Charley cross the alfalfa field to join Dick. A moment later, the two figures were following the team across the field. Next Felicia flashed down the trail, a tiny dot of blue, and shortly he saw Dick lift her to one of the horse's backs. Roger's mind harked back to old days. He recalled Charley's father giving her and him just such a ride over the fertile corn fields of home. And he pondered for a moment on the thing called fate.

There was a little hand that clung to his as he and Charley scuffled up the dusty road to the farm. There was Dick's ruddy boyish face, sternly disapproving. There was a childish treble, "I shall love Charley. She'll take such care of me as never was on sea nor land. Aunt May says so." And finally there was the woman's voice. "Go home to bed now, or you won't be fit for work to-morrow. And that work is about the most important thing in this valley now."

And now, Charley drove a team over a desert field, while he—what was he doing after all? Roger rose abruptly and lighting his pipe began to stroll aimlessly around the camp. Was this dream that had worked itself into the very fiber of his nature worth while? The desert, shimmering in endless silence about him, seemed very far from that world of machinery that he had worshiped so long. Supposing that Charley did bring the desert to bearing. Supposing that he did harness the sun and start an empire to building in these barren wastes. To what avail?

Though his dream were the very foundation of their existence, men would fight here for the supremacy of riches, just as of old. And why not? Through the welter of cut-throat striving man had won his intelligence. Who was he to endeavor to lessen that competition?

How restless, how discontented he had been for nearly ten years! Was he not missing the best of life and was not happiness the real goal of living? And did not men get the only real joy from wife and child? Did any work that did not focus round these two bring real content?

A sudden swelling of his heart, a sudden rush of blood through his brain, a sudden thrill of his lean strong body that seemed to extend to the very heart of the desert, brought Roger to pause in his walking. He gazed for a long moment at the little blue figure astride the horse, and at the tall figure in khaki beside Dick.

The March afternoon was hot but with a clear tang that was as exhilarating as winter frost. The range back of the ranch house was brown where the sky line shone clear. But the gashed and eroded sides of the mountains were filled with drifts of purple clouds that melted now in soft blue billows into the sky, now in ragged streams of crimson into canyons black in the distance. The little sounds of the camp were as nothing. The pygmy figures in the alfalfa field were infinitesimal. A new sense of the immensity of the universe poured into Roger's soul with devastating force and for the first time in his life Roger realized his own lack of importance.

A moment of this and then the instinct that has lifted man above the brutes spoke in him again. He would not belong to life only through children. He would make himself immortal through his work, work by which men should live and think and have their being for ages to come.

With a long sigh, Roger tossed his black hair back from his face and returned to his brick making.

CHAPTER VII

THE RUNAWAY

The three men toiled arduously for two days on the brick making. At the end of that time the desert all about the camp was paved with adobe brick, baking in the sun until Dick should come to start them on their house building. On the evening of the second day, Roger tramped up to the ranch house and proposed to Dick that they exchange work for half a day; Roger to finish Dick's grading, while Dick instructed Gustav and Ernest in the gentle art of adobe laying.

But Dick would not strike the bargain. "I've only an hour's work before I'm ready to start the seeding," he said, "and I won't trust any one to attend to that but myself. I'll just ride over to the Sun Plant in the morning and it won't take half an hour to teach you fellows all I know about putting up the house."

"I'm going too," said Felicia. She was sitting, cuddling her doll before the fire, for the nights were still cool.

"Almost your bedtime, Felicia," warned Charley.

The child gave Roger an agonized look.

"I brought you a present, Felicia," he said, and pulled the tiny olla out of his pocket.

"Oh, a water jar! Just like yours, Charley!" shrieked Felicia, taking the little bowl carefully in her slender childish fingers. "Where did you get it, Roger?"

Roger described his meeting with the squaws, and Dick added, "The whole outfit is camping on a canyon the other side of the range. Old Rabbit Tail told me this morning when he brought down the wood. It's there they find the rock they make these ollas of. It's a kind of decomposed granite. They pulverize it with their

metates, add boiling water and get a very fair clay. Qui-tha is up there with them and his strong medicine has made a hit."

"Do they make dishes cheap, Dicky?" asked Felicia, crowding close to her brother's knee. "Would they make me some doll dishes cheap, do you think?"

Dick lifted the little girl to his knee and kissed her. "Why cheap, little old chick-a-biddy?"

"Because I heard you tell Charley funds were getting awful low now you'd sold the last of the turquoise. But this doll will starve, Dicky, if she doesn't have dishes to eat off of."

"She looks fairly well fed," suggested Charley, shaking her head a little helplessly over the frank statement of the family finances.

"She mustn't get run down, though," said Dick. "When I see one of the squaws, I'll order some dishes, money or no money."

"I don't see why Aunt May didn't send along more of her toys," sighed Charley. "It was so stupid of her! There is nothing at Archer's Springs."

"Don't you worry, Charley!" cried Felicia. "The squaws will make me some. I'll ask 'em."

"That's a good sport," said Dick, hugging the child against his broad chest. He was Felicia's devoted slave, and Charley had no help from him in maintaining discipline. It was she who said now:

"Look at the clock, Felicia, dear."

"I'd rather not," answered Felicia. Nevertheless, she slid off Dick's lap and with the doll and the olla in her arms, kissed each of the grown-ups in turn, and went off to bed.

"She's the best kid I ever saw," said Dick, after her bedroom door had closed.

"And the prettiest," added Roger.

"You men spoil her," protested Charley, "and it's too bad because she really is unusual."

"Pshaw! You were just like her," grunted Dick, "and we all petted you. And heaven knows, you aren't spoiled. Of course, you're much too strict with Felicia —and me."

Charley flushed. "You don't really think so, do you, Dick?" she asked.

Roger joined Dick in a chuckle at this. Charley's adoration of her brother was obvious to the most casual observer. She laughed a little herself and it occurred to Roger that her laugh was much like Felicia's, just as innocent and spontaneous.

"I can always get a rise that way, eh, old girl," cried Dick. "And I know why you're blushing. You hate on top of this, to remind me that I haven't bedded the horses. Well, I'll attend to it instantly and relieve your embarrassment. I'll be back in a moment, Roger."

"Dick is in good trim again," said Roger.

"Oh, I do so hope he'll stay well!" exclaimed Charley with a sudden fervor that surprised Roger. "He's such a dear and he's been so handicapped! I think it's going to make a big difference to him, having Felicia and you people here. He's been so lonely."

"Haven't you been lonely?" asked Roger.

"Yes," replied Charley. Then after a pause, "How does your work go?"

"Very slowly! I get half crazy with impatience. Even after all the warnings I received, I had no idea of the difficulties in the desert. I realize now that I'm only about half equipped, for desert building."

"You mean mentally or financially?" asked Charley with a quick look.

"Financially, of course—or—what made you ask me that?" Roger's voice was a little indignant.

"Well, you see," answered Charley, "I've been in the desert longer than you and I know that impatience leads to madness. And you're an impatient sort of person."

"Impatient!" Roger burst out. "Impatient! When for ten years I've clung to one idea, hoping against hope, believing that the impossible would happen."

"You poor boy! Don't you suppose I know? But now that you're down here at work, you've got to be even more patient. The desert is cussed mean. You and Dick have both got to contend with the old vixen for a long time before you put your dreams through."

"Don't you worry about my impatience," replied Roger. "My middle name is patience. You'll see!"

Dick's cheerful whistle came up the trail. Charley looked at Roger as he thoughtfully relighted his pipe. His bronze black hair was ruddy in the firelight,

Charley liked his hair and she liked his square jaw and deep gray eyes, though they seemed to her a little cold and selfish as were his lips. Charley had been educated with boys in the big middle western town whither the Prebles had moved. From the time that she had entered kindergarten at four until she graduated from college at twenty-two she had buffeted through life shoulder to shoulder with boys. Charley knew men and she had read Roger as clearly as though his mind were an open book. She knew that the desert would either make or ruin a man of Roger's temperament.

Dick swung open the kitchen door. Roger rose, slowly.

"You folks had better have supper with us, to-morrow night," he suggested.

The Prebles accepted with alacrity and Roger wandered slowly home across the desert. He liked the Prebles, better than he had ever liked any family but Ernest's. Patience! He'd show that tall, dark-eyed girl that his fund was limitless.

Schmidt was worth two ordinary men, in spite of the fact that he was not in full health, and that he was deliberate in all his movements. His deliberation meant that he used his head to guide his hands. What with his steady persistent following of Roger's rapid, feverish energy and of Ernest's cheerful conscientious poddering, by mid-afternoon the engine house walls were half finished. When Charley, carrying a great basket, reached them about sundown, the door frames were almost covered in.

Ernest introduced Schmidt, who laughingly showed his muddy hands.

"I never saw three people who more evidently needed baths," Charley laughed in turn. "I suppose Felicia is the worst of the lot. Where is the child?"

"Felicia!" ejaculated Roger.

"She hasn't been here to-day," exclaimed Ernest.

Charley set the basket slowly down on the sand while her face whitened. "She started down here at nine o'clock with her doll and her olla."

There was a moment's silence, then Roger cried cheerfully, "Well, don't be frightened! Nothing could have happened to her. She must have gone on an investigating trip of her own."

"I'll go after Preble," said Ernest, "and we'll take the horses and round her up in a jiffy."

He and Gustav started immediately up the trail. Roger stopped long enough to

carry the heavy basket to the cook tent. "Look out for Miss Preble, will you, Mrs. von Minden?" he said to that lady who was finishing her second meal.

"I must go home," faltered Charley. "She may—Roger, look in the old Mellish shaft." She gave a little sob and Mrs. von Minden suddenly put her arm about her.

Roger started on a run after the others.

They overtook Dick, just as he was turning out of the lower end of the alfalfa field into the trail. At their shout he pulled up the horses and waited. He began to unharness before the first sentence was finished. He and Roger both mounted, leaving Gustav and Ernest to go up to the corral after the other two horses. Just at this moment there came through the afterglow a familiar treble shriek.

"Oh! Oh! Dickeee!"

The four men were motionless. Coming down the trail from the mountains was a little figure in blue overalls, curly head glorious in the last of the sunset gleam.

"Wait for me, Roger, wait!" shrieked Felicia, trying to quicken a very tired gait, and much impeded by a basket, which she clasped with both arms. Ernest suddenly broke into a run and picked the child up, basket and all. Dick dropped from his horse and followed to lift her away from Ernest's clinging arms.

"She's my sister, let me take her," he said hoarsely.

"Vere vas you, liebchen?" asked Schmidt.

"Well," said Felicia, looking a little bewildered—"Oh, Roger dear, look—the squaw gave me a basket and some eenty dishes, just like the olla."

"Felicia, where have you been?" begged Roger; "tell us, honey."

"Why, I just went over the mountain to find the place Dick told about where the Indians make dishes. And I got lost, and a squaw found me and I had a funny dinner with her and I bought these dishes and I told her Dick would pay for them and I brought you each a present and I'm awful tired." She stopped for lack of breath.

Dick looked helplessly at the other men. "It's five mountain miles to that Indian camp," he said.

"I got tired," Felicia nodded her head, "but Qui-tha brought me home. He wanted some more peroxide. So I gave him the bottle in your room, Dicky. He was so good to bring me home. He went right back with it."

"I wish I'd had a quart for the good old fool," said Dick.

"Where are you all going? Where's Charley?" asked Felicia.

"She's nearly frantic about you," exclaimed Roger. "We were all going to look for you."

Felicia's liquid eyes widened with sudden understanding. "Put me down, Dick, I want to go to Charley."

"Here she comes now," said Ernest.

Charley was breathless with running. Felicia set her basket in the sand and rushed into her sister's arms. The men all started explaining at once. Charley, still clasping Felicia, listened, then looked down on the curly head resting against her heart.

"Felicia, how could you be so naughty," she asked gently.

"Now, don't you scold her, Charley," protested Dick.

"Do I ever scold any one, Dick? Only Felicia must realize that she did a very dangerous thing that she must never, never do again."

"How do you mean, dangerous?" asked Felicia. "Did I make you feel badly, Charley?"

"You made me sick at heart with fear, Felicia," replied Charley.

Felicia gave a great sob. "Oh, I wouldn't do that for anything!"

"I move," said Roger, "that we go on over to the Sun Plant and that the two ladies talk this over after supper. And I'll carry Felicia pig-a-back."

The motion was unanimously carried. Ernest went up to help Dick with the chores and Roger and Gustav prepared supper while Charley sat on the bench with Felicia in her lap, and directed operations. The pot of beans and the biscuit she had brought in the basket made the meal-getting a simple matter. Mrs. von Minden was almost human, that evening. She sat with the young people during their meal and for an hour afterward, once rising, unexpectedly, to kiss Charley.

Felicia went to sleep when half way through supper, just after she had given Roger his present.

"It's a little clock," she said, holding out a small steam gauge, rusty and battered. "I found it in one of the sheds up on the mountain, where I stopped to rest."

Roger looked at it curiously. "That was an expensive gauge in its day," he said.

"How do you suppose she happened to find it?"

"Harder not to find it," replied Dick. "The ranges are full of deserted mines. They took out all the free gold, then tried to work out the rest, found it too expensive, went broke and walked out. There's enough fine machinery up in the mountains to make you believe what folks say around here, that more money goes into the ground than ever comes out of it."

Roger looked at Dick thoughtfully. "I'm glad to know that," he said. "Felicia's given me a sure-enough present, haven't you, little girl?"

But Felicia, her head burrowed against Dick's willing shoulder was fast asleep.

"When do you expect to cut your first crop, Dick?" asked Ernest.

"If the alfalfa gets a toe hold before the first of May I'll get a crop this summer. The dust storms don't begin till May. They all blow down from the north or west and I'm sure that that draw between here and the field will protect me. I shall start cottonwoods and arrow-weed wind breaks as soon as I turn the water in. Hackett is getting some young trees for me."

"Isn't farming a terrible thing—terrible," said Mrs. von Minden suddenly. Then she closed her eyes and began to speak rapidly. "When we first came out here Otto wanted me to run a ranch for him while he did his other work. I was so innocent and so ignorant that I let him start me at it.

"In the Colorado river bottoms it was, below Fort Mohave. A group of fools like me thought to grow alfalfa in the bottom land, and dike the fields to keep the Colorado out at flood. Covered with arrow-weed, six and eight feet tall, the land was, when we got there. But the dikes were finished and some of the folks were beginning to clear the land.

"Otto cut enough arrow weed to put the tent up and then he found that he must put our bed high on a platform, the rattlesnakes were so thick. This done, he left me some money and told me to get an Indian to help me and off he went on one of his prospecting trips. I used to lie at night staring at the sky and crying with fear, fear of Otto and fear of the snakes that rattled and whirred all night.

"I found an Indian and he and I cleared about five acres of land and got the seed in. But the water used to run out of my mouth every minute with the snake fear. Then one night a rattler got one of our horses and my fear of what Otto would say if the other was bitten was greater than my fear of the snakes, and one night, while I watched beside the remaining horse, I killed a rattler. I waited for him to coil, then as I had seen the others do, I brought the butt end of an arrow-weed

down on the coils and my fear of snakes was gone.

"Food was hard to get. There were only eight of us there. And as it got hot, some of them left. By the time we were expecting the river to rise in spring flood, there were only three fools in the colony. And I seldom saw the other two. There was a hundred acres of arrow-weed between them and me. My Indian left, after the crop came up. So I was all alone when the flood came. The first day my dikes began to leak. For eighteen hours I toted adobe to mend them with. When my strength gave out the water was two feet deep over my little field. My baby came that night, much too soon. I'd have died just as it did, if my Indian with a squaw hadn't happened back to beg for food. They took me over to the California side in their flat boat, and I never went back to the ranch again, though Otto tried to make me."

There was silence for a time. Mrs. von Minden, eyes still closed, seemed to be concentrating. Suddenly Charley leaned forward to say a little huskily,

"But why are you going back to him, Mrs. von Minden?"

"I have a message for him from the Yogis."

"I know him pretty well," Charley went on, carefully, "and he's been very kind to me. But he's never mentioned you. He's quick and queer, he's been alone so much, and very quick with his gun."

"He won't touch me," answered Mrs. von Minden. "He's afraid of me, the German bully."

"Tut, madam, tut!" exclaimed Gustav. "Germans no more mistreat their vomen than other peoples."

Madam opened her eyes. "Tell that to some one who hasn't been married to one."

"There are brutes in all nations," said Ernest. "You certainly have had more than your share of trouble."

"Hah!" the gaunt face in the rocking chair was scornful, "I merely told you my ranching experience. I've mined with Otto, too, and prospected and herded sheep and cattle and run a boarding house."

"Mrs. von Minden, you can't be very comfortable in this rough camp," pleaded Charley. "Do come up to my comfortable house. I'd love to have a woman visitor."

"You're very kind, my child, but I must stay here. I've been so ordered."

"We'd better be starting back, Charley," suggested Dick. "Felicia is getting sounder asleep every minute."

And so the party ended.

The erection of the engine house went on briskly. Before even Roger's impatience could have demanded it, the sheet iron roof was on and Schmidt began to putter with the doors and windows. The completed building was not unpicturesque. The dull yellow-gray walls were topped by a roof of red corrugated iron, with deeply projecting eaves.

Roger had bought the sheet iron from Dick, who had used considerable of this material in the buildings round his turquoise mine. Ernest and Gustav toiled up to the mine one morning and at night returned with a good supply of the sheet iron. Roger made a concrete base for the engine, at one end of the building. Gustav made two doors, one for either end, by nailing the corrugated iron onto a wooden frame. A work bench and shelves erected by Ernest completed the work on the engine house except for the hanging of the doors.

The three workmen were pleased with their job and sat contemplating it in great contentment, one evening after supper.

"The engine should be here next month," said Roger.

"That is to be of your design?" asked Gustav.

Roger nodded. "The Dean of our old college is getting it made for us. He began work on it as soon as we closed the deal with Austin. If he doesn't hustle we'll be ready for it before he is. We'll begin work on the absorber, to-morrow."

"I must uphang my door to-morrow," said Gustav. "Vat place did you put the hinges?"

"Hinges! By Jove, we haven't a hinge to our names!" exclaimed Ernest. "Dick will have to help us out again."

But for once Dick failed them. "It's too bad," he told Ernest the next day, "but I've been meaning to get hinges every time I've gone to town. But I forgot. You'll have to use some stout leather, the way I do."

"Well, let me have some leather, then," begged Ernest

"Sorry, old chap, but there's not a scrap of leather an inch long around this place. You see I sole Charley's and my shoes, and I've robbed all the mines around here of belting to do it with and that doesn't mean that I've had much belting either.

Lots of other people have had the same idea I've had. But take a day off and go up to the Sun's Luck, five miles up that trail yonder and I think you'll find a few pieces."

Ernest groaned, then laughed. "Dick, poor old Roger will faint at the idea of more delay, and for hinges! We'd better let the doors go till some of us go into Archer's."

Dick shook his head. "Ern, you get those doors up, and up right. I'm betting on there not being a real sand storm for six weeks yet, but if one should come, and you have any delicate apparatus in the engine house, you'll regret not having sand proof doors and windows. And to tell the truth, Charley and Felicia are both nearly bare foot."

"So am I," said Ernest, "and Rog is too."

"What's a day in the desert?" laughed Dick. "Go on and bring down some leather for the crowd, Ern."

And go he did, although Roger protested until Ernest mentioned the matter of Charley's and Felicia's shoes. Then he gave a ready consent. Ernest returned by mid-afternoon with perhaps a yard of belting, the half of which he gave to Dick, much to that hard worked gentleman's delight.

The days passed swiftly. Ernest was less homesick after Schmidt's arrival and the intelligent German's industry and interest in the work completely won Roger's heart. When the week of his visit was up, Roger resolved that he would find a way to feed three instead of two if he had to start the camp to eating desert mice. He wrote now to the Dean, asking him to sell his laboratory equipment. Dick took the letter to town.

The absorber was not as ambitious a structure as the engine house. Nevertheless, it took twice as long to build as Roger had thought it would. The foundations consisted of a shallow trough raised from the ground on four by four supports. It covered several hundred square feet and sloped very gently to carry the flow of oil. It was covered with double layers of window sash. The task of laying this was considerable and in spite of the men's best efforts, the breakage was large enough to use up practically all the reserve glass. But the most trying task of all was that of making the great trough leak proof with asphaltum. Even after the rest of the job was done and the huge cold frame lay gleaming mightily in the desert sun, the men still puttered with leaks in the trough, which they tested by pouring water over in lieu of the oil which would ultimately form the flow.

Roger and Ernest were at work on this task one morning when Gustav returned with a barrel of water from the ranch. Before driving back with the team he came excitedly round the corner of the engine house.

"The alfalfa vas up already!" he shouted. "A little shadow of green on yellow sand. Lieber Gott! vat a country! And the kleine Felicia almost eating it like a little rabbit. And Dick talks like it vas golt. And he vas vorried. He says a sand storm vas coming to-day. Look!"

Gustav pointed down the valley to the south. A gray blue haze, not unlike a sea fog, was slowly advancing.

"Fasten up the tents. I go back mit the horses," said Gustav, disappearing as abruptly as he had arrived.

"If any one thinks a little thing like a sand storm can stop work on the plant, he's mistaken," grunted Roger. "Anyhow Dick said one wasn't due for six weeks."

Ernest looked from the approaching gray cloud to Roger's obstinate mouth, shrugged his shoulders and daubed another brush full of hot asphaltum over a crack.

Suddenly a hot blast of air took their hats off. The tent gave a boom. The window-sash resting against the engine house wall fell with a tinkling crack. Without a word the two men ran to close the tent. When they had finished, the whole world was a swirling dust cloud through which they could not perceive each other when ten feet apart.

"Make for the engine house!" roared Ernest. "I'll fetch the old lady."

He was better than his word for he brought not only the madam, but her rocking chair and a book. Certainly no one could have accused their visitor of being a trial. She took the storm with the utmost philosophy and spoke scarcely a hundred words until the storm was over.

When he had stowed Mrs. von Minden and her rocker inside Ernest slammed the door shut and turned the button. "If Gustav tries to get back through this, he'll lose his way, without fail," said Roger.

"How long do you suppose it'll last?" asked Ernest.

"The Lord knows! Have you got any tobacco with you?" Roger sat down on a box of window glass and took out his pipe. For half an hour they sat listening to the howl of the wind while Madam read.

"Evidently it doesn't intend to quit for a while," said Roger finally. "Guess I'll make up my diary and write some letters. I understand now why Dick was so insistent on this adobe. You take a look at the cook tent and I'll see if the house tent is still standing while I get some paper."

The wind increased in violence until long past noon. They retrieved some canned stuff from the kitchen tent and ate it with their mouths full of the sand that sifted through the cracks of the doors and windows. Madam satisfied herself with crackers. It was very hot, even in the adobe. About three o'clock Roger wiped the sweat out of his eyes and paused—pipe poised:

"It's letting up, Ern," he said.

Ernest paused to listen. There was a perceptible lull in the uproar, and the lull increased until at five o'clock they emerged from their shelter. The air had miraculously cleared. The sky was a deep, rich violet and the desert, lighted by the westering sun, was a beaten gold and remodeled to unfamiliar lines. Well known cat's-claw and cactus clumps had disappeared. A sand drift a foot in length covered the well curb. A drift that touched the thatch lay against the east side of the cook tent and had spilled within, half burying the tables and benches. Within the living tent, sand lay thick on trunks and cots. But the tents had withstood the day's siege, stolidly.

"Let's look at the absorber," said Roger, gloomily.

They plowed through a great billow of sand at the end of the engine house. Ernest groaned. Two of the four by fours at the end of the great trough had been undermined and had collapsed, carrying a great part of the trough with it. The exposed part of the trough was filled with an indiscriminate mixture of sand and asphaltum.

"My God! What a country!" cried Ernest.

"My God! What a pair of fools," returned Roger. "After all Dick's warnings, why didn't we build for sand storms! Lend me a hand here, Ern, with this four by four. My word! Where's Dick going? Hey, Dick! What's your hurry?"

He might as well have hailed the setting sun. Dick driving his own team, Hackett's hitched to his wagon tail, whirled by at a gallop.

Roger and Ernest stood gaping, first at the receding puff of dust on the Archer's Springs trail, then at each other.

"Something's wrong at the ranch!" exclaimed Roger finally.

Ernest nodded and they both turned to stare toward the ranch house. As they stood scowling into the blinding desert light, a little gray burro rounded the corner of the cook tent, and a moment later Crazy Dutch appeared.

"We need a traffic policeman in this desert," said Ernest solemnly. "There's too much passing at this corner."

"Get your gun, quick, Ern. It's Von Minden," cried Roger.

Ernest obeyed hurriedly. But the visitor shot his arms even more hurriedly into the air.

"Don't shoot!" he cried. "My gun's strapped on Peter. I came to make apologies. Search Peter and me."

"I certainly will," said Roger, starting to suit action to word, as Ernest came running back with his shot gun. But he was interrupted. Mrs. von Minden came slowly forth from her tent, the broom in her hand with which she had been sweeping the sand drifts from her bed and floor.

"Gott im Himmel!" roared Crazy Dutch.

"He cannot hear such as you." Madam's tone was grim, as she advanced majestically.

She was a good foot taller than her husband, but he did not flinch, even at sight of the broom.

"What are you doing here?" he took a threatening step toward her.

"I was waiting for you, Otto."

"Well, I don't want you. I finished with you a good many years ago. There are just two things in my life now and they are my work and my emperor."

"Fudge!" exclaimed Mrs. von Minden, unexpectedly. "There's just two things in your life, just as there's always been, your work and your German cussedness. Otto, I want that strong box of yours. Give it to me and I'll go back to Phœnix."

Crazy Dutch gave an ugly laugh. "I'm likely to do that! What do you want of it?"

"If you won't let me take it, let me go through it. There is something in it I want."

"And what is that?" queried her husband.

"I don't know," replied Madam, very simply.

"You don't know?" roared Crazy Dutch.

"No, Otto, I don't know. The Yogis told me to come up and they told me that when I went through the papers I would recognize some that I wanted."

Von Minden turned appealingly to Roger and Ernest. "Have you any idea what she's talking about?"

Ernest shook his head.

"Wouldn't you like to go into the engine house to talk this over?" suggested Roger. "You'd have privacy there."

"Don't leave me alone with him," exclaimed Mrs. von Minden. "He's not safe."

"All right," said Roger. "I've searched him and now I'm going through his pack, and I shall confiscate any weapon I find."

"Don't you dare to give her my strong box," shouted Crazy Dutch.

"I'll put the box back where I find it," replied Roger. "Come on, Ern, begin."

It was a pitifully mean little pack, quite poverty stricken compared with Mrs. von Minden's. A woolen quilt and a Navajo, a coffee pot, frying pan and a small sack of sugar, a canteen, a flannel shirt and a pair of ragged socks, a gun, a small strong box, with a geological hammer, a barometer and a compass, comprised Peter's load.

Roger took the gun into the living tent and Ernest remade the pack. During the search, Mrs. von Minden had not spoken, though she eyed the work with keenest interest.

"Now," said Roger, "I will tell you both frankly that I don't care to have a family row carried on in this camp."

"I'm not trying to row, certainly," exclaimed von Minden. "It's all this woman."

"The woman is your wife, isn't she?" asked Ernest.

"In name only. I tell you I finished with women, years ago."

"But I haven't finished with you yet," commented his wife.

"What can you do to me?" sneered Crazy Dutch.

"I can do what They tell me. And They tell me to hang on to you like grim death until They bid me stop. I shall follow you and that strong box to the end of the earth, Otto!"

"But why! But why! You've always been glad enough to be rid of me before."

Mrs. von Minden, her pink sunbonnet pushed back to her shoulders, her eyes gleaming, took a menacing step toward her husband, and her voice rose hysterically.

"I know you! I know you! With your sneaking ways and your secret letters. I know that you're a dirty German spy. I know what that box holds. But what I want out of it is my marriage certificate and whatever else They tell me. I can't read German and They can. I can't throw fear into your black heart but They can. And if I told you the way They have interpreted some of your acts to me, you would crawl on your hands and knees to me."

Von Minden watched the woman with a stolid face. "Who are They?" he growled.

"They are the spirits of the dead. The great ones of the Universe are talking to me now, Otto von Minden! They directed me here. The hand of Fate is in it. Listen! You have not long to live, Otto. And all that you have lived for will be dust and ashes. All the work that you have done will be cast to the four winds of Heaven, while this man," pointing to Roger, "will found your empire for you. You have planted in intrigue and you will die in shame. Otto, let me go through the strong box."

"Clarissa," exclaimed Von Minden, with for the first time a note of pity in his voice, "you've gone crazy."

His wife smiled sardonically. "I'm going to see what is in the strong box, if I follow you to China," and with this she turned on her heel and disappeared into her tent. Nor did she come out again that night.

"Now, Mr. von Minden," said Roger sternly. "I tell you quite frankly, that you're not welcome here. If Miss Preble hadn't interceded for you, I'd hand you over to the authorities."

Crazy Dutch nodded affably. "You're quite right. I deserve it. But I've had a touch of the sun and for a moment I was out of my head. In this lonely country we must bear with each other."

"The way you bear with your wife, I suppose," suggested Ernest.

Von Minden looked half apprehensively over his shoulder at his wife's tent, then he said in a confidential whisper, "Now *she* is crazy and has been for years. Only she's crazy all the time so the only thing to do is to keep away from her. She was

a very good, hard working woman, once."

"So I should judge from what she tells us," Roger's voice was grim. "It strikes us that you treated her as if she were a horse and not a woman. But that's not our business. Why did you come back here, Von Minden?"

"I came to apologize."

"Well, I accept the apology. Now you had better go on about your business and I'll get your wife back to Phœnix, some way."

Von Minden drew himself up. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Moore, I'm not in the habit of being spoken to in this manner. Apologize at once!"

Roger turned red. "Why you infernal little shrimp—" he began.

But Ernest interrupted. "Keep your temper, Rog. All this isn't worth seeing red for."

"Of course it isn't," said the little German briskly. "Now I'm planning to spend the evening with the Prebles and then I'll go on into the range. Peter, my dear, I'll give you a drink now. We were out in all this storm, gentlemen, but we don't mind them, Peter and I. There is a beauty about them, these passions of the desert. How are the Prebles?"

The two men started. "We were going up there," said Ernest. "Dick just went driving by at a gallop, without a word, toward Archer's Springs."

Von Minden scowled, started to speak, was silent, then said: "What do you think was the matter?"

"Let's go find out," urged Ernest.

The three men, Peter trailing at the rear, started hurriedly along the half obliterated trail toward the ranch.

The stillness after the day of warfare was heavenly. The violet of the sky had changed to the blue of larkspur, that now was shot with lacey streamers, rose pink from the setting sun. An oriole, balancing itself on Dick's line fence, poured forth a melody of transporting sweetness.

"O, by Jove!" exclaimed Roger suddenly, "look at Dick's alfalfa!"

The oriole fluttered away as they approached the fence. The field had not drifted badly. The draw to the north had prevented that. But the bright green shadow on the yellow sand of which Gustav had told them in the morning, was no more. A huge blight lay on the field with every tender plant blackened and dead.

"Poor old Dick!" groaned Ernest. Then he added plaintively, "But he's no tenderfoot. He knows desert storms. Why did he attempt it?"

"A storm like this, this time of year, is unheard of," said Von Minden. "Close to the mountain like this, Dick was choosing a good spot. See there are few drifts. Poor fellow!"

There were actual tears in Ernest's blue eyes as he looked at the blackened field. "Let's get to the girls," he urged.

At the corral gate they met Gustav.

"What's the trouble, Gustav?" cried Roger.

"Dick he vent to the field down to see how the alfalfa vas, then he came running like a mad man. He scolded Fräulein Charley like it vas her fault, then he ran to the corral, hitched up and vent."

"But didn't you try to stop him?" demanded Roger.

"Not Fräulein Charley. She just sat on the step and little Felicia on her lap and say nothing. But I vent to the corral to talk to Dick and he told me to go to hell. He vas a mad man, I tell you. Now I go milk."

Charley, at the sound of voices, came out to the steps. "Hello, Uncle Otto," she called. The men looked up at her. Her tanned cheeks were flushed, her fine square shoulders were tense. But her voice was gay:

"Have you and Mr. Moore had your duel?"

"It's postponed," replied Crazy Dutch.

Felicia scrambled past her sister and ran down to Roger: "Dick went away mad," she exclaimed. "He scolded Charley and me awful and made me cry. I hate to cry. It hurts my insides so."

Charley had joined them now. "Poor Dick!" she said. "That alfalfa field was dearer to him than any of you know. He'll cool down by the time he reaches Archer's and brings back more seed. Why can't you all stay to supper here?"

"It's too much trouble for you," protested Ernest, weakly.

"You can all help," said Charley. "Please all stay." Something in the eagerness of her low voice touched Roger as it did the other men.

"Of course, we're delighted to stay," he exclaimed, tossing Felicia to his shoulder. "Come along, chicken, we'll split some wood for sister."

"And me, I must wash myself," said Crazy Dutch, "and give Peter some hay."

"And me, I'll help get the supper," said Ernest.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LONELY HUNTER

As soon as Ernest and she were alone in the kitchen, Charley whispered: "How about Mrs. von Minden?"

"Oh, they had a fine row. She wants his strong box. She said at first that she didn't know what she wanted but later confessed that it was her marriage certificate plus something the Yogis were to put her wise to."

"Poor old soul!" exclaimed Charley softly. "What tragedy do you suppose is back of all this?"

"I don't know. But none of us urged the poor old girl to come up here with us. He says he's going to spend the night with you, but if Dick isn't here—"

"That's all right," said Charley. "He stays here often when Dick is gone. He and I are great friends. I shall say nothing at all about his wife, unless he does."

"That's the best cue, I think," agreed Ernest; "I'm so darned sorry about the alfalfa, Charley."

"Pioneer luck," replied the girl shaking her dark head. "I feel rather heartsick about it myself. If only Dick wouldn't go to pieces so! That's what worries me, because we may have many failures before the alfalfa catches and he is going to have such a hard time."

"I can't see why you chose such a difficult part of the world to farm in," mused Ernest.

"That's where the sport comes in," returned Charley with a smile.

Whatever discomfort Dick's surly and erratic moods may have cost her Charley gave no sign that evening of having any thought save the comfort and

entertainment of her guests. Before Felicia had been sent to bed and after the men, all smoking, had listened to Von Minden's dissertation on sand storms, Charley suggested that Peter be invited in and put through his paces.

To the surprise and delight of the others, when Crazy Dutch went to the door and whistled, there was the sound of little hoof-beats on the porch, then Peter's gray head appeared enquiringly in the doorway.

"Wipe your feet and come in, Peter," said Crazy Dutch, returning to his seat by the fire.

The little donkey rubbed one hoof after the other on the straw mat before the sill, then advanced into the room. Felicia, who was in Roger's lap, trembled with excitement and pleasure.

"Now, Peter dear, here is your pipe," pulling a corncob from his pocket; "sit down and smoke it like a gentleman."

Peter took his pipe somewhat gingerly between his teeth and then with considerable difficulty backed his haunches down onto the box that Von Minden kicked over to him. There he sat gravely holding the empty pipe, his long ears moving slowly back and forth.

"All right, sweetheart, there's a bit of sugar for you. Shake hands with the ladies and gentlemen."

Like a great gray dog, Peter went from one to another, lifting his tiny hoof to be shaken. Felicia was afraid at first but ended by shaking the little unsteadily proffered hoof and kissing the little fellow's dusty forehead with a squeal of delight.

"Now you give us each a good night kiss, liebchen," ordered Von Minden, and as he indicated each person in turn, Peter followed and touched each one on the back of the neck, with his velvet nose.

"Now say good night," was the last order and Peter lifted his voice in a bray that shook the very rafters, after which he trotted out the door.

Certainly Peter and his master had never played to a more enthusiastic audience. Felicia wanted to go out and ride him then and there and Charley had to use considerable persuasion to get the excited little girl off to bed. But after this was accomplished Roger asked:

"Where did you get Peter? Will you sell him?"

Crazy Dutch darted an ugly look at Roger.

Charley cut in quickly. "Tell us where you found him, Uncle Otto. Mr. Moore was merely showing how much he admired Peter."

"I thought he'd be so fine for Felicia," exclaimed Roger.

Von Minden grunted. Then he lighted his pipe. "I have not always been as you see me now," he said. "I was a geologist of reputation and when my health demanded a hot climate, it was natural I should come here to look for mines for a great German company. I am lucky and I have brains and I have the greatest training in the world, German training, so I find several mines and then jealousies, jealousies—jealousies—" he fell to mumbling to himself.

Charley prompted him. "So you decided to strike out for yourself, about five years ago."

"Yes, I do so. By then, you see, I had gotten to understand the desert loneliness. I loved it and I sold myself to the desert, body and soul. All I asked was to wander about on her magnificent barren bosom. It seemed to me I was entirely happy. But one day I found a little young burro stuck in a crevice in a blind canyon. Evidently he had been abandoned by an Indian. Me, I climb down in the crevice and I tie his heels so he can't kick and with my geologist's pick and hammer I work so carefully all day till I get him out. Why such toil? Because I find when I look into Peter's deep eyes that I am lonely—lonely beyond the power of thought or word to describe. And Peter, from that day to this, has never left me, day or night."

"You are in excellent health again, Mr. von Minden," said Ernest. "Don't you plan ever to return to the Vaterland?"

"Yes! Yes!" cried Crazy Dutch, "but only when I can return with an empire in my hand for my Kaiser."

"Hoch!" said Gustav softly, "Hoch!"

"Hoch!" Roger and Ernest took up the exclamation with a laugh and a wave of their pipes, and Charley joined them, smiling. Von Minden looked deeply pleased.

"Yes! Yes!" he cried. "You all are good children, properly educated, ready to understand Germany as the citizens of no other country. You all speak German? Yes! And you all know German literature and music to be the best. Yes, ah, these great universities and high schools, they are doing their work wonderfully."

"If I fall down all together in getting my plant funded in this country, I'm going to Germany with it," said Roger abruptly.

"No, you aren't!" cried Charley, quickly; "I love Germany too, but America comes first."

Ernest rose with a sigh. "That may be, but with me, bed comes first."

"You will not be cross the next time we meet, eh?" asked Crazy Dutch as the men made their adieux.

"I'll try not to be!" replied Roger, not too enthusiastically.

When they had crawled into their cots, an hour later, Roger said: "Ern, do you realize that we haven't a drop of crude oil for the absorber flow?"

"Sure, I do," replied Ernest. "I've been wondering for days what we would do about it, but until I had a suggestion, I didn't want to bring the matter up."

"How much money do you think the Dean can get for the laboratory equipment?" asked Roger.

"Well, I hope at least two hundred dollars. But you know how those things go."

"We'll have to save every cent of that for grub," mused Roger. "Dick told me that over on Snake Peak there is a mine that closed down four years ago and that their engine was an oil burner. He says there hasn't been a watchman there for a year. There's a chance that they have left some oil."

"How'll you pay for it?" asked Ernest.

"Pay for it!" grunted Roger. "Wait till I find it, will you? You and Gustav clean up after the storm to-morrow and go on with the absorber. I'll take a tramp up to Snake Peak."

He was on his way before sun-up, the next morning, a canteen of water over his shoulder and a lunch in his pocket. He moved as rapidly as the heavy walking permitted, driven by a sense of impatience to which he gave no name. But subconsciously he realized that forever behind that beauty of the desert to which, like Von Minden, he felt he might gladly sell himself, loomed the menace of the desert's brutality which he was not equipped to fight and which he could overcome only by the extraordinary precision and swiftness of his work.

The sun was not half an hour high when Roger reached the top of the mountain behind the ranch. Here he gazed eastward across the low ranges to a peak which dominated all the crests around it, a jagged, black and brown monster, its top

crimson now in the morning glow.

Roger stood breathing deeply, hat in hand, the sun turning his bronze hair red, his thin strong body erect against the morning sky. He could see no trail, so he determined to reach Snake Peak by a direct cross line. The peak would be lost to view when he reached the valley below so he sighted a lonely cedar on the crest of the opposite range and began to climb downward. It was stiff going. The prickly pear cactus and the ollas grew thick and the ground was covered with broken rock that made short work of his already well-worn shoes.

When Roger reached the lonely cedar the sun was two hours high. He had thought to make it in twenty minutes. He dropped, trembling with weariness in the shadow of a little tree, drank deeply of the canteen and gave himself ten minutes of rest, lying flat on his back, his eyes on the magnificent expanse of the heavens.

The ten minutes up, he crossed the narrow ridge and after a moment found a landmark on the opposite crest, a single black rock against a lavender outcropping. Again he plunged into the narrow valley below him falling, sliding and swearing, then scrambling and clambering with knee and elbow and broken nail, until after another hour's interval, he cast himself down on the lavender outcropping.

Snake Peak was now just across the canyon and he could see clearly the gray white of the tailing dump that marked the mine. It was well after eleven when in a fury of impatience he reached his final goal.

The loneliness of the untouched wilderness is not so great as that of the deserted habitation. Roger had not felt the desert's solitude until he dropped on a bench outside the cook house and began to examine the lost endeavor about him. There were bunk houses and office buildings, shaft and engine houses, aerial tramways and car tracks, all the many and costly appurtenances of desert mining. Sand lay thick over everything. The silence was complete save for the flopping of the torn canvas that had been fastened over a hoist.

A sense of profound depression settled upon Roger. He dropped his head in his hands with a groan. A dream, vastly better financed than his own, had come to naught in the face of the distances and the difficulties of the desert. Was there any greater hell, he wondered than to be hounded by a creative desire for which there was no outlet; to have stored within one's brain gifts indispensable to humanity's best development, of which humanity would take heed only after the creator had been crucified by desperate handicaps and indifference.

As Roger brooded, his eyes fell on the engine house and a carefully locked shed beside it. His face brightened. He got stiffly to his feet and plodded up to the window of the engine house, raised it and clambered within. A great engine shrouded with greasy canvas lay in the dusky room. It was a gas-producer type, in excellent condition. Roger went over it as tenderly and eagerly as a horseman goes over a thoroughbred racer. Then he went through the open door into the shed adjoining. It was full of oil drums, some of them empty but with a sufficient number filled to more than satisfy Roger's needs.

He suddenly began to whistle cheerfully, went over the engine again and was still whistling when he climbed out of the window and sat down on the bench to eat his lunch. When he had finished eating he lighted his pipe and sat smoking at ease. Life was not so bad, by Jove! One could make the desert his if one had resourcefulness and courage. As soon as Dick's horses were rested after their return from Archer's Springs, they must start hauling oil. Of course, though, that beastly re-seeding would have to be done first. Roger's shoulders twitched impatiently and he started abruptly homeward.

The sun had set, when weary beyond words, he reached the Sun Plant.

"Well! Did you run across the Von Mindens?" was Ernest's greeting.

"No! What's happened?"

"We don't know. The old lady was so long coming out of her tent that toward noon I investigated, to find that she was no longer with us. I went up to Prebles' and Charley reported that two of the madam's burros were missing this morning as well as the pack ropes. We think that she hit out in the night and is trailing the old boy up in the ranges. He started off early, serene in the thought that she was down here. Charley didn't mention the burros to him."

"Well, thank heaven for small favors!" exclaimed Roger. "She certainly got on my nerves."

"Did you find oil?" asked Gustav.

"Yes, I unearthed a fine cache of it. I wish you folks could see the outfit up there on Snake Peak," and he told them what he had found.

"But you aren't going to annex that oil until you hear from the owners?" exclaimed Ernest.

"You write to the owners, when we get it here, enclosing a check for the oil at market rates. I may have trouble, but I doubt it."

They were sitting as usual before their tent smoking their good night pipes.

"You will get into trouble, Rog," warned Ernest. "Impatience is all right and good driving power, but what's the use of laying yourself open to difficulties?"

"Don't be an old maid, Ern, with your piffling German conscientiousness. I haven't the slightest notion of stealing. I'll pay for every drop of the oil—"

"How vas the road?" asked Gustav.

"No road at all," replied Roger. "I just plunged through across country."

"Then, the horses, where—"

"Lord, that's right!" interrupted Roger. "I noticed that there was a good enough road leading out of the mine to the south—toward Archer's Springs. But it's clear on the other side of the range and parallel to this trail, of course. No good to us at all. Don't tell me we've got to build a road to get that oil out. My lord, what a country!"

"Vell," said Gustav, "if it is too hard to get it out, then you don't steal it, then you don't break the law, then you don't get arrested, so that is good."

"Don't you think I won't get it out, if I have to pack it out in a canteen," said Roger. "High treason, arson, murder are nothing to stand between me and that cache of oil."

"You'd better swipe two teams of horses, Rog, on one of your predatory expeditions," exclaimed Ernest. "Dick may need his own horses occasionally this spring."

Roger rose and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "I'd like to swipe that gas producer engine up there," he replied and went to bed.

CHAPTER IX

GUSTAV

It was late the next afternoon when Dick drove slowly along the trail. The three men were flat on their backs under the absorber, patching leaks, when they heard the squeak of the wagon and the soft tread of horses' hoofs in the sand. They made no attempt to greet him.

The next morning, however, Roger plodded up to the ranch house to consult with Dick about the moving of the oil. Although it was close to eight o'clock, Dick was just finishing breakfast. He was cheerful and talkative.

"Don't try to use horses," he urged. "There's old Rabbit Tail lives ten miles over the range. He's got a bunch of little wild burros and he does packing for the miners when there is any. He'll pack that oil for you."

Roger brightened up, then shook his head. "I can't pay him. The Smithsonian folks aren't coming up to the scratch and I've got to finish this job without funds. I've about twenty-five dollars in hand and two hundred more in sight. I thought perhaps I could exchange work with you. Help you to re-seed and then to increase your irrigating capacity here."

"Gosh, that's hard luck!" exclaimed Dick. "Did you hear that, Charley, about Roger's money?"

Charley, who had been busy in the kitchen, came in now with a fresh cup of coffee for Roger in one hand and an extra chair in the other. Had Roger's mind been less concentrated on the problem in hand he might have noted the fine ease with which she swung the chair up to the table for him before either he or Dick could proffer help. Charley was so slender that one did not easily recognize the splendid strength she sometimes displayed.

"Yes, I heard," said Charley with a look of sympathy at the restless fire in Roger's deep gray eyes. "I guess we're all up against it and will have to cultivate patience. Perhaps Rabbit Tail will trust you, Roger."

"I call him Roger dear, and he likes it. Why don't you too, Charley?" interrupted Felicia, coming in from the porch where she had been building an adobe doll house.

The abstracted look left Roger's face for a moment. "Yes, why don't you, Charley?" he asked with a grin that made his face look bright.

Charley laughed. "If it will make you look human, like that," she exclaimed, "I will call you anything you wish, Roger dear!"

Roger's grin faded to an expression that was curiously tense. Dick, who had been giving only half attention to this exchange, now said: "Rabbit Tail won't trust you. He's had too many dealings with the whites, poor devil. We'll have to break a trail to the mine and use our team. Just let me get that alfalfa in again, Roger, and I'll help you out."

"I can pay you up in days' work as far as the use of your time and team go," said Roger. "What I'll always be in your debt for is the advice and backing you give me."

Dick grunted. "I'm glad my four years' hell down here is of value to some one. I'll let you know when I've finished re-seeding."

"I want to help on that," insisted Roger. "Our international debt is getting too one-sided."

"Well, I'll be mighty grateful to you," sighed Dick. "I'll take your help on the re-seeding, but I'll be still more appreciative if you'll take a look at my gasoline engine to-morrow morning. I've spun that fly wheel until my hope of salvation's gone. And I've got to wet that field down."

"I'll get at it now," said Roger.

With Felicia trailing at his heels, Roger made his way to the shed beside the spring. The engine and pump were both old. Roger tinkered for a half hour, Felicia standing by to hand him the wrench or the oil can on demand.

"Do you love me, Roger?" the child asked, as Roger tugged at a rusty oil cup screw.

"I certainly do. Do you love me?"

"Yes. Do you love Charley?"

"Well, I'm fond of Charley. I've known her a long time, you know."

"But you aren't fonder of her than you are of me?" insisted Felicia.

"Certainly not! You're my best sweetheart. Now the oil can, Felicia."

The little girl stared at Roger, with speculative eyes. "Charley says you're very interesting. What is an interesting man, Roger?"

"One who knows how to start a gas engine, chicken," exclaimed Charley, coming into the shed. "Mercy, Felicia, are you always as personal as this?"

"Felicia is nothing if not feminine." Roger tugged at the fly wheel and grinned at Charley who made a little grimace.

"Roger likes it!" exclaimed Felicia. "He belongs to me, Charley. He likes me bettern you, he says so."

"Well, it is like this, Charley—" began Roger elaborately.

Charley cut him off with a wave of her hand. "Nothing can explain away that blow, Roger." Then she went on, soberly. "Do you suppose the old lemon will pull us through our first crop?"

"I don't know, Charley. One never does about a gasoline engine. There's always more life in an old one though than one realizes. If this does fail you, however, I'll be in running shape in two months' time with my solar engine. Don't forget that."

"When do you expect to make your first actual test?" asked Charley.

"Well, the engine will be here almost any time now. If the Dean has done a good construction job, I ought to be able to make a tentative connection in six weeks' time."

"How do you mean a good job?" asked Charley.

"Well, this is the first full size fifty horse power engine that we've built. You see, I've had no money and we've worked from models, though I did build one ten horse power engine. That worries me a little, but I'm sure that any defects that appear will be easily remedied. Now then, this old mule ought to begin to kick!"

Roger turned the fly wheel again and an obstinate Put! Put! Put! came from the engine, then a long pause, during which the audience of three waited anxiously, then a steady Put! Put! Put! Put! Put! that promised to last as long as did the

gasoline.

"If the old thing could just realize all that depends on its behaving itself!" exclaimed Charley. "Roger, let's throw in the pump, I really believe it's going to run!"

And run it did, during the entire day, with only three stops for repair. Roger worked until late afternoon with Dick and the next day Gustav took his place. The damage done by the dust storm to the absorber was now completely remedied and Roger and Ernest began work on a shallow concrete trough on which the condenser was to be erected. By the time this was completed, Dick's second sowing was finished and he announced himself ready for road building.

At first, Roger felt violently resentful at the thought of having to build a road. It seemed to him that after all his years of patient persistency, fate at the last was playing him a scurvy trick. She had brought his goal within sight, only to beset it with delays and difficulties whose very paltriness it seemed to him he could not endure. And a feverish little flame of impatience began to glow within him that was not to be extinguished for many months. However when, pick in hand, he actually began with the others to break the road, a sudden elation swept over him. After all, primitive as this work might be, it was empire building of the most fundamental sort. And, in spite of his anxieties and impatience, Roger did his share of the road building with right good will.

They began work in the range back of the ranch, taking advantage of draw and canyon whenever possible, even when this demanded a long detour. Sometimes, the canyon bottoms were astonishingly level. At other times boulders and crevices would block them until they had made free use of dynamite. They had all sorts of minor mishaps. Dick was not an expert either in road grading or blasting, although he was far ahead of the Sun Planters in his information about both.

In running the road up the side of Snake Peak he used too heavy a charge and brought down a land slide which it took them a day to clear. On a previous day he had blasted too close to the wagon and a bowlder had smashed the rear axle. He took extraordinarily narrow chances with the steepness of grade but in spite of the Sun Planters' prophecies they did not lose either horses or wagon down canyon or mountain side. Ernest, however, slipped on top of one of the finished sections and rolled two hundred feet before he could stop himself.

When, after two weeks' steady labor, Dick pronounced the road good enough, the others looked at him aghast. "You'll break your wagon and your horses'

necks, to say nothing of losing the oil!" protested Ernest.

Dick only laughed. "This is a boulevard compared with some of the desert routes I've taken. With just a few drums of oil lashed on at a time, we'll make it."

And make it he did, though nearly another week was consumed in the doing, and four drums of the oil were lost in different draws and canyons. After the road was finished, the transporting of the oil was turned over to Ernest and Dick while Roger and Gustav began the erecting of the condenser. Ernest was now quite reconciled to the use of the oil for Hackett had received a telegram from the owner in San Francisco that the deal was more than satisfactory to him.

Roger and Gustav worked well together. The self-controlled German, evidently accustomed to hard grind and overwork in an office job, was not in the least ruffled by Roger's impatient ways. And he distinctly enjoyed the vim and imagination that were characteristic of Roger's work even when it involved the seemingly simple task of cutting and threading condenser pipe. For cutting and threading condenser pipe so that it shall be leak proof is not a simple job at all.

April came to the desert with a noon temperature of a hundred degrees in the shade. Imperceptibly the daily breeze stiffened to a noon gale. There were no sand storms however for six weeks and the second alfalfa crop caught toe hold and grew, an amazing patch of green on the thirsty yellow sand.

The ranch house engine misbehaved, regularly, but Roger developed what Charley called actual genius for tinkering and somehow the five acres were watered. When the morning stillness was broken by the first uneven Put! Put! of the engine, the Sun Planters would pause in their work and listen intently. If, after due patience, the Put! Put! developed into a steady throb, they resumed work. But if after a spasm or two, silence reigned again, Roger would pull his hat over his eyes and start for the ranch, and eventually that day, water would be given the parching fields. In the meantime, Dick began to prepare a second five-acre patch for late sowing.

Early in the month Roger received a check from the Dean for one hundred and sixty dollars. He resolved to put all but a few dollars of this into a supply of food and with Charley's help, he made a list that Gustav filled at Hackett's. There was provision for over three months in this list and Roger felt sure that this period of time would see the completion of the plant.

A curt letter had come to Roger from the Smithsonian Institution saying merely that his case was being investigated and that in due time a report and decision would reach him. With this, Roger was obliged to be content. He had little faith,

however, that the Institution would go on with Austin's undertaking and he resolved to push ahead with all speed, taking advantage of what was left of the golden opportunity Austin had offered him.

Late in April, the engine reached Archer's Springs. Hackett, who was properly equipped for heavy freighting, as poor willing Dick was not, undertook to haul the engine to the camp. He was entirely willing, he told Roger, to wait for his pay.

"No great loss," he said, "if I don't get it. But I got confidence in you and though your idea do seem awful nutty, if anything comes of it, I ain't going to have it said I done something to set back our community here. We got a great state and a great county and I'm here to promote 'em both."

So the dismantled engine was landed, without too great difficulty, in the waiting engine house and as soon as the condenser was finished, the three men began to set up this child of Roger's heart and brain. But after the heavy work was done Roger would let no one attempt adjusting the parts but himself. He set Ernest and Gustav to digging the oil pit for the storing of the sun-heated oil and spent his days and part of his nights in the engine house.

As the weeks slipped into May, many were the surmises as to what had become of the Von Mindens. The madam's tent stood just as she had left it and the burros she had left behind ranged about the desert, near the Preble corral, coming home each night for the good feed Dick gave them.

Almost every day Felicia came to the plant. Her love for Roger and Roger's for her was an accepted thing now between the two households. Only Charley could draw the child away from the abstracted, hard-driven young engineer and Dick showed his innate generosity in that though he adored the little girl he did not harbor a grudge because Felicia so frankly declared her preference for Roger.

After the condenser was finished Felicia took a deep interest in helping Roger to find leaks in the system. Roger taught her to squirt oil from an oil can over the different points and to interpret bubbles rising from the resulting oil flow as leaks. It was the quaintest sight in the world to see the slender little figure in blue overalls, brown head running over with short curls, crawling like a little lizard over the greasy pipes while Roger followed with pipe wrench, cold chisel and peen hammer. After Roger began work on the engine, Felicia became a sort of plumber's assistant and a clever one, at that.

Sometimes Charley came late in the afternoon to take Felicia home. She would perch on the edge of the work bench and talk to Roger about the work in a voice

and with an unself-conscious manner so like her small sister's that Roger, his restless mind on the problems of his work, often confused the two girls in his thoughts and answered or directed them indiscriminately. And Charley would chuckle as she watched him.

The day in May that the men began a test for oil leaks in the absorber dawned with a promise of ferocious heat. Felicia appeared as usual but admitted that she had come over Charley's protest.

"We'll have to leave off work at eleven, and not begin again until three as Dick suggested, if this heat keeps up," observed Ernest.

"Then we'll begin work at dawn," said Roger, with a sigh. "Every minute counts, old man."

About nine o'clock Charley came panting down the trail.

"Felicia must come home at once," she cried. "There's a big sand storm coming. Dick is getting the stock under cover as fast as he can."

The men dropped their tools hurriedly and looked up the valley. A great gray cloud was approaching so rapidly that as they gazed they caught the sound of its increasing roar. The sky, which had been sapphire of an unusual translucence that morning, turned all in a moment to a sullen red gray. There was a dry rattle of lizards and horned toads scuttling into the roots of grease wood and cactus.

"You mustn't try to go home, Charley," exclaimed Roger.

"But I must! Dick and his alfalfa! He *can't* be alone!"

But Dick was destined to spend the day in solitude. With a very Niagara of sound the sand storm struck the camp. Charley and Felicia ran for the living tent where the men shortly joined them. They closed the flaps and settled to a day of discomfort. The engine house would have been more comfortable than the tent but it was too cumbered with machinery now to be used as a sitting room. There was no work that could be done indoors. The heat was stifling, a hundred and six the thermometer over the washstand trunk reported. The tent rocked and bellied, bellied and flapped with reverberations like drum-beats. Felicia was frightened at first and hid her head in Charley's lap. Charley herself was white-lipped, less, Ernest thought, from fear of the storm than from that vague apprehension about Dick that never seemed to leave her.

For a time Roger sat scowling with impatience, then Felicia's fear moved him and calling the child to him he began to tell her of the old swimming pool. The

others listened and laughed and when Felicia begged for more, Gustav told a charming tale of his own Bavarian childhood. And he and Ernest sang together some tender folk songs which Felicia insisted on learning. While Gustav and Ernest undertook this pleasant task Charley and Roger talked.

At Charley's request, Roger brought out his blue prints and explained the plant to her. He felt his impatience lifting as he talked. Explaining his work always seemed to increase his critical vision. New ideas came flooding, and he pulled out his note book, feeling that after all the day was not entirely wasted.

So, in spite of the bitter taste of alkali in their mouths and its sting in their eyes, in spite of the breathless burning heat, the morning passed cheerfully. They even managed to satisfy their hunger with canned beef and canned brown bread. They had washed down the last of the unsavory lunch with the tepid, nauseously alkaline water from the olla when a gust of wind of tremendous proportions tore open the door flap and filled the room with a blinding swirl of sand. At the same moment there was a fearful crash from without, followed by the sound of breaking glass. Leaving Charley to refasten the door flap, the three men bolted toward the absorber.

The sand cloud was so dense that they could distinguish little until in actual contact with the edge of the trough. Then the trouble was obvious. A part of the sheet iron roof had blown off the engine house, and lay in a great twisted heap on the absorber. Roger immediately crawled under the trough. The heavy metal had pierced the floor of the absorber and oil was pouring out in a thin but steady stream. He pawed his way out hurriedly.

"Go shut the oil off, Ernest," he shouted, "and get pails to catch that oil. Why the devil did some one leave the valve open? Gustav, give me a hand with this mess. Why didn't we have sense enough to fasten it securely? If we don't move it, it may blow the length of the trough."

Roger plunged hastily up among the panes of broken glass, Gustav following. After a moment of effort the guilty mass of sheet iron was shoved over onto the sand. Just at the last a particularly vicious blast of wind twisted it violently against Gustav's bare arm.

"Du lieber Gott!" he roared. "Be careful yet!"

"Now let's cover the engine," shouted Roger, giving no heed to Gustav's cry.

"Hell mit the engine! Look!" Gustav thrust his left hand in Roger's face. The sleeve was dripping blood. Roger seized Gustav's arm tightly above the elbow.

"Come over to the tent, Gustav," he said.

Stumbling blindly through the sand drifts the two men reached the tent, where just as they crept inside the flap, Gustav fainted. Charley ran forward and before Roger could protest had helped lift Gustav to his cot.

"I don't think it's so bad. He never can stand the sight of blood," said Roger.

They stripped back the sleeve as Roger spoke. A gash several inches long in Gustav's upper arm had laid bare the bone. Felicia began to cry.

"I've got a first aid kit, somewhere," said Roger, running to dig wildly through the trunks, emerging in a moment with a black box, from which he produced a tourniquet. They applied this quickly.

"Now, is there some alcohol here?" asked Charley. "We will wash it off with that until we can boil some water. Felicia, you go put all the things back nicely in the boys' trunks, and don't pay any attention to us."

Felicia was quickly absorbed in this altogether fascinating task, while Charley's skillful fingers made a temporary bandage for Gustav's arm. He was conscious now and offered a sick protest against Charley's suggestion:

"Let's cut this shirt off him, Roger. It's saturated with blood. I'll sew it up for him later."

Gustav sat up and before he could do more, Roger and Charley had removed his shirt. To their surprise they found he was wearing two, the second shirt having a particularly huge pocket, full of papers that were blood saturated.

"Don't touch that, don't!" cried Gustav. Then catching sight of the blood stains, he fainted again.

"Who'd think old Gustav was such a perfect lady," chuckled Roger. "Here, let's get him cleaned up now before he comes to, again."

They pulled off the second shirt, and put on one of Roger's fresh ones. Then while Charley gave Gustav some water, Roger took the papers from the bloody pockets of the second shirt.

"I'll wipe these off before the blood sets," he said. Then his eye caught a memorandum in German "Low pressure engine—new detail. Moore." Roger quickly opened the paper. It was about six inches square and was a copy of a detail of one of Roger's patent drawings.

"I'll be damned!" muttered Roger, his face flushing darkly.

He ran through other sheets. There were more drawings and some carefully written notes on Roger's general scheme for heat utilization. He was reading these very deliberately when Ernest came in.

"Whew, what a country!" began Ernest, then he stopped with a gasp.

Gustav, who was sitting up again, groaned weakly.

"I vas a chicken-fool, eh, Miss Charley?"

Roger crossed to the bed with a stride. "Look here, Schmidt," he said, "the sooner you get your things together and get out of here, the better I'll like it."

Gustav stood up. His jaw dropped. Then his eye fell on the papers in Roger's hand.

"I told you not to take off the shirt from me!" he cried.

"What's the matter, Rog?" asked Ernest.

"Matter? Matter? Why, this fellow is a thief. He's been stealing my ideas. Go on now! Get out of here!"

Ernest took the blood-stained papers and glanced at them hurriedly.

"Hold on! Be cool, Roger! Give Gustav a chance to explain."

"Explain! Explain what? Just how he stole these? Tear those papers up, Ernest, and take this Dutchman out of my sight. Get him out, I tell you."

Ernest hesitated. In all the years he had known Roger he never had seen him in a passion like this. Felicia flew over to Charley who stood with wide troubled eyes on Roger's distorted face. The child was white and trembling.

"Ernest!" thundered Roger.

With a glance at Gustav, Ernest began to tear up the papers.

"Roger! Please! Bitte! I can explain," began Gustav.

"Don't speak to me. I've heard vague stories of how German manufacturers get their ideas. This, I know: in the morning, you'll start for Archer's Springs, you skunk!"

"Oh, Rog!" protested Ernest.

"How dare you protest, Ernest?" Roger turned on his friend furiously. "You know what that engine means to me. You know the difficulty of patent protection and now this dirty hound—"

"Here! That I von't take from any man," cried Gustav. "You vas acting like a fool, Roger."

Roger lunged forward with his right fist swinging. But before Ernest could interfere, Charley had caught the clenched fist with both her hands, and was clinging to it with all her fine strength.

"Oh, Roger!" she cried. "Oh, Roger! Roger!"

Roger dropped his arm and stared at her for a moment. Her eyes, so like Felicia's, so unlike them, returned his furious gaze, unflinching. Suddenly, he grew pale and without a word, turned on his heel and left the tent.

He made his way to the engine house. Ernest had covered the engine with a tent fly, but Roger did not even glance at the idol of his heart. He made his way back where the roof still offered some protection from the storm and sat down on an empty box. An hour, then another slipped by, the sand sifting heavily on Roger as he crouched motionless, his head in his hands.

At the end of the first hour, the storm had lessened perceptibly and by the time the second had passed, the westering sun was flashing through the dusty windows. Voices outside did not rouse Roger, but when Charley slipped in through the sagging door, he looked up. The girl returned his look soberly and sat down on a pile of adobe brick near him.

Roger looked at her curiously. No one, excepting his mother, had ever before checked one of his flights of fury, midway. Sometimes, as in the episode with young Hallock, he had been able to check himself, but this was not frequent.

"Why did you do that? Why did you interfere?" he asked abruptly.

"I couldn't stand by and see you make a mess of your life," replied Charley, "just as things seemed to be going well."

"Going well!" repeated Roger sardonically. "Why, I've been sitting here for hours, bringing myself to the realization of the fact that my life is a hopeless mess. I can't trust any one. I can't get help. I can't do it all alone. I'm going to quit this game and get a job."

"Roger," said Charley slowly, "do you want to know what's the matter with you, aside from your temper? You're completely work- and self-centered. You don't take human beings into your calculations at all. And you won't be a real success until you get to studying and liking people as well as you do machinery. If you'd given about a tenth of the thought to Gustav that you have, say, to stopping the

leaks in the condenser, and then if you'd used the same patience with him to-day that you would to a big leak in the pipes, you'd be farther ahead on your job and a good deal bigger man. Roger, the more I see of you the more I'm convinced that your failure is a good deal less the result of other people's indifference than it is of your own temperamental peculiarities and weaknesses."

Roger's face flushed again. "What business have you got talking this way to me?" he blurted out, angrily.

"Every business in the world," returned Charley serenely. "I like you, and your work is very important. Anything I can do to help get it across, I'm going to do, regardless of your feelings. I have an idea that no one has really helped you since your mother died—that is, with your temper."

The anger died out of Roger's eyes. Once again he seemed to feel that faint and heavenly touch upon his forehead. It did not seem to him possible that what this girl said of him was true. And yet there was in the depths of her steady brown eyes a sort of ageless wisdom that made him feel awkward and immature. An ageless wisdom, with the sweetness and purity of the child Felicia's gaze. Lovely drooping lips that were Felicia's, and yet were, because of their sad patience, not Felicia's, but belonged to a woman who reminded him of his mother.

Roger continued to stare at Charley as if he never had seen her before. After a moment he said in a half-whisper, "By Jove, I believe you *are* a friend to me—with nerve enough to tell me the truth as you see it, which Ernest never had. And he's been my only friend. Perhaps you're right, perhaps part of the fault has been with myself. O Lord, Charley! I do need some one to tell me the truth, I certainly do."

Charley put out her hand to lay it on Roger's shoulder.

"Poor child!" she said, softly.

In a moment, Roger was a little boy again, back at his mother's side. "O God!" he whispered, and throwing himself forward on his knees, buried his head in Charley's lap. She laid her hand on his head with the touch that had been his mother's. "Poor lonely child," she said again. And for the first time in nearly ten years, Roger burst into tears.

Charley, smoothing his heavy black hair, said nothing more until Roger sheepishly raised his head and pulled out a very dirty handkerchief.

Then she said in a very matter-of-fact voice, "By the way, as soon as the storm let up a little, I had Ernest take Gustav up to the ranch. I can take care of him up

there and I didn't want Dick to be alone any longer."

"Where's Felicia?" asked Roger.

"She's asleep in the tent, I must wake her up and take her home now. The storm is over."

"Leave her with me a little while," said Roger. "I'll bring her home."

"All right, come up for supper. Ernest and Dick will help me get it."

Roger nodded and Charley started along the drifted trail to the ranch while Roger went to the tent. Felicia slept on while he shaved and put the tent in order. Then he stooped over the cot and raised her.

"Suppertime, little sweetheart," he said.

Felicia woke with a start. "Don't be cross, Roger," she exclaimed after blinking at him for an instant.

"I couldn't be cross with you, Felicia," Roger lifted her in his arms and held her against his heart.

"Never, Roger?"

"Never, Felicia. You must never be afraid of me, even when I scold other people. Because I love you very much, Felicia."

The child threw her arms around Roger's neck and they both looked off to the ranch house, where the windows glowed red in the sunset. There was something infinitely soothing to Roger in Felicia's embrace and he held her until she wriggled impatiently and announced that she was hungry.

"We'll head for supper," he said, and putting her down he took her hand and they started through the sand for the ranch and Charley. Gustav was waiting for them at the edge of the corral.

"Felicia, you run on up to the house and tell Charley I'll be there in a minute," said Roger.

CHAPTER X

DEATH IN THE DESERT

"Don't scold Gustav," cried Felicia.

"I won't," replied Roger, grimly, and the child sped up the path to the porch.

"Roger! I did not mean nodings to hurt you! Vy, you ver like my own son. I vas having a plan to help you. Please, Roger, listen—Bitte sehr!"

Roger was a little pale and his lips were stiff but he had himself well in hand.

"Look here, Gustav, you know you sneaked on me, don't you?"

"Yes, but it vas to help you. I vas an inventor, Roger. I haf many ideas."

"Oh! That was it, was it?" He looked at Gustav's sweaty face, usually so placid, now distorted with pain and anxiety. "Well, all right, old man! I guess I was a bit hasty. But I want you to give me your word of honor to take no more notes and under no circumstances to give any one any information about my work."

Gustav's face cleared as if by magic. He shook Roger's proffered hand heartily. "I promise. Absolute, I promise. Thank you; thank you much, Roger."

"Right-o—come on now, let's go to supper," and the two swung up the trail, and into the adobe, where, after a glance at their faces, their waiting friends greeted them hilariously.

"The alfalfa has come through, Roger," shouted Dick. "I guess the worst is over for me, all right. I'll take an order right now for five tons of alfalfa from you, Charley."

"Better let Felicia order," replied Charley. "I understand that Mr. von Minden is going to find a burro for her, the exact twin of Peter."

"And he's going to learn to do everything Peter does," added Felicia, "and Ernest says I must name him Re-peater. Please let's have supper."

Gustav made a poor fist at eating. His arm gave him a great deal of pain and it was finally decided that Ernest should take the patient team and that night drive Gustav to the doctor. They made the start immediately after supper and did not return until the third day following. Gustav was one-armed for some time but managed to make himself indispensable, nevertheless.

As summer advanced, a new working schedule that precluded labor in the middle of the day was inaugurated. The more intense the heat grew, the more intense, it seemed to Roger, grew the weird beauty of the desert. The midnight stars seemed hardly to have blossomed before dawn turned the desert world to a delicate transparent yellow, deepening at the zenith to blue and on the desert floor to orange. As the sun rose, the yellow changed suddenly to scarlet and for a few moments earth and sky quivered in a lambent red fire. When the sun had shot clear of the mountains, details of landscape and contrasts of color were accented. Clear black of peaks, crimson of canyons, purple of rifts in the ranges, bright moss green of cactus dots on the yellow desert floor. And always to the west that far melting loveliness of blue and gold and black that was the River Range. And always the quivering, parching air that burned against the body like a furnace blast.

Ernest felt the heat more than Roger did and lost weight. But though he complained a great deal he stuck to his work manfully.

After Ernest and Gustav had returned from Archer's Springs and the ravages caused by the desert storm had been repaired, Roger started on a hunt into the ranges for more window glass. He dared spend his money for nothing but food.

He outfitted for a three day trip, carrying a blanket, the two-gallon canteen, beans, canned pears and a batch of baking powder biscuits. Dick gave him minute directions as to the location of different mines and of springs, and Roger started off confidently.

There was very little glass left in the Goodloe mines where Roger had located the oil. But Dick knew of mines some ten miles north along the backbone of the ranges and these Roger had as an objective when he left the camp in the yellow dawn.

He reached the Goodloe district by mid-morning. There was no trail to the north but he jogged along all the afternoon by compass and sun, keeping to the top of the ridge whenever possible. During all this time he saw no sign of human

habitation. Indeed the only living beings he beheld that day were two buzzards circling meditatively over a distant peak and a lonely coyote skulking against the sky on a neighboring ridge. By six o'clock he was tired beyond expression and he had lost all idea of the number of miles he had covered, so tortuous had been the seemingly direct line of the ridge.

Roger was in no wise discomfitted or discouraged, however. He made his camp in a little sandy draw on the side of the ridge which was full of stunted cedars. He cut up one cedar for his fire and drew on the others for sufficient twigs to cushion his blanket bed, then in spite of the heat he slept the sleep that belongs to the open.

He was on his way at daylight, whistling cheerfully into the vast distances that unrolled about him. Mid-morning came, and then noon. Half the time allotted for the trip had gone, and still there was no sign of deserted mines.

Roger smoked a long pipe after his lunch, chewing impatiently on his pipestem and swearing under his breath from time to time. He was tempted violently to keep on to the north, but remembering Dick's repeated warnings as to the danger of running out of water he finally won his own consent to turning back. He determined, however, to make the return trip on the neighboring range, to the east.

He hoisted his pack and started heavily down into the valley that separated him from the next range. It was a good two miles of tooth and nail climbing and the canyon was filled with afternoon shadows when Roger reached the foot-wall of the east range. The heat was almost intolerable.

As he paused here, far above his head a donkey brayed. Roger started quickly upward and for an hour was led by the brayings that grew louder as he neared the top. As he crawled around the last brown rock heap that crowned the ridge, he almost stepped on a man beside whom stood a little gray burro.

"Peter!" said Roger. Then, "I say, Von Minden!"

He stooped over the quiet form at his feet. The little German was lying on his face, his iron-gray head resting on his arm. His blue overalls and faded red sweater were covered with a light sifting of dust. His pack lay beside him, unopened.

Roger turned him over, and as he did so Peter backed off. Von Minden was dead. He had been dead a long time Roger thought, as shuddering, he looked down on the bearded, distorted face. Roger took off his own pack and went over the body

carefully. There was no sign whatever of any violence. He made a careful survey of the immediate surroundings, but there was no trace of Mrs. von Minden to be found.

Peter watched Roger's every move, moving his long ears back and forth enquiringly.

There was nothing whatever in Von Minden's pockets, except a jack knife. There was neither food in his pack nor water in his canteen. The one sack contained only a few ore samples. The dispatch box was not to be found.

It was impossible to dig a grave on that peak of solid rock. Moreover, Roger had an idea that the authorities—if there were authorities in the desert world—ought to find the body as he had found it. He cut down several of the stunted cedars and piled them over the pathetic heap, under the blanket. On these he heaped stones, as heavy as he could lift until he felt sure that neither coyote, nor yet the buzzards that circled meditatively above could disturb the mound.

The sun was setting when he had finished.

"There Peter," said he, "you did your bit, keeping the beasts away. And now I've done mine, so we'll move on."

Roger stood for a moment looking from Peter to the mound, then at the wide sweep of the ranges about. The whole world was spread before him in utter silence; range beyond range, desert beyond desert into a violet distance so great that the fancy staggered in contemplating it. For the first time a feeling of utter desolation swept over Roger.

What a death! What a burial! Moved by the impulse that is the heritage of the ages, Roger took off his hat and bowed his head.

"O God!" he said softly. "Receive this man's soul and give him peace. Amen!"

Then he turned south along the range. He had gone a hundred yards when he remembered Peter and turned back. The little fellow was standing, head drooping, ears flopping beside the grave. Roger whistled but Peter gave no heed, and finally Roger was compelled to go back, tie the lead rope to Peter's bridle and fairly pull him along the trail.

Roger did not pause until he had put a peak between himself and that lonely grave. Then, when the moon was sailing high, he made camp by a great bowlder. He turned Peter loose, a little fearfully at first, but the wise little burro made no attempt to turn back. When Roger was seated cross-legged by the fire eating

bacon and beans, Peter dropped his nose over Roger's shoulder with a sigh.

"Hungry, old Peter?" asked Roger. "I haven't got much, but by Jove, you can have half of that," and he scooped half of the contents of his plate on a nearby stone. Peter ate it gravely, after which Roger poured a cup of his precious water into the frying pan for the little donkey's benefit. Then while Peter seemed to doze with his nose dropped almost to the ground, Roger sat long in the hot night, smoking and wrapped in thought.

Since the death of his father, Roger had had no contact with the Grim Reaper, and the tragic discovery of the afternoon had shaken him. Yet as he sat looking out over the impenetrable calm and mystery of the ranges that lifted their noble peaks to the sailing moon, it seemed to him that death in the desert was a clean and normal part of life. If his Sun Plant were finished, if the best of him, his dreams, were made permanent in concrete and steel, what more happy ending could he ask than to lie at last asleep on a desert peak: these peaks still unsmirched by the hand of man; still fresh from the hand of God.

It was with this thought that Roger finally fell asleep while the moon sank behind the far horizon, the night wind rose and Peter searched for herbage in the rock crevices.

The next day was a long one. Roger found no trace of a trail and by mid-afternoon, the last of the water was gone. When this fact was established, the heat seemed worse and Dick's many stories of men who had thirsted to death in the ranges began to haunt Roger. He noticed that Peter's little legs were hourly more unsteady and his heart ached for the little chap. He ate sparingly that evening, giving Peter the larger share. The food was like dry sawdust in his parched mouth. He slept uneasily, waking from dreams of running water to toss for an hour before sleep came again.

With the first streak of dawn he was up and on. Going was slow, for now the real torture of desert thirst was on him and he knew that unless he found water that day, buzzards would be circling over him on the morrow. By ten o'clock his tongue was swelling and he seemed to have ceased to sweat, and Peter leaned panting against the rocks in the shade of which Roger paused to rest. After a half hour, Roger rose to his feet. The morning had been breathless but as he rose, a little hot gust of air blew up from the canyon below.

Instantly Peter raised his head and sniffed. The gust increased to a breeze. With ears lapped forward the burro tottered to the canyon edge and began feebly to pick his way downward.

Roger watched him for a moment. Then, "I don't know what you've discovered, old man," he said thickly, "but what's good enough for you, is good enough for me," and he followed weakly after him.

There was considerable rolling and scrambling done by both Peter and Roger before they reached bottom. When Roger finally scrambled panting to his feet, face burning, ears ringing, he found that they were in a narrow valley thick grown with scrub oak. Peter had rolled the last ten feet, and when he brought up against a barrel cactus, he could not rise until Roger had pottered over and pulled weakly on his bridle. Then he walked shakily across the canyon, Roger close behind him. A little pool reflecting the sky and the fern-like leaves of the mesquite that bordered it lay at the base of the great brown rock.

Roger, as he drank, had vague recollections of warnings he had read about the dangers of over-drinking after water famine. But he was developing an implicit faith in Peter's wisdom and Peter was drinking till his thin ribs swelled. When he had entirely slaked his thirst, Roger rested for a bit, then looked about him. A trail led along the canyon from the spring, westward. Roger filled the canteen, then he and Peter took the trail. It led perhaps a quarter of a mile to a deserted mine, a mine of vast workings and huge ramshackle sheds that were innocent of either windows or doors. The engine house had been nailed up, but Roger's strength and spirits had been much revived by the water. He rested for awhile, then wrenched off some boards and went in, Peter struggling to follow, then giving the idea up and standing at rest in the shade. A complete ore separator plant was installed within. At the fore end of the shed was a gas producer engine in perfect condition as far as Roger could tell, except for the sand that had sifted over it. It was of a type with which he was not familiar and he spent a half hour in thoughtfully examining it, and making notes on a scrap of paper concerning it. He was absorbed in a new idea when he closed up the shed and whistled to Peter who had found some old alfalfa hay in a manger under a shed and was just finishing it off.

There was a trail still leading westward out of the camp, and Roger, with a blind faith that his luck had turned, followed it to the opposite canyon wall, and here, where it evidently once had been a fair mountain road, followed it on up to the top of the range. It was late afternoon when this was accomplished. The ridge where Roger now found himself was high and barren. At first it seemed to him that the trail ended here where the winds had swept unhampered by man so long. But Peter was untroubled. He crossed the ridge nimbly, picked up a range trail on the opposite side and started to descend.

His new master followed with a chuckle that increased to a laugh as he descried far to the north on the west range, the faint outlines of buildings, with the trail faintly marked along valley and mountainside toward it. Just at dusk they reached it. It was the Goodloe mine! In spite of utter fatigue and hunger, Roger would not stop now. In high spirits he took the familiar road toward home.

It was nine o'clock when he passed the Preble ranch house, silent and lightless, but with the horses munching in the corral. He stopped to pick up a measure of oats for Peter, then he began the last lap of his journey. There was a bright fire glowing at the Sun Plant. As he neared it, he gave a shout. There was an answering shout and Ernest and Gustav came rushing through the desert to meet him.

They had been consumed with anxiety about him. Dick had said that they must start on the hunt for him at dawn. Ernest had lighted the fire with the hope that it might help him.

Gustav took Roger's pack and Ernest threw a helping arm about him. They led him straight to the cook tent where they had kept the coffee pot warm, and seated him at the table where a place was set for him. Their joy and relief almost unmanned Roger.

"My dear chaps," he insisted, "I was in no such great danger!"

"In no danger! You should have heard what Dick and Charley said," cried Ernest.

"Well, it's all right now," said Roger. "I've wasted a lot of time but I've located some rich loot, believe me."

"Where'd you pick up the burro?" asked Ernest. "He looks just like Peter."

"It is Peter," replied Roger. "Gustav, give him those oats in my coffee pot and let me eat, then I'll tell you all about it."

It was scarcely dawn and Roger was still fast asleep, when Ernest met Dick at the corral with the news of Roger's safe return and of the tragedy of poor Crazy Dutch. Dick was much upset at hearing of Von Minden's death.

"He was a poor old loon, but mighty good-hearted," he said, "and I swear I don't know what we'd have done sometimes without him—especially Charley. She's going to be all broken up over this. I'll tell her, then I'll come down and talk to Roger."

"Roger thought we ought to notify the folks at Archer's Springs right away," said

Ernest.

"Shucks! That's not necessary. When some of us go in we can notify the sheriff. Dutch had a bum heart and had run out of food and water. Not a bad death, poor old chap."

When Dick came down to the camp, and they all had talked a little sadly of Von Minden's lonely death, Ernest asked suddenly:

"Did you find any window glass, Rog?"

Roger gave him a blank look. "By Jove, no! I was so excited over Von Minden and that new type engine and a hunch I got, that I forgot all about it. Well, I'll just have to start out again."

"By the way," Ernest went on, "I went into town while you were gone to get the mail. There was just one letter. It was from Elsa. She's on her way down here. She's due on Sunday."

Roger looked from Dick to Ernest. "What the devil shall we do with her?"

"Well, she'll have to outfit and grubstake herself. She knows that, and she knows we're broke. I think this is a cooked up job of hers and mother's just to help us out. And gee!—but I'll be glad to see old Elschen!"

"So'll I, old man. But Ernest, this is no place nor circumstances for an Old Home week. I'm sweating to finish this plant against almost impossible odds."

"Don't I know it? Have I failed you any?"

"You have been absolutely O. K. and we'll try to give Elsa a good time."

"It will be a perfect godsend to Charley," said Dick. "She almost cried when Gustav told us."

"Then that's settled," said Ernest with a sigh.

"Just as soon as it can be managed, we'll have to give Von Minden a decent burial, Roger," said Dick. "I won't be using the horses to-morrow and you'll be in good trim by then, won't you, Rog?"

"Yes," replied Roger, and if he smothered a sigh for another day lost from his work, no one noticed it.

Roger spent the remainder of the day in the engine house, going over his engine, shaking his head, muttering to himself like an old man, finally straightening his shoulders stubbornly and whistling through his teeth.

After an early supper, the three went up to the ranch. Felicia, who was wiping the dishes for Charley, hurled herself at Roger, dishcloth and all.

"Oh!" she shrieked. "You must never leave me like this again, Roger. I worried so about you that my stomach ached all the time you were gone."

Charley laughed with the rest, but quickly sobered. "I'm so glad you were able to take care of poor Uncle Otto," she said. "I shall miss him so. None of you knew him as I did." There was a pause, then Charley went on, "Just think of Ernest's sister coming! I remember her vaguely. She's like you, isn't she, Ernest?"

"Not a bit," said Roger. "She's full of pep and very good looking."

"Well, what do you know about that?" asked Ernest, looking at Roger wonderingly.

"She's going to stay with us, isn't she? Please say yes," cried Charley.

"Oh, no, don't have her here. She wouldn't like to be here all the time," begged Felicia. Then she blushed and retreated behind Roger's chair. She refused half tearfully to explain her statement when Dick urged her, at first jokingly, then in a commanding manner.

"Tell me, Felicia, don't you like it here?" drawing her to his side.

"Oh, let her alone, Dicky," begged Charley. "Why insist on a child's reason for anything?"

"But I want to know! Tell me, Felicia, don't you like it here?"

"Yes," said Felicia, with trembling lips, "I like it here, 'cept when you get sick and are so awful cross with me and Charley and make Charley cry. I wouldn't want Elsa to see you that way."

Dick turned purple. "Oh, well," cut in Roger, quickly, "Elsa'll have three men's crossness to put up with down at our camp, Felicia. Just think of that! And if it should happen that we'd all get cross at once, probably we'd blow the roof of the engine house off again."

"That's why we want Elsa to stay with us," said Ernest. "You see when men are cross, the only thing that cures them is having a nice girl around to make them ashamed of themselves."

"Sometimes already, if it gets too much vhen I make myself mad," added Gustav, "maybe ve get a squaw to come by our camp to vip us bad boys for Fräulein Elsa, eh?"

"If all the men in the world get cross, like you, Dicky," asked Felicia, wonderingly, "why do ladies marry them?"

"They don't, chicken! No one's married me."

"Maybe Elsa will. Unless Gustav gets her," suggested Felicia.

"Maybe Roger, he gets her, eh?" asked Gustav.

"Oh, no!" in sudden alarm, crossing over to Roger's knee to look up into his face with a depth of love in her brown eyes that tightened his throat as he lifted her into his lap. "Roger's going to marry me. Only Roger, if ever you're as cross to me as you were to Gustav, I shall just walk out of the house and never, never come back."

It was Roger's turn to blush and he did so thoroughly, while Dick burst into a roar of laughter in which the other men joined. Under its cover, Charley hustled Felicia off to bed.

At dawn the next day Roger and Dick started on their melancholy errand. The climbing was in many instances too precipitous for the horses and they made many detours. It was late in the afternoon, on a detour across a wide canyon that they came upon the end of the Von Minden drama. The canyon was really a part of the desert floor and was deep with sand. Roger it was, who first noted footprints.

"Look, Dick!" he called. "An Indian must have been here! Look at the naked footprints!"

Dick rode up beside him. "I wonder!" he said.

Both men glanced about them. "Yonder are some clothes, let's pick up this trail," suggested Dick.

"By Jove, it's Mrs. von Minden's pink wrapper!" cried Roger, "and over there are her shoes."

"Rog, we've got to brace ourselves," Dick pulled up his horse. "When folks thirst to death in the desert, they often strip off their clothes and run around in a big circle."

Roger bit his dry lips. "All right, Dick, come on," he muttered.

The foot marks swung in a wide circle. It was a mile farther on that they found the madam, stark naked, her gaunt face turned to the sky. She too had been dead for many days.

"I don't see why the buzzards didn't get her. Her burro wasn't Peter, he deserted her," murmured Dick. "Look, Rog, under her head."

It was the dispatch box, lightly sifted over with sand as was the body.

"What do you suppose happened?" asked Roger.

"She obviously thirsted to death. But she got the box first. Do you suppose she killed him, to get it?"

"Perhaps she found him dead and took it," suggested Roger.

"Well, we'll never know. Let's gather up what we can of her clothes and bury her. Poor old devil. Her story's ended," said Dick.

They dug Clarissa von Minden's grave and put her in it, then Dick pulled a prayer book from his pocket.

"Charley made me bring it," he explained. "I'm glad of it, now. Somehow it seems worse to chuck a woman away without a minister to help, than it does a man. I guess she did some tall suffering, from first to last, eh Rog?"

Roger nodded. Dick read the burial service reverently and they finished this gruesome job. Roger tied the little black metal box to his saddle and they started on their way. They made camp in the mountains that evening, not far from the peak that sheltered Von Minden. They had ample firewood for they camped near a clump of cedars and they went hastily through the contents of the dispatch box, by the light of the flames.

There was no marriage certificate. The entire box was filled with notes in German in a microscopic hand. Roger read excerpts of it. Von Minden seemed to have made an exhaustive study of the resources of this section of the desert and of the north of Mexico.

"He had some sort of a huge irrigation scheme in his head," Roger said. "He's got some letters copied in here and a lot of stuff. We ought to turn this over to a German consul, somewhere and let him notify the proper relations."

"That a good idea," agreed Dick. "He used to tell Charley and me strange things when he was off his head. Once he said he was charting this region for the Kaiser. The poor old lunatic."

"His ideas were not so crazy as they might be," protested Roger. "I've some dreams myself for this country, you know."

"What are they, Rog?" asked Dick. "I know in only the vaguest way."

"If I can irrigate your twenty-five acres with my little plant, don't you see that I have proven that I am able to tap unlimited cheap power. The possibilities of this country with cheap power are staggering. I don't blame Von Minden for calling it a kingdom. That's just what it might be, with the mountains of the west range and the Rockies to the east forming natural boundaries. It seems as if a kingdom really could be self-supporting in here. If only I can harness the sun to a cheap apparatus that any one can buy and operate! Why all these ranges would be studded with going mines. Every valley would be green with growing crops. I hardly dare let my imagination go on it. Our little old U. S. has got a wonderful unborn commonwealth down here."

"Well, your dreaming is a lot more practical than his, anyhow," said Dick. "More power to your elbow, old man, I say."

"I won't forget what you people have done for me!" Roger returned the papers to the dispatch box.

They found the crude grave intact, the next morning. They were able with the aid of the pick to make a shallow trough in the rock. They built this up with stone and the last chapter of the Von Minden story was ended. They reached home at dusk.

Ernest and Roger sat before the tent alone that night while Gustav wrote a letter in the cook house. The heat did not seem to have lessened much with the going down of the sun. The stars low-hung over the engine house seemed to glow with fire and the darkness was like a hot blanket over the sand. Ernest was unusually silent. He sat with his pipe unlighted, staring at the stars so long that Roger said, at last:

"Homesick, Ern?"

Ernest grunted. "What did you say? Eh—no—I don't think so. Say, Roger, old man, she's refused me."

"She? Who? What are you talking about, Ernest?"

"About Charley. Who else would it be?"

Roger nearly fell off the box on which he was sitting. "Proposed to Charley? Why, you weren't in love with her, were you, Ernest?"

"You great nut! Why else should I propose to her? Just because you don't admire her is no reason that other men are wooden headed."

"I never said I didn't admire her," exclaimed Roger.

"You did. You said you didn't care for big women."

"Did I? Well, I guess I don't. But I never think of her as a woman. She's just like a fine young fellow that you want for a friend."

Ernest grunted. "I wouldn't have a temperament like yours for real money, Roger."

"I don't see that yours is giving you much joy right now, old chap."

"Never you mind," returned Ernest. "I'd rather suffer as I am suffering than never have loved her."

Roger, who had helped his friend to recover from a good many heart-breaks patted him on the shoulder. "Awfully sorry, old Ern."

"I know what you're thinking," said Ernest, "but this one is different, just as she's different. I'll never get over this. You realize that she's different, don't you, you wooden image?"

Roger answered thoughtfully. "Yes, Charley is different. I really like her very much. But she's like a younger brother, so clean-cut and direct and—" His voice trailed away to nothing as suddenly he thought of Charley's hand on his head, that memorable afternoon in the engine house. Indeed, he wondered if the thought of that touch would ever leave him. He believed that it would become as much a part of his memory as his mother's gentle touch.

Finally, Ernest said, "If it weren't for you and the help I can give you, I'd go home."

"You *are* hard hit, old man! Maybe it'll be easier when Elsa comes."

"Yes, I think it will," replied Ernest. "I thought I'd go in to-morrow and hang around Archer's till she gets here. You'll be tinkering on the engine and won't miss me. Suppose we can fix up Mrs. von Minden's tent for her, instead of her buying a new one."

"Good idea! But, by Jove, the thought of going to Archer's Springs for mental distraction is either funny or pathetic! I don't know which. I hope I can have a test of the plant on Monday."

"So do I," replied Ernest. "Guess I'll go to bed. Gustav's blown out his bug."

"I'm with you," agreed Roger, and was asleep long before Ernest ceased to toss in the hot silence of the tent.

It was late Sunday afternoon when dust on the south trail announced the coming

of Elsa and Ernest. Gustav and Roger had given the entire morning to putting the camp in order. Gustav had achieved his *chef-d'œuvre* in a huge "welcome" made of yucca stalks outlined over the living tent door. Roger had given Peter to Felicia and about two o'clock she appeared, riding the little burro whose face she explained she had washed with soap and water for the occasion. Charley and Dick followed not long after.

For the first time Roger realized that Charley's isolation had meant more to her than she allowed any of them to suspect. She nearly wept as she begged that Elsa be permitted to stay with them and went over the living tent and the cook tent with a critical eye. When the cloud of dust appeared upon the horizon Roger saw her whiten under her tan.

"Suppose she doesn't like me," she exclaimed suddenly to the three men. "Suppose she finds me rough and stupid after all these years of hardship. Oh, what would I do! The first woman after so long!"

"Well," Dick's voice was angry, "if she doesn't like you she's a fool, that's all."

Tears had sprung to Gustav's eyes. "She vill love you on sight," he said slowly.

"You wait!" cried Roger. "You two girls were made to be friends."

Charley gave a nervous glance at her khaki clothing. The men did not know that the day before she had routed out a white frock, the remnant of her college days and after much debate with herself, had rejected it. It was of a bygone date and fashion. It had been worn by a happy-go-lucky college girl, who had little in common with the mature, sunburned, wind-blown woman who looked back at Charley from the mirror.

The horses plodded slowly through the sand. Dick pulled up before the living tent.

"She's come! Here she is!" shouted Ernest, as if the watching group in the burning western sun could doubt its eyes. Roger lifted Elsa down from the wheel.

"Never knew I could be so glad to see you, Elsa," he said. "And you're prettier than ever even if your nose is peeling. Look! Here's Charley Preble and Felicia and Dick and Gustav."

Elsa, freshly burned, but with her silk traveling suit smart in spite of the dust, shook hands all round.

She turned back from Gustav to Charley again, and looked at her with frank

interest. "You know, Ernest never told me what to wear, so I didn't bring a bit of khaki. Wasn't I foolish? It looks just right down here."

"I've some extra skirts you can wear till you can send back for some," said Charley. "Let's go into the living tent out of this heat while the boys unload."

They went alone, for Felicia, after standing in an agony of indecision for a moment or two, decided in favor of the tantalizing packages in the wagon box. The girls were not in the tent long. When they came out, they had their arms about each other.

"Elsa's going up to the house with me and get a bath and change her clothes. We'll be down for supper," said Charley.

There was a flush of happiness on her face that made Dick say, "I hope you stay forever, Elsa! Come along! I'll take the team up and your trunk. What do you want done with the cot and things, Ernest?"

"Never mind those," said Elsa, serenely. "I'm going to stay with Charley."

The men looked at each other speechlessly. As the wagon rattled off, Roger said to Ernest:

"They were in that tent less than five minutes. What do you suppose happened?"

Ernest shook his head. "I've given up trying to understand women. Look at that cot and the lumber—a whole darned outfit, and I nearly killed the horses getting the mess up in one load because Elsa insisted she'd have to have it to-night. Women!"

CHAPTER XI

DICK'S SICKNESS

All day Monday, Roger and his two helpers sweated to prepare for the plant's first trial. Roger would let no one touch the engine but himself, but Ernest and Gustav puttered with the condenser and the pump and at dawn started the oil circulating through the absorber. All day long the burning desert sun poured its heat through the glass into the oil which caught and imprisoned it for Roger's purpose, until the storage pit was full. Roger had set the time of trial as nine o'clock in the evening in order to prove the night as well as the day power of his plant. The Prebles appeared shortly before the hour.

"Everything O. K.?" asked Dick, with a creditable effort at being off-hand.

"One never knows till afterward," replied Roger. "Come into the engine house. No room for you, Peter, old man."

There were three "bugs" lighted over the engine. Ernest and Gustav were both smoking violently. Dick was chewing gum. Elsa and Charley said nothing but watched every movement on the part of the men.

"Come here, Felicia," said Roger, biting at his cold pipe. "You see this little valve? All right. Now, as I've told you many times, I hope that when you turn this, that the sun which shone to-day will turn the big fly wheel round. When I give the wheel a twist, you turn the valve clear over."

"Yes, Roger," replied Felicia, her little fingers quivering as she grasped the valve.

"Now!" exclaimed Roger, tugging at the fly-wheel.

There was a moment's breathless silence. Then very slowly and sedately, the fly

wheel began to revolve, gathered speed and shortly was chugging away steadily. A little cheer rose from Roger's audience. He grinned.

"Now Ern, let's throw in the pump." A belt, connecting the engine with the pump outside, was quickly slipped in place. The engine slowed down. But a moment later the sound of water pouring over the condenser pipes was heard above the chugging of the engine and pump.

Gustav and Ernest fell on each other's necks. "It works!" squealed Felicia. "It works and I helped make it, I did." Peter, his head as far in at one of the windows as a very short neck would carry it, brayed. Roger watched the pressure gauge and scratched his head thoughtfully.

Charley and Felicia slipped outside to inspect the pump, and Charley called: "Does anybody smell anything?" At the same moment Felicia shrieked.

"Oh! oh, Roger! There's a terrible leak out here!"

Roger shut off the engine and followed by the others, he darted to the condenser. The odor of sulphur dioxide filled the night.

"By Jove, it's big enough to lose my charge!" groaned Roger. "Bring bugs, everybody."

Felicia, "bug" and oil can in hand, was running over the pipes at the top before the others had arrived.

"Here it is, Roger! Oh, an awful one. There!"

The leak was in a pipe joint at the top of the stack. The odor grew almost unbearable. For half an hour the men wrestled with it, turn about, and at last succeeded in stopping it. Other minor leaks occurred but all were located and controlled. Finally Roger announced all safe and lighted his pipe. In the flash of the match, his face showed tense and dripping with sweat, his eyes bloodshot from the gas fumes.

"Darn the leaks!" exclaimed Elsa.

"Well, it's what we'll have to expect as long as I can't afford to buy bent pipe or an acetylene welding outfit," said Roger. "But after all, the leaks are the least of my troubles."

"What is troubling you?" asked Charley quickly.

"There isn't as much power there as my calculations had indicated there would be."

"I told you that you were running pretty close on your absorption area," exclaimed Ernest. "You see your temperature readings have been lower right along down here than that table we had up in the laboratory for this region."

"But I don't want to increase the absorption area in order to get more power. It's a clumsy solution. It makes the plant too large and too high priced. The solution to the problem lies in making that engine more efficient." Roger sighed.

"Now don't change your engine design, Roger!" cried Ernest. "That is a peach and has been for years."

"Yes, I know," replied Roger. "But there's a possibility that you and the Dean and I have been too complacent about that engine."

"Gee, but you're a regular pessimist, Rog!" exclaimed Dick.

"No, I'm not. No inventor is. I'm just open minded. And don't think I'm blue, either. If I weren't so heckled and worried by the time and money element I'd be having the time of my life. Wouldn't I, Felicia, honey?"

There was no answer. Felicia, with the oil can hugged tight against her middy, was curled up on the work bench, fast asleep.

"Well, it seems to me I'd better take my family home," said Dick. "Where's the rest of my harem? Elsa! Charley! Come with papa."

By eleven o'clock the camp was quiet. Roger prowled about the condenser a bit, covered the engine with canvas and then went to bed. It had been a hard day and none of the three men were wakened by the smell of sulphur dioxide that began to hang over the camp at midnight. The dawn wind blew most of it away, but when Gustav rose to get breakfast, he sniffed suspiciously and called Roger. They traced a leak in the lower tier. Half the charge had evaporated during the night.

"At least two weeks before we get more and a chunk out of the precious grub money," groaned Ernest at breakfast.

"Patience! Patience!" exclaimed Gustav. "I'll start to Archer's Spring mit the empty drums to-morrow."

Roger, who had been bolting his breakfast in silence, suddenly set down his coffee cup. Patience! He had told Charley that he was a patient man. Yet every muscle of his body at the moment was twitching with impatience. He acknowledged this to himself, then said aloud:

"No use getting nervous, boys, I'm not. You get the new charge, Gustav. I'll leave that in your hands and think no more about it. I'm going over my heat tables again."

"I'll help you check over," said Ernest.

"If you don't mind I'd rather grind for a few days on it alone. I can think better that way. Then I'll go over the results with you."

"All right," returned Ernest, with his usual good nature. "Gustav and I'll offer our services to Dick to-day on his new field. Do increase your absorbing area, Roger!"

Roger shook his head. "That's an awkward and expensive solution. The answer's in the engine!"

He began to figure on an old envelope. When this was covered, he continued his calculations on the margin of an old newspaper spread over the work house table. Long after Gustav and Ernest had gone about their day's business Elsa found him here, sweating in the stifling glare from the sun and sand, hair disheveled, shirt open at the throat. Elsa looked almost cool in comparison in her soft white blouse and one of Charley's khaki skirts.

"Well, Roger," she exclaimed, "hasn't your cook the decency to wash the breakfast dishes for you?"

"It does look rotten, doesn't it?" said Roger, staring vaguely around the kitchen. "But the cook seems to be on a strike and I forgot to clean things up."

"If you'll get out of the way, I'll do it." Elsa began to roll up her sleeves.

"It's too hot now. Wait until late afternoon," suggested Roger, glancing from his papers out to the yellow waves of heat dancing from sand to deep blue of sky.

"I can stand the heat if Charley can," returned Elsa. "She's baking bread and cookies. The thermometer on the porch says 112°. I should judge that it was about 190° in her kitchen. Rog, do you know that she's a highly educated girl? Why do you suppose she's throwing her life away down here, cut off from everything?"

Roger looked up from his figures with a little sigh of resignation.

"What did you say, Elsa?"

Elsa smiled but repeated her inquiry.

"She's not wasting her life," replied Roger. "This is really a superb country and

she takes to pioneering like a fine boy. This is about the last big adventure there is in America, this desert pioneering."

"Like a boy!" sniffed Elsa. "Roger, you're hopeless! She's just the most womanly woman I ever met—and one of the saddest. She's got some trouble on her mind."

"Aw shucks, Elsa! Don't try to make Charley out temperamental. She's not and that's why she's such a pal to us fellows. Wholesome and clean-cut and direct, that's Charley."

"Oh, well, have it your own way, stupid! Only, go on over to the living tent while I clean up here." This with a curious glance at Roger's preoccupied eyes; those fine, steady, clear-seeing eyes, that saw so much and so little of life.

"Just one thing more, Roger," she said. He paused in the doorway and looked at her with a smile. "Yes, ma'am."

"Ernest told me on the way out about your money troubles. I don't want you to worry about the cost of keeping me. I can pay my way. I had to come against Papa's wishes, of course, but I had my own little chunk of savings and Mamma had a little. And I just made up my mind I was going to get away from home for a while if it was the last act of my life. And I know I can do lots of things to make you all comfortable."

"I'm as glad as I can be to have you here, Elsa. And after all you folks have done for me, it makes me sick not to be able to do everything for you. But I swear I'm right up against it. Some day I'll make it all up to you and Ern. See if I don't. If you can keep homesick old Ern bucked up you'll be doing your bit. Your father need have had no fear. Ern'll be back in the University when this is done contented to teach the rest of his life."

"I know it. And how about you, Roger?"

"Me? Oh, I've struck my gait down here. I'm going to follow heat problems round the world, see if I don't."

He looked off over the desert with a glow in his face that the girl never had seen there before. She gave a wistful little sigh, and began to unroll the kitchen apron she had brought under her arm.

"Run along while I try to make the place fit for white people to live in," she said.

It was a comfort to have a woman about the camp. The three men testified to this at supper time as they ate the meal she had prepared in an immaculate kitchen. That evening after Roger had taken Elsa back up to the ranch, Ernest decided he

would accompany Gustav into Archer's to get some khaki for Elsa and to endeavor to locate some sulphur dioxide by telegraph. Elsa announced that although she would sleep and take breakfast at the ranch she would spend the day at the Plant as housekeeper.

It was perhaps four o'clock the next afternoon, that Roger, at work in the engine house, saw Felicia half running, half plodding through the sand. Elsa, sewing in the living tent, saw her at the same time.

"What can they mean by letting her come out in this awful heat?" she called to Roger.

Roger made no reply but shouted to Felicia, "Don't run, child! It's too hot!"

Felicia's answer was to quicken her pace. With a sudden sense of apprehension Roger went to meet her. Felicia was sobbing when he reached her. He lifted her in his arms.

"What is it, sweetheart?"

Felicia was almost beyond words. "Dicky—he's—sick again! And—he yelled at me—and slapped me, and he knocked Charley over with his fist. And I ran away —to you—"

Roger's lips stiffened. Elsa had joined them and as he set Felicia down, he said hurriedly, "Take her into the tent. Cool her down gradually. Keep her there till I come."

And he set off as fast as he dared in the burning sun. As he neared the ranch house, he could hear Dick's incoherent shouts and as he ran up the trail, Dick appeared on the porch.

"Get out of here, Roger!" he roared, thickly.

Roger ran up the steps. "Where's Charley?"

Dick planted himself belligerently in the doorway, "Get out!" Roger moved slowly toward him. A heavy odor of cologne enveloped Dick. A quick surmise flashed over Roger.

"Felicia needs Charley, Dick, I've got to fetch her."

"Get out!" repeated Dick sullenly. He gave a lunge toward Roger and Roger met him with a quick undercut on the jaw that laid Dick flat. He dragged him down the trail to the seed and tool shack, where he turned the heavy button on the door. Then he ran into the house.

Charley lay on the floor, her hair in disorder about her. Roger, with an oath, stooped over her, then ran for a cup of water and bathed her face. In a moment she opened her eyes. Roger's own eyes were black with excitement but he met her puzzled gaze with a twisted smile.

"There you are, Charley! Where are you hurt?"

She did not answer but struggled to rise and Roger putting an arm under her shoulder helped her to her feet where she leaned dizzily against him, for a moment, shoulder to shoulder.

"Where's Felicia, Roger?"

"Safe with Elsa at the Plant. Sit down here on the couch, Charley. Where did Dick strike you?"

"He—he—where is he, Roger?" clinging suddenly to Roger's hand as he laid her back on the couch.

"Locked in the tool house. Charley, you *must* tell me what happened so I can help you."

"Why—he—he pushed me backward and I must have hit something when I fell. The back of my head is very sore and my head aches terribly—and I'm a little sick at my stomach."

"Let me see your head," said Roger peremptorily. He parted the mass of bronze brown hair, wondering even in his anger and pity at its softness and thickness. It was not difficult to locate the great lump at the base of the skull.

"He might have killed you if it hadn't been for your hair. The skin isn't broken. Be still, Charley, till I get a basin of water and a towel."

He was back in a moment and sitting down on the edge of the couch, he attempted to bathe the swelling. But Charley groaned in agony at the first touch, so he gave that up and bathed her face and wrist awkwardly but very gently.

"I guess it's my turn to say 'Poor Child,'" Roger murmured.

The quick tears sprang to Charley's eyes. At this moment Dick gave an incoherent shout. Charley gripped Roger's hand.

"It's all right," he said. "He can't get out, the whelp!"

"Roger! Don't hurt him. Promise me you won't hurt him!"

"Hurt him!" Roger burst forth. "How can you be so foolish! He ought to be

beaten within an inch of his life. He's gotten drunk on cologne!"

"Roger, he's never been this bad before. He's been growing slowly better all these years. He never struck me before."

"And you've been living with a drunkard all these years who might have killed you. You knew this, yet you let little Felicia come to you. How could you do it?" Roger paced up and down the floor.

Charley looked at him piteously, but he went on, his voice growing louder.

"You must know that a periodic drunkard is the worst kind and almost never cured. I thought you were unafraid of truth, but you've been living just like a sentimental woman, after all."

Charley raised her hands and dropped them as if in despair. "I promised mother I'd never leave him. And he's put up a fight. Oh, you'll never know what a fight! And I love him. He's a dear when he's not drinking."

Dick roared again and Roger stared at Charley's sick white face.

"Promise me you won't hurt him, Roger."

"How can I promise when I know if I get another glimpse of him I'll break every bone in his carcass?"

Again Charley dropped her hands with that despairing gesture. "Then how can I help fearing your dreadful temper as much as I do Dick's drinking? What difference is there?"

Roger jumped as if she had struck him. "You can't mean that! You're sick and unstrung and don't know what you're saying. I'll go after Ern."

"I have to mean it," insisted Charley wearily, "after seeing you that time with Gustav."

"I'm not like Dick!" shouted Roger. "I wouldn't touch a woman or a child!"

"How do you know you wouldn't?" asked Charley.

A sudden burning recollection of the little boy who had struck his mother's hand from his shoulder flashed through Roger's mind. He groaned and dropped his head. Charley did not speak and for some moments Roger did not move. Then he came over to the couch and said quietly:

"I'll not hurt Dick. Where did he get the cologne, Charley?"

"He must have found it in Elsa's room. I didn't know she had it, or I'd have put it

away. And now, every one will know! Oh, Roger, must they all know?"

"I don't see how it can be helped. But you can be sure none of us will say more than has to be said. Charley, I'm going to get Peter and take you down to the Plant for the night. You need absolute rest and quiet and you can't get it so near Dick."

"And Dick?"

"Dick must fend for himself in the tool shack. I'll put a canteen of water and a blanket in there and by morning he'll be ready for conversation."

"But he won't be. Drink makes him terribly sick. His stomach is very bad. That's why I always say it's stomach trouble. He ought to be taken care of to-night."

"He'll stay where he is and by himself," said Roger, grimly. "When I have a temper fit the next time, you can do the same by me. Lord, I'm glad Elsa is here! You lie quiet while I go milk."

When he had put the milk away he found that Charley had braided her hair but was still very white and shaken. Dick's shouts and curses floated in at the open door. Roger tied the little bundle of night things she had made up to the saddle and helped her to mount. She swayed dizzily and he put a strong, steadying arm about her. They made their way very slowly and Roger heaved a sigh of relief when they were finally beyond ear shot of poor Dick.

Elsa met them a short distance from the camp. "Hello, Charley," she said. "Felicia has just fallen asleep."

Roger nodded and at the living-tent door, helped Charley from the saddle. "Get this patient to sleep too, Elsa, if you can."

Elsa's eyes filled with tears as she looked at Charley. "You poor dear," she said, "come and let me take care of you."

One touch of a woman's sympathy, after her starved years, was too much for Charley. She burst into deep drawn sobs. Elsa, motioning Roger away, put her arm about the girl and led her into the tent.

Roger paced up and down in the sand for a while, listening to the low despairing sobs from the tent. Then he unsaddled Peter and put a huge bottle of water to heat. He had heard somewhere that women took great comfort in a cup of tea.

Roger passed rather a restless night. He had put Elsa's cot which she never had used, in the living tent so that Elsa could be close to her two patients, and

himself put in the night in Gustav's shack which was built against the kitchen tent.

It was early July and the summer's heat was at its height. Three times between midnight and dawn Roger scratched a match and looked at the thermometer. It never registered below 118°. Even the night wind did not rise. The silence of the desert was complete as though torridity had overwhelmed every other aspect of nature. The stars were magnificent and for an hour or so, hoping to find the air outside cooler, Roger put a blanket on the work bench near the condenser and lay there, his face to the sky.

He wanted to keep his mind fastened lucidly on his engine problem, but he found it impossible to put away the events of the day. Dick's bestial voice, Charley's white, proud face, little Felicia's clinging arms, Charley's sobs from the living tent and her bitter words concerning his temper. These words he pondered unwillingly for some time, following with his eye the constellations of the Great Bear. Finally he rolled on his face with a groan. Perhaps she was right. God knew though that he'd fought the red demon within him. After a time he rolled back. Felicia had not wakened for her supper. She had slept straight through. It was a great pity, he thought, that she should have seen Dick drunk, that she should have seen him knock Charley down. He wondered if there were any way he could make her forget it. Then with a deep flush in the starlight he wished to God she had not seen him lose his temper like a fool. Felicia! tender, high strung little Felicia!

At last when the stars were growing dim, Roger fell asleep. He rose at sunrise, and went up to the ranch. Dick was lying on the adobe floor of the tent house, evidently very sick and very cross.

"How'd I come in here? Send Charley to me!" he snarled.

"I will, like thunder, you drunken bum! You did your best to beat up both of your sisters. I'm going to keep them at the Sun Plant until some new arrangement can be made. The best I can do for you is to leave this door open. Fend for yourself, hang you!" And Roger walked off to do the milking.

When he had finished milking he glanced in at the open door of the tool house. Dick lay where Roger had left him, staring with eyes of feverish agony at the roof above his head. Roger, without a word, went back to the plant. To his relief, Felicia appeared at the breakfast table, very hungry and quite herself. But Charley was not able to get up. It seemed as if the long years of strain had culminated in yesterday's events, and that Charley had no will-power left.

The girl lay on Ernest's cot, the tent flap lifted beside her, with no apparent desire save to stare at the desert dancing in heat waves against the sky. What thoughts were passing behind those quiet brown eyes, no one knew.

It was mid-morning when Roger went in to see her. He pulled a box up beside the cot. "Well, old dear," he said. "How is the head?"

Charley smiled. "Sore and aching, but better than during the night. I am so tired and that's very unusual. I'm always so strong."

Roger nodded. "It was a bad knock, to leave you senseless for half an hour. I suspect you ought to take pretty good care of yourself for several days. I've been talking with Elsa and she thinks you ought to stay here for a few days. And I do too. Don't worry about Dick. I saw him this morning and he'll be himself by sundown. And I've promised Elsa I won't see him again until after she does."

Charley eyed Roger's long brown face as if taking in the full significance of all he had said. Then she gave a little sigh of relief.

"If I could rest here in this peaceful tent, just for a day or two."

"The tent's all right at night, but I've moved Gustav's cot into the engine house, and I'm going to help you over there. It's ten degrees cooler than here. Elsa and Felicia are established there and I won't disturb you for I'm drawing, which act is noiseless."

In a dim corner of the adobe engine house in Gustav's cot Charley spent the day. Elsa, when she was not playing housekeeper sat beside her with her sewing and Felicia visited between the cot and Roger's drawing board.

Once when Charley seemed to be in an uneasy sleep, Felicia asked Roger, "Is Charley very sick?"

"Not really sick at all, chicken. She's just tired. She's worked too hard for you and Dick."

Felicia stared at him with her innocent, speculative gaze so like Charley's, yet so unlike.

"Can't we live here with you, instead of up at the ranch, Roger? I know Charley would like it better."

"You can stay and make us a visit, anyhow. Then we'll see."

At sunset, after the dishes were finished and Charley had moved back to the living tent for the night, Elsa went up to the ranch house. She was gone a long

time. Charley was dozing and Felicia asleep. Roger prowled up and down the camp closely followed by Peter until he could bear the suspense no longer. A sudden fear that Dick might have discovered more liquor somewhere started him along the ranch trail. He met Elsa just as the afterglow disappeared and the parching night came down like a star dotted curtain. She came trudging through the sand as if she were tired.

"It does seem as if I'd wilt with the heat," she exclaimed. "You needn't have worried about me, Roger. Dick came back with me till we saw you."

"He did, huh! Then he's neither drunk nor dead?"

"Rog! Don't say such awful things about the poor fellow."

"Poor fellow! You didn't see Charley lying on the floor as I did. Well, what has he to say for himself?"

"He's in an awful state of mind. He was trying to cook some supper when I got there. He'd succeeded in milking. When he saw me, he gasped. 'Is Charley sick?' and dropped the kettle of water he was lifting."

"I told him just what you had seen and what an exhausted state Charley's nerves seemed to be in. He just stood and took it looking like a sick cat. When I had finished he asked what you had said and I told him and he sort of groaned, 'You women should have let Roger beat me to death. Why did you interfere?' Poor Dick!"

Elsa drew a long breath and was silent for a moment before she began again. "He's in a most awful frame of mind. He's like a man who knows he has fits of insanity and feels perfectly helpless to prevent them. He cried and cried while he told me how he had fought drink. I never knew any one could suffer so. He's much more to be pitied than Charley."

"Huh! Women!" grunted Roger. "Why, he's just the usual thing in drunks, you little ninny. What's he going to do?"

"Well, I want Charley to give him one more chance."

"I thought so! Well, he doesn't get it."

"But, Roger, you can't prevent it. And he's not going into Archer's Springs again. He's going to let us do his errands. That's where the trouble has been."

"Except when he drinks cologne."

"What makes you so hard, Roger?"

"I saw Charley lying where Dick had knocked her down. And I felt little Felicia almost in convulsions from fear. Let him keep out of my sight until I can forget that."

"Of course, all I can do is to advise, anyhow," said Elsa. "Dick is coming down in the morning and take his medicine. He insists on it. He's a fine man, Roger, in many ways."

"You've not seen him drunk," returned Roger. "Commend me to a woman every time for sentimentality."

"There are other weaknesses men have than drunkenness that their sentimentality helps women to endure, aren't there, Roger?" asked Elsa quietly. Roger dropped Elsa's arm and left her without a word.

He was at work in the engine house, the next morning when Dick came slowly down the trail and was led by Elsa into the living tent. Then she went off to the cook tent with Felicia. Roger, working with strained concentration on his engine, heard on the one side the low murmur of Dick's and Charley's voices and on the other Felicia's occasional happy laugh above Elsa's little songs. After perhaps an hour, Dick came out and went to the cook tent and in a moment Felicia came flying into the engine house and threw her arms around Roger.

"I won't stay where Dicky is," she panted. "I won't!"

The child was trembling violently. Roger sat down and held her to his heart.

"Dick won't hurt you, honey, now. It's only when he's sick."

Felicia shuddered. "He slapped me and he knocked Charley over with his fist and in the night I dream about it. I am going to live with you. You won't get mad again like you did with Gustav, will you, Roger?"

Roger bowed his forehead on the soft bronze brown head that rested so confidently on his breast.

"You do love poor old Roger, don't you, sweetheart?" he asked, brokenly.

As if she sensed some secret pain, Felicia turned and put her arms about him and kissed him softly on the lips. "I love you as much as I do Charley. Don't send me back to Dicky, dearest Roger."

"I won't." Roger's lips tightened grimly.

Charley came out to lunch that noon, looking much stronger.

"I'm so grateful to you, Roger and Elsa," she said, "and after I've helped with the

dishes, if you'll loan me Peter, we'll go home."

Roger dropped his knife and fork, then looked at Felicia. "Felicia, you know Roger's trunk? Well, if you'll run to the living tent and open the trunk and take all the things out of it, at the very bottom you'll find some Christmas cake Elsa made last year. Then put all the things back carefully and bring the cake here."

Felicia gave an ecstatic "Oh, Roger!" and disappeared. Roger turned to Charley.

"I'm going to say one more thing. Do you realize fully that in living with Dick you jeopardize both yours and Felicia's lives?"

"Oh, no, Roger! He never touched us before. It was the poison in that cologne."

Roger shrugged his shoulders.

"How can you be so hard?" pleaded Charley. "Dick's my own flesh and blood. It might have been I instead of Dick with this appetite. You're hard, Roger."

"I'm not hard. I'm disappointed. I didn't think you were a sentimentalist."

"I wonder," exclaimed Elsa, "how women will ever get time to vote when it takes all their time to make men endurable to live with. My word! I'm glad I haven't one of the critters!"

She said this with such heartfelt sincerity that Charley laughed and Roger joined her. By the time Felicia came running back with the Christmas cake, the atmosphere was considerably lighter.

"We're going home, Felicia! Aren't you glad I'm well again?" said Charley. "And haven't the Sun Planters been kind?"

Felicia whitened under her tan.

"Oh, but, Charley, I'm not going. I don't have to, do I, Roger? I'm so afraid of Dicky. He slapped me twice, Charley, and he knocked you over with his fist. Oh, let me stay with Roger!"

Charley gasped. "Oh, Felicia! Felicia! Oh, my little Felicia!"

Roger spoke quickly. "Why not let her stay for a little visit, Charley? I'll finish Elsa's tent this afternoon and she can share that with Elsa, till her nerves become normal."

"But I'm going up to stay with Charley," said Elsa; "that's part of the cure."

"Then let her stay alone. She'll be safe and happy with me," replied Roger. "Dick deserves punishment."

Charley looked at Roger, then at Felicia. "I think that's a good idea," she said, slowly.

And so when Ernest and Gustav came home that night, they found Felicia watching the camp fire beside Roger, and after she was asleep in her tent, they heard the whole story. Ernest was indignant at the thought of Elsa's staying on at the ranch.

"I am going to be firm with her in the morning," he said.

But Elsa's firmness was greater than Ernest's and shortly the two households had settled down and Dick was gradually reinstated in every one's good graces but Roger's. Felicia stayed on for a week, to the joy of the three camp mates who spoiled her outrageously. Then one Saturday evening Dick came down and he and Felicia had a long talk, at the end of which Felicia said good-by to Roger, Ernest and Gustav, and returned to the ranch, quite happily.

CHAPTER XII

DICKY'S LAST BOUT

The fact that the engine had fallen below expectations brought the Sun Planters' food problem into prominence again. When Elsa had begun housekeeping for the men she had protested over the meagerness and the simplicity of the food supplies. But Roger had explained their situation frankly and Elsa had proceeded to make good German magic over the canned food of which the camp had been so weary.

"The Lord knows," exclaimed Ernest at the breakfast table one morning, "how long we'll be tied up in this Hades. If Roger's begun puttering on the engine we may be here ten years."

"This isn't Hades, Ern!" exclaimed Elsa. "I'm having the time of my life."

"I notice that Dick's down here a good deal," said Ernest, slyly, "and I suppose that adds to the hilarity of the nations."

"By the way," Elsa ignored her brother except for a blush, "what are we going to do about the food problem, Ern? All the cotton-tails and quail that Gustav shoots, won't keep us much longer."

"Do you suppose Hackett would let us run a bill with him and take a mortgage on the outfit here as security? Of course, I haven't any right to give a mortgage but I'll explain the whole situation to him." Roger's voice had a desperate note in it.

"Well, that is worth the try, eh?" said Gustav. "Me, I might borrow a little yet, from a friend in the East."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Gustav," exclaimed Roger. "You're far from home

and you may need all your borrowing power for yourself—not but what I appreciate your offer, old man!"

"I've got a little—my fare home and about a hundred beside," offered Elsa.

"Keep it, old girl," Roger's voice was husky. "By Jove, I may be poor in everything else, but I'm rich in friends. Ern, what do you think of my suggestion?"

"Well, I hate debt worse than anything in the world. But we're in this thing up to our necks and I'm willing to try anything that's honest. If Hackett knows the whole story—"

"He knows it now, I guess, but I'll give him all the details. I may as well go in to-day and get a yes or no at once."

"I'll go," said Ernest. "I'd like to and you'd better not lose a day."

Roger nodded in a relieved manner.

"Listen! There goes the Lemon!" exclaimed Elsa. "I do hope she goes to-day."

"Put! Put!" came over the desert. "Put! Put! Put!"

"I guess she's launched and I've got a clear day for work." Roger rose as he spoke. "Dick's having a struggle to get enough water for that second five acres of his. He insists that he's going ahead with the next five, though."

"Elsa, want to go into Archer's with me?" asked Ernest.

"Sorry, Ern, but I'm going to help Charley can pumpkins to-day. She planted some for luck up by the engine house where the pump leaks, you remember, and the crop is wonderful."

"Oh, well, if you prefer pumpkins to me and Archer's Springs, I've nothing to say," groaned Ernest.

"I'll go," offered Gustav. "I haf letters and other things."

Ernest accepted the offer with alacrity. He was beginning to recover some of his old spirits but he had not been himself since Charley's refusal. Roger had never known Ernest to take one of his affairs quite so hard before. He dreaded to be alone and was often moody: a rare state of mind for easy going Ernest.

The two men made a quick and successful trip to Archer's, for Hackett agreed to sell them food to the sum of two hundred dollars. He didn't see how a mortgage could be given but he was willing to take Roger's personal note for ninety days.

This Roger gave with some misgivings but with a sigh of relief that the day of starvation had been put off once more. Then he gave his whole mind to his engine problem.

He was planning some changes in his engine that were fundamental and that were really the outcome of his early trip through the ranges in the search for window glass. He worked at his redesigning with a single minded passion that set him apart from the others. All of them except Felicia found him tense and at times irritable.

As August came in, the beauty of the desert seemed to increase daily. The heat, whilst it added to one's sense of the desert's cruelty, added at the same time to the unreality and to the mystery of silence and of distances that are so large a part of the desert's fascination.

The sand was alive with an uncanny, tiny life. Horned toads flopped unexpectedly across the trail. Lizards were everywhere, running over and under the tent floors and along the thatching of the condenser and the engine house. There were many rattlesnakes too, particularly dangerous at this time of year because, Dick said, they were shedding their skins and were blind, striking at any sound. There were Gila monsters now and again. There were many scorpions and centipedes, with once in a while a tarantula.

Dick and Charley laid down certain laws of the summer desert. No one was to go to bed without examining the bedding for tarantulas or centipedes. No one was to dress without subjecting every article of apparel to the same scrutiny. No one was to go out at night without a "bug" for fear of the blind striking of a rattler. Every one must learn to kill a snake with a snake stick. And every one, even Felicia, must learn to treat snake bites.

Elsa, clear-headed and matter of fact, was very little annoyed by all this gliding venomous summer life. But little Felicia's horror of it was difficult to control. It seemed to Roger that the child's nerves had been uneven ever since the "cologne affair," as Ernest called it. But he could not be sure of this, for Charley insisted that the little girl's fears of all that uncanny fraternity of the sand was exactly what hers had been four years before.

August was slipping by, quietly enough when Gustav, returning one day from Archer's Springs, delivered to Roger a letter from Hampton of the Smithsonian saying that on the thirtieth day of August a representative of the Smithsonian would reach Archer's Springs on his way to Los Angeles; that he had but two days to spare but would be glad to give these days to the Moore experiment.

Roger was in despair. "Two days!" he groaned. "Why, it takes two days to come up and back. Better stay away."

"Don't be an idiot, Rog," exclaimed Ernest. "You get him here, and he'll stay for a day or so. How can he get away? The thing that bothers me is that darned engine of yours."

"It doesn't bother me," replied Roger, with a quick gleam in his gray eyes and a sudden smile. "I've got a week before he gets here and by Jove, the old kettle's got to be ready!" He gave a sudden long sigh and looked off toward the distant line of the river range. "I thought it was queer of the Smithsonian to treat me as it did. Ern, this puts new life in me."

If new life means redoubled effort, Roger had found it indeed. He gave himself as little sleep as possible during the week before the expected visit. All day and a larger part of the night he was at work in the engine house, till his eyes were bigger and his face gaunter than ever. Felicia was his little shadow. Her taste for mechanics made her seem more like a small boy than ever. And although Roger's tense nerves grew tenser and his impatience with the others was shown oftener and oftener, to Felicia he showed only the gentleness for which she loved him.

Charley and Elsa were forming a real friendship. The isolation of the little desert community was almost complete. Since the death of Von Minden no one from the outer rim of the desert or of the world had been near either camp or ranch. Even the Indians who had been camping in the remote canyon where Felicia had visited them had found good hunting in some still more remote section and never had appeared in the camp. This isolation forced the friendship between the two young women to a quick growth. Charley was happier, Dick said, than he had seen her since her college days.

Two days before the visitor was due, Roger announced that one day's work would make him ready for a test, so that, and he did not believe that he was over-confident, when Gustav arrived with the Smithsonian investigator, the plant would be in full action. He made this announcement at breakfast. Ernest and Gustav cheered.

"I never thought you'd make it," said Gustav.

"I *had* to make it," replied Roger. "I have the conviction that if this man, whoever he is, sees the plant working, the thing will be done, and that if he doesn't find the wheels going round, I'm going to miss the chance of my life."

"If the heat would just let up for a little while," sighed Ernest. "If he's a

northerner, it may put him out of business."

"Pshaw! they'll send an experienced man, never fear!" Roger poured himself another cup of coffee. "Hello! Here's a caller!"

It was Qui-tha, riding a half-starved pony whose mangy sides were working in the early morning sun like a pair of bellows.

He dismounted and grinned affably. "How! You give Qui-tha more strong medicine, maybe!"

"Look here, Qui-tha, I'll give you all the strong medicine you want, if you'll stay and help me for a week," cried Ernest.

Qui-tha shook his head. "No got time to work. Must go back to Injun camp take care of sick Injun. Qui-tha heap big medicine man, now."

"All right!" Ernest shrugged his shoulders. "No work, no strong medicine."

Qui-tha shrugged his shoulders and remounting, he started on up the trail to the ranch house. Elsa reported later in the day that Dick, having no peroxide, had promised to get some from Archer's Springs if Qui-tha would do a day's work for him. Qui-tha, she said, was giving the matter due consideration.

Late that evening, while Roger and Gustav were working at the little forge, Ernest came out of the living tent where he had been writing letters.

"Did you fellows hear a gun shot a little bit ago?" he asked. "You two are making such an infernal racket, I can't tell what it was."

Roger and Gustav both stopped work and listened. The desert was breathlessly silent.

"Are you sure?" asked Roger. "Did you think it might have been at the ranch?"

"I couldn't tell. It may have been nothing at all but you folks here. But if I hear it again, I'm going up there."

It was fifteen or twenty minutes later that Elsa's voice came from the trail.

"Ernest! Roger! Gustav!"

The three men started on a run to meet her. A dark figure in the starlight, she staggered exhausted toward them.

"The Indian—had whiskey—he and Dick both drunk. The Indian shot Dick—in the leg and ran away."

"Did he hurt you girls?" cried Roger.

"Not a bit. But Dick's terrible. We've got him in his bedroom. But if his leg didn't prevent him he'd climb out of the window."

As she spoke, she turned back toward the ranch with the men. "You go ahead. I'm all in and will follow slowly," she said.

"Not with that Indian around in the desert," exclaimed Ernest. "Gustav, you come along with Elsa and Roger and I'll run for it."

They could hear Dick's roars as they neared the adobe. When they burst breathlessly into the living room, Charley was standing by the door holding in place a chair which hung on the knob and against the door jamb made an effective bolt.

"Is he armed?" asked Roger.

"No," replied Charley. "There's the only gun in the house," pointing to the one on the table. "And Qui-tha had his with him as he ran out of the house."

Roger turned to Ernest. "We could just leave him in there alone to wake up, if there wasn't danger of his bleeding to death. Come on, Ern. Remember he's as strong as a bear and be ready to jump him with me. Get some clean rags and water, Charley, and bring them in when we call. And keep Gustav out. He'll faint."

They slid quickly into Dick's room, closing the door behind them. Dick lay on the bed, blood oozing through his pants leg below the knee. He seemed too sick to move, but Roger would take no chances.

"Ern, you hold his hands above his head while I cut off that pants leg."

The precautions were unnecessary. Dick lay muttering and limp while Roger uncovered a nasty wound that had plowed to the bone down Dick's skin.

"Qui-tha must have been at close quarters when that happened," said Ernest. "You'll need help, Roger. Hand me that towel and I'll tie his hands."

Roger handed Ernest the towel, then went out for the rags and water. Gustav and Elsa had arrived. He had hardly answered them that Dick's wound was not very serious when there was a sudden uproar. Dick had gone amuck again and even the girls had to be called into service to help with the bandaging while the men held him quiet.

By the time the blood flow was staunched and the rude bandaging finished, Dick

had subsided into a drunken stupor, from which, in spite of his evident pain, there seemed little danger of his rousing for some hours. Leaving Gustav to watch, the others withdrew to the living room.

"What have you done with Felicia?" asked Roger.

"She's slept through it all, thank heaven," replied Charley. "I ran into her room as soon as Qui-tha had clattered away and she was sound asleep. So I just locked the door. I'll go in now and attend to her."

She picked up a candle and tiptoed into the bedroom. There was a moment's hush, then Charley rushed back into the living room.

"She's not there! Felicia!" Her voice rising to a scream. "Felicia! Where are you?"

Elsa ran wildly into the bedroom followed by the others. The little room was empty. Felicia's nightdress lay in a heap on the floor. The clothing she had taken off was gone. A quick search of the house, then of the outbuildings was made. To no avail. Some one gasped:

"Qui-tha!"

But Charley who had recovered her self control, vetoed this idea at once. "An Indian isn't like that! Roger, she climbed out of the window to run to you."

"I'll go down there at once," replied Roger. "The rest of you keep on calling and searching around here."

"Ride old Nell," Charley suggested, as Roger hurried away.

But Felicia was not at the Sun Plant, nor did Roger's stentorian shouts raise any reply save faint howls from a coyote pack. With a sinking heart he rode back to the ranch and called in the others whose lights were flashing about the mountainside.

"If she started for our camp," he said, "I don't see how she could have wandered away. She knows that trail so well."

"But she has never taken it alone after dark." Elsa's voice was uncertain. "And she's so little! And it was so dark to-night, I kept wandering off the trail myself."

"Let's not waste time surmising!" exclaimed Ernest, impatiently.

"But we must use a little system," returned Roger. "Girls, you patrol the trail up and down between the Sun Plant and here. I've left a lighted 'bug' in the tent. You both carry 'bugs' and extra candles and keep calling. The moon will soon be

rising, and that will help. Gustav, you make a big circle round the camp as far out as you can keep the tent light in sight. Ern, you follow the Archer's Springs trail a mile or so, then swing inside of Gustav's circle and cover all the arroyas and rock heaps you can. I'm going to take the mountain trail. Everybody get something for a tourniquet. At sun up, come back here. If you can find her, or even get her trail, fire three shots."

Elsa gave a little sob, but Charley was tearless. As they started for their respective stations, she asked: "How about Dick?"

Roger flushed a deep red. "Dick rots for all I care until we find Felicia."

No one commented on this and shortly the desert was dotted with slow moving fingers of light. Roger, as he panted up and down the mountainside, knew that never would he forget the wistful melancholy of those thin calls that rose and fell all night, now in Gustav's, or Ernest's deep notes, now in the high treble tones of Elsa or Charlotte. "Felicia! Felicia! Felicia!" But Felicia did not answer.

With the dawn, the wind rose, and there began that perpetual shifting and sifting of the sand which in a few hours more, Roger knew, would obliterate the little girl's trail, although it was only a summer wind which would die down by mid-morning.

At sun up, a weary eyed, hoarse and hectic group gathered in the living room of the adobe.

"Now," said Roger, "you girls get three or four hours' sleep, then one of you go down to the Plant and one of you stay here. We three men will take a day's water and grub supply and keep to the general beats we had last night. I can't believe, unless Qui-tha got her, that she wandered very far."

"But I saw her after Qui-tha had gone. If a rattler struck her she—" Charley stopped.

"How long does a person live after a rattler bite?" asked Ernest, with stiff lips.

"A Mexican who worked for us three years ago lived twelve hours but he was unconscious most of the time," replied Charley.

"Now, you girls go cook a little breakfast," said Gustav, hastily, "and ve vill do the chores, eh?"

They ate a hasty meal in the kitchen a little later. No one talked. Charley patted Elsa's shoulder in a helpless way when Elsa now and again burst into tears. They had finished their preparation for the renewal of the search when Dick called

from the bedroom. Charley went to him, closing the door after her. What she said the others did not know but there was silence in the bedroom for some moments after she came out. Then there was a confusion of sounds and Dick dragged himself on his hands and knees into the kitchen. He pulled himself up into the chair by the table. The others stood silently looking at him.

"O God!" he groaned. "O God in Heaven!"

Still no one spoke.

"Hurry!" he shouted. "What are you waiting for? She may be dead now! Hurry, you fools!"

"I'm going to stay here, Dick," said Elsa.

"You'll not! To hell with me!" Dick paused and lifted a shaking hand to his eyes for a moment. "Rog, you go along the foot of the range and search every canyon. Watch every spot of shade. I've warned her so often about desert sun."

Roger nodded and started off, Peter following him with a good supply of water and food on his back. Ernest and Gustav were to use the two horses.

The sun rose higher and higher, crossed the zenith and traveled toward the River Range. Roger, with dogged thoroughness, followed the trail suggested by Dick. He was numb with fear. Remotely he recalled that somehow he had been expecting this to be a decisive day in his history but it was only a fleeting memory. Every sense that he possessed was concentrated on finding Felicia. At noon, he ate and drank something, then lay down in the shade of a canyon to sleep for an hour or so, with Peter standing like a little gray bodyguard beside him. At three he was plodding on his way again, around cactus thicket, up and down washouts, over rockheaps, talking to Peter when the silence became unendurable, or his voice refused to rise longer with Felicia's name. He could with difficulty urge his body on through the burning heat. What then of a tender little girl? In this summer sun of the desert a man without water for twenty-four hours would die. What of Felicia?

By sun down he had covered several miles on either side of the ranch. He was covered with dust and his lips were cracking in spite of his free use of the canteen. He was tired to the very bones of him. The hot sand had blistered his feet. The cholla had torn his hands. When the sudden blackness of night descended, he determined to rest once more until the moon rose. He did not think that he was more than a mile from the ranch, but as there was still plenty of food and water, and as he was within ear-reach of possible gun-shots, there was

no point in going home for the few hours' rest. He removed Peter's pack, gave him some oats and a mouthful of water, then started a tiny fire of greasewood twigs. It was very hot but Roger had seen several rattlers during the day and the idea of lying down in utter darkness did not appeal to him.

Yet, he did not sleep after all. He sat, wide-eyed, feeding the tiny blaze, trying to develop some new theory on the little girl's sudden disappearance. He had been pondering this for an hour when there came the sound of footsteps stumbling through the sand. He jumped trembling to his feet.

"Felicia! Oh, Felicia!" he cried.

"No! No! It's Charley!" a hoarse voice answered and in a moment Charley appeared within the tiny circle of firelight. She was disheveled and pale, and evidently very, very tired, but still outwardly composed.

"Sit down and rest," said Roger. "Here, I've been sitting on Peter's pack blanket. There's room for us both, I guess."

Charley sank down with a grateful sigh and Roger, recalling his pipe, took it out, filled it and essayed several puffs, then established himself beside Charley.

"I couldn't stay indoors," she said. "Dick made us all lie down for a few hours' sleep, but I couldn't sleep. I thought perhaps she might have gone up the trail that she took when she went to find the Indians. If the Indian went down toward your camp, she would try to go in the opposite direction. And then, I got to wondering if she stole down to the camp, while we were all occupied with Dick, and finding it all dark, she got confused and—And then I wonder—"

Roger laid a quiet hand on the interlaced fingers with which Charley was clasping her knee.

"Easy now, Charley, easy. Have you had your supper?" Charley turned to look at him. His own eyes filled at the glimpse he got of the misery in her deep eyes—Felicia's eyes.

"Yes, I think I did," she answered.

"That's fine! Now is any one staying down at the camp in case she wanders in there?"

"Gustav's there."

"All right! Good old Gustav. It seems to me your idea about the Indian trail is a good one. How did you come clear up here, when you were headed into the

range."

"My 'bug' went out and I'd lost my matches, so I wandered off the trail, I guess, till I saw your light."

"My heavens, Charley. But it was a horrible risk you ran! You might have—"

"Don't scold," said Charley drearily. "What does it matter?"

"I won't scold," replied Roger with a gentle note in his voice that no one but Felicia had ever heard. "Now, I tell you what we'll do. We'll just rest here until the moon comes up. Then we'll try the Indian trail. Let's spread this blanket so you can lie down."

"I don't want to lie down. I just want to sit here by you. She loved you so."

"All right, Charley. I'll smoke and we'll buck each other up. How's Dick?"

"I don't really know. He won't let any of us touch him. He must be in great pain."

"I hope so," said Roger bitterly.

Charley made no reply. The process of bucking each other up did not proceed with much enthusiasm. The two sat brooding over the tiny blaze. Now and again Peter returned from a short foraging expedition and thrusting a soft nose over one of their shoulders waited to have his forehead rubbed, then started off again.

Roger noted that Charley's pallor had given way to flushed cheeks, and suddenly he was aware that he too was parched and feverish; that try as he would to think, clearly, he could do nothing but wonder, impatiently, when the moon would rise and to fight down the picture that rose constantly of tiny Felicia wandering in an endless desert. Measuring the depth of his love for the child by the immensity of his fear, he was astounded by its greatness.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GREAT DIVIDE

The moon appeared at last and suddenly all the desert lay before them like molten silver. They rose, stiffly, and Charley helped Roger to replace the little pack on Peter. Roger led, Peter followed and Charley brought up in the rear. For hours, they toiled slowly up into the range, flashing their "bugs" into the shadows, stopping now and again to go over rock heap or cactus clump carefully, then on again, neither of them speaking, even to Peter, except to call at irregular intervals Felicia's name.

Dawn found them high in the range, in a little canyon, sweet with a tiny spring about which grew mesquite and bear grass. The black ashes of old fires were there, but nothing else. Roger broke the silence of hours:

"We're both going to get a sleep here, then I'm going to take you home. We're way out of the reach of gun sound. They might have found her, you know."

They stood staring about them for a moment and listening. The unutterable silence of the desert was about them. Roger, eyes bloodshot, face unshaven, lips cracked, turned to Charley whose great eyes were sunk in her head, her lip colorless and drawn.

"Come," he said. "I'll cook the bacon and you unpack the rest of the grub. We simply haven't strength to get home without rest and food."

Charley had the remainder of the food ready for Roger when the bacon was cooked. They ate in silence, then Charley lay down on the pack blanket while Roger stretched out in a drift of sand beyond the spring. In utter weariness they both slept, unmindful of danger from snakes or vermin.

It was mid-morning when Roger woke. He sat up with a start and a sudden clear

picture in his eyes of a spot in the desert where he had not searched. About a mile from the ranch and perhaps an eighth of a mile west of the trail at the base of the range was a little stone monument. Roger had observed it but it was too small to shelter even Felicia's small frame in its shadows, so he had not troubled to make a close observation of the flat desert round about it. The picture which had awakened him was an extraordinarily vivid one of this monument. He resolved to examine it thoroughly on his way home.

Roger rose stiffly. Charley was lying on her face, her head pillowed on her arm. He moved over and touched her on the shoulder.

"Sorry, Charley," he said, "but we'd better start back."

The girl sat up, slowly. "I wasn't asleep," she said. "I've just been napping off and on. I can't sleep until I know."

"Perhaps we'll find her safe at home," Roger even managed a smile with his broken lips.

"Let's not stop to eat again!" exclaimed Charley.

Roger nodded. They reloaded Peter who was well gorged on spring water and the uncertain looking herbage that grew about its brim.

The trail back was nearly all downward and they had covered it by noon. Roger told Charley of his strange awakening dream of which he made light, but when they sighted the little monument in the distance, they both hurried toward it.

It was there that they found Felicia. On the west side of the monument the prospector had begun a hole and left it. It was not over a foot in depth nor over three feet square. Too small to show in the vast levels of the desert until one was upon it and protected from view from the mountain because of the monument, tiny as it was, it was not too small to hold her little body, huddled face downward, arms and legs cramped.

Roger lifted her out and Charley, without a word, fainted. Roger groaned and covered his eyes for a moment, then he took the pack blanket and rolled the little body in it and left it while he turned to Charley. A part of the canteen of water poured gently over her face revived her. As soon as Roger saw that she was looking at him intelligently he said, sternly:

"Charley, you've got to brace up until we can get home. You must help me get you and her back by keeping as much of a grip on yourself as you can. Remember this is desert noon and we can't temporize. You mount Peter. We'll

leave the pack here. I'll carry Felicia."

He took the shot gun from the pack and fired three shots into the air, followed by two more; the code that Ernest had suggested after the first night's hunt had led them to fear the worst. Then he lifted the little blanketed form across his breast and slowly led the way back to the ranch. He could not weep. He could not curse. He could only hope, blindly, that the volcano within him would not burst forth until his work was done.

Ernest met him a short distance from the ranch house, and took the little body from his arms, without a word. Roger turned back to Charley.

"I'm not coming up to the house just now," he said gruffly. "I'm afraid to see Dick."

Elsa, hurrying up to help her friend, tears streaming down her tired, pretty face, heard this:

"Don't try to see him, Rog, but you're not fit to go down to the camp yet. Lie down on the cot on the porch for a little while first."

Roger who was dizzy and staggering caught Gustav's arm. The good fellow had come panting up, uncertain what to say or do to show his sympathy and pain.

"Just for a few minutes then," panted Roger; "I don't want to see Dick for I'd kill him."

"No—don't vorry. I von't let you," said Gustav. "Come, lieber freund, take the steps mit slowness."

Roger dropped on the couch and Elsa and Charley went into the living room. Suddenly Dick shouted:

"Snake bite! On the ankle there! O God Almighty!"

Roger jumped to his feet and ran to the living-room door. Dick on an improvised crutch was staring down at the little form on the cot. Roger lunged for him with an oath, but Gustav caught Roger round the waist, and Charley, who had been sitting weakly in one of the camp chairs, her face bowed on the table, sprang forward, her eyes blazing.

"Don't you dare bring your hellish temper into this room of death, Roger Moore!" she said. "Supposing Felicia had seen you in one of your temper frenzies, mightn't she have run away from you just as she did from Dick?"

Roger stood as if paralyzed. Charley turned to Dick. "Fratricide!" she sobbed.

"Murderer!" Then her voice rose hysterically. "Oh, why did I risk that little child to your weakness? Why? I killed her by it! I killed her!"

Elsa ran to put her arm about Charley. "Come, dear, come into the bedroom and let me talk to you."

Roger stood motionless for a moment, staring at the bedroom door which was closed in his face. Dick dropped into a chair with eyes closed, sweat pouring down his forehead and chin. Gustav gave Roger a tug and Roger allowed himself to be led back to the cot.

Here he lay for a few moments glaring up at Gustav who perched himself watchfully on the cot edge. Then he said hoarsely: "Is that true, Gustav, what Charley said about me?"

Gustav's honest face worked and his lips trembled. "Vell, you haf a bad temper, and she was a frightened little thing like a rabbit at a cross word."

Roger groaned and closed his eyes. He lay for a long time so silent that Gustav was sure he was asleep. The house within was very silent. Elsa came out onto the porch and spoke to Gustav, softly and Roger opened his eyes.

"It's all right, Gustav, old man," he said gently. "I won't touch Dick. Go on and do what Elsa wants and as soon as I've rested a bit, I'll help you."

"You'll feel better if you have some food, Roger." Elsa came round to the side of the cot where Roger could see her. She was carrying a bowl of milk and a plate of bread, which she placed silently on a chair beside him, then she and Gustav disappeared toward the tool house where Ernest already had gone.

Roger did feel better after he had cleaned the two dishes and he dozed a little.

He was roused by the sound of sawing and hammering from the tool house. A moment after Charley flew out the door and down the trail to the door of the little adobe shack.

"What are you all doing?" Roger heard her ask in a voice totally unlike her own, so shrill it was, and broken.

"Don't come in, Charley," cried Elsa. "Roger, come here."

Roger already was hurrying down the trail.

"You must take Charley down to the Plant and keep her there for awhile," Elsa said firmly, as Roger came up. "We'll tend to things here—she's reached her limit."

"Wait till I get Peter," replied Roger. He was back shortly with the little burro and Charley's broad hat. When the trembling girl mounted he walked beside her with a steadying arm over her shoulders. Her helplessness suddenly made her seem very like Felicia to him.

"We'll go right to the living tent," he said, quietly, "and you must try to rest while I get some supper."

"No! No! Don't leave me. I'm not hungry. I can't rest! I killed her, Roger, I killed her!"

"Nonsense! Booze killed her. Come, Charley, dismount, poor girl, and we'll turn old Peter loose," as they reached the camp.

Charley dismounted, then stood staring levelly into Roger's eyes. "I let my love for Dick kill her. I hate him now. Oh, how I hate him!"

"Don't talk about that," exclaimed Roger. "Charley, let's go into the living tent out of the sun."

They sat down side by side on one of the trunks. Roger had a vague notion that Charley would find relief if she could weep. But he had no notion of how to make her do so. He took one of her feverish, trembling hands in his and began talking at random.

"You are so like Felicia. You two always were getting confused in my mind and right now it's worse than ever. She loved me as much as I loved her. And now you'll have to try to be fond of me too, for her sake, Charley, and overlook my failings. You didn't kill her, my dear. She might have been bitten anywhere and at any time. Try to think of that. Why, you took wonderful care of her. Such care as never was on sea nor land, she used to say to me."

Felicia's familiar little phrase was too much for Charley. Suddenly she ran over to one of the cots and dropping there burst into tears. Then Roger, wiping the sweat from his face, left her while he went out to boil the tea kettle. When he returned in about half an hour, he was able to persuade Charley to drink a cup of strong tea and eat a cracker. The sun had set by the time she had finished, and she asked him to walk with her up and down the sand before the door.

How many hours he paced up and down in the hot darkness with Charley clinging to his arm, he could not tell. She did not cry again. Her agony of mind, like Roger's, was too deep for tears. She could only wring her hands and stumble back and forth like a hunted thing.

It was Roger's first experience in trying to assuage the grief of any one else. He discovered resources within himself of which he never before had dreamed.

"We were all to blame, Charley," he insisted again and again.

"No, the fault was mine! Oh, little, lovely Felicia! Roger, you must know that though I wouldn't let you strike Dick, I hate him! I hate him!"

"Good God, Charley! Let's not bring Dick in, to-night. We have our own private hell as he has his. Do you know that I'm realizing that what you said is right? That if Felicia had seen me again in one of my temper fits, it might have driven her away, just as this did. I'll never lose control of my temper again, Charley."

She did not answer except to groan. After a time, Roger said, "I'm thinking about Dick's wound. If it isn't attended to, soon, gangrene may set in. You and I had better drive him into town to-morrow."

"We'll not. He deserves to lose his leg!"

"Perhaps he does. But **we** aren't the ones to say so. Come into the tent, Charley, you are staggering and so **am I**."

Once more he led her into the tent where he lighted a "bug" and once more they sat down side by side on the trunk. Suddenly Roger put his arm about the girl and pulled her close against him, saying brokenly:

"Oh, Charley! Charley! You are so like her! Lean against me, dear, as she would, and we'll try to weather this together." And Charley, with a tremulous sigh, laid her soft cheek against his rough, unshaven one. They sat there until the tent was filled with the lovely gray of the filtered moonlight. Then Roger persuaded Charley to lie down. But when she had done so she clung to his hand.

"Stay with me, just a little bit longer," she whispered. Roger seated himself on the floor, clasping her hand closely. It was not long before Charley, still clinging to his hand, drifted off into uneasy slumber. Roger then leaned his tired head against the pillow and cramped as he was in his sitting posture, he dropped into a profound sleep.

Thus Gustav found them at dawn. His face was tear-stained but he smiled a little with a look that was full of pity and understanding. He tried to tiptoe out without a sound but a board creaked and Charley sat up, stared at him, then exclaimed:

"I must go up and dress her."

Roger clambered to his feet. Gustav came over to the cot and took Charley's

hand in both his own.

"Miss Elsa haf dressed her, in the leedle vite dress and sash. And den, Miss Charley, you know how in so few hours Gott changes the bodies ve love so ve can't vish to haf them longer—so ve lay the little sister up on the mountain side last night, ven the moon came."

Charley sat staring at him with horror in her eyes, then when he had ceased speaking, she lay back and closed her eyes and the two men left her.

Later in the day, it was decided that Gustav must drive Dick, who was in great pain, into Archer's Springs to the doctor. Charley absolutely refused to see Dick or to offer any suggestions.

Just as the wagon with Dick perching on the cot at the bottom was ready to start for the camp Ernest called:

"Oh, Gustav, be sure to find out about the Smithsonian's visitor and wire to Washington the reason for our failure to meet him."

Roger, who was standing in the living tent, caught his breath. Through his grief for Felicia merged realization that his great opportunity had come and gone. For the first time in three days he turned to the engine house.

CHAPTER XIV

WASHINGTON

After the wagon was a receding dust-cloud on the trail, Charley went back up to the adobe, where Elsa was to stay on with her, and Ernest to sleep at night.

Outwardly life assumed its old routine. Gustav returned on the third day and reported that Dick was established at Doc Evans' house and that the Doc said "he'd have Dick about again in two or three weeks if no new complication set in." He also brought a letter from the Smithsonian man, Arlington, somewhat caustically deploring the fact that Roger had not been sufficiently interested to meet him and closing with the remark that he would not be in the neighborhood again for another six months. Gustav brought with him, too, the refilled drums of sulphur dioxide.

Roger handed the letter, without comment, to Ernest and went back into the engine house. He did not go up to the ranch for supper that evening as he had been doing, but the following morning which was Sunday, he appeared for breakfast. He was looking haggard and old but he greeted his friends cheerfully.

"Got any victuals for a broken down inventor?" he asked Charley.

She smiled faintly as she set a place for Roger at the table.

"You certainly look the part, Rog," said Ernest. "It's a good thing you've got friends with business heads."

"With what?" exclaimed Roger.

"Don't be cynical!" cried Elsa. "We sat up half the night working out a wonderful scheme for you. We—"

"Yes," Ernest interrupted eagerly, "we all went over the situation and we've made

up our minds to a mode of action. You are such an impractical old chump, Rog! It's ridiculous for you to waste your time trying to make an engine out of a junk pile while the main idea of your invention, the real selling part, is neglected." He stopped to butter a biscuit.

Roger sipped his coffee and waited for Ernest to continue. "Now then, Elsa has a little money, enough to take me to Washington and back. It's her idea that I take that and go to see the Smithsonian people. There's not the slightest sense in your going. You're no salesman and I am. You remember it was I who landed Austin in the first place."

"I remember," said Roger quietly.

There was a long silence. Roger thought of the tiny food supply and of the months of experimentation that must go on before the Sun Plant would show efficiency.

"I hate to see Elsa putting money into this thing," he said slowly, "but at most I can always take a job and pay her back."

"Of course you can!" exclaimed Elsa.

"I know I can get money from the Smithsonian," said Ernest, "and we'll repay her at once."

Roger looked at Charley. "What do you advise?" he asked.

"I wouldn't hesitate for an instant," she replied. "Elsa feels just as I would—that the work must be finished."

"I know I can land the Smithsonian," reiterated Ernest, "and we'll repay Elsa at once."

"You needn't hurry," exclaimed Elsa. "As long as I have no money, I can't go home!"

Roger looked from Ernest to Elsa, then out the door across the desert to where the Sun Plant lay in the burning, quivering blue air.

"We'll try it out, Ern," he said. "You know how grateful I am to you both."

Ernest nodded. "Nobody's using the horses, so I'll drive in and leave the team at Hackett's. If Dick gets well before I come back he can drive himself out. Otherwise it will be waiting for me. Elsa, do you think you could fix up a clean collar and shirt for me?"

"If she can't, I can," offered Charley.

"Take anything you can find of mine," Roger's face was more cheerful than it had been for days. "I'll get the reports and drawings ready for you."

So, by the united efforts of the two households, Ernest was made ready for a flying trip to civilization. He was so happy and excited over the trip that he really lifted some of the sadness that had hung so heavily over the ranch house. After his departure, Gustav slept at the ranch, in order to do the chores while Roger remained at the Plant.

Ever since he had reached the desert Roger had been conducting heat tests and while he was able under perfectly controlled conditions to produce higher temperatures than those of the tables he had used for so many years, his average readings under the absorber glass were less than he had counted on. And so he was at work on a new type, low pressure engine, for which his average temperatures would produce ample heat.

Ernest took little stock in his new idea. "It may take fifty years to work it out," he had said the day he left for Washington. "Increase your absorption area and let it go at that. Better men than you have spent their lives on the low pressure idea and failed."

"I tell you," Roger had insisted, "that with a few changes of this present engine, I'll produce *the* low pressure engine of to-day."

"Well, go to it, old man! In the meantime, I'll fetch you some money so you can buy all the parts needed, and not have to continue your awful career of mountain brigand. The devilish thing about you inventors is that you putter so. My God, you drive me crazy! I do honestly believe that if it weren't for fear of starvation, you'd be puttering here for ten years."

"You're getting to be nothing better than a common scold, Ern," returned Roger with a laugh. "I'll be glad to get you out of the camp. Run along now and do your little errand."

With a routine established for caring for the two households, Roger bent all his splendid mind and energies on re-making the engine. Charley, coming to the camp one afternoon, as she or Elsa often did to cheer Roger's long day, watched him as he worked with infinite care to adjust a gauge he had taken apart.

"One of the many things that break me up," she said, "is that you missed the visit from the Smithsonian man."

"As it turns out," replied Roger, stoutly, "I didn't miss anything. I found when I got to work again that my safety device was inadequate and I've been all this

time evolving a new one. If I'd run the engine as it was, I might have had a nasty blow-up and I've made one or two other changes, too, that are important."

"The engine doesn't look so very different to me," said Charley.

Roger chuckled. "Her whole insides have been made over really, by just a few changes. When Dean Erskine gets the new parts made and down here, I'll be O. K. I sent the design up to him when Ernest went in and some new parts ought to be here in a couple of weeks, now. I told Ern to have Hackett deliver them on arrival. It's too complicated to explain to you but I had another corking good idea the day that Dick went. I'm glad Arlington won't get here for six months."

Charley's eyes filled with sudden tears. "You're a lamb, Roger," she murmured.

"Where's Gustav?" asked Roger, quickly.

"He's puttering with the Lemon. If you need him, I'll go up for him."

"No, you won't. It seems to me that you need water on the alfalfa badly. The second field is getting pretty yellow."

Charley sighed. "I know it! Roger, that well just isn't adequate. I've told Dick so fifty times. He should have begun work on a driven well, long ago, but he's simply hipped on the powers of this present well. I think that the old thing is going dry."

"You do?" Roger's tone was startled. "Here, there's no hurry on this job. I'm just waiting really for the new parts. Let's go up and have a look at your whole water outfit."

They set off forthwith, the Lemon starting on its uneasy way, just as they reached the pumping shed.

"Something's wrong, certainly," exclaimed Roger, watching the stream of water that came from the pump. "There isn't half the usual stream there. Do you think the pump is all right, Gustav?"

"The pump is new and goot. The vater is low. Sometime, no vater it come at all. Then I vait for it to fill again."

"I don't understand it at all," said Charley. "There is plenty of water in this range. You see that old silver mine, up there?" pointing to an ancient dump on the mountainside back of the house. "Well, the lower level of that has a foot of water in it."

"How does it seem, stagnant?" asked Roger.

"I've never seen it," replied Charley. "Dick told me."

Roger lighted his pipe and took a few meditative puffs. "Charley, are you and Dick entirely broke?" he asked.

"We've got enough left of the turquoise money to grub stake us to the end of the year. Why, Roger?"

"Well, I think you've got to have a decent gasoline engine here, at once, if you're going to save that first crop."

"But I thought your plant—" Charley spoke carefully as if fearful of hurting Roger.

"So did I," he returned, a little bitterly. "But I've thought a good many things in my life that haven't come true."

"I'm very certain that this new engine of yours will do everything you expect of it." She smiled a little. "You remember poor old Mrs. von Minden said you were to found an empire."

Roger grinned. "She didn't know engineers!"

Charley's smile faded as she stood staring at the Lemon. "No, a new engine is out of the question. We—we have some bad debts that keep Hackett from giving us credit. We're counting on this first crop to clear part of that up."

"Then," said Roger decidedly, "there's just one thing to be done. We'll move the Sun Plant up here, now, while I'm waiting to complete the engine."

"The absorber and condenser! Oh, Roger man, the whole crop would be burned to a crisp while you did that! And only you and Gustav to do it, and the team is at Archer's."

Roger bit his pipe stem. "There must be a way," he insisted, doggedly. "There's got to be."

"Vy not make the vell, first," suggested Gustav who had been a silent auditor to the entire conversation. "If you don't get vater, a gut engine is no gut."

"Who's going to dig it?" asked Roger. "If it takes as long to get to water up here as it did at the Plant, you and I would be at it till October. No! I'm going to get help. I don't know how I'm going to get it, but it's going to be done. I could keep twenty men busy here for a month."

Charley sighed and Gustav shrugged his shoulders.

Roger relighted his pipe and went into a brown study. Gustav waited patiently for several moments, then left to do the evening chores. Charley sat on an empty box beside the pump watching now the stream that flowed over the field and now Roger's half closed eyes. Finally he emptied his pipe and rose.

"Didn't Elsa call supper?" he asked.

"Some time ago." Charley rose too. "But I didn't want to interrupt. Have you solved your troubles?"

"I don't know. But I've thought of something I'm going to try out. Wasn't that camp Felicia went to a permanent one?"

"Yes, in a way. The Indians come there again and again. But they won't work, Roger."

"Old Rabbit Tail works. Charley, take a little trip with me to-morrow. Let's see if my idea works."

"I'd like to, Roger. I haven't been away from sight of this adobe hut but twice in a year. Once, the night we found you, and once, the night you and I—"

"I know, poor old girl! Well, let's have a little picnic trip of our own to-morrow. We'll take Peter and some grub—get a dawn start and be back by sundown."

"Oh, I'd love it!" cried Charley, looking like Felicia with the sudden flash of joy in her eyes. "I'll put up the best lunch ever. Come along, Roger, do! Elsa will take our heads off."

Roger invited Elsa to accompany them on the mysterious trip, but Elsa refused to go.

"Dick will be back any day now," she said, "and I'm going to be here when he comes."

Charley made no reply to this but Roger frankly shrugged his shoulders. "I feel as if I never wanted to see him again. I'll be here at dawn, Charley. You can meet me at the corral, can't you, so's not to rout the others out too early?"

Charley agreed and dawn was just unfolding over the desert when she tied the grub pack to Peter's saddle. She waited for some time, sitting on the rock, her back against the corral, before Roger came. He appeared at last, just as the first rays of the sun shot over the mountains.

"Sorry to be late," he said, "but my gasoline's given out and I had to cook breakfast by hand, as it were, over some chips. Whew, it's going to be one hot

day."

"I don't care how hot it is," replied Charley, recklessly. "I feel as I were being taken to the county fair, and I was almost too excited to sleep. Come along! I know the trail well."

It was a well beaten trail. The Indians had used it for countless generations in their search for pottery clay. It lifted zig-zag over the Coyote Range, giving at the crest this morning a superb view of distant peaks and of gold melting into blue infinities. It dropped zig-zag into canyons that were parched and cracked with late summer heat and lifted again to cross a peak whose top and sides had been blasted and left purple and gashed by an ancient volcano. Then once more it dropped gradually and gracefully into the canyon where the little spring mirrored the blue of the Arizona sky.

There were half a dozen Indian sun shelters near the spring, each a mere cat's claw and yucca thatch, supported on cedar posts. To Roger's surprise and gratification the Indians were at home. It was still early and they were at breakfast. With Peter trailing like a dog, Charley and Roger stopped a short distance from the camp.

Old Rabbit Tail, in his breech clout, squatted near a pot of simmering stew, now dipping in a long handled spoon and eating from it meditatively, now puffing at a yellow cigarette. Several squaws in dirty calico dresses, squatted near by awaiting their turn. Each shelter held a similar group, every one of which paused in breathless interest as the two whites approached.

Roger strode directly up to the old chief. "Good morning, Rabbit Tail!" he said.

Rabbit Tail grunted.

"I came up to have a talk with you," Roger went on, pulling out his pipe. "Sit down, Charley, this is going to be a regular pow-wow."

A tall Indian in the next shelter rose slowly and started quietly toward the back trail. "Hey! Qui-tha!" called Roger, sternly, "Come back here! I've something to say to you. The sheriff ought to have you. Call him, Rabbit Tail."

Rabbit Tail spoke in Hualapai and Qui-tha came slowly up to the old chief's shelter and dropping down beside him, lighted a cigarette. Charley, sitting on a rock at a little distance, chin in hand, arm on knee, shivered slightly in the broiling sun. Roger, who had learned much about Indians from Qui-tha, jerked his thumb at Charley.

"You know that white woman, Rabbit Tail?"

"Four years!" replied the chief.

"What kind of a woman is she—eh?"

"Good woman. My squaw have papoose one time in her 'dobe. Charley take care her all same she her sister. Heap good white squaw, Charley."

The squaw in question nodded and smiled at Charley, who smiled in return, a little sadly. Roger turned to Qui-tha.

"How about her brother, Dick Preble? You like him?"

Qui-tha, his brown face expressionless, nodded. "Yes! Most whites steal and lie. Dick he never steal or lie to Injun. Good man, except when drunk."

"Exactly," Roger clutched his pipe bowl firmly. "Did you tell 'em about the little girl—eh?"

Qui-tha looked up in honest surprise. "Tell what 'bout little girl?"

Roger turned to Rabbit Tail. "You haven't heard about what Qui-tha did to little girl?"

"Me no touch little girl," exclaimed Qui-tha, indignantly. "Have fight with Dick', no touch little girl. Like little girl, bring her home when she get lost up here."

"You know how Dick is a devil when he gets drunk?"

Qui-tha nodded.

"You knew that, yet you brought him a bottle of whiskey and got drunk with him and shot him in the leg when you fought."

The old chief turned inquiringly toward Qui-tha. Again Qui-tha nodded grimly.

"And you knew that the infernal drunken row you kicked up that night frightened the little girl so that she ran away into the desert where a rattle snake bit her and she died—died all alone at night, in the desert."

A look of complete horror rose in Qui-tha's eyes. "No!" he gasped.

"Ai! Ai! Ai!" cried the squaw who had given Felicia the pottery. "Poor little papoose! She was sweet, like her," pointing to Charley.

Then there was silence in the camp, all eyes turned on the old chief. Indians are great lovers of children. Their tenderness to them never fails, be they white or red or black.

"Dick heap sick?" asked old Rabbit Tail, finally.

"Yes, but he'll get well. He's at Doc Evans's house in Archer's."

"Did you tell the sheriff?" continued the chief.

"No," replied Roger. "Charley wouldn't let me."

Rabbit Tail turned to Charley. "Why?" he queried, laconically

Charley bit her lip. "The whites brought whiskey to the Indians in the first place," she said.

There was another silence. Then Roger began again. "Dick has been sick a long time now and he can't work much when he gets back. You know his alfalfa field?"

"Yes," said the chief.

"Well, Dick has been away and his water pump is no good and the alfalfa is dying. If we don't get water on it it will die. If it dies, then Charley will have much trouble, bad trouble. They owe Hackett much money because of Dick's drinking. So they can't get food unless they pay that money. They can't pay that money unless they sell much alfalfa. See?"

Qui-tha and Rabbit Tail both nodded.

"Now, I know you Indians don't believe in work. But if I can dig a big well for Charley and move my engine up to the adobe, I can get plenty of water on the alfalfa. It would take twenty Indians one week to move my plant. Rabbit Tail, you supply gangs sometimes for government work. Get Charley a gang for one week."

"You whites," said Rabbit Tail, "work heap hard for what you get—huh? If you live like Injun, no worry 'bout food, go out shoot 'em. No worry 'bout bed. Sleep in sand, huh?"

Roger nodded. "I think many times you're right, Rabbit Tail. But it's too late now. Whites have lived like this too many hundreds of years. They can't change to your ways any more than Indians can change to white ways."

Again there was a long pause before Rabbit Tail began once more.

"You know you whites kill many Injuns. Give Injun dirty sickness—kill Injun babies. Me—I see white take Injun baby by feet, smash head against rock. See Injun squaw belly cut out by white man. You know all that?"

Roger nodded. "The whites have been rotten to the Indians. I don't blame you for hating us. But how about Charley and the little girl?"

One of Qui-tha's squaws spoke. She had been educated at an Indian school.

"Charley showed me how to cure my baby of sore scalp and how to take care of him when he had croup. She lets me stay with her when he is sick or I am."

"She lets me use her sewing machine whenever I want it," spoke up a pretty young squaw in a red gingham dress.

"When old Chachee die," an elderly Indian woman looked from Charley to Rabbit Tail, "she die in Charley's house. Charley help sickness in her chest better'n medicine man."

Roger looked at Charley. He knew that she liked the Indians but she never had mentioned her good works to them.

The educated squaw spoke again. "I hate most white women. They treat us as if we were servants. But Charley treats us as if we were human beings like herself. And Felicia was a beautiful child."

"It's queer some of you have never been near Charley then, in her trouble," said Roger.

"The men have been working for months on the government dam at Bitter Peak. We were with them and just got here three days ago. Of course, Qui-tha didn't tell what little he knew. If the men won't help Charley, we women will. We could carry water to the field."

Qui-tha rose and walked over to Charley. "Qui-tha heap sorry. You give Qui-tha to sheriff."

Charley shook her head. "What good would that do?"

"All right then, Qui-tha go help one week, fix the alfalfa."

Old Rabbit Tail lighted another cigarette. "We come Monday, bring fifteen men, one week," he said.

"You know neither Roger nor I have any money, Rabbit Tail," explained Charley.

"Money no pay for blood. You good to Injuns. Now Injuns good to you."

Roger rose. "Thank you," he said simply. But Charley was too moved for words and as if she understood, one of the squaws put one hand on the girl's shoulder while she patted her cheek.

They clambered back to the top of the trail, without a word until the camp was out of sight, then Roger said with a half smile,

"You are some girl, Charley dear."

"And you are some boy, Roger."

"I? Why Charley, I'm just beginning to realize that I have gone through life with my eyes shut. The man with one idea misses most of life. I went up there with the intention of threatening a lot of savages. I've come away feeling as if I'd met a group of intelligent and kind hearted fellow humans."

"It was wonderful of them, wasn't it!" exclaimed Charley. "I had no idea they felt under obligations, to me. I certainly didn't want them to."

Roger nodded and looked at his watch. "It's only nine o'clock now. If it wasn't so frightfully hot and there were any place to go, I'd say let's continue our spree."

"Just beyond that strip of desert there," Charley pointed into the valley to the east, "there are some wonderful Indian inscriptions on some rocks around a spring. I've never seen them, but I've always wanted to and I know the trail. Dick has shown it to me."

"Let's try it," said Roger. "Peter, come on, you're getting fat and lazy. I believe it's about ten degrees hotter than usual."

It was an hour's climb down into the valley. It lost its level look on near inspection. In every direction a fine, powderlike sand lay in long undulating ridges. Neither rock nor cactus was to be seen. A faint wind was stirring and tiny eddies of sand rose against the sky.

"You see that peak, due east?" asked Charley. "Well, the spring is just at the foot of that in a little canyon. There's never any trail here at all, the sand drifts so."

"I'm glad we're heading for a spring," exclaimed Roger. "I know I can empty the gallon canteen by myself."

They started ahead, Roger leading, Peter following behind Charley. It was heavy slow walking. After perhaps an hour of it, during which conversation languished more and more, Charley said,

"I don't feel as eager minded as I did about Indian writings, do you?"

"Well," replied Roger, stopping to wipe the sand from his face and to grin at Charley. "I wasn't eager about the hieroglyphics to begin with. I haven't taken a girl for a walk for years and I thought this was my chance!"

"How is your enthusiasm for that standing up?" chuckled Charley.

Roger cleared his throat. "You see, it's like this—" he began, his eyes twinkling.

Charley interrupted by catching his arm. "Look, Roger! There's a sand storm coming!"

Roger looked up the desert to the north. The familiar gray veil of sand was plainly visible. "Lord!" he exclaimed. "We'd better start back at once."

"No, we're within a mile of the spring, now," said Charley. "We'd better get there as fast as we can. I do hope Gustav and Elsa will be all right. That poor new field of alfalfa!"

"Perhaps it won't be so bad in the other valley. Certainly this sand is going to try its best to suffocate us. Whew, there she comes!" as a cloud of sand enveloped them.

They paused long enough to adjust their bandannas across their faces, then started hurriedly on, Roger holding Charley by the hand and catching Peter's lead rope firmly. In ten minutes the peak toward which they were heading was obscured.

"Shall we stop or press on?" shouted Roger.

"Let Peter lead!" cried Charley. "If he stops, we'll stop."

Peter, shoved ahead of the little procession, did not hesitate. He dropped his head between his knees and moved very slowly, but none the less surely onward. The walking was almost incredibly difficult. The very desert underfoot seemed in motion. New ridges rose before their burning, half blinded eyes. The uproar was that of a hurricane roaring through a forest. Now Roger would stagger to his knees: now Charley. But Peter, lifting and planting his little feet gingerly and exactly, never stumbled. Panting, sweating, Roger after what seemed hours of this going halted Peter with some difficulty and putting his lips close to Charley's ear called, "Having a pleasant walk to the county fair, my dear?"

"Of its kind, it's perfect!" shrieked Charley in return and not to be outdone.

As if thoroughly disgusted by such persiflage, Peter brayed and started on without waiting to be urged. A moment later the footing became firmer and Peter led the way around a rock heap and buried his nose in a tiny pool that seemed thick with sand. Roger sighed with deep relief. He had seen the desert strike too often now to face her ugly moods with full equanimity.

There was no real shelter from the storm here. But it was vastly better than the open desert. They found a hollowed rock facing the spring, just big enough for the two of them to crouch with their backs against it. Although the sand sifted in on them constantly, they were at least away from the fury of the wind. There was water a-plenty at hand and they could bide their time. Peter established himself with his forefeet in the water, his tail to the storm and appeared to go to sleep.

For a time, Roger and Charley were glad to sit in silence, recovering their breath. But finally Roger stretched his cramped legs with a sigh.

"Charley, I find desert life just a bit strenuous," he said.

Charley wiped her face vigorously with her bandanna and nodded.

"So do I. But I like it. I think I must like the constant fight and the awful beauty. There's nothing else here."

"Have you anything in you but Anglo-Saxon blood?" asked Roger.

"No," replied Charley.

"That accounts for your loving it, I believe. The Anglo-Saxons are the trail makers for civilization. And by Jove, if any two people on earth are making trails it's you and Dick."

"You're Anglo-Saxon yourself. What is your work but trail making?"

"We aren't all trail makers!" Roger gave a half cynical chuckle. "You know I'm solving the labor question."

"With old Rabbit Tail's gang?"

"Hardly! Yet, by golly, Charley, I don't know but what I'm developing a typical labor situation down here. The Indian gang is working as a favor, you understand, and not from any necessity."

Charley laughed. "If it weren't for you inventors, we all could revert comfortably to Rabbit Tail's philosophy."

"It was to make that philosophy workable that started me inventing. That is, to give every man food and shelter with a minimum of work."

Once fairly launched, Roger gave Charley a rapid picture of the strike and the burning of the factory. When he had finished the two sat long in silence watching the gray veil that roared before them.

At last Charley shook her head. "It's a long trail from the old plow factory to the hieroglyphic spring, Roger."

"A long way," agreed Roger, "and I have no idea whether I'm helping or hindering labor. I only know now that my job is to make deserts bloom. Let labor go hang!"

Charley did not answer. She sat with her brown hands clasping her khaki knees, her hat pulled low over her eyes. Roger eyed her affectionately. It occurred to him that since Felicia's death, she had seemed more than ever like a fine intelligent boy. And yet he was honest enough to tell himself that there was infinitely more satisfaction in sitting in a hollowed rock with Charley than with any boy he had ever known. Suddenly Roger put his long arm across Charley's fine shoulders.

"Charley, you old dear!" he said. "I am mighty fond of you! You're the best man I know."

Charley said nothing for a moment. She reached up to clasp the hand that hung over her shoulder, then she turned to look into Roger's face and there was that in her eyes that held him speechless. There was in them Felicia's innocence and Felicia's eternal query. There was Charley's own sweetness and wistfulness, but back of these were burning depths of which Roger as yet had no understanding but they stirred him so profoundly that he paled beneath his tan.

"I'm glad you're fond of me, Roger. I'm fond of you." Charley's voice was gentle.

Roger's hand tightened on the girl's. "You are very beautiful," he said, a little breathlessly. "Even with your face all dust, and in khaki, you are beautiful."

"I am glad," replied Charley with a smile that showed her white teeth.

Roger did not speak again for a long time, but he did not release Charley's hand until she said, "Roger, the storm is going down."

Then he rose and stood staring at her until, smiling again, she said, "If you'll push your friend Peter out of the spring, I'll see if I can get clean water for us."

CHAPTER XV

RABBIT TAIL'S GANG

The dust storm died down almost as rapidly as it had risen. By four o'clock the three were on their way home across the strange sea of sand. They had reached the home range before Roger said to Charley,

"By Jove, you never did show me the Indian writing! What do you mean by such subterfuge? Couldn't you think of any other way to entice a man for a stroll?"

"There were inscriptions all around you!" exclaimed Charley. "You were leaning against the drawing of a horse, all the afternoon. Where were your eyes?"

"That portion of them not blinded by sand was on you, my dear."

"Tut! Tut! Don't try freshman blarney on me, Roger! I'm getting too old for it. Besides one man doesn't blarney another."

Roger looked at Charley quickly. "Hum!" he said, "I'm not at all sure but what you're totally feminine and that I'm a fool."

"Here's the home trail," said Charley. "I hope they haven't worried about us."

Elsa was waiting supper for them and the look of relief on her face as they came in at the door told the story of the day's anxiety.

"Gustav and I have been frantic!" she said. "You poor things! Where did the storm catch you?" Then without waiting for an answer she went on. "We kept the pump going off and on all day. In fact just as steadily as the Lemon would let us, which was not very steadily, you can be sure. But I'm so afraid that the second field is gone. The sand was not so bad this time but the heat was frightful. I don't see how anything green could stand up against those heat blasts. The thermometer here in the adobe was 118° at five o'clock this afternoon."

Charley pulled off her hat and sank into a chair. "Well," she sighed, "why worry! Seems to me I've had all the troubles known to women and I'm not going to let the mere loss of the family fortune ruin an otherwise perfect day."

Elsa looked at the two sharply. But Charley went on serenely. "I've been drowned in sand. I've been bullied and baked and burned, I've been——"

"Good gracious, Els, feed her! She's delirious with hunger!" said Roger.

"Well, of course," exclaimed Elsa, "if the owner of that magnificent alfalfa crop ____"

She was interrupted by a cheerful call from Gustav who was in the corral.

"Hello, Dick! Hello! How vas the leg?"

Elsa set the coffee pot hastily on the table. The smile left Charley's face as Dick came slowly over the porch and paused just within the door.

"Well," he said huskily, "the bad egg is back."

"How's the leg?" asked Roger, stiffly.

"All right except for a little lameness. I'll sit down though, if you don't mind."

Dick sank wearily into a chair and there was a moment's silence. Roger could not have believed it possible for a human being to have changed as had Dick in less than a month. His ruddy brown hair was sprinkled with gray. He was thin, and his usually round face was sunken of cheek with heavy lines showing around his eyes and at the corners of the mouth.

"Supper's just ready," said Elsa. "You must be hungry, Dick." Dick pulled himself slowly out of his chair.

"Charley," he said, "and all the rest of you, I've just a few things I want to tell you before I try to pick up the old threads. Nothing you folks can say or do to show how you despise me can hurt me. I'm too low in my own opinion—At first, that afternoon Roger brought Felicia home, I made up my mind to kill myself. The only thing that kept me from it was realizing that Charley couldn't stand much more without losing her mind."

He paused to look at Charley, but she only gazed at him silently in return and he went on.

"When I went into Archer's Springs, I hadn't the slightest intention of ever coming back here. But lying there on the flat of my back, I came to the conclusion that the one way to help Charley endure what's happened would be to

have it make a man of me. Then perhaps in the years to come, she would grow to think of Felicia as if she were thinking of the ordinary death of a lovely little child and not with the hell of remorse she's having now. As for me, I'll always have that remorse. That's common justice. But there's no reason why Charley should have it.

"I guess that's about all, except this. For two weeks I've gone over every afternoon to the saloon and sat there for two or three hours. And the sight and smell of the booze for the first time in my life made me want to vomit."

Dick paused again, trembling visibly and staring at Charley.

"I'm sorry, Dick," she said, her lips stiff, yet quivering. "I'm going to try to care for you again. But I don't know whether I can or not. Every night when I go to bed I see first your face that night all red and bloated and distorted, then Felicia's, the way Roger and I found her. I—I've got lots to forget, Dick."

"God knows you have, Charley. But you're going to give me one more trial, aren't you? Please, Charley!"

"Try if you want to, Dick. I don't seem to care, one way or the other."

Dick's head dropped to his chest. With a little inarticulate cry, Elsa ran across the room and pulling Dick's head over to rest on her soft breast, she kissed him on the forehead.

"I care, Dicky!" she cried. "I care! It's my whole life whether you make good or not."

Dick lifted his agonized face and stared into Elsa's tear wet eyes. A slow, twisted smile touched his lips.

"Oh, Elsa! Oh, Elsa!" he breathed. "I think you've saved my soul alive!" He turned his face against her and Elsa, clasping the gray-touched head to her, looked at the others fiercely.

"Now, who hurts Dick, hurts me!"

Roger dropped his hand on Charley's shoulder. "Then look to it that he never hurts Charley again," he said sternly.

There was a silence, broken by Gustav, who came into the kitchen with the milk pail.

"Elsa, make me the pans ready!" he called.

"Coming, Gustav," answered Elsa in her normal voice. "The rest of you sit down

to supper. Gustav and I won't be a minute."

"Better wash up, Roger," said Charley. "Dick, your room is ready for you!" and she disappeared into her own bedroom.

When they finally sat down to the belated supper, Roger began at once to tell of the crop conditions and of the call on old Rabbit Tail.

"Let's see, this is Friday and he promises the gang here on Monday. I think we'd better get busy to-morrow and make the drill connections on the old Lemon. What do you think of the whole scheme, Dick?"

"I think it's perfect!" exclaimed Dick.

"Perfect if my engine works," said Roger. "But even if it doesn't, you'll still have the old Lemon and a real well. So I'll have done you no harm."

"Have you got to dismantle that condenser to move it?" asked Dick.

"Pretty thoroughly, I'm afraid. But if the Indians are any good at all—"

"If Rabbit Tail brings his pet gang," said Dick "there'll be four first class machinists in it, trained at Carlisle. Fellows who work only when they please, but Lord, they are wonders. I saw them put up an oil engine once that had been badly smashed en route. It was a poem, I tell you."

"Heaven send them then!" exclaimed Roger. "If they put this thing over for us, I'll pay for it in cold cash as soon as I get it."

"Rabbit Tail won't take money for this deal," said Charley.

"The others will, but they won't ask for it." Dick filled his pipe, and pushed his coffee cup away with a little smile for Elsa.

"My debts are getting so large now," mused Roger, "that I can begin to take a sort of pride in them. Gustav, as Dick's home now, will you come down to the Plant in the morning?"

And at Gustav's nod Roger made his adieux and went home to bed.

Monday dawned with the usual promise of merciless heat. It seemed as if the torrid days of late summer were harder to bear than July had been. Though there was an occasional dust storm, the air was quiet except for the little gusts of burning wind. These gusts were too transitory to carry a sand storm. But all day long, tall spirals of sand, like water spouts, whirled across the desert. One struck Dick's corral, during his absence, ripped off the roof of the tool house and overturned the watering trough. Several days later, one brought up against the

condenser and after knocking off the thatch, collapsed, deluging the apparatus with sand. There was something uncanny about these gigantic figures, whirling suddenly across the desert, now viciously ripping up a cholla or a Joshua tree, now collapsing ridiculously against a rock.

It was now too, that thunderstorms were occasionally heard in the distant western ranges, though rain seemed forever denied to the desert valleys. But on the Sunday noon before Rabbit Tail's gang was to arrive, the impossible happened. Roger and Gustav were eating their monotonous lunch of corned beef and canned brown bread when a curious roar broke the desert silence. As the two men looked at each other questioningly, there was a deafening crash and a huge deluge of water smashed down on the cook tent. The sun-baked canvas was like a sieve and in a moment both men were saturated.

"A cloud burst!" exclaimed Roger, grinning fatuously at the delicious sensation of wet clothing and skin.

"Gott, vat a country!" cried Gustav.

Roger's grin disappeared. "The living tent, by Jove!" Heedless of the blinding torrent, he dashed to the tent where all the morning he had been sorting and checking drawings and notes. He stopped in the doorway appalled. Everything in the tent was dripping. Drawings, instruments, camera, open trunks and bedding were flooded. The patient work of months must be done over.

"Hang this infernal desert!" roared Roger. "This is the last straw!"

He stood glowering at the wreckage, water pouring over his head and shoulders, when, as suddenly as it had begun, the rain ceased. Roger looked out the door. Every grain of sand, every cactus spine bore a tiny rainbow. The whole desert floor was a mosaic of opals. The sky was of a blue too deep, too brilliant for the eye to endure. As Roger stood with mouth agape he was thrilled by a sensation he had not before experienced. The desert, ordinarily entirely odorless, gave forth a scent. Just for a moment a pungent perfume for which he could find no adjectives swept softly to his nostrils and was gone. Roger stood a moment longer as if transfixed. Then he smiled and turning into the tent, he began to repair the damage done.

Promptly at eight o'clock on Monday morning, Roger and Dick, at work on the Lemon, were greeted by a pleasant

"How! Boss!"

Standing by the corral in various attitudes of ease, all of them smoking

cigarettes, were the members of Rabbit Tail's gang. They were lean, powerful fellows, most of them young. They were dressed almost with the similarity of a uniform, black trousers, blue flannel shirts, girdled with a twist of bright colored silk, a bandanna twisted and tied filet wise about the head. Most of them wore their black hair waist long, but there were four men with short hair and Roger wondered if these were not the machinists of whom Dick had spoken.

"Any of you men ever drill a well?" asked Roger. Two of the older men promptly nodded. "All right, Dick, here you are. Rabbit Tail, how many burros did you bring? Thirty. By Jove, that's fine! Now three of you must start clearing this space between the corral and pump house. See, I have it all pegged out. But, Rabbit Tail, I want all the mechanics down at the Plant."

The old Indian nodded, then said, "Where's Charley? You tell her come out here."

"She's up at the house," said Dick. "There she is, on the porch with the squaw. Oh, Charley! Come here!"

Charley came rapidly down the trail. Old Rabbit Tail shook hands with her solemnly. "Here is the gang. Old Rabbit Tail keep promise, see? I tell all these men why we come. See? They glad do this for white squaw good to Injuns. You say 'How' to them."

Charley's fine eyes deepened with unshed tears. "I am so grateful to all of you!" she exclaimed. "I want to shake hands with each of you," and she went down the line, the strangers among the Indians looking at her with frank curiosity and interest.

This little ceremony having been completed to Rabbit Tail's obvious satisfaction, the old chief set his men at the tasks designated at the Ranch and then with the rest of the gang and the string of burros, he followed Roger down to the Plant.

That was a mad week. The Indians showed a willingness to work that Roger had never seen equaled by white men. They were as curious about the Sun Plant as children and deeply interested in Roger's explanation of it. Their general intelligence Roger found to be high above that of the average gang of whites. He never before had had the thrill of working with a crowd of mechanics who combined skill, intelligence and interest to this degree. The four machinists proved to be all that Dick had said and more. In all his life, Roger had never had so deeply satisfying a seven days. This, in spite of the fact that he worked like his men from daylight until dark, stopping only to eat the bountiful meals that the girls, with the Indian women, prepared at the ranch. This, in spite of

ferocious heat and almost insuperable mechanical difficulties owing to the lack of lifting and trucking facilities.

For the first four days of the week, Dick was quite despondent about the water problem. But on Friday afternoon, as Roger was superintending the reerection of the condenser, he heard a wild shout and beheld Dick and his four helpers laughing and slapping each other's backs, knee deep all of them in a stream that gushed into the ditch from the new well.

"My luck has turned!" roared Dick. "My luck has turned! Look at it! Look at it! It will water fifty acres. I'll bet there won't be an inch of water left in the range. Wow!" and he plunged full length into the little crystal stream, his helpers following suit with a shout.

It was the signal for a general recess. And the men, including Roger, took a ducking and returned to work steaming but unspeakably rejuvenated. The sudden appearance of the water seemed to Roger like a happy omen for the whole endeavor and it would have been difficult to tell who was the most enthusiastic for the rest of the day, Roger or Dick.

Rabbit Tail's week was a full seven days. At five o'clock Sunday afternoon, the absorber was finished. The old tool shed stood remade, roughly to be sure, but securely, into an engine house. The condenser was half finished, the engine was standing in its new home, dismantled in parts but quite ready for Roger to adjust when the new parts should arrive.

When the old iron triangle called supper, Rabbit Tail sauntered up to Roger.

"Good job, Boss, huh?"

"Fine! The best ever! Rabbit Tail, the country is missing some wonderful mechanics and engineers in not getting you Indians interested in civilization."

The old chief grinned and shrugged his shoulders. "To-night, we go," he said.

"Let me keep Jo and the other three machinists," pleaded Roger. "I'm sure they'll be interested in finishing the condenser for me."

"Ask 'em," grunted Rabbit Tail.

"Come along," said Roger and he strode over to the bench where the four Indians were fitting together the condenser pipe. They looked up and grinned affably at Roger.

"Rabbit Tail says you fellows may stay and help me finish this condenser, if you

will. I know I can find the money to pay you for it. How about it?"

Jo, the spokesman, was a tall thin Indian, with a fine brow and intelligent eyes.

"No, I guess we'll go on back to camp, Mr. Moore," he said.

"But I thought you were interested in what I am trying to put over," exclaimed Roger.

"So we are. It's always interesting to learn what you whites are trying to do. You work so fearfully hard that we Indians are always curious to find out the idea back of the work. But as for helping you do the work—well, it's like this, you folks are always mighty interested in what we Indians do—making blankets or pottery or building hogans or making ceremonial altars. But I don't notice any of you really wanting to help us."

Roger cast a bewildered look about him but the other bronzed faces betokened full acquiescence with Jo's words.

"But why did you learn your trades so well?" he asked, finally.

"Interested in the idea—and it helps us compete with the whites, when necessary!"

"Then you really don't care about my finishing the plant?"

"Why should we?" returned Jo.

Roger sighed and scratched his head. "Then why did you come at all?"

"The chief asked us and we knew Charley. She's been kind to me and I wanted to help her out."

"If the whole gang of you would give me just two more days we could finish in good shape," pleaded Roger.

"You can get along," replied Jo. "We've done what we promised."

"Yes, you have, and a bully job. But—well, I'm floored. I just can't get your point of view." Roger's voice was rueful.

Jo laughed. "And we can't get yours."

There was an extra good supper that night and formal thanks on the part of Charley. Then, in the moonlight, the whole picturesque caravan moved off up the mountain trail.

Charley, returning to the living room, said, "Well, children, I'm cheerful in spite

of the fact that there's not two days' food left in the house."

"I've got a little credit still at Hackett's," said Roger. "I think Gustav had better go in to Archer's in the morning. I think my freight must be there from the Dean and we should be hearing from Ernest."

Dick, smoking in the doorway, nodded, then repeated the remark that he had made on the average of once an hour ever since Friday. "There isn't a well like mine in a radius of a hundred miles."

Gustav brought back two weeks' food supply, the freight from the Dean and letters from Ernest. They were very noncommittal but cheerful. He had cleared up the misunderstanding with the Smithsonian Institution, but as yet had no money and did not know when he could get back.

"Well," said Roger, "we've got grub for a week or so. I'm not quite sure whose grub it is. These two camps seem to me to have become helplessly entangled."

"Who cares!" said Elsa.

"Not you, young woman," returned Charley, dryly. She still seemed indifferent to Dick but there was no mistaking her warm enthusiasm over Elsa as a sister.

"I'm going to cut the first five acres to-morrow," said Dick. "That will solve the most pressing problems. The second field is dead. I'm going to plow it under. But I should worry. That's the best well in a radius of a hundred miles."

"Well, I'll assemble my engine." Roger tamped down the tobacco in his pipe. "The Lord send that it goes together right."

"Amen to that," said Charley, while the others nodded.

Another two weeks passed in unremitting industry, but by the second Saturday night, Roger with a sigh of unutterable satisfaction announced himself ready for a test of the plant on Monday. It was mid-September now, and it seemed as if the heat were a little less intense. The nights, at any rate, were not so parching. In spite of the sadness that would not lift, the little community was experiencing some of the contentment that comes from hard work and sympathetic companionship.

Roger was finding that the regular, well cooked meals and the home life of the adobe was making a great difference in his mental as well as his physical condition. In spite of the nerve strain of the past months, he was beginning to feel that life never had been so much worth while as now.

On the Sunday afternoon before the test of the rebuilt plant, Ernest, driven by Hackett, jogged up to the corral.

After the noisy and excited greetings and after Ernest's delight over the moving of the plant had been expressed, Ernest slapped Roger on the back. They all were talking at once, on the adobe porch.

"Here, put your eye on that, you emaciated desert blister!"

Ernest pulled a bill case carefully from his inner breast pocket and carefully extracted a check which he handed to Roger. It was for five thousand dollars. Roger stared at it stupidly.

"Browning! Who on earth is he?" he ejaculated.

"Smithsonian! I had the check made out to me. It was simpler. But I'm going to make it payable to you, right now."

He sat down at the table, pulled out his fountain pen and, signing the check, handed it over to Roger. The room was silent for a moment then, "Ernest," faltered Roger, his thin tanned face working. "I can't tell you—why old man, if I'd had a brother he couldn't have done for me what you have done. It's wonderful! How did you do it, Ern?"

Ernest beamed. "There's more where that came from. They're crazy about your whole scheme."

Roger stood staring at his friend, lost in admiration. "You are a genius, Ernest! Your talents as a salesman are lost on a college professor."

"Don't you think it! When I'm made President of the University, it will be because of my talents as a salesman."

Everybody laughed. "Ernest, do tell us how you did it," urged Elsa.

"Wait a minute!" cried Roger. "What shall I do with the check?" holding it as if it were alive and dangerous to the touch.

"Put it in your pocket, you chump! Then have a talk with Hackett. He has a connection with a bank at Los Angeles and he does a lot of banking for the miners south of Archer's Springs. He'll take care of it for you."

"I can't carry it in the pocket of my shirt, I perspire so!" protested Roger. "Why not shift it to Hackett right now?"

"So be it!" returned Ernest, wearily. "Must I hold your hand while you do it! Say, did you move my clothes up here?"

"Our living tent is just the other side of the old tool house," replied Roger. "Come along, old man, and get rid of your store clothes. You look like a tenderfoot."

"Farewell to decency again!" groaned Ernest.

"When you come back, supper will be ready," called Elsa.

Hackett was sitting in the shade of the engine house and Roger reached an understanding with him very quickly. He undertook to act not only as Roger's banker but as his purchasing agent as well, and Roger undertook to furnish him with a list of tools and machinery before his return to Archer's Springs at dawn.

Gustav was waiting impatiently during the interview, and when Roger said with a sigh:

"Well, I guess that covers everything, Mr. Hackett," Gustav put in quickly:

"Did Ernest tell you there is var in Europe. The Vaterland, England, France, Belgium. Mein Gott, you should see the papers they brought."

"Good heavens! War! You don't mean it! Not a real one," cried Roger.

"Yes, more or less real! Of course, Germany will be in Paris any time now, and that will end it," said Ernest.

"But what is it all about? War! I can't believe it." Roger looked over the breathless, shimmering desert to the far calm blue of the River Range.

"Nobody knows exactly who started it or why," said Hackett. "Looks to me though as if Germany was trying to hog Belgium."

"Belgium deserves to be hogged," exclaimed Ernest, who had changed his clothes, "after her Congo history."

"But if it is var, I must get back to the Vaterland," cried Gustav.

"Oh, as to that," returned Ernest, "I saw Werner in New York and he said for you to stay here till you heard from him. He plans to be down this way, this fall."

Gustav grinned. "That vas good. I don't vant to go, sure."

"Were you in New York?" asked Roger vaguely. "War in Europe! I can't realize it."

"Why try?" suggested Ernest. "It'll be over before you succeed. What's a war in Europe to us, anyhow? Let's go in to supper."

War was indeed a vague and shadowy affair to the little desert community: quite overshadowed by the importance of Ernest's successful trip. Roger did brood a good deal for a day or so over the disclosures in the bundle of newspapers, then the excitement of the testing of the plant swallowed everything else in life.

There was no ceremony about this test. The memory of that other trial, with little Felicia as the central figure, was too fresh and too poignant. Just before the girls called breakfast on Monday morning, there sounded a soft chug, chug from the new engine house. It was so very soft that at first Charley thought she must be mistaken. Then she slipped out to see. Roger, his hot face tense and eager, was standing before his engine watching the perfect mechanism play.

"Look at her, Charley! Look at her! Isn't she a dream? Ernest, look at that indicator—does she do any work? Has she power? Why man, she could pull the waters of the Yangtse Kiang up through the bowels of the earth and throw 'em on Dick's alfalfa fields!"

Ernest stood staring at the engine, round eyed, his mouth open! "Man, what have you been putting over on me! Why, Rog, the old girl is practically noiseless. Throw in the pump, will you?"

Dick promptly threw in the pump, but almost immediately roared. "Hey, slow her down! Slow her down! She's going to pull the pump up by the roots."

"Rog, let's see your drawings a minute, you old sly boots, you!" said Ernest.

"You will laugh at me and tell me to increase the absorber area, will you!" exclaimed Roger. "Why, old man, I've developed *the* low temperature, high speed engine! It's the one the world has been looking for for years!"

In all the years Ernest had known his chum, he never had heard him express such enthusiasm as this, over his own work. Ernest's eyes were still staring, his mouth still open.

"I believe you have, Rog! I believe you have! Lord, I wish I'd known this when I went East."

"No more sweating down to Hackett's for gasoline, eh?" exclaimed Dick.

Roger grinned. "Day before yesterday's sun is turning the wheels just now. Come on in to breakfast, folks. We can leave her to herself for a while."

Then, as Elsa and Dick followed Ernest up the trail, Roger lingered to wipe a gauge tenderly with a bit of waste. As he did so, he noticed that Charley was standing in the doorway, her eyes fastened wistfully on the whirring fly wheel.

She looked very like Felicia in her blue denim blouse and skirt and once more that old confusion of personalities flashed over Roger.

"It's—it's like Felicia's own engine, somehow," said Charley. "She did love to help you so. I wish she knew."

"Charley, dear girl—we miss her so, don't we!" Roger half whispered.

Charley's lips quivered and Roger, hastily wiping his hands, took one of hers and carried it to his lips. "You are so like her!" he said. "So like her!"

Then, they turned slowly and joined the others at breakfast.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RIVER RANGE

Late in the afternoon, after the men had carried on many and increasingly satisfactory tests on the Plant, Charley joined Roger on the porch. The others were with Dick in the alfalfa fields. They sat in silence for a time, then Charley said,

"Roger, has it struck you that Ernest has been unlike himself since his return?"

Roger pulled at his pipe and nodded. "He's putting up a good front, but the dear old boy does hate this desert life. It was a twist for him to come back to it."

"It's more than that, Roger. He's uneasy and irritable. That's absolutely abnormal for Ernest, isn't it?" Then without waiting for an answer, she went on. "Roger, has Ernest given you any details of his interviews with the people in Washington?"

"Sure he has, at least all I wanted. He said he explained everything to the Big Boss down there and that after they had spent hours together and had gotten Dean Erskine on the long distance, he got the money. It was the mistake of some underling, turning me down, after Austin's death. The head of the Institution had supposed I had been taken care of."

"Oh!" murmured Charley. She looked at Roger's face, so lined and tanned and now for the first time in months wearing an expression of relaxed contentment. She bit her lips and with an evident effort began again.

"Don't think I'm intruding, Roger, will you, but I do want to ask you one more question."

"You can ask me anything on earth, dear old Charley," replied Roger.

"Well then, have you a clear understanding of the terms on which the Smithsonian let you have this money?"

"Yes, on the same terms we had with Austin."

"Do you know that, or do you just take it for granted?"

Roger hesitated. "Why—well, in a way, I just take it for granted. That was what Ern and I talked over before he left. He's better than I at that sort of thing. He has my power of attorney and signed up the papers. I haven't gone over this since he got back, I've been so busy."

"You won't think I'm impertinent or nosey, will you, Roger, if I ask you one more question?" Charley's voice had tones in it like Felicia's and Roger was very gentle as he answered:

"Nothing pleases me more than to have you show interest in my work, Charley."

"Well then, let's have a look at those papers."

Roger looked at her curiously. "You think Ernest is as careless as I? He isn't, and you know I'm careless only because I have such confidence in him."

Charley nodded. "I know. Just put it down to female curiosity."

Roger laughed and went lazily over to the living tent, returning shortly with a tin document box. This he unlocked and ran rapidly, then again carefully, through the papers it contained.

"Ern must have them," he said finally. "Come to think of it, he just spoke of them but didn't give them back to me. They must be in his box."

"To which you have no access?"

Roger shook his head, still eyeing Charley with undisguised curiosity.

Charley drew a long breath. "Roger, there's something about this deal I don't like. Ernest is so queer, and Elsa is worried and absentminded. And every time I try to say anything about Ernest's salesmanship she takes my head off. And you know what good friends she and Ernest are normally. They never row each other. But now they're always quarreling in undertones. I would think Ernest was sore about Elsa and Dick's engagement if Ernest hadn't told me before her and Dick that he thought Elsa was foolish but that he washed his hands of the matter."

"Nevertheless that's probably what the worry is about," said Roger.

"No, it's not," very decidedly. "This noon they were at it again, in the kitchen,

while I was in my bedroom. I tried not to hear them but all of a sudden Ernest shouted, 'I don't see why I told you! You've done nothing but nag me, ever since. Werner's all right and what difference does it make whether I got the money from him or the Smithsonian?' I went right out and told them what I had overheard and asked them to be more careful. Ernest merely said they were talking of a family matter and Elsa burst into tears and walked away."

Roger laid his pipe down with a scowl. "Pshaw, Charley, you're foolish! What could be Ernest's object in deceiving me? He's as honest as daylight. He knew I was desperate and wouldn't care where he got the money as long as there were no strings to it."

Charley flushed painfully. "I don't blame you for feeling that way. That's why I wanted to see the papers in the matter."

"And why should Werner," asked Roger, "put money into a thing he never saw, when—Oh rot, Charley! I thought you had a mind like a nice fellow—above such hen rubbish."

"My mind is feminine through and through," returned Charley. "I knew you'd scold me. But promise me one thing—that you'll ask Ernest to let you see the contracts."

"I'll do that, of course. I should have done it before. That's being only businesslike."

The opportunity for the request came at the breakfast table but in a manner different from what Roger had planned.

"Somebody ought to take Mrs. von Minden's tent down," said Charley. "It looks stark lonely now at the dismantled plant."

"By the way," exclaimed Ernest, "Roger, we never sent that poor fellow's papers to a German Consul. But it's just as well. When I saw Werner in New York it turned out that he knew Von Minden. He said he'd forward his papers to the proper persons."

"How on earth did he know Crazy Dutch?" asked Roger.

"Just what I asked him. He says that a part of his work in this country is to keep an eye on all the resources of America, particularly of the Southwest. They like to keep in touch with the Germans coming to this country and help them to a profitable living. Seems that Von Minden really was quite an engineering pioneer before he went bug."

"You never did say, Ern," Roger's voice was casual, "how you happened to run on Werner."

"Didn't run on him at all," replied Ernest irritably. "I went up to see him on my way home. He told us to call on him if we ever were in New York. And I wasn't coming back to this God forsaken hole without seeing Broadway. Where is the mysterious black box, Rog?"

"I'd rather send the papers to a German Consul, Ern. Now that they're in a state of war, over there, it might be more regular."

"I promised Werner he should have them. Don't be a stick in the mud, Rog, and try to put anything regular over on me after all your high-handed predatory methods down here."

Roger flushed. "I haven't taken a thing that won't be paid for to the last dollar."

"Well, I'm not going to quarrel with you about Von Minden's box. I invited Werner down here to inspect the plant and you can fight it out with him. He'll fall dead when he sees the new engine."

"I'm not sure that I want him down here," Roger scowled, thoughtfully. "I have no patents as yet and I had an unpleasant experience with Von Minden, another with Gustav and I'm not altogether crazy about trying out a third German."

Gustav gulped his coffee and walked out of the room.

Ernest suddenly flushed deeply, but said nothing.

"I thought you were keen about Germans," said Elsa.

"I always have been, and I still am. And yet, ever since I've heard about this war —I don't know. I feel uneasy. Hang it! Germany had no business hogging across Belgium as she did. It was a dirty trick, just like the one, by Jove, Von Minden tried to play on me! Gustav, another German, take notice, tried to steal from me, too!"

There was an awkward silence, then Ernest said a little belligerently: "Germany must fulfill her destiny, no matter who suffers."

"What is her destiny?" asked Charley, curiously.

"To rule the world. The Vaterland is superman. It's coming into its own, now!"

"Superman fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Charley.

"Seems to me you picked up a lot of silly rot on this trip East, Ern," said Roger.

"Who is this Werner, anyhow? I'll have you remember, old man, when it comes to a choice, I'm all American, as I believe you are, eh?"

Slowly Ernest's face darkened. Slowly he rose from his chair. No one had ever before seen the look of passion in Ernest's beautiful eyes that now blazed there.

"There's not a drop of blood in my veins, thank God, that's not German. I say to you 'Deutschland über alles,' and all that Ernest Wolf can do to bring it about, shall be done."

"And I tell you," Elsa cried suddenly, as she crossed the room to face Ernest, "that I am all American and I hate Germany and all her works. I think you've acted like a fool, Ernest."

"Be quiet, Elsa!" roared Ernest, in exactly his father's voice.

"I'll not be quiet! I'm an American girl, not a German Fräulein. I say that you've got to cut out all this superman stuff and tell Roger where you got that money."

"Do you suppose I'm afraid to tell him? I was just waiting for Werner to come to satisfy Roger," shouted Ernest. He turned to Roger. "I got that money from Werner. Your Solar Heat Device is sold to the German Government."

There was a sudden hush in the room. Roger sat hunched in his chair. Charley and Elsa glanced at each other apprehensively.

Dick cleared his throat and spoke for the first time. "Easy, now Roger!"

Roger did not seem to hear him. "How do you mean, you've sold me to the German government?"

"What I say. The Smithsonian people turned me down cold and when I told my troubles to Werner, he offered to help me out. Germany's crazy to develop this neck of the woods. And crazier still to get fellows like you and me to using their influence among the educators and scientists of this country in favor of German culture."

Roger's face was like stone. "How do you mean, sold my device to the German government?" he repeated.

"What I say!" roared Ernest. "I sold it for fifty thousand dollars. I've checks for the rest here in my pocket, but I knew you'd get your back up, so I was waiting for Werner. Now listen, Roger, you've the chance of a lifetime. You've often said you were going to Germany if this country failed you, and it did."

Roger looked around the room in a dazed way, then back at Ernest. "You sold

my invention—the work of my life—without my knowledge or permission? Ernest, it can't be true. Why, you're my best friend!"

"Certainly I am."

"And you sold it to a stranger. Sold me out. Why I'd as soon you sold a child of mine. Damn it, are you Germans born crooked?" He rose slowly. "You picked my brains and sold the contents. You sneaked on me! And I thought you were my friend! You've lied to me ever since you came home. Why did you lie——" his voice rising now uncontrollably. "Why did you lie, you skunk?"

Ernest's face turned purple. He leaned across the table and struck Roger in the mouth.

"No one can say that to me!" he shouted.

Roger rushed around the table and seized Ernest by the throat. "Now I'm going to kill you," he said between his teeth.

Dick, shouting for Gustav, fought to break Roger's hold. Gustav came rushing over the porch.

When Roger next was fully conscious of himself he was climbing from the desert up onto a broad mesa. The sun was sinking behind the mountains into which the mesa merged. When he reached the crest of the mesa, Roger paused, shaken and breathless. There was the scramble of little footsteps behind him and Roger turned to look. Peter, packless and breathing hard, was following him. Roger drew his shirt sleeves across his eyes. He knew that Gustav and Dick had pulled him away from Ernest. How much he had injured Ernest he did not know, nor, for the present, did he care. He recalled that, with Ernest motionless on the floor, the others had united in denouncing him, that Charley had turned on him with furious eyes. Then he had fled. Not toward Archer's Springs where he was known. But with a vague idea of crossing the Colorado into California, he had turned westward.

He was fleeing not from fear nor from cowardice. He was fleeing because with the discovery of Ernest's duplicity, the entire edifice of his life had tumbled into ruins. A great loathing of the desert, of the work he had attempted there, but most of all, a red hate for Ernest, carried him across the many burning miles of desert to the foothills of the River Range. A blind desire to get away from it all, to lose himself forever, to forget all that he had ever been or known, but above everything to get away from Ernest was for the time being the motive force of his existence.

He was carrying a bag of grub and his two gallon canteen which still was heavy with water. For a moment Roger considered some method of transferring his burden to the burro's little back. But Peter was so small, so winded, that he gave up the idea and trudged on to the west. Peter fell in after him and two scarcely discernible specks on the immense floor of the mesa they moved toward the black mountain top lifting before them. There was no sound save that of their own footsteps. There was no verdure here except the martial figures of the great cacti, those soldiers of the waste, that guard the eternal solitudes. There was no wind. Only a breathless sense of brooding in the remote wonder of the sky. The desert is a hard country; a country to try out the mettle of a man and leave it all dross or pure gold.

It was starlight when Roger and Peter reached the top of the range. Beyond dimly lay another range.

Roger resolved to camp for the night in the valley below. Peter was reluctant to go farther. In fact for the last hour, Roger had been obliged to lead him. The way down was very precipitous and they had not covered a third of it when Roger slipped and fell. He did not lose his grip on the lead rope and at the sudden jerk the little burro pitched forward after Roger. But Peter got his balance immediately and threw himself back on his shoulders, bracing his feet against the roots of a giant cactus and stood fast.

Roger dangled helplessly over a black drop for a few seconds, then with the aid of the lead rope he crawled up to the root of another cactus where he lay for a moment. Then he started on downward, zig-zagging carefully this time as one should descend a trailless mountain.

Roger slept fitfully in the sand at the bottom of the valley, waking and rising at the first peep of dawn. Peter had fared rather well. There were grass tufts growing at the roots of the great cacti, around about. Roger ate a cold breakfast. He found a rough hollow in a rock, where he gave Peter a small drink of water, then he started on. But, although he cursed the little burro roundly, Peter again was reluctant to move westward, and Roger had again to take hold of the lead rope.

All day long, he continued the march westward. This range was like the Coyote Range, though there were more passes through the ridges, so that had he been able to find a trail, he could have moved rapidly. But the way underfoot was inconceivably rough and by noon Roger's shoes were cut and his feet bruised and bleeding. But he never for a moment considered turning back. He was

through—through with the old work which had brought him only disappointment, through with the old affections which had only played him false. Even Peter who had come with him voluntarily was now trying to turn back.

It was late afternoon when they reached a low mountain shoulder. As they breasted its crest, Peter raised his tail and brayed, starting forward at a trot. Roger followed to the mountain edge. The valley of the Colorado lay before him, a narrow valley here, with a range of mountains on the opposite side lifting brilliant peaks against the afternoon sky. The valley was sandy and the river looked shallow and slow moving, with arrow-weed growing along its edge.

Peter led the way down. Roger had been fortunate in the time he chose for his crossing. The river was at its lowest level, sliding lazily over the sand. As Roger descended the mountain he found water marks where at flood, the river had filled the valley and gnawed deep into the vitals of the range. He followed the burro across the sand to the water's edge. Peter buried his nose in the stream, then rolled himself joyfully in the moist sand, snorting and blowing. Roger stood staring at the little fellow. Then as Peter began to crop the coarse grass which grew in sparse clumps among the straight stalks of the arrow-weed, Roger gathered together some bits of drift wood for his supper fire.

He fried some bacon, made coffee, and seated himself in the sand. Peter dropped his soft nose over Roger's shoulders, and ate the bacon rinds one by one, then crowding still closer, tried to nibble at the cracker Roger was devouring.

"Hang you, Pete, get round on the other side of the fire!" exclaimed Roger.

It was the first time he had spoken in several hours and the sound of his own voice startled him. Peter trotted obediently around and stood opposite, head drooping as if in thought. Strangely small and gray he looked; strangely wise as if the same weathering of the centuries that had worn the mountain peaks into shapes of brooding significance had worn his little gray head into the semblance of Wise Patience, itself.

When Roger had finished his meal, and packed, he walked slowly up and down the river bank. But nowhere could he see a better place for crossing than at the spot where he had built his fire. Here a small island amid stream made the crossing seem possible. He found a cottonwood log to which he tied his food pack and canteen as well as his clothes which he took off and rolled up. He fastened Peter to a clump of arrow-weed, then waded out into the stream, pushing the log before him.

The water was very cold and the current much swifter than Roger had

anticipated but he was an excellent swimmer and though the current carried him well down stream, he made a safe landing on the island with all his goods and chattels. Then he went back for Peter. He could not bear the thought of going on alone.

The lead rope was long. Roger pulled the reluctant Peter to the water's edge, plunged in and was swimming violently in the current before the rope stretched taut and he realized that Peter was braced, stiff-legged on the bank. Roger swam back and climbed out of the water.

"Come, Peter," he said gently. "I'll swim beside you so you needn't be afraid."

Peter moved his long ears back and forth.

"Come! Come! Don't make me beat you. Come, Peter."

Peter did not stir. Roger picked up a bit of driftwood and belaboured Peter's gray sides, but the beating might have been a sand flea hopping on him for all it appeared to move Peter.

"Darn you, Peter!" shouted Roger. "Have you quit me too? I tell you, you shall not! Come now, I'm too tired to argue."

He plunged once more into the water, once more swam into the current, whistling Peter's call as he did so. But to no avail. When he reached the bank this time he was angry. He roared at Peter and kicked at him with his bare toes. But he kicked him only once. Peter's ribs were strong and none too well covered.

Peter looked at Roger's thin white body and his brown angry face, moved his ears, breathed hard and snorted.

Roger roared again. "All right, sir! All right, sir! If you won't come with me, neither shall you go back to the Germans and their sympathizers. I'll fix you, young fellow!"

He led Peter up to a mesquite tree and with trembling fingers tied the little gray head as high as he could pull it.

"There," he said, "you can stay there till the buzzards get you" and without a backward glance he swam once more across to the island.

Here he dressed and lay for a time resting in the sand. The sun had sunk behind the ranges. The night shadows in the valley were cool. Partly because of this, partly from sheer nervous and physical exhaustion, Roger shivered. Finally when twilight had settled in the valley, he sat up and gazed across the river. It was too

dark to see Peter. There was only the murmur of the river in all that barren solitude. Then suddenly Peter brayed. It was not the usual ridiculous hee haw of the burro but a strange blending of whinny and scream. Roger shuddered and told himself that he would keep Peter company just a little longer, then move on.

The desert night came on quickly and completely. The great desert stars had pricked out before the last light had left the mountain tops. An hour passed, then two. Roger was too weary to build a fire, too wretched to sleep. He sat huddled in the sand, his head against a great cottonwood log, his face toward the river. A dim red edge began to show over the ranges. It lifted into a crescent, then into a half circle. Suddenly the little valley was flooded with white light and the moon sailed free over the sliding river.

Roger stared eagerly toward the mesquite tree. Peter stood unmoving, his little gray head turned upward, his sturdy neck seeming unusually long and thin, stretched thus unnaturally. It seemed curious to Roger that the burro did not kick nor lunge. But Peter's patience, won by who knows what beaten and burdened ancestry, did not desert him. He did not tug at his rope but he brayed again, as if he were giving an eerie shriek of warning.

Roger bit his nails nervously, then hollowed out a bed in the sand and lying down tried to sleep. The stars glowed down on him quietly. From where he lay he could see Peter. The little gray head must be tired. How Felicia had loved the little burro. Used to wash his face and brush his foolish mane. Felicia! Little lost Felicia! Roger groaned and sat up.

His moment of reckoning had arrived, as it arrives once to every man.

First he thought of Felicia. He recalled that first day on the train when she had sat in his lap so long and he had felt the whisper of fate in their meeting. He came down through the desert days with her. How pitifully few there were of them, after all! And he lived them over, one by one. He recalled her loveliness, her childish curiosity, her love of his work. He thought of her affection and of her timidity, her shrinking fear of a rough word. And suddenly he groaned and said aloud:

"Thank God in His mercy that she didn't see me when I throttled Ernest!"

Ernest! The friend of his boyhood and his young manhood. Generous, sweet-tempered, easy going Ernest! How patiently he had endured Roger's temper! How loyally he had devoted himself to Roger's experiments. How utterly he had given himself to their friendship. Why had he betrayed Roger at the last? What had happened? Roger's brain seemed on fire as he turned over in his mind the

events that had led to Tuesday's tragedy. Charley had come to him and had said: —

Well—no matter what she had said. Long before she had told him that his life failure was due to his selfish indifference to other people. He remembered that he had not believed her. But now the words seemed seared into his brain.

Roger took a long drink, then as methodically as he could he examined his own temperament. First, he tried to consider himself as if he were Ernest looking at Roger. What had Roger ever done for Ernest? He had been a constant spur to Ernest mentally, forcing him into new fields of research and experiment, but only after all, for Roger's own purposes, or Roger's own ideas. What return had Roger ever made for the exquisite hospitality of Ernest's home and the tenderness of Ernest's mother? None! None whatever! What return even in kindness had Roger ever made for Ernest's untiring efforts to promote the solar device. Once more Roger whispered huskily:

"None! None at all! Less than nothing!"

So Ernest must see him as a brain devoid of any human qualities save that of quick temper. Thank heaven, Felicia never had seen him angry but once! But Charley had seen every red hate that had swept him since he had come to the desert. What would he not give if this were not so! More than any one in the world, he suddenly thought, he wanted Charley's good opinion. And how must she see him? Impatient, ugly tempered, selfish,—excepting toward Felicia. Thank God, she had seen how he had loved that little child.

And so, here he was at thirty, a failure. It was better to acknowledge it now: to admit that the fault was his; to go on into some mining camp and lose himself than to drag on making a fool of himself at the Sun Plant. He would rest a little longer, then start on in the moonlight.

Once more Roger stretched himself out on his bed of sand. As he did so, Peter brayed again. Roger jumped to his feet, the cold sweat starting from his forehead. Felicia's little burro! What devil could have entered into him that he could treat a dumb brute so! He tore off his clothing and jumped into the water. It was not easy to breast the current, he was so tired. But he made the bank and staggering up to the mesquite tree, he untied Peter.

"There, old man," he said gently, "go back to your friends."

Then he turned to cross the river. He was carried far below his camp this time and for some minutes after he landed he lay naked and exhausted before he

could urge himself back to the cottonwood log and climb into his clothing.

He was in a state now of utter despair. No grief, no anger can bring to the human mind the depth of suffering that self-loathing can. Roger lay with his forehead pillowed on his arm, for the first time in his life facing his own weaknesses. Just in the degree that his brain was clearer, his mind more honest, his nerves more highly strung than other men's, just in that degree did he suffer more.

Perhaps, after a time, he slipped into a half doze. But it seemed to him that the touch on his forehead was his mother's. No, it was Felicia's or was it Charley's? Again Charley and Felicia merged in his mind. Felicia was looking at him with adoring eyes. Thank God once more that she could never grow up to know the truth about him. But she had grown up and was stooping over him with a gentle hand on his forehead as if she understood him and forgave him a thousand times over.

It was Charley, of course, Charley with the great heart and the seeing mind. What an awful thing for him to have brought another failure to the valley! Charley had had a sad life. Perhaps she had had dreams of her own, before she merged her destiny with Dick's. Dick was a poor weakling. But Felicia's death had saved him. Dick was a man now. If Felicia had seen him attack Ernest, she would have run away to her death, just as she had for Dick's frenzy. Potentially, he was a murderer too. But now he was a failure and as far as his red devil was concerned, Felicia had died in vain.

Roger's heart seemed to stop beating with the horror of this thought. Try as he would he could not get away from the idea that potentially he shared Dick's guilt. And Felicia had been sacrificed in vain. Suddenly he clenched his fists. No, by heaven, this should not be!

Roger pulled himself to his knees beside the cottonwood log and lifted his ravished face to the stars.

"Listen, God!" he shouted. "It was not in vain! I'm going back! I'm going back to Felicia and Charley and prove myself a man. I don't know why Ernest did it. But that doesn't matter. I'm going back. Listen to me, God!"

Half kneeling, half crouching, with the sinking moon touching his burning eyes, his trembling lips, Roger watched the great compassionate desert stars as if waiting for an answer. And as he waited, the answer came. Roger whispered as if in reply.

"Yes! Yes! I love her! I love her! I love her! Oh, Charley, my darling! I'm

coming back to you and show you that Felicia did not die in vain!"

Then he slipped down into the sand and fell asleep as deeply, as sweetly as a child, and the quiet stars looked down upon the dark slender figure with infinite understanding.

The first rays of the sun roused Roger. He lay for a time blinking and trying to account for the peace and happiness of which he was conscious from the instant he opened his eyes. After a moment, memory spoke and he jumped to his feet and stretched himself. Then he gave a sudden shout.

"Oh, I say, old Peter! You are a good scout! Waiting for me, are you? Hang it! I couldn't blame you if you were just waiting to kick my brains out. Just hold on till I get some breakfast and I'll be with you."

At Roger's shout, Peter left off his desultory browsing, lifted his tail and brayed, an honest old fashioned bray that set Roger at his breakfast getting with a broad grin.

The sun was not an hour high when the two started on the home trail. Peter scorned the lead rope now but led the way nimbly, finding a far easier trail than Roger had dragged him over the day before. Roger was tired and stiff. He was dirty and unshaven. But he was happy; happy as he had never dreamed of being; too happy, too utterly brain weary to think. He only knew that he was going home to Charley.

They reached the mesa that evening, at sundown. With all the desire in the world, Roger could not go on. So he made camp in a little draw and lay down to sleep. He did not waken until morning.

It was well toward supper time when Roger reached the ranch. There was no one to be seen. Roger turned Peter into the corral and fed him, then went into the living tent, shaved and changed his clothing. Charley, Elsa and Dick were at supper when Roger entered and with a quick sense of remorse he saw that each face turned toward him wore a look of startled anxiety. He paused in the doorway, the lamp glow disclosing the lines of exhaustion around his mouth.

"Hello," he said, huskily, "I've come back to you people, if you'll have me!"

Elsa was the first to rush to him. "Oh, Roger, did you really want to come back?" she cried.

Roger stooped and kissed her cheek. "Want to come back? Why, I've almost died of impatience getting back."

Dick shoved Elsa gently aside. "I'm sure things can be fixed up, Roger," he said. "Ernest isn't—"

Roger interrupted by placing both hands on Dick's shoulders. "Old man," he said. "The important thing to me now is for you to understand how I feel about you, how I understand what you've been through and how I need your help, just because of what you've been through."

There was a sudden silence. Charley, her great eyes on Roger's face, did not move. Dick cleared his throat.

"Why—why—Roger!—My God—do you mean it? That you don't hate me any more? Don't bluff me, Roger! I've been in too lonely a hell. What's happened to you, Rog?"

"I've come to," replied Roger, dropping his hands from Dick's shoulders and crossing the room to stand before Charley.

She had risen and was standing quietly behind her chair. Roger, with his eyes on hers, lifted both her hands against his breast.

"Charley!" he said, huskily, "Oh, Charley! Charley!" and then, his voice and his will failed him and he bowed his head on her shoulder.

Charley freed one hand and laid it on his head. "Poor child!" she murmured. "Poor old Roger!"

Elsa sniffed in a manner peculiarly like a sob, and Roger raised his head with a sheepish laugh.

"I guess I'm about all in," he said.

"You're hungry and tired out," exclaimed Charley. "Sit down, Roger and have some supper."

There was a little flurry of bringing fresh plates and an extra chair and the interrupted meal was begun again.

"Where on earth did you go, Roger?" asked Elsa. "We saw you start straight across the valley."

"I got as far as the river. I didn't do Ernest any real damage, did I?" Roger looked at Dick inquiringly.

"I guess not. He seems to have worked around, as usual. He and Gustav went into Archer's Springs yesterday."

There was a moment's pause, then Elsa said, "What do you intend to do, Roger?"

Roger laid down his knife and fork, dejectedly. "I don't know! How could a man like Ernest do such a rotten trick!"

"He refused to make us any explanation whatever," said Dick. "As far as I'm concerned, I'm through with him unless he comes across with a satisfactory statement. I don't like the look of the whole thing."

"Elsa agrees with Dick and me," Charley looked at Elsa's troubled face sympathetically, "that Ernest's got to be kept in Coventry until something drastic is done. We were all hoping and believing that you'd come back to see the matter through."

Roger finished his second cup of coffee in deep thought. "I'll have to have a talk with Ernest," he said, finally.

"Hackett brought in the new pump yesterday morning," said Dick. "He brought a bunch of newspapers. We've been floored by their contents."

"Yes," exclaimed Charley, "the war news is unbelievable."

"They've sacked Louvain!" cried Elsa.

"Who sacked Louvain? It sounds like the Dark Ages!" asked Roger.

"The Germans!" Elsa, evidently controlling her voice with difficulty went on, "They've shot old women and children as hostages. Hostages! Why that word belongs to the Dark Ages. It's unbelievable! And the library—all those priceless things are burned."

"Good God!" exclaimed Roger. Then, "What does Ernest say to this?"

"None of us have talked to him since you left," said Charley.

"But whether it's a war of offense or defense, there's no excuse for that sort of thing. I thought German culture—" Roger paused and Elsa cut in excitedly—

"Culture! I tell you they never were cultured, the Germans. Look at Professor Rosenthal and Dad and Ernest. How deep is their so-called culture? Bah! Petty tyrants in their homes and bloody savages, I'll bet, if they run amuck."

"Keep your hair on, Elsa, old dear." Dick patted the excited girl on the shoulder.

"Some one's coming up the trail," exclaimed Charley.

There was a footstep on the porch as she spoke and Ernest appeared in the doorway. His face was sullen and he made no pretense of a greeting.

"I came up to say that Mr. Werner will be here to-morrow and it will be necessary for you to see both him and me, Roger, and settle this miserable affair. We'll come up as soon as Werner arrives, probably late in the afternoon."

Ernest turned abruptly on his heel. Roger sprang to his feet. Charley laid a quick hand on his arm. Roger gave her a glance. "It's all right, Charley. Don't worry! Hold on, Ernest. We'll have this thing out right now."

Ernest turned back slowly. "There's nothing to have out. A man has a right to his own political opinion. And as for the Werner matter, you insulted me for doing you a favor and I'm through with you."

"Favor!" gasped Roger. "Why Ernest, you're crazy! You lied to me and sneaked on me and it wasn't to do me a favor, at all. It was for Germany. That's what gets all our goats. For *Germany*!"

"Well, what's the matter with Germany? You've worshiped at her shrine all these years, haven't you? And now in her hour of need, you turn against her," sneered Ernest.

Roger looked from Charley to Dick in utter bewilderment. "Germany's hour of need! The hour of need of a horde of vandals.—Where's your common sense, Ern?"

"It's a Dutchman's logic, Roger, that's all!" cried Elsa. "You're just beginning to recognize it! Lord, I was brought up on it!"

"Oh, dry up, Elsa! You were always a disloyal minx," growled Ernest. "Now, you folks are welcome to think what you please. I'm not like Roger, ready to murder a man who has a different political opinion from me. I'm going to see that Werner's given a square deal, then I'm going to quit the whole bunch of you."

"Look here, Ern, you've got to straighten this business out," insisted Roger. "Crazy Dutch and Werner and Gustav and you! It's a dirty deal, somehow. Just why did you turn on your best friend, Ernest?"

"Turn on my best friend! I like that from you, with your devil's temper. And you've turned nasty nice all of a sudden, about where you get your money, after robbing all the mines around here."

"You know I've sent a list of everything I've taken from each mine to each mine owner and asked him to send a bill!" shouted Roger.

"Huh! That may be, but when it comes to giving Mr. Werner a chance at the Solar Plant, I recalled all that and didn't suppose you'd be finicky."

Roger's drawn face burned. Felicia's clock on the mantel ticked and Charley's deep eyes did not leave Roger's clenched fists. He ground his teeth, then drew a long breath.

"That was a rotten thing to say to me, Ern, but I guess I deserved part of it. Of course, the contract with Werner's got to be broken, and I want you to chew on this. You've got to choose between Werner and me. Our friendship ends unless you drop Germany."

"Oh, hell!" grunted Ernest and he turned and disappeared into the night.

Elsa shrugged her shoulders and began to gather up the dishes. Charley followed her example mechanically. Roger and Dick lighted their pipes and stood with their backs to the empty fireplace, and no one spoke until the dishes were finished and the girls were seated with their sewing.

Then, "By Jove," said Dick. "I don't know what to suggest."

"Neither do I," echoed Roger. "But this much I know. The main point is to save Ernest. The Solar Plant is secondary. He's got to do what's right in this."

"You'll never get away with it, Roger," exclaimed Dick. "Ernest really believes in this superman stuff. He's a German."

"He's got to do what's right," repeated Roger, this time with a tired break in his voice. "I feel as if I'd never believe in a man again unless he does. What can I do, Elsa?"

Elsa shook her head. "I don't know. If you people will think back you'll realize you've all been raised on adulation of Germany. Ernest is merely the logical product of his ancestry and environment."

"How did you escape the poison, Elsa?" asked Charley.

"Overstuffed," she replied. "And I'm not alone. There's any number of us American children of German parents who've been fed up on the 'Vaterland' stuff."

"Elsa," asked Dick, suddenly, "is Ernest a spy?"

The girl turned crimson. Roger interrupted quickly: "Oh, I say, Dick, give Ernest first chance to answer that question."

"No, I'll answer it," replied Elsa. "He wasn't up to the time he came to the desert, I'm sure. He was just wonderfully prepared soil, ready for the planting of any sort of seed. What Mr. Werner did to him, I don't know."

"Do you think Werner is a spy?" asked Charley.

"Probably, of an exalted order. As I look back now, he's been using Papa and all the rest of the silly Turnverein, any way he wants to. How much they know we never shall know. My heavens, what a dirty place the world is!"

No one replied to this comment. Roger sighed deeply and a pitying glance passed between the two girls as he dropped his head dejectedly on his hands.

"Well, let's postpone more talk until morning," said Dick. "Elsa, going to help me put the menagerie to bed?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Elsa with alacrity, adding, as she followed Dick to the door, "Don't you think Roger'd better sleep here, to-night? With Gustav in the living tent—"

Charley nodded. "I'll make up the cot on the porch." She eyed Roger's drooping head with tear-dimmed eyes, as the others went out.

Roger lifted his worn face and gave Charley a long look. She was recovering some of her tone. Her eyes were bright and though the deepened sadness of her mouth would never lessen, the despondency that had marked her face when in repose ever since Felicia's death was gone. As Roger watched her, it seemed to him that if Charley as well as Ernest failed him, the blackness of the pit would indeed close around him. He rose suddenly and crossed the room to kneel beside her. He clasped her hands against his heart, and said slowly:

"Charley, look in my face and tell me that you realize I am a changed man! That you need never fear my temper again!"

Charley caught her lower lip which would tremble, between her teeth, and steady, wise, brown eyes gazed long into deep-set, wearied, blue eyes.

"What happened, Roger?" Charley asked, at last.

"I fully recognized my devil, for the first time, and fought him to a finish. I'm going to have many a tough struggle but you'll never see again nor will any one else, the thing little Felicia was so afraid of. You understand and believe me, don't you?"

Charley nodded, not trusting her quivering lips to words.

Roger dropped her hands and took her face in a tender clasp.

"Charley, it's a poor, broken, futile thing just now, my life, but so help me, God, it will not always be so. And whatever it is or will be, it belongs to you. Will you take it, Charley?"

There was a long pause during which Felicia's old enemy, the alarm clock, ticked loudly. Then Charley smiled and said uncertainly:

"While I'm taking my own share of you, I think I'll take Felicia's too. Then I'll have all of you!"

"Charley! Oh, Charley! My dearest love! My dearest!" Roger jumped up, pulled Charley to her feet and clasping the slender body in his arms laid his lips

hungrily to hers. He kissed her eyes, her hair. "Charley! Charley! I'm a selfish brute, but you'll never know what you're doing for me. You ought to have a man worth ten of me but I'm going to have you just the same. Now I can bear even Ernest's failure. Do you really love me, my darling?"

"Curiously enough, I do!" replied Charley with the old whimsical lift of her eyebrows. "Oh, you dear old single-track thinking machine, you!"

Roger held her off and looked at her wonderingly. "You mean—Oh, Charley, I have been a fool in every possible way, haven't I?"

Charley laughed, with her cheek against Roger's, her arm about his neck. Roger held her closer still. "Well," he said huskily, "I'm through with one kind of foolishness! Charley, will you ride into Archer's Springs to-morrow and marry me?"

The girl laughed outright. "I certainly won't! Let me go, Roger. Here come Elsa and Dick."

Elsa entered the room, her head on one side, her eyes bright and questioning.

"Well, Rog?" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"Yes, Elsa," he replied. "By Jove, I can't believe it myself but Charley says she'll marry me."

"Thank the Lord for that!" sighed Elsa.

"You're not good enough for her, Roger," said Dick, coming across the room with right hand outstretched but a grim face. "But when I think about Elsa taking me—"

He did not finish the sentence but Roger nodded understandingly and the two men, regarding each other seriously over a long hand clasp, laid at that moment the foundation of a close friendship that was to last them to the end of their lives.

"Poor old Ernest!" Roger broke the silence with a sigh.

"Try not to think about him to-night, Roger," Charley laid a gentle hand on his arm. "You are so fearfully tired, I'm going to fix the porch couch and you must go to bed at once."

Roger was glad to stretch out on the cot and close his weary eyes. But he could not sleep. The thrilling joy of Charley's welcome, the burning soft touch of her lips on his and with this, the sick sense of loss in the constantly recurring thought of Ernest combined to make sleep long in coming. He heard Dick, then Elsa call

good night. He heard the subdued clatter of Charley in the kitchen making her breakfast preparations, and after a few minutes the sound of Felicia's alarm clock being wound for the night.

"Charley!" he called softly.

In a moment Charley's lovely head was outlined against the lamplight as she paused in the door.

"Haven't you been asleep, Roger dear?"

"Charley, how could Ernest have done it? I can't sleep for thinking about it."

Charley came over to his cot and sitting down on the edge of it, lifted Roger's hot hand against her cheek. "You must realize that he thinks he loves the 'Vaterland' and that he is doing the best thing for the world in placing loyalty to Germany first."

"Then he should be shot as a traitor," said Roger. "I can't believe that he thinks so crooked. Why, he's got a mind that's as pellucid as that spring Peter found in Lost Canyon."

Charley smoothed his hair back from his forehead. "Poor old Roger! You may have been selfish toward your friends, but you certainly loved them. Try to go to sleep now, dearest. You'll need a clear head if you're going to save Ernest and the Solar Plant. Aren't the stars beautiful? I never lose my awe of their nearness in the desert."

"They were wonderful over in the River Canyon," said Roger, relaxing with a long breath at Charley's touch on his forehead, while he clung closely to her other hand. "Do you really love me, Charley, my sweetheart?"

Suddenly the girl slipped to her knees beside the cot and buried her face against his on the pillows. "Oh, Roger! Roger! Just as much and more than Felicia did and for nearly as long."

"And I you," replied Roger, brokenly, "only I was such a self-centered fool I didn't know it. Don't kneel there, Charley, you're tired and must go to bed."

"Oh, Roger! Roger! I've wanted you so! And the years have been so hard! Never leave me, dear! Don't make me go now! Let me watch here beside you till you sleep, just as you did for me that night Felicia died."

"I'll never leave you, you darling! Even my work shall never drive me from you. We'll put things through together from now on. Oh, Charley! I don't deserve it!"

"I know you don't!" this with a chuckle that was half a sob, "but somehow even old Peter can't bear to be separated from you."

"Bless his old gray head! Charley, let me tell you about Peter and the river." Roger began eagerly but before his story was half finished his sentences were broken and finally ended abruptly. Roger was fast asleep. Charley, with a soft kiss on his hair, rose from the cramped position on her knees and went into the house. In a short time the adobe was in darkness and Peter, with a wisp of alfalfa on which he chewed meditatively, hanging from his mouth, leaned his gray head on the corral bars and eyed the stars unblinkingly.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BLACK BOX

Roger was awakened the next morning by the sound of Dick uncrating the new pump. He rose at once feeling quite himself. He had his belated breakfast alone, with Charley hovering in attendance.

"Ernest and Gustav are down at the old camp as usual," she reported. "What are you going to do to-day, Roger?"

"I want to go through Von Minden's papers. If I'd done a thorough job on that in the beginning, all the trouble might have been obviated."

"I don't know about that," said Charley. "It couldn't have been foreseen that Ernest would get in touch with Werner."

"Will you help me?" asked Roger. "I want to get through before Werner comes."

"Are you feeling fairly calm for the interview, dear?" Charley smoothed Roger's hair back, caressingly.

"Calm!" Roger suddenly caught the girl to him in a passionate embrace. "Calm! I don't want to be calm when I think of you and all you are to me. Oh, my darling, my darling!"

With Dick and Elsa's help, the Von Minden papers had been thoroughly gone over by mid-afternoon.

It was well on toward four o'clock before Ernest appeared with his unwelcome guest. Dick had descried a dust-cloud on the Archer's Springs trail about three o'clock and they all had seen a buckboard with two figures in it drive into the Sun Camp.

"Werner must have come," said Roger, only half succeeding in keeping his voice

casual.

Dick nodded. "Hackett was telling me that he'd finally made up his mind to get a tin Lizzy. These old-time cowboys do certainly hate to give up their horses, don't they? But when the Chinaman said that he was going to buy a jitney for the miners, poor Hackett had to give in. Of course, he'll still have to use his horses and the pack-train for mountain work."

Roger grunted absentmindedly and stored Von Minden's box in the kitchen, as Hackett drove Werner and Ernest up to the corral.

Herr Werner, badly sunburned and dusty, seemed unfeignedly glad to have reached the ranch. He greeted Elsa and Charley effusively, shook hands with Dick and showed Roger a mixture of cordiality and deference in manner that was irreproachable.

Left alone in the living room with Roger and Ernest, he came to the point at once:

"Wolf tells me, Mr. Moore, that you have been much angered at his selling the solar device to me."

"I certainly have been and I haven't the least idea of letting the thing go through," replied Roger. "A considerable part of the money you advanced has been spent but I shall spend no more of it and my friend Preble can arrange a loan that will cover what has been spent."

"You know, of course," Werner took an audible sip of lemonade, "that a bargain is a bargain and that the contract Wolf signed is binding."

"Ordinarily, yes," said Roger, "but I have an idea that before I'm through with you, you'll be glad to let go."

"For heaven's sake, Roger!" cried Ernest irritably, throwing his cigarette in the fireplace, and taking a quick turn up and down the room, "don't start a row."

"If you mean not to lose my temper, I can promise that," returned Roger, "but Germany can never have my solar apparatus."

"How're you going to help yourself?" asked Ernest, with an ugly edge to his voice.

"There are ways! Mr. Werner, Von Minden was a part of Germany's great system, was he not, for exploiting America? He was one of your agents and his job was to outline the desert empire Germany plans to take over. But being

German, like Ernest's father who never will take the human element into consideration, you didn't count on the desert's sending your poor tool crazy, so he blabbed. Gustav is your watch-dog and spy, keeping you in touch at present with all my doings. Your own activities, outside of these minor ones, I imagine, center round the banking and educational interests of America. You've seen to it that our high schools and universities produce students that admire Germany. I must say that you have been highly successful up to now. But the superman stuff is a bit thick, Mr. Werner. It makes our American gorge rise in our throats."

Roger fingered his cold pipe, swallowed several times, looked out the open door where he could see Charley at the bars, rubbing Peter's head, then went on:

"What you've done to Ernest is obvious. He's the sweetest tempered, most easily influenced chap in the world. You caught him in New York after he'd failed with the Smithsonian—probably after some spy in the Smithsonian had put you wise, and fed him up with the superman idea and he, poor mut, fell for it."

"Roger!" shouted Ernest. "You can't talk about me as if I were feeble-minded."

"But hang it, Ern, you have been!" exclaimed Roger. Then, with a little break in his voice, "I tell you, you've been thinking and speaking treason and I won't have it! I won't have it!"

"Come! Come! Mr. Moore!" said Werner; "supposing what you've surmised should turn out to be true. Might is right in this world."

"You can't draw me into a discussion of ethics, Mr. Werner. Ernest and I'll have that out afterward. I'm just telling you this, that Germany can't have my solar device and it can't have Ernest. There's enough evidence in that tin dispatch box of Von Minden's, Mr. Werner, almost to persuade Congress to declare war on your super-fatherland. There's enough evidence in that box to make headlines in every American paper for a month. What it would do to pro-German sentiment in this country is a caution."

Werner's sunburned face went purple. "Gott im Himmel!" he roared. "Did the fool keep my letters?"

"No, but he copied them into his journal, with all sorts of other data of vital interest to the American public. We had a very pleasant morning reading his journal. My great regret is that I've so neglected that document box."

With surprising quickness for a stout man, Werner pulled a revolver from his hip pocket, and pointed it at Roger.

"I want that box, Moore!" he roared.

Quick as a cat, Ernest crossed the room, and with a twist of Werner's wrist disarmed him.

"None of that!" he said.

"Keep your shirt on, Mr. Werner!" said Roger. "You're going to need it, take my word for that!"

Werner bit his nails for a moment. "Very well, sir. Give me back the box and I'll turn back the contract."

"Not on your life! You turn back the contract and I'll give you a week to get out of the country before I turn the box over to the Department of Justice. Just one week, mind you, no more!"

"Look here, Rog, you can't do that! It would be a dirty trick! Why, it's blackmail!" Ernest dropped the revolver on the table with a thud.

"Good God, Ernest! Blackmail! Toward a man who is a spy—a man who plots against the physical and moral fiber of your country! Blackmail! Come out of your trance. There are some things that can't be done, Ern! Life's full of forbidden trails. My temper was one of them and poor old Dick's drinking was another. And the one most impossible of all for a real man to take is the one you're headed toward—a real man can't be renegade to his country."

Werner, chewing nervously at his thumb knuckle, eyed Roger blackly. Then he turned abruptly to Ernest.

"And you!" he roared. "A fine German you are, you milk sop! A beautiful muddle you've made of this. Von Minden's letters here for months and what use have they come to? There'd have been an Iron Cross in this for you, had you shown sense."

Ernest gave a sudden short laugh. "An Iron Cross would have been a wonderful reward for breaking up a man's life friendship. An Iron Cross! My word! Where's your sense of humor, Werner?"

"Come, Werner, the contract!" urged Roger.

"Damn you!" shrieked the German, jerking a heavy envelope from his inner pocket and throwing it in Roger's face. Roger caught it and after examining the contents, put it into his own pocket with a nod.

"Now, Mr. Werner," he said, "if you'll just annex Gustav, and plan to leave at sun

down, Hackett will drive you in with Preble's team. I hate to lose Gustav. He was born to be a white man, poor devil."

Werner cleared his throat and spoke sneeringly: "And how do I know you'll live up to your bargain, Moore?"

"Oh, I'm an American! I promise to hold the papers a week and a promise isn't a scrap of paper in America. After the week's up, you won't enjoy the climate, I can assure you of that. I'll send you a check for the amount I've spent, next week, with the amount still untouched."

"Roger!" shouted Ernest, "Don't be a fool! It's the chance of your life you're throwing down!"

"Come with me, Wolf," cried Werner, "Come with me! I'll give you opportunities that you never dreamed of. You don't belong to this nation of thick-headed numb-skulls. You're a German. You know all that Moore knows about using solar heat. Come and help the Vaterland. Let this man rot. Bah! He belongs to a nation of swine!"

There was silence in the adobe living room. Roger's face turned a slow purple and sweat stood on his forehead. But by a supreme effort he kept his clenched fists in his pockets and his eyes riveted on Ernest's.

"Choose, Ernest," he said, suddenly.

Ernest seemed scarcely to hear him. The sullenness that his face had worn constantly for many days changed slowly to a look of anger that distorted his features until his expression was demoniacal.

He clutched the revolver and leaned across the table with a hoarse whisper:

"By God, if you insult America again, I'll shoot you! It's one thing to admire Germany. It's another to sling mud at America."

"What, you too, you hybrid!" shrieked Werner. "You play Germany into the hands of this swine; this monkey-headed inventor; this letter thief, this——"

With an inarticulate roar, Ernest pulled the trigger just as Roger knocked the revolver upward. The bullet lodged in the ceiling. But Werner had had enough. While Roger clung to the roaring Ernest, he rushed down the trail to the corral, where Hackett began at once to hitch Dick's team to the buckboard.

"Let go of me, Roger! Let me get at him!" howled Ernest.

Dick came running up the trail. "It's all right, Dick, don't bother!" called Roger.

"Leave us alone a little while longer. What's the matter, Ernest? Be quiet, man! Let's talk like men and not row like a couple of dogs."

Roger eased Ernest into a chair and Ernest ceased to struggle, but stared at Roger gloomily.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he asked sullenly.

"I'm going to make you see the error of your ways." Roger smiled grimly. "Use your common sense, Ernest. What could Germany give you, except money? All your life ties are here."

"Wonderful ties!" sneered Ernest. "Charley has turned me down, my father has turned me out and you've beaten me up."

Roger concealed a grin. "Poor old chap!" he murmured. "So a woman's at the bottom of it all, eh?"

"I don't know why her refusing me affected me so," said Ernest, as if to himself. "But I felt as if nothing mattered. And then to have the Sun Plant a failure and my father's attitude! O pshaw, what's the use? Let me alone, Roger. I'm going to pack up and get out of here."

"Ernest," said Roger, "if you don't stay by while we straighten this out, I'll never get over it and no more will you. We've loved each other too long, Ern. Our lives have become interwoven. If we break now we'll go lame all our days. You know that, don't you, old man? You folks have all done so much for me. I've got to keep your friendship in order to pay up some of my indebtedness, eh, Ernie?"

Ernest drew a long breath and suddenly dropped his head into his hands and burst into tears.

"And now I'm crying!" he said. "Now I'm crying! There's no limit to my weakness."

Roger, still with a little twisted grin, lighted a cigarette. "A peach of a superman you are, eh, Ern?"

Ernest did not answer and Roger walked up and down the room, waiting. Finally Ernest lifted his flushed face and took the cigarette which Roger offered him, and began to speak, rapidly:

"I was desperate, after the Smithsonian turned me down. Seems that they didn't like the look of things Austin did and that's why they dropped you. Werner looked me up. I found out later that Gustav had kept him informed, and that

Werner had got Austin just as they got me. I honestly thought I was doing a great thing for you and the world, Rog. Werner showed me a list of names of people in this country that're helping Germany that would make your eyes start. And he was always praising America."

"Ernest, has Werner any drawings of the plant?" asked Roger.

"No, he hasn't."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, because that's the first thing he asked me for, this afternoon. All our stuff that Austin had, his widow burned with his other papers. She said he told her to if anything happened to him. And you know I brought yours back, as I promised. What Gustav may have sent him I don't know, but evidently not satisfactory drawings or he wouldn't have been so keen to get more!"

"I wonder about the new engine," mused Roger. "Well, I have little fear of that. Gustav isn't enough of an engineer to guess what he doesn't see. He couldn't make a drawing of the idea of that engine to save his neck. And Dean Erskine's got the only plan I ever finished of it."

"I'm sure you're safe on that," insisted Ernest.

"I think I am," agreed Roger, "and now, Ernest, I want to know how I can square up with you for my attack on you the other night."

Ernest looked up at Roger and the sullen look which even his tears had not washed out lifted a little.

"You mean—?" he asked.

"I mean that I had no business attacking you as I did. It was a rotten trick and I'm ashamed and sorry. My temper has been a brutal thing and you've always put up with it. If we can clear this thing up, I'm going to do better by you, Ern."

There was a curious look in Ernest's beautiful eyes. "Do you know, I hoped for twenty years you'd get to see yourself in that light," he spoke thoughtfully. "What you've just said does away with any resentment I may have had about your temper, Roger. As for the other thing—" He paused.

"Ern, how could you do it?" asked Roger huskily.

"Before heaven, Roger, I did it solely for love of you. And you know I was brought up on admiration of Germany. I honestly thought that we could make you see it as I do. I've been seeing for days what a skunk trick it must have

looked to you, but this obstinate streak in me wouldn't let me give up until Werner slanged America. Rog, I'll make it up to you somehow so you'll trust me again! See if I don't!"

"I'll trust you fast enough, old man, if you'll assure me that you're through with this superman stuff. Are you an American or a German, Ern?"

With a smile of extraordinary sweetness, Ernest put a hand on Roger's shoulder and said in a voice of utter sincerity, "I'm whatever you are, Roger. Thy country shall be my country and thy God, my God. After all, what is a man's country but the place of his loves and his friendships? And America has all of mine, Roger, all of mine."

The two men stood in silence after this until Roger said, brokenly, "Thank you, Ernest, you've made a new man of me."

"And now," said Ernest, briskly, "being considerably worse in debt than ever, the question before the house is whom do we do next?"

"I don't know! I swear I don't," Roger sighed, as he took one of Ernest's cigarettes.

Ernest gave a scornful laugh. "He doesn't know! the poor little woolly lamb! He doesn't know! with a plant such as is now established in the Prebles' backyard! Why, man, I could sell that to an Egyptian mummy."

Roger laughed and at the sound Dick called in through the open door,

"For the love of heaven, put us out of our misery! What's happened? We've been sweating blood!"

Both men hurried out to the porch. Seated in a solemn row on the steps were Charley, Dick and Elsa.

Ernest looked at Roger pleadingly. "You tell them, Rog. I want to attend to something in the tent."

Roger sat down beside Charley and told the story. When it was finished, Dick said, "Are you sure he's not German, Roger?"

"Certainly he's not any longer!" exclaimed Elsa. "The strongest thing in Ernest's life is his love for Roger. He'll never give any woman what he's given Roger. That love has saved Ernest and will keep him safe. Oh, I'm so thankful! So thankful!"

"Don't cry, Elsa! I've had all the emotion I can stand in one day," cried Roger.

"I wouldn't waste a tear on either of you," returned Elsa, stoutly as she wiped her eyes. "Come along, Dicky belovedest. You're the only one who treats me with respect. I'm going to cook you the most perfect biscuits ever invented for supper."

Ernest came into supper that night and after the first moment of embarrassment, the meal resolved itself into a frank discussion of ways and means, quite as if nothing had happened. Roger flatly refused to take Dick's possible loan.

"You keep that for a rainy day fall back," he said. "You and Elsa aren't going to have smooth sledding for a long time yet."

"How about you and Charley?" returned Dick. "Don't forget you've got a woman to provide for now!"

"Thanks for reminding me," smiled Roger. "She's an extravagant minx too and accustomed to luxury."

"Well, something will turn up, see if it doesn't," said Ernest. "In the meantime, there's considerable work to be done before Roger can claim that he's irrigating twenty-five acres of alfalfa. I'll guarantee that something will turn up before he's able to do that."

"Looks to me as if I were going to cash in pretty heavily on this business," said Dick. "Well, I'll supply you alfalfa for the rest of your lives."

"Thank you for nothing," returned Charley, sweetly.

CHAPTER XVIII

PAPA WOLF

October came in with a decided diminution of heat and with an accented brilliancy in sky and sand. The work of getting the remainder of the twenty-five acres into alfalfa went on rapidly. And in spite of the money uncertainty, there was the lift of hopefulness and happiness in the atmosphere of the ranch.

The alfalfa grew amazingly. One morning Elsa electrified the ranch by announcing that the second field now in blossom was full of wild bees. No one believed her. Every one decamped at once to the field. It was quite true. Far and wide swept the burning barrens of the desert. But close about corral and pumping plant crowded the unbelievable verdure of alfalfa with the fringed green lines of cottonwoods on its borders silhouetted against the sullen yellow sand. And wild bees, drunk with rapturous surprise, buzzed thick in the heavy blossoms. Whence they came no one could guess. Dick was willing to wager that there was nothing else within a hundred miles on which a bee might feed.

It was early morning. Roger and Charley allowed the others to drift back to their various occupations while they remained to watch the field. Seated side by side on a rock heap, Roger's arm around Charley's shoulders, they listened to the humming of the bees.

"If you weren't here, it would make me homesick," said Roger. "I can shut my eyes and see the old Preble farm and my mother in her phlox bed, calling to me to drive the bees away. I wonder if a fellow ever gets over his heartache for his mother."

"Not the right kind of a fellow for the right kind of a mother," replied Charley, lifting Roger's hand against her cheek. "The price we pay for any kind of love is pain."

"I hope when yours and my time comes to go we can go together," said Roger, "and that we won't have to start until our work is done. Queer how life's values shift. When I came down here, the thing I wanted most in life was to make a success of heat engineering. I thought it was impossible for me to reach an equal degree of desire about anything else. And now, while I want just as much as ever to go on with my profession, successfully, I want a thousand times more to be your husband and to be the right kind of a husband. I never have pipe-dreamed much about marriage, though I've done my share of flirting in my day. But for the first time in my life I realize that Bobby Burns knew what human life is in its innermost essence when he said:

> '"To make a happy fireside clime for wean and wife,
> That's the true purpose and sublime, of human life!'"

Charley did not speak but she turned and looked into Roger's blue eyes with her own bespeaking a depth of feeling that was beyond words. Roger, looking at the splendid brow above the brown eyes, kissed it reverently and then gazing at the beautiful curving mouth, he crushed his lips to Charley's. Then again they sat watching the bees in the alfalfa.

Charley noted before Roger the sound of hoof beats and looking round, beheld Hackett's two seated buckboard crawling slowly toward them.

"Who on earth now!" exclaimed Roger. "It can't be—yes, by Jove it is Dean Erskine—and—and Mamma and Papa Wolf! Oh, Elsa and Dick are going to have real trouble now!"

They hurried round to the corral, and shouted to the others so that the whole ranch was present to welcome the travelers. Ernest was first, lifting his mother bodily to the ground and kissing her a dozen times before Elsa had a chance.

"Guess I can pull off a surprise party when I try!" he shouted. "Here, Papa, this is Charley. Don't you remember the little roly-poly who used to play in the swimming pool? And Dick—who tried to boss us."

"Come up to the house! I know you're half dead," said Charley, leading the way as she spoke.

"I don't want to go into any house till I've seen the Plant," exclaimed Dean Erskine, wiping the sand from his face.

"Not a Plant for me, but coffee and some shade and a little breeze, maybe," cried Papa Wolf.

"Better have some breakfast first, Dean," suggested Roger. "There's a long story goes with seeing the plant."

"There's a long story goes with a number of things here I would suspect," grunted Papa Wolf, mounting the steps to the porch.

"Now, Papa, don't try to talk until you've eaten," called Mamma anxiously, from Ernest's arm. "Oh, but children, this is very pleasant," as the party entered the living room. "How do you keep it so cool and how have you endured this dreadful heat?"

"Heat!" laughed Elsa, "why, Mamma, this is our cool fall weather we're having now. You should have been here in the good old summer time."

"God forbid, if it was warmer than this yet. Papa, take off your coat, and you too, Dean." Mamma lifted her dusty little black hat from a very flushed forehead. "These boys look cool in their flannel shirts and you so hot in your coats. And see what a nice fine place and a nice clock and a—"

"Hold, Mamma! Hold! You needn't talk every minute," interrupted Papa Wolf. "I promised to say nothing until we all have eaten. So now, enjoy your breakfast."

But Papa and probably the Dean were the only persons who really enjoyed the meal. Elsa was plainly rattled and Dick whose worn face recently had looked much less haggard had settled again into lines of suffering. Except in looking after the guests' comfort, he had nothing to say. Charley and Roger were apprehensive as to the outcome of what was plainly to be a family row. Ernest, who talked a great deal, seemed excited and uneasy.

When the coffee pot had been emptied and pipes and cigars lighted, Dean Erskine rose. He was small and thin and his Van Dyke beard was nearly white but he still gave the impression of tremendous nervous energy.

"Now, I'm ready for the Plant, Roger," he said energetically.

"No! No! The Plant can wait!" protested Papa. "You know all about why we have come, Dean, and I want you to stay and lend your good sense to the interview."

"But my dear Wolf, it will be very unpleasant for me," exclaimed the Dean.

"And for me!" added Roger.

"For you, Roger! Why you're the cause of all our troubles and the Dean has backed you in all! Come now, don't be a coward. See it through! I must take my

two children back with me. That is settled."

"Is that what brought you down here, Papa?" inquired Elsa.

"Ernest's letter brought me down here. It's the only letter he has written me since he left my roof. But it was most important."

"You see, it was this way," Ernest cleared his throat, nervously, but his blue eyes were steady. "You told me not to communicate with you, but I've written regularly to Mother. So, of course, it amounted to the same thing. Naturally, I've tried not to write you about our worries. But finally, I made up my mind, Papa, that you needed to learn one or two things that I had learned down here. I knew there was no use in my asking you to come, so I merely wrote you of Elsa's engagement."

Ernest turned to his sister and Dick, who sat side by side on the living-room cot.

"I'm not going to apologize to you two. Mamma and Papa had to know sometime or other. And I wanted Papa down here."

"You should have let me write, Ernest. I might have given myself a fair show, I think." Dick's voice was bitter.

"I did you no harm in the long run, Dick, old man," said Ernest, eagerly. "Just bear with me for a while."

"Ernie, you always were an old butter-in," cried Elsa angrily. "As if I weren't perfectly capable of managing my own affairs. Now you've ruined everything. Papa, I am going to marry Dick. Mamma, you will love him."

"Wait, Elsa, wait," exclaimed Ernest.

But Papa could not wait. "Marry a Preble!" he roared. "Marry a drunkard, the son of a drunkard! Oh, don't try to hush me, Mamma! You know you're just as anxious about the matter as I am. I had the Dean look Dick Preble up. His record in college was that of a drunken rounder. His father drank the old farm up, you remember that, Roger."

"I remember folks said so, but all I know and all I want to know about Dick is what he is now. He's a new man and a mighty fine one."

"Impossible! His father—"

Dick jumped to his feet, but Charley spoke first. "Leave our father absolutely out of this, Mr. Wolf, if you please. He's not here to defend himself. Dick is."

"Impossible!" roared Papa Wolf.

Charley crossed the room swiftly and standing in all the dignity of her good height and her quiet beauty, she looked down on Papa Wolf.

"I am telling you," she did not raise her voice, "not to include my father or my mother in this conversation. My brother and I stand on our own reputations and no one else's."

Papa Wolf swallowed two or three times. "But inheritance," he said feebly.

"Nobody inherits the drink habit," returned Charley, disdainfully. "You can inherit a weak will but not a habit. Dick drank because he thought he was going to die and he went the pace, thinking like other fool men that he was living life to the full, in that way. By the time he had been cured of his illness, he had the drink appetite. But he's cured of that now."

"How do you know?" asked Papa Wolf, belligerently.

"Because I know," replied Charley, shortly, returning to her chair, while Dick and Elsa stared at her, astonishment and gratitude both struggling in their faces.

"Well, do I want my daughter to marry a man who's been a bum, eh? Do you think I, Karl Wolf—"

"Hold on, Mr. Wolf," interrupted Dick. "I never was a bum. Drink was my failing. I've always, with Charley's help, paid my own way. I have a real business down here now. Elsa loves the desert life and she loves me. I can take care of her and make her happy, I know."

"You know, huh! Yet you remember Elsa's home. All its luxury?"

"Yes, I remember Elsa's home and I remember that Elsa and her mother were high class, unpaid servants in that home."

Papa Wolf jumped to his feet. Ernest laid a hand on his arm.

"Wait now, Papa. You've got the top layer off your chest. Now I'm going to tell you the inside story of what has happened in this desert in the seven or eight months. Light your pipe, Papa. It's going to be a long story."

"Pipe! Pipe! I will not light my pipe!"

"Why not? Nobody's married yet. You've got days and weeks if you wish to argue about that and you'll be liking Dick better all the time you're arguing. Now Elsa's marriage isn't the important matter you've to decide down here, at all. Light your pipe. Papa dear! You always did give me good advice, except about coming down here. Here, take a fresh box of matches."

Papa Wolf, established once more, Ernest took a turn or two up and down the room, coming finally to a stop before the empty fire place. Roger, looking at his chum closely, realized suddenly that Ernest had aged in the past few months. There were lines around his eyes and his lips. Ernest looked from his father to his mother with a little smile.

"Roger and I, in spite of our thirty years, were unsophisticated kids when we came into this country. I think we're grown up now. I think we're pretty certain to go a straight and decent trail to the end. But that I came mighty near to going a forbidden trail as Roger calls it, is your fault, Papa—and yours, Dean Erskine."

He paused and although the Dean and Ernest's father looked at each other in amazement, neither interrupted and the younger man went on.

"I never saw death until I came down here—I never knew love. I never knew real work. But here I have learned all three. We have lived here with an intensity as great as the heat. The—the primal passions have shaken us, Papa—and burned us clean—You know some creeds speak of Christ's hours between the Last Supper and His death as the passion of the cross. Sometimes I feel as if I could call my months down here my passion of the desert."

Again Ernest paused, and those who had lived with him through these months of passion—passion of joy, of fear, of sorrow, of love, of personal grief and of world pain, listened with astonishment that jovial, easy-going Ernest should have felt as deeply as they.

"Mrs. von Minden died first. Roger and Dick found her dead up in a remote canyon. She had thirsted to death. I wrote Elsa of her but not of her death. That would have set you to worrying about me, Mütterchen. She had the little black box with her that I wrote Elsa she had demanded from her husband. Whether she found in it what she wanted no one will ever know. But her death ended one of those strange, feverish life dramas that this trackless desert is always turning up. Next they found Von Minden, alone except for Peter. (You must meet Peter, Papa.) He probably died of heart failure. We don't know how she got the box away from him. Maybe she poisoned him. And next Felicia,—Felicia was exactly as Charley was, Mamma, when she used to come to play with us in the pool."

Ernest looked at Charley—"I've got to talk about her, Charley, to make them understand."

Charley moistened her lips, but nodded and Dick put his hand over his eyes.

"She was like Charley too in that she was the kind of a girl that decent men instinctively love—not with one of these headlong, unreasoning loves, you understand. But with the kind of a deep-seated adoration for beauty and goodness and brain that gets a man where he lives and never leaves him. That's the way I got to caring for Charley and that's the way, in embryo, we all loved Felicia.

"In the meantime, you understand we were all working like the very devil to get the plant up and the alfalfa in. I wrote home of that. How difficult the work here in the desert was is beyond description. And, what made it more difficult, after the Smithsonian turned Roger down, he got to working against time, and though he never said much, he gave an atmosphere of desperate hurry and worry to the camp, that simply got us all strung up to the breaking point. At intervals, too, he lost that famous temper of his. These tempers upset Felicia terribly."

Roger filled his pipe with fingers that trembled a little. But Ernest was staring out the door now, with eyes that saw nothing.

"Dick varied the monotony two or three times by getting drunk. He is an ugly whelp when he's drunk. Once he knocked Charley down and Felicia saw it and Roger and he mixed up over it and Elsa finally straightened it out, and we let him out of Coventry. But the next time he got drunk, Felicia, in her fright, ran away into the desert and was killed by a rattler. Charley and Roger found her. It nearly killed us all. But it cured Dick of drinking—that's one reason why I'm telling you. Don't cry, Mütterchen."

"But you have Charley, Ernie! You have Charley!" sobbed his mother.

"No, I haven't Charley. Roger has Charley. None of us deserved her, but Roger is nearer fit than the rest."

"Don't, Ernest!" pleaded Charley.

"I must, Charley. You'll see in a few moments what I'm getting at. Well, Papa, in the meantime, there was no money and it looked as if there would be no food. Roger's plant didn't work out as we'd planned. I wrote home the difficulties even of hanging a door. You can picture Roger trying to build a new engine out of wire and a string he had tramped ten miles into the ranges to find and steal. The alfalfa was dying for lack of water and there was no adequate pumping system even if we'd had adequate water.

"It was at this point that I decided to go to Washington, Papa, and try the Smithsonian. You would have been the one, naturally, for me to turn to, but even

if I'd had the inclination, which I hadn't, Roger absolutely wouldn't stand for the suggestion. So I went to Washington, all sort of strung up, you understand, and in bad mental trim because of—of everything. And in Washington I got a good swift kick. So I went to New York and spent the rest of Elsa's good money on Broadway. It didn't take me very far but when I went broke, I looked up your friend Werner. This is the point where you come in too, Dean Erskine.

"Now I had been brought up at home, naturally, to worship all things German. I liked to think of myself not as an American but as a German. At school, this home influence should have been counteracted if America expects to make real citizens. But it wasn't. The High School taught us German and no other modern language. In college, all things mental centered on the German idea in the majority of the departments. And your department was the worst of all, Dean. You are a Germanophile yourself and you taught your students to be.

"So behold me, calling on Werner and finding that Werner among other activities has been the head of an organized effort on the part of the German government for twenty years to Germanize America—through schools, churches, singing societies—oh, countless ways. And he was deeply worried about our British sympathies. And he wanted my influence in the college and elsewhere and he wanted Roger's big mechanical brain for Germany and so he offered me fifty thousand dollars for the Sun Plant and I took it."

"Fine! Wonderful!" exclaimed Papa Wolf.

"So I thought," said Ernest dryly, "but Roger and the others here thought differently. In fact when Roger found out about Werner, he tried to kill me, and then went away into the mountains with Peter for three days."

"Oh, Ernie! Oh, Roger!" moaned Mamma Wolf.

Papa Wolf's lips tightened. "But why, Roger?" he demanded.

"Wait, Roger! I'm telling the story. Rog tried to kill me for selling out secretly the idea that was bone of his bone. He tried to kill me because I sold it to a government that has gone through Belgium like a Hunnish horde, and because I claimed to admire it for that. Well, he didn't kill me and I was very sore and decided to go to Germany to live. Then Werner came down to settle details with Roger, and Roger told him what was in the black box and made him give back the contract."

"The black box! What black box?" asked Dean Erskine.

"The Von Mindens' black box. When I brought back word that Werner wanted it,

Roger and Charley read the contents. It developed that Von Minden was one of a group working for the German government with the idea of making Arizona and New Mexico into German colonies. Gustav—you remember my writing of Gustav—was Werner's spy, keeping Werner informed of our every move and what he could about Von Minden."

"I don't believe a word of it! Not a word! It's all British influence," exclaimed Papa Wolf stoutly.

"You'll have to believe it, because it's true," returned Ernest. "Roger was angry and threw Werner and Gustav out of the camp and made me choose between him and Werner. I chose Roger, because the time had come in my life when I'd got to make a tremendous decision. It's one you've got to make, Papa, and so has the Dean. I wanted you to make it my way. That's why I got you down here to see the things that I'd been up against."

"You don't intend to ask us to break our neutrality, surely, Ernest," protested Dean Erskine.

"I'll develop your job in just a moment, Dean. Papa, what I want is that you repudiate Werner and all his works, and undertake to finance Roger's project."

"My heavens, Ern!" cried Roger.

"Tut! Tut! Rog—you be quiet. Dean, your job is to sell the Plant to my father, after you've both made your decision."

"I cannot understand your talking to me in this manner, Ernest," shouted Papa Wolf, pounding on the table till the belated breakfast dishes rattled.

"I'll explain," said Ernest, imperturbably. "There's love of human beings. There's love of work. There's love of country. They make up a man's life. I had the first two and I thought that they were enough. But lately, I've discovered differently and I think a good many people in this country are finding out the same thing. I never gave the matter any thought until the Werner episode. Then I began to examine this thing called patriotism and I found that it was the very wellspring of a man's usefulness as a citizen. Without it family pride is a travesty. Without it, the impulse to build up sane and humane and lasting governments is lacking. Without it, a man may be ever so learned, ever so rich, yet he lacks any real place in community life. Patriotism is to a man's community life what religion is to his moral life.

"Now I intend to lead a full, normal man's life. I want to love a country, and I couldn't see, when I got down to brass tacks, why that country should be

Germany. This is the land that bred me and fed me. Actually I'm a physical part of the soil of America. What do I care how cultured Germany may or may not be? Here in America are the hills and valleys, the rivers and mountains that I know and care for. Here is the kind of government I like. Here is the place of my profession. I wouldn't marry a German fräulein for anything. A slangy, athletic, bossy, saucy, well-educated American girl for mine! All the people that I love are here in America. You folks and all the relatives are here. Roger is here, Charley is here and up there on an American mountainside lies little Felicia. Papa, I am an American, not a German."

Again there was full silence in the room. Then Dean Erskine cleared his throat. "Ernest, I want to thank you very much. I, too, am an American."

Papa Wolf blew his nose and walked slowly out of the house. There was no one in the room who had not been moved deeply by the something poignant in Ernest's face, even though his voice was so sedulously casual. Before any one else had opportunity to speak however, Papa Wolf was back.

"I don't believe a word about Werner," he said to Ernest. "But I am surprised, Ernest, after your upbringing that you should have deceived Roger as you did."

"But are you an American, Papa?" persisted Ernest.

"You numb-skull!" shouted his father. "I have been an American longer than you have hairs to your head. It's my land, even if I am sentimental about Germany."

Once more he marched out the door.

"Come, Dean, and see the Plant," said Roger. The Dean rose with alacrity and bumped into Papa Wolf, who came in again shaking his head.

"I don't see, Ernie, how you could have treated Roger so. Of course, I think he's crazy and all his works. But I've always loved him, though I was and am very mad at him for bringing you down here. I don't see how you could have done it."

"I thought I owed it to Germany and that it would help him. You forget my German superman upbringing."

"I'll look at the Plant, of course," said Papa Wolf, "just to see what you have wasted your life blood on. But not one cent of money, boys."

"I don't want your money, sir," exclaimed Roger, proudly.

"You don't eh! Then we're all satisfied," returned Ernest's father, following the Dean out of the door.

The last place inspected was the engine house. Ernest made a simple explanation of the machinery while the Dean went over the engine almost as lovingly and keenly as Roger would have. Then Roger led the Dean back to the porch for a talk.

"So this is the result of all your years of work, eh, Ernie?" said Papa Wolf. "Do you mean to say that you made that machine out of your own head?"

"I only helped Roger," replied Ernest, "but it means a lot to me. Father, this solar work of ours will be recorded in history as the beginning of a new harnessing of energy."

The older man looked at his son with interest. "You should have taken the trouble to explain all this to me, years ago, my son."

"I know it," replied Ernest. "Well, anyhow, I've done my bit down here. When you go back I'll go back with you. I'm a teacher, not a pioneer."

Papa Wolf seized both of Ernest's hand. "No! Really! Ernest, you really will go on with the professorship! Then I am satisfied. But we must not let this work be in vain. This child of your mind, Ernest, it must be recorded. It will help you in your professorship, eh?"

Ernest nodded. "It's really a great thing, father. Roger has a wonderful mind."

"He's got a good mind, yes, but I'm asking you where would he have been all these years without my boy? O Ernie! Ernie! You've taken ten years off me! Now, you let me think. I'll sit and watch this engine of yours. You go along about your work, Ernie." And Ernest, a tired look in his eyes, went along as he was bidden.

It was dinner time before the tour of inspection was done. Mamma Wolf spent the morning, after a nap, helping the girls to prepare a huge dinner. She and Elsa wept a little on each other's necks, and Mamma Wolf promised to take Dick to her heart and love him as another son. And somehow Elsa put full faith in Ernest's bringing his father around.

No one talked business or politics at dinner. There were many details of the camp life to be told and many stories of the Von Mindens that invariably brought Papa Wolf to the verge of apoplexy with laughter. Ernest never had been more charming than he was now. And by some magic of his own, he drew Dick out to tell the story of his turquoise mining. Like almost any story of desert endeavor it was full of drama, of quiet heroism, and of weird humor. Papa and Mamma Wolf hung breathless on every word of it.

"Himmel!" exclaimed Papa at the end, "if I were thirty years younger, I'd like just such adventuring!" The others looked at one another and smiled.

When the long dinner hour was over, Papa Wolf lighted his meerschaum. "And now let's look at that engine again. You should come and see it, Mamma. Run by sunshine and almost as silent as the sun and powerful like it. Wonderful! Wonderful!"

"You've hardly looked at the alfalfa, Papa," said Ernest.

"Plenty of time for that. One thing at a time. Come along, Dean. If you should explain that engine through to me two or three times more, I'll understand it. Ernest and Roger, they never thought to take old Papa to see the working model at the University. They thought because I was a fool about the working drawings, I knew nothing. Come on, Dean! Come along."

Seated on two up-ended boxes before the engine, the two gray headed men spent the afternoon. The Dean could have been enticed away to examine the alfalfa and the pumping system. But not Papa. He went out at intervals to look at the absorber and to read the thermometer at the oil storage pit, then back to the engine.

"And this is what Ernie has been working on for all these years. And I never could get it through my old head."

"Ernest and Roger too," the Dean would suggest.

"Of course, Roger. But you know Ernest and his fine mind. Observe now, Dean, out there the parching, cruel sun, that strikes and kills. Here Ernest's magic, this silent machine that catches that sun and turns its death kiss into life. And out there, where the honey bees buzz, the magic made vital. My boy's brain did such miracles and I never knew it until now. I even forbade him the house when he insisted on giving birth to his idea."

The others drifted in and out and at last the supper hour came and once more the clan gathered at the familiar table.

"Why, Papa, I haven't seen you with such appetite or with such spirits since last Christmas," said Mamma.

"You haven't seen me with such cause. And how mad I was when I came—eh, Mamma!"

"You know, Papa," said Ernest, "we never could have put over the Plant if it hadn't been for the Prebles. I swear Charley has fed us and Dick has guided us

and had faith in us when it seemed as if the whole world outside had turned us down."

"Is it so?" exclaimed Papa as if realizing that fact for the first time. "So you stood by my boy, eh, Dick? Well, that's good! My boy has stood by you and so will I. Now listen, boys. Why can't I do a little adventuring, eh? Let's make this a thousand acre Plant. And the Dean says that this engine will put every other low temperature, high speed engine off the market. Why not build some and sell them, eh?"

"But Mr. Wolf," said Roger. "I haven't felt as if you ought to put money in. If anything should go wrong and you should lose by it, I'd never forgive myself."

Papa Wolf put his hand on Roger's knee. "Roger, I've known you since you were born and I loved your father. He died a disappointed man. When I think of the things Ernie said this morning I realize that perhaps if I'd been a better patriot I wouldn't have let a man so valuable to the community die a disappointed man. Now you're an even more valuable man than your father was, and so is Ernest. Shall I wait for outsiders to do for my son and your father's son? Or shall I help you organize so as to develop this hot country for America? And again I did my only son an unkindness in not understanding his work—almost a fatal unkindness. Suppose he had left us for Germany. Shall I not make it up to him? And lastly, my son treated you dishonorably. Shall he and I not together try to make it up?"

Roger's tense face worked.

"Now, don't speak! I know how you feel," cried Papa. "Now I have more than enough tucked away for Mamma and me. And I have two friends, one in the brewery, one in the bank. We can organize a company. We have Dick's ranch and the turquoise mine and Ernest's and your plant. We can get plenty of money. I'll make all those Männerchors come down here. We'll irrigate this whole desert. We'll open up mines—we'll—"

He got up to pace the floor. "Why there's an empire here for Uncle Sam that the Reclamation Service can't handle. We'll do it."

"Roger has talked of Asia Minor," said Dick, with twinkling eyes.

"Well, we'll tackle that later," replied Papa dreamily. "America is a good field. Dean, are you coming in with us?"

"Thanks," returned the Dean. "But Ernest and I have another job, fighting *furor Teutonicus* up at the university. But I'll be on hand for such advice as I can give."

"I think," Papa went on after a brisk nod, "we'll spend a month or so down here, Mamma and I. Ernest, you can go on up and open the house and we'll be back after Christmas. If all works well, I'll have to spend a part of each year down here. Dick, can't you get those Indians you talk of to build Mamma and Ernie and me a little house, near by? Then you and Elsa can have this and Charley and Roger must build them a little nest somewhere. And we all are fixed, see!"

There was a little pause, then Elsa ran across the room and threw herself in her father's arms. "Oh, Papa! Papa! I never knew what a saint you were until now."

Papa Wolf smoothed Elsa's hair tenderly. "I still think you are a fool, Elschen. But if your mother and I are down here to watch closely—the very first time, sir," he glared at Dick, "that I find—"

"You won't have to do anything, Mr. Wolf," said Dick. "I'll cut my throat."

"Don't talk silly," exclaimed Papa. "Just try to be a good boy and we'll help. Of course, I think Elsa is a fool but I thought Ernest was one and now look!"

The Dean slipped out, unobserved and a moment later Charley whispered to Roger,

"Let's get out and let Dick have his chance to clear everything up."

And so Roger and Charley found themselves alone, under the stars.

"I just can't realize it, at all, can you, Roger dearest?" asked Charley.

Roger did not answer for a moment. They were standing beside the corral, looking toward the shadowy mountainside where lay Felicia's grave.

"I wish I could believe she saw and knew everything," he said, brokenly. Then as Charley said nothing, he turned and took her in his arms with a sudden passion that found expression in hot kisses and half broken sentences.

"Oh, Charley! Charley! After all I'm not a failure. I am—Darling, you do love me, you are sure of that—! How beautiful you are! How beautiful! You are as lovely as the desert. God, Charley, but I'm happy!"

Charley, clinging to him speechlessly, finally raised her head, and looked with Roger across the desert night of silence and blue, while the rich sense of space, of mystery, of heaven very near and life's bitternesses far away touched them both at once. And Peter, a wisp of cat's claw hanging from his mouth, rubbed his patient head affectionately against Roger's arm.

THE END

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