# The Magnificent Adventure

Being the Story of the World's Greatest Exploration and the Romance of a Very Gallant Gentleman

Emerson Hough

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the Romance of a Very Gallant Gentleman

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# THE MAGNIFICENT ADVENTURE

*Being the Story of the World's Greatest Exploration and the Romance of a Very Gallant Gentleman.*

**A NOVEL**

**BY**

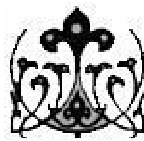
**EMERSON HOUGH**

AUTHOR OF

**THE COVERED WAGON, NORTH OF 36, ETC.**

**ILLUSTRATED BY**

**ARTHUR I. KELLER**



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“‘Him Ro’shones,’ replied the girl”
**“‘Him Ro’shones,’ replied the girl” PAGE 219**

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**TO**

**ROBERT H. DAVIS**

**GOOD FRIEND**

**INVALUABLE COLLABORATOR**

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# THE
# MAGNIFICENT ADVENTURE

# CHAPTER I

## MOTHER AND SON

A woman, tall, somewhat angular, dark of hair and eye, strong of features—a woman now approaching middle age—sat looking out over the long, tree-clad slopes that ran down from the gallery front of the mansion house to the gate at the distant roadway. She had sat thus for some moments, many moments, her gaze intently fixed, as though waiting for something—something or someone that she did not now see, but expected soon to see.

It was late afternoon of a day so beautiful that not even old Albemarle, beauty spot of Virginia, ever produced one more beautiful—not in the hundred years preceding that day, nor in the century since then. For this was more than a hundred years ago; and what is now an ancient land was then a half opened region, settled only here and there by the great plantations of the well-to-do. The house that lay at the summit of the long and gentle slope, flanked by its wide galleries—its flung doors opening it from front to rear to the gaze as one approached—had all the rude comfort and assuredness usual with the gentry of that time and place.

It was the privilege, and the habit, of the Widow Lewis to sit idly when she liked, but her attitude now was not that of idleness. Intentness, reposeful acceptance of life, rather, showed in her motionless, long-sustained position. She was patient, as women are; but her strong pose, its freedom from material support, her restrained power to do or to endure, gave her the look of owning something more than resignation, something more than patience. A strong figure of a woman, one would have said had one seen her, sitting on the gallery of her old home a hundred and twenty-four years ago.

The Widow Lewis stared straight down at the gate, a quarter of a mile away, with yearning in her gaze. But as so often happens, what she awaited did not appear at the time and place she herself had set. There fell at the western end of the gallery a shadow—a tall shadow, but she did not see it. She did not hear the footfall, not stealthy, but quite silent, with which the tall owner of the shadow came toward her from the gallery end.

It was a young man, or rather boy, no more than eighteen years of age, who stood now and gazed at her after his silent approach, so like that of an Indian savage. Half savage himself he seemed now, as he stood, clad in the buckskin garments of the chase, then not unusual in the Virginian borderlands among settlers and hunters, and not held *outré* among a people so often called to the chase or to war.

His tunic was of dressed deer hide, his well-fitting leggings also of that material. His feet were covered with moccasins, although his hat and the neat scarf at his neck were those of a gentleman. He was a practical youth, one would have said, for no ornament of any sort was to be seen upon his garb. In his hand he carried a long rifle of the sort then used thereabout. At his belt swung the hide of a raccoon, the bodies of a few squirrels.

Had you been a close observer, you would have found each squirrel shot fair through the head. Indeed, a look into the gray eye of the silent-paced youth would have assured you in advance of his skill with his weapons—you would have known that to be natural with him.

You would not soon have found his like, even in that land of tall hunting men. He was a grand young being as he stood there, straight and clean-limbed; hard-bitten of muscle, albeit so young; powerful and graceful in his stride. The beauty of youth was his, and of a strong heredity—that you might have seen.

The years of youth were his, yes; but the lightness of youth did not rest on his brow. While he was not yet eighteen, the gravity of manhood was his.

He did not smile now, as he saw his mother sitting there absorbed, gazing out for his return, and not seeing him now that he had returned. Instead, he stepped forward, and quietly laid a hand upon her shoulder, not with any attempt to surprise or startle her, but as if he knew that she would accept it as the announcement of his presence.

He was right. The strong figure in the chair did not start away. No exclamation came from the straight mouth of the face now turned toward him. Evidently the nerves of these two were not of the sort readily stampeded.

The young man’s mother at first did not speak to him. She only reached up her own hand to take that which lay upon her shoulder. They remained thus for a moment, until at last the youth stepped back to lean his rifle against the wall.

“I am late, mother,” said he at length, as he turned and, seating himself at her feet, threw his arm across her lap—himself but boy again now, and not the hunter and the man.

She stroked his dark hair, not foolishly fond, but with a sort of stern maternal care, smoothing it back in place where it belonged, straightening out the riot it had assumed. It made a mane above his forehead and reached down his neck to his shoulders, so heavy that where its dark mass was lifted it showed the skin of his neck white beneath.

“You are late, yes.”

“And you waited—so long?”

“I am always waiting for you, Merne,” said she. She used the Elizabethan vowel, as one should pronounce “bird,” with no sound of “u”—“Mairne,” the name sounded as she spoke it. And her voice was full and rich and strong, as was her son’s; musically strong.

“I am always waiting for you, Merne,” said she. “But I long ago learned not to expect anything else of you.” She spoke with not the least reproach in her tone. “No, I only knew that you would come back in time, because you told me that you would.”

“And you did not fear for me, then—gone overnight in the woods?” He half smiled at that thought himself.

“You know I would not. I know you, what you are—born woodsman. No, I trust you to care for yourself in any wild country, my son, and to come back. And then—to go back again into the forest. When will it be, my son? Tomorrow? In two days, or four, or six? Sometime you will go to the wilderness again. It draws you, does it not?”

She turned her head slightly toward the west, where lay the forest from which the boy had but now emerged. He did not smile, did not deprecate. He was singularly mature in his actions, though but eighteen years of age.

“I did not desert my duty, mother,” said he at length.

“Oh, no, you would not do that, Merne!” returned the widow.

“Please, mother,” said he suddenly, “I want you to call me by my full name—

that of your people. Am I not Meriwether, too?”

The hand on his forehead ceased its gentle movement, fell to its owner’s lap. A sigh passed his mother’s set lips.

“Yes, my son, Meriwether,” said she. “This is the last journey! I have lost you, then, it seems? You do not wish to be my boy any longer? You are a man altogether, then?”

“I am Meriwether Lewis, mother,” said he gravely, and no more.

“Yes!” She spoke absently, musingly. “Yes, you always were!”

“I went westward, clear across the Ragged Mountains,” said the youth. “These”—and he pointed with contempt to the small trophies at his belt—“will do for the darkies at the stables. I put yon old ringtail up a tree last night, on my way home, and thought it was as well to wait till dawn, till I could see the rifle-sights; and afterward—the woods were beautiful today. As to the trails, even if there is no trail, I know the way back home—you know that, mother.”

“I know that, my son, yes. You were born for the forest. I fear I shall not hold you long on this quiet farm.”

“All in time, mother! I am to stay here with you until I am fitted to go higher. You know what Mr. Jefferson has said to me. I am for Washington, mother, one of these days—for I hold it sure that Mr. Jefferson will go there in some still higher place. He was my father’s friend, and is ours still.”

“It may be that you will go to Washington, my son,” said his mother; “I do not know. But will you stay there? The forest will call to you all your life—all your life! Do I not know you, then? Can I not see your life—all your life—as plainly as if it were written? Do I not know—your mother? Why should not your mother know?”

He looked around at her rather gravely once again, unsmilingly, for he rarely smiled.

“How do you know, mother? What do you know? Tell me—about myself! Then I will tell you also. We shall see how we agree as to what I am and what I ought to do!”

“My son, it is no question of what you ought to do, for that blends too closely in

fate with what you surely will do—must do—because it was written for you. Yonder forest will always call to you." She turned now toward the sun, sinking across the red-leaved forest lands. "The wilderness is your home. You will go out into it and return—often; and then at last you will go and not come back again—not to me—not to anyone will you come back."

The youth did not move as she sat, her hands on his head. Her voice went on, even and steady.

"You are old, Meriwether Lewis! It is time, now. You are a man. You *always* were a man! You were born old. You never have been a boy, and never can be one. You never were a child, but always a man. When you were a baby, you did not smile; when you were a boy, you always had your way. My boy, a long time ago I ceased to oppose that will of yours—I knew that it was useless. But, ah, how I have loved that will when I felt it was behind your promise! I knew you would do what you had set for yourself to do. I knew you would come back with deeds in your hand, my boy—gained through that will which never would bend for me or for anyone else in the world!"

He remained motionless, apparently unaffected, as his mother went on.

"You were always old, always grown up, always resolved, always your own master—always Meriwether Lewis. When you were born, you were not a child. When the old nurse brought you to me—I can see her black face grinning now—she carried you held by the feet instead of lying on her arm. You *stood*, you were so strong! Your hair was dark and full even then. You were old! In two weeks you turned where you heard a sound—you recognized sight and sound together, as no child usually does for months. You were beautiful, my boy, so strong, so straight—ah, yes!—but you never were a boy at all. When you should have been a baby, you did not weep and you did not smile. I never knew you to do so. From the first, you always were a man."

She paused, but still he did not speak.

"That was well enough, for later we were left alone. But your father was in you. Do I not know well enough where you got that settled melancholy of yours, that despondency, that somber grief—call it what you like—that marked him all his life, and even in his death? That came from him, your father. I thank God I did not give you that, knowing what life must hold for you in suffering! He suffered, yes, but not as you will. And you must—you must, my son. Beyond all other men, you will suffer!"

“You were better named Cassandra, mother!” Yet the young man scarce smiled even now.

“Yes, I am a prophetess, all too sooth a prophetess, my son. I see ahead as only a mother can see—perhaps as only one of the old Highland blood can see. I am soothseer and soothsayer, because you are blood of my blood, bone of my bone, and I cannot help but know. I cannot help but know what that melancholy and that resolution, all these combined, must spell for you. You know how his heart was racked at times?”

The boy nodded now.

“Then know how your own must be racked in turn!” said she. “My son, it is no ordinary fate that will be yours. You will go forward at all costs; you will keep your word bright as the knife in your belt—you will drive yourself. What that means to you in agony—what that means when your will is set against the unalterable and the inevitable—I wish—oh, I wish I could not see it! But I do see it, now, all laid out before me—all, all! Oh, Merne—may I not call you Merne once more before I let you go?”

She let her hands fall from his head to his shoulders as she gazed steadily out beyond him, as if looking into his future; but she herself sat, her strong face composed. She might, indeed, have been a prophetess of old.

“Tragedy is yours, my son,” said she, slowly, “not happiness. No woman will ever come and lie in your arms happy and content.”

“Mother!”

He half flung off her hands, but she laid them again more firmly on his shoulders, and went on speaking, as if half in reverie, half in trance, looking down the long slope of green and gold as if it showed the vista of the years.

“You will love, my boy, but with your nature how could love mean happiness to you? Love? No man could love more terribly. You will be intent, resolved, but the firmness of your will means that much more suffering for you. You will suffer, my boy—I see that for you, my first-born boy! You will love—why should you not, a man fit to love and be loved by any woman? But that love, the stronger it grows, will but burn you the deeper. You will struggle through on your own path; but happiness does not lie at the end of that path for you. You will succeed, yes—you could not fail; but always the load on your shoulders will

grow heavier and heavier. You will carry it alone, until at last it will be too much for you. Your strong heart will break. You will lie down and die. Such a fate for you, Merne, my boy—such a man as you will be!"

She sighed, shivered, and looked about her, startled, as if she had spoken aloud in some dream.

"Well, then, go on!" she said, and withdrew her hands from his shoulders. The faces of both were now gazing straight on over the gold-flecked slope before them. "Go on, you are a man. I know you will not turn back from what you undertake. You will not change, you will not turn—because you cannot. You were born to earn and not to own; to find, but not to possess. But as you have lived, so you will die."

"You give me no long shrift, mother?" said the youth, with a twinkle in his eye.

"How can I? I can only tell you what is in the book of life. Do I not know? A mother always loves her son; so it takes all her courage to face what she knows will be his lot. Any mother can read her son's future—if she dares to read it. She knows—she knows!"

There was a long silence; then the widow continued.

"Listen, Merne," she said. "You call me a prophetess of evil. I am not that. Do you think I speak only in despair, my boy? No, there is something larger than mere happiness. Listen, and believe me, for now I could not fail to know. I tell you that your great desire, the great wish of your life, shall be yours! You never will relinquish it, you always will possess it, and at last it will be yours."

Again silence fell between them before she went on, her hand again resting on her son's dark hair.

"Your great desire will cost me my son. Be it so! We breed men for the world, we women, and we give them up. Out of the agony of our hearts, we do and must always give them up. That is the price I must pay. But I give you up to the great hope, the great thing of your life. Should I complain? Am I not your mother, and therefore a woman? And should a woman complain? But, Oh, Merne, Merne, my son, my boy!"

She drew his head back, so that she could see deep into his eyes. Her dark brows half frowning, she gazed down upon him, not so much in tenderness as in intentness. For the first time in many months—for the last time in his life—she

kissed him on the forehead; and then she let him go.

He rose now, and, silently as he had come, passed around the end of the wide gallery.

Her gaze did not follow him. She sat still looking down the golden-green slope where the leaves were dropping silently. She sat, her chin in her hand, her elbows upon her knees, facing that future, somber but splendid, to which she had devoted her son, and which in later years he so singularly fulfilled.

That was the time when the mother of Meriwether Lewis gave him to his fate—his fate, so closely linked with yours and mine.

# CHAPTER II

## MERIWETHER AND THEODOSIA

Soft is the sun in the summer season at Washington, softer at times than any old Dan Chaucer ever knew; but again so ardent that anyone who would ride abroad would best do so in the early morning. This is true today, and it was true when the capital city lay in the heart of a sweeping forest at the edge of a yet unconquered morass.

The young man who now rode into this forest, leaving behind him the open streets of the straggling city—then but beginning to lighten under the rays of the morning sun—was one who evidently knew his Washington. He knew his own mind as well, for he rode steadily, as if with some definite purpose, to some definite point, looking between his horse's ears.

Sitting as erect and as easily as any cavalier of the world's best, he was tall in his saddle seat, his legs were long and straight. His boots were neatly varnished, his coat well cut, his gloves of good pattern for that time. His hat swept over a mass of dark hair, which fell deep in its loose cue upon his neck. His cravat was immaculate and well tied. He was a good figure of a man, a fine example of the young manhood of America as he rode, his light, firm hand half unconsciously curbing the antics of the splendid animal beneath him—a horse deep bay in color, high-mettled, a mount fit for a monarch—or for a young gentleman of Virginia a little more than one hundred years ago.

If it was not the horse of a monarch the young man bestrode, none the less it was the horse of one who insisted that his stables should be as good as those of any king—none less, if you please, than Mr. Thomas Jefferson, then President of the United States of America.

This particular animal was none other than Arcturus, Mr. Jefferson's favorite saddler. It was the duty as well as the delight of Mr. Jefferson's private secretary to give Arcturus and his stable-mate, Wildair, their exercise on alternate days. On this summer morning Arcturus was enjoying his turn beneath his rider—who forsooth was more often in the saddle than Mr. Jefferson himself.

Horse and rider made a picture in perfect keeping as they fared on toward the

little-used forest road which led out Rock Creek way. Yonder, a few miles distant, was a stone mill owned by an old German, who sometimes would offer a cup of coffee to an early horseman. Perhaps this rider knew the way from earlier wanderings thither on other summer mornings.

Arcturus curveted along and tossed his head, mincing daintily, and making all manner of pretense at being dangerous, with sudden gusts of speed and shakings of his head and blowing out of his nostrils—though all the time the noble bay was as gentle as a dog. Whether or not he really were dangerous would have made small difference to the young man who bestrode him, for his seat was that of the born horseman.

They advanced comfortably enough, the rider seemingly less alive to the joys of the morning than was the animal beneath him. The young man's face was grave, his mouth unsmiling—a mouth of half Indian lines, broken in its down-sweeping curve merely by the point of a bow which spoke of gentleness as well as strength. His head was that of the new man, the American, the new man of a new world, young and strong, a continent that had lain fallow from the birth of time.

What burdened the mind of a man like this, of years which should have left him yet in full attunement with the morning of life and with the dawn of a country? Why should he pay so little heed to the playful advances of Arcturus, inviting him for a run along the shady road?

Arcturus could not tell. He could but prance insinuatingly, his ears forward, his head tossed, his eye now and again turned about, inquiring.

But though the young man, moody and abstracted, still looked on ahead, some of his senses seemed yet on guard. His head turned at the slightest sound of the forest life that came to him. If a twig cracked, he heard it. If a green nut cut by some early squirrel clattered softly on the leaves, that was not lost to him.

A bevy of partridges, feeding at dawn along the edge of the forest path, whirled up in his horse's face; and though he held the startled animal close, he followed the flight of the birds with the trained eye of the fowler, and marked well where they pitched again. He did these things unconsciously as one well used to the woods, even though his eye turned again straight down the road and the look of intentness, of sadness, almost of melancholy, once more settled upon his features.

He advanced into the wood until all sight of the city was quite cut off from him,

until the light grew yet dimmer along the forest road, in places almost half covered with a leafy canopy, until at length he came to the valley of the little stream. He followed the trail as it rambled along the bank toward the mill, through scenes apparently familiar to him.

Abstracted as he was he must have been alert, alive, for now, suddenly, he broke his moody reverie at some sound which he heard on ahead. He reined in for just an instant, then loosed the bridle and leaned forward. The horse under him sprang forward in giant strides.

It was the sound of a voice that the young cavalier had heard—the voice of a woman—apparently a woman in some distress. What cavalier at any time of the world has not instinctively leaped forward at such sound? In less than half a moment the rider was around the turn of the leafy trail.

She was there, the woman who had cried out, herself mounted, and now upon the point of trying conclusions with her mount. Whether dissatisfaction with the latter or some fear of her own had caused her to cry out might have been less certain, had it not been sure that her eye was at the moment fastened, not upon the fractious steed, but upon the cause of his unwonted misbehavior.

The keen eye of the young man looked with hers, and found the reason for the sudden scene. A serpent, some feet in length—one of the mottled, harmless species sometimes locally called the blow-snake—obviously had come out into the morning sun to warm himself, and his yellow body, lying loose and uncoiled, had been invisible to horse and rider until they were almost upon it. Then, naturally, the serpent had moved his head, and both horse and rider had seen him, to the dismay of both.

This the young man saw and understood in a second, even as he spurred forward alongside the plunging animal. His firm hand on the bridle brought both horses back to their haunches. An instant later both had control of their mounts again, and had set them down to their paces in workmanlike fashion.

There was color in the young woman’s face, but it was the color of courage, of resolution. There was breeding in every line of her. Class and lineage marked her as she sat easily, her supple young body accommodating itself handsomely to the restrained restiveness of the steed beneath her. She rode with perfect confidence, as an experienced horsewoman, and was well turned out in a close habit, neither old nor new.

Her dark hair—cut rather squarely across her forehead after an individual fashion of her own—was surmounted by a slashed hat, decorated with a wide-flung plume of smoky color, caught with a jewel at the side. Both jewel and plume had come, no doubt, in some ship from across seas. Her hands were small, and gloved as well as might be at that day of the world. There was small ornament about her; nor did this young woman need ornament beyond the color of her cheek and hair and eye, and perhaps the touch of a bold ribbon at her throat, which held a white collar closer to a neck almost as white.

An aristocrat, you must have called her, had you seen her in any chance company. And had you been a young man such as this, and had you met her alone, in some sort of agitation, and had consent been given you—or had you taken consent—surely you would have been loath to part company with one so fair, and would have ridden on with her as he did now.

But at first they did not speak. A quick, startled look came into the face of the young woman. A deeper shade glowed upon the cheek of the cavalier, reddening under the skin—a flush which shamed him, but which he could not master. He only kept his eyes straight between his horse's ears as he rode—after he had raised his hat and bowed at the close of the episode.

"I am to thank Captain Lewis once more," began the young woman, in a voice vibrant and clear—the sweetest, kindest voice in the world. "It is good fortune that you rode abroad so early this morning. You always come at need!"

He turned upon her, mute for a time, yet looking full into her face. It was sadness, not boldness, not any gay challenge, that marked his own.

"Can you then call it good fortune?" His own voice was low, suppressed.

"Why not, then?"

"You did not need me. A moment, and you would have been in command again—there was no real need of me. Ah, you never need me!"

"Yet you come. You were here, had the need been worse. And, indeed, I was quite off my guard—I must have been thinking of something else."

"And I also."

"And there was the serpent."

“Madam, there was the serpent! And why not? Is this not Eden? I swear it is paradise enough for me. Tell me, why is it that in the glimpses the sages give us of paradise they no more than lift the curtain—and let it fall again?”

“Captain Meriwether Lewis is singularly gloomy this morning!”

“Not more than I have been always. How brief was my little hour! Yet for that time I knew paradise—as I do now. We should part here, madam, now, forever. Yon serpent spelled danger for both of us.”

“For both of us?”

“No, forgive me! None the less, I could not help my thoughts—cannot help them now. I ride here every morning. I saw your horse’s hoof-marks some two miles back. Do you suppose I did not know whose they were?”

“And you followed me? Ah!”

“I suppose I did, and yet I did not. If I did I knew I was riding to my fate.”

She would have spoken—her lips half parted—but what she might have said none heard.

He went on:

“I have ridden here since first I saw you turn this way one morning. I guessed this might be your haunt at dawn. I have ridden here often—and feared each time that I might meet you. Perhaps I came this morning in the same way, not knowing that you were near, but hoping that you might be. You see, madam, I speak the absolute truth with you.”

“You have never spoken aught else to any human soul. That I know.”

“And yet you try to evade the truth? Why deceive your heart about it, since I have not deceived my own? I have faced it out in my own heart, and I have, I trust, come off the victor. At some cost!”

Her face was troubled. She looked aside as she replied in a voice low, but firm:

“Any woman would be glad to hear such words from Captain Lewis, and I am glad. But—the honest wife never lived who could listen to them often.”

“I know that,” he said simply.

“No!” Her voice was very low now; her eyes soft and cast down as they fell upon a ring under her glove. “We must not meet, Captain Meriwether Lewis. At least, we must not meet thus alone in the woods. It might cause talk. The administration has enemies enough, as you know—and never was a woman who did not have enemies, no matter how clean her life has been.”

“Clean as the snow, yours! I have never asked you to be aught else, and never will. I sought you once, when I rode from Virginia to New York—when I first had my captain’s pay, before Mr. Jefferson asked me to join his family. Before that time I had too little to offer you; but then, with my hopes and my ambitions, I ventured. I made that journey to offer you my hand. I was two weeks late—you were already wedded to Mr. Alston. Then I learned that happiness never could be mine.... Yes, we must part! You are the only thing in life I fear. And I fear as well for you. One wagging tongue in this hotbed of gossip—and there is harm for you, whom all good men should wish to shield.”

As he rode, speaking thus, his were the features of a man of tremendous emotions, a resolute man, a man of strength, of passions not easily put down.

She turned aside her own face for an instant. At last her little hand went to him in a simple gesture of farewell. Meriwether Lewis leaned and kissed it reverently as he rode.

“Good-by!” said he. “Now we may go on for the brief space that remains for us,” he added a moment later. “No one is likely to ride this way this morning. Let us go on to the old mill. May I give you a cup of coffee there?”

“I trust Captain Meriwether Lewis,” she replied.

They advanced silently, and presently came in sight of a little cascade above a rocky shallowing of the stream. Below this, after they had splashed through the ford, they saw the gray stone walls of Rock Creek Mill.

The miller was a plain man, and silent. Other folk, younger or older, married or single, had come hither of a morning, and he spoke the name of none. He welcomed these two after his fashion. Under the shade of a great tree, which flung an arm out to the rivulet, he pulled out a little table spread in white and departed to tell his wife of the company. She, busy and smiling, came out presently with her best in old china and linen and wherewith to go with both.

They sat now, face to face across the little table, their horses cropping the dewy

grass near by. Lewis's riding crop and gloves lay on his knee. He cast his hat upon the grass. Little birds hopped about on the ground and flitted here and there in the trees, twittering. A mocker, trilling in sudden ecstacy of life, spread a larger melody through all the wood.

The sun drew gently up in the heavens, screened by the waving trees. The ripple of the stream was very sweet.

"Theodosia, look!" said the young man, suddenly swinging a gesture about him. "Did I not say right? It is Eden! Ah, what a pity it is that Eden must ever be the same—a serpent—repentance—and farewell! Yet it was so beautiful."

"A sinless Eden, sir."

"No! I will not lie—I will not say that I do not love you more than ever. That is my sin; so I must go away. This must be our last meeting—I am fortunate that it came by chance today."

"Going away—where, then, my friend?"

"Into the West. It always has called me. Ah, if only I had remained in the Indian country yonder, where I belonged, and never made my ride to New York—to learn that I had come too late! But the West still is there—the wilderness still exists to welcome such as me!"

"But you will—you will come back again?"

"It is in the lap of the gods. I do not know or care. But my plans are all arranged. Mr. Jefferson and I have agreed that it is almost time to start. You see, Theodosia, I am now back from my schooling. You behold in me, madam, a scientist! At least I am competent to read by the sun and stars, can reckon longitude and latitude—as one must, to journey into the desert yonder. If only I dared orient my soul as well!"

"You would never doubt my faith in my husband."

"No! Of course, you love your husband. I could not look at you a second time if you did not."

"You are a good man, Meriwether Lewis!"

"Do not say it! I am a man accursed of evil passions—the most unhappy of all men. There is nothing else, I say, in all the world that I fear but my love for you.

Tell me it will not last—tell me it will change—tell me that I shall forget! I should not believe you—but tell me that. Does a man never forget? Success—for others; happiness—for someone else. My mother said that was to be my fate. What did she mean?"

"She meant, Meriwether Lewis, that you were a great man, a great soul! Only a man of noble soul could speak as you have spoken to me. We women, in our souls, love something noble and good and strong. Then we imagine someone like that. We believe, or try to believe, or say that we believe; but always——"

"And a woman may divide not love, only love of love itself?"

"I shall love your future, and shall watch it always," she replied, coloring. "You will be a great man, and there will be a great place for you."

"And what then?"

"Do not ask what then. You ask if men never change. Alas, they do, all too frequently! Do not deny the imperious way of nature. Only—remember me as long as you can, Meriwether Lewis."

She spoke softly, and the color of her cheek, still rising, told of her self-reproof.

He turned suddenly at this, a wonderfully sweet smile now upon his face.

"As long as I can?"

"Yes. Let your own mind run on the ambitions of a proud man, a strong man. Ambition—power—place—these things will all be yours in the coming years. They belong to any man of ability such as yours, and I covet them for you. I shall pray always for your success; but success makes men forget."

He still sat looking at her unmoved, with thoughts in his heart that he would not have cared to let her know. She went on still, half tremblingly:

"I want to see you happy after a time—with some good woman at your side—your children by you—in your own home. I want everything for you which ought to come to any man. And yet I know how hard it is to alter your resolve, once formed. Captain Lewis, you are a stubborn man, a hard man!"

He shook his head.

"Yes, I do not seem to change," said he simply. "I hope I shall be able to carry

my burden and to hold my trail."

"Fie! I will not have such talk on a morning like this."

Fearlessly she reached out her hand to his, which lay upon the table. She smiled at him, but he looked down, the lean fingers of his own hand not trembling nor responding.

If she sensed the rigidity of the muscles which held his fingers outward, at least she feared it not. If she felt the repression which kept him silent, at least she feared it not. Her intuitions told her at last that the danger was gone. His hand did not close on hers.

She raised her cup and saluted laughingly.

"A good journey, Meriwether Lewis," said she, "and a happy return from it! Cast away such melancholy—you will forget all this!"

"I ask you not to wound me more than need be. I am hard to die. I can carry many wounds, but they may pain me none the less."

"Forgive me, then," she said, and once more her small hand reached out toward him. "I would not wound you. I asked you only to remember me as——"

"As——"

"As I shall you, of course. And I remember that bright day when you came to me—yonder in New York. You offered me all that any man can ever offer any woman. I am proud of that! I told my husband, yes. He never mentions your name save in seriousness and respect. I am ambitious for you. All the Burrs are full of ambition, and I am a Burr, as you know. How long will it be before you come back to higher office and higher place? Will it be six months hence?"

"More likely six years. If there is healing for me, the wilderness alone must give it."

"I shall be an old woman—old and sallow from the Carolina suns. You will have forgotten me then."

"It is enough," said he. "You have lightened my burden for me as much as may be—you have made the trial as easy as any can. The rest is for me. At least I can go feeling that I have not wronged you in any way."

“Yes, Meriwether Lewis,” said she quietly, “there has not been one word or act of yours to cause you regret, or me. You have put no secret on me that I must keep. That was like a man! I trust you will find it easy to forget me.”

He raised a hand.

“I said, madam, that I am hard to die. I asked you not to wound me overmuch. Do not talk to me of hopes or sympathy. I do not ask—I will not have it! Only this remains to comfort me—if I had laid on my soul the memory of one secret that I had dared to place on yours, ah, then, how wretched would life be for me forever after! That thought, it seems to me, I could not endure.”

“Go, then, my savage gentleman, and let me——”

“And let you never see my face again?”

She rose and stood looking at him, her own eyes wet with a sudden moisture.

“Women worth loving are so few!” she said slowly. “Clean men are so few! How a woman could have loved you, Meriwether Lewis! How some woman ought to love you! Yes, go now,” she concluded. “Yes, go!”

“Mrs. Alston will wait with you here for a few moments,” said Meriwether Lewis to the miller’s wife quietly. He stood with his bridle rein across his arm. “See that she is very comfortable. She might have a second cup of your good coffee?”

He swung into his saddle, reined his horse about, turned and bowed formally to his late *vis-à-vis*, who still remained seated at the table. Then he was off at such speed as left Arcturus no more cause to fret at his bridle rein.

# CHAPTER III

## MR. BURR AND MR. MERRY

The young Virginian had well-nigh made his way out over the two miles or so of sheltered roadway, when he heard hoof beats on ahead, and slackened his own speed. He saw two horsemen approaching, both well mounted, coming on at a handsome gait.

Of these, one was a stout and elderly man of no special shape at all, who sat his horse with small grace, his florid face redder for his exercise, his cheeks mottled with good living and hard riding. He was clad in scrupulous riding costume, and seemed, indeed, a person of some importance. The badge of some order or society showed on his breast, and his entire air—intent as he was upon his present business of keeping company with a skilled horseman—marked him as one accustomed to attention from others. A servant in the costume of an English groom rode at a short distance behind him.

The second man was lighter, straight and trim of figure, with an erectness and exactness of carriage which marked him as a soldier at some part of his life. He was clad with extreme neatness, well booted also, and sat his mount with the nonchalance of the trained horseman. His own garb and face showed not the slightest proof that he had been riding hard.

Indeed, he seemed one whom no condition or circumstance could deprive of a cool immaculateness. He was a man to be marked in any company—especially so by the peculiar brilliance of his full, dark eye, which had a piercing, searching glint of its own; an eye such as few men have owned, and under whose spell man or woman might easily melt to acquiescence with the owner's mind.

He sat his horse with a certain haughtiness as well as carelessness. His chin seemed long and firm, and his lofty forehead—indeed, his whole air and carriage—discovered him the man of ambition that he really was. For this was no other than Aaron Burr, Vice-President of the United States, whose name was soon to be on the lips of all. He had lately come to Washington with the Jefferson administration.

This gentleman now reined up his horse as he caught sight of the young man

approaching. His older companion also halted. Burr raised his hat.

“Ah, Captain Lewis!” he said in a voice of extraordinary sweetness, yet of power. “You also have caught the secret of this climate, eh? You ride in the early morning—I do not wonder. You are Virginian, and so know the heats of Washington. I fancy you recognize Mr. Merry,” he added, his glance turning from one to the other.

The young Virginian bowed to both gentlemen.

“I have persuaded his excellency the minister from Great Britain to ride with us on one of our Washington mornings. He has been good enough to say—to say—that he enjoys it!”

Burr turned a quick glance upon the heavier figure at his side, with a half smile of badinage on his own face. Lewis bowed again, formally, and Anthony Merry answered with equal politeness and ceremony.

“Yes,” said the envoy, “to be sure I recall the young man. I met him in the anteroom at the President’s house.”

Meriwether Lewis cast him a quick glance, but made no answer. He knew well enough the slighting estimate in which everything at Washington was held by this minister accredited to our government. Also he knew, as he might have said, something about the diplomat’s visit at the Executive Mansion. For thus far the minister from Great Britain to Washington had not been able to see the President of the United States.

“And you are done your ride?” said Burr quickly, for his was a keen nose to scent any complication. “Tell me”—he lifted his own reins now to proceed—“you saw nothing of my daughter, Mrs. Alston? We missed her at the house, and have feared her abduction by some bold young Virginian, eh?”

His keen eye rested fairly on the face of the younger man as he spoke. The latter felt the challenge under the half mocking words.

“Yes,” he replied calmly, “I have seen Mrs. Alston. I left her but now at the old mill, having a cup of coffee with the miller’s wife. I had not time myself for a second, although Mrs. Alston honored me by allowing me to sit at her table for a moment. We met by accident, you see, as we both rode, a short time ago. I overtook her when it was not yet sunrise, or scarcely more.”

“You see!” laughed Burr, as he turned to Merry. “Our young men are early risers when it comes to pursuit of the fair. I must ride at once and see to the welfare of my daughter. She may be weeping at losing her escort so soon!”

They all smiled in proper fashion. Lewis bowed, and, lifting his hat, passed on. Burr, as they parted, fell for just a half-moment into thought, his face suddenly inscrutable, as if he pondered something.

“There is the ablest man I have seen in Washington,” blurted out Merry suddenly, apropos of nothing that had been said. “He has manners, and he rides like an Englishman.”

“Say not so!” said Burr, laughing. “Better—he rides like a Virginian!”

“Very well; it is the same thing. The Virginians are but ourselves—this country is all English yet. And I swear—Mr. Burr, may we speak freely?—I cannot see, and I never shall see, what is the sense in all this talk of a new democracy of the people. Now, what men like these—like you——”

“You know well enough how far I agree with you,” said Burr somberly.

“’Tis an experiment, our republic, I am willing to say that boldly to you, at least. How long it may last——”

“Depends on men like you,” said Merry, suddenly turning upon him as they rode. “How long do you suppose his Majesty will endure such slights as they put on us here day by day? My blood boils at the indignities we have had to suffer here—cooling our heels in your President’s halls. I call it mere presumptuousness. I cannot look upon this country as anything but a province to be taken back again when England is ready. And it may be, since so much turbulence and discourtesy seem growing here, that chance will not wait long in the coming!”

“It may be, Mr. Merry,” said Aaron Burr. “My own thoughts you know too well for need of repetition. Let us only go softly. My plans advance as well as I could ask. I was just wondering,” he added, “whether those two young people really were together there at the old mill—and whether they were there for the first time.”

“If not, ’twas not for the last time!” rejoined the older man. “Yonder young man was made to fill a woman’s eye. Your daughter, Mr. Burr, while the soul of married discreetness, and charming as any of her sex I have ever seen, must look

out for her heart. She might find it divided into three equal parts.”

“How then, Mr. Minister?”

“One for her father——”

Aaron Burr bowed.

“Yes, her father first, as I verily believe. What then?”

“The second for her husband——”

“Certainly. Mr. Alston is a rising man. He has a thousand slaves on his plantations—he is one of the richest of the rich South Carolinian planters. And in politics he has a chance—more than a chance. But after that?”

“The third portion of so charming a woman’s heart might perhaps be assigned to Captain Meriwether Lewis!”

“Say you so?” laughed Burr carelessly. “Well, well this must be looked into. Come, I must tell my son-in-law that his home is in danger of being invaded! Far off in his Southern rice-lands, I fear he misses his young wife sometimes. I brought her here for the sake of her own health—she cannot thrive in such swamps. Besides, I cannot bear to have her live away from me. She is happier with me than anywhere else. Yes, you are right, my daughter worships me.”

“Why should she not? And why should she not ride with a gallant at sunrise for an early cup of coffee, egad?” said the older man.

Burr did not answer, and they rode on.

In the opposite direction there rode also the young man of whom they spoke. And at about the time that the two came to the old mill and saw Theodosia Alston sitting there—her face still cast down, her eyes gazing abstractedly into her untasted cup on the little table—Meriwether Lewis was pulling up at the iron gate which then closed the opening in the stone wall encircling the modest official residence of his chief and patron, President Jefferson.

# CHAPTER IV

## PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY

There stood waiting near the gate one of Mr. Jefferson's private servants, Samson, who took the young man's rein, grinning with his usual familiar words of welcome as the secretary dismounted from his horse.

"You-all suttinly did warm old Arcturum a li'l bit dis mawnin', Mistah Mehywethah!"

Samson patted the neck of the spirited animal, which tossed its head and turned an eye to its late rider.

"Yes, and see that you rub him well. Mind you, if Mr. Jefferson finds that his whitest handkerchief shows a sweat-mark from the horse's hide he will cut off both your black ears for you, Samson—and very likely your head along with them. You know your master!" The secretary smiled kindly at the old black man.

"Yassah, yassah," grinned Samson, who no more feared Mr. Jefferson than he did the young gentleman with whom he now spoke. "I just lookin' at you comin' down that path right now, and I say to myself, 'Dar come a ridah!' I sho' did, Mistah Mehywethah!"

The young man answered the negro's compliment with one of his rare smiles, then turned, with just a flick of his gloves on his breeches legs, and marched up the walk to the door of the mansion.

At the step he turned and paused, as he usually did, to take one look out over the unfinished wing of stone still in process of erection. On beyond, in the ragged village, he saw a few good mansion houses, many structures devoted to business, many jumbled huts of negroes, and here and there a public building in its early stages.

The great system of boulevards and parks and circles of the new American capital was not yet apparent from the place where Mr. Thomas Jefferson's young secretary now stood. But the young man perhaps saw city and nation alike advanced in his vision; for he gazed long and lingeringly before he turned back

at last and entered the door which the old house servant swung open for him.

His hat and crop and gloves he handed to this bowed old darky, Ben—another of Mr. Jefferson's plantation servants whom he had brought to Washington with him. Then—for such was the simple fashion of the ménage, where Meriwether Lewis himself was one of the President's family—he stepped to the door beyond and knocked lightly, entering as he did so.

The hour was early—he himself had not breakfasted, beyond his coffee at the mill—but, early as it was, he knew he would find at his desk the gentleman who now turned to him.

"Good morning, Mr. Jefferson," said Meriwether Lewis, in the greeting which he always used.

"Good morning, my son," said the other man, gently, in his invariable address to his secretary. "And how did Arcturus perform for you this morning?"

"Grandly, sir. He is a fine animal. I have never ridden a better."

"I envy you. I wish I could find the time I once had for my horses." He turned a whimsical glance at the piled desk before him. "If our new multigraph could write a dozen letters all at once—and on as many different themes, my son—we might perhaps get through. I vow, if I had the money, I would have a dozen secretaries—if I could find them!"

The President rose now and stood, a tall and striking figure of a man, over six feet in height, of clean-cut features, dark hazel eye, and sandy, almost auburn, hair. His long, thin legs were clad in close-fitting knee breeches of green velveteen, somewhat stained. His high-collared coat, rolling above the loosely-tied stock which girded his neck, was dingy brown in color, and lay in loose folds. He was one of the worst-clad men in Washington at that hour. His waistcoat, of red, was soiled and far from new, and his woolen stockings were covered with no better footwear than carpet slippers, badly down at the heel.

Yet Thomas Jefferson, even clad thus, seemed the great man that he was. Stooped though his shoulders were, his frame was so strong, his eye so clear and keen, though contemplative, that he did not look his years.

Here was a man, all said who knew him, of whose large soul so many large deeds were demanded that he had no time for little and inconsequent things—indeed, scarce knew that they existed. To think, to feel, to create, to achieve—

these were his absorbing tasks; and so exigent were the demands on his great intellectual resources that he seemed never to know the existence of a personal world.

He stood careless, slipshod, at the side of a desk cluttered with a mass of maps, papers, letters in packets or spread open. There were writing implements here, scientific instruments of all sorts, long sheets of specifications, canceled drafts, pages of accounts—all the manifold impedimenta of a man in the full swing of business life. It might have been the desk of any mediocre man; yet on that desk lay the future of a people and the history of a world.

He stood, just a trifle stooped, smiling quizzically at the young man, yet half lovingly; for to no other being in the world did he ever give the confidence that he accorded Meriwether Lewis.

“I do not see how I could be President without you, Merne, my son,” said he, employing the familiar term that Meriwether Lewis had not elsewhere heard used, except by his mother. “Look what we must do today!”

The young secretary turned his own grave eye upon the cluttered desk; but it was not dread of the redoubtable tasks awaiting him that gave his face all the gravity it bore.

“Mr. Jefferson—” he began, but paused, for he could see now standing before him his friend, the man whom, of all in the world, he loved, and the man who believed in him and loved him.

“Yes, my son?”

“Your burden is grievous hard, and yet——”

“Yes, my son?”

But Meriwether Lewis could not speak further. He stood now, his jaws set hard, looking out of the window.

The older man came and gently laid a hand upon his shoulder.

“Come, come, my son,” said he, his own voice low and of a kindness it could assume at times. “You must not—you must not yield to this, I say. Shake off this melancholy which so obsesses you. I know whence it comes—your father gave it you, and you are not to blame; but you have more than your father’s strength

to aid you. And you have me, your friend, who can understand.”

Lewis only turned on him an eye so full of anguish as caused the older man to knit his brow in deep concern.

“What is it, Merne?” he demanded. “Tell me. Ah, you cannot tell? I know! ’Tis the old melancholy, and something more, Merne, my boy. Tell me—ah, yes, it is a woman!”

The young man did not speak.

“I have often told all my young friends,” said Mr. Jefferson slowly, after a time, “that they should marry not later than twenty-three—it is wrong to cheat the years of life—and you approach thirty now, my son. Why linger? Listen to me. No young man may work at his best and have a woman’s face in his desk to haunt him. That will not do. We all have handicap enough without that.”

But still Meriwether could only look into the face of his superior.

“I know very well, my son,” the President continued. “I know it all. Put her out of your heart, my boy. Would you shame yourself—and her—and me?”

“No! Never would I do that, Mr. Jefferson, believe me. But now I must beg of you—please, sir, let me go soon—let it be at once!”

The older man stood looking at him for a time in silence, as he went on hurriedly:

“I must say good-by to you, best and noblest of men. Indeed, I have said good-by to—everything.”

“As you say, your case is hopeless?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Ah, well, we have both been planning for our Western expedition these ten years, my son; so why should we fret if matters conspire to bring it about a trifle earlier than we planned?”

“I asked you when I was a boy to send me, but you could not then.”

“No, but instead I sent yonder maundering Michaux. He, Ledyard, and all the others failed me. They never saw the great vision. There it lies, unknown, tremendous—no man knows what—that new country. I have had to hide from

the people of this republic this secret purpose which you and I have had of exploring the vast Western country. I have picked you as the one man fitted for that work. I do not make mistakes. You are a born woodsman and traveler—you are ready to my hand as the instrument for this magnificent adventure. I cannot well spare you now—but yes, you must go!"

They stood there, two men who made our great adventure for us—vision-seers, vision-owned, gazing each into the other's eyes.

"Send me now, Mr. Jefferson!" repeated Meriwether Lewis. "Send me now. I will mend to usefulness again. I will work for you all my life, if need be—and I want my name clear with you."

The old man laid a kindly hand upon his shoulder.

"I must yield you to your destiny," said he. "It will be a great one." He turned aside, a hand to his lip as he paced uncertainly. "But I still am wondering what our friends are doing yonder in France," said he. "That is the question. Livingston, Monroe, and the others—what are they doing with Napoleon Bonaparte? The news from France—but stay," he added. "Wait! I had forgotten. Come, we shall see about it!"

With the sudden enthusiasm of a boy he caught his young aide by the arm. They passed down the hall, out by the rear entrance and across the White House grounds to the brick stables which then stood at the rear.

Mr. Jefferson paid no attention to the sleek animals there which looked in greeting toward him. Instead, he passed in front of the series of stalls, and without excuse or explanation hurriedly began to climb the steep ladder which led to the floor above.

They stood at length in the upper apartment of the stable buildings. It was not a mow or feed loft, but rather a bird loft, devoted to the use of many pigeons. All about the eaves were arranged many boxes—nesting places, apparently, although none of the birds entered the long room, which seemed free of any occupancy.

Mr. Jefferson stood for a moment, eagerly scanning the rear of the tier of boxes. An exclamation broke from him. He hurried forward with a sudden gesture to a little flag which stood up, like the tilt of a fisherman on the ice, at the side of the box to which he pointed.

"Done!" said he.

He reached up to the box that he had indicated, pressed down a little catch, opened the back and looked in. Again an exclamation escaped him.

He put in a hand gingerly, and, tenderly imprisoning the bird which he found therein, drew it forth, his long fingers eagerly lifting its wings, examining its legs.

It could easily be seen that the box was arranged with a door on a tripping-latch, so that the pigeon, on entering, would imprison itself. It was apparent that Mr. Jefferson was depending upon the natural homing instinct of his carrier pigeons to bring him some message.

“I told them,” said he, “to loose a half-dozen birds at once. See! See!”

He unrolled from one leg of the prisoner a little cylinder of paper covered with tinfoil and tied firmly in its place. It was the first wireless message ever received at Washington. None since that time has carried a greater burden. It announced a transaction in empires.

Mr. Jefferson read, and spread out the paper that his aide might read:

> General Bonaparte signed May 2—Fifteen millions—Rejoice!

In no wider phrasing than that came the news of the great Louisiana Purchase, by virtue of which this republic—whether by chance, by result of greed warring with greed, or through the providence of Almighty God, who shall say?—gained the great part of that vast and incalculably valuable realm which now reaches from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean. What wealth that great empire held no man had dreamed, nor can any dream today; for, a century later, its story is but beginning.

Century on century, that story still will be in the making. A home for millions of the earth’s best, a hope for millions of the earth’s less fortunate—granary of the peoples, mint of the nations, birthplace and growing-ground of the new race of men—who could have measured that land then—who could measure it today?

And its title passed, announced in seven words, carried by a bird wandering in the air, but bound unerringly to the ark of God’s covenant with man—the covenant of hope and progress.

Thomas Jefferson stretched out his right hand to meet that of Meriwether Lewis. Their clasp was strong and firm. The eye of each man blazed.

“Mr. Jefferson,” said Meriwether Lewis, “this is your monument!”

“And yours,” was the reply. “Come, then!”

He turned to the stairs, the pigeon still fondled in his arm. That bird—a white one, with slate-blue tips to its wings—never needed to labor again, for Mr. Jefferson kept it during its life, and long after its death.

“Come now,” he said, as he began to descend the ladder once more. “The bird was loosed yesterday, late in the afternoon. It has done its sixty or seventy-five miles an hour for us, counting out time lost in the night. The ship which brought this news docked at New York yesterday. The post stages carrying it hither cannot arrive before tomorrow. This is news—the greatest of news that we could have. Yesterday—this morning—we were a young and weak republic. Tomorrow we shall be one of the powers of the world. Go, now—you have been held in leash long enough, and the time to start has come. Tomorrow you will go westward, to that new country which now is ours!”

Neither said anything further until once again they were in the President’s little office-room; but Thomas Jefferson’s eye now was afire.

“I count this the most important enterprise in which this country ever was engaged,” he exclaimed, his hands clenched. “Yonder lies the greater America—you lead an army which will make far wider conquest than all our troops won in the Revolutionary War. The stake is larger than any man may dream. I see it—you see it—in time others also will see. Tell me, my son, tell me once more! Come what may, no matter what power shall move you, you will be faithful in this great trust? If I have your promise, then I shall rest assured.”

Thomas Jefferson, more agitated than any man had ever seen him, dropped half trembling into his chair, his shaggy red mane about his forehead, his long fingers shaking.

“I give you my promise, Mr. Jefferson,” said Meriwether Lewis.

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# CHAPTER V

## THE PELL-MELL AND SOME CONSEQUENCES

It was late in the afternoon when the secretary to the President looked up from the crowded desk. “Mr. Jefferson,” ventured he, “you will pardon me——”

“Yes, my son?”

“It grows late. You know that today the British minister, Mr. Merry, comes to meet the President for the first time formally—at dinner. Señor Yrujo also—and their ladies, of course. Mr. Burr and Mr. Merry seem already acquainted. I met them riding this morning.”

“Hand and glove, then, so soon? What do you make of it? I have a guess that those three—Burr, Merry, Yrujo—mean this administration no special good. And yet it was I myself who kept our Spanish friend from getting his passports back to Madrid. I did that only because of his marriage to the daughter of my friend, Governor McKean, of Pennsylvania. But what were you saying now?”

“I thought perhaps I should go to my rooms to change for dinner. You see that I am still in riding-clothes.”

“And what of that, my son? I am in something worse!”

The young man stood and looked at his chief for a moment. He realized the scarce dignified figure that the President presented in his long coat, his soiled waistcoat, his stained trousers, and his woolen stockings—not to mention the unspeakable slippers, down at the heel, into which he had thrust his feet that morning when he came into the office.

“You think I will not do?” Mr. Jefferson smiled at him frankly. “I am not so free from wisdom, perhaps, after all. Let this British minister see us as we are, for men and women, and not dummies for finery. Moreover, I remember well enough how we cooled our heels there in London, Mr. Madison and myself. They showed us little courtesy enough. Well, they shall have no complaint here. We will treat them as well as we do the others, as well as the electors who sent us here!”

Meriwether Lewis allowed himself a smile.

“Go,” added his chief. “Garb yourself as I would have you—in your best. But there will be no precedence at table this evening—remember that! Let them take seats pell-mell—the devil take the hindmost—a fair field for every one, and favor to none! Seat them as nearly as possible as they should not be seated—and leave the rest to me. All these—indeed, all history and all the records—shall take me precisely as I am!”

An hour later Meriwether Lewis stood before his narrow mirror, well and handsomely clad, as was seeming with one of his family and his place—a tall and superb figure of young manhood, as proper a man as ever stood in buckled shoes in any country of the world.

The guests came presently, folk of many sorts. With Mr. Jefferson as President, the democracy of America had invaded Washington, taking more and more liberties, and it had many representatives on hand. With these came persons of rank of this and other lands, dignitaries, diplomats, officials, ministers of foreign powers. Carriages with outriders came trundling over the partially paved roads of the crude capital city. Footmen opened doors to gentlemen and ladies in full dress, wearing insignia of honor, displaying gems, orders, decorations, jewels, all the brilliant costumes of the European courts.

They came up the path to the door of the mansion where, to their amazement, they were met only by Mr. Jefferson’s bowing old darky Ben, who ushered them in, helped them with their wraps and asked them to make themselves at home. And only old Henry, Mr. Jefferson’s butler, bowed them in as they passed from the simple entrance hall into the anteroom which lay between the hall and the large dining-saloon.

The numbers increased rapidly. What at first was a general gathering became a crowd, then a mob. There was no assigned place for any, no presentation of one stranger to another. Friends could not find friends. Mutterings arose; crowding and jostling was not absent; here and there an angry word might have been heard. The policy of pell-mell was not working itself out in any happy social fashion.

Matters were at their worst when suddenly from his own apartments appeared the tall and well-composed figure of Mr. Jefferson’s young secretary, social captain of matters at the Executive Mansion, and personal aide to the President. His quick glance caught sight of the gathering line of carriages; a second glance

estimated the plight of those now jammed into the anteroom like so many cattle and evidently in distress.

In a distant corner of the room, crowded into some sort of refuge back of a huge davenport, stood a small group of persons in full official dress—a group evidently ill at ease and no longer in good humor. Meriwether Lewis made his way thither rapidly as he might.

"It is Mr. Minister Merry," said he, "and Mme. Merry." He bowed deeply. "Señor and Señora Yrujo, I bring you the respects of Mr. Jefferson. He will be with us presently."

"I had believed, sir—I understood," began Merry explosively, "that we were to meet here the President of the United States. Where, then, is his suite?"

"We have no suite, sir. I represent the President as his aide."

"My word!" murmured the mystified dignitary, turning to his lady, who stood, the picture of mute anger, at his side, the very aigrets on her ginger-colored hair trembling in her anger.

"'Mistah Thomas Jeffahson!' was his sole announcement"

**"'Mistah Thomas Jeffahson!' was his sole announcement"**

They turned once more to the Spanish minister, who, with his American wife, stood at hand. There ensued such shrugs and liftings of eyebrows as left full evidence of a discontent that none of the four attempted to suppress.

Meriwether Lewis saw and noted, but seemed not to note. Mr. Merry suddenly remembered him now as the young man he had encountered that morning, and turned with an attempt at greater civility.

"You will understand, sir, that I came supposing I was to appear in my official capacity. We were invited upon that basis. There was to have been a dinner, was there not—or am I mistaken of the hour? Is it not four in the afternoon?"

"You were quite right, Mr. Minister," said Meriwether Lewis. "You shall, of course, be presented to the President so soon as it shall please his convenience to join us. He has been occupied in many duties, and begs you will excuse him."

The dignity and courtesy of the young man were not without effect. Silence, at least, was his reward from the perturbed and indignant group of diplomats

penned behind the davenport.

Matters stood thus when, at a time when scarce another soul could have been crowded into the anteroom, old Henry flung open the folding doors which he had closed.

“Mistah Thomas Jeffahson!” was his sole announcement.

There appeared in the doorway the tall, slightly stooped figure of the President of the United States, one of the greatest men of his own or of any day. He stood, gravely unconscious of himself, tranquilly looking out upon his gathered guests. He was still clad in the garb which he had worn throughout the day—the same in which he had climbed to the pigeon loft—the same in which he had labored during all these long hours.

His coat was still brown and wrinkled, hanging loosely on his long frame. His trousers were the stained velveteens of the morning; his waistcoat the same faded red; his hose the slack woolen pair that he had worn throughout the day. And upon his feet—horror of horrors!—he wore still his slippers, the same old carpet slippers, down at the heel, which had afforded him ease as he sat at his desk.

As Thomas Jefferson stood, he overtopped the men about him head and shoulders in physical stature, as he did in every other measure of a man.

Innocent or unconscious of his own appearance, his eye seeking for knowledge of his guests, he caught sight of the group behind the davenport. Rapidly making his way thither, he greeted each, offering his hand to be shaken, bowing deeply to the ladies; and so quickly passed on, leaving them almost as much mystified as before. Only Yrujo, the Spanish Minister, looked after him with any trace of recognition, for at this moment Meriwether Lewis was away, among other guests.

An instant later the curtained folding doors which separated the anteroom from the dining-saloon were thrown open. Mr. Jefferson passed in and took his place at the head of the table, casting not a single look toward any who were to join him there. There was no announcement; there was no *pas*, no precedence, no reserved place for any man, no announcement for any lady or gentleman, no servant to escort any to a place at table!

It had been worse, far worse, this extraordinary scene, had it not been for the

swiftness and tact of the young man to whom so much was entrusted. Meriwether Lewis hastened here and there, weeding out those who could not convince him that they were invited to dine. He separated as best he might the socially elect from those not yet socially arrived, until at length he stood, almost the sole barrier against those who still crowded forward.

Here he was met once more by the party from behind the davenport.

“Tell me,” demanded Mr. Merry, who—seeing that no other escort offered for her—had given his angry lady his own arm, “tell me, sir, where is the President? To whom shall I present the greetings of his British Majesty?”

“Yonder is the President of the United States, sir,” said Meriwether Lewis. “He with whom you shook hands is the President. He stands at the head of his table, and you are welcome if you like. He asks you to enter.”

Merry turned to his wife, and from her to the wife of the Spanish minister.

“Impossible!” said he. “I do not understand—it cannot be! That man—that extraordinary man in breeches and slippers yonder—it cannot be he asks us to sit at table with him! He *cannot* be the President of the United States!”

“None the less he is, Mr. Merry!” the secretary assured him.

“Good Heavens!” said the minister from Great Britain, as he passed on, half dazed.

By this time there remained but few seats, none at all toward the head of the table or about its middle portion. Toward the end of the room, farthest from the official host, a few chairs still stood vacant, because they had not been sought for. Thither, with faltering footsteps, ere even these opportunities should pass, stepped the minister from Great Britain and the minister from Spain, their ladies with them—none offering escort.

Well disposed to smile at his chief’s audacious overturning of all social usage, yet not unadvised of the seriousness of all this, Meriwether Lewis handed the distinguished guests to their seats as best he might; and then left them as best he might.

At that time there were not six vacant places remaining at the long table. No one seemed to know how many had been invited to the banquet, or how many were expected—no one in the company seemed to know anyone else. It was indeed a

pell-mell affair.

For once the American democracy was triumphant. But the leader of that democracy, the head of the new administration, the host at this official banquet, the President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, stood quietly, serenely, looking out over the long table, entirely unconcerned with what he saw. If there was trouble, it was for others, not for him.

Those at table presently began to seat themselves, following the host's example. It was at this moment that the young captain of affairs turned once more toward the great doors, with the intention of closing them. Old Henry was having his own battles with the remaining audience in the anteroom, as he now brought forward two belated guests. Old Henry, be sure, knew them both; and—as a look at the sudden change of his features might have told—so did Mr. Jefferson's aide.

They advanced with dignity, these two—one a gentleman, not tall, but elegant, exquisitely clad in full-dress costume; a man whom you would have turned to examine a second time had you met him anywhere. Upon his arm was a young woman, also beautifully costumed, smiling, graceful, entirely at her ease. Many present knew the two—Aaron Burr, Vice-President of the United States; his daughter, Theodosia Burr Alston.

Mr. Burr passed within the great doors, turned and bowed deeply to his host, distant as he was across the crowded room. His daughter curtsied, also deeply. Their entry was dramatic. Then they stood, a somewhat stately picture, waiting for an instant while seemingly deciding their future course.

It was at this moment that Meriwether Lewis approached them, beckoning. He led them toward the few seats that still remained unoccupied, placed them near to the official visitors, whose ruffled feathers still remained unsmoothed, and then stood by them for an instant, intending to take his departure.

There was one remaining chair. It was at the side of Theodosia Alston. She herself looked up at him eagerly, and patted it with her hand. He seated himself at her side.

Thus at last was filled the pell-mell table of Mr. Thomas Jefferson. To this day no man knows whether all present had been invited, or whether all invited had opportunity to be present.

There were those—his enemies, men of the opposing political party, for the most part—who spoke ill of Mr. Jefferson, and charged that he showed hypocrisy in his pretense of democratic simplicity in official life. Yet others, even among his friends, criticised him severely for the affair of this afternoon—July 4, in the year of 1803. They said that his manners were inconsistent with the dignity of the highest official of this republic.

If any of this comment injured or offended Mr. Jefferson, he never gave a sign. He was born a gentleman as much as any, and was as fully acquainted with good social usage as any man of his day. His life had been spent in the best surroundings of his own country, and at the most polished courts of the Old World. To accuse him of ignorance or boorishness would have been absurd.

The fact was that his own resourceful brain had formed a definite plan. He wished to convey a certain rebuke—and with deadly accuracy he did convey that rebuke. It was at no enduring cost to his own fame.

If the pell-mell dinner was at first a thing inchoate, awkward, impossible, criticism halted when the actual service at table began. The chef at the White House had been brought to this country by Mr. Jefferson from Paris, and no better was known on this side the water.

So devoted was Mr. Jefferson known to be to the French style of cooking that no less a man than Patrick Henry, on the stump, had accused him of having “deserted the victuals of his country.” His table was set and served with as much elegance as any at any foreign court. At the door of the city of Washington, even in the summer season, there was the best market of the world. As submitted by his *chef de cuisine*, Mr. Jefferson’s menu was of no pell-mell sort. If we may credit it as handed down, it ran thus, in the old French of that day:

Huîtres de Shinnecock, Saulce Tempête
Olives du Luc
Othon Mariné à l’Huile Vierge
Amandes et Cerneaux Salés
Pot au Feu du Roy “Henriot”
Croustade Mogador
Truite de Ruisselet, Belle Meunière
Pommes en Fines Herbes
Fricot de tendre Poulet en Coquemare, au Vieux Chanturgne
Tourte de Ris de Veau, Financière

Baron de Pré Salé aux Primeurs
Sorbet des Comtes de Champagne
Dinde Sauvage flambée devant les Sarments de Vigne,
flanquée d'Ortolans
Aspic de Foie Gras Lucullus
Salade des Nymphes à la Lamballe
Asperges Chauldes enduites de Sauce
Lombardienne
Dessert et Fruits de la Réunion
Fromage de Bique
Café Arabe
Larmes de Juliette

Whatever the wines served at the Executive Mansion may have been at later dates, those owned and used by President Jefferson were the best the world produced—vintages of rarity, selected as could have been done only by one of the nicest taste. Rumor had it that none other than Señor Yrujo, minister from Spain, recipient of many casks of the best vintages of his country that he might entertain with proper dignity, had seen fit to do a bit of merchandizing on his own account, to the end that Mr. Jefferson became the owner of certain of these rare casks.

In any event, the Spanish minister now showed no fear of the wines which came his way. Nor, for that matter, did the minister from Great Britain, nor the spouses of these twain. Mr. Burr, seated with their party, himself somewhat abstemious, none the less could not refrain from an interrogatory glance as he saw Merry halt a certain bottle or two at his own plate.

"Upon my word!" said the sturdy Briton, turning to him. "Such wine I never have tasted! I did not expect it here—served by a host in breeches and slippers! But never mind—it is wonderful!"

"There may be many things here you have not expected, your excellency," said Mr. Burr.

The Vice-President favored the little party at his left with one of his brilliant smiles. He had that strange faculty, admitted even by his enemies, of making another speak freely what he wished to hear, himself reticent the while.

The face of the English dignitary clouded again.

“I wish I could approve all else as I do the wine and the food; but I cannot understand. Here we sit, after being crowded like herrings in a box—myself, my lady here, and these others. Is this the placing his Majesty’s minister should have at the President’s table? Is this what we should demand here?”

“The indignity is to all of us alike,” smiled Burr. “Mr. Jefferson believes in a great human democracy. I myself regret to state that I cannot quite go with him to the lengths he fancies.”

“I shall report the entire matter to his Majesty’s government!” said Mr. Merry, again helping himself to wine. “To be received here by a man in his stable clothes—so to meet us when we come formally to pay our call to this government—that is an insult! I fancy it to be a direct and intentional one.”

“Insult is small word for it,” broke in the irate Spanish minister, still further down the table. “I certainly shall report to my own government what has happened here—of that be very sure!”

“Give me leave, sir,” continued Merry. “This republic, what is it? What has it done?”

“I ask as much,” affirmed Yrujo. “A small war with your own country, Great Britain, sir—in which only your generosity held you back—that is all this country can claim. In the South, my people own the mouth of the great river—we own Florida—we own the province of Texas—all the Southern and Western lands. True, Louis XV—to save it from Great Britain, perhaps, sir”—he bowed to the British minister—“originally ceded Louisiana to our crown. True, also, my sovereign has ceded it again to France. But Spain still rules the South, just as Britain rules the middle country out beyond; and what is left? I snap my fingers at this republic!”

Señor Yrujo helped himself to a brimming glass of his own wine.

“I say that Western country is ours,” he still insisted, warming to his oration now. “Suppose, under coercion, our sovereign did cede it to Napoleon, who claims it now? Does Spain not govern it still? Do we not collect the revenues? Is not the whole system of law enforced under the flag of Spain, all along the great river yonder? Possession, exploration, discovery—those are the rights under which territories are annexed. France has the title to that West, but we hold the land itself—we administer it. And never shall it go from under our flag, unless it be through the act of stronger foreign powers. Spain will fight!”

“Will Spain fight?” demanded a deep and melodious voice. It was that of Aaron Burr who spoke now, half in query, half in challenge. “Would Spain fight—and would Great Britain, if need were and the time came?”

He spoke to men heated with wine, smarting under social indignity, men owning a hurt personal vanity.

“Our past is proof enough,” said Merry proudly.

Yrujo needed no more than a shrug.

“Divide and conquer?” Burr went on, looking at them, and raising an eyebrow in query.

They nodded, both of them. Burr looked around. His daughter and Meriwether Lewis were oblivious. He saw the young man’s eyes, somber, deep, fixed on hers; saw her gazing in return, silent, troubled, fascinated.

One presumes that it was at this moment—at the instant when Aaron Burr, seeing the power his daughter held over young Meriwether Lewis, and the interest he held for her, turned to these foreign officials at his left—at that moment, let us say, the Burr conspiracy began.

“Divide that unknown country, the West, and how long would this republic endure?” said Aaron Burr.

The noise of the banquet now rose about them. Voices blended with laughter; the wine was passing; awkwardness and restraint had given way to good cheer. In a manner they were safe to talk.

“What?” demanded Aaron Burr once more. “Could a few francs transfer all that marvelous country from Spain to France? That were absurd. By what possible title could that region yonder ever come to this republic? It is still more absurd to think that. Civilization does not leap across great river valleys. It follows them. You have said rightly, Señor Yrujo. To my mind Great Britain has laid fair grasp upon the upper West; and Spain holds the lower West, with which our statesmen have interested themselves of late. By all the rights of conquest, discovery, and use, gentlemen, Great Britain’s traders have gained for her flag all the territory which they have reached on their Western trading routes. I go with you that far.”

Merry turned upon Burr suddenly a deep and estimating eye.

“I begin to see,” said he, “that you are open to conviction, Mr. Burr.”

“Not open to conviction,” said Aaron Burr, “but already convinced!”

“What do you mean, Colonel Burr?” The Englishman bent toward him, frowning in intentness.

“I mean that perhaps I have something to say to you two gentlemen of the foreign courts which will be of interest and importance to you.”

“Where, then, could we meet after this is over?”

The minister from Great Britain surely was not beyond close and ready estimate of events.

“At my residence, after this dinner,” rejoined Aaron Burr instantly. His eye did not waver as it looked into the other’s, but blazed with all the fire of his own soul. “Across the Alleghanies, along the great river, there is a land waiting, ready for strong men. Are we such men, gentlemen? And can we talk freely as such among ourselves?”

Their conversation, carried on in ordinary tones, had not been marked by any. Their brows, drawn sharp in sudden resolution, their glance each to the other, made their ratification of this extraordinary speech.

They had no time for anything further at the moment. A sound came to their ears, and they turned toward the head of the long table, where the tall figure of the President of the United States was rising in his place. The dinner had drawn toward its close.

Mr. Jefferson now stood, gravely regarding those before him, his keen eye losing no detail of the strange scene. He knew the place of every man and woman at that board—perhaps this was his own revenge for a reception he once had had at London. But at last he spoke.

“I have news for you all, my friends, today; news which applies not to one man nor to one woman of this or any country more than to another, but news which belongs to all the world.”

He paused for a moment, and held up in his right hand a tiny scrap of paper, thin, crumpled. None could guess what significance it had.

“May God in His own power punish me,” said he, solemnly, “if ever I halt or

falter in what I believe to be my duty! I place no bounds to the future of this republic—based, as I firmly believe it to be, upon the enduring principle of the just and even rights of mankind.

“Our country to the West always has inspired me with the extremest curiosity, and animated me with the loftiest hopes. Since the year 1683 that great river, the Missouri, emptying into the Mississippi, has been looked upon as the way to the Pacific Ocean. One hundred years from that time—that is to say, in 1783—I myself asked one of the ablest of our Westerners, none other than General George Rogers Clark, to undertake a journey of exploration up that Western river. It was not done. Three years later, when accredited to the court at Paris, I met a Mr. Ledyard, an American then abroad. I desired him to cross Russia, Siberia and the Pacific Ocean, and then to journey eastward over the Stony Mountains, to find, if he could, the head of that Missouri River of which we know so little. But Ledyard failed, for reasons best known, perhaps, to the monarch of Russia.

“Later than that, and long before I had the power which now is mine to order matters of the sort, the Boston sailor, Captain Grey, in 1792, as you know, found the mouth of the Columbia River. The very next year after that I engaged the scientist Michaux to explore in that direction; but he likewise failed.

“All my life I have seen what great opportunities would be ours if once we owned that vast country yonder. As a private citizen I planned that we should at least explore it—always it was my dream to know more of it. It being clear to me that the future of our republic lay not to the east, but to the west of the Alleghanies—indeed, to the west of the Mississippi itself—never have I relinquished the ambition that I have so long entertained. Never have I forgotten the dream which animated me even in my younger years. I am here now to announce to you, so that you may announce to all the world, certain news which I have here regarding that Western region, which never was ours, but which I always wished might be ours.”

With the middle finger of his left hand the President flicked at the mysterious bit of crumpled paper still held aloft in his right. There was silence all down the long table.

“More than a year ago I once more chose a messenger into that country,” went on Thomas Jefferson. “I chose a leader of exploration, of discovery. I chose him because I knew I could trust in his loyalty, in his judgment, in his courage. Well

and thoroughly he has fitted himself for that leadership.”

He turned his gaze contemplatively down the long table. The gaze of many of his guests followed his, still wonderingly, as he went on.

“My leader for this expedition into the West, which I planned more than a year ago, is here with you now. Captain Meriwether Lewis, will you stand up for a moment? I wish to present you to these, my friends.”

With wonder, doubt, and, indeed, a certain perturbation at the President’s unexpected summons, the young Virginian rose to his feet and stood gazing questioningly at his chief.

“I know your modesty as well as your courage, Captain Lewis,” smiled Mr. Jefferson. “You may be seated, sir, since now we all know you.

“Let me say to you others that I have had opportunity of knowing my captain of this magnificent adventure. In years he is not yet thirty, but he is and always was a leader, mature, wise, calm, and resolved. Of courage undaunted, possessing a firmness and perseverance of purpose which nothing but impossibilities can divert from its direction; careful as a father of those committed to his charge, and yet steady in the maintenance of order and discipline; intimate with the Indian character, customs, and principles; habituated to the hunting life; guarded by exact observation of the vegetables and animals of his own country against duplication of objects already possessed; honest, disinterested, liberal; of sound understanding, and of a fidelity to truth so scrupulous that whatever he shall report will be as certain as if seen by ourselves—with all these qualifications, I say, as if selected and implanted by nature in one body, for one purpose, I could have no hesitation in confiding this enterprise—the most cherished enterprise of my administration—to him whom now you have seen here before you.”

The President bowed deeply to the young man, who had modestly resumed his place. Then, for just a moment, Mr. Jefferson stood silent, absorbed, rapt, carried away by his own vision.

“And now for my news,” he said at length. “Here you have it!”

He waved once more the little scrap of paper.

“I had this news from New York this morning. It was despatched yesterday evening. Tomorrow it will reach all the world. The mails will bring it to you; but news like this could not wait for the mails. No horse could bring it fast enough.

It was brought by a dove—the dove of peace, I trust. Let me explain briefly; what my news concerns.

“As you know, that new country yonder belonged at first to any one who might find it—to England, if she could penetrate it first; to Spain, if she were first to put her flag upon it; to Russia, if first she conquered it from the far Northwest. But none of these three ever completed acquisition by those means under which nations take title to the new territories of the world. Louisiana, as we term it, has been unclaimed, unknown, unowned—indeed, virgin territory so far as definite title was concerned.

“In the north, such title as might be was conveyed to Great Britain by France after the latter power was conquered at Quebec. The lower regions France—supposing that she owned them—conveyed, through her monarch, the fifteenth Louis, to Spain. Again, in the policy of nations, Spain sold them to France once more, in a time of need. France owned the territory then, or had the title, though Spain still was in possession. It lay still unoccupied, still contested—until but now.

“My friends, I give you news! On the 2d of May last, Napoleon Bonaparte, First Consul of France, sold to this republic, the United States of America, all of Louisiana, whatever it may be, from the Mississippi to the Pacific! Here are seven words which carry an empire with them—the empire of humanity—a land in which democracy, humanity, shall expand and grow forever! This is my news:

“General Bonaparte signed May 2—Fifteen millions—Rejoice!”

A deep sigh rose as if in unison all along the table. The event was too large for instant grasping. There was no applause at first. Some—many—did not understand. Not so certain others.

The minister from Great Britain, the minister from Spain, Aaron Burr and a few other men acquainted with great affairs, prominent in public life, turned and looked at the President’s tall figure at the head of the table, and then at that of the silent young man whom Mr. Jefferson had publicly honored.

The face of Aaron Burr grew pale. The faces of the foreign ministers showed sudden consternation. Theodosia Alston turned, her own eyes fixed upon the grave face of the young man sitting at her side, who made no sign of the strong emotion possessing his soul.

“I have given you my news,” the voice of Mr. Jefferson went on, rising now, vibrant and masterful, fearless, compelling. “There you have it, this little message, large as any ever written in the world. The title to that Western land has passed to us. We set our seal on it now! Cost what it may, we shall hold it so long as we can claim a flag or a country on this continent. The price is nothing. Fifteen millions means no more than the wine or water left in a half-empty glass. It might be fifty times fifteen millions, and yet not be one fiftieth enough. These things are not to be measured by known signs or marks of values. It is not in human comprehension to know what we have gained. Hence we have no human right to boast. The hand of Almighty God is in this affair! It was He who guided the fingers of those who signed this cession to the United States of America!

“My friends, now I am content. What remains is but detail. Our duty is plain. Between us and this purpose, I shall hold all intervention of whatever nature, friendly or hostile, as no more than details to be ignored. Yonder lies and has always lain the scene of my own ambition. Always I have hungered to know that vast new land beyond all maps, as yet ignorant of human metes and bounds. Always I have coveted it for this republic, knowing that without room for expansion we must fail, that with it we shall triumph to the edge of our ultimate dream of human destiny—triumph and flourish while governments shall remain known among men.

“I offer that faith to the eyes of the world today and of all the days to come, believing in every humility that God guided the hands of those who signed this

title deed of a great empire, and that God long ago implanted in my unworthy bosom the strong belief that one day this might be which now has come to pass. It is no time for boasting, no time for any man to claim glory or credit for himself. We are in the face of events so vast that their margins leave our vision. We cannot see to the end of all this, cannot read all the purpose of it, because we are but men.

"Gentlemen, you Americans, men of heart, of courage! You also, ladies, who care most for gentlemen of heart and courage, whose pulses beat even with our own to the stimulus of our deeds! I say to you all that I would gladly lay aside my office and its honors—I would lay aside all my other ambitions, all my desires to be remembered as a man who at least endeavored to think and to act—if thereby I might lead this expedition of our volunteers for the discovery of the West. That may not be. These slackened sinews, these shrinking limbs, these fading eyes, do not suffice for such a task. It is in my heart, yes; but the heart for this magnificent adventure needs stronger pulses than my own.

"My heart—did I say that I had need of another, a better? Did I say that I had need of eyes and brains, of thews and sinews, of calm nerves and steady blood? Did I say I had need of courage and resolution—all these things combined? I have them! That Providence who has given us all needful instruments and agents to this point in our career as a republic has given us yet another, and the last one needful. Tomorrow my friend, my special messenger, Captain Meriwether Lewis, starts with his expedition. He will explore the country between the Missouri and the Pacific—the country of my dream and his. It is no longer the country of any other power—it is our own!

"Gentlemen, I give you a toast—Captain Meriwether Lewis!"

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# CHAPTER VI

## THE GREAT CONSPIRACY

The simplicity dinner was at an end. Released by the President's withdrawal, the crowd—it could be called little else—broke from the table. The anteroom filled with struggling guests, excited, gesticulating, exclaiming.

Meriwether Lewis, anxious only to escape from his social duties that he might rejoin his chief, felt a soft hand on his arm, and turned. Theodosia Alston was looking up at him.

"Do you forget your friends so soon? I must add my good wishes. It was splendid, what Mr. Jefferson said—and it was true!"

"I wish it might be true," said the young man. "I wish I might be worthy of such a man."

"You are worthy of us all," returned Theodosia.

"People are kind to the condemned," said he sententiously.

At the door they were once more close to the others of the diplomatic party who had sat in company at table. The usual crush of those clamoring for their carriages had begun.

"My dear," said Mr. Merry to his irate spouse, "I shall, if Mrs. Alston will permit, ask you to take her up in your carriage with you to her home. I am to go with Mr Burr."

The Spanish minister made similar excuse to his own wife. Thus Theodosia Alston left Meriwether Lewis for the second time that day.

It was a late conference, the one held that night at the home of the Vice-President of the United States. Burr, cool, calculating, always in hand, sat and weighed many matters well before he committed himself beyond repair. His keen mind saw now, and seized the advantage for which he waited.

"You say right, gentlemen, both of you," he began, leaning forward. "I would not

blame you if you never went to the White House again."

"Should I ever do so again," blazed the Spanish minister, "I will take my own wife in to dinner on my own arm, and place her at the head of the table, where she belongs! It was an insult to my sovereign that we received today."

"As much myself, sir!" said Mr. Merry, his brows contracted, his face flushed still with anger. "I shall know how to answer the next invitation which comes from Mr Jefferson.[1] I shall ask him whether or not there is to be any repetition of this sort of thing."

"So much for the rule of the plain people!" said Burr, as he laid the tips of his fingers together contemplatively.

"Yet, Colonel Burr, you are Vice-President under this administration!" broke out Merry.

"One must use agencies and opportunities as they offer. My dear sir, perhaps you do not fully know me. I took this election only in order to be close to the seat of affairs. I am no such rabid adherent to democracy as some may think. You would be startled if I told you that I regard this republic as no more than an experiment. This is a large continent. Take all that Western country—Louisiana—it ought not to be called attached to the United States. At this very moment it is half in rebellion against its constituted authorities. More than once it has been ready to take arms, to march against New Orleans, and to set up a new country of its own. It is geography which fights for monarchy, against democracy, on this continent—in spite of what all these people say."

"Sir," said the British minister, "you have been a student of affairs."

"And why not? I claim intelligence, good education, association with men of thought. My reason tells me that conquest is in the blood of those men who settled in the Mississippi Valley. They went into Kentucky and Tennessee for the sake of conquest. They are restless, unattached, dissatisfied—ready for any great move. No move can be made which will seem too great or too daring for them. Now let me confess somewhat to you—for I know that you will respect my confidence, if you go no further with me than you have gone tonight. I have bought large acreages of land in the lower Louisiana country, ostensibly for colonization purposes. I do purpose colonization there—*but not under the flag of this republic!*"

Silence greeted his remark. The others sat for a moment, merely gazing at him, half stunned, remembering only that he was Jefferson's colleague, Vice-President of the United States.

"You cannot force geography," resumed Burr, in tones as even as if he had but spoken of bartering for a house and lot. "Lower Louisiana and Mexico together—yes, perhaps. Florida, with us—yes, perhaps. Indeed, territories larger perhaps than any of us dare dream at present, once our new flag is raised. All that I purpose is to do what has been discussed a thousand times before—to unite in a natural alliance of self-interest those men who are sundered in every way of interest and alliance from the government on this side of the Alleghanies. Would you call that treason—conspiracy? I dislike the words. I call it rather a plan based upon sound reason and common sense; and I hold that its success is virtually assured."

"You will explain more fully, Colonel Burr?" Mr. Merry was intent now on all that he heard.

"I march only with destiny, yonder—do you not see, gentlemen?" Burr resumed. "Those who march with me are in alliance with natural events. This republic is split now, at this very moment. It must follow its own fate. If the flag of Spain were west of it on the south, and the flag of Britain west of it on the north, why, then we should have the natural end of the republic's expansion. With those great powers in alliance at its back, with the fleets of England on the seas, at the mouth of the great river—owning the lands in Canada on the north—it would be a simple thing, I say, to crush this republic against the wall of the Appalachians, or to drive it once more into the sea."

They were silent alike before the enormousness and the enormity of this. Reading their thoughts, Burr raised his hand in deprecation.

"I know what is in your minds, gentlemen. The one thing which troubles you is this—the man who speaks to you is Vice-President of the United States. I say what in your country would be treason. In this country I maintain it is not yet treason, because thus far we are in an experiment. We have no actual reign of reason and of law; and he marches to success who marches with natural laws and along the definite trend of existing circumstances and conditions."

"What you say, Mr. Burr," began Merry gravely, "assuredly has the merit of audacity. And I see that you have given it thought."

“I interest you, gentlemen! You can go with me only if it be to your interest and to that of your countries to join with me in these plans. They have gone far forward—let me tell you that. I know my men from St. Louis to New Orleans—I know my leaders—I know that population. If this be treason, as Mr. Patrick Henry said, let us make the most of it. At least it is the intention of Aaron Burr. I stake upon it all my fortune, my life, the happiness of my family. Do you think I am sincere?”

Merry sat engaged in thought. He could see vast movements in the game of nations thus suddenly shown before him on the diplomatic board. And on his part it is to be said that he was there to represent the interests of his own government alone.

In the same even tones, Burr resumed his astonishing statements.

“My son-in-law, Mr. Alston, of South Carolina—a very wealthy planter of that State—is in full accord with all my plans. My own resources have been pledged to their utmost, and he has been so good as to add largely from his own. I admit to you that I sought alliance with him deliberately when he asked my daughter’s hand. He is an ambitious man, and perhaps he saw his way to the fulfillment of certain personal ambitions. He has contributed fifty thousand dollars to my cause. He will have a place of honor and profit in the new government which will be formed yonder in the Mississippi Valley.”

“So, then,” began Yrujo, “the financing is somewhat forward! But fifty thousand is only a drop.”

“We may as well be plain,” rejoined Burr. “Time is short—you know that it is short. We all heard what Mr. Jefferson said—we know that if we are to take action it must be at once. That expedition must not succeed! If that wedge be driven through to the Pacific—and who can say what that young Virginian may do?—your two countries will be forever separated on this continent by one which will wage successful war on both. Swift action is my only hope—and yours.”

“Your funds,” said Mr. Merry, “seem to me inadequate for the demands which will be made upon them. You said fifty thousand?”

Burr nodded.

“I pledge you as much more—on one condition that I shall name.”

Burr turned from Mr. Merry to Señor Yrujo. The latter nodded.

“I undertake to contribute the same amount,” said the envoy of Spain, “but with no condition attached.”

The color deepened in the cheek of the great conspirator. His eye glittered a trifle more brilliantly.

“You named a certain condition, sir,” he said to Merry.

“Yes, one entirely obvious.”

“What is it, then, your excellency?” Burr inquired.

“You yourself have made it plain. The infernal ingenuity of yonder Corsican—curse his devilish brain!—has rolled a greater stone in our yard than could be placed there by any other human agency. We could not believe that Napoleon Bonaparte would part with Louisiana thus easily. No doubt he feared the British fleet at the mouth of the river—no doubt Spain was glad enough that our guns were not at New Orleans ere this. But, I say, he rolled that stone in our yard. If title to this Louisiana purchase is driven through to the Pacific—as Mr. Jefferson plans so boldly—the end is written now, Colonel Burr, to all your enterprises! Britain will be forced to content herself with what she can take on the north, and Spain eventually will hold nothing worth having on the south. By the Lord, General Bonaparte fights well—he knows how to sacrifice a pawn in order to checkmate a king!”

“Yes, your excellency,” said Burr, “I agree with you, but——”

“And now my condition. Follow me closely. I say if that wedge is driven home—if that expedition of Mr. Jefferson’s shall succeed—its success will rest on one factor. In short, there is a man at the head of that expedition who must fight with us and not against us, else my own interest in this matter lacks entirely. You know the man I have in mind.”

Burr nodded, his lips compressed.

“That young man, Colonel Burr, will go through! I know his kind. Believe me, if I know men, he is a strong man. Let that man come back from his expedition with the map of a million square miles of new American territory hanging at his belt, like a scalp torn from his foes—and there will be no chance left for Colonel Burr and his friends!”

“All that your excellency has said tallies entirely with our own beliefs,” rejoined Burr. “But what then? What is the condition?”

“Simply this—we must have Captain Lewis with us and not against us. I want that man! I must have him. That expedition must never proceed. It must be delayed, stopped. Money was raised twenty years ago in London to make this same sort of journey across the continent, but the plan fell through. Revive it now, and we English still may pull it off. But it will be too late if Captain Lewis goes forward now—too late for us—too late for you and your plan, Mr. Burr. I want that man! We must have him with us!”

Burr sat in silence for a time.

“You open up a singular train of thought for me, your excellency,” said he at length. “He does belong with us, that young Virginian!”

“You know him, then?” inquired the British minister. “That is to say, you know him well?”

“Perfectly. Why should I not? He nearly was my son-in-law. Egad! Give him two weeks more, and he might have been—he got the news of my daughter’s marriage just too late. It hit him hard. In truth, I doubt if he ever has recovered from it. They say he still takes it hard. Now, you ask me how to get that man, your excellency. There is perhaps one way in which it could be accomplished, and only one.”

“How, then?” inquired Merry.

“The way of a woman with a man may always be the answer in matters of that sort!” said Aaron Burr.

The three sat and looked each at the other for some time without comment.

“I find Colonel Burr’s brain active in all ways!” began Señor Yrujo dryly. “Now I confess that he goes somewhat in advance of mine.”

“Listen,” said Aaron Burr. “What Mr. Jefferson said of Captain Lewis is absolutely true—his will has never been known to relax or weaken. Once resolved, he cannot change—I will not say he does not, but that he cannot.”

“Then even the unusual weapon you suggest might not avail!” Mr. Merry’s smile was not altogether pleasant.

“Women would listen to him readily, I think,” remarked Yrujo.

“Gallant in his way, yes,” said Burr.

“Then what do you mean by saying something about the way of a woman with a man?”

“Only that it is the last remaining opportunity for us,” rejoined Aaron Burr. “The appeal to his senses—of course, we will set that aside. The appeal to his chivalry—that is better! The appeal to his ambition—that is less, but might be used. The appeal to his sympathy—the wish to be generous with the woman who has not been generous with him, for the reason that she could not be—here again you have another argument which we may claim as possible.”

“You reason well,” said Merry. “But while men are mortal, yonder, if I mistake not, is a gentleman.”

“Precisely,” said Burr. “If we ask him to resign his expedition we are asking him to alter all his loyalty to his chief—and he will not do that. Any appeal made to him must be to his honor or to his chivalry; otherwise it were worse than hopeless. He would no more be disloyal to my son-in-law, the lady’s husband—in case it came to that—than he would be disloyal to the orders of his chief.”

“Fie! Fie!” said Yrujo, serving himself with wine from a decanter on the table. “All men are mortal. I agree with your first proposition, Colonel Burr, that the safest argument with a man—with a young man especially, and such a young man—is a woman—and such a woman!”

“One thing is sure,” rejoined Burr, flushing. “That man will succeed unless some woman induces him to change—some woman, acting under an appeal to his chivalry or his sense of justice. His reasons must be honest to him. They must be honest to her alike.”

Burr added this last virtuously, and Mr. Merry bowed deeply in return.

“This is not only honorable of you, Colonel Burr, but logical.”

“That means some sort of sacrifice for him,” suggested Yrujo presently. “But some one is sacrificed in every great undertaking. We cannot count the loss of men when nations seek to extend their boundaries and enhance their power. Only the question is, at what sacrifice, through what appeal to his chivalry, can his assistance be carried to us?”

“We have left out of our accounting one factor,” said Burr after a time.

“What, then?”

“One factor, I repeat, we have overlooked,” said Burr. “That is the wit of a woman! I am purposing to send as our agent with him no other than my daughter, Mrs. Alston. There is no mind more brilliant, no heart more loyal, than hers—nor any soul more filled with ambition! She believes in her father absolutely—will use every resource of her own to upbuild her father’s ambitions.[2] Now, women have their own ways of accomplishing results. Suppose we leave it to my daughter to fashion her own campaign? There is nothing wrong in the relations of these two, but at table today I saw his look to her, and hers to him in reply. We are speaking in deep and sacred confidence here, gentlemen. So I say to you, ask no questions of me, and let me ask none of her. Let me only say to her: ‘My daughter, your father’s success, his life, his fortune—the life and fortune and success of your husband as well—depend upon one event, depend upon you and your ability to stop yonder expedition of Captain Meriwether Lewis into the Missouri country!’”

“When could we learn?” demanded the British minister.

“I cannot say how long a time it may take,” Burr replied. “I promise you that my daughter shall have a personal interview with Captain Lewis before he starts for the West.”

“But he starts at dawn!” smiled Minister Merry.

“Were it an hour earlier than that, I would promise it. But now, gentlemen, let us come to the main point. If we succeed, what then?”

The British minister was businesslike and definite.

“Fifty thousand dollars at once, out of a special fund in my control. Meantime I would write at once to my government and lay the matter before them.[3] We shall need a fleet at the south of the Mississippi River. That will cost money—it will require at least half a million dollars to assure any sort of success in plans so large as yours, Mr. Burr. But on the contingency that she stops him, I promise you that amount. Fifty thousand down—a half-million more when needed.”

The dark eye of Aaron Burr flashed.

“Then,” said he firmly, “success will meet our efforts—I guarantee it! I pledge

all my personal fortune, my friends, my family, to the last member.”

“I am for my country,” said Mr. Merry simply. “It is plain to see that Napoleon sought to humble us by ceding that great region to this republic. He meant to build up in the New World another enemy to Great Britain. But if we can thwart him—if at the very start we can divide the forces which might later be allied against us—perhaps we may conquer a wider sphere of possession for ourselves on this rich continent. There is no better colonizing ground in all the world!”

“You understand my plan,” said Aaron Burr. “Reduced to the least common denominator, Meriwether Lewis and my daughter Theodosia have our fate in their hands.”

The others rose. The hour was past midnight. The secret conference had been a long one.

“He starts tomorrow—is that sure?” asked Merry.

“As the clock,” rejoined Burr. “She must see him before the breakfast hour.”

“My compliments, Colonel Burr. Good night!”

“Good night, sir,” added Yrujo. “It has been a strange day.”

“Secrecy, gentlemen, secrecy! I hope soon to have more news for you, and good news, too. *Au revoir!*”

Burr himself accompanied them to the door.

# CHAPTER VII

## COLONEL BURR AND HIS DAUGHTER

One instant Aaron Burr sat, his head dropped, revolving his plans. The next, he pulled the bell-cord and paced the floor until he had answer.

“Go at once to Mrs. Alston’s rooms, Charles,” said he to the servant. “Tell her to rise and come to me at once. Tell her not to wait. Do you hear?”

He still paced the floor until he heard a light *frou-frou* in the hall, a light knock at the door. His daughter entered, her eyes still full of sleep, her attire no more than a loose peignoir caught up and thrown above her night garments.

“What is it, father—are you ill?”

“Far from it, my child,” said he, turning with head erect. “I am alive, well, and happier than I have been for months—years. I need you—come, sit here and listen to me.”

He caught her to him with a swift, paternal embrace—he loved no mortal being as he did his daughter—then pushed her tenderly into the deep seat near by the lamp, while he continued pacing up and down the room, voluble and persuasive, full of his great idea.

The matters which he had but now discussed with the two foreign officials he placed before his daughter. He told her all—except the truth. And Aaron Burr knew how to gild falsehood itself until it seemed the truth.

“Now you have it, my dear,” said he. “You see, my ambition to found a country of my own, where a man may have a real ambition. This dirty village here is too narrow a field for talents like yours or mine. Let me tell you, Napoleon has played a great jest with Mr. Jefferson. There is nothing in the Constitution of the United States—I am lawyer enough to know that—which will make it possible for Congress to ratify the purchase of Louisiana. We cannot carve new States from that country—it is already settled by the subjects of another government. Hence the expedition of Mr. Lewis must fail—it must surely fall of its own weight. It is based upon an absurdity. Not even Mr. Jefferson can fly in the face

of the supreme laws of the land.

“But as to the Mississippi Valley, matters are entirely different. There is no law against that country’s organizing for a better government. There is every natural reason for that. As these States on the East confederated in the cause against oppression, so can those yonder. There will be more opportunity for strong men there when that game is on the board—men like Captain Lewis, for instance. Should one ally one’s self with a foredoomed failure? Not at all. I prefer rather success—station, rank, power, money, for myself, if you please. With us—a million dollars for the founding of our new country. With him—for the undertaking of yonder impracticable and chimerical expedition, twenty-five hundred dollars! Which enterprise, think you, will win?

“But, on the other hand, if that expedition of Mr. Jefferson’s should succeed by virtue of accident, or of good leadership, all my plans must fail—that is plain. It comes, therefore, to this, Theo, and I may tell you plainly—Captain Lewis must be seen—he must be stopped—we must hold a conference with him. It would be useless for me to undertake to arrange all that. There is only one person who can save your father’s future—and that one, my daughter, is—you!”

He caught Theodosia’s look of surprise, her start, the swift flush on her cheek—and laughed lightly.

“Let me explain. Aaron Burr and all his family—all his friends—will reach swift advancement in yonder new government. Power, place—these are the things that strong men covet. That is what the game of politics means for strong men—that is why we fight so bitterly for office. I plan for myself some greater office than second fiddle in this tawdry republic along the Atlantic. I want the first place, and in a greater field! I will take my friends with me. I want men who can lead other men. I want men like Captain Lewis.”

“It seems that you value him more now than once you did.”

“Yes, that is true, Theo, that is true. I did not favor his suit for your hand at that time. Although he had a modest fortune in Virginia lands, he could not offer you the future assured by Mr. Alston. I was rejoiced—I admit it frankly—when I learned that young Captain Lewis came just too late, for I feared you would have preferred him. And yet I saw his quality then—Mr. Jefferson sees it—he is a good chooser of men. But Captain Lewis must not advance beyond the Ohio. That is a large task for a woman.”

"What woman, father?"

A flush came to her pale cheek. Her father turned to her directly, his own piercing gaze aflame.

"There is but one woman on earth could do that, my daughter! That young man's fate was settled when he looked on that woman—when he looked on you!"

She swiftly turned her head aside, not answering.

"Am I so engaged in affairs that I cannot see the obvious, my dear?" went on the vibrant voice. "Had I no eyes for what went on at my side this very evening, at Mr. Jefferson's dinner-table? Could I fail to observe his look to you—and, yes, am I not sensible to what your eyes said to him in reply?"

"Do you believe that of me—and you my father?"

"I believe nothing dishonorable of you, my dear," said Burr. "Neither could I ask anything dishonorable. But I know what young blood will do. Your eyes said no more than that for me. I know you wish him well—know you wish well for his ambition, his success—am sure you do not wish to see him doomed to failure. What? Would you see his career blighted when it should be but begun?"

"There would be prospects for him?"

"All the prospects in the world! I would place him only second to myself, so highly do I value his talents in an enterprise such as this. Alston's money, but Lewis's brains and courage! They both love you—do I not know?"

Troubled, again she turned her gaze aside.

"Listen, my daughter. That young man is wise—he has no such vast belief in yonder expedition. He is going in desperation, to escape a memory! Is it not true? Tell me—and believe that I am not blind—is not Captain Lewis going into the Missouri country in order to forget a certain woman? And do we not know, my daughter, who that woman is?"

Still her downcast eye gave him no reply.

"Meriwether Lewis yonder among the savages is a failure. Meriwether Lewis with me is second only to the vice-regent of the lower Louisiana country. Texas, Florida, much of Mexico, will join with us, that is sure. We fight with the great nations of the world, not against them—we fight with the stars in their courses,

and not against them.

"Now, you have two pictures, my dear—one of Meriwether Lewis, the wanderer, a broken and hopeless man, living among the savages, a log hut his home, a camp fire the only hearth he knows. Picture that hopeless and broken man—condemned to that by yourself, my dear—and then picture that other figure whom you can see rescued, restored to the world, placed by your own hand in a station of dignity and power. Then, indeed, he might forget—he might forgive. Yonder he will forsake his manhood—he will relax his ideals, and go down, step by step, until he shall not think of you again.

"There are two pictures, my daughter. Which do you prefer—what do you decide to do? Shall you condemn him, or shall you rescue him? Forgive your father for having spoken thus plainly. I know your heart—I know your generosity as well as I know your loyalty and ambition. There is no reason, my dear, why, for the sake of your father, for the sake of yourself, *and for the sake of that young man yonder*, you should not go to him immediately and carry my message."

"Could it be possible," she began at length, half musing, "that I, who made Captain Lewis so unhappy, could aid a man like him to reach a higher and better place in life? Could I save him from himself—and from myself?"

"You speak like my own daughter! If that generous wish bore fruit, I think that in the later years of life, for both of you, the reflection would prove not unwelcome. I know, as well as I know anything, that no other woman will ever hold a place in the heart of Meriwether Lewis. There is a memory there which will shut out all other things on earth. We deal now in delicate matters, it is true; but I have been frank with you, because, knowing your loyalty and fairness, knowing your ambition, even-paced with mine, none the less I know your discretion and your generosity as well. You see, I have chosen the best messenger in all the world to advance my own ambition. Indeed, I have chosen the only one in all the world who might undertake this errand with the slightest prospect of success."

"What can I do, father?"

"In the morning that young man will start. It is now two by the clock. We are late. He will start with the rising sun. It is doubtful if he will see his bed at all tonight."

"You have called me for a strange errand, father," said Theodosia Alston, at

length. “So far as my brain grasps these things, I go with you in your plans. I could plan no treachery against this country, nor could you—you are its sworn servant, its high official.”

“Treachery? No, it is statesmanship, it is service to mankind!”

“My consent to that, yes. But as to seeing Captain Lewis, there is, as you know, but one way. I go not as Theodosia Burr, but as Mrs. Alston of Carolina. I am a woman of honor; he is a man of honor. No argument on earth would avail with him except such as might be based upon honor and loyalty. Nor would any argument, even if offered by my father, avail otherwise with me.”

She turned upon him now the full gaze of her dark eyes, serious, luminous, yet tender, her love for him showing so clearly that he came to her softly, took her hands, caught her to his bosom, and kissed her tenderly.

“Theodosia,” said he, “aid me! If the fire of my ambition has consumed me, I have come to you, because I know your love, because I know your loyalty! I have not slept tonight,” he added, passing a hand across his forehead.

“There will be no more sleep for me tonight,” was her reply.

“You will see him in the morning?”

“Yes.”

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# CHAPTER VIII

## THE PARTING

There were others in Washington who did not sleep that night. A light burned until sunrise in the little office-room of Thomas Jefferson. Spread upon his desk, covering its litter of unfinished business, lay a large map—a map which today would cause any schoolboy to smile, but which at that time represented the wisdom of the world regarding the interior of the great North American continent. It had served to afford anxious study for two men, these many hours.

“Yonder it lies, Captain Lewis!” said Mr. Jefferson at length. “How vast, how little known! We know our climate and soil here. It is but reasonable to suppose that they exist yonder as they do with us, in some part, at least. If so, yonder are homes for millions now unborn. Had General Bonaparte known the value of that land, he would have fought the world rather than alienate such a region.”

The President tapped a long forefinger on the map.

“This, then,” he went on, “is your country. Find it out—bring back to me examples of its soil, its products, its vegetable and animal life. Espy out especially for us any strange animals there may be of which science has not yet account. I hold it probable that there may be yonder living examples of the mastodon, whose bones we have found in Kentucky. You yourself may see those enormous creatures yet alive.”

Meriwether Lewis listened in silence. Mr. Jefferson turned to another branch of his theme.

“I fancy that some time there will be a canal built across the isthmus that binds this continent to the one below—a canal which shall connect the two great oceans. But that is far in the future. It is for you to spy out the way now, across the country itself. Explore it—discover it—it is our new world.

“A few must think for the many,” he went on. “I had to smuggle this appropriation through Congress—twenty-five hundred dollars—the price of a poor Virginia farm! I have tampered with the Constitution itself in order to make this purchase of a country not included in our original territorial lines. I have

taken my own chances—just as you must take yours now. The finger of God will be your guide and your protector. Are you ready, Captain Lewis? It is late."

Indeed, the sun was rising over Washington, the mists of morning were reeking along the banks of the Potomac.

"I can start in half an hour," replied Meriwether Lewis.

"Are your men ready, your supplies gathered together?"

"The rendezvous is at Harper's Ferry, up the river. The wagons with the supplies are ready there. I will take boat from here myself with a few of the men. Not later than tomorrow afternoon I promise that we will be on our way. We burn the bridges behind us, and cross none until we come to them."

"Spoken like a soldier! It is in your hands. Go then!"

There was one look, one handclasp. The two men parted; nor did they meet again for years.

Mr. Jefferson did not look from his window to see the departure of his young friend, nor did the latter again call at the door to say good-by. Theirs was indeed a warrior-like simplicity.

The sun still was young when Meriwether Lewis at length descended the steps of the Executive Mansion.

He was clad now for his journey, not in buckskin hunting-garb, but with regard for the conventions of a country by no means free of convention. His jacket was of close wool, belted; his boots were high and suitable for riding. His stock, snowy white—for always Meriwether Lewis was immaculate—rose high around his throat, in spite of the hot summer season, and his hands were gloved. He seemed soldier, leader, officer, and gentleman.

No retinue, however, attended him; no servant was at his side. He went afoot, and carried with him his most precious luggage—the long rifle which he never entrusted to any hands save his own. Close wrapped around the stock, on the crook of his arm, and not yet slung over his shoulder, was a soiled buckskin pouch, which went always with the rifle—the "possible sack" of the wilderness hunter of that time. It contained his bullets, bullet-molds, flints, a bar or two of lead, some tinder for priming, a set of awls.

Such was the leader of one of the great expeditions of the world.

Meriwether Lewis had few good-bys to say. He had written but one letter—to his mother—late the previous morning. It was worded thus:

> The day after tomorrow I shall set out for the Western country. I had calculated on the pleasure of visiting you before I started, but circumstances have rendered it impossible. My absence will probably be equal to fifteen or eighteen months.
>
> The nature of this expedition is by no means dangerous. My route will be altogether through tribes of Indians friendly to the United States, therefore I consider the chances of life just as much in my favor as I should conceive them were I to remain at home. The charge of this expedition is honorable to myself, as it is important to my country.
>
> For its fatigues I feel myself perfectly prepared, nor do I doubt my health and strength of constitution to bear me through it. I go with the most perfect preconviction in my own mind of returning safe, and hope, therefore that you will not suffer yourself to indulge in any anxiety for my safety.
>
> I will write again on my arrival at Pittsburgh. Adieu, and believe me your affectionate son.

No regrets, no weak reflections for this man with a warrior’s weapon on his arm—where no other burden might lie in all his years. His were to be the comforts of the trail, the rude associations with common men, the terrors of the desert and the mountain; his fireside only that of the camp. Yet he advanced to his future steadily, his head high, his eye on ahead—a splendid figure of a man.

He did not at first hear the gallop of hoofs on the street behind him as at last, a mile or more from the White House gate, he turned toward the river front. He was looking at the dull flood of the Potomac, now visible below him; but he paused, something appealing to the strange sixth sense of the hunter, and turned.

A rider, a mounted servant, was beckoning to him. Behind the horseman, driven at a stiff gait, came a carriage which seemed to have but a single occupant. Captain Lewis halted, gazed, then hastened forward, hat in his hand.

“Mrs. Alston!” he exclaimed, as the carriage came up. “Why are you here? Is

there any news?"

"Yes, else I could not have come."

"But why have you come? Tell me!"

He motioned the outrider aside, sprang into the vehicle and told the driver to draw a little apart from the more public street. Here he caught up the reins himself, and, ordering the driver to join the footman at the edge of the roadway they had left, turned to the woman at his side.

"Pardon me," said he, and his voice was cold; "I thought I had cut all ties."

"Knit them again for my sake, then, Meriwether Lewis! I have brought you a summons to return."

"A summons? From whom?"

"My father—Mr. Merry—Señor Yrujo. They were at our home all night. We could not—they could not—I could not—bear to see you sacrifice yourself. This expedition can only fail! I implore you not to go upon it! Do not let your man's pride drive you!"

She was excited, half sobbing.

"It does drive me, indeed," said he simply. "I am under orders—I am the leader of this expedition of my government. I do not understand——"

"At this hour—on this errand—only one motive could have brought me! It is your interest. Oh, it is not for myself—it is for your future."

"Why did you come thus, unattended? There is something you are concealing. Tell me!"

"Ah, you are harsh—you have no sympathy, no compassion, no gratitude! But listen, and I will tell you. My father, Mr. Merry, the Spanish minister, are all men of affairs. They have watched the planning of this expedition. Why fly in the face of prophecy and of Providence? That is what my father says. He says that country can never be of benefit to our Union—that no new States can be made from it. He says the people will pass down the Mississippi River, but not beyond it; that it is the natural line of our expansion—that men who are actual settlers are bound not into the unknown West, but into the well-known South. He begs of you to follow the course of events, and not to fly in the face of Providence."

“You speak well! Go on.”

“England is with us, and Spain—they back my father’s plans.”

He turned now and raised a hand.

“Plans? What plans? I must warn you, I am pledged to my own country’s service.”

“Is not my father also? He is one of the highest officers in the government of this country.”

“You may tell me more or not, as you like.”

“There is little more to tell,” said she. “These gentlemen have made certain plans of which I know little. My father said to me that Thomas Jefferson himself knows that this purchase from Napoleon cannot be made under the Constitution of the United States—that, given time for reflection, Mr. Jefferson himself will admit that the Louisiana purchase was but a national folly from which this country cannot benefit. Why not turn, then, to a future which offers certainties? Why not come with us, and not attempt the impossible? That is what he said. And he asked me to implore you to pause.”

He sat motionless, looking straight ahead, as she went on.

“He only besought me to induce you, if I could, either to abandon your expedition wholly as soon as you honorably might do so, or to go on with it only to such point as will prove it unfeasible and impracticable. Not wishing you to prove traitorous to a trust, these gentlemen wish you to know that they would value your association—that they would give you splendid opportunity. With men such as these, that means a swift future of success for one—for one—whom I shall always cherish warmly in my heart.”

The color was full in her face. He turned toward her suddenly, his eye clouded.

“It is an extraordinary matter in every way which you bring for me,” he said slowly; “extraordinary that foreigners, not friends of this country, should call themselves the friends of an officer sworn to the service of the republic! I confess I do not understand it. And why send you?”

“It is difficult for me to tell you. But my father knew the antagonism between Mr. Jefferson and himself, and knew your friendship for Mr. Jefferson. He knew

also the respect, the pity—oh, what shall I say?—which I have always felt for you—the regard——”

“Regard! What do you mean?”

“I did not mean regard, but the—the wish to see you succeed, to help you, if I could, to take your place among men. I told you that but yesterday.”

She was all confusion now. He seemed pitiless.

“I have listened long enough to have my curiosity aroused. I shall have somewhat to ponder—on the trail to the West.”

“Then you mean that you will go on?”

“Yes!”

“You do not understand——”

“No! I understand only that Mr. Jefferson has never abandoned a plan or a promise or a friend. Shall I, then, who have been his scholar and his friend?”

“Ah, you two! What manner of men are you that you will not listen to reason? He is high in power. Will you not also listen to the call of your own ambition? Why, in that country below, you might hold a station as proud as that of Mr. Jefferson himself. Will you throw that away, for the sake of a few dried skins and flowers? You speak of being devoted to your country. What is devotion—what is your country? You have no heart—that I know well; but I credited you with the brain and the ambition of a man!”

He sat motionless under the sting of her reproaches; and as some reflection came to her upon the savagery of her own words, she laughed bitterly.

“Think you that I would have come here for any other man?” she demanded. “Think you that I would ask of you anything to my own dishonor, or to your dishonor? But now you do not listen. You will not come back—even for me!”

In answer he simply bent and kissed her hand, stepped from the carriage, raised his hat. Yet he hesitated for half an instant and turned back.

“Theodosia,” said he, “it is hard for me not to do anything you ask of me—you do not know how hard; but surely you understand that I am a soldier and am under orders. I have no option. It seems to me that the plans of your father and

his friends should be placed at once before Mr. Jefferson. It is strange they sent you, a woman, as their messenger! You have done all that a woman could. No other woman in the world could have done as much with me. But—my men are waiting for me."

This time he did not turn back again.

Colonel Burr's carriage returned more slowly than it had come. It was a dejected occupant who at last made her way, still at an early hour, to the door of her father's house.

Burr met her at the door. His keen eye read the answer at once.

"You have failed!" said he.

She raised her dark eyes to his, herself silent, mournful.

"What did he say?" demanded Burr.

"Said he was under orders—said you should go to Mr. Jefferson with your plan—said Mr. Jefferson alone could stop him. Failed? Yes, I failed!"

"You failed," said Burr, "because you did not use the right argument with him. The next time *you must not fail*. You must use better arguments!"

Theodosia stood motionless for an instant, looking at her father, then passed back into the house.

"Listen, my daughter," said Burr at length, in his eye a light that she never had known before. "You *must* see that man again, and bring him back into our camp! We need him. Without him I cannot handle Merry, and without Merry I cannot handle Yrujo. Without them my plan is doomed. If it fails, your husband has lost fifty thousand dollars and all the moneys to which he is pledged beyond that. You and I will be bankrupt—penniless upon the streets, do you hear?—unless you bring that man back. Granted that all goes well, it means half a million dollars pledged for my future by Great Britain herself, half as much pledged by Spain, success and future honor and power for you and me—and him. He *must* come back! That expedition must not go beyond the Mississippi. You ask me what to tell him? Ask him no longer to return to us and opportunity. *Ask him to*

*come back to Theodosia Burr and happiness*—do you understand?”

“Sir,” said his daughter, “I think—I think I do not understand!”

He seemed not to hear her—or to toss her answer aside.

“You must try again,” said he, “and with the right weapons—the old ones, my dear—the old weapons of a woman!”

# CHAPTER IX

## MR. THOMAS JEFFERSON

Not in fifty years, said Thomas Jefferson in the last days of his life, had the sun caught him in bed. On this morning, having said good-by to the man to whose hands he had entrusted the dearest enterprise of all his life, he turned back to his desk in the little office-room, and throughout the long and heated day, following a night spent wholly without sleep, he remained engaged in his usual labors, which were the heavier in his secretary's absence.

He was an old man now, but a giant in frame, a giant in mind, a giant in industry as well. He sat at his desk absorbed, sleepless, with that steady application which made possible the enormous total of his life's work. He was writing in a fine, delicate hand—legible to this day—certain of those thousands of letters and papers which have been given to us as the record of his career.

In what labor was the President of the United States engaged on this particularly eventful day? It seems he found more to do with household matters than with affairs of state. He was making careful accounts of his French cook, his Irish coachman, his black servants still remaining at his country house in Virginia.

All his life Thomas Jefferson kept itemized in absolute faithfulness a list of all his personal expenses—even to the gratuities he expended in traveling and entertainment. We find, for instance, that "John Cramer is to go into the service of Mr. Jefferson at twelve dollars a month and twopence for drink, two suits of clothes and a pair of boots." It seems that he bought a bootjack for three shillings; and the cost of countless other household items is as carefully set down.

We may learn from records of this date that in the past year Mr. Jefferson had expended in charity $1,585.60. He tells us that in the first three months of his presidency his expenses were $565.84—and he was wrong ten cents in his addition of the total! In his own hand he sets down "A View of the Consumption of Butchers' Meat from September 6, 1801, to June 12, 1802." He knew perfectly well, indeed, what all his household expenses were, also what it cost him to maintain his stables. He did all this bookkeeping himself, and at the end

of each year was able to tell precisely where his funds had gone.

We may note one such annual statement, that of the year ended five months previous to the time when Captain Lewis set forth into the West:

| | |
|---|---|
| Provisions | $4,059.98 |
| Wines | 1,296.63 |
| Groceries | 1,624.76 |
| Fuel | 553.68 |
| Secretary | 600.00 |
| Servants | 2,014.89 |
| Miscellaneous | 433.30 |
| Stable | 399.06 |
| Dress | 246.05 |
| Charities | 1,585.60 |
| Pres. House | 226.59 |
| Books | 497.41 |
| Household expenses | 393.00 |
| Monticello—plantation | 2,226.45 |
| “ —family | 1,028.79 |
| Loans | 274.00 |
| Debts | 529.61 |
| Asquisitions—lands bought | 2,156.86 |
| “ —buildings | 3,567.92 |
| “ —carriages | 363.75 |
| “ —furniture | 664.10 |
| Total | $24,682.45 |

Mr. Jefferson says in rather shamefaced fashion to his diary:

| | |
|---|---|
| I ought by this statement to have cash in hand | $183.70 |
| But I actually have in hand | 293.00 |
| So that the errors of this statement amt to | 109.20 |

> The whole of the nails used for Monticello and smithwork are omitted, because no account was kept of them. This makes part of the error, and the article of nails has been extraordinary this year.

There was a curious accuracy in the analytical tests which Mr. Jefferson applied

to all the ordinary transactions of life. It was not enough for him to know exactly how many dollars and cents he had expended; he must know what should be the average result of such expenditures. In the middle of a life of tremendous and marvelously varied activities he finds time to leave for us such records as these:

> Mr. Remsen tells me that six cord of hickory last a fireplace well the winter.
>
> Myrtle candles of last year out.
>
> Pd Farren an impudent surcharge for Venetn blinds, 2.66.
>
> Borrowed of Mr. Maddison order on bank for 150d.
>
> Enclosed to D. Rittenhouse, Lieper’s note of 238.57d, out of which he is to pay for equatorial instrument for me.
>
> Hitzeimer says that a horse well fed with grain requires 100 lb. of hay, and without grain 130 lb.
>
> T. N. Randolph has had 9 galls. whisky for his harvest.
>
> My first pipe of Termo is out—begun soon after I came home to live from Philadelphia.
>
> Agreed with Robt. Chuning to serve me as overseer at Monticello for £25 and 600 lb. pork. He is to come Dec. 1.
>
> Agreed with —— Bohlen to give 300 *livres tournois* for my bust made by Ceracchi, if he shall agree to take that sum.
>
> My daughter Maria married this day.
>
> March 16—The first shad at this market today.
>
> March 28—The weeping willow shows the green leaf.
>
> April 9—Asparagus come to table.
>
> April 10—Apricots blossom.
>
> April 12—Genl. Thaddeus Kosciusko puts into my hands a Warrant of the Treasury for 3,684.54d to have bills of exchange bought for him.

> May 8—Tea out, the pound has lasted exactly 7 weeks, used 6 times a week; this is 8-21 or .4 of an oz. a time for a single person. A pound of tea making 126 cups costs 2d, 126 cups or ounces of coffee —8 lb. cost 1.6.
>
> May 18—On trial it takes 11 dwt. Troy of double refined maple sugar to a dish of coffee, or 1 lb. avoirdupois to 26.5 dishes, so that at 20 cents per lb. it is 8 mills per dish. An ounce of coffee at 20 cents per lb. is 12.5 mills, so that sugar and coffee of a dish is worth 2 cents.

As to the code of official etiquette which we have seen to exist in Washington, the President himself was responsible for it, for we have, written out in his own delicate hand, the following explicit instructions:

> The families of foreign ministers, arriving at the seat of government, receive the first visit from those of the national ministers, as from all other residents. Members of the legislature and of the judiciary, independent of their offices, have a right as strangers to receive the first visit. No title being admitted here, those of foreigners give no precedence. Difference of grade among the diplomatic members gives no precedence.
>
> At public ceremonies the government invites the presence of foreign ministers and their families. A convenient seat or station will be provided for them, with any other strangers invited, and the families of the national ministers, each taking place as they arrive, and without any precedence.
>
> To maintain the principle of equality, or of pell-mell, and prevent the growth of precedence out of courtesy, the members of the executive will practise at their own houses, and recommend an adherence to the ancient usages of the country of gentlemen in mass giving precedence to the ladies in mass, in passing from one apartment where they are assembled into another.

And so on, through reams and reams of a strange man’s life records.

Why should we care to note his curious concern over details? The answer to that question is this—obviously, Thomas Jefferson’s estimate of a man must also in all likelihood have been curiously exact. He did not make public to the world his

judgment of Colonel Aaron Burr, at that time Vice-President of the United States; but in his diary, written in frankness by himself for himself, he put down the following:

> I have never seen Colonel Burr till he became a member of the Senate. His conduct very soon inspired me with distrust. I habitually cautioned Mr. Madison against trusting him too much. I saw that under General W. and Mr. Adams, where a great military appointment or a diplomatic one was to be made, he came post to Philadelphia to show himself, and in fact he was always in the market if they wanted him. He was indeed told by Dayton in 1800 that he might be Secretary at War, but this bid was too late. His election as Vice-President was then foreseen. With these impressions of Colonel Burr, there never has been any intimacy between us, and but little association.

A certain plan of this same Colonel Burr's now went forward in such fashion as involved the loyalty of Meriwether Lewis, the man to whom, of all others of his acquaintance, Thomas Jefferson gave first place in trust and confidence and friendship—the young man who but now was making his unostentatious departure on the great adventure that they two had planned.

His garb ill cared-for, his hair unkempt, his face a trifle haggard, working on into the day whose dawn he had seen arise, the tall, gaunt old man set aside first one minor matter, then another, leaving them all exactly finished. At last he wrote down, for later forwarding, the last item of his own knowledge regarding the new country into which he had sent his young friend.

> I have received word from Paris that Mr. Broughton, one of the companions of Captain Vancouver, went up the Columbia River one hundred miles in December, 1792. He stopped at a point he named Vancouver. Here the river Columbia is still a quarter of a mile wide. From this point Mount Hood is seen about twenty leagues distant, which is probably a dependency of the Stony Mountains. Accept my affectionate salutations.

This was the last word Meriwether Lewis received from his chief. As the latter finished it, he sat looking out of the window toward that West which meant so much to him.

He did not at first note the interruption of his reverie. Long ago he had made

public his announcement that the time of Thomas Jefferson belonged to the public, and that he might be seen at any time by any man. He hesitated now but a moment, therefore, when old Henry, his faithful black, threw open the door and stated simply that there was “a lady wantin’ to see Mistah Jeffahson.”

“Who is she, Henry?” inquired the President of the United States mildly. “I am somewhat busy today.”

“’Tain’t no diff’rence, she say—she sho’ly want see Mistah Jeffahson.”

The tired old man smiled and shrugged his shoulders. A moment later the persistent caller was ushered into the office of the nation’s chief executive. He rose courteously to meet her.

It was Theodosia Alston, whom he had known from her childhood. Mr. Jefferson greeted her with his hand outstretched, and, her arm still in his, led her to a seat.

“My dear,” said he, “you will pardon our confusion here, I am sure. There are many matters——”

“I know it is an intrusion, Mr. Jefferson,” began Theodosia Alston again, her face flushing swiftly. “But you are so good, so kind, so great in your patience that we all take advantage of you. And yet you are so tired,” she added impulsively, as she caught sight of his haggard face.

“I was not so fortunate as to find time for sleep last night.” He smiled again with humorous, half twisted mouth.

“Nor was I.”

“Tut, tut! No, no, my dear, that sort of thing will not do.” He looked at her in silence for some time. “Perhaps, my dear,” said he at last, “you come regarding Captain Lewis?”

“How did you know?” she exclaimed, startled.

“Why should I not know?” He pushed his chair so close that he might lay a hand upon her arm. “Listen, Theo, my child. I am an old man, and I am your friend, and his also. I had need to be very blind had I not known long ago what I did know. I am, perhaps, the only confidant of Captain Lewis, and I repose in him confidences that I would venture to no other man; but he is not the sort to speak of such matters. It is only by virtue of exceptional circumstances, my dear, that I

know the story of you two."

She was looking straight into his face, her eyes mournful.

"I was glad to send him away, sorely as I miss him. But then, you said, you come to me about him?"

"Yes, after he is gone—knowing all that you say—because I trust your great kindness and your chivalry. I come to ask you to call him back! Oh, Mr. Jefferson, were it any other man in the world but yourself I had not dared come here; but you know my story and his. It is your right to believe that he and I were —that is to say, we might have been—ah, sir, how can I speak?"

"You need not speak, my dear, I know."

"I shall be faithful to my husband, Mr. Jefferson."

The old man nodded.

"Captain Lewis knows that also. He would be the last to wish it otherwise. But, since it was his misfortune to set his regard upon one so fair as yourself, and since fate goes so hard for a strong man like him, then I must admit it needed strong medicine for his case. I sent him away, yes. Would you ask him back—for any cause?"

In turn she laid a small hand upon the President's arm.

"Only for himself—for that reason alone, Mr. Jefferson, and not to change your plans—for himself, because you love him. Oh, sir, even the greatest courts sometimes arrest their judgment if there is new evidence to be introduced. At the last moment justice gives a condemned man one more chance."

"What is it, Theodosia?" he said quietly. "I do not grasp all this."

"Able men say that this government cannot take advantage of the sale of Louisiana to us by Napoleon—that our Constitution prevents our taking over a foreign territory already populated to make into new States of our own——"

"Good, my learned counsel—say on!"

"Forgive my weak wit—I only try to say this as I heard it, well and plainly."

"As well as any man, my dear! Go on."

“Therefore, even if Captain Lewis does go forward, he can only fail at the last. This is what is said by the Federalists, by your enemies.”

“And perhaps by certain of my own party not Federalists—by Colonel Aaron Burr, for instance!” Thomas Jefferson smiled grimly.

“Yes!” She spoke firmly and with courage.

“I cannot pause to inquire what my enemies say, my dear lady. But in what way could this effect our friend, Captain Lewis? He is under orders, on my errand.”

“I saw him this very morning—I took my reputation in my hands—I followed him—I urged him, I implored him to stop!”

“Yes? And did he?”

“Not for an instant. Ah, I see you smile! I might have known he would not. He said that nothing but word from you could induce him to hesitate for a moment.”

“My dear young lady, I said to Captain Lewis that no report from any source would cause me for an instant to doubt his loyalty to me. If anything could shake him in his loyalty, it would be his regard for you yourself; but since I trust his honor and your own, I do not fear that such a conflict can ever occur!”

She did not reply. After a time the President went on gently:

“My dear, would you wish him to come back—would you condemn him further to the tortures of the damned? And would you halt him while he is trying to do his duty as a man and a soldier? What benefit to you?”

She drew up proudly.

“What benefit, indeed, to me? Do you think I would ask this for myself? No, it was for *him*—it was for *his* welfare only that I dared to come to you. And you will not hear new evidence?”

But now she was speaking to Thomas Jefferson, the President of the United States, man of affairs as well, man of firm will and clear-cut decision.

“Madam,” said he, coldly, “in this office we do a thing but once. Had I condemned yonder young man to his death—and perhaps I have—I would not now reconsider that decision. I would not speak so long as this over it, did I not know and love you both—yes, and grieve over you both; but what is written is

written.”

His giant hand fell lightly, but with firmness, on the desk at his side. The inexorableness of a great will was present in the room as an actual thing. Tears swam in her eyes.

“You would not hear what was the actual cause of my wish for him——”

“No, my dear! We have made our plans.”

“There are other plans afoot these days, Mr. Jefferson.”

“Tut, tut! Are you my enemy, too? Oh, yes, I know there are enemies enough in wait for me and my administration on every side. Yes, I know a plan—I know of many such. But one thing also I do know, madam, and it is this—not all the enemies on this earth can alter me one iota in this undertaking on which I have sent Captain Lewis. As against that magnificent adventure there is nothing can be offered as an offset, nothing that can halt it for an instant. No reward to him or me—nay, no reward to any other human being—shall stop his advancement in that purpose which he shares with me. If he fails, I fail with him—and all my life as well!”

She rose now, calm before the imperious quality of his nature, so unlike his former gentleness.

“You refuse, then, Mr. Jefferson? You will not reopen this case?”

“I refuse nothing to you gladly, my dear lady. But you have seen him—you have tested him. Did he turn back? Shall I, his friend and his chief, halt him at such a time? Now that were the worst kindness to him in the world. And I am convinced that you and I both plan only kindness for him.”

Suddenly he saw the tears in her eyes. At once he was back again, the courteous gentleman.

“Do not weep, Theodosia, my child,” said he. “Let me kiss you, as your father or your grandfather would—one who holds you tenderly in his heart. Forgive me that I pass sentence on you both, but you must part—you must not ask him back. There now, my dear, do not weep, or you will make me weep. Let me kiss you for him—and let us all go on about our duties in the world. My dear, good-by! You must go.”

# CHAPTER X

## THE THRESHOLD OF THE WEST

Meriwether Lewis, having put behind him one set of duties, now addressed himself to another, and did so with care and thoroughness. A few of his men, a part of his outfitting, he found already assembled at Harper's Ferry, up the Potomac. Before sunset of the first day the little band knew they had a leader.

There was not a knife or a tomahawk of the entire equipment which he himself did not examine—not a rifle which he himself did not personally test. He went over the boxes and bales which had been gathered here, and saw to their arrangement in the transport-wagons. He did all this without bluster or officiousness, but with the quiet care and thoroughness of the natural leader of men.

In two days they were on their way across the Alleghanies. A few days more of steady travel sufficed to bring them to Pittsburgh, the head of navigation on the Ohio River, and at that time the American capital in the upper valley of the West. At Pittsburgh Captain Lewis was to build his boats, to complete the details of his equipment, to take on additional men for his party—now to be officially styled the Volunteers for the Discovery of the West. He lost no time in urging forward the necessary work.

The young adventurer found this inland town half maritime in its look. Its shores were lined with commerce suited to a seaport. Schooners of considerable tonnage lay at the wharfs, others were building in the busy shipyards. The destination of these craft obviously was down the Mississippi, to the sea. Here were vessels bound for the West Indies, bound for Philadelphia, for New York, for Boston—carrying the products of this distant and little-known interior.

As he looked at this commerce of the great West, pondered its limitations, saw its trend with the down-slant of the perpetual roadway to the sea, there came to the young officer's mind with greater force certain arguments that had been advanced to him.

He saw that here was the heart of America, realized how natural was the insistence of all these hardy Western men upon the free use of the Mississippi

and its tributaries. He easily could agree with Aaron Burr that, had the fleet of Napoleon ever sailed from Haiti—had Napoleon ever done otherwise than to cede Louisiana to us—then these boats from the Ohio and the Mississippi would at this very moment, perhaps, be carrying armed men down to take New Orleans, as so often they had threatened.

There came, however, to his mind not the slightest thought of alteration in his own plans. With him it was no question of what might have been, but of what actually was. The cession by Napoleon had been made, and Louisiana was ours. It was time to plot for expeditions, not down the great river, but across it, beyond it, into that great and unknown country that lay toward the farther sea.

The keen zest of this vast enterprise came to him as a stimulus—the feel of the new country was as the breath of his nostrils. His bosom swelled with joy as he looked out toward that West which had so long allured him—that West of which he was to be the discoverer. The carousing riffraff of the wharfs, the flotsam and jetsam of the river trade, were to him but passing phenomena. He shouldered his way among them indifferently. He walked with a larger vision before his eyes.

Now, too, he had news—good news, fortunate news, joyous news—none less than the long-delayed answer of his friend, Captain William Clark, to his proposal that he should associate himself with the Volunteers for the Discovery of the West. Misspelled, scrawled, done in the hieroglyphics which marked that remarkable gentleman, William Clark's letter carried joy to the heart of Meriwether Lewis. It cemented one of the most astonishing partnerships ever known among men, one of the most beautiful friendships of which history leaves note. Let us give the strange epistle in Clark's own spelling:

> DEAR MERNE:
>
> Yours to hand touching uppon the Expedishon into the Missourie Country, & I send this by special bote up the river to mete you at Pts'brgh, at the Foarks. You convey a moast welcome and appreciated invitation to join you in an Enterprise conjenial to my Every thought and Desire. It will in all likelyhood require at least a year to make the journey out and Return, but although that means certain Sacrifises of a personal sort, I hold such far less than the pleasure to enlist with you, wh. indeed I hold to be my duty allso.
>
> I need not say how content I am to be associated with the man moast of all my acquaintance apt to achieve Success in an undertaking of

so difficult and perlous nature. As you know, it is in the wilderness men are moast sevearly tried, and there we know a man. I have seen you so tried, and I Know what you are. I am proud that you apeare to hold me and my own qualities in like confident trust and belief, and I shall hope to merit no alteration in your Judgment.

There is no other man I would go with on such an undertaking, nor consider it seriously, although the concern of my family largely has been with things military and adventurous, and we are not new to life among Savidges. Too well I know the dangers of bad leadership in such affairs, yes and my brother, the General, also, as the story of Detroit and the upper Ohio country could prove. All of that country should have been ours from the first, and only lack of courage lost it so long to us.

You are so kind as to offer me a place equal in command with you—I accept not because of the Rank, which is no moving consideration, eather for you or for me—but because I see in the jenerosity of the man proposing such a division of his own Honors, the best assurance of success.

You will find me at or near the Falls of the Ohio awaiting the arrival of your party, which I taik it will be in early August or the Midel of that month.

Pray convey to Mr. Jefferson my humble and obedient respects, and thanks for this honor wh. I shall endeavor to merit as best lies within my powers.

With all affec'n, I remain,

Your friend,

WM. CLARK.

P. S.—God alone knows how mutch this all may mean to You and me, Merne—WILL.

Clark, then, was to meet him at the Falls of the Ohio, and he, too, counseled haste. Lewis drove his drunken, lazy workmen in the shipyards as hard as he might, week after week, yet found six weeks elapsed before at last he was in any wise fitted to set forth. The delay fretted him, even though he received word

from his chief bidding him not to grieve over the possible loss of a season in his start, but to do what he might and to possess his soul in patience and in confidence.

Recruits of proper sort for his purposes did not grow on trees, he found, but he added a few men to his party now and then, picking them slowly, carefully. One morning, while engaged in his duties of supervising the work in progress at the shipyards, he had his attention attracted to a youth of some seventeen or eighteen years, who stood, cap in hand, at a little distance, apparently too timid to accost him.

“What is it, my son?” said he. “Did you wish to see me?”

The boy advanced, smiling.

“You do not know me, sir. My name is Shannon—George Shannon. I used to know you when you were stationed here with the army. I was a boy then.”

“You are right—I remember you perfectly. So you are grown into a strapping young man, I see!”

The boy twirled his cap in his hands.

“I want to go along with you, Captain,” said he shyly.

“What? You would go with me—do you know what is our journey?”

“No. I only hear that you are going up the Missouri, beyond St. Louis, into new country. They say there are buffalo there, and Indians. ’Tis too quiet here for me—I want to see the world with you.”

The young leader, after his fashion, stood silently regarding the other for a time. An instant served him.

“Very well, George,” said he. “If your parents consent, you shall go with me. Your pay will be such that you can save somewhat, and I trust you will use it to complete your schooling after your return. There will be adventure and a certain honor in our undertaking. If we come back successful, I am persuaded that our country will not forget us.”

And so that matter was completed. Strangely enough, as the future proved, were the fortunes of these two to intermingle. From the first, Shannon attached himself to his captain almost in the capacity of personal attendant.

At last the great bateau lay ready, launched from the docks and moored alongside the wharf. Fifty feet long it was, with mast, tholes and walking-boards for the arduous upstream work. It had received a part of its cargo, and soon all was in readiness to start.

On the evening of that day Lewis sat down to pen a last letter to his chief. He wrote in the little office-room of the inn where he was stopping, and for a time he did not note the presence of young Shannon, who stood, as usual, silent until his leader might address him.

“What, is it, George?” he asked at length, looking up.

“Someone waiting to see you, sir—they are in the parlor. They sent me——”

“They? Who are they?”

“I don’t know, sir. She asked me to come for you.”

“She. Who is she?”

“I don’t know, sir. She spoke to her father. They are in the room just across the hall, sir.”

The face of Meriwether Lewis was pale when presently he opened the door leading to the apartment which had been indicated. He knew, or thought he knew, who this must be. But why—why?

The interior was dim. A single lamp of the inefficient sort then in use served only to lessen the gloom. Presently, however, he saw awaiting him the figure he had anticipated. Yes, it was she herself. Almost his heart stood still.

Theodosia Alston arose from the spot where she sat in the deeper shadows, and came forward to him. He met her, his hands outstretched, his pulse leaping eagerly in spite of his reproofs. He dreaded, yet rejoiced.

“Why are you here?” he asked at length.

“My father and I are on a journey down the river to visit Mr. Blennerhasset on his island. You know his castle there?”

“Why is it that you always come to torment me the more? Another day and I should have been gone!”

“Torment you, sir?”

“You rebuke me properly. I presume I should have courage to meet you always—to speak with you—to look into your eyes—to take your hands in mine. But I find it hard, terribly hard! Each time it is worse—because each time I must leave you. Why did you not wait one day?”

She made no reply. He fought for his self-control.

“Mr. Jefferson, how is he?” he demanded at length. “You left him well?”

“Unchangeable as flint. You said that only the order of your chief could change your plans. I sought to gain that order—I went myself to see Mr. Jefferson, that very day you started. He said that nothing could alter his faith in you, and that nothing could alter the plan you both had made. He would not call you back. He ordered me not to attempt to do so; but I have broken the President’s command. You find it hard! Do you think this is not hard for me also?”

“These are strange words. What is your motive? What is it that you plan? Why should you seek to stop me when I am trying to blot your face out of my mind? Strange labor is that—to try to forget what I hold most dear!”

“You shall not leave my face behind you, Captain Lewis!” she said suddenly.

“What do you mean, Theodosia? What is it?”

“You shall see me every night under the stars, Meriwether Lewis. I will not let you go. I will not relinquish you!”

He turned swiftly toward her, but paused as if caught back by some mighty hand.

“What is it?” he said once more, half in a whisper. “What do you mean? Would you ruin me? Would you see me go to ruin?”

“No! To the contrary, shall I allow you to hasten into the usual ruin of a man? If you go yonder, what will be the fate of Meriwether Lewis? You have spoken beautifully to me at times—you have awakened some feeling of what images a woman may make in a man’s heart. I have been no more to you than any woman is to any man—the image of a dream. But, that being so beautiful, ought I to allow you to turn it to ruin? Shall I let you go down in savagery? Ah, if I thought I were relinquishing you to that, this would be a heavy day for me!”

“Can you fancy what all this means to me?” he broke out hoarsely.

“Yes, I can fancy. And what for me? So much my feeling for you has been—oh, call it what you like—admiration, affection, maternal tenderness—I do not know what—but so much have I wished, so much have I planned for your future in return for what you have given me—ah, I do not dare tell you. I could not dare come here if I did not know that I was never to see or speak to you again. It tears my heart from my bosom that I must say these things to you. I have risked all my honor in your hands. Is there no reward for that? Is my recompense to be only your assertion that I torment you, that I torture you? What! Is there no torture for me as well? The thought that I have done this covertly, secretly—what do you think that costs me?”

“Your secret is absolutely safe with me, Theodosia. No, it is not a secret! We have sworn that neither of us would lay a secret upon the other. I swear that to you once more.”

“And yet you upbraid me when I say I cannot give you up to any fate but that of happiness and success—oh, not with me, for that is beyond us two—it is past forever. But happiness——”

“There are some words that burn deep,” he said slowly. “I know that I was not made for happiness.”

“Does a woman’s wish mean nothing to you? Have I no appeal for you?”

Something like a sob was torn from his bosom.

“You can speak thus with me?” he said huskily. “If you cannot leave me happiness, can you not at least leave me partial peace of mind?”

She stood slightly swaying, silent.

“And you say you will not relinquish me, you will not let me go to that fate which surely is mine? You say you will not let me be savage? I say I am too nearly savage now. Let me go—let me go yonder into the wilderness, where I may be a gentleman!”

He saw her movement as she turned, heard her sigh.

“Sometimes,” she said, “I have thought it worth a woman’s life thrown away that a strong man may succeed. Failure and sacrifice a woman may offer—not much more. But it is as my father told me!”

“He told you what?”

“That only chivalry would ever make you forget your duty—that you never could be approached through your weakness, but only through your strength, through your honor. I cannot approach you through your strength, and I would not approach you through your weakness, even if I could. No! Wait. Perhaps some day it will all be made clear for both of us, so that we may understand. Yes, this is torture for us both!”

He heard the soft rustle of her gown, her light footfall as she passed; and once more he was alone.

# CHAPTER XI

## THE TAMING OF PATRICK GASS

“

Shannon, go get the men!”

It was midnight. For more than an hour Meriwether Lewis had sat, his head drooped, in silence.

“We are going to start?” Shannon’s face lightened eagerly. “We’ll be off at sunup?”

“Before that. Get the men—we’ll start now! I’ll meet you at the wharf.”

Eager enough, Shannon hastened away on his midnight errand. Within an hour every man of the little party was at the water front, ready for departure. They found their leader walking up and down, his head bent, his hands behind him.

It was short work enough, the completion of such plans as remained unfinished. The great keel-boat lay completed and equipped at the wharf. The men lost little time in stowing such casks and bales as remained unshipped. Shannon stepped to his chief.

“All’s aboard, sir,” said he. “Shall we cast off?”

Without a word Lewis nodded and made his way to his place in the boat. In the darkness, without a shout or a cheer to mark its passing, the expedition was launched on its long journey.

Slowly the boat passed along the waterfront of Pittsburgh town. Here rose gauntly, in the glare of torch or camp fire, the mast of some half-built schooner. Houseboats were drawn up or anchored alongshore, long pirogues lay moored or beached, or now and again a giant broadhorn, already partially loaded with household goods, common carrier for that human flood passing down the great waterway, stood out blacker than the shadows in which it lay.

Here and there camp fires flickered, each the center of a ribald group of the

hardy rivermen. Through the night came sounds of roistering, songs, shouts. Arrested, pent, dammed up, the lusty life of that great waterway leading into the West and South scarce took time for sleep.

The boat slipped on down, now crossing a shaft of light flung on the water from some lamp or fire, now blending with the ghostlike shadows which lay in the moonless night. It passed out of the town itself, and edged into the shade of the forest that swept continuously for so many leagues on ahead.

“Hello, there!” called a voice through the darkness, after a time. “Who goes there?”

The splash of a sweep had attracted the attention of someone on shore. The light of a camp fire showed.

Every one in the boat looked at the leader, but none vouchsafed a reply to the hail.

“Ahoy there, the boat!” insisted the same voice.

“Shall I fire on yez to make yez answer a civil question? Come ashore wance—I can lick the best of yez in three minutes, or me name’s not Patrick Gass!”

The captain of the boat turned slowly in his seat, casting a glance over his silent crew.

“Set in!” said he, sharply and shortly.

Without a word they obeyed, and with oar and steering-sweep the great craft slowly swung inshore.

Lewis stepped from the boat, and, not waiting to see whether he was followed—as he was by all of his men—strode on up the bank into the circle of light made by the camp fire. About the fire lay a dozen or more men of the hardest of the river type, which was saying quite enough; for of all the lawless and desperate characters of the frontier, none have ever surpassed in reckless audacity and truculence the men of the old boat trade of the Ohio and the Mississippi.

These fellows lay idly looking at Lewis as he entered the light, not troubling to accost him.

“Who hailed us?” demanded the latter shortly.

“Begorrah, ’twas me,” said a short, strongly built man, stepping forward from the other side of the fire.

Clad in loose shirt and trousers, like most of his comrades, he showed a powerful man, a shock of reddish hair falling over his eyes, a bull-like neck rising above his open shirt in such fashion that the size of his shoulder muscles might easily be seen.

“’Twas me hailed yez, and what of it?”

“That is what I came ashore to learn,” said Meriwether Lewis. “We are about our business. What concern is that of yours? I am here to learn.”

“Yez can learn, if ye’re so anxious,” replied the other. “’Tis me have got three drinks of Monongahaly in me that says I can whip you or anny man of your boat. And if that aint cause for ye to come ashore, ’tis no fighting man ye are, an’ I’ll say that to your face!”

It was the accepted fashion of challenge known anywhere along two thousand miles of waterway at that time, in a country where physical prowess and readiness to fight were the sole tests of distinction. Woe to the man who evaded such an issue, once it was offered to him!

The speaker had stepped close to Lewis—so close that the latter did not need to advance a foot. Instead, he held his ground, and the challenger, accepting this as a sign of willingness for battle, rushed at him, with the evident intent of a rough-and-tumble grapple after the fashion of his kind. To his surprise, he was held off by the leveled forearm of his opponent, rigid as a bar against his throat.

At this rebuff he roared like a bull, and breaking back rushed in once more, his giant arms flailing. Lewis swung back half a step, and then, so quickly that none saw the blow, but only its result was visible, he shifted on his feet, leaned into his thrust, and smote the joyous challenger so fell a stroke in the throat as laid him quivering and helpless. The brief fight was ended all too soon to suit the wishes of the spectators, used to more prolonged and bloodier encounters.

A sort of gasp, a half roar of surprise and anger, came from the group upon the ground. Some of the party rose to their feet menacingly. They met the silent front of the boat party, the clicking of whose well-oiled rifle-locks offered the most serious of warnings.

The sudden appearance of these visitors, so silent and so prompt—the swift act

of their leader, without threat, without warning—the instant readiness of the others to back their leader's initiative—caught every one of these rude fighting men in the sudden grip of surprise. They hesitated.

"I am no fighting man," said Meriwether Lewis, turning to them; "yet neither may I be insulted by any lout who chooses to call me ashore to thrash him. Do you think that an officer of the army has no better business than that? Who are you that would stop us?"

The group fell back muttering, lacking concerted action. What might have occurred in case they had reached their arms was prevented by the action of the party of the first part in this *rencontre*—of the second part, perhaps, he might better have been called. The fallen warrior sat up, rubbing his throat; he struggled to his knees, and at length stood. There was something of rude river chivalry about him, after all.

"An officer, did ye say?" said he. "Oh, wirra! What have I done now, and me a soldier! But ye done it fair! And ye niver wance gouged me nor jumped on me whin I was down! Begorrah, I felt both me eyes to see if they was in! Ye done it fair, and ye're an officer and a gintleman, whoever ye be. I'd like to shake hands with ye!"

"I am not shaking hands with ruffians who insult travelers," Captain Lewis sternly rejoined; but he saw the crestfallen look which swept over the strong face of the other. "There, man," said he, "since you seem to mean well!"

He shook hands with his opponent, who, stung by the rebuke, now began to sniffle.

"Sor," said he, "I am no ruffian. I am a soldier meself, and on me way to join me company at Kaskasky, down below. Me time was out awhile back, and I came East to the States to have a bit av a fling before I enlisted again. Now, what money I haven't give to me parents I've spint like a man. I have had me fling for awhile, and I'm goin' back to sign on again. Sor, I am a sergeant and a good wan, though I do say it. Me record is clean. I am Patrick Gass, first sergeant of the Tinth Dragoons, the same now stationed at Kaskasky. Though ye are not in uniform, I know well enough ye are an officer. Sor, I ask yer pardon—'twas only the whisky made me feel sportin' like at the time, do ye mind?"

"Gass, Patrick Gass, you said?"

“Yis, sor, of the Tinth. Barrin’ me love for fightin’ I am a good soldier. There are stripes on me sleeves be rights, but me old coat’s hangin’ in the barracks down below.”

Lewis stood looking curiously at the man before him, the power of whose grip he had felt in his own. He cast an eye over his erect figure, his easy and natural dropping into the position of a soldier.

“You say the Tenth?” said he briefly. “You have been with the colors? Look here, my man, do you want to serve?”

“I am going right back to Kaskasky for it, sor.”

“Why not enlist with us? I need men. We are off for the West, up the Missouri—for a long trip, like enough. You seem a well-built man, and you have seen service. I know men when I see them. I want men of courage and good temper. Will you go?”

“I could not say, sor. I would have to ask leave at Kaskasky. I gave me word I’d come back after I’d had me fling here in the East, ye see.”

“I’ll take care of that. I have full authority to recruit among enlisted men.”

“Excuse me, sor, ye are sayin’ ye are goin’ up the Missouri? Then I know yez—yez are the Captain Lewis that has been buildin’ the big boat the last two months up at the yards—Captain Lewis from Washington.”

“Yes, and from the Ohio country before then—and Kentucky, too. I am to join Captain Clark at the Point of Rocks on the Ohio. I need another oar. Come, my man, we are on our way. Two minutes ought to be enough for you to decide.”

“I’ll need not the half of two!” rejoined Patrick Gass promptly. “Give me leave of my captain, and I am with yez! There is nothin’ in the world I’d liever see than the great plains and the buffalo. ’Tis fond of travel I am, and I’d like to see the ind of the world before I die.”

“You will come as near seeing the end of it with us as anywhere else I know,” rejoined Lewis quietly. “Get your war-bag and come aboard.”

In this curious fashion Patrick Gass of the army—later one of the journalists of the expedition, and always one of its most faithful and efficient members—signed his name on the rolls of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

There was not one of the frontiersmen in the boat who had any comment to make upon any phase of the transaction; indeed, it seemed much in the day’s work to them. But from that instant every man in the boat knew he had a leader who could be depended upon for prompt and efficient action in any emergency; and from that moment, also, their leader knew he could depend on his men.

“I have nothing to complain of,” said Patrick Gass, addressing his new friends impartially, as he shifted his belongings to suit him and took his place at a rowing seat. “I have nothing to complain of. I’ve been sayin’ I would like to have one more rale fight before I enlisted—the army is too tame for a fellow of rale spirit. None o’ thim at the camp yonder, where I was two days, would take it on with me after the first day. I was fair longin’ for something to interest me—and be jabers, I found it! Now I am contintéd to ind me vacation and come back to the monothony of business life.”

The boat advanced steadily enough thereafter throughout the night. They pulled ashore at dawn, and, after the fashion of experienced travelers, were soon about the business of the morning meal.

The leader of the party drew apart for the morning plunge which was his custom. Cover lacking on the bare bar where they had landed, he was not fully out of sight when at length, freshened by his plunge, he stood drying himself for dressing. Unconsciously, his arm extended, he looked for all the world the very statue of the young Apoxyomenos of the Vatican—the finest figure of a man that the art of antiquity has handed down to us.

As that smiling youth out of the past stood, scraper in hand, drying himself after the games, so now stood this young American, type of a new race, splendid as the Greeks themselves in the immortal beauty of life. His white body shining in the sun, every rolling muscle plainly visible—even that rare muscle over the hip beloved of the ancients, but now forgotten of sculptors, because rarely seen on a man today—so comely was he, so like a god in his clean youth, that Patrick Gass, unhampered by backwardness himself, turned to his new companions, whom already he addressed each by his first name.

“George,” said he to young Shannon, “George, saw ye ever the like of yon? What a man! Lave I had knowed he could strip like yon, niver would I have taken the chance I did last night. ’Tis wonder he didn’t kill me—in which case I’d niver have had me job. The Lord loves us Irish, anny way you fix it!”

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# CHAPTER XII

## CAPTAIN WILLIAM CLARK

“

Will!”

“Merne!”

The two young men gripped hands as the great bateau swung inshore at the Point of Rocks on the Kentucky side of the Ohio. They needed not to do more, these two. The face of each told the other what he felt. Their mutual devotion, their generosity and unselfishness, their unflagging unity of purpose, their perfect manly comradeship—what wonder so many have called the story of these two more romantic than romance itself?

“It has been long since we met, Will,” said Meriwether Lewis. “I have been eating my heart out up at Pittsburgh. I got your letter, and glad enough I was to have it. I had been fearing that I would have to go on alone. Now I feel as if we already had succeeded. I cannot tell you—but I don’t need to try.”

“And you, Merne,” rejoined William Clark—Captain William Clark, if you please, border fighter, leader of men, one of a family of leaders of men, tall, gaunt, red-headed, blue-eyed, smiling, himself a splendid figure of a man—“you, Merne, are a great man now, famous there in Washington! Mr. Jefferson’s right-hand man—we hear of you often across the mountains. I have been waiting for you here, as anxious as yourself.”

“The water is low,” complained Lewis, “and a thousand things have delayed us. Are you ready to start?”

“In ten minutes—in five minutes. I will have my boy York go up and get my rifle and my bags.”

“Your brother, General Clark, how is he?”

William Clark shrugged with a smile which had half as much sorrow as mirth in it.

“The truth is, Merne, the general’s heart is broken. He thinks that his country has forgotten him.”

“Forgotten him? From Detroit to New Orleans—we owe it all to George Rogers Clark. It was he who opened the river from Pittsburgh to New Orleans. He’ll not need, now, to be an ally of France again. Once more a member of your family will be in at the finding of a vast new country!”

“Merne, I’ve sold my farm. I got ten thousand dollars for my place—and so I am off with you, not with much of it left in my pockets, but with a clean bill and a good conscience, and some of the family debts paid. I care not how far we go, or when we come back. I thank Mr. Jefferson for taking me on with you. ’Tis the gladdest time in all my life!”

“We are share and share alike, Will,” said his friend Lewis, soberly. “Tell me, can we get beyond the Mississippi this fall, do you think?”

“Doubtful,” said Clark. “The Spanish of the valley are not very well reconciled to this Louisiana sale, and neither are the French. They have been holding all that country in partnership, each people afraid of the other, and both showing their teeth to us. But I hear the commission is doing well at St. Louis, and I presume the transfer will be made this fall or winter. After that they cannot stop us from going on. Tell me, have you heard anything of Colonel Burr’s plan? There have come new rumors of the old attempt to separate the West from the government at Washington, and he is said to have agents scattered from St. Louis to New Orleans.”

He did not note the sudden flush on his friend’s face—indeed, gave him no time to answer, but went on, absorbed in his own executive details.

“What sort of men have you in your party, Merne?”

“Only good ones, I think. Young Shannon and an army sergeant by the name of Gass, Patrick Gass—they should be very good men. I brought on Collins from Maryland and Pete Weiser from Pennsylvania, also good stuff, I think. McNeal, Potts, Gibson—I got those around Carlisle. We need more men.”

“I have picked out a few here,” said Clark. “You know Kentucky breeds explorers. I have a good blacksmith, Shields, and Bill Bratton is another blacksmith—either can tinker a gun if need be. Then I have John Coalter, an active, strapping chap, and the two Fields boys, whom I know to be good men;

and Charlie Floyd, Nate Pryor, and a couple of others—Warner and Whitehouse. We should get the rest at the forts around St. Louis. I want to take my boy York along—a negro is always good-natured under hardship, and a laugh now and then will not hurt any of us."

Lewis nodded assent.

"Your judgment of men is as good as mine, Will. But come, it is September, and the leaves are falling. All my men have the fall hunt in their blood—they will start for any place at any moment. Let us move. Suppose you take the boat on down, and let me go across, horseback, to Kaskaskia. I have some business there, and I will try for a few more recruits. We must have fifty men."

"Nothing shall stop us, Merne, and we cannot start too soon. I want to see fresh grass every night for a year. But you—how can you be content to punish yourself for so long? For me, I am half Indian; but I expected to have heard long ago that you were married and settled down as a Virginia squire, raising tobacco and negroes, like anyone else. Tell me, how about that old affair of which you once used to confide to me when we were soldiering together here, years back? 'Twas a fair New York maid, was it not? From what you said I fancied her quite without comparison, in your estimate, at least. Yet here you are, vagabonding out into a country where you may be gone for years—or never come back at all, for all we know. Have a care, man—pretty girls do not wait!"

As he spoke, so strange a look passed over his friend's face that William Clark swiftly put out a hand.

"What is it, Merne? Pardon me! Did she—not wait?"

His companion looked at him gravely.

"She married, something like three years ago. She is the wife of Mr. Alston, a wealthy planter of the Carolinas, a friend of her father and a man of station. A good marriage for her—for him—for both."

The sadness of his face spoke more than his words to his warmest friend, and left them both silent for a time. William Clark ceased breaking bark between his fingers and flipping away the pieces.

"Well, in my own case," said he at length, "I have no ties to cut. 'Tis as well—we shall have no faces of women to trouble us on our trails out yonder. They don't belong there, Merne—the ways of the trappers are best. But we must not

talk too much of this,” he added. “I’ll see you yet well settled down as a Virginia squire—your white hair hanging down on your shoulders and a score of grandchildren about your knees to hamper you.”

William Clark meant well—his friend knew that; so now he smiled, or tried to smile.

“Merne,” the red-headed one went on, throwing an arm across his friend’s shoulders, “pass over this affair—cut it out of your heart. Believe me, believe me, the friendship of men is the only one that lasts. We two have eaten from the same pannikin, slept under the same bear-robe before now—we still may do so. And look at the adventures before us!”

“You are a boy, Will,” said Meriwether Lewis, actually smiling now, “and I am glad you are and always will be; because, Will, I never was a boy—I was born old. But now,” he added sharply, as he rose, “a pleasant journey to us both—and the longer the better!”

# CHAPTER XIII

## UNDER THREE FLAGS

The day was but beginning for the young American republic. All the air was vibrant with the passion of youth and romance. Yonder in the West there might be fame and fortune for any man with courage to adventure. The world had not yet settled down to inexorable grooves of life, from which no human soul might fight its way out save at cost of sweetness and content and hope. The chance of one man might still equal that of another—yonder, in that vast new world along the Mississippi, beyond the Mississippi, more than a hundred years ago.

Into that world there now pressed a flowing, seething, restless mass, a new population seeking new avenues of hope and life, of adventure and opportunity. Riflemen, axmen, fighting men, riding men, boatmen, plowmen—they made ever out and on, laughing the Cossack laugh at the mere thought of any man or thing withstanding them.

Over this new world, alert, restless, full of Homeric youth, full of the lust of life and adventure, floated three flags. The old war of France and Spain still smoldered along the great waterway into the South. The flag of Great Britain had withdrawn itself to the North. The flag of our republic had not yet advanced.

Those who made the Western population at that time cared little enough about flags or treaty rights. They concerned themselves rather with possession. Let any who liked observe the laws. The strong made their own laws from day to day, and wrote them in one general codex of adventure and full-blooded, roistering life. The world was young. Buy land? No, why buy it, when taking it was so much more simple and delightful?

Based on this general lust of conquest, this Saxon zeal for new territories, must have been that inspiration of Thomas Jefferson in his venture of the far Northwest. He saw there the splendid vision of his ideal republic. He saw there a citizenry no longer riotous and roistering, not yet frenzied or hysterical, but strong, sober, and constant. His was a glorious vision. Would God we had fully realized his dream!

There were three flags afloat here or there in the Western country then, and none

knew what land rightly belonged under any of the three. Indeed, over the heart of that region now floated all the three banners at the same time—that of Spain, passing but still proud, for a generation actual governor if not actual owner of all the country beyond the Mississippi, so far as it had any government at all; that of France, owner of the one great seaport, New Orleans, settler of the valley for a generation; and that of the new republic only just arriving into the respect of men either of the East or the West—a republic which had till recently exacted respect chiefly through the stark deadliness of its fighting and marching men.

It was a splendid game in which these two boys, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark—they scarcely were more than boys—now were entering. And with the superb unconsciousness and self-trust of youth, they played it with dash and confidence, never doubting their success.

The prediction of William Clark none the less came true. In this matter of flags, autocratic Spain was not disposed to yield. De Lassus, Spanish commandant for so many years, would not let the young travelers go beyond St. Louis, even so far as Charette. He must be sure that his country—which, by right or not, he had ruled so long—had not only been sold by Spain to France, but that the cession had been duly confirmed; and, furthermore, he must be sure that the cession by France to the United States had also been concluded formally.

Traders and trappers had been passing through from the plains country, yes—but this was a different matter. Here was a flotilla under a third flag—it must not pass. Spanish official dignity was not thus to be shaken, not to be hurried. All must wait until the formalities had been concluded.

This delay meant the loss of the entire winter. The two young leaders of the expedition were obliged to make the best of it they could.

Clark formed an encampment in the timbered country across the Mississippi from St. Louis, and soon had his men comfortably ensconced in cabins of their own building. Meanwhile he picked up more men around the adjacent military posts—Ordway and Howard and Frazer of the New England regiment; Cruzatte, Labiche, Lajeunesse, Drouillard and other voyageurs for watermen. They made a hardy and efficient band.

Upon Captain Lewis devolved most of the scientific work of the expedition. It was necessary for him to spend much time in St. Louis, to complete his store of instruments, to extend his own studies in scientific matters. Perhaps, after all, the success of the expedition was furthered by this delay upon the border.

Twenty-nine men they had on the expedition rolls by spring—forty-five in all, counting assistants who were not officially enrolled. Their equipment for the entire journey out and back, of more than two years in duration, was to cost them not more than twenty-five hundred dollars. A tiny army, a meager equipment, for the taking of the richest empire of the world!

But now this army of a score and a half of men was to witness the lowering before it of two of the greatest flags then known to the world. It already had seen the retirement of that of Great Britain. The wedge which Burr and Merry and Yrujo had so dreaded was now about to be driven home. The country must split apart—Great Britain must fall back to the North—these other powers, France and Spain, must make way to the South and West.

The army of the new republic, under two loyal boys for leaders, pressed forward, not with drums or banners, not with the roll of kettledrums, not with the pride and circumstance of glorious war. The soldiers of its ranks had not even a uniform—they were clad in buckskin and linsey, leather and fur. They had no trained fashion of march, yet stood shoulder and shoulder together well enough. They were not drilled into the perfection of trained soldiers, perhaps, but each could use his rifle, and knew how far was one hundred yards.

The boats were coming down with furs from the great West—from the Omahas, the Kaws, the Osages. Keel boats came up from the lower river, mastering a thousand miles and more of that heavy flood to bring back news from New Orleans. Broadhorns and keel-boats and sailboats and river pirogues passed down.

The strange, colorful life of the little capital of the West went on eagerly. St. Louis was happy; Detroit was glum—the fur trade had been split in half. Great Britain had lost—the furs now went out down the Mississippi instead of down the St. Lawrence. A world was in the making and remaking; and over that disturbed and divided world there still floated the three rival flags.

Five days before Christmas of 1803, the flag of France fluttered down in the old city of New Orleans. They had dreaded the fleet of Great Britain at New Orleans—had hoped for the fleet of France. They got a fleet of Americans in flatboats—rude men with long rifles and leathern garments, who came under paddle and oar, and not under sail.

Laussat was the last French commandant in the valley. De Lassus, the Spaniard, holding onto his dignity up the Missouri River beyond St. Louis, still clung to

the sovereignty that Spain had deserted. And across the river, in a little row of log cabins, lay the new army with the new flag—an army of twenty-nine men, backed by twenty-five hundred dollars of a nation's hoarded war gold!

It was a time for hope or for despair—a time for success or failure—a time for loyalty or for treason. And that army of twenty-nine men in buckskin altered the map of the world, the history of a vast continent.

While Meriwether Lewis gravely went about his scientific studies, and William Clark merrily went about his dancing with the gay St. Louis belles, when not engaged in drilling his men beyond the river, the winter passed. Spring came. The ice ceased to run in the river, the geese honked northward in millions, the grass showed green betimes.

The men in Clark's encampment were almost mutinous with lust for travel. But still the authorities had not completed their formalities; still the flag of Spain floated over the crossbars of the gate of the stone fortress, last stronghold of Spain in the valley of our great river.

March passed, and April. Not until the 9th of May, in the year 1804, were matters concluded to suit the punctilio of France and Spain alike. Now came the assured word that the republic of the United States intended to stand on the Louisiana purchase, Constitution or no Constitution—that the government purposed to take over the land which it had bought. On this point Mr. Jefferson was firm. De Lassus yielded now.

On that May morning the soldiers of Spain manning the fortifications of the old post stood at parade when the drums of the Americans were heard. One company of troops, under command of Captain Stoddard, represented our army of occupation. Our real army of invasion was that in buckskin and linsey and leather—twenty-nine men; whose captain, Meriwether Lewis, was to be our official representative at the ceremony of transfer.

De Lassus choked with emotion as he handed over the keys and the archives which so long had been under his charge.

"Sir," said he, addressing the commander, "I speak for France as well as for Spain. I hand over to you the title from France, as I hand over to you the rule from Spain. Henceforth both are for you. I salute you, gentlemen!"

With the ruffle of the few American drums the transfer was gravely

acknowledged. The flag of Spain slowly dropped from the staff where it had floated. That of France took its place, and for one day floated by courtesy over old St. Louis. On the morrow arose a strange new flag—the flag of the United States. It was supported by one company of regulars and by the little army of joint command—the army of Lewis and Clark—twenty-nine enlisted men in leather!

“Time now, at last!” said William Clark to his friend. “Time for us to say farewell! Boats—three of them—are waiting, and my men are itching to see the buffalo plains. What is the latest news in the village, Merne?” he added. “I’ve not been across there for two weeks.”

“News enough,” said Meriwether Lewis gravely. “I just have word of the arrival in town of none other than Colonel Aaron Burr.”

“The Vice-President of the United States! What does he here? Tell me, is he bound down the river? Is there anything in all this talk I have heard about Colonel Burr? Is he alone?”

“No. I wish he were alone. Will, she is with him—his daughter, Mrs. Alston!”

“Well, what of that? Oh, I know—I know, but why should you meet?”

“How can we help meeting here in the society of this little town, whose people are like one family? They have been invited by Mr. Chouteau to come to his house—I also am a guest there. Will, what shall I do? It torments me!”

“Oh, tut, tut!” said light-hearted William Clark. “What shall you do? Why, in the first place, pull the frown from your face, Merne. Now, this young lady forsakes her husband, travels—with her father, to be sure, but none the less she travels—along the same trail taken by a certain young man down the Ohio, up the Mississippi, here to St. Louis. Should you call that a torment? Not I! I should flatter myself over it. A torment? Should you call the flowers that change in sweetness as we ride along through the wood a torment? Let them beware of me! I am no respecter of fortune when it comes to a pretty face, my friend. It is mine if it is here, and if I may kiss it—don’t rebuke me, Merne! I am full of the joy of life. Woman—the nearest woman—to call her a torment! And you a soldier! I don’t blame them. Torment you? Yes, they will, so long as you allow it. Then don’t allow it!”

“You preach very well, Will. Of course, I know you don’t practise what you

preach—who does?”

“Well, perhaps! But, seriously, why take life so hard, Merne? Why don’t you relax—why don’t you swim with the current for a time? We live but once. Tell me, do you think there was but one woman made for each of us men in all the world? My faith, if that be true, I have had more than my share, I fear, as I have passed along! But even when it comes to marrying and settling down to hoeing an acre of corn-land and raising a shoat or two for the family—tell me, Merne, what woman does a man marry? Doesn’t he marry the one at hand—the one that is ready and waiting? Do you think fortune would always place the one woman in the world ready for the one man at the one time, just when the hoeing and the shoat-raising was to the fore? It is absurd, man! Nature dares not take such chances—and does not.”

Lewis did not answer his friend’s jesting argument.

“Listen, Merne,” Clark went on. “The memory of a kiss is better than the memory of a tear. No, listen, Merne! The print of a kiss is sweet as water of a spring when you are athirst. And the spring shows none the worse for the taste of heaven it gave you. Lips and water alike—they tell no tales. They are goods the gods gave us as part of life. But the great thirst—the great thirst of a man for power, for deeds, for danger, for adventure, for accomplishment—ah, that is ours, and that is harder to slake, I am thinking! A man’s deeds are his life. They tell the tale.”

“His deeds! Yes, you are right, they do, indeed, tell the tale. Let us hope the reckoning will stand clean at last.”

“Merne, you are a soldier, not a preacher.”

“Will, you are neither—you are only a boy!”

# CHAPTER XIV

## THE RENT IN THE ARMOR

Aaron Burr came to St. Louis in the spring of 1804 as much in desperation as with definite plans. Matters were going none too well for him. All the time he was getting advices from the lower country, where lay the center of his own audacious plans; but the thought of the people was directed westward, up the Missouri.

The fame of the Lewis and Clark expedition now had gathered volume. Constitution or no Constitution, the purchase of Louisiana had been completed, the transfer had been formally made. The American wedge was driving on through. If ever he was to do anything for his own enterprise, it was now high time.

Burr's was a mind to see to the core of any problem in statecraft. He knew what this sudden access of interest in the West indicated, so far as his plans were concerned. It must be stopped—else it would be too late for any dream of Aaron Burr for an empire of his own.

His resources were dwindling. He needed funds for the many secret agents in his employ—needed yet more funds for the purchase and support of his lands in the South. And the minister of Great Britain had given plain warning that unless this expedition up the Missouri could be stopped, no further aid need be expected from him.

Little by little Burr saw hope slip away from him. True, Captain Lewis was still detained by his duties among the Osage Indians, a little way out from the city; but the main expedition had actually started.

William Clark, occupied with the final details, did not finally get his party under way until five days after the formal transfer of the new territory of Louisiana to our flag, and three days after Burr's arrival. At last, however, on the 14th of May, the three boats had left St. Louis wharf, with their full complement of men and the last of the supplies aboard for the great voyage. Captain Clark, ever light-hearted and careless of his spelling-book, if not of his rifle, says it was "a jentle brease" which aided the oars and the square-sail as they started up the

river.

Assuredly the bark of Aaron Burr was sailing under no propitious following wind. Distracted, he paced up and down his apartment in the home where he was a guest, preoccupied, absorbed, almost ready to despair. He spoke but little, but time and again he cast an estimating eye upon the young woman who accompanied him.

“You are ill, Theodosia!” he exclaimed at last “Come, come, my daughter, this will not do! Have you no arts of the toilet that can overcome the story of your megrims? Shall I get you some sort of bitter herbs? You need your brightest face, your best apparel now. These folk of St. Louis must see us at our best, my dear, our very best. Besides——”

He needed not to complete the sentence. Theodosia Alston knew well enough what was in her father’s mind—knew well enough why they both were here. It was because she would not have come alone. And she knew that the burden of the work they had at heart must once more lie upon her shoulders. She once more must see Captain Meriwether Lewis—and it must be soon, if ever. He was reported as being ready to leave town at once upon his return from the Osage Indians.

But courtesy did not fail the young Virginian, and at last—although with dread in his own heart—within an hour of his actual departure, he called to pay his compliments to guests so distinguished as these, to a man so high in rank under the government which he himself served. He found it necessary to apologize for his garb, suited rather to the trail than to the drawing-room. He stood in the hall of the Chouteau home, a picture of the soldier of the frontier rather than the courtier of the capital.

His three-cornered military hat, his blue uniform coat—these made the sole formality of his attire, for his feet were moccasined, his limbs were clad in tight-fitting buckskins, and his shirt was of rough linsey, suitable for the work ahead.

“I ask your pardon, Colonel Burr,” said he, “for coming to you as I am, but the moment for my start is now directly at hand. I could not leave without coming to present my duties to you and Mrs. Alston. Indeed, I have done so at once upon my return to town. I pray you carry back to Mr. Jefferson my sincerest compliments. Say to him, if you will, that we are setting forth with high hopes of success.”

Formal, cold, polite—it was the one wish of Captain Lewis to end this interview as soon as he might, and to leave all sleeping dogs lying as they were.

But Aaron Burr planned otherwise. His low, deep voice was never more persuasive, his dark eye never more compelling—nor was his bold heart ever more in trepidation than now, as he made excuse for delay—delay—delay.

"My daughter, Mrs. Alston, will join us presently," he said. "So you are ready, Captain Lewis?"

"We are quite prepared, Colonel Burr. My men are on ahead two days' journey, camped at St. Charles, and waiting for me to overtake them. Dr. Saugrain, Mr. Chouteau, Mr. Labadie—one or two others of the gentlemen in the city—are so kind as to offer me a convoy of honor so far as St. Charles. We are quite flattered. So now we start—they are waiting for me at the wharf now, and I must go. All bridges are burned behind me!"

"*All bridges burned?*"

The deep voice of Aaron Burr almost trembled. His keen eye searched the face of the young man before him.

"Every one," replied the young Virginian. "I do not know how or when I may return. Perhaps Mr. Clark or myself may come back by sea—should we ever reach the sea. We can only trust to Providence."

He was bowing and extending his own hand in farewell, with polite excuses as to his haste—relieved that his last ordeal had been spared him. He turned, as he felt rather than heard the approach of another, whose coming caused his heart almost to stop beating—the woman dreaded and demanded by every fiber of his being.

"Oh, not so fast, not so fast!" laughed Theodosia Alston as she came into the room, offering her hand. "I heard you talking, and have been hurrying to pretty myself up for Captain Lewis. What? Were you trying to run away without ever saying good-by to me? And how you are prettied up!"

Her gaze, following her light speech, resolved itself into one of admiration. Theodosia Alston, as she looked, found him a goodly picture as he stood ready for the trail.

"I was just going, yes," stammered Meriwether Lewis. "I had hoped——" But

what he had hoped he did not say.

“Why might we not walk down with you to the wharf, if you are so soon to go?” she demanded—her own self-control concealing any disappointment she may have felt at her cavalier reception.

“An excellent idea!” said Aaron Burr, backing his daughter’s hand, and trusting to her to have some plan. “A warrior must spend his last word with some woman, captain! Go you on ahead—I surrender my daughter to you, and I shall follow presently to bid you a last Godspeed. You said those other gentlemen were to join you there?”

Meriwether Lewis found himself walking down the narrow street of the frontier settlement between the lines of hollyhocks and budding roses which fronted many of the little residences. It was spring, the air was soft. He was young. The woman at his side was very beautiful. So far as he could see they were alone.

They passed along the street, turned, made their way down the rock-faced bluff to the water front; but still they were alone. All St. Louis was at the farther end of the wharf, waiting for a last look at the idol of the town.

Theodosia sighed.

“And so Captain Lewis is going to have his way as usual? And he was going—in spite of all—even without saying good-by to me!”

“Yes, I would have preferred that.”

“Captain Lewis is mad. Look at that river! They say that when the boat started last week it took them an hour to make a quarter of a mile, when they struck into the Missouri. How many thousands of hours will it take to ascend to the mountains? How will you get your boats across the mountains? What cascades and rapids lie on ahead? Your men will mutiny and destroy you. You cannot succeed—you will fail!”

“I thank you, madam!”

“Oh, you must start now, I presume—in fact, you have started; but I want you to come back before your obstinacy has driven you too far.”

“Just what do you mean?”

“Listen. You have given me no time, unkind as you are—not a moment—at an

hour like this! In these unsettled times, who knows what may happen? In that very unsettlement lies the probable success of the plan which my father and I have put before you so often. We need you to help us. When are you going to come back to us, Merne?"

As she spoke, they were approaching the long wharf along the water front, lined with rude craft which plied the rivers at that time—flatboats, keel-boats, pirogues, canoes—and, far off at the extremity of the line, the boat which Lewis and his friends were to take. A party of idlers and observers stood about it even now. The gaze of the young leader was fixed in that direction. He did not make any immediate sign that he had heard her speech.

"I told Shannon, my aide, to meet me here," he said at last. "He was to fetch my long spyglass. There are certain little articles of my equipment over yonder in the wharf shed. Would you excuse me for just a moment?"

He stooped at the low door and entered. But she followed him—followed after him unconsciously, without plan, feeling only that he must not go, that she could not let him away from her.

She saw the light floating through the door fall on his dense hair, long, loosely bagged in its cue. She saw the quality of his strong figure, in all the fittings of a frontiersman, saw his stern face, his troubled eye, saw the unconscious strength which marked his every movement as he strode about, eager, as it seemed to her, only to be done with his last errands, and away on that trail which so long had beckoned to him.

The strength of the man, the strength of his purpose—the sudden and full realization of both—this caught her like a tangible thing, and left her no more than the old, blind, unformed protest. He must not go! She could not let him go!

But the words she had spoken had caught him, after all. He had been pondering—had been trying to set them aside as if unheard.

"Coming back?" he began, and stopped short once more. They were now both within the shelter of the old building.

"Yes, Merne!" she broke out suddenly. "When are you coming back to me, Merne?"

He stood icy silent, motionless, for just a moment. It seemed to her as if he was made of stone. Then he spoke very slowly, deliberately.

“Coming back to *you*? And you call me by that name? Only my mother, Mr. Jefferson and Will Clark ever did so.”

“Oh, stiff-necked man! It is so hard to be kind with you! And all I have ever done—every time I have followed you in this way, each time I have humiliated myself thus—it always was only in kindness for you!”

He made no reply.

“Fate ran against us, Merne,” she went on tremblingly. “We have both accepted fate. But in a woman’s heart are many mansions. Is there none in a man’s—in yours—for me? Can’t I ask a place in a good man’s heart—an innocent, clean place? Oh, think not you have had all the unhappiness in your own heart! Is all the world’s misery yours? I don’t want you to go away, Merne, but if you do—if you must—won’t you come back? Oh, won’t you, Merne?”

Her voice was trembling, her hand half raised, her eyes sought after him. She stood partly in shadow, the flare of light from the open door falling over her face. She might have been some saint of old in pictured guise; but she was a woman, alive, beautiful, delectable, alluring—especially now, with this tone in her voice, this strangely beseeching look in her eyes.

Her hands were almost lifted to be held out to him. She stood almost inclined to him, wholly unconscious of her attitude, forgetting that her words were imploring, remembering only that he was going.

He seemed not to hear her voice as he stood there, but somewhere as if out of some savage past, a voice did speak to him, saying that when a man is sore athirst, then a man may drink—that the well-spring would not miss the draft, and would tell no tale of it!

He stood, as many another man has stood, and fought the fight many another man has fought—the fight between man the primitive and man the gentleman, chivalry contending with impulse, blood warring with breeding.

“‘Oh, Theo, what have I done?’”

**“‘Oh, Theo, what have I done?’”**

“Yes!” so said the voice in his ear. “Why should the spring grudge a draft to a soul aflame with an undying thirst? Vows? What have vows to do with this? Duty? What is duty to a man perishing?—I know not what it was. I heard it. I felt it. Forgive me, it was not I myself! Oh, Theo, what have I done?”

She could not speak, could not even sob. Neither horror nor resentment was possible for her, nor any protest, save the tears which welled silently, terribly.

Unable longer to endure this, Meriwether Lewis turned to leave behind him his last hope of happiness, and to face alone what he now felt to be the impenetrable night of his own destiny. He never knew when his hands fell from Theodosia Alston’s face, or when he turned away; but at last he felt himself walking, forcing his head upright, his face forward.

He passed, a tall, proud man in his half-savage trappings—a man in full ownership of splendid physical powers; but as he walked his feet were lead, his heart was worse than lead. And though his face was turned away from her, he knew that always he would see what he had left—this picture of Theodosia weeping—this picture of a saint mocked, of an altar desecrated. She wept, and it was because of him!

The dumb cry of his remorse, his despair, must have struck back to where she still stood, her hands on her bosom, staring at him as he passed:

“Theo! Theo! What have I done? What have I done?”

# PART II

# CHAPTER I

## UNDER ONE FLAG

What do you bring, oh, mighty river—and what tidings do you carry from the great mountains yonder in the unknown lands? In what region grew this great pine which swims with you to the sea? What fat lands reared this heavy trunk, which sinks at last, to be buried in the sands?

What jewels lie under your flood? What rich minerals float impalpably in your tawny waters? Across what wide prairies did you come—among what hills—through what vast forests? How long, great river, was your journey, sufficient to afford so tremendous a gathering of the waters?

A hundred years ago the great Missouri made no answer to these questions. It was open highway only for those who dared. The man who asked its secrets must read them for himself. What a time and place for adventure! What a time and place for men!

From sea to sea, across an unknown, fabled mountain range, lay our wilderness, now swiftly trebled by a miracle in statecraft. The flag which floated over the last stockade of Spain, the furthest outpost of France, now was advancing step by step, inch by inch, up the giant flood of the Missouri, borne on the flagship of a flotilla consisting of one flatboat and two skiffs, carrying an army whose guns were one swivel piece and thirty rifles.

Not without toil and danger was this enterprise to advance. When at length the last smoke of a settler's cabin had died away over the lowland forest, the great river began in earnest to exact its toll.

Continually the boats, heavily laden as they were, ran upon shifting bars of sand, or made long détours to avoid some *chevaux de frise* of white-headed snags sunk in the current with giant uptossing limbs. Floating trees came down resistlessly on the spring rise, demanding that all craft should beware of them; caving banks, in turn, warned the boats to keep off; and always the mad current of the stream, never relaxing in vehemence, laid on the laboring boats the added weight of its mountain of waters, gaining in volume for nearly three thousand miles.

The square sail at times aided the great bateau when the wind came upstream, but no sail could serve for long on so tortuous a water. The great oars, twenty-two in all, did their work in lusty hands, hour after hour, but sometimes they could hardly hold the boats against the power of the June rise. The setting poles could not always find good bottom, but sometimes the men used these in the old keel boat fashion, traveling along the walking-boards on the sides of the craft, head down, bowed over the setting-poles—the same manner of locomotion that had conquered the Mississippi.

When sail and oar and setting-pole proved unavailing, the men were out and overboard, running the banks with the cordelle. As they labored thus on the line, like so many yoked cattle, using each ounce of weight and straining muscle to hold the heavy boat against the current, snags would catch the line, stumps would foul it, trees growing close to the bank's edge would arrest it. Sometimes the great boat, swung sidewise in the current in spite of the last art of the steersmen, would tauten the line like a tense fiddle-string, flipping the men, like so many insects, from their footing, and casting them into the river, to emerge as best they might.

Cruzatte, Labiche, Drouillard—all the French voyageurs—with the infinite French patience smiled and sweated their way through. The New Englanders grew grim; the Kentuckians fumed and swore. But little by little, inch by inch, creeping, creeping, paying the toll exacted, they went on day by day, leaving the old world behind them, morning by morning advancing farther into the new.

The sun blistered them by day; clouds of pests tormented them by night; miasmatic lowlands threatened them both night and day. But they went on.

The immensity of the river itself was an appalling thing; its bends swept miles long in giant arcs. But bend after bend they spanned, bar after bar they skirted, bank after bank they conquered—and went on. In the water as much as out of it, drenched, baked, gaunt, ragged, grim, they paid the toll.

A month passed, and more. The hunters exulted that game was so easy to get, for they must depend in large part on the game killed by the way. At the mouth of the Kansas River, near where a great city one day was to stand, they halted on the twenty-sixth of June. Deer, turkeys, bear, geese, many "goslins," as quaint Will Clark called them, rewarded their quest.

July came and well-nigh passed. They reached the mouth of the great Platte River, far out into the Indian country. Over this unmapped country ranged the

Otoes, the Omahas, the Pawnees, the Kansas, the Osages, the Rees, the Sioux. This was the buffalo range where the tribes had fought immemorially.

It was part of the mission of Captain Lewis's little army to carry peace among these warring tribes. The nature of the expedition was explained to their chiefs. At the great Council Bluffs many of the Otoes came and promised to lay down the hatchet and cease to make war against the Omahas. The Omahas, in turn, swore allegiance to the new flag.

On ahead somewhere lay the powerful Sioux nation, doubt and dread of all the traders who had ever passed up the Missouri. Dorion, the interpreter, married among them, admitted that even he could not tell what the Sioux might do.

The expedition struck camp at last, high up on the great river, in the country of the Yanktonnais. The Sioux long had marked its coming, and were ready for its landing. Their signal fires called in the villages to meet the boats of the white men.

They came riding down in bands, whooping and shouting, painted and half naked, well armed—splendid savages, fearing no man, proud, capricious, bloodthirsty. They were curious as to the errand of these new men who came carrying a new flag—these men who could make the thunder speak. For now the heavy piece on the bow of the great barge spoke in no uncertain terms so that its echoes ran back along the river shores. No such boat, no such gun as this, had ever been seen in that country before.

"Tell them to make a council, Dorion," said Lewis. "Take this officer's coat to their head man. Tell him that the Great Father sends it to him. Give him this hat with lace on it. Tell him that when we are ready we may come to their council to meet their chiefs. Say that only their real chiefs must come, for we will not treat with any but their head men. If they wish to see us soon, let them come to our village here."

"You are chiefs!" said Dorion. "Have I not seen it? I will tell them so."

But Dorion had been gone but a short time when he came hurrying back from the Indian village.

"The runners say plenty buffalo close by," he reported. "The chief, she'll call the people to hunt the buffalo."

William Clark turned to his companion.

“You hear that, Merne?” said he. “Why should we not go also?”

“Agreed!” said Meriwether Lewis. “But stay, I have a thought. We will go as they go and hunt as they do. To impress an Indian, beat him at his own game. You and I must ride this day, Will!”

“Yes, and without saddles, too! Very well, I learned that of my brother, who learned it of the Indians themselves. And I know you and I both can shoot the bow as well as most Indians—that was part of our early education. I might better have been in school sometimes, when I was learning the bow.”

“Dorion,” said Lewis to the interpreter, “go back to the village and tell their chief to send two bows with plenty of arrows. Tell them that we scorn to waste any powder on so small a game as the buffalo. On ahead are animals each one of which is as big as twenty buffalo—we keep our great gun for those. As for buffalo, we kill them as the Indians do, with the bow and with the spear. We shall want the stiffest bows, with sinewed backs. Our arms are very strong.”

Swift and wide spread the word among the Sioux that the white chiefs would run the buffalo with their own warriors. Exclamations of amusement, surprise, satisfaction, were heard. The white men should see how the Sioux could ride. But Weucha, the head man, sent a messenger with two bows and plenty of arrows—short, keen-pointed arrows, suitable for the buffalo hunt, when driven by the stiff bows of the Sioux.

“Strip, Will,” said Meriwether Lewis. “If we ride as savages, it must be in full keeping.”

They did strip to the waist, as the savages always did when running the buffalo—sternest of all savage sport or labor, and one of the boldest games ever played by man, red or white. Clad only in leggings and moccasins, their long hair tied in firm cues, when Weucha met them he exclaimed in admiration. The village turned out in wonder to see these two men whose skins were white, whose hair was not black, but some strange new color—one whose hair was red.

The two young officers were not content with this. York, Captain Clark’s servant, rolling his eyes, showing his white teeth, was ordered to strip up the sleeve of his shirt to show that his hide was neither red nor white, but black—another wonder in that land!

“Now, York, you rascal,” commanded William Clark, “do as I tell you!”

“Yessah, massa Captain, I suttinly will!”

“When I raise this flag, do you drop on the ground and knock your forehead three times. Groan loud—groan as if you had religion, York! Do you understand?”

“Yassah, massa Captain!”

York grinned his enjoyment; and when he had duly executed the maneuver, the Sioux greeted the white men with much acclamation.

“I see that you are chiefs!” exclaimed Weucha. “You have many colors, and your medicine is strong. Take, then, these two horses of mine—they are good runners for buffalo—perhaps yours are not so fast.” Thus Dorion interpreted.

“Now,” said Clark, “suppose I take the lance, Merne, and you handle the bow. I never have tried the trick, but I believe I can handle this tool.”

He picked up and shook in his hand the short lance, steel-tipped, which Weucha was carrying. The latter grinned and nodded his assent, handing the weapon to the red-haired leader.

“Now we shall serve!” said Lewis an instant later; for they brought out two handsome horses, one coal-black, the other piebald, both mettlesome and high-strung.

That the young men were riders they now proved, for they mounted alone, barebacked, and managed to control their mounts with nothing but the twisted hide rope about the lower jaw—the only bridle known among the tribes of the great plains.

The crier now passed down the village street, marshaling all the riders for the chase. Weucha gave the signal to advance, himself riding at the head of the cavalcade, with the two white captains at his side—a picture such as any painter might have envied.

Others of the expedition followed on as might be—Shannon, Gass, the two Fields boys, others of the better hunters of the Kentuckians. Even York, not to be denied, sneaked in at the rear. They all rode quietly at first, with no outcry, no sound save the steady tramp of the horses.

Their course was laid back into the prairie for a mile or two before a halt was

called. Then the chief disposed his forces. The herd was supposed to be not far away, beyond a low rim of hills. On this side the men were ranged in line. A blanket waved from a point visible to all was to be the signal for the charge.

Dorion, also stripped to the waist, a kerchief bound about his head, carrying a short carbine against his thigh, now rode alongside.

“He say Weucha show you how Sioux can ride,” he interpreted.

“Tell him it is good, Dorion,” rejoined Lewis. “We will show him also that we can ride!”

A shout came from the far edge of the restless ranks. A half-naked rider waved a blanket. With shrill shouts the entire line broke at top speed for the ridge.

Neither of the two young Americans had ever engaged in the sport of running the buffalo; yet now the excitement of the scene caused both to forget all else. They urged on their horses, mingling with the savage riders.

The buffalo had been feeding less than a quarter of a mile away; the wind was favorable, and they had not yet got scent of the approach; but now, as the line of horsemen broke across the crest, the herd streamed out and away from them—crude, huge, formless creatures, with shaggy heads held low, their vast bulk making them seem almost like prehistoric things. The dust of their going arose in a blinding cloud, the thunder of their hoofs left inaudible even the shrill cries of the riding warriors as they closed in.

The chase passed outward into an open plain, which lay white in alkali. In a few moments the swift horses had carried the best of the riders deep into the dust-cloud which arose. Each man followed some chosen animal, doing his best to keep it in sight as the herd plowed onward in the biting dust.

Here and there the vast, solid surface of a sea of rolling backs could be glimpsed; again an opening into it might be seen close at hand. It was bold work, and any who engaged in it took his chances.

Lewis found his horse, the black runner that Weucha had given him, as swift as the best, and able to lay him promptly alongside his quarry. At a distance of a few feet he drew back the sinewy string of the tough Sioux bow, gripping his horse with his knees, swaying his body out to the bow, as he well knew how. The shaft, discharged at a distance of but half a dozen feet, sank home with a soft *zut*. The stricken animal swerved quickly toward him, but his wary horse leaped

aside and went on. Such as the work had been, it was done for that buffalo at least, and Lewis knew that he had caught the trick.

The black runner singled out another and yet another; and again and again Lewis shot—until at last, his arrows nearly exhausted, after two or three miles of mad speed, he pulled out of the herd and waited.

In the white dust-cloud, lifted now and then, he could see naked forms swaying, bending forward, plying their weapons. Somewhere in the midst of it, out in the ruck of hoof and horn, his friend was riding, forgetting all else but the excitement of the chase. What if accident had befallen either of them? Lewis could not avoid asking himself that question.

Now the riders edged through the herd, outward, around its flank—turned it, were crowding it back, milling and confused. Out of the dust emerged two figures, naked, leaning forward to the leaping of their horses. One was an Indian, his black locks flowing, his eyes gleaming, his hand flogging his horse as he rode. The other was a white man, his tall white body splashed with blood, his long red hair, broken from his cue, on his shoulders.

The two were pursuing the same animal—a young bull, which thus far had kept his distance some fifty yards or so ahead. But as Lewis looked, both riders urged their horses to yet more speed. The piebald of William Clark, well ridden, sprang away in advance and laid him alongside of the quarry. Lewis himself saw the poised spear—saw it plunge—saw the buffalo stumble in its stride—and saw his companion pass on, whooping in exultation at Weucha, who came up an instant later, defeated, but grinning and offering his hand. Now came Dorion also, out of ammunition, yet not out of speech, excited, jabbering as usual.

“Four nice cow I’ll kill!” gabbled he. “I’ll kill him four tam, bang, bang! Plenty meat for my lodge now. How many you’ll shot, Captain?” he asked of Lewis.

“Plenty—you will find them back there.”

Weucha, who came up after magnanimously shaking the hand of William Clark, peered with curiosity into Lewis’s almost empty quiver. He smiled again, for that the white men had ridden well was obvious enough. He called a young man to him, showed him the arrow-mark, and sent him back to see how many of the dead buffalo showed arrows with similar marks.

In time the messenger came back carrying a sheaf of arrows. Grinning, he held

up the fingers of two hands.

“Tell him that is nothing, Dorion,” said Lewis. “We could have killed many more if we had wished. We see that the Sioux can ride. Now, let us see if they can talk at the council fire!”

The two leaders hastened to their own encampment to remove all traces of the hunt. An hour later they emerged from their tents clad as officers of the army, each in cocked hat and full uniform, with sword at side.

With the fall of the sun, the drums sounded in the Indian village. The criers passed along the street summoning the people to the feast, summoning also the chiefs to the council lodge. Here the head men of the village gathered, sitting about the little fire, the peace pipe resting on a forked stick before them, waiting for the arrival of the white chiefs—who could make the thunder come, who could make a strong chief of black skin beat his head upon the ground; and who, moreover, could ride stripped and strike the buffalo even as the Sioux.

The white leaders were in no haste to show themselves. They demanded the full dignity of their station; but they came at last, their own drum beating as they marched at the head of their men, all of whom were in the uniform of the frontier.

York, selected as standard-bearer, bore the flag at the head of the little band. Meriwether Lewis took it from him as they reached the door of the council lodge, and thrust the staff into the soil, so that it stood erect beside the lance and shield of Weucha, chief of the Yanktonnais. Then, leaving their own men on guard without, the two white chiefs stepped into the lodge, and, with not too much attention to the chiefs sitting and waiting for them, took their own places in the seat of honor. They removed their hats, shook free their hair—which had been loosened from the cues; and so, in dignified silence, not looking about them, they sat, their long locks spread out on their shoulders.

Exclamations of excitement broke even from the dignified Sioux chiefs. Clearly the appearance and the conduct of the two officers had made a good impression. The circle eyed them with respect.

At length Meriwether Lewis, holding in his hand the great peace pipe that he had brought, arose.

“Weucha,” said he, Dorion interpreting for him, “you are head man of the

Yanktonnais. I offer you this pipe. Let us smoke. We are at peace. We are children of the Great Father, and I do not bring war. I have put a flag outside the lodge. It is your flag. You must keep it. Each night you must take it down, roll it up, and put it in a parfleche, so that it will not be torn or soiled. Whenever you have a great feast, or meet other peoples, let it fly at your door. It is because you are a chief that I give you this flag. I gave one to the Omahas, another to the Otoes. Let there be no more war between you. You are under one flag now.

“I give you this medal, Weucha, this picture on white iron. See, it has the picture of the Great Father himself, my chief, who lives where the sun rises. I also give you this writing, where I have made my sign, and where the red-headed chief, my brother, has made his sign. Keep these things, so that any who come here may know that you are our friends, that you are the children of the Great Father.

“Weucha, they told us that the Sioux were bad in heart, that you would say we could not go up the river. Our Great Father has sent us up the river, and we must go. Tomorrow our boats must be on their course. If the Great Father has such medicine as this I give you, do you think we could go back to him and say the Sioux would not let us pass? You have seen that we are not afraid, that we are chiefs—we can do what you can do. Can you do what we can? Can you make the thunder come? Is there any among you who has a black skin, like the man with us? Are any of your men able to strike the eye of a deer, the head of a grouse, at fifty paces with the rifle? All of my men can do that.

“I give you these presents—these lace coats for your great men, these hats also, such as we wear, because you are our brothers, and are chiefs. A little powder, a few balls, I give you, because we think you want them. I give you a little tobacco for your pipes. If my words sound good in your ears, I will send a talking paper to the Great Father, and tell him that you are his children.”

Deep-throated exclamations of approval met this speech. Weucha took the pipe. He arose himself, a tall and powerful man, splendidly clad in savage fashion, and spoke as the born leader that he also was. He pledged the loyalty of the Sioux and the freedom of the river.

“I give you the horse you rode this morning,” said Weucha to Lewis, “the black runner. To you, red-haired chief, I give the white-and-black horse that you rode. It is well that chiefs like you should have good horses.

“Tomorrow our people will go a little way with you up the river. We want you for our friends, for we know your medicine is strong. We know that when we

show this flag to other tribes—to the Otoes, the Omahas, the Osages—they will fall on the ground and knock their heads on the ground, as the black man did when the red-headed chief raised it above him.

“The Great Father has sent us two chiefs who are young but very wise. They can strike the buffalo. They can speak at the council. Weucha, the Yanktonnais, says that they may go on. We know you will not lose the trail. We know that you will come back. You are chiefs!”

# CHAPTER II

## THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER

Late in the night the Yanktonnais drums still sounded, long after a dozen Sioux had spoken, and after the two white chieftains had arisen and left the council fire. The people of the village were feasting around half a hundred fires. The village was joyous, light-hearted, and free of care. The hunt had been successful.

“Look at them, Will,” said Meriwether Lewis, as they paused at the edge of the bluff and turned back for a last glimpse at the savage scene. “They are like children. I swear, I almost believe their lot in life is happier than our own!”

“Tut, tut, Merne—moralizing again?” laughed William Clark, the light-hearted. “Come now, help me get my eelskin about my hair. We may need this red mane of mine further up the river. I trust to take it back home with me, after all, now that we seem safe to pass these Sioux without a fight. I am happy enough that our business today has come out so well. I am a bit tired, and an old bull gave me a smash with his horn this morning; so I am ready to turn into my blankets. Are all the men on the roll tonight?”

“Sergeant Ordway reports Shannon still absent. It seems he went out on the hunt this morning, and has not yet come back. I’ll wait up a time, I think, Will, to see if he comes in. It is rather a wild business for a boy to lie out all night in such a country, with only the wolves for company. Go you to your blankets, as you say. For me, I might be a better sleeper than I am.”

“Yes, that is true,” rejoined Will Clark, rubbing his bruised leg. “It is beginning to show on you, too, Merne. Isn’t it enough to be astronomer and doctor and bookkeeper and record-keeper and all that? No, you think not—you must sit up all night by your little fire under the stars and think and think. Oh, I have seen you, Merne! I have seen you sitting there when you should have been sleeping. Do you call that leadership, Captain Lewis? The men are under you, and if the leader is not fit, the men are not. Now, a human body will stand only so much—or a human mind, either, Merne. There is a limit to effort and endurance.”

His friend turned to him seriously.

“You are right, Will,” said he. “I owe duty to many besides myself.”

“You take things too hard, Merne. You cannot carry the whole world on your shoulders. Look now, I have not been so blind as not to see that something is going wrong with you. Merne, you are ill, or will be. Something is wrong!”

His companion made no reply. They marched on to their own part of the encampment, and seated themselves at the little fire which had been left burning for them.[4]

William Clark went on with his reproving.

“Tell me, Merne, what are you thinking of? It is not that woman?”

He seemed to feel the sudden shrinking of the tall figure at his side.

“I have touched you on the raw once more, haven’t I, Merne?” he exclaimed. “I never meant to. I only want to see you happy.”

“You must not be too uneasy, Will,” returned Meriwether Lewis, at last. “It is only that sometimes at night I lie awake and ponder over things. And the nights themselves are wonderful!”

“Saw you ever such nights, Merne, in all your life? Breathed you ever such air as these plains carry in the nighttime? Why do you not exult—what is it you cannot forget? You don’t really deceive me, Merne. What is it that you *see* when you lie awake at night under the stars? Some face, eh? What, Merne? You mean to tell me you are still so foolish? We left three months ago. I gave you two months for forgetting her—and that is enough! Come, now, perhaps some maid of the Mandans, on ahead, will prove fair enough to pipe to you, or to touch the bull-hide tambourine in such fashion as to charm you from your sorrows! No, don’t be offended—it is only that I want to tell you not to take that old affair too hard. And now, it is time for you to turn in.”

William Clark himself arose and strolled to his own blanket-roll, spread it out, and lay down beneath the sky to sleep. Meriwether Lewis sought to follow his example, and spread open his robe and blankets close to the fire. As he leaned back, he felt something hard and crackling under his hand, and looked down.

It was his custom to carry in his blankets, for safekeeping, his long spyglass, a pair of dry moccasins and a buckskin tunic. These articles were here, as he expected to find them. Yet here among them was a folded and sealed envelope—

a letter! He had not placed it here; yet here it was.

He caught it up in his hand, looked at it wonderingly, kicked the ends of the embers together so that they flamed up, bent forward to read the superscription—and paused in amazement. Well enough he knew the firm, upright, characterful hand which addressed this missive to him:

TO CAPTAIN MERIWETHER LEWIS.—ON THE TRAIL IN THE WEST.

A feeling somewhat akin to awe fell upon Meriwether Lewis. He felt a cold prickling along his spine. It was for him, yes—but whence had it come? There had been no messenger from outside the camp. For one brief instant it seemed, indeed, as if this bit of paper—which of all possible gifts of the gods he would most have coveted—had dropped from the heavens themselves at his feet here in the savage wilderness. His heart had been on the point of breaking, it seemed to him—and it had come to comfort him! It was from her. It ran thus:

Dear Sir and Friend:

Greetings to you, wherever you may be when this shall find you. Are you among the Gauls, the Goths, the Visigoths, the Huns, the Vandals, or the Cimbri? Wherever you be, our hopes and faith go with you. You are, as I fancy, in a desert, a wilderness, worth no man's owning. Life passes meantime. To what end, my friend?

I fancy you in the deluge, in the hurricane, in the blaze of the sun, or in the bleak winds, alone, cheerless, perhaps athirst, perhaps knowing hunger. I know that you will meet these things like a man. But to what end—what is the purpose of all this? You have left behind you all that makes life worth while—fortune, fame, life, ambition, honor—to go away into the desert. At what time are you going to turn back and come to us once more?

Oh, if only I had the right—if only I dared—if only I were in a position to lay some command on you to bring you back! Methinks then I would. You could do so much for us all—so much for me. It would mean so much to my own happiness if you were here.

Meriwether Lewis, come back! You have gone far enough. On ahead are only cruel hardship and continual failure. Here are fortune, fame, wealth, ambition, honor—and more. I told you one time I would lay my hand upon your shoulder out yonder, no matter where you were. I said that you should look into my face yonder when you sat alone beside your fire under the stars. You said that it would be torment. I said that none the less I would not let you go. I said my face still should stay with you, until you were willing to turn back.

Turn back *now*, Meriwether Lewis! Come back!

The letter was not signed, and needed not to be. Meriwether Lewis sat staring at the paper clutched in his hand.

Her face! Ah, did he not see it now? Was it not true what she had said? He saw her face now—but not smiling, happy, contented, as it once had been. No, he saw it pale and in distress. He saw tears in her eyes. And she had written him:

Oh, if only I had the right to lay some command on you!

Was not he, who had forgotten honor, subject now to any command that she might give him?

"Will, Will!" exclaimed Meriwether Lewis, sharply, imperatively, to his friend, whom he could see dimly at a little distance as he lay.

The long figure in its robes straightened quickly, for by day or night William Clark was instantly ready for any sudden alarm. He started up on his robe, with his hand on his rifle.

"Who calls there? Who goes?" he cried, half awake.

"It is I, Will," said Meriwether Lewis, advancing toward him. "Listen—tell me, Will, why did you do this?"

"Why did I do what? Merne, what is wrong?"

Clark was now on his feet, and Lewis held out the letter to him. He took it in his hand, looked at it wonderingly.

"This letter——" began Meriwether Lewis. "Certainly you carried it for me—why did you not bring it to me long ago?"

"What letter? Whose letter is it, Merne? I never saw it before. What is it you are saying? Are you mad?"

"I think so," said Lewis, "I think I must be. Here is a letter—I found it but now in my bed. I thought perhaps you had had it for me a long time, and placed it there as a surprise."

"Who sends it, Merne. What does it say?"

"It is from the woman whose face I have seen at night, Will. She asks me to

come back!”

“Burn it—throw it in the fire!” said William Clark sharply. “Go back? What, forsake Mr. Jefferson—leave me?”

“God forgive me, Will, but you search my very heart! For one moment I was on the point of declaring myself too ill to finish this journey—on the point of letting you have all the honor of it. I was going to surrender my place to you.”

“You cannot desert us, Merne! You shall not! Go back to bed! Give me the letter! Bah! it is some counterfeit, some trick of one of the men!”

“It would be worth any man’s life to try a jest like that,” said Meriwether Lewis. “It is no counterfeit. I know it too well. This letter was written before we left St. Louis. How it came here I know not, but I know who wrote it.”

“She had no right——”

“Ah, but that is the cruelty of it—she *did* have the right!”

“There are some things which a man must work out for himself,” said William Clark slowly, after a time. “I don’t think I’ll ask any questions. If there is any place where I can take half your burden, you know what I will do. We’ve worked share and share alike, but perhaps some things cannot be shared, even by you and me. It is for you to tell me if I can help you now. If not, then you must decide.”

Even as he spoke, his beloved friend was turning away from him. Meriwether Lewis walked out alone into the night. Stumbling, he passed on out among the shadows, under the starlight. Without much plan, he found himself on a little eminence of the bluff near by.

He sat down, his blanket drawn over his head, like an Indian, motionless, thinking, fighting out his own fight, as sometimes a man must, alone. He did not know that William Clark, most faithful of friends, himself silent as a Sioux, had followed, and sat a little distance apart, his eyes fixed on the motionless figure outlined against the sky.

The dawn came at last and kindled a red band along the east. The gray light at length grew more clear. A coyote on the bluff raised a long and quavering cry, like some soul in torture. As if it were his own voice, Meriwether Lewis stirred, rose, drew back the blanket from his shoulders, and turned down the hill.

He saw his friend rising and advancing to him. Once more their hands gripped, as they had when the two first met on the Ohio, almost a year ago, at the beginning of their journey.

Lewis frowned heavily. He could not speak for a time.

“Give the orders to the men to roll out, Captain Clark,” said he at length.

“Which way, Captain Lewis—upstream or down?”

“The expedition will go forward, Captain Clark.”

“God bless you, Merne!” said the red-headed one.

# CHAPTER III

## THE DAY'S WORK

“

Roll out, men, roll out!”

The sleeping men stirred under their robes and blankets and turned out, quickly awake, after the fashion of the wilderness. The sentinel came in, his moccasins wet, his tunic girded tight against the cool of the morning, which even at that season was chill upon the high plains. Soon the fires were alight and the odors of roasting meat arose. The hour was scarce yet dawn.

“Ordway! Gass! Pryor!” Lewis called in the sergeants in charge of the three messes. “The boy Shannon has not returned. Which of your men, Ordway, will best serve to find Shannon and meet us up the river?”

“Myself, sir,” said Ordway, “if you please.”

“No, ’tis meself, sor,” interrupted Patrick Gass.

Pryor, with hand outstretched, also claimed the honor of the difficult undertaking.

“You three are needed in the boats,” said the leader. “No, I think it will be better to send Drouillard and the two Fields boys. But tell me, Sergeant Ordway——”

“Yes, sir!”

“Has any boat passed up the river within the last day—for instance, while we were away at the hunt?”

“I think not, sir. Surely any one coming up the river would have turned in at our camp.”

Lewis turned to Gass, to Pryor; but both agreed that no boat could have gone by unnoticed.

“And no man has come into the camp from below—no horseman?”

They all shook their heads. Their leader looked from one to the other keenly, trying to see if anything was concealed from him; but the honest faces of his men showed no suspicion of his own doubts.

He dismissed them, feeling it beneath his dignity to make inquiry as to the bearer of the mysterious letter; nor did he mention it again to William Clark. He knew only that some one of his men had a secret from his commander.

"The men will find Shannon and bring him in ahead—we can't afford to wait here for them. The water is falling now," said Clark. "We are doing our twenty miles daily. The men laugh on the line, for the bars are exposed, and they can track along shore easily. Suppose Shannon were out three days—that would make it sixty miles upstream—or less, for him, for he could cut the bends. I make no doubt that when he found himself out for the night he started up the river; even before this time. *En avant*, Cruzatte!" he called. "You shall lead the line for the first draw. Make it lively for an hour! Sing some song, Cruzatte, if you can—some song of old Kaskaskia."

"Sure, the Frenchmans, she'll lead on the line this morning, *Capitaine*! I'll put nine, seven Frenchmans on the line, and she'll run on the bank on her bare feet two hour—one hour. This buffalo meat, she make Frenchmans strong like nothing!"

"Go on, Frenchy!" said Patrick Gass, Cruzatte's sergeant, who stood near by. "Wait until time comes for my squad on the line—'tis thin we'll make the elkhide hum! There's a few of the Irish along."

"Ho!" said Ordway, usually silent. "Wait rather for us Yankees—we'll show you what old Vermont can do!"

"As to that," said Pryor, "belike the Ohio and Kentucky men could serve a turn as well as the Irish or the French. Old Kaintuck has to help out the others, the way she did in the French and Indian War!"

"Well," broke in Peter Weiser, joining them as they argued, "I am from Pennsylvania; but I am half Virginian, and there are some others from the Old Dominion. When you are all done, call on us—ole Virginny never tires!"

The contagion of their light-heartedness, their loyalty and devotion, came as solace to the heart of Meriwether Lewis. He smiled in spite of himself, his eye kindling with confidence and admiration as he looked over his men.

They were stripping for their day’s work, ready for mud or water or sun, as the case might be. Amidships, on the highest locker on the barge, one of the Kentuckians was flapping his arms lustily and giving the cockcrow, the river challenge of frontier days. Others seated themselves at the long sweeps of the barge, while yet others were manning the pirogues.

A few moments later, with joyous shouts, they were on their way once more—and not setting their faces toward home. In an hour they were above the first long bend. The wilderness had closed behind them. No trace of the Indian village was left, no sight of the lingering smoke of their last camp fires.

Faithfully, patiently, day by day, they held their way, sustained by the renewed fascination of adventure, hardened and inured to risk and toil alike. The distance behind them lengthened so enormously that they began to figure upon the unknown rather than the known.

“We surely must be almost across now!” said some of the men.

All of them were sore distressed over the loss of Shannon. Two weeks had passed since they left the Yankton Sioux, and four times the faithful trailers had come back to the boats with no trace of the missing one.

“It certainly is in the off chance now,” assented William Clark seriously, one day as they lay in the noon encampment. “But perhaps he may be among the natives somewhere, and we may hear of him when we come back—if ever we do.”

“If he got by the Teton Sioux, and kept on up the river, in time he would find us somewhere among the Mandans,” said Meriwether Lewis. “But we will try once more before we give him up. Send a man to the top of the bluff with my spyglass.”

Busy in their labors over their maps, and in the recording of their compass bearings, for half an hour they forgot their messenger, until a shout called their attention. He was waving his hands, wildly beckoning. Yonder, alone in the plains, bewildered, hopeless, wandering, was the lost man, who did not even know that the river was close at hand! Shannon’s escape from a miserable fate was but one more instance of the almost miraculous good fortune which seemed to attend the expedition.

“And she was lucky man, too!” said Drouillard, a half-hour later, nodding toward the opposite shore. “Suppose he is on that side, she’ll not go in today!”

“Two weeks on his foot!”

They looked where he pointed. Red men, mounted, were visible, a dozen of them, motionless, on the rim of the farther bank, watching the explorers as they began to make ready for their journey. Lewis turned his great field glass in that direction.

“Sioux!” said he. “They are painted, too. I fancy,” he added, as he turned toward his associates, “that this must be Black Buffalo’s band of Tetons you’ve told us about, Drouillard.”

“*Oui, oui*, the Teton!” exclaimed Drouillard. “I’ll not spoke his language, me; but she’ll be bad Sioux. *Prenez garde, Capitaine, prenez garde pour ces sauvages, les Sioux!*”

And indeed this warning proved well founded. More Indians gathered in toward the shore that afternoon, riding along, parallel with the course of the boats, whooping, shouting to the boatmen. At nightfall there were a hundred of them assembled—painted warriors, decked in all their savage finery, bold men, showing no fear of the newcomers.

The white men went about their camp duties in a mingling of figures, white and red. Lewis lined up his men, beat his drums, fired the great swivel piece to impress the savages.

“Bring out the flag, Will,” said he. “Put up our council awning. I’ll have a parley with their head man. Can you make him out, Drouillard?”

“He’ll said he was Black Buffalo,” replied the Frenchman. “I don’t understand him very good.”

“Take him these things, Drouillard,” said Lewis. “Give him a lace coat and hat, a red feather, some tobacco, and this medal. Tell him that when we get ready we’ll make a talk with him.”

But Black Buffalo and his men were not in the mood to wait for their parley. They crowded down to the bank angrily, excitedly, even after they had received the presents sent them. Lewis, busy about the barge, which had not yet found a good landing-place, turned at the sound of his friend’s voice, to see Clark struggling in the grasp of two or three of the Sioux, among them the Teton chief. A savage had his hand flung about the mast of the pirogue, others laid hold upon the painter. Clark, flushed and angry at the touch of another man’s hand, had

whipped out his sword, and the Indians were drawing their bows from their cases.

At that moment Lewis gave a loud order, which arrested them all. The Sioux turned toward the barge, to see the black mouth of the great swivel gun pointing at them—the gun whose thunder voice they had heard.

“Big medicine!” called out Black Buffalo in terror, and ordered his men back.

Clark offered his hand to Black Buffalo, but it was refused. Angry, he sprang into the pirogue and pushed off for the barge. Three of the Indians stepped into the pirogue with him, jabbering excitedly, and, with Clark, went aboard the barge, where they made themselves very much at home.

“*Croyez moi!*” ejaculated Drouillard. “These Hinjun, she’ll think he own this country!”

Here, then, they were, in the Teton country. No sleep that night for either of the leaders, nor for any of the men. They pulled the pirogues alongside the barge and sat, barricaded behind their goods, rifle in hand.

They kept their visitors prisoners all that night, and whatever might have been the construction the Tetons placed on their act, they themselves by dawn were far more placable. Continually they motioned that the whites should come ashore, that they must stop, that they must not go on further up the river. But when all was prepared for the start on the following morning, Lewis ordered the great cable of the barge cast off.

Black Buffalo in turn ordered his men to lay hold upon it and retain the boat. Once more the Indians began to draw their bows. Once more Lewis turned upon them the muzzle of his cannon. His men shook the priming into their pieces, and made ready to fire. An instant, and much blood might have been shed.

“Black Buffalo,” said Lewis, as best he might through his interpreter, “I heard you were a chief. You are not Black Buffalo, but some squaw! We are going to see if we can find Black Buffalo, the real chief. If he were here, he would accept our tobacco. The geese are flying down the river. Soon the snow will come. We cannot wait. See, I give you this tobacco on the prairie. Go and see if you can find Black Buffalo, the real chief!”

“Ha!” exclaimed the Teton leader, his dignity outraged. “You say I am not Black Buffalo—that I am not a chief. I will show you!”

He caught the twists of good black Virginia tobacco tossed to him, and cast the rope far from him upon the tawny flood of the Missouri. An instant later the oars had caught the water and Cruzatte had spread the bowsail of the barge. So they won through one more of the most dangerous of the tribes against whom they had been warned.

“A near thing, Merne!” said Will Clark after a time. “There is some mighty Hand that seems to guide us—is it not the truth?”

# CHAPTER IV

## THE CROSSROADS OF THE WEST

The geese were now indeed flying down the river, coming in long, dark lines out of the icy north. Sometimes the sky was overcast hours at a stretch. A new note came into the voice of the wind. The nights grew colder.

Autumn was at hand. Soon it would be winter—winter on the plains. It was late in October, more than five months out from St. Louis, when Mr. Jefferson's "Volunteers for the Discovery of the West" arrived in the Mandan country.

Long ago war and disease wiped out the gentle Mandan people. Today two cities stand where their green fields once showed the first broken soil north of the Platte River. But a century ago that region, although little known to our government at Washington, was not unknown to others. The Mandan villages lay at a great wilderness crossroads, or rather at the apex of a triangle, beyond which none had gone.

Hereabout the Sieur de la Verendrye had crossed on his own journey of exploration two generations earlier. More lately the emissaries of the great British companies, although privately warring with one another, had pushed west over the Assiniboine. Traders had been among the Mandans now for a decade. Thus far came the Western trail from Canada, and halted.

The path of the Missouri also led thus far, but here, at the intersection, ended all the trails of trading or traveling white men. Therefore, Lewis and Clark found white men located here before them—McCracken, an Irishman; Jussaume, a Frenchman; Henderson, an Englishman; La Roque, another Frenchman—all over from the Assiniboine country; and all, it hardly need be said, excited and anxious over this wholly unexpected arrival of white strangers in their own trading-limits.

Big White, chief of the Mandans, welcomed the new party as friends, for he was quick to grasp the advantage the white men's goods gave his people over the neighboring tribes, and also quick to understand the virtue of competition.

"Brothers," said he, "you have come for our beaver and our robes. As for us, we

want powder and ball and more iron hatchets and knives. We have traded with the Assiniboines, who are foolish people, and have taken all their goods away from them. We have killed the Rees until we are tired of killing them. The Sioux will not trouble us if we have plenty of powder and ball. We know that you have come to trade with us. See, the snow is here. Light your lodge fires with the Mandans. Stay here until the grass comes once more!"

"We open our ears to what Big White has said," replied Lewis—speaking through Jussaume, the Frenchman, who soon was added as interpreter to the party. "We are the children of a Great Father in the East, who gives you this medal with his picture on it. He sends you this coat, this hat of a chief. He gives you this hatchet, this case of tobacco. There are other hatchets and more tobacco for your people."

"What Great Father is that?" demanded Big White. "It seems there are many Great Fathers in these days! Who are you strangers, who come from so far?"

"You yourself shall judge, Big White. When the geese fly up the river and the grass is green, our great boat here is going back down the river. The Great Father is curious to know his children, the Mandans. If you, Big White, wish to go to see him when the grass is green, you shall sit yonder in that boat and go all the way with some of my men. You shall shake his hand. When you come back, you can tell the story to your own people. Then all the tribes will cease to wage war. Your women once more may take off their moccasins at night when they sleep."

"It is good," said the Mandan. "*Ahaie!* Come and stay with us until the grass is green, and I will make medicine over what you say. We will open our lodges to you, and will not harm you. Our young women will carry you corn which they have saved for the winter. Our squaws will feed your horses. Go no farther, for the snow and ice are coming fast. Even the buffalo will be thin, and the elk will grow so lean that they will not be good to eat. This is as far as the white men ever come when the grass is green. Beyond this, no man knows the trails."

"When the grass is green," said Lewis, "I shall lead my young men toward the setting sun. We shall make new trails."

Jussaume, McCracken, and all the others held their own council with the leaders of the expedition.

"What are you doing here?" they demanded. "The Missouri has always belonged to the British traders."

The face of Meriwether Lewis flushed with anger.

“We are about the business of our government,” he said. “It is our purpose to discover the West beyond here, all of it. It is our own country that we are discovering. We have bought it and paid for it, and will hold it. We carry the news of the great purchase to the natives.”

“Purchase? What purchase?” demanded McCracken.

And then the face of Lewis lightened, for he knew that they had outrun all the news of the world!

“The Louisiana Purchase—the purchase of all this Western country from the Mississippi to the Pacific, across the Stony Mountains. We bought it from Napoleon, who had it from Spain. We are the wedge to split the British from the South—the Missouri is our own pathway into our own country. That is our business here!”

“You must go back!” said the hot-headed Irishman. “I shall tell my factor, Chaboillez, at Fort Assiniboine. We want no more traders here. This is our country!”

“We do not come to trade,” said Meriwether Lewis. “We play a larger game. I know that the men of the Northwest Company have found the Arctic Ocean—you are welcome to it until we want it—we do not want it now. I know you have found the Pacific somewhere above the Columbia—we do not want what we have not bought or found for ourselves, and you are welcome to that. But when you ask us to turn back on our own trail, it is a different matter. We are on our own soil now, and we will not turn for any order in the world but that of the President of the United States!”

McCracken, irritated, turned away from the talk.

“It is a fine fairy tale they tell us!” said he to his fellows.

Drouillard came a moment later to his chief.

“Those men she’ll take her dog-team for Assiniboine now—maybe so one hundred and fifty miles that way. He’ll told his factor now, on the Assiniboine post.”

Lewis smiled.

“Tell him to take this letter to his factor, Drouillard,” said he. “It is a passport given me by Mr. Thompson, representing Mr. Merry, of the British Legation at Washington. I have fifty other passports, better ones, each good at a hundred yards. If Mr. Chaboillez wishes to find us, he can do so. If we have gone, let him come after us in the spring.”

“My faith,” said Jussaume, the Frenchman, “you come a long way! Why you want to go more farther West? But, listen, *Monsieur Capitaine*—the Englishman, he’ll go to make trouble for you. He is going for send word to Rocheblave, the most boss trader on Lake Superior, on Fort William. They are going for send a man to beat you over the mountain—I know!”

“’Tis a long road from here to the middle of Lake Superior’s north shore,” said Meriwether Lewis. “It will be a long way back from there in the spring. While they are planning to start, already we shall be on our way.”

“I know the man they’ll send,” went on Jussaume. “Simon Fraser—I know him. Long time he’ll want to go up the Saskatchewan and over the mountain on the ocean.”

“We’ll race Mr. Fraser to the ocean,” said Meriwether Lewis; “him or any other man. While he plans, we shall be on our way!”

Well enough the Northern traders knew the meaning of this American expedition into the West. If it went on, all the lower trade was lost to Great Britain forever. The British minister, Merry, had known it. Aaron Burr had known it. This expedition must be stopped! That was the word which must go back to Montreal, back to London, along the trail which ended here at the crossroads of the Missouri.

“The red-headed young man is not so bad,” said one of the white news-bearers at the Assiniboine post. “He is willing to parley, and he seems disposed to be amiable. But the other, the one named Lewis—I can do nothing with him. For some reason he seems to be hostile to the British interests. He speaks well, and is a man of presence and education, but he is bitter against us, and I cannot handle him. We must use force to stop that man!”

“Agreed, then!” said his master, laughing lustily, for, safe in his own sanctuary, he had not seen these men himself. “We shall use force, as we have before. We will excite the savages against them this winter. If they will listen to us, and turn back in the spring—all of them, not part of them—very well. If they will not

listen to reason, then we shall use such means as we need to stop them.”

Of this conversation the two young American officers, one of Virginia, the other of Kentucky, knew nothing at all. But they held council of their own, as was their fashion—a council of two, sitting by their camp fire; and while others talked, they acted.

Before November was a week old, the axes were ringing among the cottonwoods. The men were carrying big logs toward the cleared space shown to them, and while Meriwether Lewis worked at his journal and his scientific records, William Clark, born soldier and born engineer, was going forward with his little fortress.

Trenches were cut, the logs were ended up—taller pickets than any one of that country ever had seen before. A double row of cabins was built inside the stockade. A great gate was furnished, proof against assault. A bastion was erected in one corner, mounting the swivel piece so that it might be fired above the top of the wall. A little more work of chinking the walls, of flooring the cabins, of making chimneys of wattle and clay—and *presto*, before the winter had well settled down, the white explorers were housed and fortified and ready for what might come.

The Mandans sat and watched them in wonder. Jussaume, the French trader, shook his head. In all his experience on the trail he had seen nothing savoring quite so much of preparedness and celerity.

Among all the posts to the northward and eastward the word went out, carried by dog runners.

“They have built a great house of tall logs,” said the Indians. “They have put the thing that thunders on top of the wall. They never sleep. Each day they exercise with their rifles under their arms. They have long knives on their belts. They carry hatchets that are sharp enough to shave bark. Their medicine is strong!

“They write down the words of the Mandans and the Minnetarees in their books. They are taking skins of the antelope and the bighorn and the deer, even skins of the prairie-grouse and the badger and the prairie-dog—everything they can get. They dry these, to make some sort of medicine of them. They cut off pieces of wood and bark. They put the dirt which burns in little sacks. They make pictures and make the talking papers—all the time they work at something, the two chiefs. They have a black man with them who cannot be washed white—they

have stained him with some medicine of their own. He makes sounds like a buffalo, and he says that the white man made him as he is and will do us that way. We would like to kill them, but they have made their house too strong!

“They never sleep. In the daytime and in the nighttime, no matter how cold it is, one man, two men, walk up and down inside the wall. They have carried their boats up out of the water—two boats, a great one and two small. All through the woods they are cutting down the largest trees, and out of the straight logs they are making more boats, more boats, as many as there are fingers on one hand. They have axes that cast much larger chips than any we ever saw. We fear these men, because they do not fear us. We do not know what to think. They are men who never sleep. Before the sun is up we find them writing or making large chips with their axes, or hunting in the woods—not a day goes by that their hunters do not bring in elk and deer and buffalo. They do not fear us.

“We have seen no men like these. They are chiefs, and their medicine is strong!”

# CHAPTER V

## THE APPEAL

“

Well done, Will Clark!” said Meriwether Lewis, when, at length, one cold winter morning, they stood within the walls of the completed fortress. “Now we can have our own fireplace and go on with our work in comfort. The collection is growing splendidly!”

“Yes, Mr. Jefferson will find that we have been busy,” rejoined Clark. “The barge will go down well loaded in the spring. They’ll have the best of it—downhill, and over country they have crossed.”

“True,” mused Lewis. “We are at a blank wall here. We lack a guide now, that is sure. Two interpreters we have, who may or may not be of use, but no one knows the country. But now—you know our other new interpreter, the sullen chap, Charbonneau—that polygamous scamp with two or three Indian wives?”

“Yes, and a surly brute he is!”

“Well, it seems that last summer Charbonneau married still another wife, a girl not over sixteen years of age, I should judge. He bought her—she was a slave, a captive brought down from somewhere up the river by a war-party. She is a pleasant girl, and always smiles. She seems friendly to us—see the moccasins she made for me but now. And I only had to knock her husband down once for beating her!”

“Lucky man!” grinned William Clark. “I have knocked him down half a dozen times, and she has made me no moccasins at all. But what then?”

“So far as I can learn, that Indian girl is the only human being here who has ever seen the Stony Mountains. The girl says that she was taken captive years ago somewhere near the summit of the Stony Mountains. Above here a great river comes in, which they call the Yellow Rock River—the ‘Ro’jaune,’ Jussaume calls it. Very well. Many days’or weeks’ journey toward the west, this river comes again within a half-day’s march of the Missouri. That is near the summit

of the mountains; and this girl’s people live there.”

“By the Lord, Merne, you’re a genius for getting over new country!”

“Wait. I find the child very bright—very clear of mind. And listen, Will—the mind of a woman is better for small things than that of a man. They pick up trifles and hang on to them. I’d as soon trust that girl for a guide out yonder as any horse-stealing warrior in a hurry to get into a country and in a hurry to get out of it again. Raiding parties cling to the river-courses, which they know; but she and her people must have been far to the west of any place these adventurers of the Minnetarees ever saw. Sacajawea she calls herself—the ‘Bird Woman.’ I swear I look upon that name itself as a good omen! She has come back like a dove to the ark, this Bird Woman. William Clark, we shall reach the sea—or, at least, you will do so, Will,” he concluded.

“What do you mean, Merne? Surely, if I do, you will also!”

“I cannot be sure.”

The florid face of William Clark showed a frown of displeasure.

“You are not as well as you should be—you work too much. That is not just to Mr. Jefferson, Merne, nor to our men, nor to me.”

“It was for that reason I took you on. Doesn’t a man have two lungs, two arms, two limbs, two eyes? We are those for Mr. Jefferson—even crippled, the expedition will live. You are as my own other hand. I exult to see you every morning smiling out of your blankets, hopeful and hungry!”

Meriwether Lewis turned to his colleague with the sweet smile which sometimes his friends saw.

“You see, I am a fatalist,” he went on. “Ah, you laugh at me! My people must have been owners of the second sight, I have often told you. Humor me, Will, bear with me. Don’t question me too deep. Your flag, Will, I know will be planted on the last parapet of life—you were born to succeed. For myself, I still must remember what my mother told me—something about the burden which would be too heavy, the trail which would be long. At times I doubt.”

“Confound it, Merne, you have not been yourself since you got that accursed letter in the night last summer!”

“It was unsettling, I don’t deny.”

“I pray Heaven you’ll never get another!” said William Clark. “From a married woman, too! Thank God I’ve no such affair on my mind!”

“It is taboo, Will—that one thing!”

And Clark, growling anathemas on all women, stalked away to find his axmen.

The snows had come soft and deep, blown on the icy winds. The horses of the Mandans were housed in the lodges, and lived on cottonwood instead of grass. When the vast herds of buffalo came down from the broken hills into the shelter of the flats, the men returned frostbitten with their loads of meat. The sky was dark. The days were short.

To improve the morale of their men, the leaders now planned certain festivities for them. On Christmas Eve each man had his stocking well stuffed with such delicacies as the company stores afforded—pepper, salt, dried fruits long cherished in the commissary, such other knickknacks as might be spared.

On Christmas Day Drouillard brought out a fiddle. A dance was ordered, and went on all day long on the puncheon floor of the main cabin. In moccasins and leggings, with hair long and tunics belted close to their lean waists, the white men danced to the tunes of their own land—the reels and hoedowns of old Virginia and Kentucky.

The sounds of revelry were heard by the Mandans who came up to the gate.

“White men make a medicine dance,” they said, and knocked for entrance.

Two women only were present—the wife of Jussaume, the squaw man, and Sacajawea, the girl wife of Charbonneau, the interpreter of the Mandans. These two had many presents.

The face of Sacajawea was wreathed in smiles. Always her eyes followed the tall form of Meriwether Lewis wherever he went. Her own husband was but her husband, and already she had elected Meriwether Lewis as her deity. When her husband thrashed her, always he thrashed her husband.

In her simple child’s soul she consecrated herself to the task which he had assigned her. Yes, when the grass came she would take these white men to her own people. If they wanted to see the salt waters far to the west—her people had

heard of that—then they should go there also. The Bird Woman was very happy that Christmas Day. The chief had thrashed Charbonneau and had given her wonderful presents!

All the men danced but one—the youth Shannon, who once more had met misfortune. While hewing with the broadax at one of the canoes, he had had the misfortune to slash his foot, so must lie in his bunk and watch the others.

"Keep the men going, Will," said Meriwether Lewis. "I'll go to my room and get forward some letters which I want to write—to my mother and to Mr. Jefferson. At least I can date them Christmas Day, although Providence alone knows when they may be despatched or received!"

He returned to his own quarters, where he had erected a little desk at which he sometimes worked, and sat down. For a moment he remained in thought, as the sound of the dancing still came to him, glad to find his men so happy. At length he spread open the back of his little leather writing-case, unscrewed his ink-horn and set it safe, drew his keen hunting-knife, and put a point upon a goose-quill pen. Then he put away the many written pages which still lay in the portfolio, the product of his daily labors.

Searching for fair white paper, his eye caught sight of a sealed and folded letter, apparently long unnoticed here among the written and unwritten sheets. In a flash he knew what it was! Once more the blood in his veins seemed to stop short.

> TO CAPTAIN MERIWETHER LEWIS, IN CHARGE OF THE VOLUNTEERS FOR THE DISCOVERY OF THE WEST.—ON THE TRAIL.

He knew what hand had written the words. For one short instant he had a mad impulse to cast the letter into the fire. Then there came over him once more the feeling which oppressed him all his life—that he was a helpless instrument in the hands of fate. He broke the seal—not noticing as he did so that it had a number scratched into the wax—and read the letter, which ran thus:

> SIR AND FRIEND:
>
> I know not where these presents may find you, or in what case. Once more I keep my promise not to let you go. Once more you shall see my face—see, it is looking up at you from the page! Tell me, do you

see me now before you?

Are other faces of women in your mind? Have they lost themselves as women's faces so often—so soon—are lost from a man's mind? Can you see me, Meriwether Lewis, your childhood friend?

Do you remember the time you saved me from the cows in the lane at your father's farm, when I was but a child, on my first visit to far-off Virginia? You kissed me then, to dry my tears. You were a boy; I was a child yet younger. Can you forget that time—can you forget what you said?

"I will always be there, Theodosia," you said, "when you are in trouble!"

You said it stoutly, and I believed it, as a child.

I believed you then—I believe you now. I still have the same child's faith in you. My mother died while I was young; my father has always been so busy—I scarcely have been a girl, as you say you never were a boy. You know my husband—he has his own affairs. But you always were my friend, in so many ways!

It is true that I am laying a secret on your heart—one which you must observe all your life. My letter is for you, and for no other eyes. But now I come once more to you to hold you to your promise.

*Meriwether Lewis, come back to us!* By this time the trail surely is long enough! We are counting absolutely on your return. I heard Mr. Merry tell my father—and I may tell it to you—that on your recall rested all hope of the success of our own cause on the lower Mississippi—for ourselves and for you. If you do not come back to us, as early as you can, you condemn us to failure—myself—my life—that of my father—yourself also.

Perhaps your delay may mean even more, Meriwether Lewis. I have to tell you that times are threatening for this republic. Relations between our country and Great Britain are strained to the breaking-point. Mr. Merry says that if our cause on the lower Mississippi shall not prevail, his own country, as soon as it can finish with Napoleon, will come against this republic once more—both on the Great Lakes

and at the mouth of the Mississippi. He says that your expedition into the West will split the country, if it goes on. It must be withdrawn or the gap must be mended by war. You see, then, one of the sure results of this mad folly of Thomas Jefferson.

Go on, therefore, if you would ruin me, my father—your own future; but will you go on if you face possible ruin *for your own country* by so doing? This I leave for you to say.

Surely by now the main object of your expedition will have been accomplished—surely you may return with all practical results of your labors in your hands. Were that not a wiser thing? Does not your duty lie toward the east, and not further toward the west? There is a limit beyond which not even a forlorn hope is asked to go when it assails a citadel. Not every general is dishonored, though he does not complete the campaign laid out for him. Expeditions have failed, and will fail, with honor. Leaders of men have failed, will fail, with honor. I do not call it failure for you to return to us and let the expedition go on. There is a limit to what may be asked of a man. There are two of you for Mr. Jefferson; but for us there is only one—it is Captain Lewis. And—how shall I say it and not be misunderstood?—there is but one for her whose face you see, I hope, on this page.

What limit is there to the generosity of a man like you—what limit to his desire to pay each duty, to keep each promise that he has made in all his life? Will such a man forget his promise always to kiss away the tears of that companion to whom he has come in rescue? I am in trouble. Tears are in my eyes as I write. Do you forget that promise? Do you wish to make yet happier the woman whom you have so many times made happy—who has cherished so much ambition for you?

Meriwether Lewis, my friend—you who would have been my lover—for whom there is no hope, since fate has been so unkind—come back to us in your generosity! Come back to me, even in your hopelessness! Will you always see me with tears in my eyes? Do you see me now? I swear tears fall even as I write. And you promised always to kiss my tears away!

> Farewell until I see you again. May good fortune attend you always, wherever you go—in whatever direction you may travel—from us or toward us—from me or with me!

Meriwether Lewis sat, his face between his hands, staring down at what he saw. Should he go on, or should he hand over all to William Clark and return—return to keep his promise—return to comfort, as best he might, with the gift of all his life, that face which indeed he had left in tears by an unpardonable act of his own?

He owed her everything she could ask of him. What must she think of him now—that he was not only a dishonorable man, but also a coward running away from the responsibility of what he had done? No blow from the hands of fate could have given him more exquisite agony than this.

For a long time—he never knew how long—he sat thus, staring, pondering, but at length with sudden energy he rose and flung open the door of the dancing-room.

"Will!" he called to his companion.

When William Clark joined his friend in the outer air, he saw the open letter in Lewis's hand—saw also the distress upon his countenance.

"Merne, it's another letter from that woman! I wish I had her here, that I might wring her neck!" said William Clark viciously. "Who brought it?"

"I don't know."

Meriwether Lewis was folding up the letter. He placed it in the pocket of his coat with its fellow, received months ago.

"Will," said he at length, "don't you recall what I was telling you this very morning? I felt something coming—I felt that fate had something more for me. You know I spoke in doubt."

"Listen, Merne!" replied William Clark. "There is no woman in the world worth the misery this one has put on you. It is a thing execrable, unspeakable!"

His friend looked him steadily in the eyes.

"Rebuke not her, but me!" he said. "This letter asks me to come back to kiss away a woman's tears. Will, I was the cause of those tears. I can tell you no

more. What *I* did was a thing execrable, unspeakable—I, your friend, did that!”

William Clark, more genuinely troubled than ever in his life before, was dumb.

“My future is forfeited, Will,” went on the same even, dull voice, which Clark could scarcely recognize; “but I have decided to go on through with you.”

# CHAPTER VI

## WHICH WAY?

“

Which way, Will?” asked Meriwether Lewis. “Which is the river? If we miss many guesses, the British will beat us through. Which is our river here?”

They stood at the junction of the Yellowstone with the Missouri, and faced one of the first of their great problems. It was spring once more. The geese were flying northward again; the grass was green. Three weeks ago the ice had run clear, and they had left their winter quarters among the Mandans.

Five months they had spent at the Mandan village; for five months they had labored to reach that place; for five months, or more, they had lain at St. Louis. Time was passing. As Meriwether Lewis said, few wrong guesses could be afforded.

Early in April the great barge, manned by ten men, had set out down stream, carrying with it the proof of the success of the expedition. It bore many new things, precious things, things unknown to civilization. Among these were sixty specimens of plants, as many of minerals and earth, weapons of the Indians, examples of their clothing, specimens of the corn and other vegetables which they raised, horns of the bighorn and the antelope—both animals then new to science—antlers of the deer and elk, stuffed specimens, dried skins, herbs, fruits, flowers; and with all these the broken story of a new geography—the greatest story ever sent out for publication by any man or men; and all done in Homeric simplicity.

As the great barge had started down the river, the two pirogues which had come so far, joined by the cottonwood dugouts laboriously fabricated during the winter months, had started up the river, manned by thirty-one men.

With the pick of the original party, there had come but one woman, the girl Sacajawea, with her little baby, born that winter at the Mandan fortress. Sacajawea now had her place in the camp; she and her infant were the pets of all. She sat in the sunlight, her baby in her lap, by her side an Indian dog, a waif

which Lewis had found abandoned in an Indian encampment, and which had attached itself to him.

Sacajawea smiled as the tall form of the captain came toward her. She had already learned some of the words of his tongue, he some of hers.

“Which way, Sacajawea?” asked Meriwether Lewis. “What river is this which goes on to the left?”

“Him Ro’shone,” replied the girl. “My man call him that. No good! *Him*—big river”; and she pointed toward the right-hand stream.

“As I thought, Will,” said Lewis, nodding; and again, to the Indian girl: “Do you remember this place?”

She nodded her head vigorously and smiled.

“See!”

With a pointed stick she began to sketch a map on the sand of the river bar, showing how the Yellowstone flowed from the south—how, far on ahead, its upper course bent toward the Missouri, with a march of not more than a day between the two. The maps of this new world that first came back to civilization were copies of Indians’ drawings made with a pointed stick upon the earth, or with a coal on a whitened hide.

“She knows, Will!” said Lewis. “See, this place she marks near the mountain summit, where the two streams are close—some time we must explore that crossing!”

“I’m sure I’d rather trust her map than this one, here, of old Jonathan Carver,” answered Clark, the map-maker. “His idea of this country is that four great rivers head about where we are now. He marks the river Bourbon—which I never heard of—as running north to Hudson Bay, but he has the St. Lawrence rising near here, too—and it must be fifteen hundred or two thousand miles off to the east! The Mississippi, too, he thinks heads about here, at the mouth of the Yellowstone, and yonder runs the Oregon River, which I presume is the Columbia. ’Tis all very simple, on Carver’s maps, but perhaps not quite so easy, if we follow that of Sacajawea. This country is wider than any of us ever dreamed.”

“And greater, and more beautiful in every way,” assented his companion.

They stood and gazed about them at the scene of wild beauty. The river ran in long curves between bold and sculptured bluffs, among groves of native trees, now softly green. Above, on the prairies, lay a carpet of the shy wild rose, most beautiful of the prairie blossoms. All about were shrubs and flowers, now putting forth their claims in the renewed life of spring.

On the plains fed the buffalo, far as the eye could reach. Antelope, deer, the shy bighorn, all these might be seen, and the footprints of the giant bears along the beaches. It was the wilderness, and it was theirs—they owned it all!

Thus far they had seen no sign of any human occupancy. They did not meet a single human being, red or white, all that summer. A vast, silent, unclaimed land, beautiful and abounding, lay waiting for occupancy. There was no map of it—none save that written on the soil now and then by an Indian girl sixteen years of age.

They plodded on now, taking the right-hand stream, with full confidence in their guidance, forging onward a little every day, between the high banks of the swift river that came down from the great mountains. April passed, and May.

“Soon we see the mountains!” insisted Sacajawea.

And at last, two months out from the Mandans, Lewis looked westward from a little eminence and saw a low, broken line, white in spots, not to be confused with the lesser eminences of the near by landscape.

“It is the mountains!” he exclaimed. “There lie the Stonies. They do exist! We shall surely reach them! We have won!”

Not yet had they won. These shining mountains lay a long distance to the westward; and yet other questions were to be settled ere they might be reached.

Within a week they came to yet another forking of the stream. A strong river came boiling down from the north, of color and depth much similar to that of the Missouri they had known. On the left ran a less turbulent and clearer stream. Which was the way?

“The north wan, she’ll be the right wan, *Capitaine*,” said Cruzatte, himself a good voyageur.

Most of the men agreed with him. The leaders recalled that the Mandans had said that the Missouri after a time grew clear in color, and that it would lead to

the mountains. Which, now, was the Missouri?

They found the moccasin of an Indian not far from here.

“Blackfoot!” said Sacajawea, and pointed to the north, shaking her head.

She insisted that the left-hand river was the right one; but, unwilling as yet to rely on her fully, the leaders called a council of the men, and listened to their arguments.

They knew well enough that a wrong choice here might mean the failure of their expedition. Cruzatte had many adherents. The men began to mutter.

“If we go up that left-hand stream we shall be lost among the mountains,” one said. “We shall perish when the winter comes!”

“We will go both ways,” said Meriwether Lewis at length. “Captain Clark will explore the lower fork, while I go up the right-hand stream. We will meet here when we know the truth.”

So Lewis traveled two days’ journey up the right-hand fork before he turned back, thoughtful.

“I have decided,” said he to the men who accompanied him. “This stream will lead us far to the north, into the British country. It cannot be the true Missouri. I shall call this Maria’s River, after my cousin in Virginia, Maria Woods. I shall not call it the Missouri.”

He met Clark at the fork of the river, and again they held a council. The men were still dissatisfied. Clark had advanced some distance up the left-hand stream.

“We must prove it yet further,” said Meriwether Lewis. “Captain Clark, do you remain here, while I go on ahead far enough to know absolutely whether we are right or wrong. If we are not right in our choice, it is as the men say—we shall fail! But where is Sacajawea?” he added. “I will ask her once more.”

Sacajawea was ill; she was in a fever. She could not talk to her husband; but to Lewis she talked, and always she said, “That way! By and by, big falls—um-m-m, um-m-m!”

“Guard her well,” said Lewis anxiously. “Much depends on her. I must go on ahead.”

He took the French interpreter, Drouillard, and three of the Kentuckians, and started on up the left-hand stream with one boat. The current of the river seemed to stiffen. It cost continually increasing toil to get the boat upstream. They were gone for several days, and no word came back from them.

Meantime, at the river forks, William Clark was busy. It was obvious that the explorers must lighten the loads of their boats. They began to cache all the heavy goods with which they could dispense—their tools, the extra lead and powder-tins, some of the flour, all the heavy stuff which would encumber them most seriously. Here, too, was the end of the journey of the red pirogue from St. Louis—they hid it in the willows of an island near the mouth of Maria's River.

Lewis himself, weak from toil, fell ill on the way, but still he would not stop. He came to a point from which he could see the mountains plainly on ahead. The river was narrow, flowing through a cañon.

The next day they came to the foot of the Great Falls of the Missouri, alone, majestic here in the wilderness, soundless save for their own dashing—those wonderful cascades, now so well known in industry, so nearly forgotten in history.

“The girl was right—this is the river!” said Lewis to his men. “It comes from the mountains. We are right!”

Cascade after cascade, rapid after rapid, he pushed on to the head of the great drop of the Missouri, where it plunges down from its upper valley for its long journey through the vast plains.

Now word went down to the mouth of Maria's River; but the messenger met Clark already toiling upward with his boats, for he had guessed the cause of delay, and at last believed Sacajawea.

“Make some boat-trucks, Will,” said Lewis, when at last they were all encamped at the foot of the falls. “We shall have to portage twenty miles of falls and rapids.”

And William Clark, the ever-ready engineer, who always had a solution for any problem in mechanics or in geography, went to work upon the hardest task in transportation they yet had had.

“We must leave more plunder here, Merne,” said he. “We can't get into the mountains with all this.”

So again they cached some of their stores. They buried here the great swivel piece which had "made the thunder" among so many savage tribes. Also there were stored here the spring's collection of animals and minerals, certain books and maps not needed, and the great grindstone which had come all the way from Harper's Ferry. They were stripping for their race.

It took the party a full month to make the portage. They were worn to the bone by the hard labor, scorched by the sun, and frozen by the night winds.

"We must go on!" was always the cry.

All felt that the summer was going; none knew what might be on ahead.

At the cost of greater and greater toil they pushed on up their river above the falls, until presently its course bent off to the south again. They passed through a country of such wealth as none of them had ever dreamed of, but they did not suspect the hidden treasures of gold and silver which lay so close to them on the floor of the mountain valleys. What interested them more was the excitement of Sacajawea, who from time to time pointed out traces of human occupancy.

"My people here!" said she, and pointed to camp-fires. "Plenty people come here. Heap hunt buffalo!" She pointed out the trails made by the lodge-poles.

"She knows, Will!" said Lewis, once more. "We have a guide even here. We are the luckiest of men!"

"Soon we come where three rivers," said Sacajawea one day. They had passed to the south and west through the first range of mountains—through that Gate of the Mountains near to the rich gold fields of the future State of Montana. "By and by, three rivers—I know!"

And it was as she had said. The men, wearied to the limit by the toil of getting the boats upstream by line and setting pole, at last found their mountain river broken into three separate streams.

"We will camp here," said the leader. "We are tired, we have worked long and hard!"

"My people come here," said Sacajawea, "plenty time. Here the Minnetarees struck my people—five snows ago that was. They caught me and took me with them, so I find Charbonneau among the Mandans. Here my people live!"

Without hesitation she pointed out that one of the three forks of the Missouri which led off to the westward—the one that Meriwether Lewis called the Jefferson.

And now every man in the party felt that they were on the right path as they turned into that stream; but at the Beaver Head Rock—well known to all the Indians—they went into camp once more.

“Captains make medicine now,” said Sacajawea to Charbonneau, her husband.

For once more the captains hesitated. There were many passes, many valleys, many trails. Which was the way? The men grew sullen again.

They lay in camp for days, sending out parties, feeling out the way; but the explorers always came back uncertain. It was Clark who led these scouting parties now, for Lewis was well-nigh broken down in health.

One night, alone, the leader sat by his little fire, thinking, thinking, as so often he did now. The stars, unspeakably brilliant, lit up the wild scene about him. This was the wilderness! He had sought it all his life. All his life it had called to him aloud. What had it done for him, after all? Had it taught him to forget?

Two years now had passed, and still he saw a face which would not go away. Still there arose before him the same questions whose debate had torn his soul, worn out his body, through these weary months.

“You will be cold, sir,” said one of the men solicitously, as he passed on his way to guard mount. “Shall I fetch your coat?”

Lewis thanked him, and the man brought from his tent the captain’s uniform coat, which he had forgotten. Absently he sought to put it on, and felt something crinkling in the sleeve. It was a bit of paper.

He halted, the old presentiment coming to his mind.

“Is Shannon here?” he asked of the man who had handed him the coat. “He was to get my moccasins mended for me.”

“No, captain, he is out with Captain Clark,” replied Fields, the Kentuckian.

“Very well—that will do, Fields.”

Meriwether Lewis sat down again by his little fire, his last letter in his hand.

Gently he ran a finger along the seal—stooped over, kicked together the embers of the fire, and saw scratched in the wax a number. This was Number Three!

He did not open it for a time. He looked at it—no longer in dread, but in eagerness. It seemed to him, indeed, as if the letter had come in response to the outcry of his soul—that it really had dropped from the sky, manna for a hungry heart. It was the absence of this which had worn him thin, left him the shadow of the man he should have been.

Here, as he knew well, was one more summons to what seemed to him to be a duty. And off to the west, shining cold in the night under the stars, stood the mountains, beckoning. Which was the way?

He broke the seal slowly, with no haste, knowing that whatever the letter said it could mean only more unhappiness to him. Yet he was hungry for it as one who longs for a soothing drug.

He pushed together yet more closely the burning sticks of his little fire and bent over to read. It was very little that he saw written, but it spoke to him like a voice in the night:

> Come back to me—ah, come back! I need you. I implore you to return!

There was no address, no date, no signature. There was no means of telling whence or how this letter had come to him, more than any of the others.

Go back to her—how could he, now? It was more than a year since these words had been written! What avail now, if he did return? No, he had delayed, he had gone on, and he had cost her—what? Perhaps her happiness as well as his own, perhaps the success of herself and of many others, perhaps his own success in life. Against that, what could he measure?

The white mountains on ahead made no reply to him. The stars glowed cold and white above him, but they seemed like a thousand facets of pitiless light turned upon his soul.

The quavering howl of a wolf on a near by eminence sounded like a voice to him, mocking, taunting, fiendish. Never, it seemed to him, had any man been thus unhappy. Even the wilderness had failed him! In a land of desolation he sat, a desolate soul.

# CHAPTER VII

## THE MOUNTAINS

When William Clark returned from his three days' scouting trip, his forehead was furrowed with anxiety. His men were silent as they filed into camp and cast down their knapsacks.

"It's no use, Merne," said Clark, "we are in a pocket here. The other two forks, which we called the Madison and the Gallatin, both come from the southeast, entirely out of our course. The divide seems to face around south of us and bend up again on the west. Who knows the way across? Our river valley is gone. The only sure way seems back—downstream."

"What do you mean?" demanded Meriwether Lewis quietly.

"I scarce know. I am worn out, Merne. My men have been driven hard."

"And why not?"

His companion remained silent under the apparent rebuke.

"You don't mean that we should return?" Lewis went on.

"Why not, Merne?" said William Clark, sighing.

"Our men are exhausted. There are other years than this."

Meriwether Lewis turned upon his friend with the one flash of wrath which ever was known between them.

"Good Heavens, Captain Clark," said he, "there is *not* any other year than this! There is not any other month, or week, or day but this! It is not for you or me to hesitate—within the hour I shall go on. We'll cross over, or we'll leave the bones of every man of the expedition here—this year—now!"

Clark's florid face flushed under the sting of his comrade's words; but his response was manful and just.

"You are right," said he at length. "Forgive me if for a moment—just a moment

—I seemed to question the possibility of going forward. Give me a night to sleep. As I said, I am worn out. If I ever see Mr. Jefferson again, I shall tell him that all the credit for this expedition rests with you. I shall say that once I wavered, and that I had no cause. You do not waver—yet I know what excuse you would have for it.”

“You are only weary, Will. It is my turn now,” said Meriwether Lewis; and he never told his friend of this last letter.

A moment later he had called one of his men.

“McNeal,” said he, “get Reuben Fields, Whitehouse, and Goodrich. Make light packs. We are going into the mountains!”

The four men shortly appeared, but they were silent, morose, moody. Those who were to remain in the camp shared their silence. Sacajawea alone smiled as they departed.

“That way!” said she, pointing; and she knew that her chief would find the path.

May we not wonder, in these later days, if any of us, who reap so carelessly and so selfishly where others have plowed and sown, reflect as we should upon the first cost of what we call our own? The fifteen million dollars paid for the vast empire which these men were exploring—that was little—that was naught. But ah, the cost in blood and toil and weariness, in love and loyalty and faith, in daring and suffering and heartbreak of those who went ahead! It was a few brave leaders who furnished the stark, unflinching courage for us all.

Sergeant Ordway, with Pryor and Gass, met in one of the many little ominous groups that now began to form among the men in camp. Captain Clark was sleeping, exhausted.

“It stands to reason,” said Ordway, usually so silent, “that the way across the range is up one valley to the divide and down the next creek on the opposite side. That is the way we crossed the Alleghanies.”

Pryor nodded his head.

“Sure,” said he, “and all the game-trails break off to the south and southwest. Follow the elk!”

“Is it so?” exclaimed Patrick Gass. “You think it aisy to find a way across yonder

range? And how d’ye know jist how the Alleghanies was crossed first? Did they make it the first toime they thried? Things is aisy enough after they’ve been done *wance*—but it’s the first toime that counts!”

“There is no other way, Pat,” argued Ordway. “’Tis the rivers that make passes in any mountain range.”

“Which is the roight river, then?” rejoined Gass. “We’re lookin’ for wan that mebbe is nowhere near here. S’pose we go to the top yonder and take a creek down, and s’pose that creek don’t run the roight way at all, but comes out a thousand miles to the southwest—where are you then, I’d like to know? The throuble with us is we’re the first wans to cross here, and not comin’ along after some one else has done the thrick for us.”

Pryor was willing to argue further.

“All the Injuns have said the big river was over there somewhere.”

“‘Somewhere’!” exclaimed Patrick Gass. “‘Somewhere’ is a mighty long ways when we’re lost and hungry!”

“Which is just what we are now,” rejoined Pryor. “The sooner we start back the quicker we’ll be out of this.”

“Pryor!” The square face of the Irishman hardened at once. “Listen to me. Ye’re my bunkmate and friend, but I warn ye not to say that agin! If ye said it where he could hear ye—that man ahead—do you know what he would do to you?”

“I ain’t particular. ’Tis time we took this thing into our own hands.”

“It’s where we’re takin’ it *now*, Pryor!” said Gass ominously. “A coort martial has set for less than that ye’ve said!”

“Mebbe you couldn’t call one—I don’t know.”

“Mebbe we couldn’t, eh? I mind me of a little settlement I had with that man wance—no coort martial at all—me not enlisted at the toime, and not responsible under the arthicles of war. I said to his face I was of the belief I could lick him. I said it kindly, and meant no harm, because at the time it seemed to me I could, and ’twould be a pleasure to me. But boys, he hit me wan time, and when I came to I was careless whether it was the arthicles of war or not had hit me. Listen to me now, Pryor—and you, too, Ordway—a man like that is

liable to have judgment in his head as well as a punch in his arm. We’re safer to folly him than to folly ourselves. Moreover, I want you to say to your men that we will not have thim foregatherin’ around and talkin’ any disrespect to their shuperiors. If we’re in a bad place, let us fight our ways out. Let’s not turn back until we are forced. I never did loike any rooster in the ring that would either squawk or run away. That man yonder, on ahead, naded mighty little persuadin’ to fight. I’m with him!”

“Well, maybe you are right, Pat,” said Ordway after a time. And so the mutiny once more halted.

The tide changed quickly when it began to set the other way. Lewis led an advance party across the range. One day, deep in the mountains, he was sweeping the country with his spyglass, as was his custom. He gave a sudden exclamation.

“What is it, Captain?” asked Hugh McNeal. “Some game?”

“No, a man—an Indian! Riding a good horse, too—that means he has more horses somewhere. Come, we will call to him!”

The wild rider, however, had nothing but suspicion for the newcomers. Staring at them, he wheeled at length and was away at top speed. Once more they were alone, and none the better off.

“His people are that way,” said Lewis. “Come!”

But all that day passed, and that night, and still they found none of the natives. But they began to see signs of Indians now, fresh tracks, hoofprints of many horses. And thus finally they came upon two Indian women and a child, whom the white men surprised before they were able to escape. Lewis took up the child, and showed the mother that he was a friend.

“These are Shoshones,” said he to his men. “I can speak with them—I have learned some of their tongue from Sacajawea. These are her people. We are safe!”

Sixty warriors met them, all mounted, all gorgeously clad. Again the great peace pipe, again the spread blanket inviting the council. The Shoshones showed no signs of hostility—the few words of their tongue which Lewis was able to speak gave them assurance.

“McNeal,” said Lewis, “go back now across the range, and tell Captain Clark to bring up the men.”

William Clark, given one night’s sleep, was his energetic self again, and not in mind to lie in camp. He had already ordered camp broken, more of the heavier articles cached, the canoes concealed here and there along the stream and had pushed on after Lewis. He met McNeal coming down, bearing the tidings. Sacajawea ran on ahead in glee.

“My people! My people!” she cried.

They were indeed safe now. Sacajawea found her brother, the chief of this band of Shoshones, and was made welcome. She found many friends of her girlhood, who had long mourned her as dead. The girls and younger women laughed and wept in turn as they welcomed her and her baby. She was a great person. Never had such news as this come among the Shoshones.[5]

All were now content to lie for a few days at the Shoshone village. A brisk trade in Indian horses now sprang up—they would be footmen no more.

“Which way, Sacajawea?” Meriwether Lewis once more asked the Indian girl.

But now she only shook her head.

“Not know,” said she. “These my people. They say big river that way. Not know which way.”

“Now, Merne,” said William Clark, “it’s my turn again. We have got to learn the best way out from these mountains. If there is a big river below, some of these valleys must run down to it. Their waters probably flow to the Columbia. The Indians talk of salmon and of white men—they have heard of goods which must have been made by white men. We are in touch with the Pacific here. I’ll get a guide and explore off to the southwest. It looks better there.”

“No good—no good!” insisted Sacajawea. “That way no good. My brother say go that way.”

She pointed to the north, and insisted that the party should go in that direction.

For a hundred miles Clark scouted down the headwaters of the Salmon River, and at last turned back, to report that neither horse nor boat ever could get through. At the Shoshone village, uneasy, the men were waiting for him.

“That way!” said Sacajawea, still pointing north.

The Indian guide, who had served Clark unwillingly, at length admitted that there was a trail leading across the mountains far up to the northward.

“We will go north,” said Lewis.

They cached under the ashes of their camp fire such remaining articles as they could leave behind them. They had now a band of fifty horses. Partly mounted, mostly on foot, their half wild horses burdened, they set out once more under the guidance of an old Shoshone, who said he knew the way.

Charbonneau wanted to remain with the Shoshones, and to keep with him Sacajawea, his wife, so recently reunited to her people.

“No!” said Sacajawea. “I no go back—I go with the white chief to the water that tastes salt!” And it was so ordered.

Their course lay along the eastern side of the lofty Bitter Root Mountains. The going was rude enough, since no trail had ever been here; but mile after mile, day after day, they stumbled through to some point on ahead which none knew except the guide. They came on a new tribe of Indians—Flatheads, who were as amazed and curious as the Shoshones had been at the coming of these white men. They received the explorers as friends—asked them to tarry, told them how dangerous it was to go into the mountains.

But haste was the order of the day, and they left the Flatheads, rejoicing that these also told of streams to the westward up which the salmon came. They had heard of white men, too, to the west, many years before.

Down the beautiful valley of the Bitter Root River, with splendid mountains on either side, they pressed on, and on the ninth of September, 1805, they stopped at the mouth of a stream coming down from the heights to the west. Their old guide pointed up this valley.

“There is a trail,” said he, “which comes across here. The Indians come to reach the buffalo. On the farther side the water runs toward the sunset.”

They were at the eastern extremity of that ancient trail, later called the Lolo Trail, known immemorially to the tribes on both sides of the mountains. Laboriously, always pressing forward, they ascended the eastern slopes of the great range, crossed the summit, found the clear waters on the west side, and so

came to the Kooskooskie or Clearwater River, leading to the Snake. And always the natives marveled at these white men, the first they ever had seen.

The old Indians still made maps on the sand for them, showing them how they would come to the great river where the salmon came. They were now among yet another people—the Nez Percés. With these also they smoked and counciled, and learned that it would be easy for boats to go all the way down to the great river which ran to the sea.

“We will leave our horses here,” said Lewis. “We will take to the boats once more.”

So Gass and Bratton and Shields and all the other artisans fell to fashioning dugouts from the tall pines and cedars, hewing and burning and shaping, until at length they had transports for their scanty store of goods. By the first week of October they were at the junction of their river with the Snake. An old medicine man of the Nez Percés, Twisted Hair, a man who also could make maps, had drawn them charts on a white skin with a bit of charcoal. And on ahead, mounted runners of the Indians rushed down to inform the tribes of the coming of these strange people.

It was no longer an exploration, but a reception for them now. Bands of red men, who welcomed them, had heard of white men coming up from the sea. White men had once lived by the Tim-Tim water, on the great river of the salmon—so they had been told; but never had any living Indian heard of white men coming across the great mountains from the sunrise.

“Will,” said Lewis, “it is done—we are safe now! We shall be first across to the Columbia. This—” he shook the Nez Percés’ scrawled hide—“is the map of a new world!”

# CHAPTER VIII

## TRAIL’S END

Where lately had been gloom and despair there now reigned joy and confidence. With the great mountains behind them, and this new, pleasant and gentle land all around them, the spirits of the men rose buoyantly.

They could float easily down the strong current of the great Snake River, laboring but little, if at all. They made long hours every day, and by the middle of autumn they saw ahead of them a yet grander flood than that of the noble river which was bearing them.

At last they had found the Columbia! They had found what Mackenzie never found, what Fraser was not to find—that great river, now to be taken over with every right of double discovery by these messengers of the young republic. How swelled their hearts, when at last they knew this truth, unescapable, incontrovertible! It was theirs. They had won!

The men had grown reckless now. Cruzatte, Labiche, Drouillard—all the adventurers—sang as they traveled, gayer and more gay from day to day.

Always the landscape had fascinating interest for them in its repeated changes. They were in a different world. No one had seen the mountains which they saw. The Rockies, the Bitter Roots—these they had passed; and now they must yet pass through another range, this time not by the toilsome process of foot or horse travel, but on the strong flood of the river. The Columbia had made a trail for them through the Cascades.

Down the stormy rapids they plunged exulting. Mount Hood, St. Helen’s, Rainier, Adams—all the lofty peaks of the great Cascades, so named at a later date, appeared before them, around them, behind them, as they swung into the last lap of their wild journey and headed down toward the sea. Cruzatte, Labiche, Drouillard—all you others—time now, indeed, for you to raise the song of the old voyageurs! None have come so far as you—your paddles are wrinkling new waters. You are brave men, every one, and yours is the reward of the brave!

Soon, so said the Indians, they would come to ships—canoes with trees standing

in them, on which teepees were hung.

“Me,” said Cruzatte, “I never in my whole life was seen a sheep! I will be glad for see wan now.”

But they found no ship anywhere in the lower Columbia. All the shores were silent, deserted; no vessel lay at anchor. Before them lay the empty river, wide as a sea, and told no tales of what had been. They were alone, in the third year out from home. Thousands of leagues they had traveled, and must travel back again.

Here they saw many gulls. As to Columbus these birds had meant land, to our discoverers they meant the sea. Forty miles below the last village they saw it—rolling in solemn, white-topped waves beyond the bar.

Every paddle ceased at its work, and the boats lay tossing on the incoming waves. There was the end of the great trail. Yonder lay the Pacific!

Meriwether Lewis turned and looked into the eyes of William Clark, who sat at the bow of the next canoe. Each friend nodded to the other. Neither spoke. The lips of both were tight.

“The big flag, Sergeant Gass!” said Lewis.

They turned ashore. There had been four mess fires at each encampment thus far—those of the three sergeants and that of the officers; but now, as they huddled on the wet beach on which they disembarked, the officers ordered the men to build but one fire, and that a large one. Grouped about this they all stood, ragged, soaked, gaunt, unkempt, yet the happiest company of adventurers that ever followed a long trail to its end.

“Men,” said Meriwether Lewis at length, “we have now arrived at the end of our journey. In my belief there has never been a party more loyal to the purpose on which it has been engaged. Without your strength and courage we could not have reached the sea. It is my wish to thank you for Mr. Jefferson, the President of the United States, who sent us here. If at any time one of you has been disposed to doubt, or to resent conditions which necessarily were imposed, let all that be forgotten. We have done our work. Here we must pass the winter. In the spring we will make quick time homeward.”

They gave him three cheers, and three for Captain Clark. York gave expression to his own emotions by walking about the beach on his hands.

“And the confounded ships are all gone back to sea!” grumbled Patrick Gass. “I’ve been achin’ for days to git here, in the hope of foindin’ some sailor man I’d loike to thrash—and here is no one at all, at all!”

“Will,” said Meriwether Lewis after a time, pulling out the inevitable map, “I wonder where it was that Alexander Mackenzie struck the Pacific twelve years ago! It must have been far north of here. We have come around forty-seven degrees of longitude west from Washington, and something like nine degrees north unite with France or Spain on the south to known exploration by land. We have driven the wedge home! Never again can Great Britain on the north unite with France or Spain on the south to threaten our western frontier. If they dispute the title we purchased from Napoleon, they can never deny our claim by right of discovery. This, I say, solidifies our republic! We have done the work given us to do.”

“Yes,” grinned William Clark, standing on one leg and warming his wet moccasin sole at the fire; “and I wonder where that other gentleman, Mr. Simon Fraser, is just now!”

They could not know that Fraser, the trader who was their rival in the great race to the Pacific, was at that time snow-bound in the Rockies more than one thousand miles north of them.

Three years after the time when this little band of adventurers stood in the rain at the mouth of the Columbia, Fraser, at the mouth of the river named after him, heard of white men who had come to the ocean somewhere far to the south. Word had passed up the coast, among the native tribes, of men who had white skins, and who had with them a black man with curly hair.

“That’s Lewis and Clark!” said Simon Fraser. “They were at the Mandan villages. We are beaten!”

So now the largest flag left to Lewis and Clark floated by the side of a single fire on the wet beach on the north shore of the Columbia. Here a rude bivouac was pitched, while the leaders finished their first hasty investigation along the beach.

“There is little to attract us here,” said William Clark. “On the south shore there is better shelter for our winter camp.” So they headed their little boats across the wide flood of the Columbia.

It was now December of the year 1805. Fort Clatsop, as they called their new

stockade, was soon in process of erection—seven splendid cabins, built of the best-working wood these men ever had seen; a tall stockade with a gate, such as their forefathers had always built in any hostile country.

While some worked, others hunted, finding the elk abundant. More than one hundred elk and many deer were killed. And having nothing better, they now set to work to tan the hides of elk and deer, and to make new clothing. As to civilized equipment they had little left. About four hundred pairs of moccasins they made that winter, Sacajawea presiding over the moccasin-boards, and teaching the men to sew.

Clark, the indefatigable, a natural geographer, completed the remarkable series of maps which so fully established the accuracy of their observations and the usefulness of the voyage across the continent. Lewis kept up his records and extended his journals. All were busy, all happier than they had been since their departure from the East.

Christmas was once more celebrated to the tune of the Frenchman's fiddle. Came New Year's Day also; and by that time the stockade was finished, the gate was up, the men were ready for any fortune which might occur.

"Pretty soon, by and by," said the voyageurs, "we will run on the river for home once more!"

Even Sacajawea, having fulfilled her great ambition of looking out over the sea which tasted of salt, said that she, too, would be content to go back to her people.

"We must leave a record, Will," said Lewis one day, looking up from his papers. "We must take no chances of the results of our exploration not reaching Washington. Should we be lost among the tribes east of here, perhaps some ship may take that word to Mr. Jefferson."

So now, between them, they formulated that famous announcement to the world, which, one year after their safe arrival home overland, the ships brought around by Cape Horn, to advise the world that a transcontinental path had been blazed:

> The object of this list is that through the medium of some civilized person who may see the same, it may be made known to the world that the party consisting of the persons whose names are hereunto annexed, and who were sent out by the government of the United States to explore the interior of the continent of North America, did

> penetrate the same by the way of the Missouri and Columbia Rivers, to the discharge of the latter into the Pacific Ocean, where they arrived on the 14th day of November, 1805, and departed the 23rd day of March, 1806, on their return trip to the United States by the same route by which they had come out.

This, so soon as they knew their starting date, they signed, each of them, and copies were made for posting here and there in such places as naturally would be discovered by any mariners coming in. And today we—who can glibly list the names of the multimillionaires of America—cannot tell the names of more than two of those thirty-one men, each of whom should be an immortal.

“Boats now, Will!” said Meriwether Lewis. “We must have boats against our start in the spring. These canoes which brought us down from the Kooskooskie were well enough in their way, but will not serve for the upstream journey. Again we must lift up the entire party against the current of a great river. Get some of the Indians’ seagoing canoes, Will—their lines are easier than those of our dugouts.”

Need was for skilful trading now on the part of William Clark, for, eager as the natives were for the white men’s goods, scant store of them remained. All the fishhooks were gone, most of the beads, practically all the hats and coats which once had served so well. When at length Clark announced that he had secured a fine Chinook canoe, there remained for all the return voyage, thousands of miles among the Indians, only a half-dozen blankets, a few little trinkets, a hat, and a uniform coat.

“You could tie up all the rest in a couple of handkerchiefs,” said William Clark, laughing. “But such as it is, it must last us back to St. Louis—or at least to our caches on the Missouri.”

“How is your salt, Will?” asked Lewis. “And your powder?”

“In fine shape,” was the reply. “We have put the new-made salt in some of the empty canisters. There is plenty of powder and lead left, and we can pick up more as we reach our caches going eastward. With what dried meat we can lay up from the elk here, we ought to make a good start.”

Thus they planned, these two extraordinary young men, facing a transcontinental journey of four thousand miles, with no better equipment than the rifles which had served them on their way out. As for their followers, all the discontent and

doubt had given way to an implicit faith. All seemed well fed and content, save one—the man on whose shoulders had rested the gravest responsibility, the man in whose soul had been born the vision of this very scene.

“What is the matter with you, Merne?” grumbled his more buoyant companion. “Are you still carrying all the weight of the entire world?”

Lewis turned upon his friend with the same patient smile. Both were conscious that between them there was growing a thin, impermeable veil—something mysterious, the only barrier which ever had separated these two loyal souls.

Sacajawea, the Indian girl, was as keen-eyed as the red-headed chief. In the new boldness that she had learned in her position as general pet of the expedition, she would sometimes talk to the chief reproachfully.

“Capt’in,” she said one day, “what for you no laff? What for you no eat? What for you all time think, think, think? See,” she extended a hand—“I make you some more moccasin. I got picture your foot—these fit plenty good.”

“Thank you, Bird Woman,” said Lewis, rousing himself. “Without you we would not be here today. What can I give you in return for all that—in return for these?”

He took the pair of handsomely stitched moccasins, dangling them by the strings over one finger; but even as he did so, the old brooding melancholy fell upon him once more. He sat, forgetful of the girl’s presence, staring moodily at the fire. Sacajawea, grieving like a little child, stole silently away.

Why did Meriwether Lewis never laugh? Why did he always think, think, think? Why had there grown between him and his friend that thin, indefinable reserve?

He was hungry—hungry for another message out of the sky—another gift of manna in the wilderness. Who had brought those mysterious letters? Whoever he was, why did he not bring another? Were they all done—should he never hear from her again?

# CHAPTER IX

## THE SUMMONS

The winter was wearing away. The wild fowl were passing northward, landward. The game had changed its haunts. March was coming, the month between the seasons for the tribes, the time of want, the leanest period of the year.

Meriwether Lewis, alone one morning in the comfortable cabin which served as a house for himself and his friend, sat pondering on these things, as was his wont. His little Indian dog, always his steady companion, had taken its place on the top of the flatted stump which served as a desk, near the maps and papers which Lewis had pushed away. Here the small creature sat, motionless, mute, its eyes fixed adoringly upon its master.

The captain did not notice it. He did not at first hear the rap on the door, nor the footfall of the man who entered inquiringly.

“Yes, Sergeant Ordway?” said he presently, looking up.

Ordway saluted.

“Something for you, sir. It seems to be a letter.”

“A letter! How could that be?”

“That is the puzzle, sir,” said Ordway, extending a folded and sealed bit of paper. “We do not know how it came. Charbonneau’s wife, the Indian woman, found it in the baby’s hammock just now. She brought it to me, and I saw it was addressed to you. It must have been overlooked by you some time.”

“Possibly—possibly,” said Lewis. His face was growing pale. “That is all, I think, Sergeant,” he added.

Now alone, he turned toward the letter, which lay upon the table. His face lighted with a wondrous smile, though none might see it save the little dog which watched his every movement. For Meriwether Lewis had received once more the thing for which every fiber of his being clamored!

He knew, without one look, that the number scratched in the wax of the seal would be the figure “4.” He opened the letter slowly. There fell from it a square of stiff, white paper—all white, he thought, until he turned it over. Then he saw it looking up at him—her face indeed!

It was a little silhouette in black, done in that day before the camera, when small portraits were otherwise well-nigh impossible. The artist, skilled as were many in this curious form of portraiture, had done his work well. Lewis gazed with a sudden leap of his pulses upon the features outlined before him—the profile so cleanly cut and lofty—the hair low over the forehead, the chin round and firm, yet delicate and womanly withal. Here even the long lashes of her eyes were visible, just as in life. Yes, it was her face!

“Her face indeed!”
**“Her face indeed!”**

And now he read the letter, which covered many closely written sheets:

> Meriwether Lewis, I said to you that my face should come to you, wherever you might be. This time it has been long—I cannot tell how long. That is for my messenger to determine, not for you or me. But that it has been long I shall know, else long since there would have been no need of my adding this letter to the others.
>
> Not one of them has served to bring you back! Since you now have this one, let it advise you that she who wrote it is grieved that you gaze upon this little portrait, and not upon the face of her whom it represents. ’Tis a monstrous good likeness, they tell me; but would you not rather it were myself?
>
> Where are you? I cannot tell. What adversities have been yours? I cannot tell that. You cannot know what grief you have caused by your long absence. You cannot know how many hearts you have made sad. You cannot know how you have delayed—destroyed—plans made for you. We are in ignorance, each of the other, now. I do not know where you are—you do not know where I may be. A great wall arises between us. A great gulf is fixed. We cannot touch hands across it.
>
> As I know, this will not move you; but I cannot restrain this reproach. I cannot help telling you that you have made me suffer by

your silence, by your absence. Do I make you suffer by looking at you with reproach in my eyes—as I do now?

You have forgotten your childhood friend! I may be dead as you read—would you care? I have been in need—yet you have not come to comfort me and to dry my tears.

Figure to yourself what has happened to all my plans and dreams for you. Even I cannot tell of that, because, as I write, it all lies in the future—that future which is the present for you as you sit reading this. All I know is that as you read it my appeal has failed.

I can but guess how or where these presents may find you; for how shall I know how wise or how faithful my messenger has been? Are you on the prairie still, Meriwether Lewis? Is it winter? Does the snow lie deep? Are the winds keen and biting? Are you well fed? Are you warm? Have you bodily comforts? Have you physical well-being?

How can I answer all these questions? Yet they come to my mind as I write.

Are you in the mountains? Were there, after all, those great Stony Mountains of which men told fables? Have you found the great unicorn or the mammoth or the mastadon which Mr. Jefferson said you were likely to meet? Have you found the dinosaur or the dragon or the great serpents of a foregone day? Suppose you have. What do they weigh with me—with you? Are they so much to you as you thought they would be? Is the taste of all your triumphs so sweet as you have dreamed, Meriwether Lewis?

Have you grown savage, my friend—have you come to be just a man like the others? Tell me—no, I will not ask you! If I thought you could descend to the lawless standard of the wilderness—but no, I cannot think of that! In any case, ’tis too late now. You have not come back to me.

You see, I am writing not so much to implore you to return as to reproach you for not returning. By the time this reaches you, it will be too late in our plans. We could not afford to wait months—three months, four, six—has it been so long as that since you left us? If so,

it is too late now. If we have failed, why did we fail?

They told me—my father and his friends—and I told you plainly, that if your expedition went on, then our plan must fail. But now I must presume that you have succeeded, or by this time are beyond the feeling of either success or failure. If you have failed, it is too late for us to succeed. If you have succeeded, then certainly we have failed. As you read this, you may be doing so with hope. I, who wrote it, will be sitting in despair.

Meriwether Lewis, come back to me, even so! It will be too late for you to aid me. You will have ruined all our hopes. But yours still will be the task—the duty—to look me in the face and say whether you owe aught to me. Can I forgive you? Why, yes, I could never do aught else than forgive. No matter what you did, I fear I should forgive you. Because, after all, my own wish in all this——

Ah! let me write slowly here, and think very carefully!

My greatest wish in this, greater than any ambition I had for myself or my family—*has been for you!* See, I am writing those words—would I dare tell them to any other man in all the world? Nay, surely not. But that I trust you, the very writing itself is proof. And I write this to you, who never can be to me what man must be to woman if either is to be happy—the man to whom I can never be what woman must be if she is to mean all to any man. Apart forever! We are estranged by circumstance, sundered by that, if you please, weak as those words seem. And yet something takes your soul to mine. Does something take mine to you, across all the wilderness, across all the miles, across all the long and bitter months?

I say to you once more that in all this my demand upon you has not been for myself, nor wholly for my father. Let me be careful here.

This impassable gulf is fixed between us for all our lives. Neither of us may cross it. But I have been desirous to see you stand among men, where you belong. Do not ask me why I wished that—you must never ask me. I am Mrs. Alston, even as I write.

And as for you? Are you in rags as you read this? Are you cold and hungry? Are you alone, aloof, deserted, perhaps suffering, with none

to comfort you? I cannot aid you. Nay, I shall punish you once more, and say that it was your desire—that you brought this on yourself—that you would have it thus, in spite of all my intervention for you.

Moreover, you shall say to yourself always:

“She asked and I refused her!”

Nay, nay! I shall not be so cruel. I shall not say that at all. Let me mark that out! Because, if I write that, you will think I wish to hurt you. And, my friend, let me admit the truth—the truth I ought not to lay upon you as any secret—*I could never wish to hurt you.*

They say that men far away in the wilderness sometimes long for the sight of the face of a woman. See, now you have that! I look up at you! What is your impulse? I am alone with you—I am in your hands—treat me, therefore, with honor, I pray you!

You must not raise my face to yours, must not bend yours to mine. See now, measure my trust in you, Meriwether Lewis! Estimate the great confidence I hold in you as a gentleman because—do you not see?—a gentleman does not kiss the woman whom he has at a disadvantage—the woman who can never be his, who is another’s. Is it not true?

Happiness is not for us. We are so far apart. I am sad. Good night, Meriwether Lewis! I, too, have your picture by me—the one you gave me years ago when I was in Virginia. And it—good night, Mr. Meriwether Lewis!

Place me apart—far from you in the room. Let my face not look at you direct. But in your heart—your hard heart of a man, intent on dreams, forgetful of all else—please, please let there linger some small memory of her who dares to write these lines—and who hopes that you never may see them!

# CHAPTER X

## THE ABYSS

The little Indian dog sat on the table, silent, motionless, looking at its master, whose head was bowed upon his arms. Now and then it had stooped as if it would have looked in his face, but dared not, if for very excess of love. It turned an inquiring eye to the door, which, after a time, opened.

William Clark, silent, stood once more at the side of his friend. He looked on the sad and haggard face which was turned toward him, and fell back. His eye caught sight of the folded paper crushed between Lewis's fingers. He asked no questions, but he knew.

"Enough!" broke out Meriwether Lewis hoarsely. "No more of this—we must be gone! Are the men ready? Why do we delay? Why are we not away for the journey home?"

So impatient, so incoherent, did his speech seem that for a time Clark almost feared lest his friend's reason might have been affected. But he only stood looking at Lewis, ready to be of such aid as might be.

"In two hours, Merne," said he, "we will be on our way."

It was now near the end of March. They dated and posted up their bulletins. They had done their task. They had found the great river, they had found the sea, they had mapped the way across the new continent. Their glorious work had gloriously been done.

Such was their joy at starting home again, the boatmen disregarded the down-coming current of the great waters—they sang at the paddles, jested. Only their leader was silent and unsmiling, and he drove them hard. Short commons they knew often enough before they reached the mouth of the Walla Walla, where they found friendly Indians who gave them horse meat—which seemed exceedingly good food.

The Nez Percés, whose country was reached next beyond the Walla Wallas, offered guides across the Bitter Roots, but now the snow lay deep, the horses

could not travel. For weeks they lay in camp on the Kooskooskie, eating horse meat as the Indians then were doing, waiting, fretting.

It was the middle of June before they made the effort to pass the Bitter Roots. Sixty horses they had now, with abundance of jerked horse meat, and a half-dozen Nez Percés guides. By the third of July—just three years from the date of the Louisiana Purchase as it was made known at Mr. Jefferson's simplicity dinner—they were across the Bitter Roots once more, in the pleasant valleys of the eastern slope.

"That way," said Sacajawea, pointing, "big falls!"

She meant the short cut across the string of the bow, which would lead over the Continental Divide direct to the Great Falls of the Missouri. Both the leaders had pondered over this short cut, which the Nez Percés knew well.

"We must part, Will," said Meriwether Lewis. "It is our duty to learn all we can of this wonderful country. I will take the Indian trail straight across. Do you go on down the way we came. Pick up our caches above the three forks of the Missouri, and then cross over the mountains to the Yellowstone. Make boats there, and come on down to the mouth of that river. You should precede me there, perhaps, by some days. Wait then until I come."

With little more ado these self-reliant men parted in the middle of the vast mountain wilderness. They planned a later junction of their two parties at the mouth of a river which then was less known than the Columbia had been, through a pass which none of them had ever seen.

Lewis had with him nine men, among them Sergeant Gass, the two Fields boys, Drouillard and Cruzatte, the voyageurs. Sacajawea, in spite of her protest, remained with the Clark party, where her wonderful knowledge of the country again proved invaluable. This band advanced directly to the southward by easy and pleasant daily stages.

"That way short path over mountains," said Sacajawea at length, at one point of their journey.

She pointed out the Big Hole Trail and what was later known as Clark's Pass over the Continental Divide. They came to a new country, a beautiful valley where the grass was good; but Sacajawea still pointed onward.

"That way," said she, "find boat, find cache!"

She showed them another gap in the hills, as yet unknown; and so led them out by a short cut directly to the caches on the Jefferson!

But they could not tarry long. Boots and saddles again, pole and paddle also, for now some of the men must take to the boats while others brought on the horses. At the Three Forks rendezvous they made yet other changes, for here the boats must be left. Captain Clark must cross the mountain range to the eastward to find the Yellowstone, of which the Indian girl had told him. Yonder, she said, not quite a full day’s march through a notch in the lofty mountains, they would come to the river, which ran off to the east.

Not one of them had ever heard of that gap in the hills; there was no one to guide them through it except the Indian girl, whose memory had hitherto been so positive and so trustworthy. They trusted her implicitly.

“That way!” she said.

Always she pointed on ahead confidently; and always she was right. She was laying out the course of a railroad which one day should come up the Yellowstone and cross here to the Missouri.

They found it to be no more than eighteen or twenty miles, Sacajawea’s extraordinary short cut between the Missouri and the Yellowstone. They struck the latter river below the mouth of its great cañon, found good timber, and soon were busy felling great cottonwoods to make dugout canoes. Two of these, some thirty feet in length, when lashed side by side, served to carry all their goods and some of their party. The rest—Pryor, Shannon, Hall and one or two others—were to come on down with the horses.

The mounted men did well enough until one night the Crows stole all their horses, and left them on foot in the middle of the wilderness. Not daunted, they built themselves boats of bull hide, as they had seen Indians do, and soon they followed on down the river, they could not tell how far, to the rear of the main boat party. With the marvelous good fortune which attended the entire expedition, they had no accident; and in time they met the other explorers at the mouth of the Yellowstone, after traveling nine hundred miles on a separate voyage of original discovery!

It was on the eighth of August that the last of Clark’s boats arrived at the Yellowstone rendezvous. His men felt now as if they were almost at home. The Mandan villages were not far below. As soon as Captain Lewis should come,

they would be on their way, rejoicing. Patient, hardy, uncomplaining, they did not know that they were heroes.

What of Lewis, then gone so long? He and his men were engaged in the yet more dangerous undertaking of exploring the country of the dreaded Blackfeet, known to bear arms obtained from the northern traders. They reached the portage of the Great Falls without difficulty, and eagerly examined the caches which they had left there. Now they were to divide their party.

“Sergeant Gass,” said Captain Lewis, “I am going to leave you here. You will get the baggage and the boats below the falls, and take passage on down the river. Six of you can attend to that. I shall take Drouillard and the Fields boys with me, and strike off toward the north and east, where I fancy I shall find the upper portion of Maria’s River. When you come to the mouth of that river—which you will remember some of you held to be the real Missouri—you will go into camp and wait for us. You will remain there until the first day of September. If by that time we have not returned, you will pass on down the Missouri to Captain Clark’s camp, at the mouth of the Yellowstone, and go home with him. By that time it will have become evident that we shall not return. I plan to meet you at the mouth of Maria’s River somewhere about the beginning of August.”

They parted, and it was almost by a miracle that they ever met again; for now the perils of the wilderness asserted themselves even against the marvelous good fortune which had thus far attended them.

Hitherto, practically all the tribes met had been friendly, but now they were in the country of the dreaded Blackfeet, who by instinct and training were hostile to all whites coming in from the south and east. A party of these warriors was met on the second day of their northbound journey from the Missouri River. Lewis gave the Indians such presents as he could, and, as was his custom, told them of his purpose in traveling through the country. He showed no fear of them, although he saw his own men outnumbered ten to one. The two parties, the little band of white men and the far more numerous band of Blackfeet, lay down to sleep that night in company.

But the Blackfeet were unable to resist the temptation to attain sudden wealth by seizing the horses and guns of these strangers. Toward dawn Lewis himself, confident in the integrity of his guests, and dozing for a time, felt the corner of his robe pulled, felt something spring on his face, heard a noise. His little dog was barking loudly, excitedly.

He was more fully awakened by the sound of a shout, and then by a shot. Springing from his robes, he saw Drouillard and both of the Fields boys on their feet, struggling with the savages, who were trying to wrench their rifles from them.

“Curse you, turn loose of me!” cried Reuben Fields.

He fought for a time longer with his brawny antagonist, till he saw others coming. Then his hand went to the long knife at his belt, and the next instant the Blackfoot lay dead at his feet.

Drouillard wrenched his rifle free and stood off his man for a moment, shouting all the time to his leader that the Indians were trying to get the horses. Lewis saw the thieves tugging at the picket-ropes, and hastened into the fray, cursing himself for his own credulity. A giant Blackfoot engaged him, bull-hide shield advanced, battle-ax whirling; but wresting himself free, Lewis fired point-blank into his body, and another Indian fell dead.

The Blackfeet found they had met their match. They dropped the picket-ropes and ran as fast as they could, jumped into the river, swam across, and so escaped, leaving the little party of whites unhurt, but much disturbed.

“Mount, men! Hurry!” Lewis ordered.

As quickly as they could master the frightened horses, his men obeyed. With all thought of further exploration ended, they set out at top speed, and rode all that day and night as fast as the horses could travel. They had made probably one hundred and twenty miles when at length they came to the mouth of the Maria’s River, escaped from the most perilous adventure any of them had had.

Here again, by that strange good fortune which seemed to guide them, they arrived just in time to see the canoes of Gass and his men coming down the Missouri. These latter had made the grand portage at the falls, had taken up all the caches, and had brought the contents with them. The stars still fought for the Volunteers for the Discovery of the West.

There was no time to wait. The Blackfeet would be coming soon. Lewis abandoned his horses here. The entire party took to the boats, and hurried down the river as fast as they could, paddling in relays, day and night. Gaunt, eager, restless, moody, silent, their leader neither urged his men nor chided them, nor did he refer to the encounter with the Blackfeet. He did not need to, with

Drouillard to describe it to them all a dozen times.

At times it was necessary for the boats to stop for meat, usually a short errand in a country alive with game; and, as was his custom, Lewis stepped ashore one evening to try for a shot at some near by game—elk, buffalo, antelope, whatever offered. He had with him Cruzatte, the one-eyed Frenchman. It was now that fortune frowned ominously almost for the first time.

The two had not been gone more than a few minutes when the men remaining at the boat heard a shot—then a cry, and more shouting. Cruzatte came running back to them through the bushes, calling out at the top of his voice:

“The captain! I’ve keeled him—I’ve keeled the captain—I’ve shot him!”

“What is that you’re saying?” demanded Patrick Gass. “If you’ve done that, you would be better dead yourself!”

He reached out, caught Cruzatte’s rifle, and flung it away from him.

“Where is he?” he demanded.

Cruzatte led the way back.

“I see something move on the bushes,” said he, “and I shoot. It was not elk—it was the captain. *Mon Dieu*, what shall we do?”

They found Captain Lewis sitting up, propped against a clump of willows, his legging stripped to the thigh. He was critically examining the path of the bullet, which had passed through the limb. At seeing him still alive, his men gave a shout of joy, and Cruzatte received a parting kick from his sergeant.

There were actual tears in the eyes of some of the men as they gathered around their commander—tears which touched Meriwether Lewis deeply.

“It is all right, men!” said he. “Do not be alarmed. Do not reprove the man too much. The sight of a little blood should not trouble you. We are all soldiers. This is only an accident of the trail, and in a short time it will be mended. See, the bone is not broken!”

They aided him back to the boats and made a bed upon which he might lie, his head propped up so that he could see what lay ahead. Other men completed the evening hunt, and the boats hurried on down the river. The next day found them fifty miles below the scene of the accident.

“Sergeant,” said Meriwether Lewis, “the natural fever of my wound is coming on. Give me my little war-sack yonder—I must see if I can find some medicine.”

Gass handed him his bag of leather, and Lewis sought in it for a moment. His hand encountered something that crinkled in the touch—crinkled familiarly! For one instant he stopped, his lips compressed as if in bodily pain.

It was another of the mysterious letters!

Before he opened it, he looked at it, frowning, wondering. Whence came these messages, and how, by whose hand? All of them must have been written before he left St. Louis in May of 1804. Now it was August of 1806. There was no human agency outside his own party that could have carried them. How had they reached him? What messenger had brought them? He forgot the fever of his wound in another and greater fever which arose in his blood.

He was with his men now, their eyes were on him all the time. What should he do—cast this letter from him into the river? If he did so, he felt that it would follow him mysteriously, pointing to the *corpus delicti* of his crime, still insistent on coming to the eye!

His men, therefore, saw their leader casually open a bit of paper. They had seen him do such things a thousand times, since journals and maps were a part of the daily business of so many of them. What he did attracted no attention.

Captain Lewis would have felt relieved had it attracted more. Before he read any of the words that lay before him, in this same delicate handwriting that he knew so well, he cast a slow and searching gaze upon the face of every man that was turned toward him. In fact, he held the letter up to view rather ostentatiously, hoping that it would evoke some sign; but he saw none.

He had not been in touch with the main party for more than a month. He had with him nine men. Which of these had secretly carried the letter? Was it Gass, Cruzatte, Drouillard, Reuben Fields, or McNeal?

He studied their faces alternately. Not an eyelash flickered. The men who looked at him were anxious only for his comfort. There was no trace of guilty knowledge on any of these honest countenances before him, and he who sought such admitted his own failure. Meriwether Lewis lay back on his couch in the boat, as far as ever from his solution of the mystery.

After all, mere curiosity as to the nature of that mystery was a small matter. It

seemed of more worth to feel, as he did, that the woman who had planned this system of surprises for him was one of no ordinary mind. And it was no ordinary woman who had written the words that he now read:

SIR AND MY FRIEND:

Almost I am in despair. This is my fifth letter; you receive it, perhaps, some months after your start. I think you would have come back before now, if that had been possible. I had no news of you, and now I dread news. Should you still be gone a year from the time I write this, then I shall know that you were dead. Dead? Yes, I have written that word!

The swift thought comes to me that you will never see this at all—that it may, it must, arrive too late. Yet I must send it, even under that chance. I must write it, though it ruin all my happiness. Shall it come to you too late, others will take it to my husband. Then this secret—the one secret of my life—will be known. Ah, I hope this may come to your eyes, your living eyes; but should it not, *none the less I must write it*.

What matter? If it should be read by any after your death, that would be too late to make difference with you, or any difference for me. After that I should not care for anything—not even that then others would know what I would none might ever know save you and my Creator, so long as we both still lived.

This wilderness which you love, the wilderness to which you fled for your comfort—what has it done for you? Have you found that lonely grave which is sometimes the reward of the adventurer thither? If so, do you sleep well? I shall envy you, if that is true. I swear I often would let that thought come to me—of the vast comfort of the plains, of the mountains—the sweep of the untiring winds, sweet in the trees and grasses—or the perpetual sound of water passing by, washing out, to the voice of its unending murmurs, all memory of our trials, of our sins.

What need now to ask you to come back? What need to reproach you any further? How could I—how can I—with this terrible thought in my soul that I am writing to a man whose eyes cannot see, whose ears cannot hear?

Still, what difference, whether or not you be living? Have not your eyes thus far been blind to me? Have not your ears been deaf to me,

even when I spoke to you direct? It was the call of your country as against my call. Was ever thinking woman who could doubt what a strong man would do? I suppose I ought to have known. But oh, the longing of a woman to feel that she is something greater in a man's life even than his deeds and his ambitions—even than his labors—even than his patriotism!

It is hard for us to feel that we are but puppets in the great game of life, of so small worth to any man. How can we women read their hearts—what do we know of men? I cannot say, though I am a married woman. My husband married me. We had our honeymoon—and he went away about the business of his plantations. Does every girl dream of a continuous courtship and find a dull answer in the facts? I do not know.

How freely I write to you, seeing that you are blind and deaf, of that wish of a woman to be the one grand passion of a strong man's life—above all—before even his country! What may once have been my own dream of my capacity to evoke such emotions in the soul of any man I have flung into the scrap-heap of my life. The man, the one man—no! What was I saying, Meriwether Lewis, to you but now, even though you were blind and deaf? I must not—I *must* not!

Nay, let me dream no more! It is too late now. Living or dead, you are deaf and blind to all that I could ever do for you. But if you be still living, if this shall meet your living eyes, however cold and clear they may be, please, please remember it was not for myself alone that I took on the large ambitions of which I have spoken to you, the large risks engaged with them. Nay, do not reproach me; leave me my woman's right to make all the reproaches. I only wanted to do something for you.

I have not written so freely to any man in all my life. I could not do so now did I not feel in some strange way that by this time—perhaps at this very time—you are either dead or in some extreme of peril. If I *knew* that you would see this, I could not write it. As it is, it gives me some relief—it is my confessional. How often does a woman ever confess her own, her inner and real heart? Never, I think, to any man—certainly not to any living, present man.

I married; yes. It seemed the ordinary and natural thing to do, a useful, necessary, desirable thing to do. I should not complain—I did that with my eyes well opened and with full counsel of my father. My eyes well opened, but my heart well closed! I took on my duties as one of the species human, my duties as wife, as head of a household, as lady of a certain rank. I did all that, for it is what most women would do. It is the system of society. My husband is content.

What am I writing now? Arguing, justifying, defending? Ah, were it possible that you would read this and come back to me, never, never, though it killed me, would I open my heart to you! I write only to a dead man, I say—to one who can never hear. I write once more to a man who set other things above all that I could have done. Deeds, deeds, what you call your country—your own impulses—these were the things you placed above me. You placed above me this adventuring into the wilderness. Yes, I know what are the real impulses in your man's life. I know what you valued above me.

But you are dead! While you lived, I hoped your conscience was clean. I hope that never once have you descended to any conduct not belonging to Meriwether Lewis of Virginia. I know that no matter what temptation was yours, you would remember that I was Mrs. Alston—and that you were Meriwether Lewis of Virginia.

Nay, I *cannot* stop! How can you mind my garrulous pen—my vain pen—my wicked, wicked, wicked, shameful pen—since you cannot see what it says?

Ah, I had so hoped once more to see you before it was too late! Should this not reach you, and should it reach others, why, let it go to all the world that Theodosia Burr that was, Mrs. Alston of Carolina that is, once ardently importuned a man to join her in certain plans for the betterment of his fortunes as well as her own; and that you did not care to share in those plans! So I failed. And further—let that also go out to the world—I glory in the truth *that I have failed*!

Yes, that at last is the truth at the bottom of my heart! I have searched it to the bottom, and I have found the truth. I glory in the truth that you have *not* come back to me. There—have I not said all

that a woman could say to a man, living or dead?

Just as strongly as I have urged you to return, just as strongly I have hoped that you would not return! In my soul I wanted to see you go on in your own fashion, following your own dreams and caring not for mine. That was the Meriwether Lewis I had pictured to myself. I shall glory in my own undoing, if it has meant your success.

Holding to your own ambition, keeping your own loyalty, holding your own counsel and your own speech to the end—pushing on through everything to what you have set out to do—that is the man I could have loved! Deeds, deeds, high accomplishments—these in truth are the things which are to prevail. The selfish love of success as success—the love of ease, of money, of power—these are the things women covet *from* a man—yes, but they are not the things a woman *loves in* a man. No; it is the stiff-necked man, bound in his own ambition, whom women love, even as they swear they do not.

*Therefore, do not come back to me,* Meriwether Lewis! Do not come —forget all that I have said to you before—do not return until you have done your work! Do not come back to me until you can come content. Do not come to me with your splendid will broken. Let it triumph even over the will of a Burr, not used to yielding, not easily giving up anything desired.

This is almost the last letter I shall ever write to any man in all my life. I wonder who will read it—you, or all the world, perhaps! I wish it might rest with you at the last. Oh, let this thought lie with you as you sleep—you did not come back to me, *and I rejoiced that you did not*!

Tell me, why is it that I think of you lying where the wind is sweet in the trees? Why is it that I think of myself, too, lying at last, with all my doubts composed, all my restless ambitions ended, all my foolish dreams answered—in some place where the sound of the unceasing waters shall wash out from the memory of the world all my secrets and all my sins? Always I hear myself crying:

“I hope I shall not be unhappy, for I do not feel that I have been bad.”

Adieu, Meriwether Lewis, adieu! I am glad you can never read this. I am glad that you have not come back. I am glad that I have failed!

# CHAPTER XI

## THE BEE

“

Captain, dear,” said honest Patrick Gass, putting an arm under his wounded commander’s shoulders as he eased his position in the boat, “ye are not the man ye was when ye hit me that punch back yonder on the Ohio, three years ago. Since ye’re so weak now, I have a good mind to return it to ye, with me compliments. ’Tis safer now!”

Gass chuckled at his own jest as his leader looked up at him.

The boiling current of the great Missouri, bend after bend, vista after vista, had carried them down until at length they had reached the mouth of the Yellowstone, and had seen on ahead the curl of blue smoke on the beach—the encampment of their companions, who were waiting for them here. These wonderful young men, these extraordinary wilderness travelers, had performed one more miracle. Separated by leagues of wild and unknown land, they met now casually, as though it were only what should be expected. Their feat would be difficult even today.

William Clark, walking up and down along the bank, looking ever upstream for some sign of his friend, hurried down to meet the boats, and gazed anxiously at the figure lifted in the arms of the men.

“What’s wrong, Merne?” he exclaimed. “Tell me!”

Lewis waved a hand at him in reassurance, and smiled as his friend bent above him.

“Nothing at all, Will,” said he. “Nothing at all—I was playing elk, and Cruzatte thought it very lifelike! It is just a bullet through the thigh; the bone is safe, and the wound will soon heal. It is lucky that we are not on horseback now.”

By marvel, by miracle, the two friends were reunited once more; and surely around the camp fires there were stories for all to tell.

Sacajawea, the Indian girl, sat listening but briefly to all these tales of adventure—tales not new to one of her birth and education. Silently and without question, she took the place of nurse to the wounded commander. She had herbs of her own choosing, simple remedies which her people had found good for the treatment of wounds. As if the captain were her child—rather than the forsaken infant who lustily bemoaned his mother's absence from his tripod in the lodge—she took charge of the injured man, until at length he made protest that he was as well as ever, and that they must go on.

Again the paddles plied, again the bows of the canoes turned downstream. It seemed but a short distance thence to the Mandan villages, and once among the Mandans they felt almost as if they were at home.

The Mandans received them as beings back from the grave. The drums sounded, the feast-fires were lighted, and for a time the natives and their guests joined in rejoicing. But still Lewis's restless soul was dissatisfied with delay. He would not wait.

"We must get on!" said he. "We cannot delay."

The boats must start down the last stretch of the great river. Would any of the tribesmen like to go to the far East, to see the Great Father? Big White, chief of the Mandans, said his savage prayers.

"I will go," said he. "I will go and tell him of my people. We are poor and weak. I will ask him to take pity on us and protect us against the Sioux."

So it was arranged that Big White and his women, with Jussaume, his wife, and one or two others, should accompany the brigade down the river. Loud lamentations mingled with the preparations for the departure.

Sacajawea, what of her? Her husband lived among the Mandans. This was the end of the trail for her, and not the rudest man but was sad at the thought of going on without her. They knew well enough that in all likelihood, but for her, their expedition could never have attained success. Beyond that, each man of them held memory of some personal kindness received at her hands. She had been the life and comfort of the party, as well as its guide and inspiration.

"Sacajawea," said Meriwether Lewis, when the hour for departure came, "I am now going to finish my trail. Do you want to go part way with us? I can take you to the village where we started up this river—St. Louis. You can stay there for

one snow, until Big White comes back from seeing the Great Father. We can take the baby, too, if you like.”

Her face lighted up with a strange wistfulness.

“Yes, Capt’in,” said she, “I go with Big White—and you.”

He smiled as he shook his head.

“We go farther than that, many sleeps farther.”

“Who shall make the fire? Who shall mend your moccasins? See, there is no other woman in your party. Who shall make tea? Who shall spread down the robes? Me—Mrs. Charbonneau!”

She drew herself up proudly with this title; but still Meriwether Lewis looked at her sadly, as he stood, lean, gaunt, full-bearded, clad in his leather costume of the plains, supporting himself on his crutch.

“Sacajawea,” said he, “I cannot take your husband with me. All my goods are gone—I cannot pay him; and now we do not need him to teach us the language of other peoples. From here we can go alone.”

“Aw right!” said Sacajawea, in paleface idiom. “Him stay—me go!”

Meriwether Lewis pondered for a time on what fashion of speech he must employ to make her understand.

“Bird Woman,” said he at length, “you are a good girl. It would pain my heart to see you unhappy. But if you came with me to my villages, women would say, ‘Who is that woman there? She has no lodge; she does not belong to any man.’ They must not say that of Sacajawea—she is a good woman. Those are not the things your ears should hear. Now I shall tell the Great Father that, but for Sacajawea we should all have been lost; that we should never have come back again. His heart will be open to those words. He will send gifts to you. Sometime, I believe, the Great Father’s sons will build a picture of you in iron, out yonder at the parting of the rivers. It will show you pointing on ahead to show the way to the white men. Sacajawea must never die—she has done too much to be forgotten. Some day the children of the Great Father will take your baby, if you wish, and bring him up in the way of the white men. What we can do for you we will do. Are my words good in your ears?”

“Your words are good,” said Sacajawea. “But I go, too! No want to stay here now. No can stay!”

“But here is your village, Sacajawea—this is your home, where you must live. You will be happier here. See now, when I sleep safe at night, I shall say, ‘It was Sacajawea showed me the way. We did not go astray—we went straight.’ We will not forget who led us.”

“But,” she still expostulated, looking up at him, “how can you cook? How can you make the lodge? One woman—she must help all time.”

A spasm of pain crossed Lewis’s face.

“Sacajawea,” said he, “I told you that I had made medicine—that I had promised my dream never to have a lodge of my own. Always I shall live upon the trail—no lodge fire in any village shall be the place for me. And I told you I had made a vow to my dream that no woman should light the lodge fire for me. You are a princess—the daughter of a chief, the sister of a chief, a great person; you know about a warrior’s medicine. Surely, then, you know that no one is allowed to ask about the vows of a chief!

“By and by,” he added gently, “a great many white men will come here, Sacajawea. They will find you here. They will bring you gifts. You will live here long, and your baby will grow to be a man, and his children will live here long. But now I must go to my people.”

The unwonted tears of an Indian woman were in the eyes which looked up at him.

“Ah!” said she, in reproach. “I went with you. I cooked in the lodges. I showed the way. I was as one of your people. Now I say I go to your people, and you say no. You need me once—you no need me now! You say to me, your people are not my people—you not need Sacajawea any more!”

The Indian has no word for good-by. The faithful—nay, loving—girl simply turned away and passed from him; nor did he ever see her more.

Alone, apart from her people, she seated herself on the brink of the bluff, below which lay the boats, ready to depart. She drew her blanket over her head. When at length the voyage had begun, she did not look out once to watch them pass. They saw her motionless figure high on the bank above them. The Bird Woman was mourning.

The little Indian dog, Meriwether Lewis’s constant companion, now, like Sacajawea, mercifully banished, sat at her side, as motionless as she. Both of them, mute and resigned, accepted their fate.

But as for those others, those hardy men, now homeward bound, they were rejoicing. Speed was the cry of all the lusty paddlers, who, hour after hour, kept the boats hurrying down, aided by the current and sometimes pushed forward by favorable winds. They were upon the last stretch of their wonderful journey. Speed, early and late, was all they asked. They were going home—back over the trail they had blazed for their fellows!

“*Capitaine, Capitaine*, look what I’ll found!”

They were halting at noonday, far down the Missouri, for the boiling of the kettles. Lewis lay on his robes, still too lame to walk, watching his men as they scattered here and there after their fashion. It was Cruzatte who approached him, looking at something which the voyager held in his hand.

“What is it, Cruzatte?” smiled Lewis.

He was anxious always to be as kindly as possible to this unlucky follower, whose terrible mistake had well-nigh resulted in the death of the leader.

“Ouch, by gar! She’ll bite me with his tail. She’s hot!”

Cruzatte held out in his fingers a small but fateful object. It was a bee, an ordinary honey-bee. East of the Mississippi, in Illinois, Kentucky, the Virginias, it would have meant nothing. Here on the great plains it meant much.

Meriwether Lewis held the tiny creature in the palm of his hand.

“Why did you kill it, Cruzatte?” he asked. “It was on its errand.”

He turned to his friend who sat near, at the other side.

“Will,” he said, “our expedition has succeeded. Here is the proof of it. The bee is following our path. They are coming!”

Clark nodded. Woodsmen as they both were, they knew well enough the Indian tradition that the bee is the harbinger of the coming of the white man. When he comes, the plow soon follows, and weeds grow where lately have been the flowers of the forest or the prairie.

They sat for a time looking at the little insect, which bore so fateful a message into the West. Reverently Lewis placed it in his collector’s case—the first bee of the plains.

“They are coming!” said he again to his friend.

# CHAPTER XII

## WHAT VOICE HAD CALLED?

They lay in camp far down the river whose flood had borne them on so rapidly. They had passed through the last of the dangerous country of the Sioux, defying the wild bands whose gantlet they had to run, but which they had run in safety. Ahead was only what might be called a pleasure journey, to the end of the river trail.

The men were happy as they lay about their fires, which glowed dully in the dusk. Each was telling what he presently was going to do, when he got his pay at old St. Louis, not far below.

William Clark, weary with the day's labor, had excused himself and gone to his blankets. Lewis, the responsible head of the expedition, alone, aloof, silent, sat moodily looking into his fire, the victim of one of his recurring moods of melancholy.

He stirred at length and raised himself restlessly. It was not unusual for him to be sleepless, and always, while awake, he had with him the problems of his many duties; but at this hour something unwontedly disturbing had come to Meriwether Lewis.

He turned once more and bent down, as if figuring out some puzzle of a baffling trail. Picking up a bit of stick, he traced here and there, in the ashes at his feet, points and lines, as if it were some problem in geometry. Uneasy, strange of look, now and again he muttered to himself.

"Hoh!" he exclaimed at length, almost like an Indian, as if in some definite conclusion.

He had run his trail to the end, had finished the problem in the ashes.

"Hoh!" his voice again rumbled in his chest.

And now he threw his tracing-stick away. He sat, his head on one side, as if looking at some distant star. It seemed that he heard a voice calling to him in the night, so faintly that he could not be sure. His face, thin, gaunt, looked set and

hard in the light of his little fire. Something stern, something wistful, too, showed in his eyes, frowning under the deep brows. Was Meriwether Lewis indeed gone mad? Had the hardships of the wilderness at last taken their toll of him—as had sometimes happened to other men?

He rose, limping a little, for he still was weak and stiff from his wound, though disdaining staff or crotched bough to lean upon. He looked about him cautiously.

The camp was slumbering. Here and there, stirred by the passing breeze, the embers of a little fire glowed like an eye in the dark. The men slept, some under their rude shelters, others in the open under the stars, each rolled in his robe, his rifle under the flap to keep it from the dew.

Meriwether Lewis knew the place of every man in the encampment. Ordway, Pryor, Gass—each of the three sergeants slept by his own mess fire, his squad around him. McNeal, Bratton, Shields, Cruzatte, Reuben Fields, Goodrich, Whitehouse, Coalter, Shannon—the captain knew where each lay, rolled up like a mummy. He had marked each when he threw down his bed-roll that night; for Meriwether Lewis was a leader of men, and no detail escaped him.

He passed now, stealthy as an Indian, along the rows of sleeping forms. His moccasined foot made no sound. Save for his uniform coat, he was clad as a savage himself; and his alert eye, his noiseless foot, might have marked him one. He sought some one of these—and he knew where lay the man he wished to find.

He stood beside him silently at last, looking down at the sleeping figure. The man lay a little apart from the others, for he was to stand second watch that night, and the second guard usually slept where he would not disturb the others when awakened for his turn of duty.

This man—he was long and straight in his blankets, and filled them well—suddenly awoke, and lay staring up. He had not been called, no hand had touched him, it was not yet time for guard relief; but he had felt a presence, even as he slept.

He stared up at a tall and motionless figure looking down. With a swift movement he reached for his rifle; but the next instant, even as he lay, his hand went to his forehead in salute. He was looking up into the face of his commander!

“Shannon!” He heard a hoarse voice command him. “Get up!”

George Shannon, the youngest of the party, sprang out of his bed half clad.

“Captain!” He saluted again. “What is it, sir?” he half whispered, as if in apprehension.

“Put on your jacket, Shannon. Come with me!”

Shannon obeyed hurriedly. Half stripped, he stood a fine figure of young manhood himself, lithe, supple, yet developed into rugged strength by his years of labor on the trail.

“What is it, Captain?” he inquired once more.

They were apart from the others now, in the shadows beyond Lewis’s fire. Shannon had caught sight of his leader’s countenance, noting the wildness of its look, its drawn and haggard lines.

His commander’s hand thrust in his face a clutch of papers, folded—letters, they seemed to be. Shannon could see the trembling of the hand that held them.

“You know what I want, Shannon! I want the rest of these—I want the last one of them! Give it to me now!”

The youth felt on his shoulder the grip of a hand hard as steel. He did not make any answer, but stood dumb, wondering what might be the next act of this man, who seemed half a madman.

“Five of them!” he heard the same hoarse voice go on. “There must be another—there must be one more, at least. You have done this—you brought these letters. Give me the last one of them! Why don’t you answer?” With sudden and violent strength Lewis shook the boy as a dog might a rat. “Answer me!”

“Captain, I cannot!” broke out Shannon.

“What? Then there is another?”

“I’ll not answer! I’ll stand my trial before court martial, if you please.”

Again the heavy hand on his shoulder.

“There will be no trial!” he heard the hoarse voice of his commander saying. “I cannot sleep. I must have the last one. There is another!”

Shannon laid a hand on the iron wrist.

"How do you know?" he faltered. "Why do you think——"

"Am I not your leader? Is it not my business to know? I am a woodsman. You thought you had covered your trail, but it was plain. I know you are the messenger who has been bringing these letters to me from her. I need not name her, and you shall not! For what reason you did this—by what plan—I do not know, but I know you did it. You were absent each time that I found one of these letters. That was too cunning to be cunning! You are young, Shannon, you have something to learn. You sing songs—love songs—you write letters—love letters, perhaps! You are Irish—you have sentiment. There is romance about you—*you* are the man she would choose to do what you have done. Being a woman, she knew, she chose well; but it is my business to read all these signs.

"Give me that letter! I am your officer."

"Captain, I will not!"

"I tell you I cannot sleep! Give it to me, boy, or, by Heaven, you yourself shall sleep the long sleep here and now! What? You still refuse?"

"Yes, I'll not be driven to it. You say I'm Irish. I am—I'll not give up a woman's secret—it's a question of honor, Captain. There is a woman concerned, as you know."

"Yes!"

"And I promised her, too. I swear I never planned any wrong to either of you. I would die at your order now, as you know; but you have no right to order this, and I'll not answer!"

The hand closed at his throat. The boy could not speak, but still Meriwether Lewis growled on at him.

"Shannon! Speak! Why have you kept secrets from your commanding officer? You have begun to tell me—tell me all!"

The boy's hand clutched at his leader's wrists. At length Lewis loosed him.

"Captain," began the victim, "what do you mean? What can I do?"

"I will tell you what I mean, Shannon. I promised to care for you and bring you

back safe to your parents. You’ll never see your parents again, save on one condition. I trusted you, thought you had special loyalty for me. Was I wrong?”

“On my honor, Captain,” the boy broke out, “I’d have died for you any time, and I’d do it now! I’ve worked my very best. You’re my officer, my chief!”

With one movement, Meriwether Lewis flung off the uniform coat that he wore. They stood now, man to man, stripped, and neither gave back from the other.

“Shannon,” said Lewis, “I’m not your officer now. I’m going to choke the truth out of you. Will you fight me, or are you afraid?”

The last cruelty was too much. The boy began to gulp.

“I’m not afraid to fight, sir. I’d fight any man, but you—no, I’ll not do it! Even stripped, you’re my commander still.”

“Is that the reason?”

“Not all of it. You’re weak, Captain, your wound has you in a fever. ’Twould not be fair—I could do as I liked with you now. I’ll not fight you. I couldn’t!”

“What? You will not obey me as your officer, and will not fight me as a man? Do you want to be whipped? Do you want to be shot? Do you want to be drummed out of camp tomorrow morning? By Heaven, Private Shannon, one of these choices will be yours!”

But something of the icy silence of the youth who heard these terrible words gave pause even to the madman that was Meriwether Lewis now. He halted, his hooked hands extended for the spring upon his opponent.

“What is it, boy?” he whispered at last. “What have I done? What did I say?”

Shannon was sobbing now.

“Captain,” he said, and thrust a hand into the bosom of his tunic—“Captain, for Heaven’s sake, don’t do that! Don’t apologize to me. I understand. Leave me alone. Here’s the letter. There were six—this is the last.”

Lewis’s strained muscles relaxed, his blazing eyes softened.

“Shannon!” he whispered once more. “What have I done?”

He took the letter in his hand, but did not look at it, although his fingers could

feel the seal unbroken.

“Why do you give it to me now, boy?” he asked at length. “What changed you?”

“Because it’s orders, sir. She ordered me—that is, she asked me—to give you these letters at times when you seemed to need them most—when you were sick or in trouble, when anything had gone wrong. We couldn’t figure so far on ahead when I ought to give you each one. I had to do my best. I didn’t know at first, but now I see that you’re sick. You’re not yourself—you’re in trouble. She told me not to let you know who carried them,” he added rather inconsequently. “She said that that might end it all. She thought that you might come back.”

“Come back—when?”

“She didn’t know—we couldn’t any of us tell—it was all a guess. All this about the letters was left to me, to do my best. I couldn’t ask you, Captain, or any one. I don’t know what was in the letters, sir, and I don’t ask you, for that’s not my business; but I promised her.”

“What did she promise you?”

“Nothing. She didn’t promise me pay, because she knew I wouldn’t have done it for pay. She only looked at me, and she seemed sad, I don’t know why. I couldn’t help but promise her. I gave her my word of honor, because she said her letters might be of use to you, but that no one else must know that she had written them.”

“When was all this?”

“At St. Louis, just before we started. I reckon she picked me out because she thought I was especially close to you. You know I have been so.”

“Yes, I know, Shannon.”

“I thought I was doing something for you. You see, she told me that her name must not be mentioned, that no one must know about this, because it would hurt a woman’s reputation. She thought the men might talk, and that would be bad for you. I could not refuse her. Do you blame me now?”

“No, Shannon. No! In all this there is but one to blame, and that is your officer, myself!”

“I did not think there was any harm in my getting the letters to you, Captain. I

knew that lady was your friend. I know who she is. She was more beautiful than any woman in St. Louis when we were there—more a lady, somehow. Of course, I'm not an officer or a gentleman—I'm only a boy from the backwoods, and only a private soldier. I couldn't break my promise to her, and I couldn't very well obey your orders unless I did. If I've broken any of the regulations you can punish me. You see, I held back this letter—I gave it to you now because I had the feeling that I ought to—that she would want me to. It is the fever, sir!"

"Aye, the fever!"

Silence fell as they stood there in the night. The boy went on, half tremblingly:

"Please, please, Captain Lewis, don't call me a coward! I don't believe I am. I was trying to do something for you—for both of you. It was always on my mind about these letters. I did my best and now——"

And now it was the eye of Meriwether Lewis that suddenly was wet; it was his voice that trembled.

"Boy," said he, "I am your officer. Your officer asks your pardon. I have tried myself. I was guilty. Will you forget this?"

"Not a word to a soul in the world, Captain!" broke out Shannon. "About a woman, you see, we do not talk."

"No, Mr. Shannon, about a woman we gentlemen do not talk. But now tell me, boy, what can I do for you—what can I ever do for you?"

"Nothing in the world, Captain—but just one thing."

"What is it?"

"Please, sir, tell me that you don't think me a coward!"

"A coward? No, Shannon, you are the bravest fellow I ever met!"

The hand on the boy's shoulder was kindly now. The right hand of Captain Meriwether Lewis sought that of Private George Shannon. The madness of the trail, of the wilderness—the madness of absence and of remorse—had swept by, so that Lewis once more was officer, gentleman, just and generous man.

Shannon stooped and picked up the coat that his captain had cast from him. He held it up, and aided his commander again to don it. Then, saluting, he marched

off to his bivouac bed.

From that day to the end of his life, no one ever heard George Shannon mention a word of this episode. Beyond the two leaders of the party, none of the expedition ever knew who had played the part of the mysterious messenger. Nor did any one know, later, whence came the funds which eventually carried George Shannon through his schooling in the East, through his studies for the bar, and into the successful practise which he later built up in Kentucky's largest city.

Meriwether Lewis, limp and lax now, shivering in the chill under the reaction from his excitement, turned away, stepped back to his own lodge, and contrived a little light, after the frontier fashion—a rag wick in a shallow vessel of grease. With this uncertain aid he bent down closer to read the finely written lines, which ran:

> My Friend:
>
> This is my last letter to you. This is the one I have marked Number Six—the last one for my messenger.
>
> Yes, since you have not returned, now I know you never can. Rest well, then, sir, and let me be strong to bear the news when at length it comes, if it ever shall come. Let the winds and the waters sound your requiem in that wilderness which you loved more than me—which you loved more than fame or fortune, honor or glory for yourself. The wilderness! It holds you. And for me—when at last I come to lay me down, I hope, too, some wilderness of wood or waters will be around me with its vast silences.
>
> After all, what is life? Such a brief thing! Little in it but duty done well and faithfully. I know you did yours while you lived. I have tried to do mine. It has been hard for me to see what was duty. If I knew as absolute truth that conviction now in my heart—that you never can come back—how then could I go on?
>
> Meriwether—Merne—Merne—I have been calling to you! Have you not heard me? Can you not hear me now, calling to you across all the distances to come back to me? I cannot give you up to the world, because I have loved you so much for myself. It was a cruel fate that parted us—more and more I know that, even as more and more I resolve to do what is my duty. But, oh, I miss you! Come

back to me—to one who never was and never can be, but *is*——

Yours,

THEODOSIA.

It took him long to read this letter. At last his trembling hand dropped the creased and broken sheets. The guttering light went out. The men were silent, sleeping near their fires. The peace of the great plains lay all about.

She had said it—had said that last fated word. Now indeed he knew what voice had called to him across the deeps!

He reflected now that all these messages had been written to him before he left her; and that when he saw her last she was standing, tears in her eyes, outraged by the act of the man whom she had trusted—nay, whom she had loved!

# CHAPTER XIII

## THE NEWS

A horseman rode furiously over the new road from Fort Bellefontaine to St. Louis village. He carried news. The expedition of Lewis and Clark had returned!

Yes, these men so long thought lost, dead, were coming even now with their own story, with their proofs. The boats had passed Charette, had passed Bellefontaine, and presently would be pulling up the river to the water front of St. Louis itself.

“Run, boys!” cried Pierre Chouteau to his servants. “Call out the people! Tell them to ring the bells—tell them to fire the guns at the fort yonder. Captains Lewis and Clark have come back again—those who were dead!”

The little settlement was afire upon the instant. Laughing, talking, ejaculating, weeping in their joy, the people of St. Louis hurried out to meet the men whose voyage meant so much.

At last they saw them coming, the paddles flashing in unison in the horny hands which tirelessly drove the boats along the river. They could see them—men with long beards, clad in leggings of elk hide, moccasins of buffalo and deer; their head-dresses those of the Indians, their long hair braided. And see, in the prow of the foremost craft sat two men, side by side—Lewis and Clark, the two friends who had arisen as if from the grave!

“Present arms!” rang out a sharp command, as the boats lined up along the wharf.

The brown and scarred rifles came to place.

“Aim! Fire!”

The volley of salutation blazed out even with the chorus of the voyageurs’ cheers. And cheers repeated and unceasing greeted them as they stepped from their boats to the wharf. In an instant they were half overpowered.

“Come with me!”

“No, with me!”

“With me!”

A score of eager voices of the first men of St. Louis claimed the privilege of hospitality for them. It was almost by force that Pierre Chouteau bore them away to his castle on the hill. And always questions, questions, came upon them—ejaculations, exclamations.

“*Ma foi!*” exclaimed more than one pretty French maiden. “Such men—such splendid men—savages, yet white! See! See!”

They had gone away as youths, these two captains; they had come back men. Four thousand miles out and back they had gone, over a country unmapped, unknown; and they brought back news—news of great, new lands. Was it any wonder that they stood now, grave and dignified, feeling almost for the first time the weight of what they had done?

They passed over the boat-landing and across the wharf, approaching the foot of the rocky bluff above which lay the long street of St. Louis. Silent, as was his wont, Meriwether Lewis had replied to most of the greetings only with the smile which so lighted up his face. But now, suddenly, he ceased even to smile. His eye rested not upon the faces of those acclaiming friends, but upon something else beyond them.

Yes, there it was—the old fur-shed, the storage-house of the traders here on the wharf, just as he had left it two years before! The door was closed. What lay beyond it?

Lewis shuddered, as if caught with chill, as he looked at yonder door. Just there she had stood, more than two years ago, when he started out on this long journey. There he had kissed that face which he had left in tears—he saw it now! All the glory of his safe return, all the wonderful results which it must mean, he would have given now, could he have had back that picture for a different making.

“My matches—my thermometers—my instruments—how did they perform?”

The speaker was Dr. Saugrain, eager to meet again his friends.

“Perfect, doctor, perfect! We have some of the matches yet. As to the thermometers, we broke the last one before we reached the sea.”

“You found the sea? *Mon Dieu!*”

“We found the Pacific. We found the Columbia, the Yellowstone—many new rivers. We have found a new continent—made a new geography. We passed the head of the Missouri. We found three great mountain ranges.”

“The beaver—did you find the beaver yonder?” demanded the voice of a swarthy man who had attended them.

It was Manuel Liza, fur-trader, his eyes glowing in his interest in that reply.

“Beaver?” William Clark waved a hand. “How many I could not tell you! Thousands and millions—more beaver than ever were known in the world before. Millions of buffalo—elk in droves—bears such as you never saw—antelope, great horned sheep, otters, muskrat, mink—the greatest fur country in all the world. We could not tell you half!”

“Your men, will they be free to make return up the river with trading parties?”

William Clark smiled at the keenness of the old French trader.

“You could not possibly have better men,” said he.

The men themselves shook their heads in despair. Yes, they said, they had found a thousand miles of country ready to be plowed. They had found any quantity of hardwood forests and pine groves. They had seen rivers packed with fish until they were half solid—more fish than ever were in all the world before. They had found great rivers which led far back to the heart of the continent. They had seen trees larger than any man ever had seen—so large that they hardly could be felled by an ax.

They had found a country where in the winter men perished, and another where the winters were not cold, and where the bushes grew high as trees. They had found all manner of new animals never known before—in short, a new world. How could they tell of it?

“Captain,” inquired Chouteau at length, “your luggage, your boxes—where are they?”

Meriwether Lewis pointed to a skin parfleche and a knotted bandanna handkerchief which George Shannon carried for him.

“That is all I have left,” said he. “But the mail for the East—the mail, M.

Chouteau—we must get word to the President!”

“The President has long ago been advised of your death,” said Chouteau, laughing. “All the world has said good-by to you. No doubt you can read your own obituaries.”

“We bring them better news than that. What news for us?” asked the two captains of their host.

“News!” The voluble Frenchman threw up his hands. “Nothing but news! The entire world is changed since you left. I could not tell you in a month. The Burr duel——”

“Yes, we did not know of it for two years,” said William Clark. “We have just heard about it, up river.”

“The killing of Mr. Hamilton ended the career of Colonel Burr,” said Chouteau. “But for that we might have different times here in Mississippi. He had many friends. But you have heard the last news regarding him?”

It was the dark eye of Meriwether Lewis which now compelled his attention.

“No? Well, he came out here through this country once more. He was arrested last summer, on the Natchez Trace, and carried off to Washington. The charge is treason against his government. The country is full of it—his trial is to be at Richmond. Even now it may be going on.”

He did not notice the sudden change in Meriwether Lewis’s face.

“And all the world is swimming in blood across the sea,” went on their garrulous informant. “Napoleon and Great Britain are at war again. Were it not so, one or the other of them would be at the gates of New Orleans, that is sure. This country is still discontented. There was much in the plan of Colonel Burr to separate this valley into a country of its own, independent—to force a secession from the republic, even though by war on the flag. Indeed, he was prepared for that; but now his conspiracy is done. Perhaps, however, you do not hold with the theory of Colonel Burr?”

“Hold with the theory of Colonel Burr, sir?” exclaimed the deep voice of Meriwether Lewis. “Hold with it? This is the first time I have known what it was. It was treason! If he had any join him, that was in treason! He sought to disrupt this country? Agree with him? What is this you tell me? I had never

dreamed such a thing as possible of him!”

“He had many friends,” went on Chouteau; “very many friends. They are scattered even now all up and down this country—men who will not give up their cause. All those men needed was a leader.”

“But, M. Chouteau,” rejoined Lewis, “I do not understand—I cannot! What Colonel Burr attempted was an actual treason to this republic. I find it difficult to believe that!”

Chouteau shrugged his shoulders.

“There may be two names for it,” he said.

“And every one asked to join the cause was asked to join in treason to his country. Is it not so?” Lewis went on.

“There may be two names for it,” smiled the other, still shrugging.

“He was my friend,” said Meriwether Lewis. “I trusted him!”

“Always, I repeat, there are two names for treason. But what puzzles me is this,” Chouteau continued. “What halted the cause of Colonel Burr here in the West? He seemed to be upon the point of success. His organization was complete—his men were in New Orleans—he had great lands purchased as a rendezvous below. He had understandings with foreign powers, that is sure. Well, then, here is Colonel Burr at St. Louis, all his plans arranged. He is ready to march, to commence his campaign, to form this valley into a great kingdom, with Mexico as part of it. He was a man able to make plans, believe me. But of all this there comes—nothing! Why? At the last point something failed—no one knew what. He waited for something—no one knew what. Something lacked—no one can tell what. And all the time—this is most curious to me—I learned it through others—Colonel Burr was eager to hear something of the expedition of Lewis and Clark into the West. Why? No one knows! *Does* no one know?”

The captain did not speak, and Chouteau presently went on.

“Why did Colonel Burr hesitate, why did he give up his plans here—why, indeed, did he fail? You ask me why these things were? I say, it was because of you—*messieurs*, you two young men, with your Lewis and Clark Expedition! It was *you* who broke the Burr Conspiracy—for so they call it in these days. *Messieurs*, that is your news!”

# CHAPTER XIV

## THE GUESTS OF A NATION

“

Attention, men!”

The company of Volunteers for the Discovery of the West fell into line in front of the stone fortress of old St. Louis. A motley crew they looked in their half-savage garb. They were veterans, fit for any difficult undertaking in the wilderness. Shoulder to shoulder they had labored in the great enterprise. Now they were to disband.

Their leaders had laid aside the costume of the frontier and assumed the uniforms of officers in the army of the United States. Fresh from his barber and his tailor, Captain Lewis stood, tall, clean-limbed, immaculate, facing his men. His beard was gone, his face showed paler where it had been reaped. His hair, grown quite long, and done now in formal cue, hung low upon his shoulders. In every line a gentleman, an officer, and a thoroughbred, he no longer bore any trace of the wilderness. Love, confidence, admiration—these things showed in the faces of his men as their eyes turned to him.

“Men,” said he, “you are to be mustered out today. There will be given to each of you a certificate of service in this expedition. It will entitle you to three hundred and twenty acres of land, to be selected where you like west of the Mississippi River. You will have double pay in gold as well; but it is not only in this way that we seek to show appreciation of your services.

“We have concluded a journey of considerable length and importance. Between you and your officers there have been such relations as only could have made successful a service so extraordinary as ours has been. In our reports to our own superior officers we shall have no words save those of praise for any of you. Our expedition has succeeded. To that success you have all contributed. Your officers thank you.

“Captain Clark will give you your last command, men. As I say farewell to you, I trust I may not be taken to mean that I separate myself from you in my

thoughts or memories. If I can ever be of service to any of you, you will call upon me freely.”

He turned and stepped aside. His place was taken by his associate, William Clark, likewise a soldier, an officer, properly attired, and all the figure of a proper man. Clark’s voice rang sharp and clear.

“Attention! Aim—fire! Break ranks—march!”

The last volley of the gallant little company was fired. The last order had been given and received. With a sweep of his drawn sword, Captain Clark dismissed them. The expedition was done.

So now they went their way, most of them into oblivion, great though their services had been. For their officers much more remained to do.

The progress to Washington was a triumph. Everywhere their admiring countrymen were excited over their marvelous journey. They were fêted and honored at every turn. The country was ringing with their praises from the Mississippi to the Atlantic as the news spread eastward just ahead of them.

When at last they finished their adieux to the kindly folk of St. Louis, who scarce would let them go, they took boat across the river to the old Kaskaskia trail, and crossed the Illinois country by horse to the Falls of the Ohio, where the family of William Clark awaited him. Here was much holiday, be sure; but not even here did they pause long, for they must be on their way to meet their chief at Washington.

Their little cavalcade, growing larger now, passed on across Kentucky, over the gap in the Cumberlands, down into the country of the Virginia gentry. Here again they were fêted and dined and wined so long as they would tarry. It was specially difficult for them to leave Colonel Hancock, at Fincastle. Here they must pause and tell how they had named certain rivers in the West—the one for Maria Woods; another for Judith Hancock—the Maria’s and Judith Rivers of our maps today.

Here William Clark delayed yet a time. He found in the charms of the fair Judith herself somewhat to give him pause. Soon he was to take her as his bride down the Ohio to yonder town of St. Louis, for whose fame he had done so much, and was to do so much more.

Toward none of the fair maids who now flocked about them could Meriwether

Lewis be more than smiling gallant, though rumors ran that either he or William Clark might well-nigh take his pick. He was alike to all of them in his courtesy.

One thought of eager and unalloyed joy rested with him. He was soon to see his mother. In time he rode down from the hilltops of old Albemarle to the point beyond the Ivy Depot where rose the gentle eminence of Locust Hill, the plantation of the Lewis family.

Always in the afternoon, in all weathers, his mother sat looking down the long lane to the gate, as if she expected that one day a certain figure would appear. Sometimes, old as she was, she dozed and dreamed—just now she had done so. She awoke, and saw standing before her, as if pictured in her dream, the form of her son, in bodily presence, although at first she did not accept him as such.

“My son!” said she at length, half as much in terror as in joy. “Merne!”

He stooped down and took her grayed head in his hands as she looked up at him. She recalled other times when he had come from the forest, from the wilderness, bearing trophies in his hands. He bore now trophies greater, perhaps, than any man of his age ever had brought home with him. What Washington had defended was not so great as that which Lewis won. It required them both to make an America for us haggling and unworthy followers.

“My son!” was all she could say. “They told me that you never would come back, that you were dead. I thought the wilderness had claimed you at last, Merne!”

“I told you I should come back to you safe, mother. There was no danger at any time. From St. Louis I have come as fast as any messenger could have come. Next I must go to see Mr. Jefferson at Washington—then, back home again to talk with you, for long, long hours.”

“And what have you found?”

“More than I can tell you in a year! We found the mysterious river, the Columbia—found where it runs into the ocean, where it starts in the mountains. We found the head of the Missouri—the Ohio is but a creek beside it. We crossed plains and mountains more wonderful than any we have ever dreamed of. We saw the most wonderful land in all the world, mother—and we made it ours!”

“And you did that? Merne, was *that* why the wilderness called to you? My boy has done all that? Your country will reward you. I should not complain of all

these years of absence. You are happy now, are you not?”

“I should be the happiest of men. I can take to Mr. Jefferson, our best friend, the proof that he was right in his plans. His great dream has come true, and I in some part helped to make it true. Should I not now be happy?”

“You should be, Merne, but are you?”

“I am well, and I find you still well and strong. My friend, Will Clark, has come back with me hearty as a boy. Everything has been fortunate with us. Look at me,” he demanded, turning and stretching out his mighty arms. “I am strong. My men all came through without loss or injury—the splendid fellows! It is wonderful that in risks such as ours we met with no ill fortune.”

“Yes, but are you happy? Turn your face to me.”

But he did not turn his face.

“I told my friend, William Clark,” he said lightly, as he rose, “to join me here after an hour or so. I think I see his party coming now. York rides ahead, do you see? He is a free negro now—he will have stories enough to set all our blacks idle for a month. I must go down to meet Will and our other guests.”

William Clark, bubbling over with his own joy of life, set all the household in a whirl. There was nothing but cooking, festivity, dancing, hilarity, so long as he remained at Locust Hill.

But the mother of Meriwether Lewis looked with jealous eye on William Clark. Success, glory, honor, fame, reward—these now belonged to Meriwether Lewis, to them both, his mother knew. But why did not his laugh sound high like that of his friend? Her eyes followed her son daily, hourly, until at last she surrendered him to his duty when he declared he could no longer delay his journey to Washington.

Spick and span, cap-a-pie, pictures of splendid young manhood, the two captains rode one afternoon up to the great gate before the mansion house of the nation. Lewis looked about him at scenes once familiar; but in the three years and a half since he had seen it last the raw town had changed rapidly.

Workmen had done somewhat upon the Capitol building yonder, certain improvements had been made about the Executive Mansion itself; but the old negro men at the gate and at the door of the house were just as he had left them.

And when, running on ahead of his companion, he knocked at Mr. Jefferson’s office door—flinging it open, as he did so, with the freedom of his old habit—he looked in upon a familiar sight.

Thomas Jefferson was sitting bent over his desk, as usual littered with a thousand papers. The long frame of his multigraph copying-machine was at one side. Folded documents lay before him, unfinished briefs upon the other side; a rack of goose quills and an open inkpot stood beyond. And on the top of the desk, spread out long and over all, lay a great map, whose identity these two young men easily could tell—the Lewis and Clark map sent back from the Mandan country! Thomas Jefferson had kept it at his desk every day since it had come to him, more than two years before.

He turned now toward the door, casually, for he was used to the interruptions of his servants. What he saw brought him to his feet. He spread out his arms impulsively—he shook the hand of each in turn, drew them to him before he motioned them to seats. Never had Meriwether Lewis seen such emotion displayed by his chief.

“I could hardly wait for you!” said Mr. Jefferson. He began to pace up and down. “I knew it, I knew it!” he exclaimed. “Now they will call us constitutional, perhaps, since we have added a new world to our country! My son, that was our vision. You have proved it. You have been both dreamer and doer!”

He came up and placed a half playful hand on Meriwether Lewis’s shoulder.

“Did I know men, then?” he demanded.

“And did I, Mr. Jefferson? Captain Clark——”

“You do not say the title correctly! It is not Captain Clark, it is not Captain Lewis, that stand before me now. You are to have sixteen hundred acres of land, each of you. You, my son, will be Governor Lewis of the new Territory of Louisiana; and your friend is not Captain Clark but General Clark, agent of all the Indian tribes of the West!”

In silence the hand of each of the young men went out to the President. Then their own eyes met, and their hands. They were not to be separated after all—they were to work together yonder in St. Louis!

“Governor—General—I welcome you back! You will come back to your old rooms here in my family, Merne, and we will find a place for your friend. What

we have here is at the service of both of you. You are the guests of the nation!”

# CHAPTER XV

## MR. JEFFERSON’S ADVICE

“

Merne, my boy,” said Thomas Jefferson, when at length they two were alone once more in the little office, “I cannot say what your return means to me. You come as one from the grave—you resurrect another from the grave.”

“Meaning, Mr. Jefferson?——”

“You surely have heard that my administration is in sad disrepute? There is no man in the country hated so bitterly as myself. We are struggling on the very verge of war.”

“I heard some talk in the West, Mr. Jefferson,” hesitated Meriwether Lewis.

“Yes, they called this Louisiana Purchase, on which I had set my heart, nothing but extravagance. The machinations of Colonel Burr have added nothing to its reputation. General Jackson is with Burr, and many other strong friends. And meantime you know where Burr himself is—in the Richmond jail. I understand that his friend, Mr. Merry, has gone yonder to visit him. Our country is degenerated to be no more than a scheming-ground, a plotting-place, for other powers. You come back just in the nick of time. You have saved this administration! You bring back success with you. If the issue of your expedition were anything else, I scarce know what would be my own case here. For myself, that would have mattered little; but as to this country for which I have planned so much, your failure would have cost us all the Mississippi Valley, besides all the valley of the Missouri and the Columbia. Yes, had you not succeeded, Aaron Burr would have succeeded! Instead of a great republic reaching from ocean to ocean, we should have had a scattered coterie of States of no endurance, no continuity, no power. Thank God for the presence of one great, splendid thing gloriously done! You cannot, do not, begin to measure its importance.”

“We are glad that you have been pleased, Mr. Jefferson,” said Lewis simply.

“Pleased! Pleased! Say rather that I am saved! Say rather that this country is

saved! Had you proved disloyal to me—had you for any cause turned back," he went on, "think what had been the result! What a load, although you knew it not, was placed on your shoulders! Suppose that you had turned back on the trail last year, or the summer before—suppose you had not gotten beyond the Mandans—can you measure the difference for this republic? Can you begin to see what responsibility rested on you? Had you failed, you would have dragged the flag of your country in the dust. Had you come back any time before you did, then you might have called yourself the man who ruined his President, his friend, his country!"

"And I nearly did, Mr. Jefferson!" broke out Meriwether Lewis. "Do not praise me too much. I was tempted——"

The old man turned toward him, his face grave.

"You are honest! I value that above all in you—you are punctilious to have no praise not honestly won. Listen, now!" He leaned toward the young man, who sat beside him. "I know—I knew all along—how you were tempted. She came here—Theodosia—the very day you left!"

Lewis nodded, mute.

"In some way, I knew, the conspirators fought against your success and mine. I knew what agencies they intended to use against you—it was this woman! Had you failed, I should have known why. I know many things, whether or not you do. I know the character of Aaron Burr well enough. He has been crazed, carried away by his own ambitions—God alone knows where he would have stopped. He has been a man not surpassed in duplicity. He would stop at nothing. Moreover, he could make black look white. He did so for his daughter. She believed in him absolutely. And knowing somewhat of his plans, I imagined that he would use the attraction of that young lady for you—the power which, all things considered, she might be supposed to possess with you. I knew the depth of your regard for her, the deeper for its hopelessness. And more than all, I knew the intentness and resolution of your character. It was one motive against the other! Which was the stronger? You were a young man—the hot blood of youth was yours, and I know its power. Had the woman not been married, I should have lost! You would have sold a crown for her. It was honor saved you—your personal honor—that was what brought us success. No country is bigger than the personal honor of its gentlemen."

The bowed head of Meriwether Lewis was his only answer. The keen-faced old

man went on:

“I knew that before you had left the mouth of the Ohio River he would do his best to stop you—I knew it before you had left Harper’s Ferry; but I placed the issue in the lap of the gods. I applied to you all the tests—the severest tests—that one man can to another. I let you alone! For a year, two years, three years, I did not know. But now I do know; and the answer is yonder flag which you have carried from one ocean to the other. The answer is in this map, all these hides scrawled in coal—all those new thousands of miles of land—*our* land. God keep it safe for us always! And may the people one day know who really secured it for them! It was not so much Thomas Jefferson as it was Meriwether Lewis.

“Each time I dreamed that my subtle enemies were tempting you, I prayed in my own soul that you would be strong; that you would go on; that you would be loyal to your duty, no matter what the cost. God answered those prayers, my boy! Whatever was your need, whatever price you paid, you did what I prayed you would do. When the months passed and you did not come back, I knew that not even the woman you loved could have called you back. I knew that you had learned the priceless lesson of renunciation, of sacrifice, through which alone the great deeds of the world always have been done.”

Meriwether Lewis stood before his chief, cold and pale, unable to complete much speech. Thomas Jefferson looked at him for a moment before he went on.

“My boy, you are so simple that you will not understand. You do not understand how well I understand you! These things are not done without cost. If there was punishment for you, you took that punishment—or you will! You kept your oath as an officer and your unwritten oath as a gentleman. It is a great thing for a man to have his honor altogether unsullied.”

“Mr. Jefferson!” The young man before him lifted a hand. His face was ghastly pale. “Do not,” said he. “Do not, I beg of you!”

“What is it, Merne?” exclaimed the old man. “What have I done?”

“You speak of my honor. Do not! Indeed, you touch me deep.”

Thomas Jefferson, wise old man, raised a hand.

“I shall never listen, my son,” said he. “I will accord to you the right of hot blood to run hot—you would not be a man worth knowing were it not so. All I know or will know is that whatever the price, you have paid it—or will pay it! But tell

me, Merne, can you not tear her from your soul? It will ruin you, this hopeless attachment which you cherish. Is it always to remain with you? I bid you find some other woman. The best in the land are waiting for you."

"Mr. Jefferson, I shall never marry."

The two sat looking into each other's eyes for just a moment. Said Thomas Jefferson at length, slowly:

"So! You have come back with all happiness, all success, for me and for others—but not for yourself! Such proving as you have had has fallen to the lot of but few men. I know now how great has been the cost—I see it in your face. The fifteen millions I paid for yonder lands was nothing. We have bought them with the happiness of a human soul! The transient gratitude of this republic—the honor of that little paper—bah, they are nothing! But perhaps it may be something for you to know that at least one friend understands."

Lewis did not speak.

"What is lost is lost," the President began again after a time. "What is broken is broken. But see how clearly I look into your soul. You are not thinking now of what you can do for yourself. You are not thinking of your new rank, your honors. You are asking now, at this moment, what you can do for *her*! Is it not so?"

The smile that came upon the young man's face was a beautiful, a wonderful thing to see. It made the wise old man sad to see it—but thoughtful, too.

"She is at Richmond, Merne?" said Mr. Jefferson a moment later.

The young man nodded.

"And the greatest boon she could ask would be her father's freedom—the freedom of the man who sought to ruin this country—the man whom I scarcely dare release."

The thin lips compressed for a moment. It was not in implacable, vengeful zeal—it was but in thought.

"Now, then," said Thomas Jefferson sharply, "there comes a veil, a curtain, between you and me and all the world. No record must show that either of us raised a hand against the full action of the law, or planned that Colonel Burr

should not suffer the full penalty of the code. Yes, for him that is true—but *not for his daughter*!"

"Mr. Jefferson!" The face of Meriwether Lewis was strangely moved. "I see the actual greatness of your soul; but I ask nothing."

"Why, in my heart I feel like flinging open every prison door in the world. If you have gained an empire for your country, and paid for it as you have, could not a great and rich country afford to pay to the extent of a woman's happiness? When a king is crowned, he sets free the criminals. And this day I feel as proud and happy as if I were a king—and king of the greatest empire of all the world! I know well who assured that kingdom. Let me be, then"—he raised his long hand—"say nothing, do nothing. And let this end all talk between us of these matters. I know you can keep your own counsel."

Lewis bowed silently.

"Go to Richmond, Merne. You will find there a broken conspirator and his unhappy daughter. Both are ostracized. None is so poor as to do either of them reverence. She has no door opened to her now, though but lately she was daughter of the Vice-President, the rich Mrs. Alston, wife of the Governor of her State. Go to them now. Tell Colonel Burr that the President will not ask mercy for him. John Marshall is on the bench there; but before him is a jury—John Randolph is foreman of that jury. It is there that case will be tried—in the jury room; and *politics will try it*! Go to Theodosia, Merne, in her desperate need."

"But what can I do, Mr. Jefferson?" broke out his listener.

"Do precisely what I tell you. Go to that social outcast. Take her on your arm before all the world—*and before that jury*! Sit there, before all Richmond—and that jury. An hour or so will do. Do that, and then, as I did when I trusted you, ask no questions, but leave it on the knees of the gods. If you can call me chief in other matters," the President concluded, "and can call me chief in that fashion of thought which men call religion as well, let me give you unction and absolution, my son. It is all that I have to give to one whom I have always loved as if he were my own son. This is all I can do for you. It may fail; but I would rather trust that jury to be right than trust myself today; because, I repeat, I feel like flinging open every prison door in all the world, and telling every erring, stumbling man to try once more to do what his soul tells him he ought to do!"

# CHAPTER XVI

## THE QUALITY OF MERCY

In Richmond jail lay Aaron Burr, the great conspirator, the ruins of his ambition fallen about him. He had found a prison instead of a palace. He was eager no longer to gain a scepter, but only to escape a noose.

The great conspiracy was at an end. The only question was of the punishment the accused should have—for in the general belief he was certain of conviction. That he never was convicted has always been one of the most mysterious facts of a mysterious chapter in our national development.

So crowded were the hostelries of Richmond that a stranger would have had difficulty in finding lodging there during the six months of the Burr trial. Not so with Meriwether Lewis, now one of the country's famous men. A score of homes opened their doors to him. The town buzzed over his appearance. He had once been the friend of Burr, always the friend of Jefferson. To which side now would he lean.

Luther Martin, chief of Burr's counsel, was eager above all to have a word with Meriwether Lewis, so close to affairs in Washington, possibly so useful to himself. Washington Irving, too, assistant to Martin in the great trial, would gladly have had talk with him. All asked what his errand might be. What was the leaning of the Governor of the new Territory, a man closer to the administration at Washington than any other?

Meriwether Lewis kept his own counsel. He arranged first to see Burr himself. The meagerly furnished anteroom of the Federal prison in Richmond was the discredited adventurer's reception-hall in those days.

Burr advanced to meet his visitor with something of his own old haughtiness of mien, a little of the former brilliance of his eye.

“Governor, I am delighted to see you, back safe and sound from your journey. My congratulations, sir!”

Meriwether Lewis made no reply, but gazed at him steadily, well aware of the

stinging sarcasm of his words.

“I have few friends now,” said Aaron Burr. “You have many. You are on the flood tide—it ebbs for me. When one loses, what mercy is shown to him? That scoundrel Merry—he promised everything and gave nothing! Yrujo—he is worse yet in his treachery. Even the French minister, Turreau—who surely might listen to the wishes of the great French population of the Mississippi Valley—pays no attention to their petitions whatever, and none to mine. These were my former friends! I promised them a country.”

“You promised them a country, Colonel Burr—from what?”

“From that great ownerless land yonder, the West. But they waited and waited, until your success was sure. Why, that scoundrel Merry is here this very day—the effrontery of him! He wants nothing more to do with me. No, he is here to undertake to recoup himself in his own losses by reasons of moneys he advanced to me some time ago. He is importuning my son-in-law, Mr. Alston, to pay him back those funds—which once he was so ready to furnish to us. But Mr. Alston is ruined—I am ruined—we are all ruined. No, they waited too long!”

“They waited until it was too late, yes,” Lewis returned. “That country is American now, not British or Spanish or French. Our men are passing across the river in thousands. They will never loose their hold on the West. It was treason to the future that you planned—but it was hopeless from the first!”

“It would seem, sir,” said Aaron Burr, a cynical smile twisting his thin lip, “that I may not count upon your friendship!”

“That is a hard speech, Colonel Burr. I was your friend.”

“More than your chief ever was! I fancy Mr. Jefferson would like to see me pilloried, drawn and quartered, after the old way.”

“You are unjust to him. You struck at the greatest ambition of his life—struck at his heart and the heart of his country—when you undertook to separate the West from this republic.”

“I am a plain man, and a busy man,” said Aaron Burr coldly. “I must employ my time now to the betterment of my situation. I have failed, and you have won. But let me throw the cloak aside, since I know you can be of no service to me. I care not what punishment you may have—what suffering—because I recognize in you the one great cause of my failure. It was *you*, sir, with your cursed

expedition, that defeated Aaron Burr!”

He turned, proud and defiant even in his failure, and when Meriwether Lewis looked up he was gone.

Even as Burr passed, Meriwether Lewis heard a light step in the long corridor. Under guard of the turnkey, some one stood at the door. It was the figure of a woman—a figure which caused him to halt, caused his heart to leap!

She came toward him now, all in mourning black—hat, gown, and gloves. Her face was pale, her eyes deep, her mouth drooping. Theodosia Alston was always thus on her daily visit to her father’s cell.

Herself the picture of failure and despair, she was used to avoiding the eyes of all; but she saw Meriwether Lewis standing before her, strong, tall, splendid in his manhood and vigor, in the full tide of his success. She was almost in touch of his hand when she raised her eyes to his.

These two had met at last, after what far wanderings apart! They had met as if each came from the Valley of the Shadows. Out of the vastness of the unknown, over all those long and devious trails, into what now seemed to him a world still more vast, more fraught with desperate peril, he had come back to her. And she—what had been her perils? What were her thoughts?

As his eye fell upon her, even as his keen ear had known her coming, the hand of Meriwether Lewis half unconsciously went to his breast. He felt under it the packet of faded letters which he had so long kept with him—which in some way he felt to be his talisman.

Yes, it was for this that he had had them! His love and hers—this had been his shield through all. What he saw in her grave face, her mournful eyes uplifted to his own—this was the solution of the riddle of his life, the reason for his moods of melancholy, the answer to a thousand unspoken prayers. He felt his heart thrill strong and full, felt his blood spring in strong current through his veins, until they strained, until he felt his nerves tingle as he stood, silent, endeavoring to still the tumult within him, now that he knew the great and satisfying truth of truths.

To her he was—what? A tall and handsome gentleman, immaculately clad, Governor of the newest of our Territories—the largest and richest realm ever laid under the rule of any viceroy. A bystander might have pondered on such things,

but Meriwether Lewis had no thought of them, nor had the woman who looked up at him. No, to her eyes there stood only the man who made her blood leap, her soul cry out:

"Yea! Yea! Now I know!"

To her also, from the divine compassion, was given answer for her questionings. She knew that life for her, even though it ended now, had been no blind puzzle, after all, but was a glorious and perfect thing. She had called to him across the deep, and he had heard and come! From the very grave itself he had arisen and come again to her!

Even here under the shadow of the gallows—even if, as both knew in their supreme renunciation, they must part and never meet again—for them both there could be peaceful calm, with all life's questions answered, beautifully and surely answered, never again to rise for conquering.

"Sir—Captain—that is to say, Governor Lewis," she corrected herself, "I was not expecting you."

Her tone seemed icy, though her soul was in her eyes. She was all upon the defense, as Lewis instantly understood. He took her hand in both of his own, and looked into her face.

She gazed up at him, and swiftly, mercifully, the tears came. Gently, as if she had been a child, he dried them for her—as once when a boy, he had promised to do. They were alone now. The cold silence of the prison was about them; but their own long silence seemed a golden, glowing thing. Thus only—in their silence—could they speak. They did not know that they stood hand in hand.

"My husband is not here," said she at length, gently disengaging her hand from his. "No one knows me now, every one avoids me. You must not be seen with me—a pariah, an outcast! I am my father's only friend. Already they condemn him; yet he is as innocent as any man ever was."

"I shall say no word to change that belief," said Meriwether Lewis. "But your husband is not here? It is he whom I must see at once."

"Why must you see him?"

"You must know! It is my duty to go to him and to tell him that I am the man who—who made you weep. He must have his satisfaction. Nothing that he can

do will punish me as my own conscience has already punished me. It is no use—I shall not ask you to forgive me—I will not be so cheap."

"But—*suppose he does not know*?"

He could only stand silent, regarding her fixedly.

"He must never know!" she went on. "It is no time for quixotism to make yet another suffer. We two must be strong enough to carry our own secret. It is better and kinder that it should be between two than among three. I thought you dead. Let the past remain past—let it bury its own dead!"

"It is our time of reckoning," said he, at length. "Guilty as I have been, sinning as I have sinned—tell me, was I alone in the wrong? Listen. Those who joined your father's cause were asked to join in treason to their country. What he purposed was *treason*. Tell me, did you know this when you came to me?"

He saw the quick pain upon her face, the flush that rose to her pale cheek. She drew herself up proudly.

"I shall not answer that!" said she.

"No!" he exclaimed, swiftly contrite. "Nor shall I ask it. Forgive me! You never knew—you were innocent. You do right not to answer such a question."

"I only wanted you to be happy—that was my one desire."

She looked aside, and a moment passed before she heard his deep voice reply.

"Happy! I am the most unhappy man in all the world. Happiness? No—rags, shreds, patches of happiness—that is all that is left of happiness for us, as men and women usually count it. But tell me, what would make you most happy now, of these things remaining? I have come back to pay my debts. Is there anything I can do? What would make you happiest?"

"*My father's freedom!*"

"I cannot promise that; but all that I can do I will."

"Were my father guilty, that would be the act of a noble mind. But how? You are Mr. Jefferson's friend, not the friend of Aaron Burr. All the world knows that."

"Precisely. All the world knows that, or thinks it does. It thinks it knows that Mr. Jefferson is implacable. But suppose all the world were set to wondering? I am

just wondering myself if it would be right to suborn a juryman, like John Randolph of Roanoke!”[6]

“That is impossible. What do you mean?”

“I mean this. This afternoon you and I will go into the trial-room together. I have not yet attended a session of the court. Today I will hand you to your seat in full sight of the jury box.”

“You—give your presence to one who is now a social pariah? The ladies of Richmond no longer speak to me. But to what purpose?”

“Perhaps to small purpose. I cannot tell. But let us suppose that I go with you, and that we sit there in sight of all. I am known to be the intimate friend of Mr. Jefferson. *Ergo*——”

“*Ergo*, Mr. Jefferson is not hostile to us! And you would do that—you would take that chance?”

“For you.”

And he did—for her! That afternoon all the crowded court-room saw the beadle make way for two persons of importance. One was a tall, grave, distinguished-looking man, impassive, calm, a man whose face was known to all—the new Governor of Louisiana, viceroy of the country that Burr had lost. Upon his arm, pale, clad all in black, walked the daughter of the prisoner at the bar!

Was it in defiance or in compliance that this act was done? Was it by orders, or against orders, or without orders, that the President’s best friend walked in public, before all the world, with the daughter of the President’s worst enemy? It was the guess of anybody and the query of all.

There, in full view of all the attendants, in full view of the jury—and of John Randolph of Roanoke, its foreman—sat the two persons who had had most to do with this scene of which they now made a part. There sat the man who had explored the great West, and the woman who had done her best to prevent that exploration; Mr. Jefferson’s friend, and the daughter of the great conspirator, Aaron Burr. *Ergo, ergo*, said many tongues swiftly—and leaned head to head to whisper it. Mind sometimes speaks to mind—even across the rail of a jury-box. Sympathy runs deep and swift sometimes. All the world loved Meriwether Lewis then, would favor him—or favor what he favored.

The issue of that great trial was not to come for weeks as yet; but when it came, and by whatever process, Aaron Burr was acquitted of the charges brought against him. The republic for whose downfall he had plotted set him free and bade him begone.

But now, at the close of this day, the two central figures of the tragic drama found themselves together once more. They could be alone nowhere but in the prison room; and it was there that they parted.

Between them, as they stood now at last, about to part, there stretched an abysmal gulf which might never personally be passed by either.

She faced him at length, trembling, pleading, helpless.

"How mighty a thing is a man's sense of honor!" she said slowly. "You have done what I never would have asked you to do, and I am glad that you did. I once asked you to do what you would not do, and I am glad that you did not. How can I repay you for what you have done today? I cannot tell how, but I feel that you have turned the tide for us. Ah, if ever you felt that you owed me anything, it is paid—all your debt to me and mine. See, I no longer weep. You have dried my tears!"

"We cannot balance debits and credits," he replied. "There is no way in the world in which you and I can cry quits. Only one thing is sure—I must go!"

"I cannot say good-by!" said she. "Ah, do not ask me that! We are but beginning now. Oh, see! see!"

He looked at her still, an unspeakable sadness in his gaze—at her hand, extended pleadingly toward him.

"Won't you take my hand, Merne?" said she. "Won't you?"

"I dare not," said he hoarsely. "No, I dare not!"

"Why? Do you wish to leave me still feeling that I am in your debt? You can afford so much now," she said brokenly, "for those who have not won!"

"Think you that I have won?" he broke out. "Theodosia—Theo—I shall call you by your old name just once—I do not take your hand—I dare not touch you—because I love you! I always shall. God help me, it is the truth!"

"Did you get my letters?" she said suddenly, and looked him fair in the face.

Meriwether Lewis stood searching her countenance with his own grave eyes.

"*Letters?*" said he at length. "*What letters?*"

Her eyes looked up at him luminously.

"You are glorious!" said she. "Yes, a woman's name would be safe with you. You are strong. How terrible a thing is a sense of honor! But you are glorious! Good-by!"

# CHAPTER XVII

## THE FRIENDS

Allied in fortunes as they had been in friendship, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark went on side by side in their new labors in the capital of that great land which they had won for the republic. Their offices in title were distinct, yet scarcely so in fact, for each helped the other, as they had always done.

To these two men the new Territory of Louisiana owed not only its discovery, but its early passing over to the day of law and order. No other men could have done what they did in that time of disorder and change, when, rolling to the West in countless waves, came the white men, following the bee, crossing the great river, striking out into the new lands, a headstrong, turbulent, and lawless population.

A thousand new and petty cares came to Governor Lewis. He passed from one duty to another, from one part of his vast province to another, traveling continually with the crude methods of transportation of that period, and busy night and day. Courts must be established. The compilation of the archives must be cared for. Records must be instituted to clear up the swarm of conflicts over land-titles. Scores of new duties arose, and scores of new remedies needed to be devised.

The first figure of the growing capital of St. Louis, the new Governor was also the central figure of all social activities, the cynosure of all eyes. But the laughing belles of St. Louis at length sighed and gave him up—they loved him as Governor, since they might not as man. Wise, firm, deliberate, kind, sad—he was an old man now, though still young in years.

Scattered up and down the great valley, above and below St. Louis, and harboring in that town, were many of the late adherents of Burr's broken conspiracy. These liked not the oncoming of the American government, enforced by so rigid an executive as the one who now held power. Threats came to the ears of Meriwether Lewis, who was hated by the Burr adherents as the cause of their discomfiture; but he, wholly devoid of the fear of any man, only laughed at them. Honest and blameless, it was difficult for any enemy to injure him, and no

man cared to meet Meriwether Lewis in the open.

But at last one means of attack was found. Once more—the last time—the great heart of a noble man was pierced.

“Will,” said he to his friend, as they met at William Clark’s home, according to their frequent custom, “I am in trouble.”

“Fancied trouble, Merne,” said Clark. “You’re always finding it!”

“Would I might call it fancied! But this is something in the way of facts, and very stubborn facts. See here”—he held out certain papers in his hand—“by this morning’s mail I get back these bills protested—protested by the government at Washington! And they are bills that I have drawn to pay the expenses of administering my office here.”

“Tut, tut!” said William Clark gravely. “Come, let us see.”

“Look here, and here! Will, you know that I am a man of no great fortune. You also know that I have made certain enemies in this country. But now I am not supported by my own government. I am ruined—I am a broken man! Did you think that this country could do that for either of us?”

“But Merne, you, the soul of honor——”

“Some enemy has done this! What influences have been set to work, I cannot say; but here are the bills, and there are others out in other hands—also protested, I have no doubt. I am publicly discredited, disgraced. I know not what has been said of me at Washington.”

“That is the trouble,” said William Clark slowly. “Washington is so far. But now, you must not let this trouble you. ’Tis only some six-dollar-a-week clerk in Washington that has done it. You must not consider it to be the deliberate act of any responsible head of the government. You take things too hard, Merne. I will not have you brooding over this—it will never do. You have the megrims often enough, as it is. Come here and kiss the baby! He is named for you, Meriwether Lewis—and he has two teeth. Sit down and behave yourself. Judy will be here in a minute. You are among your friends. Do not grieve. ’Twill all come well!”

This was in the year 1809. Mr. Jefferson’s embargo on foreign trade had paralyzed all Western commerce. Our ships lay idle; our crops rotted; there was no market. The name of Jefferson was now in general execration. In March,

when his second term as President expired, he had retired to private life at Monticello. He had written his last message to Congress that very spring, in which he said of the people of his country:

> I trust that in their steady character, unshaken by difficulties, in their love of liberty, obedience to law, and support of the public authorities, I see a sure guarantee of the permanence of our republic; and retiring from the charge of their affairs, I carry with me the consolation of a firm persuasion that Heaven has in store for our beloved country long ages to come of prosperity and happiness.

Whatever the veering self-interest of others led them to think or do regarding the memory of that great man, Meriwether Lewis trusted Thomas Jefferson absolutely, and relied wholly on his friendship and his counsel. Now, in the hour of trouble, he resolved to journey to Monticello to ask the advice of his old chief, as he had always done.

In this he was well supported by his friend Dr. Saugrain.

"You are ill, Governor—you have the fever of these lands," urged that worthy. "By all means leave this country and go back to the East. Go by way of New Orleans and the sea. The voyage will do you much good."

"Peria," said Meriwether Lewis to his French servant and attendant, "make ready my papers for my journey. Have a small case, such as can be carried on horseback. I must take with me all my journals, my maps, and certain of the records of my office here. Get my old spyglass; I may need it, and I always fancy to have it with me when I travel, as was my custom in the West. Secure for our costs in travel some gold—three or four hundred dollars, I imagine. I will take some in my belt, and give the rest to you for the saddle-trunk."

"Your Excellency plans to go by land, then, and not by sea?"

"I do not know. I must save all the time possible. And Peria——"

"Yes, Excellency."

"Have my pistols well cared for, and your own as well. See that my small powder-canister, with bullets, is with them in the holsters. The trails are none too safe. Be careful whom you advise of our plans. My business is of private nature, and I do not wish to be disturbed. And here, take my watch," he concluded. "It was given to me by a friend—a good friend, Mr. Wirt, and I prize it very much—

so much that I fear to have it on my person. Care for it in the saddle-trunk."

"Yes, Excellency."

"Do not call me 'Excellency'—I detest the title! I am Governor Lewis, and may so be distinguished. Go now, and do as I have told you. We shall need about ten men to man the barge. Arrange it. Have our goods ready for an early start tomorrow morning."

All that night, sleepless, fevered, almost distracted, Meriwether Lewis sat at his desk, writing, or endeavoring to write, with what matters upon his soul we may not ask. But the long night wore away at last, and morning came, a morning of the early fall, beautiful as it may be only in that latitude. Without having closed his eyes in sleep, the Governor made ready for his journey to the East.

Whether or not Peria was faithful to all his instructions one cannot say, but certainly all St. Louis knew of the intended departure of the Governor. They loved him, these folk, trusted him, would miss him now, and they gathered almost *en masse* to bid him godspeed upon his journey.

"These papers for Mr. Jefferson, Governor—certain land-titles, of which we spoke to him last year. Do you not remember?" Thus Chouteau, always busy with affairs.

"These samples of cloth and of satin, Governor," said a dark-eyed French girl, smiling up at him. "Would you match them for me in the East? I am to be married in the spring!"

"The price of furs—learn of that, Governor, if you can, while on your journey. The embargo has ruined the trade in all this inland country!" It was Manuel Liza, swarthy, taciturn, who thus voiced a general feeling.

"Books, more books, my son!" implored Dr. Saugrain. "We are growing here—I must keep up with the surgery of the day; I must know the new discoveries in medicine. Bring me books. And take this little case of medicines. You are ill, my son—the fever has you!"

"My people—they mourn for me as dead," said Big White, the Mandan, who had never returned to his people up the Missouri River since the repulse of his convoy by the Sioux. "Tell the Great Father that he must send me soldiers to take me back home to my people. My heart is poor!"

“Governor, see if you can get me an artificial limb of some sort while you are in the East.”

It was young George Shannon who said this, leaning on his crutch. Shannon had not long ago returned from another trip up the river, where in an encounter with the Sioux he had received a wound which cost him a leg and almost cost him his life—though later, as has already been said, he was to become a noted figure at the bar of the State of Kentucky.

“Yes! Yes, and yes!” Their leader, punctilious as he was kind, agreed to all these commissions—prizing them, indeed, as proof of the confidence of his people.

He was ready to depart, but stood still, looking about for the tall figure which presently he saw advancing through the throng—a tall man with wide mouth and sunny hair, with blue eye and stalwart frame—William Clark—the friend whom he loved so much, and whom he was now to see for the last time.

General Clark carried upon his arm the baby which had been named after the Governor of the new Territory. Lewis took him from his father’s arms and pressed the child’s cool face to his own, suddenly trembling a little about his own lips as he felt the tender flesh of the infant. No child of his own might he ever hold thus! He gave him back with a last look into the face of his friend.

“Good-by, Will!” said he.

# CHAPTER XVIII

## THE WILDERNESS

The Governor’s barge swept down the rolling flood of the Mississippi, impelled by the blades of ten sturdy oarsmen. Little by little the blue smoke of St. Louis town faded beyond the level of the forest. The stone tower of the old Spanish stockade, where floated the American flag, disappeared finally.

Meriwether Lewis sat staring back, but seeming not to note what passed. He did not even notice a long bateau which left the wharf just before his own and preceded him down the river, now loafing along aimlessly, sometimes ahead, sometimes behind that of the Governor and his party. In time he turned to his lap-desk and began his endless task of writing, examining, revising. Now and again he muttered to himself. The fever was indeed in his blood!

They proceeded thus, after the usual fashion of boat travel in those days, down the great river, until they had passed the mouth of the Ohio and reached what was known as the Chickasaw Bluffs, below the confluence of the two streams. Here was a little post of the army, arranged for the commander, Major Neely, Indian agent at that point.

As was the custom, all barges tied up here; and the Governor’s craft moored at the foot of the bluff. Its chief passenger was so weak that he hardly could walk up the steep steps cut in the muddy front of the bank.

“Governor Lewis!” exclaimed Major Neely, as he met him. “You are ill! You are in an ague!”

“Perhaps, perhaps. Give me rest here for a day or two, if you please. Then I fancy I shall be strong enough to travel East. See if you can get horses for myself and my party—I am resolved not to go by sea. I have not time.”

The Governor of Louisiana, haggard, flushed with fever, staggered as he followed his friend into the apartment assigned to him in one of the cabins of the little post. He wore his usual traveling-garb; but now, for some strange reason he seemed to lack his usual immaculate neatness. Instead of the formal dress of his office, he wore an old, stained, faded uniform coat, its pocket bulging with

papers. This he kept at the head of his bed when at length he flung himself down, almost in the delirium of fever.

He lay here for two days, restless, sleepless. But at length, having in the mean time scarcely tasted food, he rose and declared that he must go on.

“Major,” said he, “I can ride now. Have you horses for the journey?”

“Are you sure, Governor, that your strength is sufficient?” Neely hesitated as he looked at the wasted form before him, at the hollow eye, the fevered face.

“It is not a question of my personal convenience, Major,” said Meriwether Lewis. “Time presses for me. I must go on!”

“At least you shall not go alone,” said Major Neely. “You should have some escort. Doubtless you have important papers?”

Meriwether Lewis nodded.

“My servant has arranged everything, I fancy. Can you get an extra man or two? The Natchez Trace is none too safe.”

That military road, as they both knew, was indeed no more than a horse path cut through the trackless forest which lay across the States of Mississippi, Tennessee and Kentucky. Its reputation was not good. Many a trader passing north from New Orleans with coin, many a settler passing west with packhorses and household effects, had disappeared on this wilderness road, and left no sign. It was customary for parties of any consequence to ride in companies of some force.

It was a considerable cavalcade, therefore, which presently set forth from Chickasaw Bluffs on the long ride eastward to cross the Alleghanies, which meant some days or weeks spent in the saddle. Apprehension sat upon all, even as they started out. Their eyes rested upon the wasted form of their leader, the delirium of whose fever seemed still to hold him. He muttered to himself as he rode, resented the near approach of any traveling companion, demanded to be alone. They looked at him in silence.

“He talks to himself all the time,” said one of the party—a new man, hired by Neely at the army post. He rode with Peria now; and none but Peria knew that he had come from the long barge which had clung to the Governor’s craft all the way down the river—and which, unknown to Lewis himself, had tied up and

waited at Chickasaw Bluffs. He was a stranger to Neely and to all the others, but seemed ready enough to take pay for service along the Trace, declaring that he himself was intending to go that way. He was a man well dressed, apparently of education and of some means. He rode armed.

“What is wrong with the Governor, think you?” inquired this man once more of Peria, Lewis’s servant.

“It is his way,” shrugged Peria. “We leave him alone. His hand is heavy when he is angry.”

“He rides always with his rifle across his saddle?”

“Always, on the trail.”

“Loaded, I presume—and his pistols?”

“You may well suppose that,” said Peria.

“Oh, well,” said the new member of the party, “’tis just as well to be safe. I lifted his saddlebags and the desk, or trunk, whatever you call it, that is on the pack horse yonder. Heavy, eh?”

“Naturally,” grinned Peria.

They looked at one another. And thereafter the two, as was well noted, conversed often and more intimately together as the journey progressed.

“Now it’s an odd thing about his coat,” volunteered the stranger later in that same day. “He always keeps it on—that ragged old uniform. Was it a uniform, do you believe? Can’t the Governor of the new Territory wear a coat that shows his own quality? This one’s a dozen years old, you might say.”

“He always wears it on the trail,” said Peria. “At home he watches it as if it held some treasure.”

“Treasure?” The shifty eyes of the new man flashed in sudden interest. “What treasure? Papers, perhaps—bills—documents—money? His pocket bulges at the side. Something there—yes, eh?”

“Hush!” said Peria. “You do not know that man, the Governor. He has the eye of a hawk, the ear of a fox—you can keep nothing from him. He fears nothing in the world, and in his moods—you’d best leave him alone. Don’t let him suspect,

or——” And Peria shook his head.

The cavalcade was well out into the wilderness east of the Mississippi on that afternoon of October 8, in the year 1809. Stopping at the wayside taverns which now and then were found, they had progressed perhaps a hundred miles to the eastward. The day was drawing toward its close when Peria rode up and announced that one or two of the horses had strayed from the trail.

“I have told you to be more careful, Peria,” expostulated Governor Lewis. “There are articles on the packhorse which I need at night. Who is this new man that is so careless? Why do you not keep the horses up? Go, then, and get them. Major Neely, would you be so kind as to join the men and assure them of bringing on the horses?”

“And what of you, Governor?”

“I shall go on ahead, if you please. Is there no house near by? You know the trail. Perhaps we can get lodgings not far on.”

“The first white man’s house beyond here,” answered Neely, “belongs to an old man named Grinder. ’Tis no more than a few miles ahead. Suppose we join you there?”

“Agreed,” said Lewis, and setting spurs to his horse, he left them.

It was late in the evening when at length Meriwether Lewis reined up in front of the somewhat unattractive Grinder homestead cabin, squatted down alongside the Natchez Trace; a place where sometimes hospitality of a sort was dispensed. It was an ordinary double cabin that he saw, two cob-house apartments with a covered space between such as might have been found anywhere for hundreds of miles on either side of the Alleghanies at that time. At his call there appeared a woman—Mrs. Grinder, she announced herself.

“Madam,” he inquired, “could you entertain me and my party for the night? I am alone at present, but my servants will soon be up. They are on the trail in search of some horses which have strayed.”

“My husband is not here,” said the woman. “We are not well fixed, but I reckon if we can stand it all the time, you can for a night. How many air there in your party?”

“A half-dozen, with an extra horse or two.”

“I reckon we can fix ye up. Light down and come in.”

She was noting well her guest, and her shrewd eyes determined him to be no common man. He had the bearing of a gentleman, the carriage of a man used to command. Certain of his garments seemed to show wealth, although she noted, when he stripped off his traveling-smock, that he wore not a new coat, but an old one—very old, she would have said, soiled, stained, faded. It looked as if it had once been part of a uniform.

Her guest, whoever he was—and she neither knew nor asked, for the wilderness tavern held no register, and few questions were asked or answered—paid small attention to the woman. He carried his saddlebags into the room pointed out to him, flung them down, and began to pace up and down, sometimes talking to himself. The woman eyed him from time to time as she went about her duties.

“Set up and eat,” she said at last. “I reckon your men are not coming.”

“I thank you, Madam,” said the stranger, with gentle courtesy. “Do not let me trouble you too much. I have been ill of late, and do not as yet experience much hunger.”

Indeed, he scarcely tasted the food. He sat, as she noted, a long time, gazing fixedly out of the door, over the forest, toward the West.

“Is it not a beautiful world, Madam?” said he, after a time, in a voice of great gentleness and charm. “I have seen the forest often thus in the West in the evening, when the day was done. It is wonderful!”

“Yes. Some of my folks is thinking of going out further into the West.”

He turned to her abstractedly, yet endeavoring to be courteous.

“A wonderful country, Madam!” said he; and so he fell again into his moody staring out beyond the door.

After a time the hostess of the backwoods cabin sought to make up a bed for him, but he motioned to her to desist.

“It is not necessary,” said he. “I have slept so much in the open that ’tis rarely I use a bed at all. I see now that my servant has come up, and is in the yard yonder. Tell him to bring my robes and blankets and spread them here on the floor, as I always have them. That will answer quite well enough, thank you.”

Peria, it seemed, had by this time found his way to the cabin along the trail. He was alone.

“Come, man!” said Lewis. “Make down my bed for me—I am ill. And tell me, where is my powder? Where are the bullets for my pistols? I find them empty. Haven’t I told you to be more careful about these things? And where is my rifle-powder? The canister is here, but ’tis empty. Come, come, I must have better service than this!”

But even as he chided the remissness of his servant, he seemed to forget the matter in his mind. Presently he was again pacing apart, stopping now and then to stare out over the forest.

“I must have a place to write,” said he at length. “I shall be awake for a time tonight, occupied with business matters of importance. Where is Major Neely? Where are the other men? Why have they not come up?”

Peria could not or did not answer these questions, but sullenly went about the business of making his master as comfortable as he might, and then departed to his own quarters, down the hill, in another building. The old backwoods woman herself withdrew to the other apartment, beyond the open space of the double cabin.

The soft, velvet darkness of night in the forest now came on apace—a night of silence. There was not even the call of a tree toad. The voice of the whippoorwill was stilled at that season of the year. If there were human beings awake, alert, at that time, they made no sound. Meriwether Lewis was alone—alone in the wilderness again. Its silences, its mysteries, drew about him.

But now he stood, not enjoying in his usual fashion the familiar feeling of the night in the forest, the calm, the repose it customarily brought to him. He stood looking intently, as if he expected some one—nay, indeed, as if he saw some one—as if he saw a face! What face was it?

At last he made his way across the room to the heavy saddle-case which had been placed there. He flung the lid open, and felt among the contents. It seemed to him there was not so much within the case as there should have been. He missed certain papers, and resolved to ask Peria about them. He could not find the little bags of coin which he expected; but he found the watch, lying covered in a corner of the case. He drew it out and, stepping toward the flickering candle, opened it, gazing fixedly at the little silhouette cut round to fit in the back of the

case.

It was a face that he had seen before—a hundred times he had gazed thus at it on the far Western trails.

He brought the little portrait close up to his eyes—but not close to his lips. No, he did not kiss the face of the woman who once had written to him:

You must not kiss my picture, because I am in your power.

Meriwether Lewis had won his long fight! He had mastered the human emotions of his soul at last. The battle had been such that he sat here now, weak and spent. He sat looking at the face which had meant so much to him all these years.

There came into his mind some recollection of words that she had written to him once—something about the sound of water. He lifted his head and listened. Yes, there was a sound coming faintly through the night—the trickle of a little brook in the ravine below the window.

Always, he recalled, she had spoken of the sound of water, saying that that music would blot out memory—saying that water would wash out secrets, would wash out sins. What was it she had said? What was it she had written to him long ago? What did it mean—about the water?

The sound of the little brook came to his ears again in some shift of the wind. He rose and stumbled toward the window, carrying the candle in his hand. His haggard face was lighted by its flare as he stood there, leaning out, listening.

It was then that his doom came to him.

There came the sound of a shot; a second; and yet another.

The woman in the cabin near by heard them clearly enough. She rose and listened. There was no sound from the other cabins. The servants paid no attention to the shots, if they had heard them—and why should they not have heard them? No one called out, no one came running.

Frightened, the woman rose, and after a time stepped timidly across the covered space between the two rooms, toward the light which she saw shining faintly through the cracks of the door. She heard groans within.

A tall and ghastly figure met her as she approached the door. She saw his face, white and haggard and stained. From a wound in the forehead a broad band of something dark fell across his cheek. From his throat something dark was welling. He clutched a hand on his breast—and his fingers were dark.

He was bleeding from three wounds; but still he stood and spoke to her.

“In God’s name, Madam,” said he, “bring me water! I am killed!”

She ran away, she knew not where, calling to the others to come; but they did not come. She was alone. Once more, forgetful of her errand, incapable of rendering aid, she went back to the door.

She heard no sound. She flung open the door and peered into the room. The candle was standing, broken and guttering, on the floor. She could see the scattered belongings of the traveling-cases, empty now. The occupant of the room was gone! In terror she fled once more, back to her own room, and cowered in her bed.

Staggering, groping, his hands strained to him to hold in the life that was passing, Meriwether Lewis had left the room where he had received his wounds, and had stepped out into the air, into the night. All the resolution of his soul was bent upon one purpose. He staggered, but still stumbled onward.

It seemed to him that he heard the sound of water, and blindly, unconsciously, he headed that way. He entered the shadow of the woods and passed down the little slope of the hill. He fell, rather than seated himself, at the side of the brook whose voice he had heard in the night. He was alone. The wilderness was all about him—the wilderness which had always called to him, and which now was to claim him.

He sat, gasping, almost blind, feeling at his pockets. At last he found it—one of the sulphur matches made for him by good old Dr. Saugrain. Tremblingly he essayed to light it, and at last he saw the flare.

With skill of custom, though now almost unconsciously, his fingers felt for dry bits of bark and leaves, little twigs. Yes, the match served its purpose. A tiny flame flickered between his feet as he sat.

Did any eye see Meriwether Lewis as he sat there in the dark at his last camp fire? Did any guilty eye look on him making his last fight?

He sat alone by the little fire. His hand, dropping sometimes, responsive only to the supreme effort of his will, fumbled in the bosom of his old coat. There were some papers there—some things which no other eyes than his must ever see! Here was a secret—it must always be a secret—her secret and his! He would hide forever from the world what had been theirs in common.

The tiny flame rose up more strongly, twice, thrice, five times—six times in all! One by one he had placed them on the flames—these letters that he had carried

on his heart for years—the six letters that she had written him when he was far away in the unknown. He held the last one long, trying to see the words. He groaned. He was almost blind. His trembling finger found the last word of the last letter. It rose before him in tall characters now, all done in flame and not in block—*Theodosia!*

Now they were gone! No one could ever see them. No one could know how he had treasured them all these years. She was safe!

Before his soul, in the time of his great accounting, there rose the passing picture of the years. Free from suffering, now absolved, resigned, he was a boy once more, and all the world was young. He saw again the slopes of old Albemarle, beautiful in the green and gold of an early autumn day in old Virginia. He heard again his mother's voice. What was it that she said? He bent his head as if to listen.

"Your wish—your great desire—your hope—your dream—all these shall be yours at last, even though the trail be long, even though the burden be too heavy to carry farther."

So then she had known—she had spoken the truth in her soothsaying that day so long ago! Now his fading eye looked about him, and he nodded his head weakly, as if to assent to something he had heard.

He had so earnestly longed—he had so greatly desired—to be an honorable man! He had so longed and desired to do somewhat for others than himself! And here was peace, here indeed was conquest. His great desire was won!

His lax hands dropped between his knees as he sat. A little gust of wind sweeping down the gully caught up some of the white ashes—stained as they were with blood that dropped from his veins as he bent above them—carried them down upon the tiny thread of the little brook. It carried them away toward the sea—his blood, the ashes, the secret which they hid.

At length he rose once more, his splendid will still forcing his broken body to do its bidding. Half crawling up the bank, once more he stood erect and staggered back across the yard, into the room. The woman heard him there again. Pity arose in her breast; once more she mastered her terror and approached the door.

"In God's name, Madam," said he, "bring me water—wine! I am so strong, I am hard to die! Bind up my wounds—I have work to do! Heal me these wounds!"

But not her power nor any power could heal such wounds as his. Once more she called out for aid, and none came.

The night wore away. The dying man lay on his bearskin pallet on the floor, motionless now and silent, but still breathing, and calm at last. It was dawn when the recreant servant found him there.

“Peria,” said Meriwether Lewis, turning his fading eye on the man, “do not fear me. I will not hurt you. But my watch—I cannot find it—it seems gone. I am hard to die, it seems. But the little watch—it had—a—picture—Ah!”

# CHAPTER XIX

## DOWN TO THE SEA

Many days later the French servant, Peria, rode up to the gate, to the door, of Locust Hall, the Lewis homestead in old Virginia. The news he bore had preceded him. He met a stern-faced, dark-browed woman, who regarded him coldly when he announced his name, regarded him in silence. The servant found himself able to make but small speech.

“Your son was a brave man—he lived long,” said Peria, haltingly, at the close of his story.

“Yes,” said the mother of Meriwether Lewis. “He was a brave man. He was strong!”

“He was unhappy; but why he should have killed himself——”

“Stop!” The dark eyes blazed upon him. “What are you saying? My son kill himself? It is an outrage to his memory to suggest it. He was the victim of some enemy. As for you, begone!”

So Peria passed from sight and view, and almost from memory, not accused, not acquitted. Long afterward a brother of Meriwether Lewis met him, and found that he was carrying the old rifle and the little watch which every member of the family knew so well. These things had been missing from the effects of Meriwether Lewis in the inventory—indeed, little remained in the traveling-cases save a few scattered papers and the old spyglass. There was no gold. There were no letters of any kind.

Soon there came down from Monticello to Locust Hall the coach of Thomas Jefferson.

“Madam,” said he, when finally he stood at the side of the mistress of Locust Hall, “it is heavy news I thought to bring—I see that you have heard it. What shall I say—what can we say to each other? I mourn him as if he were my own son.”

“It has come at last,” said the mother of Meriwether Lewis. “The wilderness has

him, as I knew it would! I told him, here at this place, when he was a boy, that at last the load would weigh him down.”

“The rumor is that he died by his own hand. I find it difficult to believe. It is far more likely that some enemy or robber was guilty of the deed.”

“Whom had he ever harmed?” she demanded of Jefferson.

“None in the world, with intent; but he had enemies. Whether by his own hand or that of another, he died a gallant gentleman. He would not think of himself alone. But listen—bear with me if I tell you that could your son send out the news himself, perhaps he might say ’twas by his own hand he perished, and not by that of another!”

“Never, Mr. Jefferson, never will I believe that! It was not in his nature!”

“I agree with you. But when we take the last wishes of the dead, we take what is the law for us. And the law of your son was the law of honor. Suppose, my dear madam, there were a woman concerned in this matter?”

“He never wronged a woman in his life——”

“Precisely, nor in his death would he wrong one! Do you begin to see?”

“Did he ever speak to you of her?”

“It was impossible that he should; but I knew them both. I knew their secret. Were it in his power to do so, I am sure that he carried his secret with him, so that it might never be shared by any. That secret he has guarded in death as in life.”

“But shall I let that stain rest on his name?” The dark eye of the old woman gleamed upon her son’s friend.

“Do not I love him also? I am speaking now only of his own wish—not ours. I know that he would shield her at any cost—nay, I know he did shield her at any cost. May not we shield him—and her—no matter what the cost to us? If he laid that wish on us, ought we not to respect it? Madam, I shall frame a letter which will serve to appease the criticism of the public in regard to your son. If it be not the exact truth—and who shall tell the exact truth?—it will at least be accepted as truth, and it will forever silence any talk. What should the public know of a life such as his? There are some lives which are tragically large, and such was

his. He lived with honor, and he could not die without it. What was in his heart we shall not ask to know. If ever he sinned, he is purged of any sin.”

Jefferson was silent for a moment, holding the bereaved mother’s hand in his own.

“He shall have a monument, madam,” he went on. “It shall mark his grave in yonder wilderness. They shall name at least a county for him, and hold it his sacred grave-place—there in Tennessee, by the old Indian road. Let him lie there under the trees—that is as he would wish. He shall have some monument—yes, but how futile is all that! His greatest monument will be in the vast new country which he has brought to us. He was a man of a natural greatness not surpassed by any of his time.”

What of Theodosia Alston, loyal and lofty soul, blameless wife, devoted and pathetic adherent to the fallen fortunes of her ill-starred father?

Three years after Meriwether Lewis laid him down to sleep in the forest, a ship put out from Charleston wharf. It was bound for the city of New York, where at that time there was living a broken, homeless, forsaken man named Aaron Burr—a man execrated at home, discredited abroad, but who now, after years of exile, had crept home to the country which had cast him out.

A passenger on that ship was Theodosia Alston, the daughter of Aaron Burr. That much is known. The ship sailed. It never came to port. No more is known.

To this day none knows what was the fate of Aaron Burr’s daughter, one of the most appealing figures of her day, a woman made for happiness, but continually in close touch with tragedy. Wherever her body may lie, she has her wish. The sound of the eternal waters is the continuous requiem in her ears. Her secret, if she had one, is washed away long ere this, and is one with the eternal secrets of the sea. As to her sin, she had none. Above her memory, since she has no grave, there might best be inscribed the words she wrote at a time of her own despair:

> “I hope to be happy in the next world, for I have not been bad in this.”

Did the little brook in Tennessee ever find its way down to the sea? Did it carry a

scattered drop of a man's lifeblood, little by little thinning, thinning on its long journey? Did ever a wandering flake of ashes, melting, rest on its bosom for so great a journey as that toward the sea?

Did the sound of a voice in the wilderness, passing across the unknown leagues, ever reach an ear that heard? Who can tell? Perhaps in the great ten thousand years such things may be—perhaps deep calls to deep, and there are no longer sins nor tears.

A million hearth-fires mark the camp-fire trail of Meriwether Lewis. We own the country which he found, and for which he paid. He sleeps. Above him stands the monument which his chief assigned to him—his country. It rises now in glory and splendor, the perfected vision which he saw.

That is the happy ending of his story—his country! It is ours. As its title came to us in honor, it is for us to love it honorably, to use it honorably, and to defend it honorably. None may withstand us while we hold to his ambitions—while our sons measure to the stature of such a man.

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# Footnotes:

[1] During the following winter Mr. Merry had opportunity to fulfill his threat. In February, 1804, the President again invited him to dine, in the following words:

“Thomas Jefferson asks the favor of Mr. Merry to dine with a small party of friends on Monday, the 13th, at half past three.”

Mr. Merry, still smarting all these months, stood on his dignity and addressed his reply to the Secretary of State.

Reviewing at some length what seemed to him important events, he added:

“If Mr. Merry should be mistaken as to the meaning of Mr. Jefferson’s note, and it should prove that the invitation is designed for him in a public capacity, he trusts that Mr. Jefferson will feel equally that it must be out of his power to accept it, without receiving previously, through the channel of the Secretary of State, the necessary formal assurance of the President’s determination to observe toward him those niceties of distinction which have heretofore been shown by the executive government of the United States to the persons who have been accredited as our Majesty’s ministers.

“Mr. Merry has the honor to request of Mr. Madison to lay this explanation before the President, and to accompany it with the strongest assurance of his highest respect and consideration.”

The Secretary of State, who seems to have been acting as social secretary to Mr. Jefferson, without hesitation replied as follows:

“Mr. Madison presents his compliments to Mr. Merry. He has communicated to the President Mr. Merry’s note of this morning, and has the honor to remark to him that the President’s invitation, being in the style used by him in like cases, had no reference to the points of form which will deprive him of the pleasure of Mr. Merry’s company at dinner on Monday next.

“Mr. Madison tenders to Mr. Merry his distinguished consideration.”

The friction arising out of this and interlocking incidents was part of the unfortunate train of events which later led up to the war of 1812.

[2] It is generally conceded that Theodosia Burr Alston must have been acquainted with her father’s most intimate ambitions, and with at least part of the questionable plans by which he purposed to further them. Her blind and unswerving loyalty to him, passing all ordinary filial affection, was a predominant trait of her singular and by no means weak or hesitant character, in which masculine resolution blended so strangely with womanly reserve and sweetness.

[3] Mr. Merry did so and reported the entire proposal made by Burr. The proposition was that the latter should “lend his assistance to his majesty’s government in any manner in which they may think fit to employ him, particularly in endeavoring to effect a separation of the Western part of the United States from that which lies between the mountains in its whole extent.”

But though deeply interested in the conspiracy to separate the Western country, Mr. Merry was not too confiding, for in his message to Mr. Pitt he added the following confidence, showing his own estimate of Burr:

“I have only to add that if strict confidence could be placed in him, he certainly possesses, perhaps in a much greater degree than any other individual in this country, all the talents, energy, intrepidity, and firmness which it requires for such an enterprise.”

[4] The original journals of these two astonishing young men—one of them just thirty years old, the other thirty-four—should rank among the epic literature of the world. Battered about, scattered, separated, lost, hawked from hand to hand, handed down as unvalued heritages, “edited” first by this and then by that little man, sometimes to the extent of actual mutilation or alteration of their text—the journals of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark hold their ineffacable clarity in spite of all. Their most curious quality is the strange blending of two large souls which they show. It was only by studying closely the individual differences of handwriting, style, and spelling, that it could be determined what was the work of Lewis, which that done by Clark.

And what a labor! After long days of toil and danger, under unvarying hardships, in conditions of extremest discomfort and inconvenience for such work, the two young leaders set down with unflagging faithfulness countless thousands of details, all in such fashion as showed the keenest and most exact powers of observation. Botanists, naturalists, geographers, map-makers, builders, engineers, hunters, journalists, they brought back in their notebooks a mass of information never equaled by the records of any other party of explorers.

We cannot overestimate the sum of labor which all this meant, day after day, month after month; nor should we underestimate the qualities of mind and education demanded of them, nor the varied experience of life in primitive surroundings which needed to be part of their requisite equipment. It was indeed as if the two friends were fitted by the plan of Providence for this great enterprise which they concluded in such simple, unpretending, yet minutely thorough fashion. Neither thought himself a hero, therefore each was one. The largest glory to be accorded them is that they found their ambition and their content in the day’s work well done.

[5] Cam-e-ah-wit was the name of Sacajawea’s brother, the Shoshone chief. The country where Lewis met him is remote from any large city today. Pass through the Gate of the Mountains, not far from Helena, Montana, and ascend the upper valley of the Missouri, as it sweeps west of what is now the Yellowstone Park, and one may follow with a certain degree of comfort the trail of the early explorers. If one should then follow the Jefferson Fork of the great river up to its last narrowing, one would reach the country of Cam-e-ah-wit. Here is the crest of the Continental Divide, where it sweeps up from the south, after walling in, as if in a vast cup, the three main sources of the great river. Much of that valley country is in fertile farms today. Lewis and Clark passed within twelve miles of Alder Gulch, which wrote roaring history in the early sixties—the wild placer days of gold-mining in Montana.

As for Sacajawea, she has a monument—a very poor and inadequate one—in the city of Portland, Oregon. The crest of the Great Divide, where she met her brother, would have been a better place. It was here, in effect, that she ended that extraordinary guidance—some call it nothing less than providential—which brought the white men through in safety.

Trace this Indian girl’s birth and childhood, here among the Shoshones, who had fled to the mountains to escape the guns of the Blackfeet. Recall her capture here by the Minnetarees from the Dakota country. Picture her long journey thence to the east, on foot, by horse, in bull-hide canoes, many hundreds of miles, to the Mandan villages. It

is something of a journey, even now. Reverse that journey, go against the swift current of the waters, beyond the Great Falls, past Helena, west of the Yellowstone Park, and up to the Continental Divide, where she met her brother. You will find that that is still more of a journey, even today, with roads, and towns, and maps to guide you. Meriwether Lewis could not have made it without her.

While he was studying the courses of the stars, at Philadelphia, preparing to lead his expedition, Sacajawea was learning the story of nature also; and she was waiting to guide the white men when they reached the Mandan villages. Who guided her in such unbelievably strange fashion? The Indians sometimes made long journeys, their war parties traveled far, and their captives also; but in all the history of the tribes there is no record of a journey made by any Indian woman equal to that of Sacajawea. Why did she make it? What hand pointed out the way for her?

A statue to her? She should have a thousand memorials along the old trail! Her name should be known familiarly by every school child in America!

[6] The import of the visit of Governor Lewis and Mrs. Alston to the court-room during the Burr trial is better conveyed if there be held in mind the personality of that eccentric and extraordinary man, so prominent in the history of America and the traditions of Virginia—John Randolph of Roanoke. Irascible, high-voiced, high-headed, truculent, insolent, vitriolic—yet gallant, courteous, kind, just, and fair; the enemy and the friend in turn of almost every public man of his day; truckling to none, defiant of all, sure to do what could not be predicted of any other man—it was always certain that John Randolph of Roanoke would do what he liked, and do what—for that present time—he fancied to be just.

Now the ardent adherent, again the bitter caluminator of Jefferson, it would be held probable that John Randolph of Roanoke would do what he fancied Thomas Jefferson had not asked him to do, or had asked him not to do. But the shrewd old man at Washington spoke advisedly when he said that John Randolph of Roanoke would try the Burr case in the jury-room, and himself preside as judge, counsel, and jury all in one!

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## Transcriber's Note:

Minor changes have been made to correct obvious typesetters' errors; otherwise, every effort has been made to remain true to the author's words and intent.

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