The Valley of the Moon

By

Jack London

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BOOK I

CHAPTER 1

"You hear me, Saxon? Come on along. What if it is the Bricklayers? I'll have gentlemen friends there, and so'll you. The Al Vista band'll be along, an' you know it plays heavenly. An' you just love dancin'---"

Twenty feet away, a stout, elderly woman interrupted the girl's persuasions. The elderly woman's back was turned, and the back-loose, bulging, and misshapen--began a convulsive heaving.

"Gawd!" she cried out. "O Gawd!"

She flung wild glances, like those of an entrapped animal, up and down the big whitewashed room that panted with heat and that was thickly humid with the steam that sizzled from the damp cloth under the irons of the many ironers. From the girls and women near her, all swinging irons steadily but at high pace, came quick glances, and labor efficiency

suffered to the extent of a score of suspended or inadequate movements. The elderly woman's cry had caused a tremor of money-loss to pass among the piece-work ironers of fancy starch.

She gripped herself and her iron with a visible effort, and dabbed futilely at the frail, frilled garment on the board under her hand.

"I thought she'd got'em again--didn't you?" the girl said.

"It's a shame, a women of her age, and... condition," Saxon answered, as she frilled a lace ruffle with a hot fluting-iron. Her movements were delicate, safe, and swift, and though her face was wan with fatigue and exhausting heat, there was no slackening in her pace.

"An' her with seven, an' two of 'em in reform school," the girl at the next board sniffed sympathetic agreement. "But you just got to come to Weasel Park to-morrow, Saxon. The Bricklayers' is always lively--tugs-of-war, fat-man races, real Irish jiggin', an'... an' everything. An' The floor of the pavilion's swell."

But the elderly woman brought another interruption. She dropped her iron on the shirtwaist, clutched at the board, fumbled it, caved in at the knees and hips, and like a half-empty sack collapsed on the floor, her long shriek rising in the pent room to the acrid smell of scorching cloth. The women at the boards near to her scrambled, first, to the hot iron to save the cloth, and then to her, while the forewoman hurried

belligerently down the aisle. The women farther away continued unsteadily at their work, losing movements to the extent of a minute's set-back to the totality of the efficiency of the fancy-starch room.

"Enough to kill a dog," the girl muttered, thumping her iron down on its rest with reckless determination. "Workin' girls' life ain't what it's cracked up. Me to quit--that's what I'm comin' to."

"Mary!" Saxon uttered the other's name with a reproach so profound that she was compelled to rest her own iron for emphasis and so lose a dozen movements.

Mary flashed a half-frightened look across.

"I didn't mean it, Saxon," she whimpered. "Honest, I didn't. I wouldn't never go that way. But I leave it to you, if a day like this don't get on anybody's nerves. Listen to that!"

The stricken woman, on her back, drumming her heels on the floor, was shrieking persistently and monotonously, like a mechanical siren. Two women, clutching her under the arms, were dragging her down the aisle. She drummed and shrieked the length of it. The door opened, and a vast, muffled roar of machinery burst in; and in the roar of it the drumming and the shrieking were drowned ere the door swung shut. Remained of the episode only the scorch of cloth drifting ominously through the air.

"It's sickenin'," said Mary.

And thereafter, for a long time, the many irons rose and fell, the pace of the room in no wise diminished; while the forewoman strode the aisles with a threatening eye for incipient breakdown and hysteria. Occasionally an ironer lost the stride for an instant, gasped or sighed, then caught it up again with weary determination. The long summer day waned, but not the heat, and under the raw flare of electric light the work went on.

By nine o'clock the first women began to go home. The mountain of fancy starch had been demolished--all save the few remnants, here and there, on the boards, where the ironers still labored.

Saxon finished ahead of Mary, at whose board she paused on the way out.

"Saturday night an' another week gone," Mary said mournfully, her young cheeks pallid and hollowed, her black eyes blue-shadowed and tired. "What d'you think you've made, Saxon?"

"Twelve and a quarter," was the answer, just touched with pride "And I'd a-made more if it wasn't for that fake bunch of starchers."

"My! I got to pass it to you," Mary congratulated. "You're a sure fierce hustler--just eat it up. Me--I've only ten an' a half, an' for a hard week... See you on the nine-forty. Sure now. We can just fool around

until the dancin' begins. A lot of my gentlemen friends'll be there in the afternoon."

Two blocks from the laundry, where an arc-light showed a gang of toughs on the corner, Saxon quickened her pace. Unconsciously her face set and hardened as she passed. She did not catch the words of the muttered comment, but the rough laughter it raised made her guess and warmed her checks with resentful blood. Three blocks more, turning once to left and once to right, she walked on through the night that was already growing cool. On either side were workingmen's houses, of weathered wood, the ancient paint grimed with the dust of years, conspicuous only for cheapness and ugliness.

Dark it was, but she made no mistake, the familiar sag and screeching reproach of the front gate welcome under her hand. She went along the narrow walk to the rear, avoided the missing step without thinking about it, and entered the kitchen, where a solitary gas-jet flickered.
She turned it up to the best of its flame. It was a small room, not disorderly, because of lack of furnishings to disorder it. The plaster, discolored by the steam of many wash-days, was crisscrossed with cracks from the big earthquake of the previous spring. The floor was ridged, wide-cracked, and uneven, and in front of the stove it was worn through and repaired with a five-gallon oil-can hammered flat and double. A sink, a dirty roller-towel, several chairs, and a wooden table completed the picture.

An apple-core crunched under her foot as she drew a chair to the table. On the frayed oilcloth, a supper waited. She attempted the cold beans, thick with grease, but gave them up, and buttered a slice of bread.

The rickety house shook to a heavy, prideless tread, and through the inner door came Sarah, middle-aged, lop-breasted, hair-tousled, her face lined with care and fat petulance.

"Huh, it's you," she grunted a greeting. "I just couldn't keep things warm. Such a day! I near died of the heat. An' little Henry cut his lip awful. The doctor had to put four stitches in it."

Sarah came over and stood mountainously by the table.

"What's the matter with them beans?" she challenged.

"Nothing, only..." Saxon caught her breath and avoided the threatened outburst. "Only I'm not hungry. It's been so hot all day. It was terrible in the laundry."

Recklessly she took a mouthful of the cold tea that had been steeped so long that it was like acid in her mouth, and recklessly, under the eye of her sister-in-law, she swallowed it and the rest of the cupful. She wiped her mouth on her handkerchief and got up.

"I guess I'll go to bed."

"Wonder you ain't out to a dance," Sarah sniffed. "Funny, ain't it, you come home so dead tired every night, an' yet any night in the week you can get out an' dance unearthly hours."

Saxon started to speak, suppressed herself with tightened lips, then lost control and blazed out. "Wasn't you ever young?"

Without waiting for reply, she turned to her bedroom, which opened directly off the kitchen. It was a small room, eight by twelve, and the earthquake had left its marks upon the plaster. A bed and chair of cheap pine and a very ancient chest of drawers constituted the furniture. Saxon had known this chest of drawers all her life. The vision of it was woven into her earliest recollections. She knew it had crossed the plains with her people in a prairie schooner. It was of solid mahogany. One end was cracked and dented from the capsize of the wagon in Rock Canyon. A bullet-hole, plugged, in the face of the top drawer, told of the fight with the Indians at Little Meadow. Of these happenings her mother had told her; also had she told that the chest had come with the family originally from England in a day even earlier than the day on which George Washington was born.

Above the chest of drawers, on the wall, hung a small looking-glass. Thrust under the molding were photographs of young men and women, and of picnic groups wherein the young men, with hats rakishly on the backs of their heads, encircled the girls with their arms. Farther along on the

wall were a colored calendar and numerous colored advertisements and sketches torn out of magazines. Most of these sketches were of horses. From the gas-fixture hung a tangled bunch of well-scribbled dance programs.

Saxon started to take off her hat, but suddenly sat down on the bed. She sobbed softly, with considered repression, but the weak-latched door swung noiselessly open, and she was startled by her sister-in-law's voice.

"NOW what's the matter with you? If you didn't like them beans--"

"No, no," Saxon explained hurriedly. "I'm just tired, that's all, and my feet hurt. I wasn't hungry, Sarah. I'm just beat out."

"If you took care of this house," came the retort, "an' cooked an' baked, an' washed, an' put up with what I put up, you'd have something to be beat out about. You've got a snap, you have. But just wait." Sarah broke off to cackle gloatingly. "Just wait, that's all, an' you'll be fool enough to get married some day, like me, an' then you'll get yours--an' it'll be brats, an' brats, an' brats, an' no more dancin', an' silk stockin's, an' three pairs of shoes at one time. You've got a cinch-nobody to think of but your own precious self--an' a lot of young hoodlums makin' eyes at you an' tellin' you how beautiful your eyes are. Huh! Some fine day you'll tie up to one of 'em, an' then, mebbe, on occasion, you'll wear black eyes for a change."

"Don't say that, Sarah," Saxon protested. "My brother never laid hands on you. You know that."

"No more he didn't. He never had the gumption. Just the same, he's better stock than that tough crowd you run with, if he can't make a livin' an' keep his wife in three pairs of shoes. Just the same he's oodles better'n your bunch of hoodlums that no decent woman'd wipe her one pair of shoes on. How you've missed trouble this long is beyond me. Mebbe the younger generation is wiser in such thins--I don't know. But I do know that a young woman that has three pairs of shoes ain't thinkin' of anything but her own enjoyment, an' she's goin' to get hers, I can tell her that much. When I was a girl there wasn't such doin's. My mother'd taken the hide off me if I done the things you do. An' she was right, just as everything in the world is wrong now. Look at your brother, a-runnin' around to socialist meetin's, an' chewin' hot air, an' diggin' up extra strike dues to the union that means so much bread out of the mouths of his children, instead of makin' good with his bosses. Why, the dues he pays would keep me in seventeen pairs of shoes if I was nannygoat enough to want 'em. Some day, mark my words, he'll get his time, an' then what'll we do? What'll I do, with five mouths to feed an' nothin' comin' in?"

She stopped, out of breath but seething with the tirade yet to come.

"Oh, Sarah, please won't you shut the door?" Saxon pleaded.

The door slammed violently, and Saxon, ere she fell to crying again, could hear her sister-in-law lumbering about the kitchen and talking loudly to herself.

CHAPTER II

Each bought her own ticket at the entrance to Weasel Park. And each, as she laid her half-dollar down, was distinctly aware of how many pieces of fancy starch were represented by the coin. It was too early for the crowd, but bricklayers and their families, laden with huge lunch-baskets and armfuls of babies, were already going in--a healthy, husky race of workmen, well-paid and robustly fed. And with them, here and there, undisguised by their decent American clothing, smaller in bulk and stature, weazened not alone by age but by the pinch of lean years and early hardship, were grandfathers and mothers who had patently first seen the light of day on old Irish soil. Their faces showed content and pride as they limped along with this lusty progeny of theirs that had fed on better food.

Not with these did Mary and Saxon belong. They knew them not, had no acquaintances among them. It did not matter whether the festival were Irish, German, or Slavonian; whether the picnic was the Bricklayers', the Brewers', or the Butchers'. They, the girls, were of the dancing crowd that swelled by a certain constant percentage the gate receipts of all the picnics.

They strolled about among the booths where peanuts were grinding and popcorn was roasting in preparation for the day, and went on and inspected the dance floor of the pavilion. Saxon, clinging to an imaginary partner, essayed a few steps of the dip-waltz. Mary clapped

her hands.

"My!" she cried. "You're just swell! An' them stockin's is peaches."

Saxon smiled with appreciation, pointed out her foot, velvet-slippered with high Cuban heels, and slightly lifted the tight black skirt, exposing a trim ankle and delicate swell of calf, the white flesh gleaming through the thinnest and flimsiest of fifty-cent black silk stockings. She was slender, not tall, yet the due round lines of womanhood were hers. On her white shirtwaist was a pleated jabot of cheap lace, caught with a large novelty pin of imitation coral. Over the shirtwaist was a natty jacket, elbow-sleeved, and to the elbows she wore gloves of imitation suede. The one essentially natural touch about her appearance was the few curls, strangers to curling-irons, that escaped from under the little naughty hat of black velvet pulled low over the eyes.

Mary's dark eyes flashed with joy at the sight, and with a swift little run she caught the other girl in her arms and kissed her in a breast-crushing embrace. She released her, blushing at her own extravagance.

"You look good to me," she cried, in extenuation. "If I was a man I couldn't keep my hands off you. I'd eat you, I sure would."

They went out of the pavilion hand in hand, and on through the sunshine

they strolled, swinging hands gaily, reacting exuberantly from the week of deadening toil. They hung over the railing of the bear-pit, shivering at the huge and lonely denizen, and passed quickly on to ten minutes of laughter at the monkey cage. Crossing the grounds, they looked down into the little race track on the bed of a natural amphitheater where the early afternoon games were to take place. After that they explored the woods, threaded by countless paths, ever opening out in new surprises of green-painted rustic tables and benches in leafy nooks, many of which were already pre-empted by family parties. On a grassy slope, tree-surrounded, they spread a newspaper and sat down on the short grass already tawny-dry under the California sun. Half were they minded to do this because of the grateful indolence after six days of insistent motion, half in conservation for the hours of dancing to come.

"Bert Wanhope'll be sure to come," Mary chattered. "An' he said he was going to bring Billy Roberts--'Big Bill,' all the fellows call him. He's just a big boy, but he's awfully tough. He's a prizefighter, an' all the girls run after him. I'm afraid of him. He ain't quick in talkin'. He's more like that big bear we saw. Brr-rf! Brr-rf!--bite your head off, just like that. He ain't really a prize-fighter. He's a teamster--belongs to the union. Drives for Coberly and Morrison. But sometimes he fights in the clubs. Most of the fellows are scared of him. He's got a bad temper, an' he'd just as soon hit a fellow as eat, just like that. You won't like him, but he's a swell dancer. He's heavy, you know, an' he just slides and glides around. You wanta have a dance with'm anyway. He's a good spender, too. Never pinches. But my!--he's

got one temper."

The talk wandered on, a monologue on Mary's part, that centered always on Bert Wanhope.

"You and he are pretty thick," Saxon ventured.

"I'd marry'm to-morrow," Mary flashed out impulsively. Then her face went bleakly forlorn, hard almost in its helpless pathos. "Only, he never asks me. He's..." Her pause was broken by sudden passion. "You watch out for him, Saxon, if he ever comes foolin' around you. He's no good. Just the same, I'd marry him to-morrow. He'll never get me any other way." Her mouth opened, but instead of speaking she drew a long sigh. "It's a funny world, ain't it?" she added. "More like a scream. And all the stars are worlds, too. I wonder where God hides. Bert Wanhope says there ain't no God. But he's just terrible. He says the most terrible things. I believe in God. Don't you? What do you think about God, Saxon?"

Saxon shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"But if we do wrong we get ours, don't we?" Mary persisted. "That's what they all say, except Bert. He says he don't care what he does, he'll never get his, because when he dies he's dead, an' when he's dead he'd like to see any one put anything across on him that'd wake him up. Ain't he terrible, though? But it's all so funny. Sometimes I get scared when

I think God's keepin' an eye on me all the time. Do you think he knows what I'm sayin' now? What do you think he looks like, anyway?"

"I don't know," Saxon answered. "He's just a funny proposition."

"Oh!" the other gasped.

"He IS, just the same, from what all people say of him," Saxon went on stoutly. "My brother thinks he looks like Abraham Lincoln. Sarah thinks he has whiskers."

"An' I never think of him with his hair parted," Mary confessed, daring the thought and shivering with apprehension. "He just couldn't have his hair parted. THAT'D be funny."

"You know that little, wrinkly Mexican that sells wire puzzles?" Saxon queried. "Well, God somehow always reminds me of him."

Mary laughed outright.

"Now that IS funny. I never thought of him like that How do you make it out?"

"Well, just like the little Mexican, he seems to spend his time peddling puzzles. He passes a puzzle out to everybody, and they spend all their lives tryin' to work it out They all get stuck. I can't work mine out.

I don't know where to start. And look at the puzzle he passed Sarah. And she's part of Tom's puzzle, and she only makes his worse. And they all, an' everybody I know--you, too--are part of my puzzle."

"Mebbe the puzzles is all right," Mary considered. "But God don't look like that yellow little Greaser. THAT I won't fall for. God don't look like anybody. Don't you remember on the wall at the Salvation Army it says 'God is a spirit'?"

"That's another one of his puzzles, I guess, because nobody knows what a spirit looks like."

"That's right, too." Mary shuddered with reminiscent fear. "Whenever I try to think of God as a spirit, I can see Hen Miller all wrapped up in a sheet an' runnin' us girls. We didn't know, an' it scared the life out of us. Little Maggie Murphy fainted dead away, and Beatrice Peralta fell an' scratched her face horrible. When I think of a spirit all I can see is a white sheet runnin' in the dark. Just the same, God don't look like a Mexican, an' he don't wear his hair parted."

A strain of music from the dancing pavilion brought both girls scrambling to their feet.

"We can get a couple of dances in before we eat," Mary proposed. "An' then it'll be afternoon an' all the fellows 'll be here. Most of them are pinchers--that's why they don't come early, so as to get out of

taking the girls to dinner. But Bert's free with his money, an' so is Billy. If we can beat the other girls to it, they'll take us to the restaurant. Come on, hurry, Saxon."

There were few couples on the floor when they arrived at the pavilion, and the two girls essayed the first waltz together.

"There's Bert now," Saxon whispered, as they came around the second time.

"Don't take any notice of them," Mary whispered back. "We'll just keep on goin'. They needn't think we're chasin' after them."

But Saxon noted the heightened color in the other's cheek, and felt her quicker breathing.

"Did you see that other one?" Mary asked, as she backed Saxon in a long slide across the far end of the pavilion. "That was Billy Roberts. Bert said he'd come. He'll take you to dinner, and Bert'll take me. It's goin' to be a swell day, you'll see. My! I only wish the music'll hold out till we can get back to the other end."

Down the floor they danced, on man-trapping and dinner-getting intent, two fresh young things that undeniably danced well and that were delightfully surprised when the music stranded them perilously near to their desire.

Bert and Mary addressed each other by their given names, but to Saxon Bert was "Mr. Wanhope," though he called her by her first name. The only introduction was of Saxon and Billy Roberts. Mary carried it off with a flurry of nervous carelessness.

"Mr. Robert--Miss Brown. She's my best friend. Her first name's Saxon. Ain't it a scream of a name?"

"Sounds good to me," Billy retorted, hat off and hand extended. "Pleased to meet you, Miss Brown."

As their hands clasped and she felt the teamster callouses on his palm,

her quick eyes saw a score of things. About all that he saw was her eyes, and then it was with a vague impression that they were blue. Not till later in the day did he realize that they were gray. She, on the contrary, saw his eyes as they really were--deep blue, wide, and handsome in a sullen-boyish way. She saw that they were straight-looking, and she liked them, as she had liked the glimpse she had caught of his hand, and as she liked the contact of his hand itself. Then, too, but not sharply, she had perceived the short, square-set nose, the rosiness of cheek, and the firm, short upper lip, ere delight centered her flash of gaze on the well-modeled, large clean mouth where red lips smiled clear of the white, enviable teeth. A BOY, A GREAT BIG MAN-BOY, was her thought; and, as they smiled at each other and their

hands slipped apart, she was startled by a glimpse of his hair--short and crisp and sandy, hinting almost of palest gold save that it was too flaxen to hint of gold at all.

So blond was he that she was reminded of stage-types she had seen, such as Ole Olson and Yon Yonson; but there resemblance ceased. It was a matter of color only, for the eyes were dark-lashed and -browed, and were cloudy with temperament rather than staring a child-gaze of wonder, and the suit of smooth brown cloth had been made by a tailor. Saxon appraised the suit on the instant, and her secret judgment was NOT A CENT LESS THAN FIFTY DOLLARS. Further, he had none of the awkwardness of the Scandinavian immigrant. On the contrary, he was one of those rare individuals that radiate muscular grace through the ungraceful man-garments of civilization. Every movement was supple, slow, and apparently considered. This she did not see nor analyze. She saw only a clothed man with grace of carriage and movement. She felt, rather than perceived, the calm and certitude of all the muscular play of him, and she felt, too, the promise of easement and rest that was especially grateful and craved-for by one who had incessantly, for six days and at top-speed, ironed fancy starch. As the touch of his hand had been good, so, to her, this subtler feel of all of him, body and mind, was good.

As he took her program and skirmished and joked after the way of young men, she realized the immediacy of delight she had taken in him. Never in her life had she been so affected by any man. She wondered to herself: IS THIS THE MAN?

He danced beautifully. The joy was hers that good dancers take when they have found a good dancer for a partner. The grace of those slow-moving, certain muscles of his accorded perfectly with the rhythm of the music. There was never doubt, never a betrayal of indecision. She glanced at Bert, dancing "tough" with Mary, caroming down the long floor with more than one collision with the increasing couples. Graceful himself in his slender, tall, lean-stomached way, Bert was accounted a good dancer; yet Saxon did not remember ever having danced with him with keen pleasure. Just a hit of a jerk spoiled his dancing--a jerk that did not occur, usually, but that always impended. There was something spasmodic in his mind. He was too quick, or he continually threatened to be too quick. He always seemed just on the verge of overrunning the time. It was disquieting. He made for unrest.

"You're a dream of a dancer," Billy Roberts was saying. "I've heard lots of the fellows talk about your dancing."

"I love it," she answered.

But from the way she said it he sensed her reluctance to speak, and danced on in silence, while she warmed with the appreciation of a woman for gentle consideration. Gentle consideration was a thing rarely encountered in the life she lived. IS THIS THE MAN? She remembered Mary's "I'd marry him to-morrow," and caught herself speculating on marrying Billy Roberts by the next day--if he asked her.

With eyes that dreamily desired to close, she moved on in the arms of this masterful, guiding pressure. A PRIZE-FIGHTER! She experienced a thrill of wickedness as she thought of what Sarah would say could she see her now. Only he wasn't a prizefighter, but a teamster.

Came an abrupt lengthening of step, the guiding pressure grew more compelling, and she was caught up and carried along, though her velvet-shod feet never left the floor. Then came the sudden control down to the shorter step again, and she felt herself being held slightly from him so that he might look into her face and laugh with her in joy at the exploit. At the end, as the band slowed in the last bars, they, too, slowed, their dance fading with the music in a lengthening glide that ceased with the last lingering tone.

"We're sure cut out for each other when it comes to dancin'," he said, as they made their way to rejoin the other couple.

"It was a dream," she replied.

So low was her voice that he bent to hear, and saw the flush in her cheeks that seemed communicated to her eyes, which were softly warm and sensuous. He took the program from her and gravely and gigantically wrote his name across all the length of it.

"An' now it's no good," he dared. "Ain't no need for it."

He tore it across and tossed it aside.

"Me for you, Saxon, for the next," was Bert's greeting, as they came up. "You take Mary for the next whirl, Bill."

"Nothin' doin', Bo," was the retort. "Me an' Saxon's framed up to last the day."

"Watch out for him, Saxon," Mary warned facetiously. "He's liable to get a crush on you."

"I guess I know a good thing when I see it," Billy responded gallantly.

"And so do I," Saxon aided and abetted.

"I'd 'a' known you if I'd seen you in the dark," Billy added.

Mary regarded them with mock alarm, and Bert said good-naturedly:

"All I got to say is you ain't wastin' any time gettin' together. Just the same, if' you can spare a few minutes from each other after a couple more whirls, Mary an' me'd be complimented to have your presence at dinner."

"Just like that," chimed Mary.

"Quit your kiddin'," Billy laughed back, turning his head to look into Saxon's eyes. "Don't listen to 'em. They're grouched because they got to dance together. Bert's a rotten dancer, and Mary ain't so much. Come on, there she goes. See you after two more dances."

CHAPTER III

They had dinner in the open-air, tree-walled dining-room, and Saxon noted that it was Billy who paid the reckoning for the four. They knew many of the young men and women at the other tables, and greetings and fun flew back and forth. Bert was very possessive with Mary, almost roughly so, resting his hand on hers, catching and holding it, and, once, forcibly slipping off her two rings and refusing to return them for a long while. At times, when he put his arm around her waist, Mary promptly disengaged it; and at other times, with elaborate obliviousness that deceived no one, she allowed it to remain.

And Saxon, talking little but studying Billy Roberts very intently, was satisfied that there would be an utter difference in the way he would do such things... if ever he would do them. Anyway, he'd never paw a girl as Bert and lots of the other fellows did. She measured the breadth of Billy's heavy shoulders.

"Why do they call you 'Big' Bill?" she asked. "You're not so very tall."

"Nope," he agreed. "I'm only five feet eight an' three-quarters. I guess it must be my weight."

"He fights at a hundred an' eighty," Bert interjected.

"Oh, out it," Billy said quickly, a cloud-rift of displeasure showing

in his eyes. "I ain't a fighter. I ain't fought in six months. I've quit it. It don't pay."

"Yon got two hundred the night you put the Frisco Slasher to the bad," Bert urged proudly.

"Cut it. Cut it now.--Say, Saxon, you ain't so big yourself, are you? But you're built just right if anybody should ask you. You're round an' slender at the same time. I bet I can guess your weight."

"Everybody guesses over it," she warned, while inwardly she was puzzled that she should at the same time be glad and regretful that he did not fight any more.

"Not me," he was saying. "I'm a wooz at weight-guessin'. Just you watch me." He regarded her critically, and it was patent that warm approval played its little rivalry with the judgment of his gaze. "Wait a minute."

He reached over to her and felt her arm at the biceps. The pressure of the encircling fingers was firm and honest, and Saxon thrilled to it. There was magic in this man-boy. She would have known only irritation had Bert or any other man felt her arm. But this man! IS HE THE MAN? she was questioning, when he voiced his conclusion.

"Your clothes don't weigh more'n seven pounds. And seven from--hum--say

one hundred an' twenty-three--one hundred an' sixteen is your stripped weight."

But at the penultimate word, Mary cried out with sharp reproof:

"Why, Billy Roberts, people don't talk about such things."

He looked at her with slow-growing, uncomprehending surprise.

"What things?" he demanded finally.

"There you go again! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Look! You've got Saxon blushing!"

"I am not," Saxon denied indignantly.

"An' if you keep on, Mary, you'll have me blushing," Billy growled. "I guess I know what's right an' what ain't. It ain't what a guy says, but what he thinks. An' I'm thinkin' right, an' Saxon knows it. An' she an' I ain't thinkin' what you're thinkin' at all."

"Oh! Oh!" Mary cried. "You're gettin' worse an' worse. I never think such things."

"Whoa, Mary! Backup!" Bert checked her peremptorily. "You're in the wrong stall. Billy never makes mistakes like that."

"But he needn't be so raw," she persisted.

"Come on, Mary, an' be good, an' cut that stuff," was Billy's dismissal of her, as he turned to Saxon. "How near did I come to it?"

"One hundred and twenty-two," she answered, looking deliberately at Mary. "One twenty two with my clothes."

Billy burst into hearty laughter, in which Bert joined.

"I don't care," Mary protested, "You're terrible, both of you--an' you, too, Saxon. I'd never a-thought it of you."

"Listen to me, kid," Bert began soothingly, as his arm slipped around her waist.

But in the false excitement she had worked herself into, Mary rudely repulsed the arm, and then, fearing that she had wounded her lover's feelings, she took advantage of the teasing and banter to recover her good humor. His arm was permitted to return, and with heads bent together, they talked in whispers.

Billy discreetly began to make conversation with Saxon.

"Say, you know, your name is a funny one. I never heard it tagged on

anybody before. But it's all right. I like it."

"My mother gave it to me. She was educated, and knew all kinds of words. She was always reading books, almost until she died. And she wrote lots and lots. I've got some of her poetry published in a San Jose newspaper long ago. The Saxons were a race of people--she told me all about them when I was a little girl. They were wild, like Indians, only they were white. And they had blue eyes, and yellow hair, and they were awful fighters."

As she talked, Billy followed her solemnly, his eyes steadily turned on hers.

"Never heard of them," he confessed. "Did they live anywhere around here?"

She laughed.

"No. They lived in England. They were the first English, and you know the Americans came from the English. We're Saxons, you an' me, an' Mary, an' Bert, and all the Americans that are real Americans, you know, and not Dagoes and Japs and such."

"My folks lived in America a long time," Billy said slowly, digesting the information she had given and relating himself to it. "Anyway, my mother's folks did. They crossed to Maine hundreds of years ago."

"My father was 'State of Maine," she broke in, with a little gurgle of joy. "And my mother was horn in Ohio, or where Ohio is now. She used to call it the Great Western Reserve. What was your father?"

"Don't know." Billy shrugged his shoulders. "He didn't know himself. Nobody ever knew, though he was American, all right, all right."

"His name's regular old American," Saxon suggested. "There's a big English general right now whose name is Roberts. I've read it in the papers."

"But Roberts wasn't my father's name. He never knew what his name was. Roberts was the name of a gold-miner who adopted him. You see, it was this way. When they was Indian-fightin' up there with the Modoc Indians, a lot of the miners an' settlers took a hand. Roberts was captain of one outfit, and once, after a fight, they took a lot of prisoners--squaws, an' kids an' babies. An' one of the kids was my father. They figured he was about five years old. He didn't know nothin' but Indian."

Saxon clapped her hands, and her eyes sparkled: "He'd been captured on an Indian raid!"

"That's the way they figured it," Billy nodded. "They recollected a wagon-train of Oregon settlers that'd been killed by the Modocs four years before. Roberts adopted him, and that's why I don't know his real

name. But you can bank on it, he crossed the plains just the same."

"So did my father," Saxon said proudly.

"An' my mother, too," Billy added, pride touching his own voice. "Anyway, she came pretty close to crossin' the plains, because she was born in a wagon on the River Platte on the way out."

"My mother, too," said Saxon. "She was eight years old, an' she walked most of the way after the oxen began to give out."

Billy thrust out his hand.

"Put her there, kid," he said. "We're just like old friends, what with the same kind of folks behind us."

With shining eyes, Saxon extended her hand to his, and gravely they shook.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she murmured. "We're both old American stock. And if you aren't a Saxon there never was one--your hair, your eyes, your skin, everything. And you're a fighter, too."

"I guess all our old folks was fighters when it comes to that. It come natural to 'em, an' dog-gone it, they just had to fight or they'd never come through."

"What are you two talkin' about?" Mary broke in upon them.

"They're thicker'n mush in no time," Bert girded. "You'd think they'd known each other a week already."

"Oh, we knew each other longer than that," Saxon returned. "Before ever we were born our folks were walkin' across the plains together."

"When your folks was waitin' for the railroad to be built an' all the Indians killed off before they dasted to start for California," was Billy's way of proclaiming the new alliance. "We're the real goods, Saxon an'n me, if anybody should ride up on a buzz-wagon an' ask you."

"Oh, I don't know," Mary boasted with quiet petulance. "My father stayed behind to fight in the Civil War. He was a drummer-boy. That's why he didn't come to California until afterward."

"And my father went back to fight in the Civil War," Saxon said.

"And mine, too," said Billy.

They looked at each other gleefully. Again they had found a new contact.

"Well, they're all dead, ain't they?" was Bert's saturnine comment. "There ain't no difference dyin' in battle or in the poorhouse. The

thing is they're deado. I wouldn't care a rap if my father'd been hanged. It's all the same in a thousand years. This braggin' about folks makes me tired. Besides, my father couldn't a-fought. He wasn't born till two years after the war. Just the same, two of my uncles were killed at Gettysburg. Guess we done our share."

"Just like that," Mary applauded.

Bert's arm went around her waist again.

"We're here, ain't we?" he said. "An' that's what counts. The dead are dead, an' you can bet your sweet life they just keep on stayin' dead."

Mary put her hand over his mouth and began to chide him for his awfulness, whereupon he kissed the palm of her hand and put his head closer to hers.

The merry clatter of dishes was increasing as the dining-room filled up. Here and there voices were raised in snatches of song. There were shrill squeals and screams and bursts of heavier male laughter as the everlasting skirmishing between the young men and girls played on. Among some of the men the signs of drink were already manifest. At a near table girls were calling out to Billy. And Saxon, the sense of temporary possession already strong on her, noted with jealous eyes that he was a favorite and desired object to them.

"Ain't they awful?" Mary voiced her disapproval. "They got a nerve. I know who they are. No respectable girl 'd have a thing to do with them. Listen to that!"

"Oh, you Bill, you," one of them, a buxom young brunette, was calling. "Hope you ain't forgotten me, Bill."

"Oh, you chicken," he called back gallantly.

Saxon flattered herself that he showed vexation, and she conceived an immense dislike for the brunette.

"Goin' to dance?" the latter called.

"Mebbe," he answered, and turned abruptly to Saxon. "Say, we old Americans oughta stick together, don't you think? They ain't many of us left. The country's fillin' up with all kinds of foreigners."

He talked on steadily, in a low, confidential voice, head close to hers, as advertisement to the other girl that he was occupied.

From the next table on the opposite side, a young man had singled out Saxon. His dress was tough. His companions, male and female, were tough. His face was inflamed, his eyes touched with wildness.

"Hey, you!" he called. "You with the velvet slippers. Me for you."

The girl beside him put her arm around his neck and tried to hush him, and through the mufflement of her embrace they could hear him gurgling:

"I tell you she's some goods. Watch me go across an' win her from them cheap skates."

"Butchertown hoodlums," Mary sniffed.

Saxon's eyes encountered the eyes of the girl, who glared hatred across at her. And in Billy's eyes she saw moody anger smouldering. The eyes were more sullen, more handsome than ever, and clouds and veils and lights and shadowe shifted and deepened in the blue of them until they gave her a sense of unfathomable depth. He had stopped talking, and he made no effort to talk.

"Don't start a rough house, Bill," Bert cautioned. "They're from across the hay an' they don't know you, that's all."

Bert stood up suddenly, stepped over to the other table, whispered briefly, and came back. Every face at the table was turned on Billy. The offender arose brokenly, shook off the detaining hand of his girl, and came over. He was a large man, with a hard, malignant face and bitter eyes. Also, he was a subdued man.

"You're Big Bill Roberts," he said thickly, clinging to the table as he

reeled. "I take my hat off to you. I apologize. I admire your taste in skirts, an' take it from me that's a compliment; but I did'nt know who you was. If I'd knowed you was Bill Roberts there wouldn't been a peep from my fly-trap. D'ye get me? I apologize. Will you shake hands?"

Gruffly, Billy said, "It's all right--forget it, sport;" and sullenly he shook hands and with a slow, massive movement thrust the other back toward his own table.

Saxon was glowing. Here was a man, a protector, something to lean against, of whom even the Butchertown toughs were afraid as soon as his name was mentioned.

CHAPTER IV

After dinner there were two dances in the pavilion, and then the band led the way to the race track for the games. The dancers followed, and all through the grounds the picnic parties left their tables to join in. Five thousand packed the grassy slopes of the amphitheater and swarmed inside the race track. Here, first of the events, the men were lining up for a tug of war. The contest was between the Oakland Bricklayers and the San Francisco Bricklayers, and the picked braves, huge and heavy, were taking their positions along the rope. They kicked heel-holds in the soft earth, rubbed their hands with the soil from underfoot, and laughed and joked with the crowd that surged about them.

The judges and watchers struggled vainly to keep back this crowd of relatives and friends. The Celtic blood was up, and the Celtic faction spirit ran high. The air was filled with cries of cheer, advice, warning, and threat. Many elected to leave the side of their own team and go to the side of the other team with the intention of circumventing foul play. There were as many women as men among the jostling supporters. The dust from the trampling, scuffling feet rose in the air, and Mary gasped and coughed and begged Bert to take her away. But he, the imp in him elated with the prospect of trouble, insisted on urging in closer. Saxon clung to Billy, who slowly and methodically elbowed and shouldered a way for her.

"No place for a girl," he grumbled, looking down at her with a masked

expression of absent-mindedness, while his elbow powerfully crushed on the ribs of a big Irishman who gave room. "Things'll break loose when they start pullin'. They's been too much drink, an' you know what the Micks are for a rough house."

Saxon was very much out of place among these large-bodied men and women. She seemed very small and childlike, delicate and fragile, a creature from another race. Only Billy's skilled bulk and muscle saved her. He was continually glancing from face to face of the women and always returning to study her face, nor was she unaware of the contrast he was making.

Some excitement occurred a score of feet away from them, and to the sound of exclamations and blows a surge ran through the crowd. A large man, wedged sidewise in the jam, was shoved against Saxon, crushing her closely against Billy, who reached across to the man's shoulder with a massive thrust that was not so slow as usual. An involuntary grunt came from the victim, who turned his head, showing sun-reddened blond skin and unmistakable angry Irish eyes.

"What's eatin' yeh?" he snarled.

"Get off your foot; you're standin' on it," was Billy's contemptuous reply, emphasized by an increase of thrust.

The Irishman grunted again and made a frantic struggle to twist his body

around, but the wedging bodies on either side held him in a vise.

"I'll break yer ugly face for yeh in a minute," he announced in wrath-thick tones.

Then his own face underwent transformation. The snarl left the lips, and the angry eyes grew genial.

"An' sure an' it's yerself," he said. "I didn't know it was yeh a-shovin'. I seen yeh lick the Terrible Swede, if yeh WAS robbed on the decision."

"No, you didn't, Bo," Billy answered pleasantly. "You saw me take a good beatin' that night. The decision was all right."

The Irishman was now beaming. He had endeavored to pay a compliment with a lie, and the prompt repudiation of the lie served only to increase his hero-worship.

"Sure, an' a bad beatin' it was," he acknowledged, "but yeh showed the grit of a bunch of wildcats. Soon as I can get me arm free I'm goin' to shake yeh by the hand an' help yeh aise yer young lady."

Frustrated in the struggle to get the crowd back, the referee fired his revolver in the air, and the tug-of-war was on. Pandemonium broke loose. Saxon, protected by the two big men, was near enough to the front to

see much that ensued. The men on the rope pulled and strained till their faces were red with effort and their joints crackled. The rope was new, and, as their hands slipped, their wives and daughters sprang in, scooping up the earth in double handfuls and pouring it on the rope and the hands of their men to give them better grip.

A stout, middle-aged woman, carried beyond herself by the passion of the contest, seized the rope and pulled beside her husband, encouraged him with loud cries. A watcher from the opposing team dragged her screaming away and was dropped like a steer by an ear-blow from a partisan from the woman's team. He, in turn, went down, and brawny women joined with their men in the battle. Vainly the judges and watchers begged, pleaded, yelled, and swung with their fists. Men, as well as women, were springing in to the rope and pulling. No longer was it team against team, but all Oakland against all San Francisco, festooned with a free-for-all fight. Hands overlaid hands two and three deep in the struggle to grasp the rope. And hands that found no holds, doubled into bunches of knuckles that impacted on the jaws of the watchers who strove to tear hand-holds from the rope.

Bert yelped with joy, while Mary clung to him, mad with fear. Close to the rope the fighters were going down and being trampled. The dust arose in clouds, while from beyond, all around, unable to get into the battle, could be heard the shrill and impotent rage-screams and rage-yells of women and men.

"Dirty work, dirty work," Billy muttered over and over; and, though he saw much that occurred, assisted by the friendly Irishman he was coolly and safely working Saxon back out of the melee.

At last the break came. The losing team, accompanied by its host of volunteers, was dragged in a rush over the ground and disappeared under the avalanche of battling forms of the onlookers.

Leaving Saxon under the protection of the Irishman in an outer eddy of calm, Billy plunged back into the mix-up. Several minutes later he emerged with the missing couple--Bert bleeding from a blow on the ear, but hilarious, and Mary rumpled and hysterical.

"This ain't sport," she kept repeating. "It's a shame, a dirty shame."

"We got to get outa this," Billy said. "The fun's only commenced."

"Aw, wait," Bert begged. "It's worth eight dollars. It's cheap at any price. I ain't seen so many black eyes and bloody noses in a month of Sundays."

"Well, go on back an' enjoy yourself," Billy commended. "I'll take the girls up there on the side hill where we can look on. But I won't give much for your good looks if some of them Micks lands on you."

The trouble was over in an amazingly short time, for from the judges'

stand beside the track the announcer was bellowing the start of the boys' foot-race; and Bert, disappointed, joined Billy and the two girls on the hillside looking down upon the track.

There were boys' races and girls' races, races of young women and old women, of fat men and fat women, sack races and three-legged races, and the contestants strove around the small track through a Bedlam of cheering supporters. The tug-of-war was already forgotten, and good nature reigned again.

Five young men toed the mark, crouching with fingertips to the ground and waiting the starter's revolver-shot. Three were in their stocking-feet, and the remaining two wore spiked running-shoes.

"Young men's race," Bert read from the program. "An' only one prize--twenty-five dollars. See the red-head with the spikes--the one next to the outside. San Francisco's set on him winning. He's their crack, an' there's a lot of bets up."

"Who's goin' to win?" Mary deferred to Billy's superior athletic knowledge.

"How can I tell!" he answered. "I never saw any of 'em before. But they all look good to me. May the best one win, that's all."

The revolver was fired, and the five runners were off and away. Three

were outdistanced at the start. Redhead led, with a black-haired young man at his shoulder, and it was plain that the race lay between these two. Halfway around, the black-haired one took the lead in a spurt that was intended to last to the finish. Ten feet he gained, nor could Red-head cut it down an inch.

"The boy's a streak," Billy commented. "He ain't tryin' his hardest, an' Red-head's just bustin' himself."

Still ten feet in the lead, the black-haired one breasted the tape in a hubbub of cheers. Yet yells of disapproval could be distinguished. Bert hugged himself with joy.

"Mm-mm," he gloated. "Ain't Frisco sore? Watch out for fireworks now. See! He's bein' challenged. The judges ain't payin' him the money. An' he's got a gang behind him. Oh! Oh! Oh! Ain't had so much fun since my old woman broke her leg!"

"Why don't they pay him, Billy?" Saxon asked. "He won."

"The Frisco bunch is challengin' him for a professional," Billy elucidated. "That's what they're all beefin' about. But it ain't right. They all ran for that money, so they're all professional."

The crowd surged and argued and roared in front of the judges' stand. The stand was a rickety, two-story affair, the second story open at the

front, and here the judges could be seen debating as heatedly as the crowd beneath them.

"There she starts!" Bert cried. "Oh, you rough-house!"

The black-haired racer, backed by a dozen supporters, was climbing the outside stairs to the judges.

"The purse-holder's his friend," Billy said. "See, he's paid him, an' some of the judges is willin' an' some are beefin'. An' now that other gang's going up--they're Redhead's." He turned to Saxon with a reassuring smile. "We're well out of it this time. There's goin' to be rough stuff down there in a minute."

"The judges are tryin' to make him give the money back," Bert explained. "An' if he don't the other gang'll take it away from him. See! They're reachin' for it now."

High above his head, the winner held the roll of paper containing the twenty-five silver dollars. His gang, around him, was shouldering back those who tried to seize the money. No blows had been struck yet, but the struggle increased until the frail structure shook and swayed. From the crowd beneath the winner was variously addressed: "Give it back, you dog!" "Hang on to it, Tim!" "You won fair, Timmy!" "Give it back, you dirty robber!" Abuse unprintable as well as friendly advice was hurled at him.

The struggle grew more violent. Tim's supporters strove to hold him off the floor so that his hand would still be above the grasping hands that shot up. Once, for an instant, his arm was jerked down. Again it went up. But evidently the paper had broken, and with a last desperate effort, before he went down, Tim flung the coin out in a silvery shower upon the heads of the crowd beneath. Then ensued a weary period of arguing and quarreling.

"I wish they'd finish, so as we could get back to the dancin'," Mary complained. "This ain't no fun."

Slowly and painfully the judges' stand was cleared, and an announcer, stepping to the front of the stand, spread his arms appealing for silence. The angry clamor died down.

"The judges have decided," he shouted, "that this day of good fellowship an' brotherhood--"

"Hear! Hear!" Many of the cooler heads applauded. "That's the stuff!" "No fightin'!" "No hard feelin's!"

"An' therefore," the announcer became audible again, "the judges have decided to put up another purse of twenty-five dollars an' run the race over again!"

"An' Tim?" bellowed scores of throats. "What about Tim?" "He's been robbed!" "The judges is rotten!"

Again the announcer stilled the tumult with his arm appeal.

"The judges have decided, for the sake of good feelin', that Timothy McManus will also run. If he wins, the money's his."

"Now wouldn't that jar you?" Billy grumbled disgustedly. "If Tim's eligible now, he was eligible the first time. An' if he was eligible the first time, then the money was his."

"Red-head'll bust himself wide open this time," Bert jubilated.

"An' so will Tim," Billy rejoined. "You can bet he's mad clean through, and he'll let out the links he was holdin' in last time."

Another quarter of an hour was spent in clearing the track of the excited crowd, and this time only Tim and Red-head toed the mark. The other three young men had abandoned the contest.

The leap of Tim, at the report of the revolver, put him a clean yard in the lead.

"I guess he's professional, all right, all right," Billy remarked. "An' just look at him go!"

Half-way around, Tim led by fifty feet, and, running swiftly, maintaining the same lead, he came down the homestretch an easy winner. When directly beneath the group on the hillside, the incredible and unthinkable happened. Standing close to the inside edge of the track was a dapper young man with a light switch cane. He was distinctly out of place in such a gathering, for upon him was no ear-mark of the working class. Afterward, Bert was of the opinion that he looked like a swell dancing master, while Billy called him "the dude."

So far as Timothy McManus was concerned, the dapper young man was destiny; for as Tim passed him, the young man, with utmost deliberation, thrust his cane between Tim's flying legs. Tim sailed through the air in a headlong pitch, struck spread-eagled on his face, and plowed along in a cloud of dust.

There was an instant of vast and gasping silence. The young man, too, seemed petrified by the ghastliness of his deed. It took an appreciable interval of time for him, as well as for the onlookers, to realize what he had done. They recovered first, and from a thousand throats the wild Irish yell went up. Red-head won the race without a cheer. The storm center had shifted to the young man with the cane. After the yell, he had one moment of indecision; then he turned and darted up the track.

"Go it, sport!" Bert cheered, waving his hat in the air. "You're the goods for me! Who'd a-thought it? Who'd a-thought it? Say!--wouldn't it,

now? Just wouldn't it?"

"Phew! He's a streak himself," Billy admired. "But what did he do it for? He's no bricklayer."

Like a frightened rabbit, the mad roar at his heels, the young man tore up the track to an open space on the hillside, up which he clawed and disappeared among the trees. Behind him toiled a hundred vengeful runners.

"It's too bad he's missing the rest of it," Billy said. "Look at 'em goin' to it."

Bert was beside himself. He leaped up and down and cried continuously.

"Look at 'em! Look at 'em! Look at 'em!"

The Oakland faction was outraged. Twice had its favorite runner been jobbed out of the race. This last was only another vile trick of the Frisco faction. So Oakland doubled its brawny fists and swung into San Francisco for blood. And San Francisco, consciously innocent, was no less willing to join issues. To be charged with such a crime was no less monstrous than the crime itself. Besides, for too many tedious hours had the Irish heroically suppressed themselves. Five thousands of them exploded into joyous battle. The women joined with them. The whole amphitheater was filled with the conflict. There were rallies, retreats,

charges, and counter-charges. Weaker groups were forced fighting up the hillsides. Other groups, bested, fled among the trees to carry on guerrilla warfare, emerging in sudden dashes to overwhelm isolated enemies. Half a dozen special policemen, hired by the Weasel Park management, received an impartial trouncing from both sides.

"Nobody's the friend of a policeman," Bert chortled, dabbing his handkerchief to his injured ear, which still bled.

The bushes crackled behind him, and he sprang aside to let the locked forms of two men go by, rolling over and over down the hill, each striking when uppermost, and followed by a screaming woman who rained blows on the one who was patently not of her clan.

The judges, in the second story of the stand, valiantly withstood a fierce assault until the frail structure toppled to the ground in splinters.

"What's that woman doing?" Saxon asked, calling attention to an elderly woman beneath them on the track, who had sat down and was pulling from her foot an elastic-sided shoe of generous dimensions.

"Goin' swimming," Bert chuckled, as the stocking followed.

They watched, fascinated. The shoe was pulled on again over the bare foot. Then the woman slipped a rock the size of her fist into the

stocking, and, brandishing this ancient and horrible weapon, lumbered into the nearest fray.

"Oh!--Oh!--Oh!" Bert screamed, with every blow she struck "Hey, old flannel-mouth! Watch out! You'll get yours in a second. Oh! Oh! A peach! Did you see it? Hurray for the old lady! Look at her tearin' into 'em! Watch out, old girl!... Ah-h-h."

His voice died away regretfully, as the one with the stocking, whose hair had been clutched from behind by another Amazon, was whirled about in a dizzy semicircle.

Vainly Mary clung to his arm, shaking him back and forth and remonstrating.

"Can't you be sensible?" she cried. "It's awful! I tell you it's awful!"

But Bert was irrepressible.

"Go it, old girl!" he encouraged. "You win! Me for you every time! Now's your chance! Swat! Oh! My! A peach! A peach!"

"It's the biggest rough-house I ever saw," Billy confided to Saxon. "It sure takes the Micks to mix it. But what did that dude wanta do it for? That's what gets me. He wasn't a bricklayer--not even a workingman--just a regular sissy dude that didn't know a livin' soul in the grounds. But

if he wanted to raise a rough-house he certainly done it. Look at 'em. They're fightin' everywhere."

He broke into sudden laughter, so hearty that the tears came into his eyes.

"What is it?" Saxon asked, anxious not to miss anything.

"It's that dude," Billy explained between gusts. "What did he wanta do it for? That's what gets my goat. What'd he wanta do it for?"

There was more crashing in the brush, and two women erupted upon the scene, one in flight, the other pursuing. Almost ere they could realize it, the little group found itself merged in the astounding conflict that covered, if not the face of creation, at least all the visible landscape of Weasel Park.

The fleeing woman stumbled in rounding the end of a picnic bench, and would have been caught had she not seized Mary's arm to recover balance, and then flung Mary full into the arms of the woman who pursued. This woman, largely built, middle-aged, and too irate to comprehend, clutched Mary's hair by one hand and lifted the other to smack her. Before the blow could fall, Billy had seized both the woman's wrists.

"Come on, old girl, cut it out," he said appeasingly. "You're in wrong. She ain't done nothin'."

Then the woman did a strange thing. Making no resistance, but maintaining her hold on the girl's hair, she stood still and calmly began to scream. The scream was hideously compounded of fright and fear. Yet in her face was neither fright nor fear. She regarded Billy coolly and appraisingly, as if to see how he took it--her scream merely the cry to the clan for help.

"Aw, shut up, you battleax!" Bert vociferated, trying to drag her off by the shoulders.

The result was that The four rocked back and forth, while the woman calmly went on screaming. The scream became touched with triumph as more crashing was heard in the brush.

Saxon saw Billy's slow eyes glint suddenly to the hardness of steel, and at the same time she saw him put pressure on his wrist-holds. The woman released her grip on Mary and was shoved back and free. Then the first man of the rescue was upon them. He did not pause to inquire into the merits of the affair. It was sufficient that he saw the woman reeling away from Billy and screaming with pain that was largely feigned.

"It's all a mistake," Billy cried hurriedly. "We apologize, sport--"

The Irishman swung ponderously. Billy ducked, cutting his apology short, and as the sledge-like fist passed over his head, he drove his left to

the other's jaw. The big Irishman toppled over sidewise and sprawled on the edge of the slope. Half-scrambled back to his feet and out of balance, he was caught by Bert's fist, and this time went clawing down the slope that was slippery with short, dry grass. Bert was redoubtable. "That for you, old girl--my compliments," was his cry, as he shoved the woman over the edge on to the treacherous slope. Three more men were emerging from the brush.

In the meantime, Billy had put Saxon in behind the protection of the picnic table. Mary, who was hysterical, had evinced a desire to cling to him, and he had sent her sliding across the top of the table to Saxon.

"Come on, you flannel-mouths!" Bert yelled at the newcomers, himself swept away by passion, his black eyes flashing wildly, his dark face inflamed by the too-ready blood. "Come on, you cheap skates! Talk about Gettysburg. We'll show you all the Americans ain't dead yet!"

"Shut your trap--we don't want a scrap with the girls here," Billy growled harshly, holding his position in front of the table. He turned to the three rescuers, who were bewildered by the lack of anything visible to rescue. "Go on, sports. We don't want a row. You're in wrong. They ain't nothin' doin' in the fight line. We don't wanta fight--d'ye get me?"

They still hesitated, and Billy might have succeeded in avoiding trouble had not the man who had gone down the bank chosen that unfortunate

moment to reappear, crawling groggily on hands and knees and showing a bleeding face. Again Bert reached him and sent him downslope, and the other three, with wild yells, sprang in on Billy, who punched, shifted position, ducked and punched, and shifted again ere he struck the third time. His blows were clean end hard, scientifically delivered, with the weight of his body behind.

Saxon, looking on, saw his eyes and learned more about him. She was frightened, but clear-seeing, and she was startled by the disappearance of all depth of light and shadow in his eyes. They showed surface only--a hard, bright surface, almost glazed, devoid of all expression save deadly seriousness. Bert's eyes showed madness. The eyes of the Irishmen were angry and serious, and yet not all serious. There was a wayward gleam in them, as if they enjoyed the fracas. But in Billy's eyes was no enjoyment. It was as if he had certain work to do and had doggedly settled down to do it.

Scarcely more expression did she note in the face, though there was nothing in common between it and the one she had seen all day. The boyishness had vanished. This face was mature in a terrifying, ageless way. There was no anger in it, nor was it even pitiless. It seemed to have glazed as hard and passionlessly as his eyes. Something came to her of her wonderful mother's tales of the ancient Saxons, and he seemed to her one of those Saxons, and she caught a glimpse, on the well of her consciousness, of a long, dark boat, with a prow like the beak of a bird of prey, and of huge, half-naked men, wing-helmeted, and one of their

faces, it seemed to her, was his face. She did not reason this. She felt it, and visioned it as by an unthinkable clairvoyance, and gasped, for the flurry of war was over. It had lasted only seconds, Bert was dancing on the edge of the slippery slope and mocking the vanquished who had slid impotently to the bottom. But Billy took charge.

"Come on, you girls," he commanded. "Get onto yourself, Bert. We got to get onta this. We can't fight an army."

He led the retreat, holding Saxon's arm, and Bert, giggling and jubilant, brought up the rear with an indignant Mary who protested vainly in his unheeding ears.

For a hundred yards they ran and twisted through the trees, and then, no signs of pursuit appearing, they slowed down to a dignified saunter. Bert, the trouble-seeker, pricked his ears to the muffled sound of blows and sobs, and stepped aside to investigate.

"Oh! look what I've found!" he called.

They joined him on the edge of a dry ditch and looked down. In the bottom were two men, strays from the fight, grappled together and still fighting. They were weeping out of sheer fatigue and helplessness, and the blows they only occasionally struck were open-handed and ineffectual.

"Hey, you, sport--throw sand in his eyes," Bert counseled. "That's it, blind him an' he's your'n."

"Stop that!" Billy shouted at the man, who was following instructions, "Or I'll come down there an' beat you up myself. It's all over--d'ye get me? It's all over an' everybody's friends. Shake an' make up. The drinks are on both of you. That's right--here, gimme your hand an' I'll pull you out."

They left them shaking hands and brushing each other's clothes.

"It soon will be over," Billy grinned to Saxon. "I know 'em. Fight's fun with them. An' this big scrap's made the days howlin' success. What did I tell you!--look over at that table there."

A group of disheveled men and women, still breathing heavily, were shaking hands all around.

"Come on, let's dance," Mary pleaded, urging them in the direction of the pavilion.

All over the park the warring bricklayers were shaking hands and making up, while the open-air bars were crowded with the drinkers.

Saxon walked very close to Billy. She was proud of him. He could fight, and he could avoid trouble. In all that had occurred he had striven

to avoid trouble. And, also, consideration for her and Mary had been uppermost in his mind.

"You are brave," she said to him.

"It's like takin' candy from a baby," he disclaimed. "They only rough-house. They don't know boxin'. They're wide open, an' all you gotta do is hit 'em. It ain't real fightin', you know." With a troubled, boyish look in his eyes, he stared at his bruised knuckles. "An' I'll have to drive team to-morrow with 'em," he lamented. "Which ain't fun, I'm tellin' you, when they stiffen up."

CHAPTER V

At eight o'clock the Al Vista band played "Home, Sweet Home," and, following the hurried rush through the twilight to the picnic train, the four managed to get double seats facing each other. When the aisles and platforms were packed by the hilarious crowd, the train pulled out for the short run from the suburbs into Oakland. All the car was singing a score of songs at once, and Bert, his head pillowed on Mary's breast with her arms around him, started "On the Banks of the Wabash." And he sang the song through, undeterred by the bedlam of two general fights, one on the adjacent platform, the other at the opposite end of the car, both of which were finally subdued by special policemen to the screams of women and the crash of glass.

Billy sang a lugubrious song of many stanzas about a cowboy, the refrain of which was, "Bury me out on the lone pr-rairie."

"That's one you never heard before; my father used to sing it," he told Saxon, who was glad that it was ended.

She had discovered the first flaw in him. He was tonedeaf. Not once had he been on the key.

"I don't sing often," he added.

"You bet your sweet life he don't," Bert exclaimed. "His friends'd kill

him if he did."

"They all make fun of my singin'," he complained to Saxon. "Honest, now, do you find it as rotten as all that?"

"It's... it's maybe flat a bit," she admitted reluctantly.

"It don't sound flat to me," he protested. "It's a regular josh on me. I'll bet Bert put you up to it. You sing something now, Saxon. I bet you sing good. I can tell it from lookin' at you."

She began "When the Harvest Days Are Over." Bert and Mary joined in; but when Billy attempted to add his voice he was dissuaded by a shin-kick from Bert. Saxon sang in a clear, true soprano, thin but sweet, and she was aware that she was singing to Billy.

"Now THAT is singing what is," he proclaimed, when she had finished. "Sing it again. Aw, go on. You do it just right. It's great."

His hand slipped to hers and gathered it in, and as she sang again she felt the tide of his strength flood warmingly through her.

"Look at 'em holdin' hands," Bert jeered. "Just a-holdin' hands like they was afraid. Look at Mary an' me. Come on an' kick in, you cold-feets. Get together. If you don't, it'll look suspicious. I got my suspicions already. You're framin' somethin' up."

There was no mistaking his innuendo, and Saxon felt her cheeks flaming.

"Get onto yourself, Bert," Billy reproved.

"Shut up!" Mary added the weight of her indignation. "You're awfully raw, Bert Wanhope, an' I won't have anything more to do with you--there!"

She withdrew her arms and shoved him away, only to receive him forgivingly half a dozen seconds afterward.

"Come on, the four of us," Bert went on irrepressibly. "The night's young. Let's make a time of it--Pabst's Cafe first, and then some. What you say, Bill? What you say, Saxon? Mary's game."

Saxon waited and wondered, half sick with apprehension of this man beside her whom she had known so short a time.

"Nope," he said slowly. "I gotta get up to a hard day's work to-morrow, and I guess the girls has got to, too."

Saxon forgave him his tone-deafness. Here was the kind of man she always had known existed. It was for some such man that she had waited. She was twenty-two, and her first marriage offer had come when she was sixteen. The last had occurred only the month before, from the foreman of the

washing-room, and he had been good and kind, but not young. But this one beside her--he was strong and kind and good, and YOUNG. She was too young herself not to desire youth. There would have been rest from fancy starch with the foreman, but there would have been no warmth. But this man beside her.... She caught herself on the verge involuntarily of pressing his hand that held hers.

"No, Bert, don't tease he's right," Mary was saying. "We've got to get some sleep. It's fancy starch to-morrow, and all day on our feet."

It came to Saxon with a chill pang that she was surely older than Billy. She stole glances at the smoothness of his face, and the essential boyishness of him, so much desired, shocked her. Of course he would marry some girl years younger than himself, than herself. How old was he? Could it be that he was too young for her? As he seemed to grow inaccessible, she was drawn toward him more compellingly. He was so strong, so gentle. She lived over the events of the day. There was no flaw there. He had considered her and Mary, always. And he had torn the program up and danced only with her. Surely he had liked her, or he would not have done it.

She slightly moved her hand in his and felt the harsh contact of his teamster callouses. The sensation was exquisite. He, too, moved his hand, to accommodate the shift of hers, and she waited fearfully. She did not want him to prove like other men, and she could have hated him had he dared to take advantage of that slight movement of her fingers

and put his arm around her. He did not, and she flamed toward him. There was fineness in him. He was neither rattle-brained, like Bert, nor coarse like other men she had encountered. For she had had experiences, not nice, and she had been made to suffer by the lack of what was termed chivalry, though she, in turn, lacked that word to describe what she divined and desired.

And he was a prizefighter. The thought of it almost made her gasp. Yet he answered not at all to her conception of a prizefighter. But, then, he wasn't a prizefighter. He had said he was not. She resolved to ask him about it some time if... if he took her out again. Yet there was little doubt of that, for when a man danced with one girl a whole day he did not drop her immediately. Almost she hoped that he was a prizefighter. There was a delicious tickle of wickedness about it. Prizefighters were such terrible and mysterious men. In so far as they were out of the ordinary and were not mere common workingmen such as carpenters and laundrymen, they represented romance. Power also they represented. They did not work for bosses, but spectacularly and magnificently, with their own might, grappled with the great world and wrung splendid living from its reluctant hands. Some of them even owned automobiles and traveled with a retinue of trainers and servants. Perhaps it had been only Billy's modesty that made him say he had quit fighting. And yet, there were the callouses on his hands. That showed he had quit.

CHAPTER VI

They said good-bye at the gate. Billy betrayed awkwardness that was sweet to Saxon. He was not one of the take-it-for-granted young men. There was a pause, while she feigned desire to go into the house, yet waited in secret eagerness for the words she wanted him to say.

"When am I goin' to see you again?" he asked, holding her hand in his.

She laughed consentingly.

"I live 'way up in East Oakland," he explained. "You know there's where the stable is, an' most of our teaming is done in that section, so I don't knock around down this way much. But, say--" His hand tightened on hers. "We just gotta dance together some more. I'll tell you, the Orindore Club has its dance Wednesday. If you haven't a date--have you?"

"No," she said.

"Then Wednesday. What time'll I come for you?"

And when they had arranged the details, and he had agreed that she should dance some of the dances with the other fellows, and said good night again, his hand closed more tightly on hers and drew her toward him. She resisted slightly, but honestly. It was the custom, but she felt she ought not for fear he might misunderstand. And yet she wanted

to kiss him as she had never wanted to kiss a man. When it came, her face upturned to his, she realized that on his part it was an honest kiss. There hinted nothing behind it. Rugged and kind as himself, it was virginal almost, and betrayed no long practice in the art of saying good-bye. All men were not brutes after all, was her thought.

"Good night," she murmured; the gate screeched under her hand; and she hurried along the narrow walk that led around to the corner of the house.

"Wednesday," he celled softly.

"Wednesday," she answered.

But in the shadow of the narrow alley between the two houses she stood still and pleasured in the ring of his foot falls down the cement sidewalk. Not until they had quite died away did she go on. She crept up the back stairs and across the kitchen to her room, registering her thanksgiving that Sarah was asleep.

She lighted the gas, and, as she removed the little velvet hat, she felt her lips still tingling with the kiss. Yet it had meant nothing. It was the way of the young men. They all did it. But their good-night kisses had never tingled, while this one tingled in her brain as wall as on her lip. What was it? What did it mean? With a sudden impulse she looked at herself in the glass. The eyes were happy and bright. The color that

tinted her cheeks so easily was in them and glowing. It was a pretty reflection, and she smiled, partly in joy, partly in appreciation, and the smile grew at sight of the even rows of strong white teeth. Why shouldn't Billy like that face? was her unvoiced query. Other men had liked it. Other men did like it. Even the other girls admitted she was a good-looker. Charley Long certainly liked it from the way he made life miserable for her.

She glanced aside to the rim of the looking-glass where his photograph was wedged, shuddered, and made a moue of distaste. There was cruelty in those eyes, and brutishness. He was a brute. For a year, now, he had bullied her. Other fellows were afraid to go with her. He warned them off. She had been forced into almost slavery to his attentions. She remembered the young bookkeeper at the laundry--not a workingman, but a soft-handed, soft-voiced gentleman--whom Charley had beaten up at the corner because he had been bold enough to come to take her to the theater. And she had been helpless. For his own sake she had never dared accept another invitation to go out with him.

And now, Wednesday night, she was going with Billy. Billy! Her heart leaped. There would be trouble, but Billy would save her from him. She'd like to see him try and beat Billy up.

With a quick movement, she jerked the photograph from its niche and threw it face down upon the chest of drawers. It fell beside a small square case of dark and tarnished leather. With a feeling as of

profanation she again seized the offending photograph and flung it across the room into a corner. At the same time she picked up the leather case. Springing it open, she gazed at the daguerreotype of a worn little woman with steady gray eyes and a hopeful, pathetic mouth. Opposite, on the velvet lining, done in gold lettering, was, CARLTON FROM DAISY. She read it reverently, for it represented the father she had never known, and the mother she had so little known, though she could never forget that those wise sad eyes were gray.

Despite lack of conventional religion, Saxon's nature was deeply religious. Her thoughts of God were vague and nebulous, and there she was frankly puzzled. She could not vision God. Here, in the daguerreotype, was the concrete; much she had grasped from it, and always there seemed an infinite more to grasp. She did not go to church. This was her high altar and holy of holies. She came to it in trouble, in loneliness, for counsel, divination, end comfort. In so far as she found herself different from the girls of her acquaintance, she quested here to try to identify her characteristics in the pictured face. Her mother had been different from other women, too. This, forsooth, meant to her what God meant to others. To this she strove to be true, and not to hurt nor vex. And how little she really knew of her mother, and of how much was conjecture and surmise, she was unaware; for it was through many years she had erected this mother-myth.

Yet was it all myth? She resented the doubt with quick jealousy, and, opening the bottom drawer of the chest, drew forth a battered portfolio.

Out rolled manuscripts, faded and worn, and arose a faint far scent of sweet-kept age. The writing was delicate and curled, with the quaint fineness of half a century before. She read a stanza to herself:

"Sweet as a wind-lute's airy strains Your gentle muse has learned to sing, And California's boundless plains Prolong the soft notes echoing."

She wondered, for the thousandth time, what a windlute was; yet much of beauty, much of beyondness, she sensed of this dimly remembered beautiful mother of hers. She communed a while, then unrolled a second manuscript. "To C. B.," it read. To Carlton Brown, she knew, to her father, a love-poem from her mother. Saxon pondered the opening lines:

"I have stolen away from the crowd in the groves, Where the nude statues stand, and the leaves point and shiver At ivy-crowned Bacchus, the Queen of the Loves, Pandora and Psyche, struck voiceless forever."

This, too, was beyond her. But she breathed the beauty of it. Bacchus, and Pandora and Psyche--talismans to conjure with! But alas! the necromancy was her mother's. Strange, meaningless words that meant so much! Her marvelous mother had known their meaning. Saxon spelled the three words aloud, letter by letter, for she did not dare their pronunciation; and in her consciousness glimmered august connotations, profound and unthinkable. Her mind stumbled and halted on the star-bright and dazzling boundaries of a world beyond her world in which her mother had roamed at will. Again and again, solemnly, she went over

the four lines. They were radiance and light to the world, haunted with phantoms of pain and unrest, in which she had her being. There, hidden among those cryptic singing lines, was the clue. If she could only grasp it, all would be made clear. Of this she was sublimely confident. She would understand Sarah's sharp tongue, her unhappy brother, the cruelty of Charley Long, the justness of the bookkeeper's beating, the day-long, month-long, year-long toil at the ironing-board.

She skipped a stanza that she knew was hopelessly beyond her, and tried again:

"The dusk of the greenhouse is luminous yet
With quivers of opal and tremors of gold;
For the sun is at rest, and the light from the west,
Like delicate wine that is mellow and old,

"Flushes faintly the brow of a naiad that stands In the spray of a fountain, whose seed-amethysts Tremble lightly a moment on bosom and hands, Then dip in their basin from bosom and wrists."

"It's beautiful, just beautiful," she sighed. And then, appalled at the length of all the poem, at the volume of the mystery, she rolled the manuscript and put it away. Again she dipped in the drawer, seeking the clue among the cherished fragments of her mother's hidden soul.

This time it was a small package, wrapped in tissue paper and tied with

ribbon. She opened it carefully, with the deep gravity and circumstance of a priest before an altar. Appeared a little red-satin Spanish girdle, whale-boned like a tiny corset, pointed, the pioneer finery of a frontier woman who had crossed the plains. It was hand-made after the California-Spanish model of forgotten days. The very whalebone had been home-shaped of the raw material from the whaleships traded for in hides and tallow. The black lace trimming her mother had made. The triple edging of black velvet strips--her mother's hands had sewn the stitches.

Saxon dreamed over it in a maze of incoherent thought. This was concrete. This she understood. This she worshiped as man-created gods have been worshiped on less tangible evidence of their sojourn on earth.

Twenty-two inches it measured around. She knew it out of many verifications. She stood up and put it about her waist. This was part of the ritual. It almost met. In places it did meet. Without her dress it would meet everywhere as it had met on her mother. Closest of all, this survival of old California-Ventura days brought Saxon in touch. Hers was her mother's form. Physically, she was like her mother. Her grit, her ability to turn off work that was such an amazement to others, were her mother's. Just so had her mother been an amazement to her generation--her mother, the toy-like creature, the smallest and the youngest of the strapping pioneer brood, who nevertheless had mothered the brood. Always it had been her wisdom that was sought, even by the brothers and sisters a dozen years her senior. Daisy, it was, who had put her tiny foot down and commanded the removal from the fever

flatlands of Colusa to the healthy mountains of Ventura; who had backed the savage old Indian-fighter of a father into a corner and fought the entire family that Vila might marry the man of her choice; who had flown in the face of the family and of community morality and demanded the divorce of Laura from her criminally weak husband; and who on the other hand, had held the branches of the family together when only misunderstanding and weak humanness threatened to drive them apart.

The peacemaker and the warrior! All the old tales trooped before Saxon's eyes. They were sharp with detail, for she had visioned them many times, though their content was of things she had never seen. So far as details were concerned, they were her own creation, for she had never seen an ox, a wild Indian, nor a prairie schooner. Yet, palpitating and real, shimmering in the sun-flashed dust of ten thousand hoofs, she saw pass, from East to West, across a continent, the great hegira of the land-hungry Anglo-Saxon. It was part and fiber of her. She had been nursed on its traditions and its facts from the lips of those who had taken part. Clearly she saw the long wagon-train, the lean, gaunt men who walked before, the youths goading the lowing oxen that fell and were goaded to their feet to fall again. And through it all, a flying shuttle, weaving the golden dazzling thread of personality, moved the form of her little, indomitable mother, eight years old, and nine ere the great traverse was ended, a necromancer and a law-giver, willing her way, and the way and the willing always good and right.

Saxon saw Punch, the little, rough-coated Skye-terrier with the honest

eyes (who had plodded for weary months), gone lame and abandoned; she saw Daisy, the chit of a child, hide Punch in the wagon. She saw the savage old worried father discover the added burden of the several pounds to the dying oxen. She saw his wrath, as he held Punch by the scruff of the neck. And she saw Daisy, between the muzzle of the long-barreled rifle and the little dog. And she saw Daisy thereafter, through days of alkali and heat, walking, stumbling, in the dust of the wagons, the little sick dog, like a baby, in her arms.

But most vivid of all, Saxon saw the fight at Little Meadow--and Daisy, dressed as for a gala day, in white, a ribbon sash about her waist, ribbons and a round-comb in her hair, in her hands small water-pails,

step forth into the sunshine on the flower-grown open ground from the wagon circle, wheels interlocked, where the wounded screamed their delirium and babbled of flowing fountains, and go on, through the sunshine and the wonder-inhibition of the bullet-dealing Indians, a hundred yards to the waterhole and back again.

Saxon kissed the little, red satin Spanish girdle passionately, and wrapped it up in haste, with dewy eyes, abandoning the mystery and godhead of mother and all the strange enigma of living.

In bed, she projected against her closed eyelids the few rich scenes of her mother that her child-memory retained. It was her favorite way of wooing sleep. She had done it all her life--sunk into the

death-blackness of sleep with her mother limned to the last on her fading consciousness. But this mother was not the Daisy of the plains nor of the daguerreotype. They had been before Saxon's time. This that she saw nightly was an older mother, broken with insomnia and brave with sorrow, who crept, always crept, a pale, frail creature, gentle and unfaltering, dying from lack of sleep, living by will, and by will refraining from going mad, who, nevertheless, could not will sleep, and whom not even the whole tribe of doctors could make sleep. Crept--always she crept, about the house, from weary bed to weary chair and back again through long days and weeks of torment, never complaining, though her unfailing smile was twisted with pain, and the wise gray eyes, still wise and gray, were grown unutterably larger and profoundly deep.

But on this night Saxon did not win to sleep quickly; the little creeping mother came and went; and in the intervals the face of Billy, with the cloud-drifted, sullen, handsome eyes, burned against her eyelids. And once again, as sleep welled up to smother her, she put to herself the question IS THIS THE MAN?

CHAPTER VII

Tun work in the ironing-room slipped off, but the three days until Wednesday night were very long. She hummed over the fancy starch that flew under the iron at an astounding rate.

"I can't see how you do it," Mary admired. "You'll make thirteen or fourteen this week at that rate."

Saxon laughed, and in the steam from the iron she saw dancing golden letters that spelled WEDNESDAY.

"What do you think of Billy?" Mary asked.

"I like him," was the frank answer.

"Well, don't let it go farther than that."

"I will if I want to," Saxon retorted gaily.

"Better not," came the warning. "You'll only make trouble for yourself. He ain't marryin'. Many a girl's found that out. They just throw themselves at his head, too."

"I'm not going to throw myself at him, or any other man."

"Just thought I'd tell you," Mary concluded. "A word to the wise."

Saxon had become grave.

"He's not... not..." she began, than looked the significance of the question she could not complete.

"Oh, nothin' like that--though there's nothin' to stop him. He's straight, all right, all right. But he just won't fall for anything in skirts. He dances, an' runs around, an' has a good time, an' beyond that--nitsky. A lot of 'em's got fooled on him. I bet you there's a dozen girls in love with him right now. An' he just goes on turnin' 'em down. There was Lily Sanderson--you know her. You seen her at that Slavonic picnic last summer at Shellmound--that tall, nice-lookin' blonde that was with Butch Willows?"

"Yes, I remember her," Saxon sald. "What about her?"

"Well, she'd been runnin' with Butch Willows pretty steady, an' just because she could dance, Billy dances a lot with her. Butch ain't afraid of nothin'. He wades right in for a showdown, an' nails Billy outside, before everybody, an' reads the riot act. An' Billy listens in that slow, sleepy way of his, an' Butch gets hotter an' hotter, an' everybody expects a scrap.

"An' then Billy says to Butch, 'Are you done?' 'Yes,' Butch says; 'I've

said my say, an' what are you goin' to do about it?' An' Billy says--an' what d'ye think he said, with everybody lookin' on an' Butch with blood in his eye? Well, he said, 'I guess nothin', Butch.' Just like that. Butch was that surprised you could knocked him over with a feather. 'An' never dance with her no more?' he says. 'Not if you say I can't, Butch,' Billy says. Just like that.

"Well, you know, any other man to take water the way he did from Butch--why, everybody'd despise him. But not Billy. You see, he can afford to. He's got a rep as a fighter, an' when he just stood back 'an' let Butch have his way, everybody knew he wasn't scared, or backin' down, or anything. He didn't care a rap for Lily Sanderson, that was all, an' anybody could see she was just crazy after him."

The telling of this episode caused Saxon no little worry. Hers was the average woman's pride, but in the matter of man-conquering prowess she was not unduly conceited. Billy had enjoyed her dancing, and she wondered if that were all. If Charley Long bullied up to him would he let her go as he had let Lily Sanderson go? He was not a marrying man; nor could Saxon blind her eyes to the fact that he was eminently marriageable. No wonder the girls ran after him. And he was a man-subduer as well as a woman-subduer. Men liked him. Bert Wanhope seemed actually to love him. She remembered the Butchertown tough in the dining-room at Weasel Park who had come over to the table to apologize, and the Irishman at the tug-of-war who had abandoned all thought of fighting with him the moment he learned his identity.

A very much spoiled young man was a thought that flitted frequently through Saxon's mind; and each time she condemned it as ungenerous. He was gentle in that tantalizing slow way of his. Despite his strength, he did not walk rough-shod over others. There was the affair with Lily Sanderson. Saxon analysed it again and again. He had not cared for the girl, and he had immediately stepped from between her and Butch. It was just the thing that Bert, out of sheer wickedness and love of trouble, would not have done. There would have been a fight, hard feelings, Butch turned into an enemy, and nothing profited to Lily. But Billy had done the right thing--done it slowly and imperturbably and with the least hurt to everybody. All of which made him more desirable to Saxon and less possible.

She bought another pair of silk stockings that she had hesitated at for weeks, and on Tuesday night sewed and drowsed wearily over a new shirtwaist and earned complaint from Sarah concerning her extravagant use of gas.

Wednesday night, at the Orindore dance, was not all undiluted pleasure. It was shameless the way the girls made up to Billy, and, at times, Saxon found his easy consideration for them almost irritating. Yet she was compelled to acknowledge to herself that he hurt none of the other fellows' feelings in the way the girls hurt hers. They all but asked him outright to dance with them, and little of their open pursuit of him escaped her eyes. She resolved that she would not be guilty of throwing

herself at him, and withheld dance after dance, and yet was secretly and thrillingly aware that she was pursuing the right tactics. She deliberately demonstrated that she was desirable to other men, as he involuntarily demonstrated his own desirableness to the women.

Her happiness came when he coolly overrode her objections and insisted on two dances more than she had allotted him. And she was pleased, as well as angered, when she chanced to overhear two of the strapping young cannery girls. "The way that little sawed-off is monopolizin' him," said one. And the other: "You'd think she might have the good taste to run after somebody of her own age." "Cradle-snatcher," was the final sting that sent the angry blood into Saxon's cheeks as the two girls moved away, unaware that they had been overheard.

Billy saw her home, kissed her at the gate, and got her consent to go with him to the dance at Germania Hall on Friday night.

"I wasn't thinkin' of goin'," he said. "But if you'll say the word... Bert's goin' to be there."

Next day, at the ironing boards, Mary told her that she and Bert were dated for Germania Hall.

"Are you goin'?" Mary asked.

Saxon nodded.

"Billy Roberts?"

The nod was repeated, and Mary, with suspended iron, gave her a long and curions look.

"Say, an' what if Charley Long butts in?"

Saxon shrugged her shoulders.

They ironed swiftly and silently for a quarter of an hour.

"Well," Mary decided, "if he does butt in maybe he'll get his. I'd like to see him get it--the big stiff! It all depends how Billy feels--about you, I mean."

"I'm no Lily Sanderson," Saxon answered indignantly. "I'll never give Billy Roberts a chance to turn me down."

"You will, if Charley Long butts in. Take it from me, Saxon, he ain't no gentleman. Look what he done to Mr. Moody. That was a awful beatin'. An' Mr. Moody only a quiet little man that wouldn't harm a fly. Well, he won't find Billy Roberts a sissy by a long shot."

That night, outside the laundry entrance, Saxon found Charley Long waiting. As he stepped forward to greet her and walk alongside, she felt

the sickening palpitation that he had so thoroughly taught her to know. The blood ebbed from her face with the apprehension and fear his appearance caused. She was afraid of the rough bulk of the man; of the heavy brown eyes, dominant and confident; of the big blacksmith-hands and the thick strong fingers with the hair-pads on the back to every first joint. He was unlovely to the eye, and he was unlovely to all her finer sensibilities. It was not his strength itself, but the quality of it and the misuse of it, that affronted her. The beating he had given the gentle Mr. Moody had meant half-hours of horror to her afterward. Always did the memory of it come to her accompanied by a shudder. And yet, without shock, she had seen Billy fight at Weasel Park in the same primitive man-animal way. But it had been different. She recognized, but could not analyze, the difference. She was aware only of the brutishness of this man's hands and mind.

"You're lookin' white an' all beat to a frazzle," he was saying. "Why don't you cut the work? You got to some time, anyway. You can't lose me, kid."

"I wish I could," she replied.

He laughed with harsh joviality. "Nothin' to it, Saxon. You're just cut out to be Mrs. Long, an' you're sure goin' to be."

"I wish I was as certain about all things as you are," she said with mild sarcasm that missed.

"Take it from me," he went on, "there's just one thing you can be certain of--an' that is that I am certain." He was pleased with the cleverness of his idea and laughed approvingly. "When I go after anything I get it, an' if anything gets in between it gets hurt. D'ye get that? It's me for you, an' that's all there is to it, so you might as well make up your mind and go to workin' in my home instead of the laundry. Why, it's a snap. There wouldn't be much to do. I make good money, an' you wouldn't want for anything. You know, I just washed up from work an' skinned over here to tell it to you once more, so you wouldn't forget. I ain't ate yet, an' that shows how much I think of you."

"You'd better go and eat then," she advised, though she knew the futility of attempting to get rid of him.

She scarcely heard what he said. It had come upon her suddenly that she was very tired and very small and very weak alongside this colossus of a man. Would he dog her always? she asked despairingly, and seemed to glimpse a vision of all her future life stretched out before her, with always the form and face of the burly blacksmith pursuing her.

"Come on, kid, an' kick in," he continued. "It's the good old summer time, an' that's the time to get married."

"But I'm not going to marry you," she protested. "I've told you a

thousand times already."

"Aw, forget it. You want to get them ideas out of your think-box. Of course, you're goin' to marry me. It's a pipe. An' I'll tell you another pipe. You an' me's goin' acrost to Frisco Friday night. There's goin' to be big doin's with the Horseshoers."

"Only I'm not," she contradicted.

"Oh, yes you are," he asserted with absolute assurance. "We'll catch the last boat back, an' you'll have one fine time. An' I'll put you next to some of the good dancers. Oh, I ain't a pincher, an' I know you like dancin'."

"But I tell you I can't," she reiterated.

He shot a glance of suspicion at her from under the black thatch of brows that met above his nose and were as one brow.

"Why can't you?"

"A date," she said.

"Who's the bloke?"

"None of your business, Charley Long. I've got a date, that's all."

"I'll make it my business. Remember that lah-de-dah bookkeeper rummy? Well, just keep on rememberin' him an' what he got."

"I wish you'd leave me alone," she pleaded resentfully. "Can't you be kind just for once?"

The blacksmith laughed unpleasantly.

"If any rummy thinks he can butt in on you an' me, he'll learn different, an' I'm the little boy that'll learn 'm.--Friday night, eh? Where?"

"I won't tell you."

"Where?" he repeated.

Her lips were drawn in tight silence, and in her cheeks were little angry spots of blood.

"Huh!--As if I couldn't guess! Germania Hall. Well, I'll be there, an' I'll take you home afterward. D'ye get that? An' you'd better tell the rummy to beat it unless you want to see'm get his face hurt."

Saxon, hurt as a prideful woman can be hurt by cavalier treatment, was tempted to cry out the name and prowess of her new-found protector. And

then came fear. This was a big man, and Billy was only a boy. That was the way he affected her. She remembered her first impression of his hands and glanced quickly at the hands of the man beside her. They seemed twice as large as Billy's, and the mats of hair seemed to advertise a terrible strength. No, Billy could not fight this big brute. He must not. And then to Saxon came a wicked little hope that by the mysterious and unthinkable ability that prizefighters possessed, Billy might be able to whip this bully and rid her of him. With the next glance doubt came again, for her eye dwelt on the blacksmith's broad shoulders, the cloth of the coat muscle-wrinkled and the sleeves bulging above the biceps.

"If you lay a hand on anybody I'm going with again---" she began.

"Why, they'll get hurt, of course," Long grinned. "And they'll deserve it, too. Any rummy that comes between a fellow an' his girl ought to get hurt."

"But I'm not your girl, and all your saying so doesn't make it so."

"That's right, get mad," he approved. "I like you for that, too. You've got spunk an' fight. I like to see it. It's what a man needs in his wife--and not these fat cows of women. They're the dead ones. Now you're a live one, all wool, a yard long and a yard wide."

She stopped before the house and put her hand on the gate.

"Good-bye," she said. "I'm going in."

"Come on out afterward for a run to Idora Park," he suggested.

"No, I'm not feeling good, and I'm going straight to bed as soon as I eat supper."

"Huh!" he sneered. "Gettin' in shape for the fling to-morrow night, eh?"

With an impatient movement she opened the gate and stepped inside.

"I've given it to you straight," he went on. "If you don't go with me to-morrow night somebody'll get hurt."

"I hope it will be you," she cried vindictively.

He laughed as he threw his head back, stretched his big chest, and half-lifted his heavy arms. The action reminded her disgustingly of a great ape she had once seen in a circus.

"Well, good-bye," he said. "See you to-morrow night at Germania Hall."

"I haven't told you it was Germania Hall."

"And you haven't told me it wasn't. All the same, I'll be there. And

I'll take you home, too. Be sure an' keep plenty of round dances open fer me. That's right. Get mad. It makes you look fine."

CHAPTER VIII

The music stopped at the end of the waltz, leaving Billy and Saxon at the big entrance doorway of the ballroom. Her hand rested lightly on his arm, and they were promenading on to find seats, when Charley Long, evidently just arrived, thrust his way in front of them.

"So you're the buttinsky, eh?" he demanded, his face malignant with passion and menace.

"Who?--me?" Billy queried gently. "Some mistake, sport. I never butt in."

"You're goin' to get your head beaten off if you don't make yourself scarce pretty lively."

"I wouldn't want that to happen for the world," Billy drawled. "Come on, Saxon. This neighborhood's unhealthy for us."

He started to go on with her, but Long thrust in front again.

"You're too fresh to keep, young fellow," he snarled. "You need saltin' down. D'ye get me?"

Billy scratched his head, on his face exaggerated puzzlement.

"No, I don't get you," he said. "Now just what was it you said?"

But the big blacksmith turned contemptuously away from him to Saxon.

"Come here, you. Let's see your program."

"Do you want to dance with him?" Billy asked.

She shook her head.

"Sorry, sport, nothin' doin'," Billy said, again making to start on.

For the third time the blacksmith blocked the way.

"Get off your foot," said Billy. "You're standin' on it."

Long all but sprang upon him, his hands clenched, one arm just starting back for the punch while at the same instant shoulders and chest were coming forward. But he restrained himself at sight of Billy's unstartled body and cold and cloudy ayes. He had made no move of mind or muscle. It was as if he were unaware of the threatened attack. All of which constituted a new thing in Long's experience.

"Maybe you don't know who I am," he bullied.

"Yep, I do," Billy answered airily. "You're a record-breaker at

rough-housin'." (Here Long's face showed pleasure.) "You ought to have the Police Gazette diamond belt for rough-bousin' baby buggies'. I guess there ain't a one you're afraid to tackle."

"Leave 'm alone, Charley," advised one of the young men who had crowded about them. "He's Bill Roberts, the fighter. You know'm. Big Bill."

"I don't care if he's Jim Jeffries. He can't butt in on me this way."

Nevertheless it was noticeable, even to Saxon, that the fire had gone out of his fierceness. Billy's name seemed to have a quieting effect on obstreperous males.

"Do you know him?" Billy asked her.

She signified yes with her eyes, though it seemed she must cry out a thousand things against this man who so steadfastly persecuted her. Billy turned to the blacksmith.

"Look here, sport, you don't want trouble with me. I've got your number. Besides, what do we want to fight for? Hasn't she got a say so in the matter?"

"No, she hasn't. This is my affair an' yourn."

Billy shook his head slowly. "No; you're in wrong. I think she has a say

in the matter."

"Well, say it then," Long snarled at Saxon, "who're you goin' to go with?--me or him? Let's get it settled."

For reply, Saxon reached her free hand over to the hand that rested on Billy's arm.

"Nuff said," was Billy's remark.

Long glared at Saxon, then transferred the glare to her protector.

"I've a good mind to mix it with you anyway," Long gritted through his teeth.

Saxon was elated as they started to move away. Lily Sanderson's fate had not been hers, and her wonderful man-boy, without the threat of a blow, slow of speech and imperturbable, had conquered the big blacksmith.

"He's forced himself upon me all the time," she whispered to Billy. "He's tried to run me, and beaten up every man that came near me. I never want to see him again."

Billy halted immediately. Long, who was reluctantly moving to get out of the way, also halted.

"She says she don't want anything more to do with you," Billy said to him. "An' what she says goes. If I get a whisper any time that you've been botherin' her, I'll attend to your case. D'ye get that?"

Long glowered and remained silent.

"D'ye get that?" Billy repeated, more imperatively.

A growl of assent came from the blacksmith

"All right, then. See you remember it. An' now get outa the way or I'll walk over you."

Long slunk back, muttering inarticulate threats, and Saxon moved on as in a dream. Charley Long had taken water. He had been afraid of this smooth-skinned, blue-eyed boy. She was quit of him--something no other man had dared attempt for her. And Billy had liked her better than Lily Sanderson.

Twice Saxon tried to tell Billy the details of her acquaintance with Long, but each time was put off.

"I don't care a rap about it," Billy said the second time. "You're here, ain't you?"

But she insisted, and when, worked up and angry by the recital, she had

finished, he patted her hand soothingly.

"It's all right, Saxon," he said. "He's just a big stiff. I took his measure as soon as I looked at him. He won't bother you again. I know his kind. He's a dog. Roughhouse? He couldn't rough-house a milk wagon."

"But how do you do it?" she asked breathlessly. "Why are men so afraid of you? You're just wonderful."

He smiled in an embarrassed way and changed the subject.

"Say," he said, "I like your teeth. They're so white an' regular, an' not big, an' not dinky little baby's teeth either. They're ... they're just right, an' they fit you. I never seen such fine teeth on a girl yet. D'ye know, honest, they kind of make me hungry when I look at 'em. They're good enough to eat."

At midnight, leaving the insatiable Bert and Mary still dancing, Billy and Saxon started for home. It was on his suggestion that they left early, and he felt called upon to explain.

"It's one thing the fightin' game's taught me," he said. "To take care of myself. A fellow can't work all day and dance all night and keep in condition. It's the same way with drinkin'--an' not that I'm a little tin angel. I know what it is. I've been soused to the guards an' all the rest of it. I like my beer--big schooners of it; but I don't drink all

I want of it. I've tried, but it don't pay. Take that big stiff to-night that butted in on us. He ought to had my number. He's a dog anyway, but besides he had beer bloat. I sized that up the first rattle, an' that's the difference about who takes the other fellow's number. Condition, that's what it is."

"But he is so big," Saxon protested. "Why, his fists are twice as big as yours."

"That don't mean anything. What counts is what's behind the fists. He'd turn loose like a buckin' bronco. If I couldn't drop him at the start, all I'd do is to keep away, smother up, an' wait. An' all of a sudden he'd blow up--go all to pieces, you know, wind, heart, everything, and then I'd have him where I wanted him. And the point is he knows it, too."

"You're the first prizefighter I ever knew," Saxon said, after a pause.

"I'm not any more," he disclaimed hastily. "That's one thing the fightin' game taught me--to leave it alone. It don't pay. A fellow trains as fine as silk--till he's all silk, his skin, everything, and he's fit to live for a hundred years; an' then he climbs through the ropes for a hard twenty rounds with some tough customer that's just as good as he is, and in those twenty rounds he frazzles out all his silk an' blows in a year of his life. Yes, sometimes he blows in five years of it, or cuts it in half, or uses up all of it. I've watched 'em. I've

seen fellows strong as bulls fight a hard battle and die inside the year of consumption, or kidney disease, or anything else. Now what's the good of it? Money can't buy what they throw away. That's why I quit the game and went back to drivin' team. I got my silk, an' I'm goin' to keep it, that's all."

"It must make you feel proud to know you are the master of other men," she said softly, aware herself of pride in the strength and skill of him.

"It does," he admitted frankly. "I'm glad I went into the game--just as glad as I am that I pulled out of it.... Yep, it's taught me a lot--to keep my eyes open an' my head cool. Oh, I've got a temper, a peach of a temper. I get scared of myself sometimes. I used to be always breakin' loose. But the fightin' taught me to keep down the steam an' not do things I'd be sorry for afterward."

"Why, you're the sweetest, easiest tempered man I know," she interjected.

"Don't you believe it. Just watch me, and sometime you'll see me break out that bad that I won't know what I'm doin' myself. Oh, I'm a holy terror when I get started!"

This tacit promise of continued acquaintance gave Saxon a little joy-thrill.

"Say," he said, as they neared her neighborhood, "what are you doin' next Sunday?"

"Nothing. No plans at all."

"Well, suppose you an' me go buggy-riding all day out in the hills?"

She did not answer immediately, and for the moment she was seeing the nightmare vision of her last buggy-ride; of her fear and her leap from the buggy; and of the long miles and the stumbling through the darkness in thin-soled shoes that bruised her feet on every rock. And then it came to her with a great swell of joy that this man beside her was not such a man.

"I love horses," she said. "I almost love them better than I do dancing, only I don't know anything about them. My father rode a great roan war-horse. He was a captain of cavalry, you know. I never saw him, but somehow I always can see him on that big horse, with a sash around his waist and his sword at his side. My brother George has the sword now, but Tom--he's the brother I live with says it is mine because it wasn't his father's. You see, they're only my half-brothers. I was the only child by my mother's second marriage. That was her real marriage--her love-marriage, I mean."

Saxon ceased abruptly, embarrassed by her own garrulity; and yet the

impulse was strong to tell this young man all about herself, and it seemed to her that these far memories were a large part of her.

"Go on an' tell me about it," Billy urged. "I like to hear about the old people of the old days. My people was along in there, too, an' somehow I think it was a better world to live in than now. Things was more sensible and natural. I don't exactly say what I mean. But it's like this: I don't understand life to-day. There's the labor unions an' employers' associations, an' strikes', an' hard times, an' huntin' for jobs, an' all the rest. Things wasn't like that in the old days. Everybody farmed, an' shot their meat, an' got enough to eat, an' took care of their old folks. But now it's all a mix-up that I can't understand. Mebbe I'm a fool, I don't know. But, anyway, go ahead an' tell us about your mother."

"Well, you see, when she was only a young woman she and Captain Brown fell in love. He was a soldier then, before the war. And he was ordered East for the war when she was away nursing her sister Laura. And then came the news that he was killed at Shiloh. And she married a man who had loved her for years and years. He was a boy in the same wagon-train coming across the plains. She liked him, but she didn't love him. And afterward came the news that my father wasn't killed after all. So it made her very sad, but it did not spoil her life. She was a good mother end a good wife and all that, but she was always sad, and sweet, and gentle, and I think her voice was the most beautiful in the world."

"She was game, all right," Billy approved.

"And my father never married. He loved her all the time. I've got a lovely poem home that she wrote to him. It's just wonderful, and it sings like music. Well, long, long afterward her husband died, and then she and my father made their love marriage. They didn't get married until 1882, and she was pretty well along."

More she told him, as they stood by the gate, and Saxon tried to think that the good-bye kiss was a trifle longer than just ordinary.

"How about nine o'clock?" he queried across the gate. "Don't bother about lunch or anything. I'll fix all that up. You just be ready at nine."

CHAPTER IX

Sunday morning Saxon was beforehand in getting ready, and on her return to the kitchen from her second journey to peep through the front windows, Sarah began her customary attack.

"It's a shame an' a disgrace the way some people can afford silk stockings," she began. "Look at me, a-toilin' and a-stewin' day an' night, and I never get silk stockings--nor shoes, three pairs of them all at one time. But there's a just God in heaven, and there'll be some mighty big surprises for some when the end comes and folks get passed out what's comin' to them."

Tom, smoking his pipe and cuddling his youngest-born on his knees, dropped an eyelid surreptitiously on his cheek in token that Sarah was in a tantrum. Saxon devoted herself to tying a ribbon in the hair of one of the little girls. Sarah lumbered heavily about the kitchen, washing and putting away the breakfast dishes. She straightened her back from the sink with a groan and glared at Saxon with fresh hostility.

"You ain't sayin' anything, eh? An' why don't you? Because I guess you still got some natural shame in you a-runnin' with a prizefighter. Oh, I've heard about your goings-on with Bill Roberts. A nice specimen he is. But just you wait till Charley Long gets his hands on him, that's all."

"Oh, I don't know," Tom intervened. "Bill Roberts is a pretty good boy from what I hear."

Saxon smiled with superior knowledge, and Sarah, catching her, was infuriated.

"Why don't you marry Charley Long? He's crazy for you, and he ain't a drinkin' man."

"I guess he gets outside his share of beer," Saxon retorted.

"That's right," her brother supplemented. "An' I know for a fact that he keeps a keg in the house all the time as well."

"Maybe you've been guzzling from it," Sarah snapped.

"Maybe I have," Tom said, wiping his mouth reminiscently with the back of his hand.

"Well, he can afford to keep a keg in the house if he wants to," she returned to the attack, which now was directed at her husband as well. "He pays his bills, and he certainly makes good money--better than most men, anyway."

"An' he hasn't a wife an' children to watch out for," Tom said.

"Nor everlastin' dues to unions that don't do him no good."

"Oh, yes, he has," Tom urged genially. "Blamed little he'd work in that shop, or any other shop in Oakland, if he didn't keep in good standing with the Blacksmiths. You don't understand labor conditions, Sarah. The unions have got to stick, if the men aren't to starve to death."

"Oh, of course not," Sarah sniffed. "I don't understand anything. I ain't got a mind. I'm a fool, an' you tell me so right before the children." She turned savagely on her eldest, who startled and shrank away. "Willie, your mother is a fool. Do you get that? Your father says she's a fool--says it right before her face and yourn. She's just a plain fool. Next he'll be sayin' she's crazy an' puttin' her away in the asylum. An' how will you like that, Willie? How will you like to see your mother in a straitjacket an' a padded cell, shut out from the light of the sun an' beaten like a nigger before the war, Willie, beaten an' clubbed like a regular black nigger? That's the kind of a father you've got, Willie. Think of it, Willie, in a padded cell, the mother that bore you, with the lunatics screechin' an' screamin' all around, an' the quick-lime eatin' into the dead bodies of them that's beaten to death by the cruel wardens--"

She continued tirelessly, painting with pessimistic strokes the growing black future her husband was meditating for her, while the boy, fearful of some vague, incomprehensible catastrophe, began to weep silently,

with a pendulous, trembling underlip. Saxon, for the moment, lost control of herself.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, can't we be together five minutes without quarreling?" she blazed.

Sarah broke off from asylum conjurations and turned upon her sister-in-law.

"Who's quarreling? Can't I open my head without bein' jumped on by the two of you?"

Saxon shrugged her shoulders despairingly, and Sarah swung about on her husband.

"Seein' you love your sister so much better than your wife, why did you want to marry me, that's borne your children for you, an' slaved for you, an' toiled for you, an' worked her fingernails off for you, with no thanks, an 'insultin' me before the children, an' sayin' I'm crazy to their faces. An' what have you ever did for me? That's what I want to know--me, that's cooked for you, an' washed your stinkin' clothes, and fixed your socks, an' sat up nights with your brats when they was ailin'. Look at that!"

She thrust out a shapeless, swollen foot, encased in a monstrous, untended shoe, the dry, raw leather of which showed white on the edges

of bulging cracks.

"Look at that! That's what I say. Look at that!" Her voice was persistently rising and at the same time growing throaty. "The only shoes I got. Me. Your wife. Ain't you ashamed? Where are my three pairs? Look at that stockin'."

Speech failed her, and she sat down suddenly on a chair at the table, glaring unutterable malevolence and misery. She arose with the abrupt stiffness of an automaton, poured herself a cup of cold coffee, and in the same jerky way sat down again. As if too hot for her lips, she filled her saucer with the greasy-looking, nondescript fluid, and continued her set glare, her breast rising and falling with staccato, mechanical movement.

"Now, Sarah, be c'am, be c'am," Tom pleaded anxiously.

In response, slowly, with utmost deliberation, as if the destiny of empires rested on the certitude of her act, she turned the saucer of coffee upside down on the table. She lifted her right hand, slowly, hugely, and in the same slow, huge way landed the open palm with a sounding slap on Tom's astounded cheek. Immediately thereafter she raised her voice in the shrill, hoarse, monotonous madness of hysteria, sat down on the floor, and rocked back and forth in the throes of an abysmal grief.

Willie's silent weeping turned to noise, and the two little girls, with the fresh ribbons in their hair, joined him. Tom's face was drawn and white, though the smitten cheek still blazed, and Saxon wanted to put her arms comfortingly around him, yet dared not. He bent over his wife.

"Sarah, you ain't feelin' well. Let me put you to bed, and I'll finish tidying up."

"Don't touch me!--don't touch me!" she screamed, jerking violently away from him.

"Take the children out in the yard, Tom, for a walk, anything--get them away," Saxon said. She was sick, and white, and trembling. "Go, Tom, please, please. There's your hat. I'll take care of her. I know just how."

Left to herself, Saxon worked with frantic haste, assuming the calm she did not possess, but which she must impart to the screaming bedlamite upon the floor. The light frame house leaked the noise hideously, and Saxon knew that the houses on either side were hearing, and the street itself and the houses across the street. Her fear was that Billy should arrive in the midst of it. Further, she was incensed, violated. Every fiber rebelled, almost in a nausea; yet she maintained cool control and stroked Sarah's forehead and hair with slow, soothing movements. Soon, with one arm around her, she managed to win the first diminution in the strident, atrocious, unceasing scream. A few minutes later, sobbing

heavily, the elder woman lay in bed, across her forehead and eyes a wet-pack of towel for easement of the headache she and Saxon tacitly accepted as substitute for the brain-storm.

When a clatter of hoofs came down the street and stopped, Saxon was able to slip to the front door and wave her hand to Billy. In the kitchen she found Tom waiting in sad anxiousness.

"It's all right," she said. "Billy Roberts has come, and I've got to go. You go in and sit beside her for a while, and maybe she'll go to sleep. But don't rush her. Let her have her own way. If she'll let you take her hand, why do it. Try it, anyway. But first of all, as an opener and just as a matter of course, start wetting the towel over her eyes."

He was a kindly, easy-going man; but, after the way of a large percentage of the Western stock, he was undemonstrative. He nodded, turned toward the door to obey, and paused irresolutely. The look he gave back to Saxon was almost dog-like in gratitude and all-brotherly in love. She felt it, and in spirit leapt toward it.

"It's all right--everything's all right," she cried hastily.

Tom shook his head.

"No, it ain't. It's a shame, a blamed shame, that's what it is." He shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I don't care for myself. But it's for you.

You got your life before you yet, little kid sister. You'll get old, and all that means, fast enough. But it's a bad start for a day off. The thing for you to do is to forget all this, and skin out with your fellow, an' have a good time." In the open door, his hand on the knob to close it after him, he halted a second time. A spasm contracted his brow. "Hell! Think of it! Sarah and I used to go buggy-riding once on a time. And I guess she had her three pairs of shoes, too. Can you beat it?"

In her bedroom Saxon completed her dressing, for an instant stepping upon a chair so as to glimpse critically in the small wall-mirror the hang of her ready-made linen skirt. This, and the jacket, she had altered to fit, and she had double-stitched the seams to achieve the coveted tailored effect. Still on the chair, all in the moment of quick clear-seeing, she drew the skirt tightly back and raised it. The sight was good to her, nor did she under-appraise the lines of the slender ankle above the low tan tie nor did she under-appraise the delicate yet mature swell of calf outlined in the fresh brown of a new cotton stocking. Down from the chair, she pinned on a firm sailor hat of white straw with a brown ribbon around the crown that matched her ribbon belt. She rubbed her cheeks quickly and fiercely to bring back the color Sarah had driven out of them, and delayed a moment longer to put on her tan lisle-thread gloves. Once, in the fashion-page of a Sunday supplement, she had read that no lady ever put on her gloves after she left the door.

With a resolute self-grip, as she crossed the parlor and passed the door to Sarah's bedroom, through the thin wood of which came elephantine moanings and low slubberings, she steeled herself to keep the color in her cheeks and the brightness in her eyes. And so well did she succeed that Billy never dreamed that the radiant, live young thing, tripping lightly down the steps to him, had just come from a bout with soul-sickening hysteria and madness.

To her, in the bright sun, Billy's blondness was startling. His cheeks, smooth as a girl's, were touched with color. The blue eyes seemed more cloudily blue than usual, and the crisp, sandy hair hinted more than ever of the pale straw-gold that was not there. Never had she seen him quite so royally young. As he smiled to greet her, with a slow white flash of teeth from between red lips, she caught again the promise of easement and rest. Fresh from the shattering chaos of her sister-in-law's mind, Billy's tremendous calm was especially satisfying, and Saxon mentally laughed to scorn the terrible temper he had charged to himself.

She had been buggy-riding before, but always behind one horse, jaded, and livery, in a top-buggy, heavy and dingy, such as livery stables rent because of sturdy unbreakableness. But here stood two horses, head-tossing and restless, shouting in every high-light glint of their satin, golden-sorrel coats that they had never been rented out in all their glorious young lives. Between them was a pole inconceivably slender, on them were harnesses preposterously string-like and fragile.

And Billy belonged here, by elemental right, a part of them and of it, a master-part and a component, along with the spidery-delicate, narrow-boxed, wide- and yellow-wheeled, rubber-tired rig, efficient and capable, as different as he was different from the other man who had taken her out behind stolid, lumbering horses. He held the reins in one hand, yet, with low, steady voice, confident and assuring, held the nervous young animals more by the will and the spirit of him.

It was no time for lingering. With the quick glance and fore-knowledge of a woman, Saxon saw, not merely the curious children clustering about, but the peering of adult faces from open doors and windows, and past window-shades lifted up or held aside. With his free hand, Billy drew back the linen robe and helped her to a place beside him. The high-backed, luxuriously upholstered seat of brown leather gave her a sense of great comfort; yet even greater, it seemed to her, was the nearness and comfort of the man himself and of his body.

"How d'ye like 'em?" he asked, changing the reins to both hands and chirruping the horses, which went out with a jerk in an immediacy of action that was new to her. "They're the boss's, you know. Couldn't rent animals like them. He lets me take them out for exercise sometimes. If they ain't exercised regular they're a handful.--Look at King, there, prancin'. Some style, eh? Some style! The other one's the real goods, though. Prince is his name. Got to have some bit on him to hold'm.--Ah! Would you?--Did you see'm, Saxon? Some horse! Some horse!"

From behind came the admiring cheer of the neighborhood children, and Saxon, with a sigh of content, knew that the happy day had at last begun.

CHAPTER X

"I don't know horses," Saxon said. "I've never been on one's back, and the only ones I've tried to drive were single, and lame, or almost falling down, or something. But I'm not afraid of horses. I just love them. I was born loving them, I guess."

Billy threw an admiring, appreciative glance at her.

"That's the stuff. That's what I like in a woman--grit. Some of the girls I've had out--well, take it from me, they made me sick. Oh, I'm hep to 'em. Nervous, an' trembly, an' screechy, an' wabbly. I reckon they come out on my account an' not for the ponies. But me for the brave kid that likes the ponies. You're the real goods, Saxon, honest to God you are. Why, I can talk like a streak with you. The rest of 'em make me sick. I'm like a clam. They don't know nothin', an' they're that scared all the time--well, I guess you get me"

"You have to be born to love horses, maybe," she answered. "Maybe it's because I always think of my father on his roan war-horse that makes me love horses. But, anyway, I do. When I was a little girl I was drawing horses all the time. My mother always encouraged me. I've a scrapbook mostly filled with horses I drew when I was little. Do you know, Billy, sometimes I dream I actually own a horse, all my own. And lots of times I dream I'm on a horse's back, or driving him."

"I'll let you drive 'em, after a while, when they've worked their edge off. They're pullin' now.--There, put your hands in front of mine--take hold tight. Feel that? Sure you feel it. An' you ain't feelin' it all by a long shot. I don't dast slack, you bein' such a lightweight."

Her eyes sparkled as she felt the apportioned pull of the mouths of the beautiful, live things; and he, looking at her, sparkled with her in her delight.

"What's the good of a woman if she can't keep up with a man?" he broke out enthusiastically.

"People that like the same things always get along best together," she answered, with a triteness that concealed the joy that was hers at being so spontaneously in touch with him.

"Why, Saxon, I've fought battles, good ones, frazzlin' my silk away to beat the band before whisky-soaked, smokin' audiences of rotten fight-fans, that just made me sick clean through. An' them, that couldn't take just one stiff jolt or hook to jaw or stomach, a-cheerin' me an' yellin' for blood. Blood, mind you! An' them without the blood of a shrimp in their bodies. Why, honest, now, I'd sooner fight before an audience of one--you for instance, or anybody I liked. It'd do me proud. But them sickenin', sap-headed stiffs, with the grit of rabbits and the silk of mangy ky-yi's, a-cheerin' me--ME! Can you blame me for quittin' the dirty game?--Why, I'd sooner fight before broke-down old plugs of

work-horses that's candidates for chicken-meat, than before them rotten bunches of stiffs with nothin' thicker'n water in their veins, an' Contra Costa water at that when the rains is heavy on the hills."

"I... I didn't know prizefighting was like that," she faltered, as she released her hold on the lines and sank back again beside him.

"It ain't the fightin', it's the fight-crowds," he defended with instant jealousy. "Of course, fightin' hurts a young fellow because it frazzles the silk outa him an' all that. But it's the low-lifers in the audience that gets me. Why the good things they say to me, the praise an' that, is insulting. Do you get me? It makes me cheap. Think of it--booze-guzzlin' stiffs that 'd be afraid to mix it with a sick cat, not fit to hold the coat of any decent man, think of them a-standin' up on their hind legs an' yellin' an' cheerin' me--ME!"

"Ha! ha! What d'ye think of that? Ain't he a rogue?"

A big bulldog, sliding obliquely and silently across the street, unconcerned with the team he was avoiding, had passed so close that Prince, baring his teeth like a stallion, plunged his head down against reins and check in an effort to seize the dog.

"Now he's some fighter, that Prince. An' he's natural. He didn't make that reach just for some low-lifer to yell'm on. He just done it outa pure cussedness and himself. That's clean. That's right. Because it's

natural. But them fight-fans! Honest to God, Saxon...."

And Saxon, glimpsing him sidewise, as he watched the horses and their way on the Sunday morning streets, checking them back suddenly and swerving to avoid two boys coasting across street on a toy wagon, saw in him deeps and intensities, all the magic connotations of temperament, the glimmer and hint of rages profound, bleaknesses as cold and far as the stars, savagery as keen as a wolf's and clean as a stallion's, wrath as implacable as a destroying angel's, and youth that was fire and life beyond time and place. She was awed and fascinated, with the hunger of woman bridging the vastness to him, daring to love him with arms and breast that ached to him, murmuring to herself and through all the halls of her soul, "You dear, you dear."

"Honest to God, Saxon," he took up the broken thread, "they's times when I've hated them, when I wanted to jump over the ropes and wade into them, knock-down and drag-out, an' show'm what fightin' was. Take that night with Billy Murphy. Billy Murphy!--if you only knew him. My friend. As clean an' game a boy as ever jumped inside the ropes to take the decision. Him! We went to the Durant School together. We grew up chums. His fight was my fight. My trouble was his trouble. We both took to the fightin' game. They matched us. Not the first time. Twice we'd fought draws. Once the decision was his; once it was mine. The fifth fight of two lovin' men that just loved each other. He's three years older'n me. He's a wife and two or three kids, an' I know them, too. And he's my friend. Get it?

"I'm ten pounds heavier--but with heavyweights that 'a all right. He can't time an' distance as good as me, an' I can keep set better, too. But he's cleverer an' quicker. I never was quick like him. We both can take punishment, an' we're both two-handed, a wallop in all our fists. I know the kick of his, an' he knows my kick, an' we're both real respectful. And we're even-matched. Two draws, and a decision to each. Honest, I ain't any kind of a hunch who's gain' to win, we're that even.

"Now, the fight.--You ain't squeamish, are you?"

"No, no," she cried. "I'd just love to hear--you are so wonderful."

He took the praise with a clear, unwavering look, and without hint of acknowledgment.

"We go along--six rounds--seven rounds--eight rounds; an' honors even. I've been timin' his rushes an' straight-leftin' him, an' meetin' his duck with a wicked little right upper-cut, an' he's shaken me on the jaw an' walloped my ears till my head's all singin' an' buzzin'. An' everything lovely with both of us, with a noise like a draw decision in sight. Twenty rounds is the distance, you know.

"An' then his bad luck comes. We're just mixin' into a clinch that ain't arrived yet, when he shoots a short hook to my head--his left, an' a real hay-maker if it reaches my jaw. I make a forward duck, not quick

enough, an' he lands bingo on the side of my head. Honest to God, Saxon, it's that heavy I see some stars. But it don't hurt an' ain't serious, that high up where the bone's thick. An' right there he finishes himself, for his bad thumb, which I've known since he first got it as a kid fightin' in the sandlot at Watts Tract--he smashes that thumb right there, on my hard head, back into the socket with an out-twist, an' all the old cords that'd never got strong gets theirs again. I didn't mean it. A dirty trick, fair in the game, though, to make a guy smash his hand on your head. But not between friends. I couldn't a-done that to Bill Murphy for a million dollars. It was a accident, just because I was slow, because I was born slow.

"The hurt of it! Honest, Saxon, you don't know what hurt is till you've got a old hurt like that hurt again. What can Billy Murphy do but slow down? He's got to. He ain't fightin' two-handed any more. He knows it; I know it; The referee knows it; but nobody else. He goes on a-moving that left of his like it's all right. But it ain't. It's hurtin' him like a knife dug into him. He don't dast strike a real blow with that left of his. But it hurts, anyway. Just to move it or not move it hurts, an' every little dab-feint that I'm too wise to guard, knowin' there's no weight behind, why them little dab-touches on that poor thumb goes right to the heart of him, an' hurts worse than a thousand boils or a thousand knockouts--just hurts all over again, an' worse, each time an' touch.

"Now suppose he an' me was boxin' for fun, out in the back yard, an' he hurts his thumb that way, why we'd have the gloves off in a jiffy an'

I'd be putting cold compresses on that poor thumb of his an' bandagin' it that tight to keep the inflammation down. But no. This is a fight for fight-fans that's paid their admission for blood, an' blood they're goin' to get. They ain't men. They're wolves.

"He has to go easy, now, an' I ain't a-forcin' him none. I'm all shot to pieces. I don't know what to do. So I slow down, an' the fans get hep to it. 'Why don't you fight?' they begin to yell; 'Fake! Fake!' 'Why don't you kiss'm?' 'Lovin' cup for yours, Bill Roberts!' an' that sort of bunk.

"'Fight!' says The referee to me, low an' savage. 'Fight, or I'll disqualify you--you, Bill, I mean you.' An' this to me, with a touch on the shoulder 'so they's no mistakin'.

"It ain't pretty. It ain't right. D'ye know what we was fightin' for? A hundred bucks. Think of it! An' the game is we got to do our best to put our man down for the count because of the fans has bet on us. Sweet, ain't it? Well, that's my last fight. It finishes me deado. Never again for yours truly.

"'Quit,' I says to Billy Murphy in a clinch; 'for the love of God, Bill, quit.' An' he says back, in a whisper, 'I can't, Bill--you know that.'

"An' then the referee drags us apart, an' a lot of the fans begins to hoot an' boo.

"'Now kick in, damn you, Bill Roberts, an' finish'm' the referee says to me, an' I tell'm to go to hell as Bill an' me flop into the next clinch, not hittin', an' Bill touches his thumb again, an' I see the pain shoot across his face. Game? That good boy's the limit. An' to look into the eyes of a brave man that's sick with pain, an' love 'm, an' see love in them eyes of his, an' then have to go on givin' 'm pain--call that sport? I can't see it. But the crowd's got its money on us. We don't count. We've sold ourselves for a hundred bucks, an' we gotta deliver the goods.

"Let me tell you, Saxon, honest to God, that was one of the times I wanted to go through the ropes an' drop them fans a-yellin' for blood an' show 'em what blood is.

"'For God's sake finish me, Bill,' Bill says to me in that clinch; 'put her over an' I'll fall for it, but I can't lay down.'

"D'ye want to know? I cry there, right in the ring, in that clinch. The weeps for me. 'I can't do it, Bill,' I whisper back, hangin' onto'm like a brother an' the referee ragin' an' draggin' at us to get us apart, an' all the wolves in the house snarlin'.

"'You got 'm!' the audience is yellin'. 'Go in an' finish 'm!' 'The hay for him, Bill; put her across to the jaw an' see 'm fall!'

"'You got to, Bill, or you're a dog,' Bill says, lookin' love at me in his eyes as the referee's grip untangles us clear.

"An' them wolves of fans yellin': 'Fake! Fake! Fake!' like that, an' keepin' it up.

"Well, I done it. They's only that way out. I done it. By God, I done it. I had to. I feint for 'm, draw his left, duck to the right past it, takin' it across my shoulder, an come up with my right to his jaw. An' he knows the trick. He's hep. He's beaten me to it an' blocked it with his shoulder a thousan' times. But this time he don't. He keeps himself wide open on purpose. Blim! It lands. He's dead in the air, an' he goes down sideways, strikin' his face first on the rosin-canvas an' then layin' dead, his head twisted under 'm till you'd a-thought his neck was broke. ME--I did that for a hundred bucks an' a bunch of stiffs I'd be ashamed to wipe my feet on. An' then I pick Bill up in my arms an' carry'm to his corner, an' help bring'm around. Well, they ain't no kick comin'. They pay their money an' they get their blood, an' a knockout. An' a better man than them, that I love, layin' there dead to the world with a skinned face on the mat."

For a moment he was still, gazing straight before him at the horses, his face hard and angry. He sighed, looked at Saxon, and smiled.

"An' I quit the game right there. An' Billy Murphy's laughed at me for it. He still follows it. A side-line, you know, because he works at a

good trade. But once in a while, when the house needs paintin', or the doctor bills are up, or his oldest kid wants a bicycle, he jumps out an' makes fifty or a hundred bucks before some of the clubs. I want you to meet him when it comes handy. He's some boy I'm tellin' you. But it did make me sick that night."

Again the harshness and anger were in his face, and Saxon amazed herself by doing unconsciously what women higher in the social scale have done with deliberate sincerity. Her hand went out impulsively to his holding the lines, resting on top of it for a moment with quick, firm pressure. Her reward was a smile from lips and eyes, as his face turned toward her.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "I never talk a streak like this to anybody. I just hold my hush an' keep my thinks to myself. But, somehow, I guess it's funny, I kind of have a feelin' I want to make good with you. An' that's why I'm tellin' you my thinks. Anybody can dance."

The way led uptown, past the City Hall and the Fourteenth Street skyscrapers, and out Broadway to Mountain View. Turning to the right at the cemetery, they climbed the Piedmont Heights to Blair Park and plunged into the green coolness of Jack Hayes Canyon. Saxon could not suppress her surprise and joy at the quickness with which they covered the ground.

"They are beautiful," she said. "I never dreamed I'd ever ride behind

horses like them. I'm afraid I'll wake up now and find it's a dream. You know, I dream horses all the time. I'd give anything to own one some time."

"It's funny, ain't it?" Billy answered. "I like horses that way. The boss says I'm a wooz at horses. An' I know he's a dub. He don't know the first thing. An' yet he owns two hundred big heavy draughts besides this light drivin' pair, an' I don't own one."

"Yet God makes the horses," Saxon said.

"It's a sure thing the boss don't. Then how does he have so many?--two hundred of 'em, I'm tellin' you. He thinks he likes horses. Honest to God, Saxon, he don't like all his horses as much as I like the last hair on the last tail of the scrubbiest of the bunch. Yet they're his. Wouldn't it jar you?"

"Wouldn't it?" Saxon laughed appreciatively. "I just love fancy shirtwaists, an' I spent my life ironing some of the beautifullest I've ever seen. It's funny, an' it isn't fair."

Billy gritted his teeth in another of his rages.

"An' the way some of them women gets their shirtwaists. It makes me sick, thinkin' of you ironin' 'em. You know what I mean, Saxon. They ain't no use wastin' words over it. You know. I know. Everybody knows.

An' it's a hell of a world if men an' women sometimes can't talk to each other about such things." His manner was almost apologetic yet it was defiantly and assertively right. "I never talk this way to other girls. They'd think I'm workin up to designs on 'em. They make me sick the way they're always lookin' for them designs. But you're different I can talk to you that way. I know I've got to. It's the square thing. You're like Billy Murphy, or any other man a man can talk to."

She sighed with a great happiness, and looked at him with unconscious, love-shining eyes.

"It's the same way with me," she said. "The fellows I've run with I've never dared let talk about such things, because I knew they'd take advantage of it. Why, all the time, with them, I've a feeling that we're cheating and lying to each other, playing a game like at a masquerade ball." She paused for a moment, hesitant and debating, then went on in a queer low voice. "I haven't been asleep. I've seen... and heard. I've had my chances, when I was that tired of the laundry I'd have done almost anything. I could have got those fancy shirtwaists... an' all the rest... and maybe a horse to ride. There was a bank cashier... married, too, if you please. He talked to me straight out. I didn't count, you know. I wasn't a girl, with a girl's feelings, or anything. I was nobody. It was just like a business talk. I learned about men from him. He told me what he'd do. He..."

Her voice died away in sadness, and in the silence she could hear Billy

grit his teeth.

"You can't tell me," he cried. "I know. It's a dirty world--an unfair, lousy world. I can't make it out. They's no squareness in it.--Women, with the best that's in 'em, bought an' sold like horses. I don't understand women that way. I don't understand men that way. I can't see how a man gets anything but cheated when he buys such things. It's funny, ain't it? Take my boss an' his horses. He owns women, too. He might a-owned you, just because he's got the price. An', Saxon, you was made for fancy shirtwaists an' all that, but, honest to God, I can't see you payin' for them that way. It'd be a crime--"

He broke off abruptly and reined in the horses. Around a sharp turn, speeding down the grade upon them, had appeared an automobile. With slamming of brakes it was brought to a stop, while the faces of the occupants took new lease of interest of life and stared at the young man and woman in the light rig that barred the way. Billy held up his hand.

"Take the outside, sport," he said to the chauffeur.

"Nothin' doin', kiddo," came the answer, as the chauffeur measured with hard, wise eyes the crumbling edge of the road and the downfall of the outside bank.

"Then we camp," Billy announced cheerfully. "I know the rules of the road. These animals ain't automobile broke altogether, an' if you think

I'm goin' to have 'em shy off the grade you got another guess comin'."

A confusion of injured protestation arose from those that sat in the car.

"You needn't be a road-hog because you're a Rube," said the chauffeur. "We ain't a-goin' to hurt your horses. Pull out so we can pass. If you don't..."

"That'll do you, sport," was Billy's retort. "You can't talk that way to yours truly. I got your number an' your tag, my son. You're standin' on your foot. Back up the grade an' get off of it. Stop on the outside at the first psssin'-place an' we'll pass you. You've got the juice. Throw on the reverse."

After a nervous consultation, the chauffeur obeyed, and the car backed up the hill and out of sight around the turn.

"Them cheap skates," Billy sneered to Saxon, "with a couple of gallons of gasoline an' the price of a machine a-thinkin' they own the roads your folks an' my folks made."

"Talkin' all night about it?" came the chauffeur's voice from around the bend. "Get a move on. You can pass."

"Get off your foot," Billy retorted contemptuously. "I'm a-comin' when

I'm ready to come, an' if you ain't given room enough I'll go clean over you an' your load of chicken meat."

He slightly slacked the reins on the restless, head-tossing animals, and without need of chirrup they took the weight of the light vehicle and passed up the hill and apprehensively on the inside of the purring machine.

"Where was we?" Billy queried, as the clear road showed in front. "Yep, take my boss. Why should he own two hundred horses, an' women, an' the rest, an' you an' me own nothin'?"

"You own your silk, Billy," she said softly.

"An' you yours. Yet we sell it to 'em like it was cloth across the counter at so much a yard. I guess you're hep to what a few more years in the laundry'll do to you. Take me. I'm sellin' my silk slow every day I work. See that little finger?" He shifted the reins to one hand for a moment and held up the free hand for inspection. "I can't straighten it like the others, an' it's growin'. I never put it out fightin'. The teamin's done it. That's silk gone across the counter, that's all. Ever see a old four-horse teamster's hands? They look like claws they're that crippled an' twisted."

"Things weren't like that in the old days when our folks crossed the plains," she answered. "They might a-got their fingers twisted, but they

owned the best goin' in the way of horses and such."

"Sure. They worked for themselves. They twisted their fingers for themselves. But I'm twistin' my fingers for my boss. Why, d'ye know, Saxon, his hands is soft as a woman's that's never done any work. Yet he owns the horses an' the stables, an' never does a tap of work, an' I manage to scratch my meal-ticket an' my clothes. It's got my goat the way things is run. An' who runs 'em that way? That's what I want to know. Times has changed. Who changed 'em?"

"God didn't."

"You bet your life he didn't. An' that's another thing that gets me. Who's God anyway? If he's runnin' things--an' what good is he if he ain't?--then why does he let my boss, an' men like that cashier you mentioned, why does he let them own the horses, an' buy the women, the nice little girls that oughta be lovin' their own husbands, an' havin' children they're not ashamed of, an' just bein' happy accordin' to their nature?"

CHAPTER XI

The horses, resting frequently and lathered by the work, had climbed the steep grade of the old road to Moraga Valley, and on the divide of the Contra Costa hills the way descended sharply through the green and sunny stillness of Redwood Canyon.

"Say, ain't it swell?" Billy queried, with a wave of his hand indicating the circled tree-groups, the trickle of unseen water, and the summer hum of bees.

"I love it"' Saxon affirmed. "It makes me want to live in the country, and I never have."

"Me, too, Saxon. I've never lived in the country in my life--an' all my folks was country folks."

"No cities then. Everybody lived in the country."

"I guess you're right," he nodded. "They just had to live in the country."

There was no brake on the light carriage, and Billy became absorbed in managing his team down the steep, winding road. Saxon leaned back, eyes closed, with a feeling of ineffable rest. Time and again he shot glances at her closed eyes.

"What's the matter?" he asked finally, in mild alarm. "You ain't sick?"

"It's so beautiful I'm afraid to look," she answered. "It's so brave it hurts."

"BRAVE?--now that's funny."

"Isn't it? But it just makes me feel that way. It's brave. Now the houses and streets and things in the city aren't brave. But this is. I don't know why. It just is."

"By golly, I think you're right," he exclaimed. "It strikes me that way, now you speak of it. They ain't no games or tricks here, no cheatin' an' no lyin'. Them trees just stand up natural an' strong an' clean like young boys their first time in the ring before they've learned its rottenness an' how to double-cross an' lay down to the bettin' odds an' the fight-fans. Yep; it is brave. Say, Saxon, you see things, don't you?" His pause was almost wistful, and he looked at her and studied her with a caressing softness that ran through her in resurgent thrills. "D'ye know, I'd just like you to see me fight some time--a real fight, with something doin' every moment. I'd be proud to death to do it for you. An' I'd sure fight some with you lookin' on an' understandin'. That'd be a fight what is, take it from me. An' that's funny, too. I never wanted to fight before a woman in my life. They squeal and screech an' don't understand. But you'd understand. It's dead open an' shut you would."

A little later, swinging along the flat of the valley, through the little clearings of the farmers and the ripe grain-stretches golden in the sunshine, Billy turned to Saxon again.

"Say, you've ben in love with fellows, lots of times. Tell me about it. What's it like?"

She shook her head slowly.

"I only thought I was in love--and not many times, either--"

"Many times!" he cried.

"Not really ever," she assured him, secretly exultant at his unconscious jealousy. "I never was really in love. If I had been I'd be married now. You see, I couldn't see anything else to it but to marry a man if I loved him."

"But suppose he didn't love you?"

"Oh, I don't know," she smiled, half with facetiousness and half with certainty and pride. "I think I could make him love me."

"I guess you sure could," Billy proclaimed enthusiastically.

"The trouble is," she went on, "the men that loved me I never cared for that way.--Oh, look!"

A cottontail rabbit had scuttled across the road, and a tiny dust cloud lingered like smoke, marking the way of his flight. At the next turn a dozen quail exploded into the air from under the noses of the horses. Billy and Saxon exclaimed in mutual delight.

"Gee," he muttered, "I almost wisht I'd ben born a farmer. Folks wasn't made to live in cities."

"Not our kind, at least," she agreed. Followed a pause and a long sigh. "It's all so beautiful. It would be a dream just to live all your life in it. I'd like to be an Indian squaw sometimes."

Several times Billy checked himself on the verge of speech.

"About those fellows you thought you was in love with," he said finally. "You ain't told me, yet."

"You want to know?" she asked. "They didn't amount to anything."

"Of course I want to know. Go ahead. Fire away."

"Well, first there was Al Stanley--"

"What did he do for a livin'?" Billy demanded, almost as with authority.

"He was a gambler."

Billy's face abruptly stiffened, and she could see his eyes cloudy with doubt in the quick glance he flung at her.

"Oh, it was all right," she laughed. "I was only eight years old. You see, I'm beginning at the beginning. It was after my mother died and when I was adopted by Cady. He kept a hotel and saloon. It was down in Los Angeles. Just a small hotel. Workingmen, just common laborers, mostly, and some railroad men, stopped at it, and I guess Al Stanley got his share of their wages. He was so handsome and so quiet and soft-spoken. And he had the nicest eyes and the softest, cleanest hands. I can see them now. He played with me sometimes, in the afternoon, and gave me candy and little presents. He used to sleep most of the day. I didn't know why, then. I thought he was a fairy prince in disguise. And then he got killed, right in the bar-room, but first he killed the man that killed him. So that was the end of that love affair.

"Next was after the asylum, when I was thirteen and living with my brother--I've lived with him ever since. He was a boy that drove a bakery wagon. Almost every morning, on the way to school, I used to pass him. He would come driving down Wood Street and turn in on Twelfth. Maybe it was because he drove a horse that attracted me. Anyway, I must have loved him for a couple of months. Then he lost his job, or

something, for another boy drove the wagon. And we'd never even spoken to each other.

"Then there was a bookkeeper when I was sixteen. I seem to run to bookkeepers. It was a bookkeeper at the laundry that Charley Long beat up. This other one was when I was working in Hickmeyer's Cannery. He had soft hands, too. But I quickly got all I wanted of him. He was... well, anyway, he had ideas like your boss. And I never really did love him, truly and honest, Billy. I felt from the first that he wasn't just right. And when I was working in the paper-box factory I thought I loved a clerk in Kahn's Emporium--you know, on Eleventh and Washington. He was all right. That was the trouble with him. He was too much all right. He didn't have any life in him, any go. He wanted to marry me, though. But somehow I couldn't see it. That shows I didn't love him. He was narrow-chested and skinny, and his hands were always cold and fishy. But my! he could dress--just like he came out of a bandbox. He said he was going to drown himself, and all kinds of things, but I broke with him just the same.

"And after that... well, there isn't any after that. I must have got particular, I guess, but I didn't see anybody I could love. It seemed more like a game with the men I met, or a fight. And we never fought fair on either side. Seemed as if we always had cards up our sleeves. We weren't honest or outspoken, but instead it seemed as if we were trying to take advantage of each other. Charley Long was honest, though. And so was that bank cashier. And even they made me have the fight feeling

harder than ever. All of them always made me feel I had to take care of myself. They wouldn't. That was sure."

She stopped and looked with interest at the clean profile of his face as he watched and guided the homes. He looked at her inquiringly, and her eyes laughed lazily into his as she stretched her arms.

"That's all," she concluded. "I've told you everything, which I've never done before to any one. And it's your turn now."

"Not much of a turn, Saxon. I've never cared for girls--that is, not enough to want to marry 'em. I always liked men better--fellows like Billy Murphy. Besides, I guess I was too interested in trainin' an' fightin' to bother with women much. Why, Saxon, honest, while I ain't ben altogether good--you understand what I mean--just the same I ain't never talked love to a girl in my life. They was no call to."

"The girls have loved you just the same," she teased, while in her heart was a curious elation at his virginal confession.

He devoted himself to the horses.

"Lots of them," she urged.

Still he did not reply.

"Now, haven't they?"

"Well, it wasn't my fault," he said slowly. "If they wanted to look sideways at me it was up to them. And it was up to me to sidestep if I wanted to, wasn't it? You've no idea, Saxon, how a prizefighter is run after. Why, sometimes it's seemed to me that girls an' women ain't got an ounce of natural shame in their make-up. Oh, I was never afraid of them, believe muh, but I didn't hanker after 'em. A man's a fool that'd let them kind get his goat.

"Maybe you haven't got love in you," she challenged.

"Maybe I haven't," was his discouraging reply. "Anyway, I don't see myself lovin' a girl that runs after me. It's all right for Charley-boys, but a man that is a man don't like bein' chased by women."

"My mother always said that love was the greatest thing in the world," Saxon argued. "She wrote poems about it, too. Some of them were published in the San Jose Mercury."

"What do you think about it?"

"Oh, I don't know," she baffled, meeting his eyes with another lazy smile. "All I know is it's pretty good to be alive a day like this."

"On a trip like this--you bet it is," he added promptly.

At one o'clock Billy turned off the road and drove into an open space among the trees.

"Here's where we eat," he announced. "I thought it'd be better to have a lunch by ourselves than atop at one of these roadside dinner counters. An' now, just to make everything safe an' comfortable, I'm goin' to unharness the horses. We got lots of time. You can get the lunch basket out an' spread it on the lap-robe."

As Saxon unpacked she basket she was appalled at his extravagance. She spread an amazing array of ham and chicken sandwiches, crab salad, hard-boiled eggs, pickled pigs' feet, ripe olives and dill pickles, Swiss cheese, salted almonds, oranges and bananas, and several pint bottles of beer. It was the quantity as well as the variety that bothered her. It had the appearance of a reckless attempt to buy out a whole delicatessen shop.

"You oughtn't to blow yourself that way," she reproved him as he sat down beside her. "Why it's enough for half a dozen bricklayers."

"It's all right, isn't it?"

"Yes," she acknowledged. "But that's the trouble. It's too much so."

"Then it's all right," he concluded. "I always believe in havin' plenty.

Have some beer to wash the dust away before we begin? Watch out for the glasses. I gotta return them."

Later, the meal finished, he lay on his back, smoking a cigarette, and questioned her about her earlier history. She had been telling him of her life in her brother's house, where she paid four dollars and a half a week board. At fifteen she had graduated from grammar school and gone to work in the jute mills for four dollars a week, three of which she had paid to Sarah.

"How about that saloonkeeper?" Billy asked. "How come it he adopted you?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know, except that all my relatives were hard up. It seemed they just couldn't get on. They managed to scratch a lean living for themselves, and that was all. Cady--he was the saloonkeeper--had been a soldier in my father's company, and he always swore by Captain Kit, which was their nickname for him. My father had kept the surgeons from amputating his leg in the war, and he never forgot it. He was making money in the hotel and saloon, and I found out afterward he helped out a lot to pay the doctors and to bury my mother alongside of father. I was to go to Uncle Will--that was my mother's wish; but there had been fighting up in the Ventura Mountains where his ranch was, and men had been killed. It was about fences and cattlemen or something, and anyway he was in jail a long time, and when he got his freedom the lawyers had got his ranch. He was an old man, then, and

broken, and his wife took sick, and he got a job as night watchman for forty dollars a month. So he couldn't do anything for me, and Cady adopted me.

"Cady was a good man, if he did run a saloon. His wife was a big, handsome-looking woman. I don't think she was all right... and I've heard so since. But she was good to me. I don't care what they say about her, or what she was. She was awful good to me. After he died, she went altogether bad, and so I went into the orphan asylum. It wasn't any too good there, and I had three years of it. And then Tom had married and settled down to steady work, and he took me out to live with him. And--well, I've been working pretty steady ever since."

She gazed sadly away across the fields until her eyes came to rest on a fence bright-splashed with poppies at its base. Billy, who from his supine position had been looking up at her, studying and pleasuring in the pointed oval of her woman's face, reached his hand out slowly as he murmured:

"You poor little kid."

His hand closed sympathetically on her bare forearm, and as she looked down to greet his eyes she saw in them surprise and delight.

"Say, ain't your skin cool though," he said. "Now me, I'm always warm. Feel my hand."

It was warmly moist, and she noted microscopic beads of sweat on his forehead and clean-shaven upper lip.

"My, but you are sweaty."

She bent to him and with her handkerchief dabbed his lip and forehead dry, then dried his palms.

"I breathe through my skin, I guess," he explained. "The wise guys in the trainin' camps and gyms say it's a good sign for health. But somehow I'm sweatin' more than usual now. Funny, ain't it?"

She had been forced to unclasp his hand from her arm in order to dry it, and when she finished, it returned to its old position.

"But, say, ain't your skin cool," he repeated with renewed wonder. "Soft as velvet, too, an' smooth as silk. It feels great."

Gently explorative, he slid his hand from wrist to elbow and came to rest half way back. Tired and languid from the morning in the sun, she found herself thrilling to his touch and half-dreamily deciding that here was a man she could love, hands and all.

"Now I've taken the cool all out of that spot." He did not look up to her, and she could see the roguish smile that curled on his lips. "So I

guess I'll try another."

He shifted his hand along her arm with soft sensuousness, and she, looking down at his lips, remembered the long tingling they had given hers the first time they had met.

"Go on and talk," he urged, after a delicious five minutes of silence. "I like to watch your lips talking. It's funny, but every move they make looks like a tickly kiss."

Greatly she wanted to stay where she was. Instead, she said:

"If I talk, you won't like what I say."

"Go on," he insisted. "You can't say anything I won't like."

"Well, there's some poppies over there by the fence I want to pick. And then it's time for us to be going."

"I lose," he laughed. "But you made twenty-five tickle kisses just the same. I counted 'em. I'll tell you what: you sing 'When the Harvest Days Are Over,' and let me have your other cool arm while you're doin' it, and then we'll go."

She sang looking down into his eyes, which ware centered, not on hers, but on her lips. When she finished, she slipped his hands from her arms

and got up. He was about to start for the horses, when she held her jacket out to him. Despite the independence natural to a girl who earned her own living, she had an innate love of the little services and finenesses; and, also, she remembered from her childhood the talk by the pioneer women of the courtesy and attendance of the caballeros of the Spanish-California days.

Sunset greeted them when, after a wide circle to the east and south, they cleared the divide of the Contra Costa hills and began dropping down the long grade that led past Redwood Peak to Fruitvale. Beneath them stretched the flatlands to the bay, checkerboarded into fields and broken by the towns of Elmhurst, San Leandro, and Haywards. The smoke of Oakland filled the western sky with haze and murk, while beyond, across the bay, they could see the first winking lights of San Francisco.

Darkness was on them, and Billy had become curiously silent. For half an hour he had given no recognition of her existence save once, when the chill evening wind caused him to tuck the robe tightly about her and himself. Half a dozen times Saxon found herself on the verge of the remark, "What's on your mind?" but each time let it remain unuttered. She sat very close to him. The warmth of their bodies intermingled, and she was aware of a great restfulness and content.

"Say, Saxon," he began abruptly. "It's no use my holdin' it in any longer. It's ben in my mouth all day, ever since lunch. What's the matter with you an' me gettin' married?"

She knew, very quietly and very gladly, that he meant it. Instinctively she was impelled to hold off, to make him woo her, to make herself more desirably valuable ere she yielded. Further, her woman's sensitiveness and pride were offended. She had never dreamed of so forthright and bald a proposal from the man to whom she would give herself. The simplicity and directness of Billy's proposal constituted almost a hurt. On the other hand she wanted him so much--how much she had not realized until now, when he had so unexpectedly made himself accessible.

"Well you gotta say something, Saxon. Hand it to me, good or bad; but anyway hand it to me. An' just take into consideration that I love you. Why, I love you like the very devil, Saxon. I must, because I'm askin' you to marry me, an' I never asked any girl that before."

Another silence fell, and Saxon found herself dwelling on the warmth, tingling now, under the lap-robe. When she realized whither her thoughts led, she blushed guiltily in the darkness.

"How old are you, Billy?" she questioned, with a suddenness and irrelevance as disconcerting as his first words had been.

"Twenty-two," he answered.

"I am twenty-four."

"As if I didn't know. When you left the orphan asylum and how old you were, how long you worked in the jute mills, the cannery, the paper-box factory, the laundry--maybe you think I can't do addition. I knew how old you was, even to your birthday."

"That doesn't change the fact that I'm two years older."

"What of it? If it counted for anything, I wouldn't be lovin' you, would I? Your mother was dead right. Love's the big stuff. It's what counts. Don't you see? I just love you, an' I gotta have you. It's natural, I guess; and I've always found with horses, dogs, and other folks, that what's natural is right. There's no gettin' away from it, Saxon; I gotta have you, an' I'm just hopin' hard you gotta have me. Maybe my hands ain't soft like bookkeepers' an' clerks, but they can work for you, an' fight like Sam Hill for you, and, Saxon, they can love you."

The old sex antagonism which she had always experienced with men seemed to have vanished. She had no sense of being on the defensive. This was no game. It was what she had been looking for and dreaming about. Before Billy she was defenseless, and there was an all-satisfaction in the knowledge. She could deny him nothing. Not even if he proved to be like the others. And out of the greatness of the thought rose a greater thought--he would not so prove himself.

She did not speak. Instead, in a glow of spirit and flesh, she reached out to his left hand and gently tried to remove it from the rein. He did

not understand; but when she persisted he shifted the rein to his right and let her have her will with the other hand. Her head bent over it, and she kissed the teamster callouses.

For the moment he was stunned.

"You mean it?" he stammered.

For reply, she kissed the hand again and murmured:

"I love your hands, Billy. To me they are the most beautiful hands in the world, and it would take hours of talking to tell you all they mean to me."

"Whoa!" he called to the horses.

He pulled them in to a standstill, soothed them with his voice, and made the reins fast around the whip. Then he turned to her with arms around her and lips to lips.

"Oh, Billy, I'll make you a good wife," she sobbed, when the kiss was broken.

He kissed her wet eyes and found her lips again.

"Now you know what I was thinkin' and why I was sweatin' when we was

eatin' lunch. Just seemed I couldn't hold in much longer from tellin' you. Why, you know, you looked good to me from the first moment I spotted you."

"And I think I loved you from that first day, too, Billy. And I was so proud of you all that day, you were so kind and gentle, and so strong, and the way the men all respected you and the girls all wanted you, and the way you fought those three Irishmen when I was behind the picnic table. I couldn't love or marry a man I wasn't proud of, and I'm so proud of you, so proud."

"Not half as much as I am right now of myself," he answered, "for having won you. It's too good to be true. Maybe the alarm clock'll go off and wake me up in a couple of minutes. Well, anyway, if it does, I'm goin' to make the best of them two minutes first. Watch out I don't eat you, I'm that hungry for you."

He smothered her in an embrace, holding her so tightly to him that it almost hurt. After what was to her an age-long period of bliss, his arms relaxed and he seemed to make an effort to draw himself together.

"An' the clock ain't gone off yet," he whispered against her cheek. "And it's a dark night, an' there's Fruitvale right ahead, an' if there ain't King and Prince standin' still in the middle of the road. I never thought the time'd come when I wouldn't want to take the ribbons on a fine pair of horses. But this is that time. I just can't let go

of you, and I've gotta some time to-night. It hurts worse'n poison, but here goes."

He restored her to herself, tucked the disarranged robe about her, and chirruped to the impatient team.

Half an hour later he called "Whoa!"

"I know I'm awake now, but I don't know but maybe I dreamed all the rest, and I just want to make sure."

And again be made the reins fast and took her in his arms.

CHAPTER XII

The days flew by for Saxon. She worked on steadily at the laundry, even doing more overtime than usual, and all her free waking hours were devoted to preparations for the great change and to Billy. He had proved himself God's own impetuous lover by insisting on getting married the next day after the proposal, and then by resolutely refusing to compromise on more than a week's delay.

"Why wait?" he demanded. "We're not gettin' any younger so far as I can notice, an' think of all we lose every day we wait."

In the end, he gave in to a month, which was well, for in two weeks he was transferred, with half a dozen other drivers, to work from the big stables of Corberly and Morrison in West Oakland. House-hunting in the other end of town ceased, and on Pine Street, between Fifth and Fourth, and in immediate proximity to the great Southern Pacific railroad yards, Billy and Saxon rented a neat cottage of four small rooms for ten dollars a month.

"Dog-cheap is what I call it, when I think of the small rooms I've ben soaked for," was Billy's judgment. "Look at the one I got now, not as big as the smallest here, an' me payin' six dollars a month for it."

"But it's furnished," Saxon reminded him. "You see, that makes a difference."

But Billy didn't see.

"I ain't much of a scholar, Saxon, but I know simple arithmetic; I've soaked my watch when I was hard up, and I can calculate interest. How much do you figure it will cost to furnish the house, carpets on the floor, linoleum on the kitchen, and all?"

"We can do it nicely for three hundred dollars," she answered. "I've been thinking it over and I'm sure we can do it for that."

"Three hundred," he muttered, wrinkling his brows with concentration. "Three hundred, say at six per cent.--that'd be six cents on the dollar, sixty cents on ten dollars, six dollars on the hundred, on three hundred eighteen dollars. Say--I'm a bear at multiplyin' by ten. Now divide eighteen by twelve, that'd be a dollar an' a half a month interest."
He stopped, satisfied that he had proved his contention. Then his face quickened with a fresh thought. "Hold on! That ain't all. That'd be the interest on the furniture for four rooms. Divide by four. What's a dollar an' a half divided by four?"

"Four into fifteen, three times and three to carry," Saxon recited glibly. "Four into thirty is seven, twenty-eight, two to carry; and two-fourths is one-half. There you are."

"Gee! You're the real bear at figures." He hesitated. "I didn't follow

you. How much did you say it was?"

"Thirty-seven and a half cents."

"Ah, ha! Now we'll see how much I've ben gouged for my one room. Ten dollars a month for four rooms is two an' a half for one. Add thirty-seven an' a half cents interest on furniture, an' that makes two dollars an' eighty-seven an' a half cents. Subtract from six dollars...."

"Three dollars and twelve and a half cents," she supplied quickly.

"There we are! Three dollars an' twelve an' a half cents I'm jiggered out of on the room I'm rentin'. Say! Bein' married is like savin' money, ain't it?"

"But furniture wears out, Billy."

"By golly, I never thought of that. It ought to be figured, too. Anyway, we've got a snap here, and next Saturday afternoon you've gotta get off from the laundry so as we can go an' buy our furniture. I saw Salinger's last night. I give'm fifty down, and the rest installment plan, ten dollars a month. In twenty-five months the furniture's ourn. An' remember, Saxon, you wanta buy everything you want, no matter how much it costs. No scrimpin' on what's for you an' me. Get me?"

She nodded, with no betrayal on her face of the myriad secret economies that filled her mind. A hint of moisture glistened in her eyes.

"You're so good to me, Billy," she murmured, as she came to him and was met inside his arms.

"So you've gone an' done it," Mary commented, one morning in the laundry. They had not been at work ten minutes ere her eye had glimpsed the topaz ring on the third finger of Saxon's left hand. "Who's the lucky one? Charley Long or Billy Roberts?"

"Billy," was the answer.

"Huh! Takin' a young boy to raise, eh?"

Saxon showed that the stab had gone home, and Mary was all contrition.

"Can't you take a josh? I'm glad to death at the news. Billy's a awful good man, and I'm glad to see you get him. There ain't many like him knockin' 'round, an' they ain't to be had for the askin'. An' you're both lucky. You was just made for each other, an' you'll make him a better wife than any girl I know. When is it to be?"

Going home from the laundry a few days later, Saxon encountered Charley Long. He blocked the sidewalk, and compelled speech with her.

"So you're runnin' with a prizefighter," he sneered. "A blind man can see your finish."

For the first time she was unafraid of this big-bodied, black-browed men with the hairy-matted hands and fingers. She held up her left hand.

"See that? It's something, with all your strength, that you could never put on my finger. Billy Roberts put it on inside a week. He got your number, Charley Long, and at the same time he got me."

"Skiddoo for you," Long retorted. "Twenty-three's your number."

"He's not like you," Saxon went on. "He's a man, every bit of him, a fine, clean man."

Long laughed hoarsely.

"He's got your goat all right."

"And yours," she flashed back.

"I could tell you things about him. Saxon, straight, he ain't no good. If I was to tell you--"

"You'd better get out of my way," she interrupted, "or I'll tell him, and you know what you'll get, you great big bully."

Long shuffled uneasily, then reluctantly stepped aside.

"You're a caution," he said, half admiringly.

"So's Billy Roberts," she laughed, and continued on her way. After half a dozen steps she stopped. "Say," she called.

The big blacksmith turned toward her with eagerness.

"About a block back," she said, "I saw a man with hip disease. You might go and beat him up."

Of one extravagance Saxon was guilty in the course of the brief engagement period. A full day's wages she spent in the purchase of half a dozen cabinet photographs of herself. Billy had insisted that life was unendurable could he not look upon her semblance the last thing when he went to bed at night and the first thing when he got up in the morning. In return, his photographs, one conventional and one in the stripped fighting costume of the ring, ornamented her looking glass. It was while gazing at the latter that she was reminded of her wonderful mother's tales of the ancient Saxons and sea-foragers of the English coasts. From the chest of drawers that had crossed the plains she drew forth another of her several precious heirloom--a scrap-book of her mother's in which was pasted much of the fugitive newspaper verse of pioneer California days. Also, there were copies of paintings and old wood engravings from

the magazines of a generation and more before.

Saxon ran the pages with familiar fingers and stopped at the picture she was seeking. Between bold headlands of rock and under a gray cloud-blown sky, a dozen boats, long and lean and dark, beaked like monstrous birds, were landing on a foam-whitened beach of sand. The men in the boats, half naked, huge-muscled and fair-haired, wore winged helmets. In their hands were swords and spears, and they were leaping, waist-deep, into the sea-wash and wading ashore. Opposed to them, contesting the landing, were skin-clad savages, unlike Indians, however, who clustered on the beach or waded into the water to their knees. The first blows were being struck, and here and there the bodies of the dead and wounded rolled in the surf. One fair-haired invader lay across the gunwale of a boat, the manner of his death told by the arrow that transfixed his breast. In the air, leaping past him into the water, sword in hand, was Billy. There was no mistaking it. The striking blondness, the face, the eyes, the mouth were the same. The very expression on the face was what had been on Billy's the day of the picnic when he faced the three wild Irishmen.

Somewhere out of the ruck of those warring races had emerged Billy's ancestors, and hers, was her afterthought, as she closed the book and put it back in the drawer. And some of those ancestors had made this ancient and battered chest of drawers which had crossed the salt ocean and the plains and been pierced by a bullet in the fight with the Indians at Little Meadow. Almost, it seemed, she could visualize the women who had kept their pretties and their family homespun in its

drawers--the women of those wandering generations who were grandmothers and greater great grandmothers of her own mother. Well, she sighed, it was a good stock to be born of, a hard-working, hard-fighting stock. She fell to wondering what her life would have been like had she been born a Chinese woman, or an Italian woman like those she saw, head-shawled or bareheaded, squat, ungainly and swarthy, who carried great loads of driftwood on their heads up from the beach. Then she laughed at her foolishness, remembered Billy and the four-roomed cottage on Pine Street, and went to bed with her mind filled for the hundredth time with the details of the furniture.

CHAPTER XIII

"Our cattle were all played out," Saxon was saying, "and winter was so near that we couldn't dare try to cross the Great American Desert, so our train stopped in Salt Lake City that winter. The Mormons hadn't got bad yet, and they were good to us."

"You talk as though you were there," Bert commented.

"My mother was," Saxon answered proudly. "She was nine years old that winter."

They were seated around the table in the kitchen of the little Pine Street cottage, making a cold lunch of sandwiches, tamales, and bottled beer. It being Sunday, the four were free from work, and they had come early, to work harder than on any week day, washing walls and windows, scrubbing floors, laying carpets and linoleum, hanging curtains, setting up the stove, putting the kitchen utensils and dishes away, and placing the furniture.

"Go on with the story, Saxon," Mary begged. "I'm just dyin' to hear. And Bert, you just shut up and listen."

"Well, that winter was when Del Hancock showed up. He was Kentucky born, but he'd been in the West for years. He was a scout, like Kit Carson, and he knew him well. Many's a time Kit Carson and he slept under the

same blankets. They were together to California and Oregon with General Fremont. Well, Del Hancock was passing on his way through Salt Lake, going I don't know where to raise a company of Rocky Mountain trappers to go after beaver some new place he knew about. Ha was a handsome man. He wore his hair long like in pictures, and had a silk sash around his waist he'd learned to wear in California from the Spanish, and two revolvers in his belt. Any woman 'd fall in love with him first sight. Well, he saw Sadie, who was my mother's oldest sister, and I guess she looked good to him, for he stopped right there in Salt Lake and didn't go a step. He was a great Indian fighter, too, and I heard my Aunt Villa say, when I was a little girl, that he had the blackest, brightest eyes, and that the way he looked was like an eagle. He'd fought duels, too, the way they did in those days, and he wasn't afraid of anything.

"Sadie was a beauty, and she flirted with him and drove him crazy. Maybe she wasn't sure of her own mind, I don't know. But I do know that she didn't give in as easy as I did to Billy. Finally, he couldn't stand it any more. Ha rode up that night on horseback, wild as could be. 'Sadie,' he said, 'if you don't promise to marry me to-morrow, I'll shoot myself to-night right back of the corral.' And he'd have done it, too, and Sadie knew it, and said she would. Didn't they make love fast in those days?"

"Oh, I don't know," Mary sniffed. "A week after you first laid eyes on Billy you was engaged. Did Billy say he was going to shoot himself back of the laundry if you turned him down?"

"I didn't give him a chance," Saxon confessed. "Anyway Del Hancock and Aunt Sadie got married next day. And they were very happy afterward, only she died. And after that he was killed, with General Custer and all the rest, by the Indians. He was an old man by then, but I guess he got his share of Indians before they got him. Men like him always died fighting, and they took their dead with them. I used to know Al Stanley when I was a little girl. He was a gambler, but he was game. A railroad man shot him in the back when he was sitting at a table. That shot killed him, too. He died in about two seconds. But before he died he'd pulled his gun and put three bullets into the man that killed him."

"I don't like fightin'," Mary protested. "It makes me nervous. Bert gives me the willies the way he's always lookin' for trouble. There ain't no sense in it."

"And I wouldn't give a snap of my fingers for a man without fighting spirit," Saxon answered. "Why, we wouldn't be here to-day if it wasn't for the fighting spirit of our people before us."

"You've got the real goods of a fighter in Billy," Bert assured her; "a yard long and a yard wide and genuine A Number One, long-fleeced wool. Billy's a Mohegan with a scalp-lock, that's what he is. And when he gets his mad up it's a case of get out from under or something will fall on you--hard."

"Just like that," Mary added.

Billy, who had taken no part in the conversation, got up, glanced into the bedroom off the kitchen, went into the parlor and the bedroom off the parlor, then returned and stood gazing with puzzled brows into the kitchen bedroom.

"What's eatin' you, old man," Bert queried. "You look as though you'd lost something or was markin' a three-way ticket. What you got on your chest? Cough it up."

"Why, I'm just thinkin' where in Sam Hill's the bed an' stuff for the back bedroom."

"There isn't any," Saxon explained. "We didn't order any."

"Then I'll see about it to-morrow."

"What d'ye want another bed for?" asked Bert. "Ain't one bed enough for the two of you?"

"You shut up, Bert!" Mary cried. "Don't get raw."

"Whoa, Mary!" Bert grinned. "Back up. You're in the wrong stall as usual."

"We don't need that room," Saxon was saying to Billy. "And so I didn't plan any furniture. That money went to buy better carpets and a better stove."

Billy came over to her, lifted her from the chair, and seated himself with her on his knees.

"That's right, little girl. I'm glad you did. The best for us every time. And to-morrow night I want you to run up with me to Salinger's an' pick out a good bedroom set an' carpet for that room. And it must be good. Nothin' snide."

"It will cost fifty dollars," she objected.

"That's right," he nodded. "Make it cost fifty dollars and not a cent less. We're goin' to have the best. And what's the good of an empty room? It'd make the house look cheap. Why, I go around now, seein' this little nest just as it grows an' softens, day by day, from the day we paid the cash money down an' nailed the keys. Why, almost every moment I'm drivin' the horses, all day long, I just keep on seein' this nest. And when we're married, I'll go on seein' it. And I want to see it complete. If that room'd he bare-floored an' empty, I'd see nothin' but it and its bare floor all day long. I'd be cheated. The house'd be a lie. Look at them curtains you put up in it, Saxon. That's to make believe to the neighbors that it's furnished. Saxon, them curtains are lyin' about that room, makin' a noise for every one to hear that that

room's furnished. Nitsky for us. I'm goin' to see that them curtains tell the truth."

"You might rent it," Bert suggested. "You're close to the railroad yards, and it's only two blocks to a restaurant."

"Not on your life. I ain't marryin' Saxon to take in lodgers. If I can't take care of her, d'ye know what I'll do? Go down to Long Wharf, say 'Here goes nothin',' an' jump into the bay with a stone tied to my neck. Ain't I right, Saxon?"

It was contrary to her prudent judgment, but it fanned her pride. She threw her arms around her lover's neck, and said, ere she kissed him:

"You're the boss, Billy. What you say goes, and always will go."

"Listen to that!" Bert gibed to Mary. "That's the stuff. Saxon's onto her job."

"I guess we'll talk things over together first before ever I do anything," Billy was saying to Saxon.

"Listen to that," Mary triumphed. "You bet the man that marries me'll have to talk things over first."

"Billy's only givin' her hot air," Bert plagued. "They all do it before

they're married."

Mary sniffed contemptuously.

"I'll bet Saxon leads him around by the nose. And I'm goin' to say, loud an' strong, that I'll lead the man around by the nose that marries me."

"Not if you love him," Saxon interposed.

"All the more reason," Mary pursued.

Bert assumed an expression and attitude of mournful dejection.

"Now you see why me an' Mary don't get married," he said. "I'm some big Indian myself, an' I'll be everlastingly jiggerooed if I put up for a wigwam I can't be boss of."

"And I'm no squaw," Mary retaliated, "an' I wouldn't marry a big buck Indian if all the rest of the men in the world was dead."

"Well this big buck Indian ain't asked you yet."

"He knows what he'd get if he did."

"And after that maybe he'll think twice before he does ask you."

Saxon, intent on diverting the conversation into pleasanter channels, clapped her hands as if with sudden recollection.

"Oh! I forgot! I want to show you something." From her purse she drew a slender ring of plain gold and passed it around. "My mother's wedding ring. I've worn it around my neck always, like a locket. I cried for it so in the orphan asylum that the matron gave it back for me to wear. And now, just to think, after next Tuesday I'll be wearing it on my finger. Look, Billy, see the engraving on the inside."

"C to D, 1879," he read.

"Carlton to Daisy--Carlton was my father's first name. And now, Billy, you've got to get it engraved for you and me."

Mary was all eagerness and delight.

"Oh, it's fine," she cried. "W to S, 1907."

Billy considered a moment.

"No, that wouldn't be right, because I'm not giving it to Saxon."

"I'll tell you what," Saxon said. "W and S."

"Nope." Billy shook his head. "S and W, because you come first with me."

"If I come first with you, you come first with us. Billy, dear, I insist on W and S."

"You see," Mary said to Bert. "Having her own way and leading him by the nose already."

Saxon acknowledged the sting.

"Anyway you want, Billy," she surrendered. His arms tightened about her.

"We'll talk it over first, I guess."

CHAPTER XIV

Sarah was conservative. Worse, she had crystallized at the end of her love-time with the coming of her first child. After that she was as set in her ways as plaster in a mold. Her mold was the prejudices and notions of her girlhood and the house she lived in. So habitual was she that any change in the customary round assumed the proportions of a revolution. Tom had gone through many of these revolutions, three of them when he moved house. Then his stamina broke, and he never moved house again.

So it was that Saxon had held back the announcement of her approaching marriage until it was unavoidable. She expected a scene, and she got it.

"A prizefighter, a hoodlum, a plug-ugly," Sarah sneered, after she had exhausted herself of all calamitous forecasts of her own future and the future of her children in the absence of Saxon's weekly four dollars and a half. "I don't know what your mother'd thought if she lived to see the day when you took up with a tough like Bill Roberts. Bill! Why, your mother was too refined to associate with a man that was called Bill. And all I can say is you can say good-bye to silk stockings and your three pair of shoes. It won't be long before you'll think yourself lucky to go sloppin' around in Congress gaiters and cotton stockin's two pair for a quarter."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of Billy not being able to keep me in all kinds of

shoes," Saxon retorted with a proud toss of her head.

"You don't know what you're talkin' about." Sarah paused to laugh in mirthless discordance. "Watch for the babies to come. They come faster than wages raise these days."

"But we're not going to have any babies... that is, at first. Not until after the furniture is all paid for anyway."

"Wise in your generation, eh? In my days girls were more modest than to know anything about disgraceful subjects."

"As babies?" Saxon queried, with a touch of gentle malice.

"Yes, as babies."

"The first I knew that babies were disgraceful. Why, Sarah, you, with your five, how disgraceful you have been. Billy and I have decided not to be half as disgraceful. We're only going to have two--a boy and a girl."

Tom chuckled, but held the peace by hiding his face in his coffee cup. Sarah, though checked by this flank attack, was herself an old hand in the art. So temporary was the setback that she scarcely paused ere hurling her assault from a new angle.

"An' marryin' so quick, all of a sudden, eh? If that ain't suspicious, nothin' is. I don't know what young women's comin' to. They ain't decent, I tell you. They ain't decent. That's what comes of Sunday dancin' an' all the rest. Young women nowadays are like a lot of animals. Such fast an' looseness I never saw...."

Saxon was white with anger, but while Sarah wandered on in her diatribe, Tom managed to wink privily and prodigiously at his sister and to implore her to help in keeping the peace.

"It's all right, kid sister," he comforted Saxon when they were alone. "There's no use talkin' to Sarah. Bill Roberts is a good boy. I know a lot about him. It does you proud to get him for a husband. You're bound to be happy with him..." His voice sank, and his face seemed suddenly to be very old and tired as he went on anxiously. "Take warning from Sarah. Don't nag. Whatever you do, don't nag. Don't give him a perpetual-motion line of chin. Kind of let him talk once in a while. Men have some horse sense, though Sarah don't know it. Why, Sarah actually loves me, though she don't make a noise like it. The thing for you is to love your husband, and, by thunder, to make a noise of lovin' him, too. And then you can kid him into doing 'most anything you want. Let him have his way once in a while, and he'll let you have yourn. But you just go on lovin' him, and leanin' on his judgement--he's no fool--and you'll be all hunky-dory. I'm scared from goin' wrong, what of Sarah. But I'd sooner be loved into not going wrong."

"Oh, I'll do it, Tom," Saxon nodded, smiling through the tears his sympathy had brought into her eyes. "And on top of it I'm going to do something else, I'm going to make Billy love me and just keep on loving me. And then I won't have to kid him into doing some of the things I want. He'll do them because he loves me, you see."

"You got the right idea, Saxon. Stick with it, an' you'll win out."

Later, when she had put on her hat to start for the laundry, she found Tom waiting for her at the corner.

"An', Saxon," he said, hastily and haltingly, "you won't take anything I've said... you know... --about Sarah... as bein' in any way disloyal to her? She's a good woman, an' faithful. An' her life ain't so easy by a long shot. I'd bite out my tongue before I'd say anything against her. I guess all folks have their troubles. It's hell to be poor, ain't it?"

"You've been awful good to me, Tom. I can never forget it. And I know Sarah means right. She does do her best."

"I won't be able to give you a wedding present," her brother ventured apologetically. "Sarah won't hear of it. Says we didn't get none from my folks when we got married. But I got something for you just the same. A surprise. You'd never guess it."

Saxon waited.

"When you told me you was goin' to get married, I just happened to think of it, an' I wrote to brother George, askin' him for it for you. An' by thunder he sent it by express. I didn't tell you because I didn't know but maybe he'd sold it. He did sell the silver spurs. He needed the money, I guess. But the other, I had it sent to the shop so as not to bother Sarah, an' I sneaked it in last night an' hid it in the woodshed."

"Oh, it is something of my father's! What is it? Oh, what is it?"

"His army sword."

"The one he wore on his roan war horse! Oh, Tom, you couldn't give me a better present. Let's go back now. I want to see it. We can slip in the back way. Sarah's washing in the kitchen, and she won't begin hanging out for an hour."

"I spoke to Sarah about lettin' you take the old chest of drawers that was your mother's," Tom whispered, as they stole along the narrow alley between the houses. "Only she got on her high horse. Said that Daisy was as much my mother as yourn, even if we did have different fathers, and that the chest had always belonged in Daisy's family and not Captain Kit's, an' that it was mine, an' what was mine she had some say-so about."

"It's all right," Saxon reassured him. "She sold it to me last night. She was waiting up for me when I got home with fire in her eye."

"Yep, she was on the warpath all day after I mentioned it. How much did you give her for it?"

"Six dollars."

"Robbery--it ain't worth it," Tom groaned. "It's all cracked at one end and as old as the hills."

"I'd have given ten dollars for it. I'd have given 'most anything for it, Tom. It was mother's, you know. I remember it in her room when she was still alive."

In the woodshed Tom resurrected the hidden treasure and took off the wrapping paper. Appeared a rusty, steel-scabbarded saber of the heavy type carried by cavalry officers in Civil War days. It was attached to a moth-eaten sash of thick-woven crimson silk from which hung heavy silk tassels. Saxon almost seized it from her brother in her eagerness. She drew forth the blade and pressed her lips to the steel.

It was her last day at the laundry. She was to quit work that evening for good. And the next afternoon, at five, she and Billy were to go before a justice of the peace and be married. Bert and Mary were to be the witnesses, and after that the four were to go to a private room in

Barnum's Restaurant for the wedding supper. That over, Bert and Mary would proceed to a dance at Myrtle Hall, while Billy and Saxon would take the Eighth Street car to Seventh and Pine. Honeymoons are infrequent in the working class. The next morning Billy must be at the stable at his regular hour to drive his team out.

All the women in the fancy starch room knew it was Saxon's last day. Many exulted for her, and not a few were envious of her, in that she had won a husband and to freedom from the suffocating slavery of the ironing board. Much of bantering she endured; such was the fate of every girl who married out of the fancy starch room. But Saxon was too happy to be hurt by the teasing, a great deal of which was gross, but all of which was good-natured.

In the steam that arose from under her iron, and on the surfaces of the dainty lawns and muslins that flew under her hands, she kept visioning herself in the Pine Street cottage; and steadily she hummed under her breath her paraphrase of the latest popular song:

"And when I work, and when I work, I'll always work for Billy."

By three in the afternoon the strain of the piece-workers in the humid, heated room grew tense. Elderly women gasped and sighed; the color went out of the cheeks of the young women, their faces became drawn and dark circles formed under their eyes; but all held on with weary, unabated speed. The tireless, vigilant forewoman kept a sharp lookout for

incipient hysteria, and once led a narrow-chested, stoop-shouldered young thing out of the place in time to prevent a collapse.

Saxon was startled by the wildest scream of terror she had ever heard. The tense thread of human resolution snapped; wills and nerves broke down, and a hundred women suspended their irons or dropped them. It was Mary who had screamed so terribly, and Saxon saw a strange black animal flapping great claw-like wings and nestling on Mary's shoulder. With the scream, Mary crouched down, and the strange creature, darting into the air, fluttered full into the startled face of a woman at the next board. This woman promptly screamed and fainted. Into the air again, the flying thing darted hither and thither, while the shrieking, shrinking women threw up their arms, tried to run away along the aisles, or cowered under their ironing boards.

"It's only a bat!" the forewoman shouted. She was furious. "Ain't you ever seen a bat? It won't eat you!"

But they were ghetto people, and were not to be quieted. Some woman who could not see the cause of the uproar, out of her overwrought apprehension raised the cry of fire and precipitated the panic rush for the doors. All of them were screaming the stupid, soul-sickening high note of terror, drowning the forewoman's voice. Saxon had been merely startled at first, but the screaming panic broke her grip on herself and swept her away. Though she did not scream, she fled with the rest. When this horde of crazed women debouched on the next department, those who

worked there joined in the stampede to escape from they knew not what danger. In ten minutes the laundry was deserted, save for a few men wandering about with hand grenades in futile search for the cause of the disturbance.

The forewoman was stout, but indomitable. Swept along half the length of an aisle by the terror-stricken women, she had broken her way back through the rout and quickly caught the light-blinded visitant in a clothes basket.

"Maybe I don't know what God looks like, but take it from me I've seen a tintype of the devil," Mary gurgled, emotionally fluttering back and forth between laughter and tears.

But Saxon was angry with herself, for she had been as frightened as the rest in that wild flight for out-of-doors.

"We're a lot of fools," she said. "It was only a bat. I've heard about them. They live in the country. They wouldn't hurt a fly. They can't see in the daytime. That was what was the matter with this one. It was only a bat."

"Huh, you can't string me," Mary replied. "It was the devil." She sobbed a moment, and then laughed hysterically again. "Did you see Mrs. Bergstrom faint? And it only touched her in the face. Why, it was on my shoulder and touching my bare neck like the hand of a corpse. And I

didn't faint." She laughed again. "I guess, maybe, I was too scared to faint."

"Come on back," Saxon urged. "We've lost half an hour."

"Not me. I'm goin' home after that, if they fire me. I couldn't iron for sour apples now, I'm that shaky."

One woman had broken a leg, another an arm, and a number nursed milder bruises and bruises. No bullying nor entreating of the forewoman could persuade the women to return to work. They were too upset and nervous, and only here and there could one be found brave enough to re-enter the building for the hats and lunch baskets of the others. Saxon was one of the handful that returned and worked till six o'clock.

CHAPTER XV

"Why, Bert!--you're squiffed!" Mary cried reproachfully.

The four were at the table in the private room at Barnum's. The wedding supper, simple enough, but seemingly too expensive to Saxon, had been eaten. Bert, in his hand a glass of California red wine, which the management supplied for fifty cents a bottle, was on his feet endeavoring a speech. His face was flushed; his black eyes were feverishly bright.

"You've ben drinkin' before you met me," Mary continued. "I can see it stickin' out all over you."

"Consult an oculist, my dear," he replied. "Bertram is himself to-night. An' he is here, arisin' to his feet to give the glad hand to his old pal. Bill, old man, here's to you. It's how-de-do an' good-bye, I guess. You're a married man now, Bill, an' you got to keep regular hours. No more runnin' around with the boys. You gotta take care of yourself, an' get your life insured, an' take out an accident policy, an' join a buildin' an' loan society, an' a buryin' association--"

"Now you shut up, Bert," Mary broke in. "You don't talk about buryin's at weddings. You oughta be ashamed of yourself."

"Whoa, Mary! Back up! I said what I said because I meant it. I ain't

thinkin' what Mary thinks. What I was thinkin'.... Let me tell you what I was thinkin'. I said buryin' association, didn't I? Well, it was not with the idea of castin' gloom over this merry gatherin'. Far be it...."

He was so evidently seeking a way out of his predicament, that Mary tossed her head triumphantly. This acted as a spur to his reeling wits.

"Let me tell you why," he went on. "Because, Bill, you got such an all-fired pretty wife, that's why. All the fellows is crazy over her, an' when they get to runnin' after her, what'll you be doin'? You'll be gettin' busy. And then won't you need a buryin' association to bury 'em? I just guess yes. That was the compliment to your good taste in skirts I was tryin' to come across with when Mary butted in."

His glittering eyes rested for a moment in bantering triumph on Mary.

"Who says I'm squiffed? Me? Not on your life. I'm seein' all things in a clear white light. An' I see Bill there, my old friend Bill. An' I don't see two Bills. I see only one. Bill was never two-faced in his life. Bill, old man, when I look at you there in the married harness, I'm sorry--" He ceased abruptly and turned on Mary. "Now don't go up in the air, old girl. I'm onto my job. My grandfather was a state senator, and he could spiel graceful an' pleasin' till the cows come home. So can I.--Bill, when I look at you, I'm sorry. I repeat, I'm sorry." He glared challengingly at Mary. "For myself when I look at you an' know all the happiness you got a hammerlock on. Take it from me, you're a wise guy,

bless the women. You've started well. Keep it up. Marry 'em all, bless 'em. Bill, here's to you. You're a Mohegan with a scalplock. An' you got a squaw that is some squaw, take it from me. Minnehaha, here's to you--to the two of you--an' to the papooses, too, gosh-dang them!"

He drained the glass suddenly and collapsed in his chair, blinking his eyes across at the wedded couple while tears trickled unheeded down his cheeks. Mary's hand went out soothingly to his, completing his break-down.

"By God, I got a right to cry," he sobbed. "I'm losin' my best friend, ain't I? It'll never be the same again never. When I think of the fun, an' scrapes, an' good times Bill an' me has had together, I could darn near hate you, Saxon, sittin' there with your hand in his."

"Cheer up, Bert," she laughed gently. "Look at whose hand you are holding."

"Aw, it's only one of his cryin' jags," Mary said, with a harshness that her free hand belied as it caressed his hair with soothing strokes. "Buck up, Bert. Everything's all right. And now it's up to Bill to say something after your dandy spiel."

Bert recovered himself quickly with another glass of wine.

"Kick in, Bill," he cried. "It's your turn now."

"I'm no hotair artist," Billy grumbled. "What'll I say, Saxon? They ain't no use tellin' 'em how happy we are. They know that."

"Tell them we're always going to be happy," she said. "And thank them for all their good wishes, and we both wish them the same. And we're always going to be together, like old times, the four of us. And tell them they're invited down to 507 Pine Street next Sunday for Sunday dinner.--And, Mary, if you want to come Saturday night you can sleep in the spare bedroom."

"You've told'm yourself, better'n I could." Billy clapped his hands. "You did yourself proud, an' I guess they ain't much to add to it, but just the same I'm goin' to pass them a hot one."

He stood up, his hand on his glass. His clear blue eyes under the dark brows and framed by the dark lashes, seemed a deeper blue, and accentuated the blondness of hair and skin. The smooth cheeks were rosy--not with wine, for it was only his second glass--but with health and joy. Saxon, looking up at him, thrilled with pride in him, he was so well-dressed, so strong, so handsome, so clean-looking--her man-boy. And she was aware of pride in herself, in her woman's desirableness that had won for her so wonderful a lover.

"Well, Bert an' Mary, here you are at Saxon's and my wedding supper. We're just goin' to take all your good wishes to heart, we wish you the

same back, and when we say it we mean more than you think we mean. Saxon an' I believe in tit for tat. So we're wishin' for the day when the table is turned clear around an' we're sittin' as guests at your weddin' supper. And then, when you come to Sunday dinner, you can both stop Saturday night in the spare bedroom. I guess I was wised up when I furnished it, eh?"

"I never thought it of you, Billy!" Mary exclaimed. "You're every hit as raw as Bert. But just the same..."

There was a rush of moisture to her eyes. Her voice faltered and broke. She smiled through her tears at them, then turned to look at Bert, who put his arm around her and gathered her on to his knees.

When they left the restaurant, the four walked to Eighth and Broadway, where they stopped beside the electric car. Bert and Billy were awkward and silent, oppressed by a strange aloofness. But Mary embraced Saxon with fond anxiousness.

"It's all right, dear," Mary whispered. "Don't be scared. It's all right. Think of all the other women in the world."

The conductor clanged the gong, and the two couples separated in a sudden hubbub of farewell.

"Oh, you Mohegan!" Bert called after, as the car got under way. "Oh, you

Minnehaha!"

"Remember what I said," was Mary's parting to Saxon.

The car stopped at Seventh and Pine, the terminus of the line. It was only a little over two blocks to the cottage. On the front steps Billy took the key from his pocket.

"Funny, isn't it?" he said, as the key turned in the lock. "You an' me. Just you an' me."

While he lighted the lamp in the parlor, Saxon was taking off her hat. He went into the bedroom and lighted the lamp there, then turned back and stood in the doorway. Saxon, still unaccountably fumbling with her hatpins, stole a glance at him. He held out his arms.

"Now," he said.

She came to him, and in his arms he could feel her trembling.