

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

The car ran as far as Hayward's, but at Saxon's suggestion they got off at San Leandro.

"It doesn't matter where we start walking," she said, "for start to walk somewhere we must. And as we're looking for land and finding out about land, the quicker we begin to investigate the better. Besides, we want to know all about all kinds of land, close to the big cities as well as back in the mountains."

"Geel!--this must be the Porchugeeze headquarters," was Billy's reiterated comment, as they walked through San Leandro.

"It looks as though they'd crowd our kind out," Saxon adjudged.

"Some tall crowdin', I guess," Billy grumbled. "It looks like the free-born American ain't got no room left in his own land."

"Then it's his own fault," Saxon said, with vague asperity, resenting conditions she was just beginning to grasp.

"Oh, I don't know about that. I reckon the American could do what the Porchugeeze do if he wanted to. Only he don't want to, thank God. He ain't much given to livin' like a pig often leavin's."

"Not in the country, maybe," Saxon controverted. "But I've seen an awful lot of Americans living like pigs in the cities."

Billy grunted unwilling assent. "I guess they quit the farms an' go to the city for something better, an' get it in the neck."

"Look at all the children!" Saxon cried. "School's letting out. And nearly all are Portuguese, Billy, NOT Porchugeeze. Mercedes taught me the right way."

"They never wore glad rags like them in the old country," Billy sneered.

"They had to come over here to get decent clothes and decent grub.

They're as fat as butterballs."

Saxon nodded affirmation, and a great light seemed suddenly to kindle in her understanding.

"That's the very point, Billy. They're doing it--doing it farming, too.

Strikes don't bother THEM."

"You don't call that dinky gardening farming," he objected, pointing to a piece of land barely the size of an acre, which they were passing.

"Oh, your ideas are still big," she laughed. "You're like Uncle Will, who owned thousands of acres and wanted to own a million, and who wound up as night watchman. That's what was the trouble with all us Americans. Everything large scale. Anything less than one hundred and sixty acres was small scale."

"Just the same," Billy held stubbornly, "large scale's a whole lot better'n small scale like all these dinky gardens."

Saxon sighed. "I don't know which is the dinkier," she observed finally, "--owning a few little acres and the team you're driving, or not owning any acres and driving a team somebody else owns for wages."

Billy winced.

"Go on, Robinson Crusoe," he growled good naturedly. "Rub it in good an' plenty. An' the worst of it is it's correct. A hell of a free-born American I've been, adrivin' other folkses' teams for a livin', a-strikin' and a-sluggin' scabs, an' not bein' able to keep up with the installments for a few sticks of furniture. Just the same I was sorry for one thing. I hated worse in Sam Hill to see that Morris chair go back--you liked it so. We did a lot of honeymoonin' in that chair."

They were well out of San Leandro, walking through a region of tiny holdings--"farmlets," Billy called them; and Saxon got out her ukulele

to cheer him with a song.

First, it was "Treat my daughter kind-i-ly," and then she swung into old-fashioned darky camp-meeting hymns, beginning with:

"Oh! de Judgmen' Day am rollin' roan', Rollin', yes, a-rollin', I hear the trumpets' awful soun', Rollin', yes, a-rollin'."

A big touring car, dashing past, threw a dusty pause in her singing, and Saxon delivered herself of her latest wisdom.

"Now, Billy, remember we're not going to take up with the first piece of land we see. We've got to go into this with our eyes open--"

"An' they ain't open yet," he agreed.

"And we've got to get them open. 'Tis them that looks that finds.' There's lots of time to learn things. We don't care if it takes months and months. We're footloose. A good start is better than a dozen bad ones. We've got to talk and find out. We'll talk with everybody we meet. Ask questions. Ask everybody. It's the only way to find out."

"I ain't much of a hand at askin' questions," Billy demurred.

"Then I'll ask," she cried. "We've got to win out at this game, and the way is to know. Look at all these Portuguese. Where are all the

Americans? They owned the land first, after the Mexicans. What made the Americans clear out? How do the Portuguese make it go? Don't you see? We've got to ask millions of questions."

She strummed a few chords, and then her clear sweet voice rang out gaily:

"I's g'wine back to Dixie, I's g'wine back to Dixie, I's g'wine where de orange blossoms grow, For I hear de chillun callin', I see de sad tears fallin'--My heart's turned back to Dixie, An' I mus'go."

She broke off to exclaim: "Oh! What a lovely place! See that arbor--just covered with grapes!"

Again and again she was attracted by the small places they passed. Now it was: "Look at the flowers!" or: "My! those vegetables!" or: "See! They've got a cow!"

Men--Americans--driving along in buggies or runabouts looked at Saxon and Billy curiously. This Saxon could brook far easier than could Billy, who would mutter and grumble deep in his throat.

Beside the road they came upon a lineman eating his lunch.

"Stop and talk," Saxon whispered.

"Aw, what's the good? He's a lineman. What'd he know about farmin'?"

"You never can tell. He's our kind. Go ahead, Billy. You just speak to him. He isn't working now anyway, and he'll be more likely to talk. See that tree in there, just inside the gate, and the way the branches are grown together. It's a curiosity. Ask him about it. That's a good way to get started."

Billy stopped, when they were alongside.

"How do you do," he said gruffly.

The lineman, a young fellow, paused in the cracking of a hard-boiled egg to stare up at the couple.

"How do you do," he said.

Billy swung his pack from his shoulders to the ground, and Saxon rested her telescope basket.

"Peddlin'?" the young man asked, too discreet to put his question directly to Saxon, yet dividing it between her and Billy, and cocking his eye at the covered basket.

"No," she spoke up quickly. "We're looking for land. Do you know of any around here?"

Again he desisted from the egg, studying them with sharp eyes as if to fathom their financial status.

"Do you know what land sells for around here?" he asked.

"No," Saxon answered. "Do you?"

"I guess I ought to. I was born here. And land like this all around you runs at from two to three hundred to four an' five hundred dollars an acre."

"Whew!" Billy whistled. "I guess we don't want none of it."

"But what makes it that high? Town lots?" Saxon wanted to know.

"Nope. The Porchugeeze make it that high, I guess."

"I thought it was pretty good land that fetched a hundred an acre," Billy said.

"Oh, them times is past. They used to give away land once, an' if you was good, throw in all the cattle runnin' on it."

"How about government land around here?" was Billy's next query.

"Ain't none, an' never was. This was old Mexican grants. My grandfather bought sixteen hundred of the best acres around here for fifteen hundred dollars--five hundred down an' the balance in five years without interest. But that was in the early days. He come West in '48, tryin' to find a country without chills an' fever."

"He found it all right," said Billy.

"You bet he did. An' if him an' father 'd held onto the land it'd been better than a gold mine, an' I wouldn't be workin' for a livin'. What's your business?"

"Teamster."

"Ben in the strike in Oakland?"

"Sure thing. I've teamed there most of my life."

Here the two men wandered off into a discussion of union affairs and the strike situation; but Saxon refused to be balked, and brought back the talk to the land.

"How was it the Portuguese ran up the price of lend?" she asked.

The young fellow broke away from union matters with an effort, and for a moment regarded her with lack luster eyes, until the question sank into

his consciousness.

"Because they worked the land overtime. Because they worked mornin', noon, an' night, all hands, women an' kids. Because they could get more out of twenty acres than we could out of a hundred an' sixty. Look at old Silva--Antonio Silva. I've known him ever since I was a shaver. He didn't have the price of a square meal when he hit this section and begun leasin' land from my folks. Look at him now--worth two hundred an' fifty thousan' cold, an' I bet he's got credit for a million, an' there's no tellin' what the rest of his family owns."

"And he made all that out of your folks' land?" Saxon demanded.

The young man nodded his head with evident reluctance.

"Then why didn't your folks do it?" she pursued.

The lineman shrugged his shoulders.

"Search me," he said.

"But the money was in the land," she persisted.

"Blamed if it was," came the retort, tinged slightly with color. "We never saw it stickin' out so as you could notice it. The money was in the hands of the Porchugeeze, I guess. They knew a few more 'n we did,

that's all."

Saxon showed such dissatisfaction with his explanation that he was stung to action. He got up wrathfully. "Come on, an' I'll show you," he said. "I'll show you why I'm workin' for wages when I might a-ben a millionaire if my folks hadn't been mutts. That's what we old Americans are, Mutts, with a capital M."

He led them inside the gate, to the fruit tree that had first attracted Saxon's attention. From the main crotch diverged the four main branches of the tree. Two feet above the crotch the branches were connected, each to the ones on both sides, by braces of living wood.

"You think it grewed that way, eh? Well, it did. But it was old Silva that made it just the same--caught two sprouts, when the tree was young, an' twisted 'em together. Pretty slick, eh? You bet. That tree'll never blow down. It's a natural, springy brace, an' beats iron braces stiff. Look along all the rows. Every tree's that way. See? An' that's just one trick of the Porchugeeze. They got a million like it.

"Figure it out for yourself. They don't need props when the crop's heavy. Why, when we had a heavy crop, we used to use five props to a tree. Now take ten acres of trees. That'd be some several thousand props. Which cost money, an' labor to put in an' take out every year. These here natural braces don't have to have a thing done. They're Johnny-on-the-spot all the time. Why, the Porchugeeze has got us skinned

a mile. Come on, I'll show you."

Billy, with city notions of trespass, betrayed perturbation at the freedom they were making of the little farm.

"Oh, it's all right, as long as you don't step on nothin'," the lineman reassured him. "Besides, my grandfather used to own this. They know me. Forty years ago old Silva come from the Azores. Went sheep-herdin' in the mountains for a couple of years, then blew in to San Leandro. These five acres was the first land he leased. That was the beginnin'. Then he began leasin' by the hundreds of acres, an' by the hundred-an'-sixties. An' his sisters an' his uncles an' his aunts begun pourin' in from the Azores--they're all related there, you know; an' pretty soon San Leandro was a regular Porchugeeze settlement.

"An' old Silva wound up by buyin' these five acres from grandfather. Pretty soon--an' father by that time was in the hole to the neck--he was buyin' father's land by the hundred-an'-sixties. An' all the rest of his relations was coin' the same thing. Father was always gettin' rich quick, an' he wound up by dyin' in debt. But old Silva never overlooked a bet, no matter how dinky. An' all the rest are just like him. You see outside the fence there, clear to the wheel-tracks in the road--horse-beans. We'd a-scorned to do a picayune thing like that. Not Silva. Why he's got a town house in San Leandro now. An' he rides around in a four-thousan'-dollar tourin' car. An' just the same his front door yard grows onions clear to the sidewalk. He clears three hundred a year

on that patch alone. I know ten acres of land he bought last year,--a thousand an acre they asked'm, an' he never batted an eye. He knew it was worth it, that's all. He knew he could make it pay. Back in the hills, there, he's got a ranch of five hundred an' eighty acres, bought it dirt cheap, too; an' I want to tell you I could travel around in a different tourin' car every day in the week just outa the profits he makes on that ranch from the horses all the way from heavy draughts to fancy steppers.

"But how?--how?--how did he get it all?" Saxon clamored.

"By bein' wise to farmin'. Why, the whole blame family works. They ain't ashamed to roll up their sleeves an' dig--sons an' daughters an' daughter-in-laws, old man, old woman, an' the babies. They have a sayin' that a kid four years old that can't pasture one cow on the county road an' keep it fat ain't worth his salt. Why, the Silvas, the whole tribe of 'em, works a hundred acres in peas, eighty in tomatoes, thirty in asparagus, ten in pie-plant, forty in cucumbers, an'--oh, stacks of other things."

"But how do they do it?" Saxon continued to demand. "We've never been ashamed to work. We've worked hard all our lives. I can out-work any Portuguese woman ever born. And I've done it, too, in the jute mills. There were lots of Portuguese girls working at the looms all around me, and I could out-weave them, every day, and I did, too. It isn't a case of work. What is it?"

The lineman looked at her in a troubled way.

"Many's the time I've asked myself that same question. 'We're better'n these cheap emigrants,' I'd say to myself. 'We was here first, an' owned the land. I can lick any Dago that ever hatched in the Azores. I got a better education. Then how in thunder do they put it all over us, get our land, an' start accounts in the banks?' An' the only answer I know is that we ain't got the sabe. We don't use our head-pieces right. Something's wrong with us. Anyway, we wasn't wised up to farming. We played at it. Show you? That's what I brung you in for--the way old Silva an' all his tribe farms. Book at this place. Some cousin of his, just out from the Azores, is makin' a start on it, an' payin' good rent to Silva. Pretty soon he'll be up to snuff an' buyin' land for himself from some perishin' American farmer.

"Look at that--though you ought to see it in summer. Not an inch wasted. Where we got one thin crop, they get four fat crops. An' look at the way they crowd it--currants between the tree rows, beans between the currant rows, a row of beans close on each side of the trees, an' rows of beans along the ends of the tree rows. Why, Silva wouldn't sell these five acres for five hundred an acre cash down. He gave grandfather fifty an acre for it on long time, an' here am I, workin' for the telephone company an' putting' in a telephone for old Silva's cousin from the Azores that can't speak American yet. Horse-beans along the road--say, when Silva swung that trick he made more outa fattenin' hogs with 'em

than grandfather made with all his farmin'. Grandfather stuck up his nose at horse-beans. He died with it stuck up, an' with more mortgages on the land he had left than you could shake a stick at. Plantin' tomatoes wrapped up in wrappin' paper--ever heard of that? Father snorted when he first seen the Porchugeeze doin' it. An' he went on snortin'. Just the same they got bumper crops, an' father's house-patch of tomatoes was eaten by the black beetles. We ain't got the sabe, or the knack, or something or other. Just look at this piece of ground--four crops a year, an' every inch of soil workin' over time. Why, back in town there, there's single acres that earns more than fifty of ours in the old days. The Porchugeeze is natural-born farmers, that's all, an' we don't know nothin' about farmin' an' never did."

Saxon talked with the lineman, following him about, till one o'clock, when he looked at his watch, said good bye, and returned to his task of putting in a telephone for the latest immigrant from the Azores.

When in town, Saxon carried her oilcloth-wrapped telescope in her hand; but it was so arranged with loops, that, once on the road, she could thrust her arms through the loops and carry it on her back. When she did this, the tiny ukulele case was shifted so that it hung under her left arm.

A mile on from the lineman, they stopped where a small creek, fringed with brush, crossed the county road. Billy was for the cold lunch, which was the last meal Saxon had prepared in the Pine street cottage; but

she was determined upon building a fire and boiling coffee. Not that she desired it for herself, but that she was impressed with the idea that everything at the starting of their strange wandering must be as comfortable as possible for Billy's sake. Bent on inspiring him with enthusiasm equal to her own, she declined to dampen what sparks he had caught by anything so uncheerful as a cold meal.

"Now one thing we want to get out of our heads right at the start, Billy, is that we're in a hurry. We're not in a hurry, and we don't care whether school keeps or not. We're out to have a good time, a regular adventure like you read about in books.--My! I wish that boy that took me fishing to Goat Island could see me now. Oakland was just a place to start from, he said. And, well, we've started, haven't we? And right here's where we stop and boil coffee. You get the fire going, Billy, and I'll get the water and the things ready to spread out."

"Say," Billy remarked, while they waited for the water to boil, "d'ye know what this reminds me of?"

Saxon was certain she did know, but she shook her head. She wanted to hear him say it.

"Why, the second Sunday I knew you, when we drove out to Moraga Valley behind Prince and King. You spread the lunch that day."

"Only it was a more scrumptious lunch," she added, with a happy smile.

"But I wonder why we didn't have coffee that day," he went on.

"Perhaps it would have been too much like housekeeping," she laughed;
"kind of what Mary would call indelicate--"

"Or raw," Billy interpolated. "She was always springin' that word."

"And yet look what became of her."

"That's the way with all of them," Billy growled somberly. "I've always noticed it's the fastidious, la-de-da ones that turn out the rottenest. They're like some horses I know, a-shyin' at the things they're the least afraid of."

Saxon was silent, oppressed by a sadness, vague and remote, which the mention of Bert's widow had served to bring on.

"I know something else that happened that day which you'd never guess," Billy reminisced. "I bet you couldn't."

"I wonder," Saxon murmured, and guessed it with her eyes.

Billy's eyes answered, and quite spontaneously he reached over, caught her hand, and pressed it caressingly to his cheek.

"It's little, but oh my," he said, addressing the imprisoned hand.

Then he gazed at Saxon, and she warmed with his words. "We're beginnin' courtin' all over again, ain't we?"

Both ate heartily, and Billy was guilty of three cups of coffee.

"Say, this country air gives some appetite," he mumbled, as he sank his teeth into his fifth bread-and-meat sandwich. "I could eat a horse, an' drown his head off in coffee afterward."

Saxon's mind had reverted to all the young lineman had told her, and she completed a sort of general resume of the information. "My!" she exclaimed, "but we've learned a lot!"

"An' we've sure learned one thing," Billy said. "An' that is that this is no place for us, with land a thousan' an acre an' only twenty dollars in our pockets."

"Oh, we're not going to stop here," she hastened to say.

"But just the same it's the Portuguese that gave it its price, and they make things go on it--send their children to school... and have them; and, as you said yourself, they're as fat as butterballs."

"An' I take my hat off to them," Billy responded.

"But all the same, I'd sooner have forty acres at a hundred an acre than four at a thousand an acre. Somehow, you know, I'd be scared stiff on four acres--scared of fallin' off, you know."

She was in full sympathy with him. In her heart of hearts the forty acres tugged much the harder. In her way, allowing for the difference of a generation, her desire for spaciousness was as strong as her Uncle Will's.

"Well, we're not going to stop here," she assured Billy. "We're going in, not for forty acres, but for a hundred and sixty acres free from the government."

"An' I guess the government owes it to us for what our fathers an' mothers done. I tell you, Saxon, when a woman walks across the plains like your mother done, an' a man an' wife gets massacred by the Indians like my grandfather an' mother done, the government does owe them something."

"Well, it's up to us to collect."

"An' we'll collect all right, all right, somewhere down in them redwood mountains south of Monterey."

CHAPTER II

It was a good afternoon's tramp to Niles, passing through the town of Haywards; yet Saxon and Billy found time to diverge from the main county road and take the parallel roads through acres of intense cultivation where the land was farmed to the wheel-tracks. Saxon looked with amazement at these small, brown-skinned immigrants who came to the soil with nothing and yet made the soil pay for itself to the tune of two hundred, of five hundred, and of a thousand dollars an acre.

On every hand was activity. Women and children were in the fields as well as men. The land was turned endlessly over and over. They seemed never to let it rest. And it rewarded them. It must reward them, or their children would not be able to go to school, nor would so many of them be able to drive by in rattletrap, second-hand buggies or in stout light wagons.

"Look at their faces," Saxon said. "They are happy and contented. They haven't faces like the people in our neighborhood after the strikes began."

"Oh, sure, they got a good thing," Billy agreed. "You can see it stickin' out all over them. But they needn't get chesty with ME, I can tell you that much--just because they've jiggerooed us out of our land an' everything."

"But they're not showing any signs of chestiness," Saxon demurred.

"No, they're not, come to think of it. All the same, they ain't so wise. I bet I could tell 'em a few about horses."

It was sunset when they entered the little town of Niles. Billy, who had been silent for the last half mile, hesitantly ventured a suggestion.

"Say... I could put up for a room in the hotel just as well as not. What d 'ye think?"

But Saxon shook her head emphatically.

"How long do you think our twenty dollars will last at that rate? Besides, the only way to begin is to begin at the beginning. We didn't plan sleeping in hotels."

"All right," he gave in. "I'm game. I was just thinkin' about you."

"Then you'd better think I'm game, too," she flashed forgivingly. "And now we'll have to see about getting things for supper."

They bought a round steak, potatoes, onions, and a dozen eating apples, then went out from the town to the fringe of trees and brush that advertised a creek. Beside the trees, on a sand bank, they pitched camp. Plenty of dry wood lay about, and Billy whistled genially while he

gathered and chopped. Saxon, keen to follow his every mood, was cheered by the atrocious discord on his lips. She smiled to herself as she spread the blankets, with the tarpaulin underneath, for a table, having first removed all twigs from the sand. She had much to learn in the matter of cooking over a camp-fire, and made fair progress, discovering, first of all, that control of the fire meant far more than the size of it. When the coffee was boiled, she settled the grounds with a part-cup of cold water and placed the pot on the edge of the coals where it would keep hot and yet not boil. She fried potato dollars and onions in the same pan, but separately, and set them on top of the coffee pot in the tin plate she was to eat from, covering it with Billy's inverted plate. On the dry hot pan, in the way that delighted Billy, she fried the steak. This completed, and while Billy poured the coffee, she served the steak, putting the dollars and onions back into the frying pan for a moment to make them piping hot again.

"What more d'ye want than this?" Billy challenged with deep-toned satisfaction, in the pause after his final cup of coffee, while he rolled a cigarette. He lay on his side, full length, resting on his elbow. The fire was burning brightly, and Saxon's color was heightened by the flickering flames. "Now our folks, when they was on the move, had to be afraid for Indians, and wild animals and all sorts of things; an' here we are, as safe as bugs in a rug. Take this sand. What better bed could you ask? Soft as feathers. Say--you look good to me, heap little squaw. I bet you don't look an inch over sixteen right now, Mrs. Babe-in-the-Woods."

"Don't I?" she glowed, with a flirt of the head sideward and a white flash of teeth. "If you weren't smoking a cigarette I'd ask you if your mother knew you're out, Mr. Babe-in-the-Sandbank."

"Say," he began, with transparently feigned seriousness. "I want to ask you something, if you don't mind. Now, of course, I don't want to hurt your feelin's or nothin', but just the same there's something important I'd like to know."

"Well, what is it?" she inquired, after a fruitless wait.

"Well, it's just this, Saxon. I like you like anything an' all that, but here's night come on, an' we're a thousand miles from anywhere, and--well, what I wanta know is: are we really an' truly married, you an' me?"

"Really and truly," she assured him. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing; but I'd kind a-forgotten, an' I was gettin' embarrassed, you know, because if we wasn't, seein' the way I was brought up, this'd be no place--"

"That will do you," she said severely. "And this is just the time and place for you to get in the firewood for morning while I wash up the dishes and put the kitchen in order."

He started to obey, but paused to throw his arm about her and draw her close. Neither spoke, but when he went his way Saxon's breast was fluttering and a song of thanksgiving breathed on her lips.

The night had come on, dim with the light of faint stars. But these had disappeared behind clouds that seemed to have arisen from nowhere. It was the beginning of California Indian summer. The air was warm, with just the first hint of evening chill, and there was no wind.

"I've a feeling as if we've just started to live," Saxon said, when Billy, his firewood collected, joined her on the blankets before the fire. "I've learned more to-day than ten years in Oakland." She drew a long breath and braced her shoulders. "Farming's a bigger subject than I thought."

Billy said nothing. With steady eyes he was staring into the fire, and she knew he was turning something over in his mind.

"What is it," she asked, when she saw he had reached a conclusion, at the same time resting her hand on the back of his.

"Just been framin' up that ranch of ourn," he answered. "It's all well enough, these dinky farmlets. They'll do for foreigners. But we Americans just gotta have room. I want to be able to look at a hilltop an' know it's my land, and know it's my land down the other side an' up

the next hilltop, an' know that over beyond that, down alongside some creek, my mares are most likely grazin', an' their little colts grazin' with 'em or kickin' up their heels. You know, there's money in raisin' horses--especially the big workhorses that run to eighteen hundred an' two thousand pounds. They're payin' for 'em, in the cities, every day in the year, seven an' eight hundred a pair, matched geldings, four years old. Good pasture an' plenty of it, in this kind of a climate, is all they need, along with some sort of shelter an' a little hay in long spells of bad weather. I never thought of it before, but let me tell you that this ranch proposition is beginnin' to look good to ME."

Saxon was all excitement. Here was new information on the cherished subject, and, best of all, Billy was the authority. Still better, he was taking an interest himself.

"There'll be room for that and for everything on a quarter section," she encouraged.

"Sure thing. Around the house we'll have vegetables an' fruit and chickens an' everything, just like the Porchugeeze, an' plenty of room beside to walk around an' range the horses."

"But won't the colts cost money, Billy?"

"Not much. The cobblestones eat horses up fast. That's where I'll get my brood mares, from the ones knocked out by the city. I know THAT end of

it. They sell 'em at auction, an' they're good for years an' years, only no good on the cobbles any more."

There ensued a long pause. In the dying fire both were busy visioning the farm to be.

"It's pretty still, ain't it?" Billy said, rousing himself at last.

He gazed about him. "An' black as a stack of black cats." He shivered, buttoned his coat, and tossed several sticks on the fire. "Just the same, it's the best kind of a climate in the world. Many's the time, when I was a little kid, I've heard my father brag about California's bein' a blanket climate. He went East, once, an' staid a summer an' a winter, an' got all he wanted. Never again for him."

"My mother said there never was such a land for climate. How wonderful it must have seemed to them after crossing the deserts and mountains. They called it the land of milk and honey. The ground was so rich that all they needed to do was scratch it, Cady used to say."

"And wild game everywhere," Billy contributed. "Mr. Roberts, the one that adopted my father, he drove cattle from the San Josquin to the Columbia river. He had forty men helpin' him, an' all they took along was powder an' salt. They lived off the game they shot."

"The hills were full of deer, and my mother saw whole herds of elk around Santa Rosa. Some time we'll go there, Billy. I've always wanted

to."

"And when my father was a young man, somewhere up north of Sacramento, in a creek called Cache Slough, the tules was full of grizzliest He used to go in an' shoot 'em. An' when they caught 'em in the open, he an' the Mexicans used to ride up an' rope them--catch them with lariats, you know. He said a horse that wasn't afraid of grizzlies fetched ten times as much as any other horse An' panthers!--all the old folks called 'em painters an' catamounts an' varmints. Yes, we'll go to Santa Rosa some time. Maybe we won't like that land down the coast, an' have to keep on hikin'."

By this time the fire had died down, and Saxon had finished brushing and braiding her hair. Their bed-going preliminaries were simple, and in a few minutes they were side by side under the blankets. Saxon closed her eyes, but could not sleep. On the contrary, she had never been more wide awake. She had never slept out of doors in her life, and by no exertion of will could she overcome the strangeness of it. In addition, she was stiffened from the long trudge, and the sand, to her surprise, was anything but soft. An hour passed. She tried to believe that Billy was asleep, but felt certain he was not. The sharp crackle of a dying ember startled her. She was confident that Billy had moved slightly.

"Billy," she whispered, "are you awake?"

"Yep," came his low answer, "--an' thinkin' this sand is harder'n a

cement floor. It's one on me, all right. But who'd a-thought it?"

Both shifted their postures slightly, but vain was the attempt to escape from the dull, aching contact of the sand.

An abrupt, metallic, whirring noise of some nearby cricket gave Saxon another startle. She endured the sound for some minutes, until Billy broke forth.

"Say, that gets my goat whatever it is."

"Do you think it's a rattlesnake?" she asked, maintaining a calmness she did not feel.

"Just what I've been thinkin'."

"I saw two, in the window of Bowman's Drug Store An' you know, Billy, they've got a hollow fang, and when they stick it into you the poison runs down the hollow."

"Br-r-r-r," Billy shivered, in fear that was not altogether mockery.

"Certain death, everybody says, unless you're a Bosco. Remember him?"

"He eats 'em alive! He eats 'em alive! Bosco! Bosco!" Saxon responded, mimicking the cry of a side-show barker. "Just the same, all Bosco's rattlers had the poison-sacs cut outa them. They must a-had. Gee! It's

funny I can't get asleep. I wish that damned thing'd close its trap. I wonder if it is a rattlesnake."

"No; it can't be," Saxon decided. "All the rattlesnakes are killed off long ago."

"Then where did Bosco get his?" Billy demanded with unimpeachable logic. "An' why don't you get to sleep?"

"Because it's all new, I guess," was her reply. "You see, I never camped out in my life."

"Neither did I. An' until now I always thought it was a lark." He changed his position on the maddening sand and sighed heavily. "But we'll get used to it in time, I guess. What other folks can do, we can, an' a mighty lot of 'em has camped out. It's all right. Here we are, free an' independent, no rent to pay, our own bosses--"

He stopped abruptly. From somewhere in the brush came an intermittent rustling. When they tried to locate it, it mysteriously ceased, and when the first hint of drowsiness stole upon them the rustling as mysteriously recommenced.

"It sounds like something creeping up on us," Saxon suggested, snuggling closer to Billy.

"Well, it ain't a wild Indian, at all events," was the best he could offer in the way of comfort. He yawned deliberately. "Aw, shucks! What's there to be scared of? Think of what all the pioneers went through."

Several minutes later his shoulders began to shake, and Saxon knew he was giggling.

"I was just thinkin' of a yarn my father used to tell about," he explained. "It was about old Susan Kleghorn, one of the Oregon pioneer women. Wall-Eyed Susan, they used to call her; but she could shoot to beat the band. Once, on the Plains, the wagon train she was in, was attacked by Indians. They got all the wagons in a circle, an' all hands an' the oxen inside, an' drove the Indians off, killin' a lot of 'em. They was too strong that way, so what'd the Indians do, to draw 'em out into the open, but take two white girls, captured from some other train, an' begin to torture 'em. They done it just out of gunshot, but so everybody could see. The idea was that the white men couldn't stand it, an' would rush out, an' then the Indians'd have 'em where they wanted 'em.

"The white men couldn't do a thing. If they rushed out to save the girls, they'd be finished, an' then the Indians'd rush the train. It meant death to everybody. But what does old Susan do, but get out an old, long-barreled Kentucky rifle. She rams down about three times the regular load of powder, takes aim at a big buck that's pretty busy at the torturin', an' bangs away. It knocked her clean over backward, an'

her shoulder was lame all the rest of the way to Oregon, but she dropped the big Indian deado. He never knew what struck 'm.

"But that wasn't the yarn I wanted to tell. It seems old Susan liked John Barleycorn. She'd souse herself to the ears every chance she got. An' her sons an' daughters an' the old man had to be mighty careful not to leave any around where she could get hands on it."

"On what?" asked Saxon.

"On John Barleycorn.--Oh, you ain't on to that. It's the old fashioned name for whisky. Well, one day all the folks was goin' away--that was over somewhere at a place called Bodega, where they'd settled after comin' down from Oregon. An' old Susan claimed her rheumatics was hurtin' her an' so she couldn't go. But the family was on. There was a two-gallon demijohn of whisky in the house. They said all right, but before they left they sent one of the grandsons to climb a big tree in the barnyard, where he tied the demijohn sixty feet from the ground. Just the same, when they come home that night they found Susan on the kitchen floor dead to the world."

"And she'd climbed the tree after all," Saxon hazarded, when Billy had shown no inclination of going on.

"Not on your life," he laughed jubilantly. "All she'd done was to put a washtub on the ground square under the demijohn. Then she got out her

old rifle an' shot the demijohn to smithereens, an' all she had to do was lap the whisky outa the tub."

Again Saxon was drowsing, when the rustling sound was heard, this time closer. To her excited apprehension there was something stealthy about it, and she imagined a beast of prey creeping upon them. "Billy," she whispered.

"Yes, I'm a-listenin' to it," came his wide awake answer.

"Mightn't that be a panther, or maybe... a wildcat?"

"It can't be. All the varmints was killed off long ago. This is peaceable farmin' country."

A vagrant breeze sighed through the trees and made Saxon shiver. The mysterious cricket-noise ceased with suspicious abruptness. Then, from the rustling noise, ensued a dull but heavy thump that caused both Saxon and Billy to sit up in the blankets. There were no further sounds, and they lay down again, though the very silence now seemed ominous.

"Huh," Billy muttered with relief. "As though I don't know what it was. It was a rabbit. I've heard tame ones bang their hind feet down on the floor that way."

In vain Saxon tried to win sleep. The sand grew harder with the passage

of time. Her flesh and her bones ached from contact with it. And, though her reason flouted any possibility of wild dangers, her fancy went on picturing them with unflagging zeal.

A new sound commenced. It was neither a rustling nor a rattling, and it tokened some large body passing through the brush. Sometimes twigs crackled and broke, and, once, they heard bush-branches press aside and spring back into place.

"If that other thing was a panther, this is an elephant," was Billy's uncheering opinion. "It's got weight. Listen to that. An' it's comin' nearer."

There were frequent stoppages, then the sounds would begin again, always louder, always closer. Billy sat up in the blankets once more, passing one arm around Saxon, who had also sat up.

"I ain't slept a wink," he complained. "--There it goes again. I wish I could see."

"It makes a noise big enough for a grizzly," Saxon chattered, partly from nervousness, partly from the chill of the night.

"It ain't no grasshopper, that's sure."

Billy started to leave the blankets, but Saxon caught his arm.

"What are you going to do?"

"Oh, I ain't scairt none," he answered. "But, honest to God, this is gettin' on my nerves. If I don't find what that thing is, it'll give me the willies. I'm just goin' to reconnoiter. I won't go close."

So intensely dark was the night, that the moment Billy crawled beyond the reach of her hand he was lost to sight. She sat and waited. The sound had ceased, though she could follow Billy's progress by the cracking of dry twigs and limbs. After a few moments he returned and crawled under the blankets.

"I scared it away, I guess. It's got better ears, an' when it heard me comin' it skinned out most likely. I did my dangdest, too, not to make a sound.--O Lord, there it goes again."

They sat up. Saxon nudged Billy.

"There," she warned, in the faintest of whispers. "I can hear it breathing. It almost made a snort."

A dead branch cracked loudly, and so near at hand, that both of them jumped shamelessly.

"I ain't goin' to stand any more of its foolin'," Billy declared

wrathfully. "It'll be on top of us if I don't."

"What are you going to do?" she queried anxiously.

"Yell the top of my head off. I'll get a fall outa whatever it is."

He drew a deep breath and emitted a wild yell.

The result far exceeded any expectation he could have entertained, and Saxon's heart leaped up in sheer panic. On the instant the darkness erupted into terrible sound and movement. There were trashings of underbrush and lunges and plunges of heavy bodies in different directions. Fortunately for their ease of mind, all these sounds receded and died away.

"An' what d'ye think of that?" Billy broke the silence.

"Gee! all the fight fans used to say I was scairt of nothin'. Just the same I'm glad they ain't seein' me to-night."

He groaned. "I've got all I want of that blamed sand. I'm goin' to get up and start the fire."

This was easy. Under the ashes were live embers which quickly ignited the wood he threw on. A few stars were peeping out in the misty zenith. He looked up at them, deliberated, and started to move away.

"Where are you going now?" Saxon called.

"Oh, I've got an idea," he replied noncommittally, and walked boldly away beyond the circle of the firelight.

Saxon sat with the blankets drawn closely under her chin, and admired his courage. He had not even taken the hatchet, and he was going in the direction in which the disturbance had died away.

Ten minutes later he came back chuckling.

"The sons-of-guns, they got my goat all right. I'll be scairt of my own shadow next.--What was they? Huh! You couldn't guess in a thousand years. A bunch of half-grown calves, an' they was worse scairt than us."

He smoked a cigarette by the fire, then rejoined Saxon under the blankets.

"A hell of a farmer I'll make," he chafed, "when a lot of little calves can scare the stuffin' outa me. I bet your father or mine wouldn't a-batted an eye. The stock has gone to seed, that's what it has."

"No, it hasn't," Saxon defended. "The stock is all right. We're just as able as our folks ever were, and we're healthier on top of it. We've been brought up different, that's all. We've lived in cities all our

lives. We know the city sounds and thugs, but we don't know the country ones. Our training has been unnatural, that's the whole thing in a nutshell. Now we're going in for natural training. Give us a little time, and we'll sleep as sound out of doors as ever your father or mine did."

"But not on sand," Billy groaned.

"We won't try. That's one thing, for good and all, we've learned the very first time. And now hush up and go to sleep."

Their fears had vanished, but the sand, receiving now their undivided attention, multiplied its unyieldingness. Billy dozed off first, and roosters were crowing somewhere in the distance when Saxon's eyes closed. But they could not escape the sand, and their sleep was fitful.

At the first gray of dawn, Billy crawled out and built a roaring fire. Saxon drew up to it shiveringly. They were hollow-eyed and weary. Saxon began to laugh. Billy joined sulkily, then brightened up as his eyes chanced upon the coffee pot, which he immediately put on to boil.

CHAPTER III

It is forty miles from Oakland to San Jose, and Saxon and Billy accomplished it in three easy days. No more obliging and angrily garrulous linemen were encountered, and few were the opportunities for conversation with chance wayfarers. Numbers of tramps, carrying rolls of blankets, were met, traveling both north and south on the county road; and from talks with them Saxon quickly learned that they knew little or nothing about farming. They were mostly old men, feeble or besotted, and all they knew was work--where jobs might be good, where jobs had been good; but the places they mentioned were always a long way off. One thing she did glean from them, and that was that the district she and Billy were passing through was "small-farmer" country in which labor was rarely hired, and that when it was it generally was Portuguese.

The farmers themselves were unfriendly. They drove by Billy and Saxon, often with empty wagons, but never invited them to ride. When chance offered and Saxon did ask questions, they looked her over curiously, or suspiciously, and gave ambiguous and facetious answers.

"They ain't Americans, damn them," Billy fretted. "Why, in the old days everybody was friendly to everybody."

But Saxon remembered her last talk with her brother.

"It's the spirit of the times, Billy. The spirit has changed. Besides,

these people are too near. Wait till we get farther away from the cities, then we'll find them more friendly."

"A measly lot these ones are," he sneered.

"Maybe they've a right to be," she laughed. "For all you know, more than one of the scabs you've slugged were sons of theirs."

"If I could only hope so," Billy said fervently. "But I don't care if I owned ten thousand acres, any man hikin' with his blankets might be just as good a man as me, an' maybe better, for all I'd know. I'd give 'm the benefit of the doubt, anyway."

Billy asked for work, at first, indiscriminately, later, only at the larger farms. The unvarying reply was that there was no work. A few said there would be plowing after the first rains. Here and there, in a small way, dry plowing was going on. But in the main the farmers were waiting.

"But do you know how to plow?" Saxon asked Billy.

"No; but I guess it ain't much of a trick to turn. Besides, next man I see plowing I'm goin' to get a lesson from."

In the mid-afternoon of the second day his opportunity came. He climbed on top of the fence of a small field and watched an old man plow round and round it.

"Aw, shucks, just as easy as easy," Billy commented scornfully. "If an old codger like that can handle one plow, I can handle two."

"Go on and try it," Saxon urged.

"What's the good?"

"Cold feet," she jeered, but with a smiling face. "All you have to do is ask him. All he can do is say no. And what if he does? You faced the Chicago Terror twenty rounds without flinching."

"Aw, but it's different," he demurred, then dropped to the ground inside the fence. "Two to one the old geezer turns me down."

"No, he won't. Just tell him you want to learn, and ask him if he'll let you drive around a few times. Tell him it won't cost him anything."

"Huh! If he gets chesty I'll take his blamed plow away from him."

From the top of the fence, but too far away to hear, Saxon watched the colloquy. After several minutes, the lines were transferred to Billy's neck, the handles to his hands. Then the team started, and the old man, delivering a rapid fire of instructions, walked alongside of Billy. When a few turns had been made, the farmer crossed the plowed strip to Saxon, and joined her on the rail.

"He's plowed before, a little mite, ain't he?"

Saxon shook her head.

"Never in his life. But he knows how to drive horses."

"He showed he wasn't all greenhorn, an' he learns pretty quick." Here the farmer chuckled and cut himself a chew from a plug of tobacco. "I reckon he won't tire me out a-settin' here."

The unplowed area grew smaller and smaller, but Billy evinced no intention of quitting, and his audience on the fence was deep in conversation. Saxon's questions flew fast and furious, and she was not long in concluding that the old man bore a striking resemblance to the description the lineman had given of his father.

Billy persisted till the field was finished, and the old man invited him and Saxon to stop for the night. There was a disused outbuilding where they would find a small cook stove, he said, and also he would give them fresh milk. Further, if Saxon wanted to test HER desire for farming, she could try her hand on the cow.

The milking lesson did not prove as successful as Billy's plowing; but when he had mocked sufficiently, Saxon challenged him to try, and he failed as grievously as she. Saxon had eyes and questions for

everything, and it did not take her long to realize that she was looking upon the other side of the farming shield. Farm and farmer were old-fashioned. There was no intensive cultivation. There was too much land too little farmed. Everything was slipshod. House and barn and outbuildings were fast falling into ruin. The front yard was weed-grown. There was no vegetable garden. The small orchard was old, sickly, and neglected. The trees were twisted, spindling, and overgrown with a gray moss. The sons and daughters were away in the cities, Saxon found out. One daughter had married a doctor, the other was a teacher in the state normal school; one son was a locomotive engineer, the second was an architect, and the third was a police court reporter in San Francisco. On occasion, the father said, they helped out the old folks.

"What do you think?" Saxon asked Billy as he smoked his after-supper cigarette.

His shoulders went up in a comprehensive shrug.

"Huh! That's easy. The old geezer's like his orchard--covered with moss. It's plain as the nose on your face, after San Leandro, that he don't know the first thing. An' them horses. It'd be a charity to him, an' a savin' of money for him, to take 'em out an' shoot 'em both. You bet you don't see the Porchugeeze with horses like them. An' it ain't a case of bein' proud, or puttin' on side, to have good horses. It's brass tacks an' business. It pays. That's the game. Old horses eat more in young ones to keep in condition an' they can't do the same amount of work. But

you bet it costs just as much to shoe them. An' his is scrub on top of it. Every minute he has them horses he's losin' money. You oughta see the way they work an' figure horses in the city."

They slept soundly, and, after an early breakfast, prepared to start.

"I'd like to give you a couple of days' work," the old man regretted, at parting, "but I can't see it. The ranch just about keeps me and the old woman, now that the children are gone. An' then it don't always. Seems times have been bad for a long spell now. Ain't never been the same since Grover Cleveland."

Early in the afternoon, on the outskirts of San Jose, Saxon called a halt.

"I'm going right in there and talk," she declared, "unless they set the dogs on me. That's the prettiest place yet, isn't it?"

Billy, who was always visioning hills and spacious ranges for his horses, mumbled unenthusiastic assent.

"And the vegetables! Look at them! And the flowers growing along the borders! That beats tomato plants in wrapping paper."

"Don't see the sense of it," Billy objected. "Where's the money come in from flowers that take up the ground that good vegetables might be

growin' on?"

"And that's what I'm going to find out." She pointed to a woman, stooped to the ground and working with a trowel; in front of the tiny bungalow.

"I don't know what she's like, but at the worst she can only be mean.

See! She's looking at us now. Drop your load alongside of mine, and come on in."

Billy slung the blankets from his shoulder to the ground, but elected to wait. As Saxon went up the narrow, flower-bordered walk, she noted two men at work among the vegetables--one an old Chinese, the other old and of some dark-eyed foreign breed. Here were neatness, efficiency, and intensive cultivation with a vengeance--even her untrained eye could see that. The woman stood up and turned from her flowers, and Saxon saw that she was middle-aged, slender, and simply but nicely dressed. She wore glasses, and Saxon's reading of her face was that it was kind but nervous looking.

"I don't want anything to-day," she said, before Saxon could speak, administering the rebuff with a pleasant smile.

Saxon groaned inwardly over the black-covered telescope basket.

Evidently the woman had seen her put it down.

"We're not peddling," she explained quickly.

"Oh, I am sorry for the mistake."

This time the woman's smile was even pleasanter, and she waited for Saxon to state her errand.

Nothing loath, Saxon took it at a plunge.

"We're looking for land. We want to be farmers, you know, and before we get the land we want to find out what kind of land we want. And seeing your pretty place has just filled me up with questions. You see, we don't know anything about farming. We've lived in the city all our life, and now we've given it up and are going to live in the country and be happy."

She paused. The woman's face seemed to grow quizzical, though the pleasantness did not abate.

"But how do you know you will be happy in the country?" she asked.

"I don't know. All I do know is that poor people can't be happy in the city where they have labor troubles all the time. If they can't be happy in the country, then there's no happiness anywhere, and that doesn't seem fair, does it?"

"It is sound reasoning, my dear, as far as it goes. But you must remember that there are many poor people in the country and many unhappy

people."

"You look neither poor nor unhappy," Saxon challenged.

"You ARE a dear."

Saxon saw the pleased flush in the other's face, which lingered as she went on.

"But still, I may be peculiarly qualified to live and succeed in the country. As you say yourself, you've spent your life in the city. You don't know the first thing about the country. It might even break your heart."

Saxon's mind went back to the terrible months in the Pine street cottage.

"I know already that the city will break my heart. Maybe the country will, too, but just the same it's my only chance, don't you see. It's that or nothing. Besides, our folks before us were all of the country. It seems the more natural way. And better, here I am, which proves that 'way down inside I must want the country, must, as you call it, be peculiarly qualified for the country, or else I wouldn't be here."

The other nodded approval, and looked at her with growing interest.

"That young man--" she began.

"Is my husband. He was a teamster until the big strike came. My name is Roberts, Saxon Roberts, and my husband is William Roberts."

"And I am Mrs. Mortimer," the other said, with a bow of acknowledgment.

"I am a widow. And now, if you will ask your husband in, I shall try to answer some of your many questions. Tell him to put the bundles inside the gate.. .. And now what are all the questions you are filled with?"

"Oh, all kinds. How does it pay? How did you manage it all? How much did the land cost? Did you build that beautiful house? How much do you pay the men? How did you learn all the different kinds of things, and which grew best and which paid best? What is the best way to sell them? How do you sell them?" Saxon paused and laughed. "Oh, I haven't begun yet. Why do you have flowers on the borders everywhere? I looked over the Portuguese farms around San Leandro, but they never mixed flowers and vegetables."

Mrs. Mortimer held up her hand. "Let me answer the last first. It is the key to almost everything."

But Billy arrived, and the explanation was deferred until after his introduction.

"The flowers caught your eyes, didn't they, my dear?" Mrs. Mortimer

resumed. "And brought you in through my gate and right up to me. And that's the very reason they were planted with the vegetables--to catch eyes. You can't imagine how many eyes they have caught, nor how many owners of eyes they have lured inside my gate. This is a good road, and is a very popular short country drive for townsfolk. Oh, no; I've never had any luck with automobiles. They can't see anything for dust. But I began when nearly everybody still used carriages. The townswomen would drive by. My flowers, and then my place, would catch their eyes. They would tell their drivers to stop. And--well, somehow, I managed to be in the front within speaking distance. Usually I succeeded in inviting them in to see my flowers... and vegetables, of course. Everything was sweet, clean, pretty. It all appealed. And--" Mrs. Mortimer shrugged her shoulders. "It is well known that the stomach sees through the eyes. The thought of vegetables growing among flowers pleased their fancy. They wanted my vegetables. They must have them. And they did, at double the market price, which they were only too glad to pay. You see, I became the fashion, or a fad, in a small way. Nobody lost. The vegetables were certainly good, as good as any on the market and often fresher. And, besides, my customers killed two birds with one stone; for they were pleased with themselves for philanthropic reasons. Not only did they obtain the finest and freshest possible vegetables, but at the same time they were happy with the knowledge that they were helping a deserving widow-woman. Yes, and it gave a certain tone to their establishments to be able to say they bought Mrs. Mortimer's vegetables. But that's too big a side to go into. In short, my little place became a show place--anywhere to go, for a drive or anything, you know, when time has

to be killed. And it became noised about who I was, and who my husband had been, what I had been. Some of the townsladies I had known personally in the old days. They actually worked for my success. And then, too, I used to serve tea. My patrons became my guests for the time being. I still serve it, when they drive out to show me off to their friends. So you see, the flowers are one of the ways I succeeded."

Saxon was glowing with appreciation, but Mrs. Mortimer, glancing at Billy, noted not entire approval. His blue eyes were clouded.

"Well, out with it," she encouraged. "What are you thinking?"

To Saxon's surprise, he answered directly, and to her double surprise, his criticism was of a nature which had never entered her head.

"It's just a trick," Billy expounded. "That's what I was gettin' at--"

"But a paying trick," Mrs. Mortimer interrupted, her eyes dancing and vivacious behind the glasses.

"Yes, and no," Billy said stubbornly, speaking in his slow, deliberate fashion. "If every farmer was to mix flowers an' vegetables, then every farmer would get double the market price, an' then there wouldn't be any double market price. Everything'd be as it was before."

"You are opposing a theory to a fact," Mrs. Mortimer stated. "The fact

is that all the farmers do not do it. The fact is that I do receive double the price. You can't get away from that."

Billy was unconvinced, though unable to reply.

"Just the same," he muttered, with a slow shake of the head, "I don't get the hang of it. There's something wrong so far as we're concerned--my wife an' me, I mean. Maybe I'll get hold of it after a while."

"And in the meantime, we'll look around," Mrs. Mortimer invited. "I want to show you everything, and tell you how I make it go. Afterward, we'll sit down, and I'll tell you about the beginning. You see--" she bent her gaze on Saxon--"I want you thoroughly to understand that you can succeed in the country if you go about it right. I didn't know a thing about it when I began, and I didn't have a fine big man like yours. I was all alone. But I'll tell you about that."

For the next hour, among vegetables, berry-bushes and fruit trees, Saxon stored her brain with a huge mass of information to be digested at her leisure. Billy, too, was interested, but he left the talking to Saxon, himself rarely asking a question. At the rear of the bungalow, where everything was as clean and orderly as the front, they were shown through the chicken yard. Here, in different runs, were kept several hundred small and snow-white hens.

"White Leghorns," said Mrs. Mortimer. "You have no idea what they netted me this year. I never keep a hen a moment past the prime of her laying period--"

"Just what I was tellin' you, Saxon, about horses," Billy broke in.

"And by the simplest method of hatching them at the right time, which not one farmer in ten thousand ever dreams of doing, I have them laying in the winter when most hens stop laying and when eggs are highest. Another thing: I have my special customers. They pay me ten cents a dozen more than the market price, because my specialty is one-day eggs."

Here she chanced to glance at Billy, and guessed that he was still wrestling with his problem.

"Same old thing?" she queried.

He nodded. "Same old thing. If every farmer delivered day-old eggs, there wouldn't be no ten cents higher 'n the top price. They'd be no better off than they was before."

"But the eggs would be one-day eggs, all the eggs would be one-day eggs, you mustn't forget that," Mrs. Mortimer pointed out.

"But that don't butter no toast for my wife an' me," he objected. "An'

that's what I've been tryin' to get the hang of, an' now I got it. You talk about theory an' fact. Ten cents higher than top price is a theory to Saxon an' me. The fact is, we ain't got no eggs, no chickens, an' no land for the chickens to run an' lay eggs on."

Their hostess nodded sympathetically.

"An' there's something else about this outfit of yours that I don't get the hang of," he pursued. "I can't just put my finger on it, but it's there all right."

They were shown over the cattery, the piggery, the milkers, and the kennelry, as Mrs. Mortimer called her live stock departments. None was large. All were moneymakers, she assured them, and rattled off her profits glibly. She took their breaths away by the prices given and received for pedigreed Persians, pedigreed Ohio Improved Chesters, pedigreed Scotch collies, and pedigreed Jerseys. For the milk of the last she also had a special private market, receiving five cents more a quart than was fetched by the best dairy milk. Billy was quick to point out the difference between the look of her orchard and the look of the orchard they had inspected the previous afternoon, and Mrs. Mortimer showed him scores of other differences, many of which he was compelled to accept on faith.

Then she told them of another industry, her home-made jams and jellies, always contracted for in advance, and at prices dizzyingly beyond the

regular market. They sat in comfortable rattan chairs on the veranda, while she told the story of how she had drummed up the jam and jelly trade, dealing only with the one best restaurant and one best club in San Jose. To the proprietor and the steward she had gone with her samples, in long discussions beaten down their opposition, overcome their reluctance, and persuaded the proprietor, in particular, to make a "special" of her wares, to boom them quietly with his patrons, and, above all, to charge stiffly for dishes and courses in which they appeared.

Throughout the recital Billy's eyes were moody with dissatisfaction. Mrs. Mortimer saw, and waited.

"And now, begin at the beginning," Saxon begged.

But Mrs. Mortimer refused unless they agreed to stop for supper. Saxon frowned Billy's reluctance away, and accepted for both of them.

"Well, then," Mrs. Mortimer took up her tale, "in the beginning I was a greenhorn, city born and bred. All I knew of the country was that it was a place to go to for vacations, and I always went to springs and mountain and seaside resorts. I had lived among books almost all my life. I was head librarian of the Doncaster Library for years. Then I married Mr. Mortimer. He was a book man, a professor in San Miguel University. He had a long sickness, and when he died there was nothing left. Even his life insurance was eaten into before I could be free

of creditors. As for myself, I was worn out, on the verge of nervous prostration, fit for nothing. I had five thousand dollars left, however, and, without going into the details, I decided to go farming. I found this place, in a delightful climate, close to San Jose--the end of the electric line is only a quarter of a mile on--and I bought it. I paid two thousand cash, and gave a mortgage for two thousand. It cost two hundred an acre, you see."

"Twenty acres!" Saxon cried.

"Wasn't that pretty small?" Billy ventured.

"Too large, oceans too large. I leased ten acres of it the first thing. And it's still leased after all this time. Even the ten I'd retained was much too large for a long, long time. It's only now that I'm beginning to feel a tiny mite crowded."

"And ten acres has supported you an' two hired men?" Billy demanded, amazed.

Mrs. Mortimer clapped her hands delightedly.

"Listen. I had been a librarian. I knew my way among books. First of all I'd read everything written on the subject, and subscribed to some of the best farm magazines and papers. And you ask if my ten acres have supported me and two hired men. Let me tell you. I have four hired men.

The ten acres certainly must support them, as it supports Hannah--she's a Swedish widow who runs the house and who is a perfect Trojan during the jam and jelly season--and Hannah's daughter, who goes to school and lends a hand, and my nephew whom I have taken to raise and educate. Also, the ten acres have come pretty close to paying for the whole twenty, as well as for this house, and all the outbuildings, and all the pedigreed stock."

Saxon remembered what the young lineman had said about the Portuguese.

"The ten acres didn't do a bit of it," she cried. "It was your head that did it all, and you know it."

"And that's the point, my dear. It shows the right kind of person can succeed in the country. Remember, the soil is generous. But it must be treated generously, and that is something the old style American farmer can't get into his head. So it IS head that counts. Even when his starving acres have convinced him of the need for fertilizing, he can't see the difference between cheap fertilizer and good fertilizer."

"And that's something I want to know about," Saxon exclaimed. "And I'll tell you all I know, but, first, you must be very tired. I noticed you were limping. Let me take you in--never mind your bundles; I'll send Chang for them."

To Saxon, with her innate love of beauty and charm in all personal

things, the interior of the bungalow was a revelation. Never before had she been inside a middle class home, and what she saw not only far exceeded anything she had imagined, but was vastly different from her imaginings. Mrs. Mortimer noted her sparkling glances which took in everything, and went out of her way to show Saxon around, doing it under the guise of gleeful boastings, stating the costs of the different materials, explaining how she had done things with her own hands, such as staining the doors, weathering the bookcases, and putting together the big Mission Morris chair. Billy stepped gingerly behind, and though it never entered his mind to ape to the manner born, he succeeded in escaping conspicuous awkwardness, even at the table where he and Saxon had the unique experience of being waited on in a private house by a servant.

"If you'd only come along next year," Mrs. Mortimer mourned; "then I should have had the spare room I had planned--"

"That's all right," Billy spoke up; "thank you just the same. But we'll catch the electric cars into San Jose an' get a room."

Mrs. Mortimer was still disturbed at her inability to put them up for the night, and Saxon changed the conversation by pleading to be told more.

"You remember, I told you I'd paid only two thousand down on the land," Mrs. Mortimer complied. "That left me three thousand to experiment with.

Of course, all my friends and relatives prophesied failure. And, of course, I made my mistakes, plenty of them, but I was saved from still more by the thorough study I had made and continued to make." She indicated shelves of farm books and files of farm magazines that lined the walls. "And I continued to study. I was resolved to be up to date, and I sent for all the experiment station reports. I went almost entirely on the basis that whatever the old type farmer did was wrong, and, do you know, in doing that I was not so far wrong myself. It's almost unthinkable, the stupidity of the old-fashioned farmers. Oh, I consulted with them, talked things over with them, challenged their stereotyped ways, demanded demonstration of their dogmatic and prejudiced beliefs, and quite succeeded in convincing the last of them that I was a fool and doomed to come to grief."

"But you didn't! You didn't!"

Mrs. Mortimer smiled gratefully.

"Sometimes, even now, I'm amazed that I didn't. But I came of a hard-headed stock which had been away from the soil long enough to gain a new perspective. When a thing satisfied my judgment, I did it forthwith and downright, no matter how extravagant it seemed. Take the old orchard. Worthless! Worse than worthless! Old Calkins nearly died of heart disease when he saw the devastation I had wreaked upon it. And look at it now. There was an old rattletrap ruin where the bungalow now stands. I put up with it, but I immediately pulled down the cow barn,

the pigsties, the chicken houses, everything--made a clean sweep. They shook their heads and groaned when they saw such wanton waste by a widow struggling to make a living. But worse was to come. They were paralyzed when I told them the price of the three beautiful O.I.C.'s--pigs, you know, Chesters--which I bought, sixty dollars for the three, and only just weaned. Then I hustled the nondescript chickens to market, replacing them with the White Leghorns. The two scrub cows that came with the place I sold to the butcher for thirty dollars each, paying two hundred and fifty for two blue-blooded Jersey heifers... and coined money on the exchange, while Calkins and the rest went right on with their scrubs that couldn't give enough milk to pay for their board."

Billy nodded approval.

"Remember what I told you about horses," he reiterated to Saxon; and, assisted by his hostess, he gave a very creditable disquisition on horseflesh and its management from a business point of view.

When he went out to smoke Mrs. Mortimer led Saxon into talking about herself and Billy, and betrayed not the slightest shock when she learned of his prizefighting and scab-slugging proclivities.

"He's a splendid young man, and good," she assured Saxon. "His face shows that. And, best of all, he loves you and is proud of you. You can't imagine how I have enjoyed watching the way he looks at you, especially when you are talking. He respects your judgment. Why, he

must, for here he is with you on this pilgrimage which is wholly your idea." Mrs. Mortimer sighed. "You are very fortunate, dear child, very fortunate. And you don't yet know what a man's brain is. Wait till he is quite fired with enthusiasm for your project. You will be astounded by the way he takes hold. You will have to exert yourself to keep up with him. In the meantime, you must lead. Remember, he is city bred. It will be a struggle to wean him from the only life he's known."

"Oh, but he's disgusted with the city, too--" Saxon began.

"But not as you are. Love is not the whole of man, as it is of woman. The city hurt you more than it hurt him. It was you who lost the dear little babe. His interest, his connection, was no more than casual and incidental compared with the depth and vividness of yours."

Mrs. Mortimer turned her head to Billy, who was just entering.

"Have you got the hang of what was bothering you?" she asked.

"Pretty close to it," he answered, taking the indicated big Morris chair. "It's this--"

"One moment," Mrs. Mortimer checked him. "That is a beautiful, big, strong chair, and so are you, at any rate big and strong, and your little wife is very weary--no, no; sit down, it's your strength she needs. Yes, I insist. Open your arms."

And to him she led Saxon, and into his arms placed her. "Now, sir--and you look delicious, the pair of you--register your objections to my way of earning a living."

"It ain't your way," Billy repudiated quickly. "Your way's all right. It's great. What I'm trying to get at is that your way don't fit us. We couldn't make a go of it your way. Why you had pull--well-to-do acquaintances, people that knew you'd been a librarian an' your husband a professor. An' you had...." Here he floundered a moment, seeking definiteness for the idea he still vaguely grasped. "Well, you had a way we couldn't have. You were educated, an'... an'--I don't know, I guess you knew society ways an' business ways we couldn't know."

"But, my dear boy, you could learn what was necessary," she contended.

Billy shook his head.

"No. You don't quite get me. Let's take it this way. Just suppose it's me, with jam an' jelly, a-wadin' into that swell restaurant like you did to talk with the top guy. Why, I'd be outa place the moment I stepped into his office. Worse'n that, I'd feel outa place. That'd make me have a chip on my shoulder an' lookin' for trouble, which is a poor way to do business. Then, too, I'd be thinkin' he was thinkin' I was a whole lot of a husky to be peddlin' jam. What'd happen, I'd be chesty at the drop of the hat. I'd be thinkin' he was thinkin' I was standin' on my foot,

an' I'd beat him to it in tellin' him he was standin' on HIS foot. Don't you see? It's because I was raised that way. It'd be take it or leave it with me, an' no jam sold."

"What you say is true," Mrs. Mortimer took up brightly. "But there is your wife. Just look at her. She'd make an impression on any business man. He'd be only too willing to listen to her."

Billy stiffened, a forbidding expression springing into his eyes.

"What have I done now?" their hostess laughed.

"I ain't got around yet to tradin' on my wife's looks," he rumbled gruffly.

"Right you are. The only trouble is that you, both of you, are fifty years behind the times. You're old American. How you ever got here in the thick of modern conditions is a miracle. You're Rip Van Winkles. Who ever heard, in these degenerate times, of a young man and woman of the city putting their blankets on their backs and starting out in search of land? Why, it's the old Argonaut spirit. You're as like as peas in a pod to those who yoked their oxen and held west to the lands beyond the sunset. I'll wager your fathers and mothers, or grandfathers and grandmothers, were that very stock."

Saxon's eyes were glistening, and Billy's were friendly once more. Both

nodded their heads.

"I'm of the old stock myself," Mrs. Mortimer went on proudly.

"My grandmother was one of the survivors of the Donner Party. My grandfather, Jason Whitney, came around the Horn and took part in the raising of the Bear Flag at Sonoma. He was at Monterey when John Marshall discovered gold in Sutter's mill-race. One of the streets in San Francisco is named after him."

"I know it," Billy put in. "Whitney Street. It's near Russian Hill. Saxon's mother walked across the Plains."

"And Billy's grandfather and grandmother were massacred by the Indians," Saxon contributed. "His father was a little baby boy, and lived with the Indians, until captured by the whites. He didn't even know his name and was adopted by a Mr. Roberts."

"Why, you two dear children, we're almost like relatives," Mrs. Mortimer beamed. "It's a breath of old times, alas! all forgotten in these fly-away days. I am especially interested, because I've catalogued and read everything covering those times. You--" she indicated Billy, "you are historical, or at least your father is. I remember about him. The whole thing is in Bancroft's History. It was the Modoc Indians. There were eighteen wagons. Your father was the only survivor, a mere baby at the time, with no knowledge of what happened. He was adopted by the leader of the whites."

"That's right," said Billy. "It was the Modocs. His train must have been bound for Oregon. It was all wiped out. I wonder if you know anything about Saxon's mother. She used to write poetry in the early days."

"Was any of it printed?"

"Yes," Saxon answered. "In the old San Jose papers."

"And do you know any of it?"

"Yes, there's one beginning:

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

"It sounds familiar," Mrs. Mortimer said, pondering.

"And there was another I remember that began:

"I've stolen away from the crowd in the groves,
Where the nude statues
stand, and the leaves point and shiver,'--

"And it run on like that. I don't understand it all. It was written to my father--"

"A love poem!" Mrs. Mortimer broke in. "I remember it. Wait a minute....
Da-da-dah, da-da-dah, da-da-dah, da-da--STANDS--

"In the spray of a fountain, whose seed-amethysts Tremble lightly
a moment on bosom and hands, Then drip in their basin from bosom and
wrists.'

"I've never forgotten the drip of the seed-amethysts, though I don't
remember your mother's name."

"It was Daisy--" Saxon began.

"No; Dayelle," Mrs. Mortimer corrected with quickening recollection.

"Oh, but nobody called her that."

"But she signed it that way. What is the rest?"

"Daisy Wiley Brown."

Mrs. Mortimer went to the bookshelves and quickly returned with a large,
soberly-bound volume.

"It's 'The Story of the Files,'" she explained. "Among other things, all
the good fugitive verse was gathered here from the old newspaper files."

Her eyes running down the index suddenly stopped. "I was right. Dayelle Wiley Brown. There it is. Ten of her poems, too: 'The Viking's Quest'; 'Days of Gold'; 'Constancy'; 'The Caballero'; 'Graves at Little Meadow'--"

"We fought off the Indians there," Saxon interrupted in her excitement. "And mother, who was only a little girl, went out and got water for the wounded. And the Indians wouldn't shoot at her. Everybody said it was a miracle." She sprang out of Billy's arms, reaching for the book and crying: "Oh, let me see it! Let me see it! It's all new to me. I don't know these poems. Can I copy them? I'll learn them by heart. Just to think, my mother's!"

Mrs. Mortimer's glasses required repolishing; and for half an hour she and Billy remained silent while Saxon devoured her mother's lines. At the end, staring at the book which she had closed on her finger, she could only repeat in wondering awe:

"And I never knew, I never knew."

But during that half hour Mrs. Mortimer's mind had not been idle. A little later, she broached her plan. She believed in intensive dairying as well as intensive farming, and intended, as soon as the lease expired, to establish a Jersey dairy on the other ten acres. This, like everything she had done, would be model, and it meant that she would require more help. Billy and Saxon were just the two. By next summer she

could have them installed in the cottage she intended building. In the meantime she could arrange, one way and another, to get work for Billy through the winter. She would guarantee this work, and she knew a small house they could rent just at the end of the car-line. Under her supervision Billy could take charge from the very beginning of the building. In this way they would be earning money, preparing themselves for independent farming life, and have opportunity to look about them.

But her persuasions were in vain. In the end Saxon succinctly epitomized their point of view.

"We can't stop at the first place, even if it is as beautiful and kind as yours and as nice as this valley is. We don't even know what we want. We've got to go farther, and see all kinds of places and all kinds of ways, in order to find out. We're not in a hurry to make up our minds. We want to make, oh, so very sure! And besides...." She hesitated. "Besides, we don't like altogether flat land. Billy wants some hills in his. And so do I."

When they were ready to leave Mrs. Mortimer offered to present Saxon with "The Story of the Files"; but Saxon shook her head and got some money from Billy.

"It says it costs two dollars," she said. "Will you buy me one, and keep it till we get settled? Then I'll write, and you can send it to me."

"Oh, you Americans," Mrs. Mortimer chided, accepting the money. "But you must promise to write from time to time before you're settled."

She saw them to the county road.

"You are brave young things," she said at parting. "I only wish I were going with you, my pack upon my back. You're perfectly glorious, the pair of you. If ever I can do anything for you, just let me know. You're bound to succeed, and I want a hand in it myself. Let me know how that government land turns out, though I warn you I haven't much faith in its feasibility. It's sure to be too far away from markets."

She shook hands with Billy. Saxon she caught into her arms and kissed.

"Be brave," she said, with low earnestness, in Saxon's ear. "You'll win. You are starting with the right ideas. And you were right not to accept my proposition. But remember, it, or better, will always be open to you. You're young yet, both of you. Don't be in a hurry. Any time you stop anywhere for a while, let me know, and I'll mail you heaps of agricultural reports and farm publications. Good-bye. Heaps and heaps and heaps of luck."

CHAPTER IV

Bill sat motionless on the edge of the bed in their little room in San Jose that night, a musing expression in his eyes.

"Well," he remarked at last, with a long-drawn breath, "all I've got to say is there's some pretty nice people in this world after all. Take Mrs. Mortimer. Now she's the real goods--regular old American."

"A fine, educated lady," Saxon agreed, "and not a bit ashamed to work at farming herself. And she made it go, too."

"On twenty acres--no, ten; and paid for 'em, an' all improvements, an' supported herself, four hired men, a Swede woman an' daughter, an' her own nephew. It gets me. Ten acres! Why, my father never talked less'n one hundred an' sixty acres. Even your brother Tom still talks in quarter sections.--An' she was only a woman, too. We was lucky in meetin' her."

"Wasn't it an adventure!" Saxon cried. "That's what comes of traveling. You never know what's going to happen next. It jumped right out at us, just when we were tired and wondering how much farther to San Jose. We weren't expecting it at all. And she didn't treat us as if we were tramping. And that house--so clean and beautiful. You could eat off the floor. I never dreamed of anything so sweet and lovely as the inside of that house."

"It smelt good," Billy supplied.

"That's the very thing. It's what the women's pages call atmosphere. I didn't know what they meant before. That house has beautiful, sweet atmosphere--"

"Like all your nice underthings," said Billy.

"And that's the next step after keeping your body sweet and clean and beautiful. It's to have your house sweet and clean and beautiful."

"But it can't be a rented one, Saxon. You've got to own it. Landlords don't build houses like that. Just the same, one thing stuck out plain: that house was not expensive. It wasn't the cost. It was the way. The wood was ordinary wood you can buy in any lumber yard. Why, our house on Pine street was made out of the same kind of wood. But the way it was made was different. I can't explain, but you can see what I'm drivin' at."

Saxon, revisioning the little bungalow they had just left, repeated absently: "That's it--the way."

The next morning they were early afoot, seeking through the suburbs of San Jose the road to San Juan and Monterey. Saxon's limp had increased. Beginning with a burst blister, her heel was skinning rapidly. Billy

remembered his father's talks about care of the feet, and stopped at a butcher shop to buy five cents' worth of mutton tallow.

"That's the stuff," he told Saxon. "Clean foot-gear and the feet well greased. We'll put some on as soon as we're clear of town. An' we might as well go easy for a couple of days. Now, if I could get a little work so as you could rest up several days it'd be just the thing. I 'll keep my eye peeled."

Almost on the outskirts of town he left Saxon on the county road and went up a long driveway to what appeared a large farm. He came back beaming.

"It's all hunkydory," he called as he approached. "We'll just go down to that clump of trees by the creek an' pitch camp. I start work in the mornin', two dollars a day an' board myself. It'd been a dollar an' a half if he furnished the board. I told 'm I liked the other way best, an' that I had my camp with me. The weather's fine, an' we can make out a few days till your foot's in shape. Come on. We'll pitch a regular, decent camp."

"How did you get the job," Saxon asked, as they cast about, determining their camp-site.

"Wait till we get fixed an' I'll tell you all about it. It was a dream, a cinch."

Not until the bed was spread, the fire built, and a pot of beans boiling did Billy throw down the last armful of wood and begin.

"In the first place, Benson's no old-fashioned geezer. You wouldn't think he was a farmer to look at 'm. He's up to date, sharp as tacks, talks an' acts like a business man. I could see that, just by lookin' at his place, before I seen HIM. He took about fifteen seconds to size me up.

"Can you plow?' says he.

"Sure thing,' I told 'm.

"Know horses?'

"I was hatched in a box-stall,' says I.

"An' just then--you remember that four-horse load of machinery that come in after me?--just then it drove up.

"How about four horses?' he asks, casual-like.

"Right to home. I can drive 'm to a plow, a sewin' machine, or a merry-go-round.'

"Jump up an' take them lines, then,' he says, quick an' sharp, not wastin' seconds. 'See that shed. Go 'round the barn to the right an' back in for unloadin'.'

"An' right here I wanta tell you it was some nifty drivin' he was askin'. I could see by the tracks the wagons'd all ben goin' around the barn to the left. What he was askin' was too close work for comfort--a double turn, like an S, between a corner of a paddock an' around the corner of the barn to the last swing. An', to eat into the little room there was, there was piles of manure just thrown outa the barn an' not hauled away yet. But I wasn't lettin' on nothin'. The driver gave me the lines, an' I could see he was grinnin', sure I'd make a mess of it. I bet he couldn't a-done it himself. I never let on, an away we went, me not even knowin' the horses--but, say, if you'd seen me throw them leaders clean to the top of the manure till the nigh horse was scrapin' the side of the barn to make it, an' the off hind hub was cuttin' the corner post of the paddock to miss by six inches. It was the only way. An' them horses was sure beaunts. The leaders slacked back an' darn near sat down on their singletrees when I threw the back into the wheelers an' slammed on the brake an' stopped on the very precise spot.

"You'll do,' Benson says. 'That was good work.'

"Aw, shucks,' I says, indifferent as hell. 'Gimme something real hard.'

"He smiles an' understands.

"You done that well,' he says. 'An' I'm particular about who handles my horses. The road ain't no place for you. You must be a good man gone wrong. Just the same you can plow with my horses, startin' in to-morrow mornin'.'

"Which shows how wise he wasn't. I hadn't showed I could plow."

When Saxon had served the beans, and Billy the coffee, she stood still a moment and surveyed the spread meal on the blankets--the canister of sugar, the condensed milk tin, the sliced corned beef, the lettuce salad and sliced tomatoes, the slices of fresh French bread, and the steaming plates of beans and mugs of coffee.

"What a difference from last night!" Saxon exclaimed, clapping her hands. "It's like an adventure out of a book. Oh, that boy I went fishing with! Think of that beautiful table and that beautiful house last night, and then look at this. Why, we could have lived a thousand years on end in Oakland and never met a woman like Mrs. Mortimer nor dreamed a house like hers existed. And, Billy, just to think, we've only just started."

Billy worked for three days, and while insisting that he was doing very well, he freely admitted that there was more in plowing than he had thought. Saxon experienced quiet satisfaction when she learned he was enjoying it.

"I never thought I'd like plowin'--much," he observed. "But it's fine. It's good for the leg-muscles, too. They don't get exercise enough in teamin'. If ever I trained for another fight, you bet I'd take a whack at plowin'. An', you know, the ground has a regular good smell to it, a-turnin' over an' turnin' over. Gosh, it's good enough to eat, that smell. An' it just goes on, turnin' up an' over, fresh an' thick an' good, all day long. An' the horses are Joe-dandies. They know their business as well as a man. That's one thing, Benson ain't got a scrub horse on the place."

The last day Billy worked, the sky clouded over, the air grew damp, a strong wind began to blow from the southeast, and all the signs were present of the first winter rain. Billy came back in the evening with a small roll of old canvas he had borrowed, which he proceeded to arrange over their bed on a framework so as to shed rain. Several times he complained about the little finger of his left hand. It had been bothering him all day he told Saxon, for several days slightly, in fact, and it was as tender as a boil--most likely a splinter, but he had been unable to locate it.

He went ahead with storm preparations, elevating the bed on old boards which he lugged from a disused barn falling to decay on the opposite bank of the creek. Upon the boards he heaped dry leaves for a mattress. He concluded by reinforcing the canvas with additional guys of odd pieces of rope and bailing-wire.

When the first splashes of rain arrived Saxon was delighted. Billy betrayed little interest. His finger was hurting too much, he said. Neither he nor Saxon could make anything of it, and both scoffed at the idea of a felon.

"It might be a run-around," Saxon hazarded.

"What's that?"

"I don't know. I remember Mrs. Cady had one once, but I was too small. It was the little finger, too. She poulticed it, I think. And I remember she dressed it with some kind of salve. It got awful bad, and finished by her losing the nail. After that it got well quick, and a new nail grew out. Suppose I make a hot bread poultice for yours."

Billy declined, being of the opinion that it would be better in the morning. Saxon was troubled, and as she dozed off she knew that he was lying restlessly wide awake. A few minutes afterward, roused by a heavy blast of wind and rain on the canvas, she heard Billy softly groaning. She raised herself on her elbow and with her free hand, in the way she knew, manipulating his forehead and the surfaces around his eyes, soothed him off to sleep.

Again she slept. And again she was aroused, this time not by the storm, but by Billy. She could not see, but by feeling she ascertained his

strange position. He was outside the blankets and on his knees, his forehead resting on the boards, his shoulders writhing with suppressed anguish.

"She's pulsin' to beat the band," he said, when she spoke. "It's worsen a thousand toothaches. But it ain't nothin'... if only the canvas don't blow down. Think what our folks had to stand," he gritted out between groans. "Why, my father was out in the mountains, an' the man with 'm got mauled by a grizzly--clean clawed to the bones all over. An' they was outa grub an' had to travel. Two times outa three, when my father put 'm on the horse, he'd faint away. Had to be tied on. An' that lasted five weeks, an' HE pulled through. Then there was Jack Quigley. He blowed off his whole right hand with the burstin' of his shotgun, an' the huntin' dog pup he had with 'm ate up three of the fingers. An' he was all alone in the marsh, an'--"

But Saxon heard no more of the adventures of Jack Quigley. A terrific blast of wind parted several of the guys, collapsed the framework, and for a moment buried them under the canvas. The next moment canvas, framework, and trailing guys were whisked away into the darkness, and Saxon and Billy were deluged with rain.

"Only one thing to do," he yelled in her ear. "--Gather up the things an' get into that old barn."

They accomplished this in the drenching darkness, making two trips

across the stepping stones of the shallow creek and soaking themselves to the knees. The old barn leaked like a sieve, but they managed to find a dry space on which to spread their anything but dry bedding. Billy's pain was heart-rending to Saxon. An hour was required to subdue him to a doze, and only by continuously stroking his forehead could she keep him asleep. Shivering and miserable, she accepted a night of wakefulness gladly with the knowledge that she kept him from knowing the worst of his pain.

At the time when she had decided it must be past midnight, there was an interruption. From the open doorway came a flash of electric light, like a tiny searchlight, which quested about the barn and came to rest on her and Billy. From the source of light a harsh voice said:

"Ah! ha! I've got you! Come out of that!"

Billy sat up, his eyes dazzled by the light. The voice behind the light was approaching and reiterating its demand that they come out of that.

"What's up?" Billy asked.

"Me," was the answer; "an' wide awake, you bet."

The voice was now beside them, scarcely a yard away, yet they could see nothing on account of the light, which was intermittent, frequently going out for an instant as the operator's thumb tired on the switch.

"Come on, get a move on," the voice went on. "Roll up your blankets an' trot along. I want you."

"Who in hell are you?" Billy demanded.

"I'm the constable. Come on."

"Well, what do you want?"

"You, of course, the pair of you."

"What for?"

"Vagrancy. Now hustle. I ain't goin' to loaf here all night."

"Aw, chase yourself," Billy advised. "I ain't a vag. I'm a workingman."

"Maybe you are an' maybe you ain't," said the constable; "but you can tell all that to Judge Neusbaumer in the mornin'."

"Why you... you stinkin', dirty cur, you think you're goin' to pull me," Billy began. "Turn the light on yourself. I want to see what kind of an ugly mug you got. Pull me, eh? Pull me? For two cents I'd get up there an' beat you to a jelly, you--"

"No, no, Billy," Saxon pleaded. "Don't make trouble. It would mean jail."

"That's right," the constable approved, "listen to your woman."

"She's my wife, an' see you speak of her as such," Billy warned. "Now get out, if you know what's good for yourself."

"I've seen your kind before," the constable retorted. "An' I've got my little persuader with me. Take a squint."

The shaft of light shifted, and out of the darkness, illuminated with ghastly brilliance, they saw thrust a hand holding a revolver. This hand seemed a thing apart, self-existent, with no corporeal attachment, and it appeared and disappeared like an apparition as the thumb-pressure wavered on the switch. One moment they were staring at the hand and revolver, the next moment at impenetrable darkness, and the next moment again at the hand and revolver.

"Now, I guess you'll come," the constable gloated.

"You got another guess comin'," Billy began.

But at that moment the light went out. They heard a quick movement on the officer's part and the thud of the light-stick on the ground. Both Billy and the constable fumbled for it, but Billy found it and flashed

it on the other. They saw a gray-bearded man clad in streaming oilskins. He was an old man, and reminded Saxon of the sort she had been used to see in Grand Army processions on Decoration Day.

"Give me that stick," he bullied.

Billy sneered a refusal.

"Then I'll put a hole through you, by crimony."

He leveled the revolver directly at Billy, whose thumb on the switch did not waver, and they could see the gleaming bullet-tips in the chambers of the cylinder.

"Why, you whiskery old skunk, you ain't got the grit to shoot sour apples," was Billy's answer. "I know your kind--brave as lions when it comes to pullin' miserable, broken-spirited bindle stiffs, but as leery as a yellow dog when you face a man. Pull that trigger! Why, you pusillanimous piece of dirt, you'd run with your tail between your legs if I said boo!"

Suiting action to the word, Billy let out an explosive "BOO!" and Saxon giggled involuntarily at the startle it caused in the constable.

"I'll give you a last chance," the latter grated through his teeth.

"Turn over that light-stick an' come along peaceable, or I'll lay you

out."

Saxon was frightened for Billy's sake, and yet only half frightened. She had a faith that the man dared not fire, and she felt the old familiar thrills of admiration for Billy's courage. She could not see his face, but she knew in all certitude that it was bleak and passionless in the terrifying way she had seen it when he fought the three Irishmen.

"You ain't the first man I killed," the constable threatened. "I'm an old soldier, an' I ain't squeamish over blood--"

"And you ought to be ashamed of yourself," Saxon broke in, "trying to shame and disgrace peaceable people who've done no wrong."

"You've done wrong sleepin' here," was his vindication. "This ain't your property. It's agin the law. An' folks that go agin the law go to jail, as the two of you'll go. I've sent many a tramp up for thirty days for sleepin' in this very shack. Why, it's a regular trap for 'em. I got a good glimpse of your faces an' could see you was tough characters." He turned on Billy. "I've fooled enough with you. Are you goin' to give in an' come peaceable?"

"I'm goin' to tell you a couple of things, old boss," Billy answered. "Number one: you ain't goin' to pull us. Number two: we're goin' to sleep the night out here."

"Gimme that light-stick," the constable demanded peremptorily.

"G'wan, Whiskers. You're standin' on your foot. Beat it. Pull your freight. As for your torch you'll find it outside in the mud."

Billy shifted the light until it illuminated the doorway, and then threw the stick as he would pitch a baseball. They were now in total darkness, and they could hear the intruder gritting his teeth in rage.

"Now start your shootin' an' see what'll happen to you," Billy advised menacingly.

Saxon felt for Billy's hand and squeezed it proudly. The constable grumbled some threat.

"What's that?" Billy demanded sharply. "Ain't you gone yet? Now listen to me, Whiskers. I've put up with all your shenanigan I'm goin' to. Now get out or I'll throw you out. An' if you come monkeyin, around here again you'll get yours. Now get!"

So great was the roar of the storm that they could hear nothing. Billy rolled a cigarette. When he lighted it, they saw the barn was empty. Billy chuckled.

"Say, I was so mad I clean forgot my run-around. It's only just beginnin' to tune up again."

Saxon made him lie down and receive her soothing ministrations.

"There is no use moving till morning," she said. "Then, just as soon as it's light, we'll catch a car into San Jose, rent a room, get a hot breakfast, and go to a drug store for the proper stuff for poulticing or whatever treatment's needed."

"But Benson," Billy demurred.

"I'll telephone him from town. It will only cost five cents. I saw he had, a wire. And you couldn't plow on account of the rain, even if your finger was well. Besides, we'll both be mending together. My heel will be all right by the time it clears up and we can start traveling."

CHAPTER V

Early on Monday morning, three days later, Saxon and Billy took an electric car to the end of the line, and started a second time for San Juan. Puddles were standing in the road, but the sun shone from a blue sky, and everywhere, on the ground, was a faint hint of budding green. At Benson's Saxon waited while Billy went in to get his six dollars for the three days' plowing.

"Kicked like a steer because I was quittin'," he told her when he came back. "He wouldn't listen at first. Said he'd put me to drivin' in a few days, an' that there wasn't enough good four-horse men to let one go easily."

"And what did you say?"

"Oh, I just told 'm I had to be movin' along. An' when he tried to argue I told 'm my wife was with me, an' she was blamed anxious to get along."

"But so are you, Billy."

"Sure, Pete; but just the same I wasn't as keen as you. Doggone it, I was gettin' to like that plowin'. I'll never be scairt to ask for a job at it again. I've got to where I savvy the burro, an' you bet I can plow against most of 'm right now."

An hour afterward, with a good three miles to their credit, they edged to the side of the road at the sound of an automobile behind them. But the machine did not pass. Benson was alone in it, and he came to a stop alongside.

"Where are you bound?" he inquired of Billy, with a quick, measuring glance at Saxon.

"Monterey--if you're goin' that far," Billy answered with a chuckle.

"I can give you a lift as far as Watsonville. It would take you several days on shank's mare with those loads. Climb in." He addressed Saxon directly. "Do you want to ride in front?"

Saxon glanced to Billy.

"Go on," he approved. "It's fine in front.--This is my wife, Mr. Benson--Mrs. Roberts."

"Oh, ho, so you're the one that took your husband away from me," Benson accused good humoredly, as he tucked the robe around her.

Saxon shouldered the responsibility and became absorbed in watching him start the car.

"I'd be a mighty poor farmer if I owned no more land than you'd plowed

before you came to me," Benson, with a twinkling eye, jerked over his shoulder to Billy.

"I'd never had my hands on a plow but once before," Billy confessed.

"But a fellow has to learn some time."

"At two dollars a day?"

"If he can get some alfalfa artist to put up for it," Billy met him complacently.

Benson laughed heartily.

"You're a quick learner," he complimented. "I could see that you and plows weren't on speaking acquaintance. But you took hold right. There isn't one man in ten I could hire off the county road that could do as well as you were doing on the third day. But your big asset is that you know horses. It was half a joke when I told you to take the lines that morning. You're a trained horseman and a born horseman as well."

"He's very gentle with horses," Saxon said.

"But there's more than that to it," Benson took her up. "Your husband's got the WAY with him. It's hard to explain. But that's what it is--the WAY. It's an instinct almost. Kindness is necessary. But GRIP is more so. Your husband grips his horses. Take the test I gave him with the

four-horse load. It was too complicated and severe. Kindness couldn't have done it. It took grip. I could see it the moment he started. There wasn't any doubt in his mind. There wasn't any doubt in the horses. They got the feel of him. They just knew the thing was going to be done and that it was up to them to do it. They didn't have any fear, but just the same they knew the boss was in the seat. When he took hold of those lines, he took hold of the horses. He gripped them, don't you see. He picked them up and put them where he wanted them, swung them up and down and right and left, made them pull, and slack, and back--and they knew everything was going to come out right. Oh, horses may be stupid, but they're not altogether fools. They know when the proper horseman has hold of them, though how they know it so quickly is beyond me."

Benson paused, half vexed at his volubility, and gazed keenly at Saxon to see if she had followed him. What he saw in her face and eyes satisfied him, and he added, with a short laugh:

"Horseflesh is a hobby of mine. Don't think otherwise because I am running a stink engine. I'd rather be streaking along here behind a pair of fast-steppers. But I'd lose time on them, and, worse than that, I'd be too anxious about them all the time. As for this thing, why, it has no nerves, no delicate joints nor tendons; it's a case of let her rip."

The miles flew past and Saxon was soon deep in talk with her host. Here again, she discerned immediately, was a type of the new farmer. The knowledge she had picked up enabled her to talk to advantage, and when

Benson talked she was amazed that she could understand so much. In response to his direct querying, she told him her and Billy's plans, sketching the Oakland life vaguely, and dwelling on their future intentions.

Almost as in a dream, when they passed the nurseries at Morgan Hill, she learned they had come twenty miles, and realized that it was a longer stretch than they had planned to walk that day. And still the machine hummed on, eating up the distance as ever it flashed into view.

"I wondered what so good a man as your husband was doing on the road," Benson told her.

"Yes," she smiled. "He said you said he must be a good man gone wrong."

"But you see, I didn't know about YOU. Now I understand. Though I must say it's extraordinary in these days for a young couple like you to pack your blankets in search of land. And, before I forget it, I want to tell you one thing." He turned to Billy. "I am just telling your wife that there's an all-the-year job waiting for you on my ranch. And there's a tight little cottage of three rooms the two of you can housekeep in. Don't forget."

Among other things Saxon discovered that Benson had gone through the College of Agriculture at the University of California--a branch of learning she had not known existed. He gave her small hope in her search

for government land.

"The only government land left," he informed her, "is what is not good enough to take up for one reason or another. If it's good land down there where you're going, then the market is inaccessible. I know no railroads tap in there."

"Wait till we strike Pajaro Valley," he said, when they had passed Gilroy and were booming on toward Sargent's. "I'll show you what can be done with the soil--and not by cow-college graduates but by uneducated foreigners that the high and mighty American has always sneered at. I'll show you. It's one of the most wonderful demonstrations in the state."

At Sargent's he left them in the machine a few minutes while he transacted business.

"Whew! It beats hikin'," Billy said. "The day's young yet and when he drops us we'll be fresh for a few miles on our own. Just the same, when we get settled an' well off, I guess I'll stick by horses. They'll always be good enough for me."

"A machine's only good to get somewhere in a hurry," Saxon agreed. "Of course, if we got very, very rich--"

"Say, Saxon," Billy broke in, suddenly struck with an idea. "I've learned one thing. I ain't afraid any more of not gettin' work in the

country. I was at first, but I didn't tell you. Just the same I was dead leery when we pulled out on the San Leandro pike. An' here, already, is two places open--Mrs. Mortimer's an' Benson's; an' steady jobs, too. Yep, a man can get work in the country."

"Ah," Saxon amended, with a proud little smile, "you haven't said it right. Any GOOD man can get work in the country. The big farmers don't hire men out of charity."

"Sure; they ain't in it for their health," he grinned.

"And they jump at you. That's because you are a good man. They can see it with half an eye. Why, Billy, take all the working tramps we've met on the road already. There wasn't one to compare with you. I looked them over. They're all weak--weak in their bodies, weak in their heads, weak both ways."

"Yep, they are a pretty measly bunch," Billy admitted modestly.

"It's the wrong time of the year to see Pajaro Valley," Benson said, when he again sat beside Saxon and Sargent's was a thing of the past. "Just the same, it's worth seeing any time. Think of it--twelve thousand acres of apples! Do you know what they call Pajaro Valley now? New Dalmatia. We're being squeezed out. We Yankees thought we were smart. Well, the Dalmatians came along and showed they were smarter. They were miserable immigrants--poorer than Job's turkey. First, they worked

at day's labor in the fruit harvest. Next they began, in a small way, buying the apples on the trees. The more money they made the bigger became their deals. Pretty soon they were renting the orchards on long leases. And now, they are beginning to buy the land. It won't be long before they own the whole valley, and the last American will be gone.

"Oh, our smart Yankees! Why, those first ragged Slavs in their first little deals with us only made something like two and three thousand per cent. profits. And now they're satisfied to make a hundred per cent. It's a calamity if their profits sink to twenty-five or fifty per cent."

"It's like San Leandro," Saxon said. "The original owners of the land are about all gone already. It's intensive cultivation." She liked that phrase. "It isn't a case of having a lot of acres, but of how much they can get out of one acre."

"Yes, and more than that," Benson answered, nodding his head emphatically. "Lots of them, like Luke Scurich, are in it on a large scale. Several of them are worth a quarter of a million already. I know ten of them who will average one hundred and fifty thousand each. They have a WAY with apples. It's almost a gift. They KNOW trees in much the same way your husband knows horses. Each tree is just as much an individual to them as a horse is to me. They know each tree, its whole history, everything that ever happened to it, its every idiosyncrasy. They have their fingers on its pulse. They can tell if it's feeling as well to-day as it felt yesterday. And if it isn't, they know why and

proceed to remedy matters for it. They can look at a tree in bloom and tell how many boxes of apples it will pack, and not only that--they'll know what the quality and grades of those apples are going to be. Why, they know each individual apple, and they pick it tenderly, with love, never hurting it, and pack it and ship it tenderly and with love, and when it arrives at market, it isn't bruised nor rotten, and it fetches top price.

"Yes, it's more than intensive. These Adriatic Slavs are long-headed in business. Not only can they grow apples, but they can sell apples. No market? What does it matter? Make a market. That's their way, while our kind let the crops rot knee-deep under the trees. Look at Peter Mengol. Every year he goes to England, and he takes a hundred carloads of yellow Newton pippins with him. Why, those Dalmatians are showing Pajaro apples on the South African market right now, and coining money out of it hand over fist."

"What do they do with all the money?" Saxon queried.

"Buy the Americans of Pajaro Valley out, of course, as they are already doing."

"And then?" she questioned.

Benson looked at her quickly.

"Then they'll start buying the Americans out of some other valley. And the Americans will spend the money and by the second generation start rotting in the cities, as you and your husband would have rotted if you hadn't got out."

Saxon could not repress a shudder.--As Mary had rotted, she thought; as Bert and all the rest had rotted; as Tom and all the rest were rotting.

"Oh, it's a great country," Benson was continuing. "But we're not a great people. Kipling is right. We're crowded out and sitting on the stoop. And the worst of it is there's no reason we shouldn't know better. We're teaching it in all our agricultural colleges, experiment stations, and demonstration trains. But the people won't take hold, and the immigrant, who has learned in a hard school, beats them out. Why, after I graduated, and before my father died--he was of the old school and laughed at what he called my theories--I traveled for a couple of years. I wanted to see how the old countries farmed. Oh, I saw.

"We'll soon enter the valley. You bet I saw. First thing, in Japan, the terraced hillsides. Take a hill so steep you couldn't drive a horse up it. No bother to them. They terraced it--a stone wall, and good masonry, six feet high, a level terrace six feet wide; up and up, walls and terraces, the same thing all the way, straight into the air, walls upon walls, terraces upon terraces, until I've seen ten-foot walls built to make three-foot terraces, and twenty-foot walls for four or five feet of soil they could grow things on. And that soil, packed up the

mountainsides in baskets on their backs!

"Same thing everywhere I went, in Greece, in Ireland, in Dalmatia--I went there, too. They went around and gathered every bit of soil they could find, gleaned it and even stole it by the shovelful or handful, and carried it up the mountains on their backs and built farms--BUILT them, MADE them, on the naked rock. Why, in France, I've seen hill peasants mining their stream-beds for soil as our fathers mined the streams of California for gold. Only our gold's gone, and the peasants' soil remains, turning over and over, doing something, growing something, all the time. Now, I guess I'll hush."

"My God!" Billy muttered in awe-stricken tones. "Our folks never done that. No wonder they lost out."

"There's the valley now," Benson said. "Look at those trees! Look at those hillsides! That's New Dalmatia. Look at it! An apple paradise! Look at that soil! Look at the way it's worked!"

It was not a large valley that Saxon saw. But everywhere, across the flat-lands and up the low rolling hills, the industry of the Dalmatians was evident. As she looked she listened to Benson.

"Do you know what the old settlers did with this beautiful soil? Planted the flats in grain and pastured cattle on the hills. And now twelve thousand acres of it are in apples. It's a regular show place for the

Eastern guests at Del Monte, who run out here in their machines to see the trees in bloom or fruit. Take Matteo Lettunich--he's one of the originals. Entered through Castle Garden and became a dish-washer. When he laid eyes on this valley he knew it was his Klondike. To-day he leases seven hundred acres and owns a hundred and thirty of his own--the finest orchard in the valley, and he packs from forty to fifty thousand boxes of export apples from it every year. And he won't let a soul but a Dalmatian pick a single apple of all those apples. One day, in a banter, I asked him what he'd sell his hundred and thirty acres for. He answered seriously. He told me what it had netted him, year by year, and struck an average. He told me to calculate the principal from that at six per cent. I did. It came to over three thousand dollars an acre."

"What are all the Chinks doin' in the Valley?" Billy asked. "Growin' apples, too?"

Benson shook his head.

"But that's another point where we Americans lose out. There isn't anything wasted in this valley, not a core nor a paring; and it isn't the Americans who do the saving. There are fifty-seven apple-evaporating furnaces, to say nothing of the apple canneries and cider and vinegar factories. And Mr. John Chinaman owns them. They ship fifteen thousand barrels of cider and vinegar each year."

"It was our folks that made this country," Billy reflected. "Fought for

it, opened it up, did everything--"

"But develop it," Benson caught him up. "We did our best to destroy it, as we destroyed the soil of New England." He waved his hand, indicating some place beyond the hills. "Salinas lies over that way. If you went through there you'd think you were in Japan. And more than one fat little fruit valley in California has been taken over by the Japanese. Their method is somewhat different from the Dalmatians'. First they drift in fruit picking at day's wages. They give better satisfaction than the American fruit-pickers, too, and the Yankee grower is glad to get them. Next, as they get stronger, they form in Japanese unions and proceed to run the American labor out. Still the fruit-growers are satisfied. The next step is when the Japs won't pick. The American labor is gone. The fruit-grower is helpless. The crop perishes. Then in step the Jap labor bosses. They're the masters already. They contract for the crop. The fruit-growers are at their mercy, you see. Pretty soon the Japs are running the valley. The fruit-growers have become absentee landlords and are busy learning higher standards of living in the cities or making trips to Europe. Remains only one more step. The Japs buy them out. They've got to sell, for the Japs control the labor market and could bankrupt them at will."

"But if this goes on, what is left for us?" asked Saxon.

"What is happening. Those of us who haven't anything rot in the cities. Those of us who have land, sell it and go to the cities. Some become

larger capitalists; some go into the professions; the rest spend the money and start rotting when it's gone, and if it lasts their life-time their children do the rotting for them."

Their long ride was soon over, and at parting Benson reminded Billy of the steady job that awaited him any time he gave the word.

"I guess we'll take a peep at that government land first," Billy answered. "Don't know what we'll settle down to, but there's one thing sure we won't tackle."

"What's that?"

"Start in apple-growin' at three thousan' dollars an acre."

Billy and Saxon, their packs upon the backs, trudged along a hundred yards. He was the first to break silence.

"An' I tell you another thing, Saxon. We'll never be goin' around smellin' out an' swipin' bits of soil an' carryin' it up a hill in a basket. The United States is big yet. I don't care what Benson or any of 'em says, the United States ain't played out. There's millions of acres untouched an' waitin', an' it's up to us to find 'em."

"And I'll tell you one thing," Saxon said. "We're getting an education. Tom was raised on a ranch, yet he doesn't know right now as much about

farming conditions as we do. And I'll tell you another thing. The more I think of it, the more it seems we are going to be disappointed about that government land."

"Ain't no use believin' what everybody tells you," he protested.

"Oh, it isn't that. It's what I think. I leave it to you. If this land around here is worth three thousand an acre, why is it that government land, if it's any good, is waiting there, only a short way off, to be taken for the asking."

Billy pondered this for a quarter of a mile, but could come to no conclusion. At last he cleared his throat and remarked:

"Well, we can wait till we see it first, can't we?"

"All right," Saxon agreed. "We'll wait till we see it."

CHAPTER VI

They had taken the direct county road across the hills from Monterey, instead of the Seventeen Mile Drive around by the coast, so that Carmel Bay came upon them without any fore-glimmerings of its beauty. Dropping down through the pungent pines, they passed woods-embowered cottages, quaint and rustic, of artists and writers, and went on across wind-blown rolling sandhills held to place by sturdy lupine and nodding with pale California poppies. Saxon screamed in sudden wonder of delight, then caught her breath and gazed at the amazing peacock-blue of a breaker, shot through with golden sunlight, overfalling in a mile-long sweep and thundering into white ruin of foam on a crescent beach of sand scarcely less white.

How long they stood and watched the stately procession of breakers, rising from out the deep and wind-capped sea to froth and thunder at their feet, Saxon did not know. She was recalled to herself when Billy, laughing, tried to remove the telescope basket from her shoulders.

"You kind of look as though you was goin' to stop a while," he said. "So we might as well get comfortable."

"I never dreamed it, I never dreamed it," she repeated, with passionately clasped hands. "I... I thought the surf at the Cliff House was wonderful, but it gave no idea of this.--Oh! Look! LOOK! Did you ever see such an unspeakable color? And the sunlight flashing right

through it! Oh! Oh! Oh!"

At last she was able to take her eyes from the surf and gaze at the sea-horizon of deepest peacock-blue and piled with cloud-masses, at the curve of the beach south to the jagged point of rocks, and at the rugged blue mountains seen across soft low hills, landward, up Carmel Valley.

"Might as well sit down an' take it easy," Billy indulged her. "This is too good to want to run away from all at once."

Saxon assented, but began immediately to unlace her shoes.

"You ain't a-goin' to?" Billy asked in surprised delight, then began unlacing his own.

But before they were ready to run barefooted on the perilous fringe of cream-wet sand where land and ocean met, a new and wonderful thing attracted their attention. Down from the dark pines and across the sandhills ran a man, naked save for narrow trunks. He was smooth and rosy-skinned, cherubic-faced, with a thatch of curly yellow hair, but his body was hugely thewed as a Hercules'.

"Geel!--must be Sandow," Billy muttered low to Saxon.

But she was thinking of the engraving in her mother's scrapbook and of the Vikings on the wet sands of England.

The runner passed them a dozen feet away, crossed the wet sand, never parsing, till the froth wash was to his knees while above him, ten feet at least, upreared a was of overtopping water. Huge and powerful as his body had seemed, it was now white and fragile in the face of that imminent, great-handed buffet of the sea. Saxon gasped with anxiety, and she stole a look at Billy to note that he was tense with watching.

But the stranger sprang to meet the blow, and, just when it seemed he must be crushed, he dived into the face of the breaker and disappeared. The mighty mass of water fell in thunder on the beach, but beyond appeared a yellow head, one arm out-reaching, and a portion of a shoulder. Only a few strokes was he able to make are he was come pelted to dye through another breaker. This was the battle--to win seaward against the Creep of the shoreward hastening sea. Each time he dived and was lost to view Saxon caught her breath and clenched her hands. Sometimes, after the passage of a breaker, they enfold not find him, and when they did he would be scores of feet away, flung there like a chip by a smoke-bearded breaker. Often it seemed he must fail and be thrown upon the beach, but at the end of half an hour he was beyond the outer edge of the surf and swimming strong, no longer diving, but topping the waves. Soon he was so far away that only at intervals could they find the speck of him. That, too, vanished, and Saxon and Billy looked at each other, she with amazement at the swimmer's valor, Billy with blue eyes flashing.

"Some swimmer, that boy, some swimmer," he praised. "Nothing chicken-hearted about him.--Say, I only know tank-swimmin', an' bay-swimmin', but now I'm goin' to learn ocean-swimmin'. If I could do that I'd be so proud you couldn't come within forty feet of me. Why, Saxon, honest to God, I'd sooner do what he done than own a thousand farms. Oh, I can swim, too, I'm tellin' you, like a fish--I swum, one Sunday, from the Narrow Gauge Pier to Sessions' Basin, an' that's miles--but I never seen anything like that guy in the swimmin' line. An' I'm not goin' to leave this beach until he comes back.--All by his lonely out there in a mountain sea, think of it! He's got his nerve all right, all right."

Saxon and Billy ran barefooted up and down the beach, pursuing each other with brandished snakes of seaweed and playing like children for an hour. It was not until they were putting on their shoes that they sighted the yellow head bearing shoreward. Billy was at the edge of the surf to meet him, emerging, not white-skinned as he had entered, but red from the pounding he had received at the hands of the sea.

"You're a wonder, and I just got to hand it to you," Billy greeted him in outspoken admiration.

"It was a big surf to-day," the young man replied, with a nod of acknowledgment.

"It don't happen that you are a fighter I never heard of?" Billy

queried, striving to get some inkling of the identity of the physical prodigy.

The other laughed and shook his head, and Billy could not guess that he was an ex-captain of a 'Varsity Eleven, and incidentally the father of a family and the author of many books. He looked Billy over with an eye trained in measuring freshmen aspirants for the gridiron.

"You're some body of a man," he appreciated. "You'd strip with the best of them. Am I right in guessing that you know your way about in the ring?"

Billy nodded. "My name's Roberts."

The swimmer scowled with a futile effort at recollection.

"Bill--Bill Roberts," Billy supplemented.

"Oh, ho!--Not BIG Bill Roberts? Why, I saw you fight, before the earthquake, in the Mechanic's Pavilion. It was a preliminary to Eddie Hanlon and some other fellow. You're a two-handed fighter, I remember that, with an awful wallop, but slow. Yes, I remember, you were slow that night, but you got your man." He put out a wet hand. "My name's Hazard--Jim Hazard."

"An' if you're the football coach that was, a couple of years ago, I've

read about you in the papers. Am I right?"

They shook hands heartily, and Saxon was introduced. She felt very small beside the two young giants, and very proud, withal, that she belonged to the race that gave them birth. She could only listen to them talk.

"I'd like to put on the gloves with you every day for half an hour," Hazard said. "You could teach me a lot. Are you going to stay around here?"

"No. We're goin' on down the coast, lookin' for land. Just the same, I could teach you a few, and there's one thing you could teach me--surf swimmin'."

"I'll swap lessons with you any time," Hazard offered. He turned to Saxon. "Why don't you stop in Carmel for a while? It isn't so bad."

"It's beautiful," she acknowledged, with a grateful smile, "but--" She turned and pointed to their packs on the edge of the lupine. "We're on the tramp, and lookin' for government land."

"If you're looking down past the Sur for it, it will keep," he laughed. "Well, I've got to run along and get some clothes on. If you come back this way, look me up. Anybody will tell you where I live. So long."

And, as he had first arrived, he departed, crossing the sandhills on the

run.

Billy followed him with admiring eyes.

"Some boy, some boy," he murmured. "Why, Saxon, he's famous. If I've seen his face in the papers once, I've seen it a thousand times. An' he ain't a bit stuck on himself. Just man to man. Say!--I'm beginnin' to have faith in the old stock again."

They turned their backs on the beach and in the tiny main street bought meat, vegetables, and half a dozen eggs. Billy had to drag Saxon away from the window of a fascinating shop where were iridescent pearls of abalone, set and unset.

"Abalones grow here, all along the coast," Billy assured her; "an' I'll get you all you want. Low tide's the time."

"My father had a set of cuff-buttons made of abalone shell," she said.

"They were set in pure, soft gold. I haven't thought about them for years, and I wonder who has them now."

They turned south. Everywhere from among the pines peeped the quaint pretty houses of the artist folk, and they were not prepared, where the road dipped to Carmel River, for the building that met their eyes.

"I know what it is," Saxon almost whispered. "It's an old Spanish

Mission. It's the Carmel Mission, of course. That's the way the Spaniards came up from Mexico, building missions as they came and converting the Indians."

"Until we chased them out, Spaniards an' Indians, whole kit an' caboodle," Billy observed with calm satisfaction.

"Just the same, it's wonderful," Saxon mused, gazing at the big, half-ruined adobe structure. "There is the Mission Dolores, in San Francisco, but it's smaller than this and not as old."

Hidden from the sea by low hillocks, forsaken by human being and human habitation, the church of sun-baked clay and straw and chalk-rock stood hushed and breathless in the midst of the adobe ruins which once had housed its worshiping thousands. The spirit of the place descended upon Saxon and Billy, and they walked softly, speaking in whispers, almost afraid to go in through the open ports. There was neither priest nor worshiper, yet they found all the evidences of use, by a congregation which Billy judged must be small from the number of the benches. Inter they climbed the earthquake-racked belfry, noting the hand-hewn timbers; and in the gallery, discovering the pure quality of their voices, Saxon, trembling at her own temerity, softly sang the opening bars of "Jesus Lover of My Soul." Delighted with the result, she leaned over the railing, gradually increasing her voice to its full strength as she sang:

"Jesus, Lover of my soul, Let me to Thy bosom fly, While the nearer waters roll, While the tempest still is nigh. Hide me, O my Saviour, hide, Till the storm of life is past; Safe into the haven guide And receive my soul at last."

Billy leaned against the ancient wall and loved her with his eyes, and, when she had finished, he murmured, almost in a whisper:

"That was beautiful--just beautiful. An' you ought to a-seen your face when you sang. It was as beautiful as your voice. Ain't it funny?--I never think of religion except when I think of you."

They camped in the willow bottom, cooked dinner, and spent the afternoon on the point of low rocks north of the mouth of the river. They had not intended to spend the afternoon, but found themselves too fascinated to turn away from the breakers bursting upon the rocks and from the many kinds of colorful sea life starfish, crabs, mussels, sea anemones, and, once, in a rock-pool, a small devilfish that chilled their blood when it cast the hooded net of its body around the small crabs they tossed to it. As the tide grew lower, they gathered a mess of mussels--huge fellows, five and six inches long and bearded like patriarchs. Then, while Billy wandered in a vain search for abalones, Saxon lay and dabbled in the crystal-clear water of a rock-pool, dipping up handfuls of glistening jewels--ground bits of shell and pebble of flashing rose and blue and green and violet. Billy came back and lay beside her, lazying in the sea-cool sunshine, and together they watched the sun sink

into the horizon where the ocean was deepest peacock-blue.

She reached out her hand to Billy's and sighed with sheer repletion of content. It seemed she had never lived such a wonderful day. It was as if all old dreams were coming true. Such beauty of the world she had never guessed in her fondest imagining. Billy pressed her hand tenderly.

"What was you thinkin' of?" he asked, as they arose finally to go.

"Oh, I don't know, Billy. Perhaps that it was better, one day like this, than ten thousand years in Oakland."

CHAPTER VII

They left Carmel River and Carmel Valley behind, and with a rising sun went south across the hills between the mountains and the sea. The road was badly washed and gullied and showed little sign of travel.

"It peters out altogether farther down," Billy said. "From there on it's only horse trails. But I don't see much signs of timber, an' this soil's none so good. It's only used for pasture--no farmin' to speak of."

The hills were bare and grassy. Only the canyons were wooded, while the higher and more distant hills were furry with chaparral. Once they saw a coyote slide into the brush, and once Billy wished for a gun when a large wildcat stared at them malignantly and declined to run until routed by a clod of earth that burst about its ears like shrapnel.

Several miles along Saxon complained of thirst. Where the road dipped nearly at sea level to cross a small gulch Billy looked for water. The bed of the gulch was damp with hill-drip, and he left her to rest while he sought a spring.

"Say," he hailed a few minutes afterward. "Come on down. You just gotta see this. It'll 'most take your breath away."

Saxon followed the faint path that led steeply down through the thicket. Midway along, where a barbed wire fence was strung high across the mouth

of the gulch and weighted down with big rocks, she caught her first glimpse of the tiny beach. Only from the sea could one guess its existence, so completely was it tucked away on three precipitous sides by the land, and screened by the thicket. Furthermore, the beach was the head of a narrow rock cove, a quarter of a mile long, up which pent way the sea roared and was subdued at the last to a gentle pulse of surf. Beyond the mouth many detached rocks, meeting the full force of the breakers, spouted foam and spray high in the air. The knees of these rocks, seen between the surges, were black with mussels. On their tops sprawled huge sea-lions tawny-wet and roaring in the sun, while overhead, uttering shrill cries, darted and wheeled a multitude of sea birds.

The last of the descent, from the barbed wire fence, was a sliding fall of a dozen feet, and Saxon arrived on the soft dry sand in a sitting posture.

"Oh, I tell you it's just great," Billy bubbled. "Look at it for a camping spot. In among the trees there is the prettiest spring you ever saw. An' look at all the good firewood, an'..." He gazed about and seaward with eyes that saw what no rush of words could compass. "... An', an' everything. We could live here. Look at the mussels out there. An' I bet you we could catch fish. What d'ye say we stop a few days?--It's vacation anyway--an' I could go back to Carmel for hooks an' lines."

Saxon, keenly appraising his glowing face, realized that he was indeed being won from the city.

"An' there ain't no wind here," he was recommending. "Not a breath. An' look how wild it is. Just as if we was a thousand miles from anywhere."

The wind, which had been fresh and raw across the bare hills, gained no entrance to the cove; and the beach was warm and balmy, the air sweetly pungent with the thicket odors. Here and there, in the midst of the thicket, severe small oak trees and other small trees of which Saxon did not know the names. Her enthusiasm now vied with Billy's, and, hand in hand, they started to explore.

"Here's where we can play real Robinson Crusoe," Billy cried, as they crossed the hard sand from highwater mark to the edge of the water. "Come on, Robinson. Let's stop over. Of course, I'm your Man Friday, an' what you say goes."

"But what shall we do with Man Saturday!" She pointed in mock consternation to a fresh footprint in the sand. "He may be a savage cannibal, you know."

"No chance. It's not a bare foot but a tennis shoe."

"But a savage could get a tennis shoe from a drowned or eaten sailor, couldn't hey" she contended.

"But sailors don't wear tennis shoes," was Billy's prompt refutation.

"You know too much for Man Friday," she chided; "but, just the same; if you'll fetch the packs we'll make camp. Besides, it mightn't have been a sailor that was eaten. It might have been a passenger."

By the end of an hour a snug camp was completed. The blankets were spread, a supply of firewood was chopped from the seasoned driftwood, and over a fire the coffee pot had begun to sing. Saxon called to Billy, who was improvising a table from a wave-washed plank. She pointed seaward. On the far point of rocks, naked except for swimming trunks, stood a man. He was gazing toward them, and they could see his long mop of dark hair blown by the wind. As he started to climb the rocks landward Billy called Saxon's attention to the fact that the stranger wore tennis shoes. In a few minutes he dropped down from the rock to the beach and walked up to them.

"Gosh!" Billy whispered to Saxon. "He's lean enough, but look at his muscles. Everybody down here seems to go in for physical culture."

As the newcomer approached, Saxon glimpsed sufficient of his face to be reminded of the old pioneers and of a certain type of face seen frequently among the old soldiers: Young though he was--not more than thirty, she decided--this man had the same long and narrow face, with the high cheekbones, high and slender forehead, and nose high, lean,

and almost beaked. The lips were thin and sensitive; but the eyes were different from any she had ever seen in pioneer or veteran or any man. They were so dark a gray that they seemed brown, and there were a farness and alertness of vision in them as of bright questing through profounds of space. In a misty way Saxon felt that she had seen him before.

"Hello," he greeted. "You ought to be comfortable here." He threw down a partly filled sack. "Mussels. All I could get. The tide's not low enough yet."

Saxon heard Billy muffle an ejaculation, and saw painted on his face the extremest astonishment.

"Well, honest to God, it does me proud to meet you," he blurted out.

"Shake hands. I always said if I laid eyes on you I'd shake.--Say!"

But Billy's feelings mastered him, and, beginning with a choking giggle, he roared into helpless mirth.

The stranger looked at him curiously across their clasped hands, and glanced inquiringly to Saxon.

"You gotta excuse me," Billy gurgled, pumping the other's hand up and down. "But I just gotta laugh. Why, honest to God, I've woke up nights an' laughed an' gone to sleep again. Don't you recognize 'm, Saxon? He's

the same identical dude say, friend, you're some punkins at a hundred yards dash, ain't you?"

And then, in a sudden rush, Saxon placed him. He it was who had stood with Roy Blanchard alongside the automobile on the day she had wandered, sick and unwitting, into strange neighborhoods. Nor had that day been the first time she had seen him.

"Remember the Bricklayers' Picnic at Weasel Park?" Billy was asking.

"An' the foot race? Why, I'd know that nose of yours anywhere among a million. You was the guy that stuck your cane between Timothy McManus's legs an' started the grandest roughhouse Weasel Park or any other park ever seen."

The visitor now commenced to laugh. He stood on one leg as he laughed harder, then stood on the other leg. Finally he sat down on a log of driftwood.

"And you were there," he managed to gasp to Billy at last. "You saw it. You saw it." He turned to Saxon. "--And you?"

She nodded.

"Say," Billy began again, as their laughter eased down, "what I wants know is what'd you wanta do it for. Say, what'd you wants do it for? I've been askin' that to myself ever since."

"So have I," was the answer.

"You didn't know Timothy McManus, did you?"

"No; I'd never seen him before, and I've never seen him since."

"But what'd you wanta do it for?" Billy persisted.

The young man laughed, then controlled himself.

"To save my life, I don't know. I have one friend, a most intelligent chap that writes sober, scientific books, and he's always aching to throw an egg into an electric fan to see what will happen. Perhaps that's the way it was with me, except that there was no aching. When I saw those legs flying past, I merely stuck my stick in between. I didn't know I was going to do it. I just did it. Timothy McManus was no more surprised than I was."

"Did they catch you?" Billy asked.

"Do I look as if they did? I was never so scared in my life. Timothy McManus himself couldn't have caught me that day. But what happened afterward? I heard they had a fearful roughhouse, but I couldn't stop to see."

It was not until a quarter of an hour had passed, during which Billy described the fight, that introductions took place. Mark Hall was their visitor's name, and he lived in a bungalow among the Carmel pines.

"But how did you ever find your way to Bierce's Cove?" he was curious to know. "Nobody ever dreams of it from the road."

"So that's its name?" Saxon said.

"It's the name we gave it. One of our crowd camped here one summer, and we named it after him. I'll take a cup of that coffee, if you don't mind."--This to Saxon. "And then I'll show your husband around. We're pretty proud of this cove. Nobody ever comes here but ourselves."

"You didn't get all that muscle from bein' chased by McManus," Billy observed over the coffee.

"Massage under tension," was the cryptic reply.

"Yes," Billy said, pondering vacantly. "Do you eat it with a spoon?"

Hall laughed.

"I'll show you. Take any muscle you want, tense it, then manipulate it with your fingers, so, and so."

"An' that done all that" Billy asked skeptically.

"All that!" the other scorned proudly. "For one muscle you see, there's five tucked away but under command. Touch your finger to any part of me and see."

Billy complied, touching the right breast.

"You know something about anatomy, picking a muscleless spot," scolded Hall.

Billy grinned triumphantly, then, to his amazement, saw a muscle grow up under his finger. He prodded it, and found it hard and honest.

"Massage under tension!" Hall exulted. "Go on--anywhere you want."

And anywhere and everywhere Billy touched, muscles large and small rose up, quivered, and sank down, till the whole body was a ripple of willed quick.

"Never saw anything like it," Billy marveled at the end; "an' I've seen some few good men stripped in my time. Why, you're all living silk."

"Massage under tension did it, my friend. The doctors gave me up. My friends called me the sick rat, and the mangy poet, and all that. Then I quit the city, came down to Carmel, and went in for the open air--and

massage under tension."

"Jim Hazard didn't get his muscles that way," Billy challenged.

"Certainly not, the lucky skunk; he was born with them. Mine's made. That's the difference. I'm a work of art. He's a cave bear. Come along. I'll show you around now. You'd better get your clothes off. Keep on only your shoes and pants, unless you've got a pair of trunks."

"My mother was a poet," Saxon said, while Billy was getting himself ready in the thicket. She had noted Hall's reference to himself.

He seemed incurious, and she ventured further.

"Some of it was printed."

"What was her name?" he asked idly.

"Dayelle Wiley Brown. She wrote: 'The Viking's Quest'; 'Days of Gold'; 'Constancy'; 'The Caballero'; 'Graves at Little Meadow'; and a lot more. Ten of them are in 'The Story of the Files.'"

"I've the book at home," he remarked, for the first time showing real interest. "She was a pioneer, of course--before my time. I'll look her up when I get back to the house. My people were pioneers. They came by Panama, in the Fifties, from Long Island. My father was a doctor, but

he went into business in San Francisco and robbed his fellow men out of enough to keep me and the rest of a large family going ever since.--Say, where are you and your husband bound?"

When Saxon had told him of their attempt to get away from Oakland and of their quest for land, he sympathized with the first and shook his head over the second.

"It's beautiful down beyond the Sur," he told her. "I've been all over those redwood canyons, and the place is alive with game. The government land is there, too. But you'd be foolish to settle. It's too remote. And it isn't good farming land, except in patches in the canyons. I know a Mexican there who is wild to sell his five hundred acres for fifteen hundred dollars. Three dollars an acre! And what does that mean? That it isn't worth more. That it isn't worth so much; because he can find no takers. Land, you know, is worth what they buy and sell it for."

Billy, emerging from the thicket, only in shoes and in pants rolled to the knees, put an end to the conversation; and Saxon watched the two men, physically so dissimilar, climb the rocks and start out the south side of the cove. At first her eyes followed them lazily, but soon she grew interested and worried. Hall was leading Billy up what seemed a perpendicular wall in order to gain the backbone of the rock. Billy went slowly, displaying extreme caution; but twice she saw him slip, the weather-eaten stone crumbling away in his hand and rattling beneath him into the cove. When Hall reached the top, a hundred feet above the sea,

she saw him stand upright and sway easily on the knife-edge which she knew fell away as abruptly on the other side. Billy, once on top, contented himself with crouching on hands and knees. The leader went on, upright, walking as easily as on a level floor. Billy abandoned the hands and knees position, but crouched closely and often helped himself with his hands.

The knife-edge backbone was deeply serrated, and into one of the notches both men disappeared. Saxon could not keep down her anxiety, and climbed out on the north side of the cove, which was less rugged and far less difficult to travel. Even so, the unaccustomed height, the crumbling surface, and the fierce buffets of the wind tried her nerve. Soon she was opposite the men. They had leaped a narrow chasm and were scaling another tooth. Already Billy was going more nimbly, but his leader often paused and waited for him. The way grew severer, and several times the clefts they essayed extended down to the ocean level and spouted spray from the growling breakers that burst through. At other times, standing erect, they would fall forward across deep and narrow clefts until their palms met the opposing side; then, clinging with their fingers, their bodies would be drawn across and up.

Near the end, Hall and Billy went out of sight over the south side of the backbone, and when Saxon saw them again they were rounding the extreme point of rock and coming back on the cove side. Here the way seemed barred. A wide fissure, with hopelessly vertical sides, yawned skywards from a foam-white vortex where the mad waters shot their level

a dozen feet upward and dropped it as abruptly to the black depths of battered rock and writhing weed.

Clinging precariously, the men descended their side till the spray was flying about them. Here they paused. Saxon could see Hall pointing down across the fissure and imagined he was showing some curious thing to Billy. She was not prepared for what followed. The surf-level sucked and sank away, and across and down Hall jumped to a narrow foothold where the wash had roared yards deep the moment before. Without pause, as the returning sea rushed up, he was around the sharp corner and clawing upward hand and foot to escape being caught. Billy was now left alone. He could not even see Hall, much less be further advised by him, and so tensely did Saxon watch, that the pain in her finger-tips, crushed to the rock by which she held, warned her to relax. Billy waited his chance, twice made tentative preparations to leap and sank back, then leaped across and down to the momentarily exposed foothold, doubled the corner, and as he clawed up to join Hall was washed to the waist but not torn away.

Saxon did not breathe easily till they rejoined her at the fire. One glance at Billy told her that he was exceedingly disgusted with himself.

"You'll do, for a beginner," Hall cried, slapping him jovially on the bare shoulder. "That climb is a stunt of mine. Many's the brave lad that's started with me and broken down before we were half way out. I've had a dozen balk at that big jump. Only the athletes make it."

"I ain't ashamed of admittin' I was scairt," Billy growled. "You're a regular goat, an' you sure got my goat half a dozen times. But I'm mad now. It's mostly trainin', an' I'm goin' to camp right here an' train till I can challenge you to a race out an' around an' back to the beach."

"Done," said Hall, putting out his hand in ratification. "And some time, when we get together in San Francisco, I'll lead you up against Bierce--the one this cove is named after. His favorite stunt, when he isn't collecting rattlesnakes, is to wait for a forty-mile-an-hour breeze, and then get up and walk on the parapet of a skyscraper--on the lee side, mind you, so that if he blows off there's nothing to fetch him up but the street. He sprang that on me once."

"Did you do it!" Billy asked eagerly.

"I wouldn't have if I hadn't been on. I'd been practicing it secretly for a week. And I got twenty dollars out of him on the bet."

The tide was now low enough for mussel gathering and Saxon accompanied the men out the north wall. Hall had several sacks to fill. A rig was coming for him in the afternoon, he explained, to cart the mussels back to Carmel. When the sacks were full they ventured further among the rock crevices and were rewarded with three abalones, among the shells of which Saxon found one coveted blister-pearl. Hall initiated them into

the mysteries of pounding and preparing the abalone meat for cooking.

By this time it seemed to Saxon that they had known him a long time. It reminded her of the old times when Bert had been with them, singing his songs or ranting about the last of the Mohicans.

"Now, listen; I'm going to teach you something," Hall commanded, a large round rock poised in his hand above the abalone meat. "You must never, never pound abalone without singing this song. Nor must you sing this song at any other time. It would be the rankest sacrilege. Abalone is the food of the gods. Its preparation is a religious function. Now listen, and follow, and remember that it is a very solemn occasion."

The stone came down with a thump on the white meat, and thereafter arose and fell in a sort of tom-tom accompaniment to the poet's song:

"Oh! some folks boast of quail on toast, Because they think it's tony;
But I'm content to owe my rent And live on abalone.

"Oh! Mission Point's a friendly joint Where every crab's a crony, And
true and kind you'll ever find The clinging abalone.

"He wanders free beside the sea Where 'er the coast is stony; He flaps
his wings and madly sings--The plaintive abalone.

"Some stick to biz, some flirt with Liz Down on the sands of Coney; But

we, by hell, stay in Carmel, And whang the abalone."

He paused with his mouth open and stone upraised. There was a rattle of wheels and a voice calling from above where the sacks of mussels had been carried. He brought the stone down with a final thump and stood up.

"There's a thousand more verses like those," he said. "Sorry I hadn't time to teach you them." He held out his hand, palm downward. "And now, children, bless you, you are now members of the clan of Abalone Eaters, and I solemnly enjoin you, never, no matter what the circumstances, pound abalone meat without chanting the sacred words I have revealed unto you."

"But we can't remember the words from only one hearing," Saxon expostulated.

"That shall be attended to. Next Sunday the Tribe of Abalone Eaters will descend upon you here in Bierce's Cove, and you will be able to see the rites, the writers and writeresses, down even to the Iron Man with the basilisk eyes, vulgarly known as the King of the Sacerdotal Lizards."

"Will Jim Hazard come?" Billy called, as Hall disappeared into the thicket.

"He will certainly come. Is he not the Cave-Bear Pot-Walloper and Gridironer, the most fearsome, and, next to me, the most exalted, of all

the Abalone Eaters?"

Saxon and Billy could only look at each other till they heard the wheels rattle away.

"Well, I'll be doggoned," Billy let out. "He's some boy, that. Nothing stuck up about him. Just like Jim Hazard, comes along and makes himself at home, you're as good as he is an' he's as good as you, an' we're all friends together, just like that, right off the bat."

"He's old stock, too," Saxon said. "He told me while you were undressing. His folks came by Panama before the railroad was built, and from what he said I guess he's got plenty of money."

"He sure don't act like it."

"And isn't he full of fun!" Saxon cried.

"A regular josher. An' HIM!--a POET!"

"Oh, I don't know, Billy. I've heard that plenty of poets are odd."

"That's right, come to think of it. There's Joaquin Miller, lives out in the hills back of Fruitvale. He's certainly odd. It's right near his place where I proposed to you. Just the same I thought poets wore whiskers and eyeglasses, an' never tripped up foot-racers at Sunday

picnics, nor run around with as few clothes on as the law allows, gatherin' mussels an' climbin' like goats."

That night, under the blankets, Saxon lay awake, looking at the stars, pleasuring in the balmy thicket-scents, and listening to the dull rumble of the outer surf and the whispering ripples on the sheltered beach a few feet away. Billy stirred, and she knew he was not yet asleep.

"Glad you left Oakland, Billy?" she snuggled.

"Huh!" came his answer. "Is a clam happy?"

CHAPTER VIII

Every half tide Billy raced out the south wall over the dangerous course he and Hall had traveled, and each trial found him doing it in faster time.

"Wait till Sunday," he said to Saxon. "I'll give that poet a run for his money. Why, they ain't a place that bothers me now. I've got the head confidence. I run where I went on hands an' knees. I figured it out this way: Suppose you had a foot to fall on each side, an' it was soft hay. They'd be nothing to stop you. You wouldn't fall. You'd go like a streak. Then it's just the same if it's a mile down on each side. That ain't your concern. Your concern is to stay on top and go like a streak. An', d'ye know, Saxon, when I went at it that way it never bothered me at all. Wait till he comes with his crowd Sunday. I'm ready for him."

"I wonder what the crowd will be like," Saxon speculated.

"Like him, of course. Birds of a feather flock together. They won't be stuck up, any of them, you'll see."

Hall had sent out fish-lines and a swimming suit by a Mexican cowboy bound south to his ranch, and from the latter they learned much of the government land and how to get it. The week flew by; each day Saxon sighed a farewell of happiness to the sun; each morning they greeted its return with laughter of joy in that another happy day had begun. They

made no plans, but fished, gathered mussels and abalones, and climbed among the rocks as the moment moved them. The abalone meat they pounded religiously to a verse of doggerel improvised by Saxon. Billy prospered. Saxon had never seen him at so keen a pitch of health. As for herself, she scarcely needed the little hand-mirror to know that never, since she was a young girl, had there been such color in her cheeks, such spontaneity of vivacity.

"It's the first time in my life I ever had real play," Billy said. "An' you an' me never played at all all the time we was married. This beats bein' any kind of a millionaire."

"No seven o'clock whistle," Saxon exulted. "I'd lie abed in the mornings on purpose, only everything is too good not to be up. And now you just play at chopping some firewood and catching a nice big perch, Man Friday, if you expect to get any dinner."

Billy got up, hatchet in hand, from where he had been lying prone, digging holes in the sand with his bare toes.

"But it ain't goin' to last," he said, with a deep sigh of regret. "The rains'll come any time now. The good weather's hangin' on something wonderful."

On Saturday morning, returning from his run out the south wall, he missed Saxon. After helloing for her without result, he climbed to the

road. Half a mile away, he saw her astride an unsaddled, unbridled horse that moved unwillingly, at a slow walk, across the pasture.

"Lucky for you it was an old mare that had been used to ridin'--see them saddle marks," he grumbled, when she at last drew to a halt beside him and allowed him to help her down.

"Oh, Billy," she sparkled, "I was never on a horse before. It was glorious! I felt so helpless, too, and so brave."

"I'm proud of you, just the same," he said, in more grumbling tones than before. "'Tain't every married women'd tackle a strange horse that way, especially if she'd never ben on one. An' I ain't forgot that you're goin' to have a saddle animal all to yourself some day--a regular Joe dandy."

The Abalone Eaters, in two rigs and on a number of horses, descended in force on Bierce's Cove. There were half a score of men and almost as many women. All were young, between the ages of twenty-five and forty, and all seemed good friends. Most of them were married. They arrived in a roar of good spirits, tripping one another down the slippery trail and engulfing Saxon and Billy in a comradeship as artless and warm as the sunshine itself. Saxon was appropriated by the girls--she could not realize them women; and they made much of her, praising her camping and traveling equipment and insisting on hearing some of her tale. They were experienced campers themselves, as she quickly discovered when she saw

the pots and pans and clothes-boilers for the mussels which they had brought.

In the meantime Billy and the men had undressed and scattered out after mussels and abalones. The girls lighted on Saxon's ukulele and nothing would do but she must play and sing. Several of them had been to Honolulu, and knew the instrument, confirming Mercedes' definition of ukulele as "jumping flea." Also, they knew Hawaiian songs she had learned from Mercedes, and soon, to her accompaniment, all were singing: "Aloha Oe," "Honolulu Tomboy," and "Sweet Lei Lehua." Saxon was genuinely shocked when some of them, even the more matronly, danced hulas on the sand.

When the men returned, burdened with sacks of shellfish, Mark Hall, as high priest, commanded the due and solemn rite of the tribe. At a wave of his hand, the many poised stones came down in unison on the white meat, and all voices were uplifted in the Hymn to the Abalone. Old verses all sang, occasionally some one sang a fresh verse alone, whereupon it was repeated in chorus. Billy betrayed Saxon by begging her in an undertone to sing the verse she had made, and her pretty voice was timidly raised in:

"We sit around and gaily pound, And bear no acrimony Because our ob--ject is a gob Of sizzling abalone."

"Great!" cried the poet, who had winced at ob--ject. "She speaks the

language of the tribe! Come on, children--now!"

And all chanted Saxon's lines. Then Jim Hazard had a new verse, and one of the girls, and the Iron Man with the basilisk eyes of greenish-gray, whom Saxon recognized from Hall's description. To her it seemed he had the face of a priest.

"Oh! some like ham and some like lamb
And some like macaroni; But bring
me in a pail of gin
And a tub of abalone.

"Oh! some drink rain and some champagne
Or brandy by the pony; But I
will try a little rye
With a dash of abalone.

"Some live on hope and some on dope
And some on alimony. But our
tom-cat, he lives on fat
And tender abalone."

A black-haired, black-eyed man with the roguish face of a satyr, who, Saxon learned, was an artist who sold his paintings at five hundred apiece, brought on himself universal execration and acclamation by singing:

"The more we take, the more they make
In deep sea matrimony; Race
suicide cannot betide
The fertile abalone."

And so it went, verses new and old, verses without end, all in glorification of the succulent shellfish of Carmel. Saxon's enjoyment

was keen, almost ecstatic, and she had difficulty in convincing herself of the reality of it all. It seemed like some fairy tale or book story come true. Again, it seemed more like a stage, and these the actors, she and Billy having blundered into the scene in some incomprehensible way. Much of wit she sensed which she did not understand. Much she did understand. And she was aware that brains were playing as she had never seen brains play before. The puritan streak in her training was astonished and shocked by some of the broadness; but she refused to sit in judgment. They SEEMED good, these light-hearted young people; they certainly were not rough or gross as were many of the crowds she had been with on Sunday picnics. None of the men got drunk, although there were cocktails in vacuum bottles and red wine in a huge demijohn.

What impressed Saxon most was their excessive jollity, their childlike joy, and the childlike things they did. This effect was heightened by the fact that they were novelists and painters, poets and critics, sculptors and musicians. One man, with a refined and delicate face--a dramatic critic on a great San Francisco daily, she was told--introduced a feat which all the men tried and failed at most ludicrously. On the beach, at regular intervals, planks were placed as obstacles. Then the dramatic critic, on all fours, galloped along the sand for all the world like a horse, and for all the world like a horse taking hurdles he jumped the planks to the end of the course.

Quoits had been brought along, and for a while these were pitched with zest. Then jumping was started, and game slid into game. Billy took part

in everything, but did not win first place as often as he had expected. An English writer beat him a dozen feet at tossing the caber. Jim Hazard beat him in putting the heavy "rock." Mark Hall out-jumped him standing and running. But at the standing high back-jump Billy did come first. Despite the handicap of his weight, this victory was due to his splendid back and abdominal lifting muscles. Immediately after this, however, he was brought to grief by Mark Hall's sister, a strapping young amazon in cross-saddle riding costume, who three times tumbled him ignominiously heels over head in a bout of Indian wrestling.

"You're easy," jeered the Iron Man, whose name they had learned was Pete Bideaux. "I can put you down myself, catch-as-catch-can."

Billy accepted the challenge, and found in all truth that the other was rightly nicknamed. In the training camps Billy had sparred and clinched with giant champions like Jim Jeffries and Jack Johnson, and met the weight of their strength, but never had he encountered strength like this of the Iron Man. Do what he could, Billy was powerless, and twice his shoulders were ground into the sand in defeat.

"You'll get a chance back at him," Hazard whispered to Billy, off at one side. "I've brought the gloves along. Of course, you had no chance with him at his own game. He's wrestled in the music halls in London with Hackenschmidt. Now you keep quiet, and we'll lead up to it in a casual sort of way. He doesn't know about you."

Soon, the Englishman who had tossed the caber was sparring with the dramatic critic, Hazard and Hall boxed in fantastic burlesque, then, gloves in hand, looked for the next appropriately matched couple. The choice of Bideaux and Billy was obvious.

"He's liable to get nasty if he's hurt," Hazard warned Billy, as he tied on the gloves for him. "He's old American French, and he's got a devil of a temper. But just keep your head and tap him--whatever you do, keep tapping him."

"Easy sparring now"; "No roughhouse, Bideaux"; "Just light tapping, you know," were admonitions variously addressed to the Iron Man.

"Hold on a second," he said to Billy, dropping his hands. "When I get rapped I do get a bit hot. But don't mind me. I can't help it, you know. It's only for the moment, and I don't mean it."

Saxon felt very nervous, visions of Billy's bloody fights and all the scabs he had slugged rising in her brain; but she had never seen her husband box, and but few seconds were required to put her at ease. The Iron Man had no chance. Billy was too completely the master, guarding every blow, himself continually and almost at will tapping the other's face and body. There was no weight in Billy's blows, only a light and snappy tingle; but their incessant iteration told on the Iron Man's temper. In vain the onlookers warned him to go easy. His face purpled with anger, and his blows became savage. But Billy went on, tap, tap,

tap, calmly, gently, imperturbably. The Iron Man lost control, and rushed and plunged, delivering great swings and upper-cuts of man-killing quality. Billy ducked, side-stepped, blocked, stalled, and escaped all damage. In the clinches, which were unavoidable, he locked the Iron Man's arms, and in the clinches the Iron Man invariably laughed and apologized, only to lose his head with the first tap the instant they separated and be more infuriated than ever.

And when it was over and Billy's identity had been divulged, the Iron Man accepted the joke on himself with the best of humor. It had been a splendid exhibition on Billy's part. His mastery of the sport, coupled with his self-control, had most favorably impressed the crowd, and Saxon, very proud of her man boy, could not but see the admiration all had for him.

Nor did she prove in any way a social failure. When the tired and sweating players lay down in the dry sand to cool off, she was persuaded into accompanying their nonsense songs with the ukulele. Nor was it long, catching their spirit, ere she was singing to them and teaching them quaint songs of early days which she had herself learned as a little girl from Cady--Cady, the saloonkeeper, pioneer, and ax-cavalryman, who had been a bull-whacker on the Salt Intake Trail in the days before the railroad.

One song which became an immediate favorite was:

"Oh! times on Bitter Creek, they never can be beat, Root hog or die is on every wagon sheet; The sand within your throat, the dust within your eye, Bend your back and stand it--root hog or die."

After the dozen verses of "Root Hog or Die," Mark Hall claimed to be especially infatuated with:

"Obadier, he dreampt a dream, Dreampt he was drivin' a ten-mule team, But when he woke he heaved a sigh, The lead-mule kicked e-o-wt the swing-mule's eye."

It was Mark Hall who brought up the matter of Billy's challenge to race out the south wall of the cove, though he referred to the test as lying somewhere in the future. Billy surprised him by saying he was ready at any time. Forthwith the crowd clamored for the race. Hall offered to bet on himself, but there were no takers. He offered two to one to Jim Hazard, who shook his head and said he would accept three to one as a sporting proposition. Billy heard and gritted his teeth.

"I'll take you for five dollars," he said to Hall, "but not at those odds. I'll back myself even."

"It isn't your money I want; it's Hazard's," Hall demurred. "Though I'll give either of you three to one."

"Even or nothing," Billy held out obstinately.

Hall finally closed both bets--even with Billy, and three to one with Hazard.

The path along the knife-edge was so narrow that it was impossible for runners to pass each other, so it was arranged to time the men, Hall to go first and Billy to follow after an interval of half a minute.

Hall toed the mark and at the word was off with the form of a sprinter. Saxon's heart sank. She knew Billy had never crossed the stretch of sand at that speed. Billy darted forward thirty seconds later, and reached the foot of the rock when Hall was half way up. When both were on top and racing from notch to notch, the Iron Man announced that they had scaled the wall in the same time to a second.

"My money still looks good," Hazard remarked, "though I hope neither of them breaks a neck. I wouldn't take that run that way for all the gold that would fill the cove."

"But you'll take bigger chances swimming in a storm on Carmel Beach," his wife chided.

"Oh, I don't know," he retorted. "You haven't so far to fall when swimming."

Billy and Hall had disappeared and were making the circle around the

end. Those on the beach were certain that the poet had gained in the dizzy spurts of flight along the knife-edge. Even Hazard admitted it.

"What price for my money now?" he cried excitedly, dancing up and down.

Hall had reappeared, the great jump accomplished, and was running shoreward. But there was no gap. Billy was on his heels, and on his heels he stayed, in to shore, down the wall, and to the mark on the beach. Billy had won by half a minute.

"Only by the watch," he panted. "Hall was over half a minute ahead of me out to the end. I'm not slower than I thought, but he's faster. He's a woz of a sprinter. He could beat me ten times outa ten, except for accident. He was hung up at the jump by a big sea. That's where I caught 'm. I jumped right after 'm on the same sea, then he set the pace home, and all I had to do was take it."

"That's all right," said Hall. "You did better than beat me. That's the first time in the history of Bierce's Cove that two men made that jump on the same sea. And all the risk was yours, coming last."

"It was a fluke," Billy insisted.

And at that point Saxon settled the dispute of modesty and raised a general laugh by rippling chords on the ukulele and parodying an old hymn in negro minstrel fashion:

"De Lawd move in er mischievous way His blunders to perform."

In the afternoon Jim Hazard and Hall dived into the breakers and swam to the outlying rocks, routing the protesting sea-lions and taking possession of their surf-battered stronghold. Billy followed the swimmers with his eyes, yearning after them so undisguisedly that Mrs. Hazard said to him:

"Why don't you stop in Carmel this winter? Jim will teach you all he knows about the surf. And he's wild to box with you. He works long hours at his desk, and he really needs exercise."

Not until sunset did the merry crowd carry their pots and pans and trove of mussels up to the road and depart. Saxon and Billy watched them disappear, on horses and behind horses, over the top of the first hill, and then descended hand in hand through the thicket to the camp. Billy threw himself on the sand and stretched out.

"I don't know when I've been so tired," he yawned. "An' there's one thing sure: I never had such a day. It's worth livin' twenty years for an' then some."

He reached out his hand to Saxon, who lay beside him.

"And, oh, I was so proud of you, Billy," she said. "I never saw you box before. I didn't know it was like that. The Iron Man was at your mercy all the time, and you kept it from being violent or terrible. Everybody could look on and enjoy--and they did, too."

"Huh, I want to say you was goin' some yourself. They just took to you. Why, honest to God, Saxon, in the singin' you was the whole show, along with the ukulele. All the women liked you, too, an' that's what counts."

It was their first social triumph, and the taste of it was sweet:

"Mr. Hall said he'd looked up the 'Story of the Files,'" Saxon recounted. "And he said mother was a true poet. He said it was astonishing the fine stock that had crossed the Plains. He told me a lot about those times and the people I didn't know. And he's read all about the fight at Little Meadow. He says he's got it in a book at home, and if we come back to Carmel he'll show it to me."

"He wants us to come back all right. D'ye know what he said to me, Saxon t He gave me a letter to some guy that's down on the government land--some poet that's holdin' down a quarter of a section--so we'll be able to stop there, which'll come in handy if the big rains catch us. An'--Oh! that's what I was drivin' at. He said he had a little shack he lived in while the house was buildin'. The Iron Man's livin' in it now, but he's goin' away to some Catholic college to study to be a priest, an' Hall said the shack'd be ours as long as we wanted to use it. An' he

said I could do what the Iron Man was doin' to make a livin'. Hall was kind of bashful when he was offerin' me work. Said it'd be only odd jobs, but that we'd make out. I could help'm plant potatoes, he said; an' he got half savage when he said I couldn't chop wood. That was his job, he said; an' you could see he was actually jealous over it."

"And Mrs. Hall said just about the same to me, Billy. Carmel wouldn't be so bad to pass the rainy season in. And then, too, you could go swimming with Mr. Hazard."

"Seems as if we could settle down wherever we've a mind to," Billy assented. "Carmel's the third place now that's offered. Well, after this, no man need be afraid of makin' a go in the country."

"No good man," Saxon corrected.

"I guess you're right." Billy thought for a moment. "Just the same a dub, too, has a better chance in the country than in the city."

"Who'd have ever thought that such fine people existed?" Saxon pondered.

"It's just wonderful, when you come to think of it."

"It's only what you'd expect from a rich poet that'd trip up a foot-racer at an Irish picnic," Billy exposted.

"The only crowd such a guy'd run with would be like himself, or he'd

make a crowd that was. I wouldn't wonder that he'd make this crowd. Say, he's got some sister, if anybody'd ride up on a sea-lion an' ask you. She's got that Indian wrestlin' down pat, an' she's built for it. An' say, ain't his wife a beaut?"

A little longer they lay in the warm sand. It was Billy who broke the silence, and what he said seemed to proceed out of profound meditation.

"Say, Saxon, d'ye know I don't care if I never see movie pictures again."

CHAPTER IX

Saxon and Billy were gone weeks on the trip south, but in the end they came back to Carmel. They had stopped with Hafler, the poets in the Marble House, which he had built with his own hands. This queer dwelling was all in one room, built almost entirely of white marble. Hailer cooked, as over a campfire, in the huge marble fireplace, which he used in all ways as a kitchen. There were divers shelves of books, and the massive furniture he had made from redwood, as he had made the shakes for the roof. A blanket, stretched across a corner, gave Saxon privacy. The poet was on the verge of departing for San Francisco and New York, but remained a day over with them to explain the country and run over the government land with Billy. Saxon had wanted to go along that morning, but Hafler scornfully rejected her, telling her that her legs were too short. That night, when the men returned, Billy was played out to exhaustion. He frankly acknowledged that Hafler had walked him into the ground, and that his tongue had been hanging out from the first hour. Hafler estimated that they had covered fifty-five miles.

"But such miles!" Billy enlarged. "Half the time up or down, an' 'most all the time without trails. An' such a pace. He was dead right about your short legs, Saxon. You wouldn't a-lasting the first mile. An' such country! We ain't seen anything like it yet."

Hafler left the next day to catch the train at Monterey. He gave them the freedom of the Marble House, and told them to stay the whole winter

if they wanted. Billy elected to loaf around and rest up that day. He was stiff and sore. Moreover, he was stunned by the exhibition of walking prowess on the part of the poet.

"Everybody can do something top-notch down in this country," he marveled. "Now take that Hafler. He's a bigger man than me, an' a heavier. An' weight's against walkin', too. But not with him. He's done eighty miles inside twenty-four hours, he told me, an' once a hundred an' seventy in three days. Why, he made a show outa me. I felt ashamed as a little kid."

"Remember, Billy," Saxon soothed him, "every man to his own game. And down here you're a top-notch at your own game. There isn't one you're not the master of with the gloves."

"I guess that's right," he conceded. "But just the same it goes against the grain to be walked off my legs by a poet--by a poet, mind you."

They spent days in going over the government land, and in the end reluctantly decided against taking it up. The redwood canyons and great cliffs of the Santa Lucia Mountains fascinated Saxon; but she remembered what Hafler had told her of the summer fogs which hid the sun sometimes for a week or two at a time, and which lingered for months. Then, too, there was no access to market. It was many miles to where the nearest wagon road began, at Post's, and from there on, past Point Sur to Carmel, it was a weary and perilous way. Billy, with his teamster

judgment, admitted that for heavy hauling it was anything but a picnic. There was the quarry of perfect marble on Hafler's quarter section. He had said that it would be worth a fortune if near a railroad; but, as it was, he'd make them a present of it if they wanted it.

Billy visioned the grassy slopes pastured with his horses and cattle, and found it hard to turn his back; but he listened with a willing ear to Saxon's argument in favor of a farm-home like the one they had seen in the moving pictures in Oakland. Yes, he agreed, what they wanted was an all-around farm, and an all-around farm they would have if they hiked forty years to find it.

"But it must have redwoods on it," Saxon hastened to stipulate. "I've fallen in love with them. And we can get along without fog. And there must be good wagon-roads, and a railroad not more than a thousand miles away."

Heavy winter rains held them prisoners for two weeks in the Marble House. Saxon browsed among Hafler's books, though most of them were depressingly beyond her, while Billy hunted with Hafler's guns. But he was a poor shot and a worse hunter. His only success was with rabbits, which he managed to kill on occasions when they stood still. With the rifle he got nothing, although he fired at half a dozen different deer, and, once, at a huge cat-creature with a long tail which he was certain was a mountain lion. Despite the way he grumbled at himself, Saxon could see the keen joy he was taking. This belated arousal of the hunting

instinct seemed to make almost another man of him. He was out early and late, compassing prodigious climbs and tramps--once reaching as far as the gold mines Tom had spoken of, and being away two days.

"Talk about pluggin' away at a job in the city, an' goin' to movie' pictures and Sunday picnics for amusement!" he would burst out. "I can't see what was eatin' me that I ever put up with such truck. Here's where I oughta ben all the time, or some place like it."

He was filled with this new mode of life, and was continually recalling old hunting tales of his father and telling them to Saxon.

"Say, I don't get stiffened any more after an all-day tramp," he exulted. "I'm broke in. An' some day, if I meet up with that Hafler, I'll challenge'm to a tramp that'll break his heart."

"Foolish boy, always wanting to play everybody's game and beat them at it," Saxon laughed delightedly.

"Aw, I guess you're right," he growled. "Hafler can always out-walk me. He's made that way. But some day, just the same, if I ever see 'm again, I'll invite 'm to put on the gloves.. .. though I won't be mean enough to make 'm as sore as he made me."

After they left Post's on the way back to Carmel, the condition of the road proved the wisdom of their rejection of the government land. They

passed a rancher's wagon overturned, a second wagon with a broken axle, and the stage a hundred yards down the mountainside, where it had fallen, passengers, horses, road, and all.

"I guess they just about quit tryin' to use this road in the winter," Billy said. "It's horse-killin' an' man-killin', an' I can just see 'm freightin' that marble out over it I don't think."

Settling down at Carmel was an easy matter. The Iron Man had already departed to his Catholic college, and the "shack" turned out to be a three-roomed house comfortably furnished for housekeeping. Hall put Billy to work on the potato patch--a matter of three acres which the poet farmed erratically to the huge delight of his crowd. He planted at all seasons, and it was accepted by the community that what did not rot in the ground was evenly divided between the gophers and trespassing cows. A plow was borrowed, a team of horses hired, and Billy took hold. Also he built a fence around the patch, and after that was set to staining the shingled roof of the bungalow. Hall climbed to the ridge-pole to repeat his warning that Billy must keep away from his wood-pile. One morning Hall came over and watched Billy chopping wood for Saxon. The poet looked on covetously as long as he could restrain himself.

"It's plain you don't know how to use an axe," he sneered. "Here, let me show you."

He worked away for an hour, all the while delivering an exposition on the art of chopping wood.

"Here," Billy expostulated at last, taking hold of the axe. "I'll have to chop a cord of yours now in order to make this up to you."

Hall surrendered the axe reluctantly.

"Don't let me catch you around my wood-pile, that's all," he threatened.

"My wood-pile is my castle, and you've got to understand that."

From a financial standpoint, Saxon and Billy were putting aside much money. They paid no rent, their simple living was cheap, and Billy had all the work he cared to accept. The various members of the crowd seemed in a conspiracy to keep him busy. It was all odd jobs, but he preferred it so, for it enabled him to suit his time to Jim Hazard's. Each day they boxed and took a long swim through the surf. When Hazard finished his morning's writing, he would whoop through the pines to Billy, who dropped whatever work he was doing. After the swim, they would take a fresh shower at Hazard's house, rub each other down in training camp style, and be ready for the noon meal. In the afternoon Hazard returned to his desk, and Billy to his outdoor work, although, still later, they often met for a few miles' run over the hills. Training was a matter of habit to both men. Hazard, when he had finished with seven years of football, knowing the dire death that awaits the big-muscled athlete who ceases training abruptly, had been compelled to keep it up. Not only was

it a necessity, but he had grown to like it. Billy also liked it, for he took great delight in the silk of his body.

Often, in the early morning, gun in hand, he was off with Mark Hall, who taught him to shoot and hunt. Hall had dragged a shotgun around from the days when he wore knee pants, and his keen observing eyes and knowledge of the habits of wild life were a revelation to Billy. This part of the country was too settled for large game, but Billy kept Saxon supplied with squirrels and quail, cottontails and jackrabbits, snipe and wild ducks. And they learned to eat roasted mallard and canvasback in the California style of sixteen minutes in a hot oven. As he became expert with shotgun and rifle, he began to regret the deer and the mountain lion he had missed down below the Sur; and to the requirements of the farm he and Saxon sought he added plenty of game.

But it was not all play in Carmel. That portion of the community which Saxon and Billy came to know, "the crowd," was hard-working. Some worked regularly, in the morning or late at night. Others worked spasmodically, like the wild Irish playwright, who would shut himself up for a week at a time, then emerge, pale and drawn, to play like a madman against the time of his next retirement. The pale and youthful father of a family, with the face of Shelley, who wrote vaudeville turns for a living and blank verse tragedies and sonnet cycles for the despair of managers and publishers, hid himself in a concrete cell with three-foot walls, so piped, that, by turning a lever, the whole structure spouted water upon the impending intruder. But in the main, they respected each other's

work-time. They drifted into one another's houses as the spirit prompted, but if they found a man at work they went their way. This obtained to all except Mark Hall, who did not have to work for a living; and he climbed trees to get away from popularity and compose in peace.

The crowd was unique in its democracy and solidarity. It had little intercourse with the sober and conventional part of Carmel. This section constituted the aristocracy of art and letters, and was sneered at as bourgeois. In return, it looked askance at the crowd with its rampant bohemianism. The taboo extended to Billy and Saxon. Billy took up the attitude of the clan and sought no work from the other camp. Nor was work offered him.

Hall kept open house. The big living room, with its huge fireplace, divans, shelves and tables of books and magazines, was the center of things. Here, Billy and Saxon were expected to be, and in truth found themselves to be, as much at home as anybody. Here, when wordy discussions on all subjects under the sun were not being waged, Billy played at cut-throat Pedro, horrible fives, bridge, and pinochle. Saxon, a favorite of the young women, sewed with them, teaching them pretties and being taught in fair measure in return.

It was Billy, before they had been in Carmel a week, who said shyly to Saxon:

"Say, you can't guess how I'm missin' all your nice things. What's

the matter with writin' Tom to express 'm down? When we start trampin' again, we'll express 'm back."

Saxon wrote the letter, and all that day her heart was singing. Her man was still her lover. And there were in his eyes all the old lights which had been blotted out during the nightmare period of the strike.

"Some pretty nifty skirts around here, but you've got 'em all beat, or I'm no judge," he told her. And again: "Oh, I love you to death anyway. But if them things ain't shipped down there'll be a funeral."

Hall and his wife owned a pair of saddle horses which were kept at the livery stable, and here Billy naturally gravitated. The stable operated the stage and carried the mails between Carmel and Monterey. Also, it rented out carriages and mountain wagons that seated nine persons. With carriages and wagons a driver was furnished. The stable often found itself short a driver, and Billy was quickly called upon. He became an extra man at the stable. He received three dollars a day at such times, and drove many parties around the Seventeen Mile Drive, up Carmel Valley, and down the coast to the various points and beaches.

"But they're a pretty uppish sort, most of 'em," he said to Saxon, referring to the persons he drove. "Always MISTER Roberts this, an' MISTER Roberts that--all kinds of ceremony so as to make me not forget they consider themselves better 'n me. You see, I ain't exactly a servant, an' yet I ain't good enough for them. I'm the driver--something

half way between a hired man and a chauffeur. Huh! When they eat they give me my lunch off to one side, or afterward. No family party like with Hall an' HIS kind. An' that crowd to-day, why, they just naturally didn't have no lunch for me at all. After this, always, you make me up my own lunch. I won't be be holdin' to 'em for nothin', the damned geezers. An' you'd a-died to seen one of 'em try to give me a tip. I didn't say nothin'. I just looked at 'm like I didn't see 'm, an' turned away casual-like after a moment, leavin' him as embarrassed as hell."

Nevertheless, Billy enjoyed the driving, never more so than when he held the reins, not of four plodding workhorses, but of four fast driving animals, his foot on the powerful brake, and swung around curves and along dizzy cliff-rims to a frightened chorus of women passengers. And when it came to horse judgment and treatment of sick and injured horses even the owner of the stable yielded place to Billy.

"I could get a regular job there any time," he boasted quietly to Saxon. "Why, the country's just sproutin' with jobs for any so-so sort of a fellow. I bet anything, right now, if I said to the boss that I'd take sixty dollars an' work regular, he'd jump for me. He's hinted as much.--And, say! Are you onta the fact that yours truly has learnt a new trade. Well he has. He could take a job stage-drivin' anywheres. They drive six on some of the stages up in Lake County. If we ever get there, I'll get thick with some driver, just to get the reins of six in my hands. An' I'll have you on the box beside me. Some goin' that! Some goin'!"

Billy took little interest in the many discussions waged in Hall's big living room. "Wind-chewin'," was his term for it. To him it was so much good time wasted that might be employed at a game of Pedro, or going swimming, or wrestling in the sand. Saxon, on the contrary, delighted in the logomachy, though little enough she understood of it, following mainly by feeling, and once in a while catching a high light.

But what she could never comprehend was the pessimism that so often cropped up. The wild Irish playwright had terrible spells of depression. Shelley, who wrote vaudeville turns in the concrete cell, was a chronic pessimist. St. John, a young magazine writer, was an anarchic disciple of Nietzsche. Masson, a painter, held to a doctrine of eternal recurrence that was petrifying. And Hall, usually so merry, could outfoot them all when he once got started on the cosmic pathos of religion and the gibbering anthropomorphisms of those who loved not to die. At such times Saxon was oppressed by these sad children of art. It was inconceivable that they, of all people, should be so forlorn.

One night Hall turned suddenly upon Billy, who had been following dimly and who only comprehended that to them everything in life was rotten and wrong.

"Here, you pagan, you, you stolid and flesh-fettered ox, you monstrosity of over-weening and perennial health and joy, what do you think of it?" Hall demanded.

"Oh, I've had my troubles," Billy answered, speaking in his wonted slow way. "I've had my hard times, an' fought a losin' strike, an' soaked my watch, an' ben unable to pay my rent or buy grub, an' slugged scabs, an' ben slugged, and ben thrown into jail for makin' a fool of myself. If I get you, I'd be a whole lot better to be a swell hog fattenin' for market an' nothin' worryin', than to be a guy sick to his stomach from not savvyin' how the world is made or from wonderin' what's the good of anything."

"That's good, that prize hog," the poet laughed. "Least irritation, least effort--a compromise of Nirvana and life. Least irritation, least effort, the ideal existence: a jellyfish floating in a tideless, tepid, twilight sea."

"But you're missin' all the good things," Billy objected.

"Name them," came the challenge.

Billy was silent a moment. To him life seemed a large and generous thing. He felt as if his arms ached from inability to compass it all, and he began, haltingly at first, to put his feeling into speech.

"If you'd ever stood up in the ring an' out-gamed an' out-fought a man as good as yourself for twenty rounds, you'd get what I'm drivin' at. Jim Hazard an' I get it when we swim out through the surf an' laugh in

the teeth of the biggest breakers that ever pounded the beach, an' when we come out from the shower, rubbed down and dressed, our skin an' muscles like silk, our bodies an' brains all a-tinglin' like silk.. .."

He paused and gave up from sheer inability to express ideas that were nebulous at best and that in reality were remembered sensations.

"Silk of the body, can you beat it?" he concluded lamely, feeling that he had failed to make his point, embarrassed by the circle of listeners.

"We know all that," Hall retorted. "The lies of the flesh. Afterward come rheumatism and diabetes. The wine of life is heady, but all too quickly it turns to--"

"Uric acid," interpolated the wild Irish playwright.

"They's plenty more of the good things," Billy took up with a sudden rush of words. "Good things all the way up from juicy porterhouse and the kind of coffee Mrs. Hall makes to...." He hesitated at what he was about to say, then took it at a plunge. "To a woman you can love an' that loves you. Just take a look at Saxon there with the ukulele in her lap. There's where I got the jellyfish in the dishwater an' the prize hog skinned to death."

A shout of applause and great hand-clapping went up from the girls, and Billy looked painfully uncomfortable.

"But suppose the silk goes out of your body till you creak like a rusty wheelbarrow?" Hall pursued. "Suppose, just suppose, Saxon went away with another man. What then?"

Billy considered a space.

"Then it'd be me for the dishwater an' the jellyfish, I guess." He straightened up in his chair and threw back his shoulders unconsciously as he ran a hand over his biceps and swelled it. Then he took another look at Saxon. "But thank the Lord I still got a wallop in both my arms an' a wife to fill 'em with love."

Again the girls applauded, and Mrs. Hall cried:

"Look at Saxon! She blushing! What have you to say for yourself?"

"That no woman could be happier," she stammered, "and no queen as proud. And that--"

She completed the thought by strumming on the ukulele and singing:

"De Lawd move in or mischievous way His blunders to perform."

"I give you best," Hall grinned to Billy.

"Oh, I don't know," Billy disclaimed modestly. "You've read so much I guess you know more about everything than I do."

"Oh! Oh!" "Traitor!" "Taking it all back!" the girls cried variously.

Billy took heart of courage, reassured them with a slow smile, and said:

"Just the same I'd sooner be myself than have book indigestion. An' as for Saxon, why, one kiss of her lips is worth more'n all the libraries in the world."

CHAPTER X

"There be hills and valleys, and rich land, and streams of clear water, good wagon roads and a railroad not too far away, plenty of sunshine, and cold enough at night to need blankets, and not only pines but plenty of other kinds of trees, with open spaces to pasture Billy's horses and cattle, and deer and rabbits for him to shoot, and lots and lots of redwood trees, and... and... well, and no fog," Saxon concluded the description of the farm she and Billy sought.

Mark Hall laughed delightedly.

"And nightingales roosting in all the trees," he cried; "flowers that neither fail nor fade, bees without stings, honey dew every morning, showers of manna betweenwhiles, fountains of youth and quarries of philosopher's stones--why, I know the very place. Let me show you."

She waited while he pored over road-maps of the state. Failing in them, he got out a big atlas, and, though all the countries of the world were in it, he could not find what he was after.

"Never mind," he said. "Come over to-night and I'll be able to show you."

That evening he led her out on the veranda to the telescope, and she found herself looking through it at the full moon.

"Somewhere up there in some valley you'll find that farm," he teased.

Mrs. Hall looked inquiringly at them as they returned inside.

"I've been showing her a valley in the moon where she expects to go farming," he laughed.

"We started out prepared to go any distance," Saxon said. "And if it's to the moon, I expect we can make it."

"But my dear child, you can't expect to find such a paradise on the earth," Hall continued. "For instance, you can't have redwoods without fog. They go together. The redwoods grow only in the fog belt."

Saxon debated a while.

"Well, we could put up with a little fog," she conceded, "--almost anything to have redwoods. I don't know what a quarry of philosopher's stones is like, but if it's anything like Mr. Hafler's marble quarry, and there's a railroad handy, I guess we could manage to worry along. And you don't have to go to the moon for honey dew. They scrape it off of the leaves of the bushes up in Nevada County. I know that for a fact, because my father told my mother about it, and she told me."

A little later in the evening, the subject of farming having remained

uppermost, Hall swept off into a diatribe against the "gambler's paradise," which was his epithet for the United States.

"When you think of the glorious chance," he said. "A new country, bounded by the oceans, situated just right in latitude, with the richest land and vastest natural resources of any country in the world, settled by immigrants who had thrown off all the leading strings of the Old World and were in the humor for democracy. There was only one thing to stop them from perfecting the democracy they started, and that thing was greediness.

"They started gobbling everything in sight like a lot of swine, and while they gobbled democracy went to smash. Gobbling became gambling. It was a nation of tin horns. Whenever a man lost his stake, all he had to do was to chase the frontier west a few miles and get another stake. They moved over the face of the land like so many locusts. They destroyed everything--the Indians, the soil, the forests, just as they destroyed the buffalo and the passenger pigeon. Their morality in business and politics was gambler morality. Their laws were gambling laws--how to play the game. Everybody played. Therefore, hurrah for the game. Nobody objected, because nobody was unable to play. As I said, the losers chased the frontier for fresh stakes. The winner of to-day, broke to-morrow, on the day following might be riding his luck to royal flushes on five-card draws.

"So they gobbled and gambled from the Atlantic to the Pacific, until

they'd swined a whole continent. When they'd finished with the lands and forests and mines, they turned back, gambling for any little stakes they'd overlooked, gambling for franchises and monopolies, using politics to protect their crooked deals and brace games. And democracy gone clean to smash.

"And then was the funniest time of all. The losers couldn't get any more stakes, while the winners went on gambling among themselves. The losers could only stand around with their hands in their pockets and look on. When they got hungry, they went, hat in hand, and begged the successful gamblers for a job. The losers went to work for the winners, and they've been working for them ever since, and democracy side-tracked up Salt Creek. You, Billy Roberts, have never had a hand in the game in your life. That's because your people were among the also-rans."

"How about yourself?" Billy asked. "I ain't seen you holdin' any hands."

"I don't have to. I don't count. I am a parasite."

"What's that?"

"A flea, a woodtick, anything that gets something for nothing. I batten on the mangy hides of the workingmen. I don't have to gamble. I don't have to work. My father left me enough of his winnings.--Oh, don't preen yourself, my boy. Your folks were just as bad as mine. But yours lost, and mine won, and so you plow in my potato patch."

"I don't see it," Billy contended stoutly. "A man with gumption can win out to-day--"

"On government land?" Hall asked quickly.

Billy swallowed and acknowledged the stab.

"Just the same he can win out," he reiterated.

"Surely--he can win a job from some other fellow? A young husky with a good head like yours can win jobs anywhere. But think of the handicaps on the fellows who lose. How many tramps have you met along the road who could get a job driving four horses for the Carmel Livery Stabler And some of them were as husky as you when they were young. And on top of it all you've got no shout coming. It's a mighty big come-down from gambling for a continent to gambling for a job."

"Just the same--" Billy recommenced.

"Oh, you've got it in your blood," Hall cut him off cavalierly. "And why not? Everybody in this country has been gambling for generations. It was in the air when you were born. You've breathed it all your life. You, who 've never had a white chip in the game, still go on shouting for it and capping for it."

"But what are all of us losers to do?" Saxon inquired.

"Call in the police and stop the game," Hall recommended. "It's crooked."

Saxon frowned.

"Do what your forefathers didn't do," he amplified. "Go ahead and perfect democracy."

She remembered a remark of Mercedes. "A friend of mine says that democracy is an enchantment."

"It is--in a gambling joint. There are a million boys in our public schools right now swallowing the gump of canal boy to President, and millions of worthy citizens who sleep sound every night in the belief that they have a say in running the country."

"You talk like my brother Tom," Saxon said, failing to comprehend. "If we all get into politics and work hard for something better maybe we'll get it after a thousand years or so. But I want it now." She clenched her hands passionately. "I can't wait; I want it now."

"But that is just what I've been telling you, my dear girl. That's what's the trouble with all the losers. They can't wait. They want it now--a stack of chips and a fling at the game. Well, they won't get it

now. That's what's the matter with you, chasing a valley in the moon. That's what's the matter with Billy, aching right now for a chance to win ten cents from me at Pedro cussing wind-chewing under his breath."

"Gee! you'd make a good soap-boxer," commented Billy.

"And I'd be a soap-boxer if I didn't have the spending of my father's ill-gotten gains. It's none of my affair. Islet them rot. They'd be just as bad if they were on top. It's all a mess--blind bats, hungry swine, and filthy buzzards--"

Here Mrs. Hall interferred.

"Now, Mark, you stop that, or you'll be getting the blues."

He tossed his mop of hair and laughed with an effort.

"No I won't," he denied. "I'm going to get ten cents from Billy at a game of Pedro. He won't have a look in."

Saxon and Billy flourished in the genial human atmosphere of Carmel. They appreciated in their own estimation. Saxon felt that she was something more than a laundry girl and the wife of a union teamster. She was no longer pent in the narrow working class environment of a Pine street neighborhood. Life had grown opulent. They fared better physically, materially, and spiritually; and all this was reflected

in their features, in the carriage of their bodies. She knew Billy had never been handsomer nor in more splendid bodily condition. He swore he had a harem, and that she was his second wife--twice as beautiful as the first one he had married. And she demurely confessed to him that Mrs. Hall and several others of the matrons had enthusiastically admired her form one day when in for a cold dip in Carmel river. They had got around her, and called her Venus, and made her crouch and assume different poses.

Billy understood the Venus reference; for a marble one, with broken arms, stood in Hall's living room, and the poet had told him the world worshiped it as the perfection of female form.

"I always said you had Annette Kellerman beat a mile," Billy said; and so proud was his air of possession that Saxon blushed and trembled, and hid her hot face against his breast.

The men in the crowd were open in their admiration of Saxon, in an above-board manner. But she made no mistake. She did not lose her head. There was no chance of that, for her love for Billy beat more strongly than ever. Nor was she guilty of over-appraisal. She knew him for what he was, and loved him with open eyes. He had no book learning, no art, like the other men. His grammar was bad; she knew that, just as she knew that he would never mend it. Yet she would not have exchanged him for any of the others, not even for Mark Hall with the princely heart whom she loved much in the same way that she loved his wife.

For that matter, she found in Billy a certain health and rightness, a certain essential integrity, which she prized more highly than all book learning and bank accounts. It was by virtue of this health, and rightness, and integrity, that he had beaten Hall in argument the night the poet was on the pessimistic rampage. Billy had beaten him, not with the weapons of learning, but just by being himself and by speaking out the truth that was in him. Best of all, he had not even known that he had beaten, and had taken the applause as good-natured banter. But Saxon knew, though she could scarcely tell why; and she would always remember how the wife of Shelley had whispered to her afterward with shining eyes: "Oh, Saxon, you must be so happy."

Were Saxon driven to speech to attempt to express what Billy meant to her, she would have done it with the simple word "man." Always he was that to her. Always in glowing splendor, that was his connotation--MAN. Sometimes, by herself, she would all but weep with joy at recollection of his way of informing some truculent male that he was standing on his foot. "Get off your foot. You're standin' on it." It was Billy! It was magnificently Billy. And it was this Billy who loved her. She knew it. She knew it by the pulse that only a woman knows how to gauge. He loved her less wildly, it was true; but more fondly, more maturely. It was the love that lasted--if only they did not go back to the city where the beautiful things of the spirit perished and the beast bared its fangs.

In the early spring, Mark Hall and his wife went to New York, the two

Japanese servants of the bungalow were dismissed, and Saxon and Billy were installed as caretakers. Jim Hazard, too, departed on his yearly visit to Paris; and though Billy missed him, he continued his long swims out through the breakers. Hall's two saddle horses had been left in his charge, and Saxon made herself a pretty cross-saddle riding costume of tawny-brown corduroy that matched the glints in her hair. Billy no longer worked at odd jobs. As extra driver at the stable he earned more than they spent, and, in preference to cash, he taught Saxon to ride, and was out and away with her over the country on all-day trips. A favorite ride was around by the coast to Monterey, where he taught her to swim in the big Del Monte tank. They would come home in the evening across the hills. Also, she took to following him on his early morning hunts, and life seemed one long vacation.

"I'll tell you one thing," he said to Saxon, one day, as they drew their horses to a halt and gazed down into Carmel Valley. "I ain't never going to work steady for another man for wages as long as I live."

"Work isn't everything," she acknowledged.

"I should guess not. Why, look here, Saxon, what'd it mean if I worked teamin' in Oakland for a million dollars a day for a million years and just had to go on stayin' there an' livin' the way we used to? It'd mean work all day, three squares, an' movie' pictures for recreation. Movin' pictures! Huh! We're livin' movie' pictures these days. I'd sooner have one year like what we're havin' here in Carmel and then die, than a

thousan' million years like on Pine street."

Saxon had warned the Halls by letter that she and Billy intended starting on their search for the valley in the moon as soon as the first of summer arrived. Fortunately, the poet was put to no inconvenience, for Bideaux, the Iron Man with the basilisk eyes, had abandoned his dreams of priesthood and decided to become an actor. He arrived at Carmel from the Catholic college in time to take charge of the bungalow.

Much to Saxon's gratification, the crowd was loth to see them depart. The owner of the Carmel stable offered to put Billy in charge at ninety dollars a month. Also, he received a similar offer from the stable in Pacific Grove.

"Whither away," the wild Irish playwright hailed them on the station platform at Monterey. He was just returning from New York.

"To a valley in the moon," Saxon answered gaily.

He regarded their business-like packs.

"By George!" he cried. "I'll do it! By George! Let me come along." Then his face fell. "And I've signed the contract," he groaned. "Three acts! Say, you're lucky. And this time of year, too."

CHAPTER XI

"We hiked into Monterey last winter, but we're ridin' out now, b 'gosh!" Billy said as the train pulled out and they leaned back in their seats.

They had decided against retracing their steps over the ground already traveled, and took the train to San Francisco. They had been warned by Mark Hall of the enervation of the south, and were bound north for their blanket climate. Their intention was to cross the Bay to Sausalito and wander up through the coast counties. Here, Hall had told them, they would find the true home of the redwood. But Billy, in the smoking car for a cigarette, seated himself beside a man who was destined to deflect them from their course. He was a keen-faced, dark-eyed man, undoubtedly a Jew; and Billy, remembering Saxon's admonition always to ask questions, watched his opportunity and started a conversation. It took but a little while to learn that Gunston was a commission merchant, and to realize that the content of his talk was too valuable for Saxon to lose. Promptly, when he saw that the other's cigar was finished, Billy invited him into the next car to meet Saxon. Billy would have been incapable of such an act prior to his sojourn in Carmel. That much at least he had acquired of social facility.

"He's just teen tellin' me about the potato kings, and I wanted him to tell you," Billy explained to Saxon after the introduction. "Go on and tell her, Mr. Gunston, about that fan tan sucker that made nineteen thousan' last year in celery an' asparagus."

"I was just telling your husband about the way the Chinese make things go up the San Joaquin river. It would be worth your while to go up there and look around. It's the good season now--too early for mosquitoes. You can get off the train at Black Diamond or Antioch and travel around among the big farming islands on the steamers and launches. The fares are cheap, and you'll find some of those big gasoline boats, like the Duchess and Princess, more like big steamboats."

"Tell her about Chow Lam," Billy urged.

The commission merchant leaned back and laughed.

"Chow Lam, several years ago, was a broken-down fan tan player. He hadn't a cent, and his health was going back on him. He had worn out his back with twenty years' work in the gold mines, washing over the tailings of the early miners. And whatever he'd made he'd lost at gambling. Also, he was in debt three hundred dollars to the Six Companies--you know, they're Chinese affairs. And, remember, this was only seven years ago--health breaking down, three hundred in debt, and no trade. Chow Lam blew into Stockton and got a job on the peat lands at day's wages. It was a Chinese company, down on Middle River, that farmed celery and asparagus. This was when he got onto himself and took stock of himself. A quarter of a century in the United States, back not so strong as it used to was, and not a penny laid by for his return to China. He saw how the Chinese in the company had done it--saved their

wages and bought a share.

"He saved his wages for two years, and bought one share in a thirty-share company. That was only five years ago. They leased three hundred acres of peat land from a white man who preferred traveling in Europe. Out of the profits of that one share in the first year, he bought two shares in another company. And in a year more, out of the three shares, he organized a company of his own. One year of this, with bad luck, and he just broke even. That brings it up to three years ago. The following year, bumper crops, he netted four thousand. The next year it was five thousand. And last year he cleaned up nineteen thousand dollars. Pretty good, eh, for old broken-down Chow Lam?"

"My!" was all Saxon could say.

Her eager interest, however, incited the commission merchant to go on.

"Look at Sing Kee--the Potato King of Stockton. I know him well. I've had more large deals with him and made less money than with any man I know. He was only a coolie, and he smuggled himself into the United States twenty years ago. Started at day's wages, then peddled vegetables in a couple of baskets slung on a stick, and after that opened up a store in Chinatown in San Francisco. But he had a head on him, and he was soon onto the curves of the Chinese farmers that dealt at his store. The store couldn't make money fast enough to suit him. He headed up the San Joaquin. Didn't do much for a couple of years except keep his eyes

peeled. Then he jumped in and leased twelve hundred acres at seven dollars an acre."

"My God!" Billy said in an awe-struck voice. "Eight thousan', four hundred dollars just for rent the first year. I know five hundred acres I can buy for three dollars an acre."

"Will it grow potatoes?" Gunston asked.

Billy shook his head. "Nor nothin' else, I guess."

All three laughed heartily and the commission merchant resumed:

"That seven dollars was only for the land. Possibly you know what it costs to plow twelve hundred acres?"

Billy nodded solemnly.

"And he got a hundred and sixty sacks to the acre that year," Gunston continued. "Potatoes were selling at fifty cents. My father was at the head of our concern at the time, so I know for a fact. And Sing Kee could have sold at fifty cents and made money. But did he? Trust a Chinaman to know the market. They can skin the commission merchants at it. Sing Kee held on. When 'most everybody else had sold, potatoes began to climb. He laughed at our buyers when we offered him sixty cents, seventy cents, a dollar. Do you want to know what he finally did sell

for? One dollar and sixty-five a sack. Suppose they actually cost him forty cents. A hundred and sixty times twelve hundred... let me see... twelve times nought is nought and twelve times sixteen is a hundred and ninety-two... a hundred and ninety-two thousand sacks at a dollar and a quarter net... four into a hundred and ninety-two is forty-eight, plus, is two hundred and forty--there you are, two hundred and forty thousand dollars clear profit on that year's deal."

"An' him a Chink," Billy mourned disconsolately. He turned to Saxon.

"They ought to be some new country for us white folks to go to.

Gosh!--we're settin' on the stoop all right, all right."

"But, of course, that was unusual," Glunston hastened to qualify. "There was a failure of potatoes in other districts, and a corner, and in some strange way Sing Kee was dead on. He never made profits like that again. But he goes ahead steadily. Last year he had four thousand acres in potatoes, a thousand in asparagus, five hundred in celery and five hundred in beans. And he's running six hundred acres in seeds. No matter what happens to one or two crops, he can't lose on all of them."

"I've seen twelve thousand acres of apple trees," Saxon said. "And I'd like to see four thousand acres in potatoes."

"And we will," Billy rejoined with great positiveness. "It's us for the San Joaquin. We don't know what's in our country. No wonder we're out on the stoop."

"You'll find lots of kings up there," Gunston related. "Yep Hong Lee--they call him 'Big Jim,' and Ah Pock, and Ah Whang, and--then there's Shima, the Japanese potato king. He's worth several millions. Lives like a prince."

"Why don't Americans succeed like that?" asked Saxon.

"Because they won't, I guess. There's nothing to stop them except themselves. I'll tell you one thing, though--give me the Chinese to deal with. He's honest. His word is as good as his bond. If he says he'll do a thing, he'll do it. And, anyway, the white man doesn't know how to farm. Even the up-to-date white farmer is content with one crop at a time and rotation of crops. Mr. John Chinaman goes him one better, and grows two crops at one time on the same soil. I've seen it--radishes and carrots, two crops, sown at one time."

"Which don't stand to reason," Billy objected. "They'd be only a half crop of each."

"Another guess coming," Gunston jeered. "Carrots have to be thinned when they're so far along. So do radishes. But carrots grow slow. Radishes grow fast. The slow-going carrots serve the purpose of thinning the radishes. And when the radishes are pulled, ready for market, that thins the carrots, which come along later. You can't beat the Chink."

"Don't see why a white man can't do what a Chink can," protested Billy.

"That sounds all right," Gunston replied. "The only objection is that the white man doesn't. The Chink is busy all the time, and he keeps the ground just as busy. He has organization, system. Who ever heard of white farmers keeping books? The Chink does. No guess work with him. He knows just where he stands, to a cent, on any crop at any moment. And he knows the market. He plays both ends. How he does it is beyond me, but he knows the market better than we commission merchants.

"Then, again, he's patient but not stubborn. Suppose he does make a mistake, and gets in a crop, and then finds the market is wrong. In such a situation the white man gets stubborn and hangs on like a bulldog. But not the Chink. He's going to minimize the losses of that mistake. That land has got to work, and make money. Without a quiver or a regret, the moment he's learned his error, he puts his plows into that crop, turns it under, and plants something else. He has the savvy. He can look at a sprout, just poked up out of the ground, and tell how it's going to turn out--whether it will head up or won't head up; or if it's going to head up good, medium, or bad. That's one end. Take the other end. He controls his crop. He forces it or holds it back with an eye on the market. And when the market is just right, there's his crop, ready to deliver, timed to the minute."

The conversation with Gunston lasted hours, and the more he talked of the Chinese and their farming ways the more Saxon became aware of a

growing dissatisfaction. She did not question the facts. The trouble was that they were not alluring. Somehow, she could not find place for them in her valley of the moon. It was not until the genial Jew left the train that Billy gave definite statement to what was vaguely bothering her.

"Huh! We ain't Chinks. We're white folks. Does a Chink ever want to ride a horse, hell-bent for election an' havin' a good time of it? Did you ever see a Chink go swimmin' out through the breakers at Carmel?--or boxin', wrestlin', runnin' an' jumpin' for the sport of it? Did you ever see a Chink take a shotgun on his arm, tramp six miles, an' come back happy with one measly rabbit? What does a Chink do? Work his damned head off. That's all he's good for. To hell with work, if that's the whole of the game--an' I've done my share of work, an' I can work alongside of any of 'em. But what's the good? If they's one thing I've learned solid since you an' me hit the road, Saxon, it is that work's the least part of life. God!--if it was all of life I couldn't cut my throat quick enough to get away from it. I want shotguns an' rifles, an' a horse between my legs. I don't want to be so tired all the time I can't love my wife. Who wants to be rich an' clear two hundred an' forty thousand on a potato deal! Look at Rockefeller. Has to live on milk. I want porterhouse and a stomach that can bite sole-leather. An' I want you, an' plenty of time along with you, an' fun for both of us. What's the good of life if they ain't no fun?"

"Oh, Billy!" Saxon cried. "It's just what I've been trying to get

straightened out in my head. It's been worrying me for ever so long. I was afraid there was something wrong with me--that I wasn't made for the country after all. All the time I didn't envy the San Leandro Portuguese. I didn't want to be one, nor a Pajaro Valley Dalmatian, nor even a Mrs. Mortimer. And you didn't either. What we want is a valley of the moon, with not too much work, and all the fun we want. And we'll just keep on looking until we find it. And if we don't find it, we'll go on having the fun just as we have ever since we left Oakland. And, Billy... we're never, never going to work our damned heads off, are we?"

"Not on your life," Billy growled in fierce affirmation.

They walked into Black Diamond with their packs on their backs. It was a scattered village of shabby little cottages, with a main street that was a wallow of black mud from the last late spring rain. The sidewalks bumped up and down in uneven steps and landings. Everything seemed un-American. The names on the strange dingy shops were unspeakably foreign. The one dingy hotel was run by a Greek. Greeks were everywhere--swarthy men in sea-boots and tam-o'-shanters, hatless women in bright colors, hordes of sturdy children, and all speaking in outlandish voices, crying shrilly and vivaciously with the volubility of the Mediterranean.

"Huh!--this ain't the United States," Billy muttered. Down on the water front they found a fish cannery and an asparagus cannery in the height of the busy season, where they looked in vain among the toilers for

familiar American faces. Billy picked out the bookkeepers and foremen for Americans. All the rest were Greeks, Italians, and Chinese.

At the steamboat wharf, they watched the bright-painted Greek boats arriving, discharging their loads of glorious salmon, and departing. New York Cut-Off, as the slough was called, curved to the west and north and flowed into a vast body of water which was the united Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers.

Beyond the steamboat wharf, the fishing wharves dwindled to stages for the drying of nets; and here, away from the noise and clatter of the alien town, Saxon and Billy took off their packs and rested. The tall, rustling tules grew out of the deep water close to the dilapidated boat-landing where they sat. Opposite the town lay a long flat island, on which a row of ragged poplars leaned against the sky.

"Just like in that Dutch windmill picture Mark Hall has," Saxon said.

Billy pointed out the mouth of the slough and across the broad reach of water to a cluster of tiny white buildings, behind which, like a glimmering mirage, rolled the low Montezuma Hills.

"Those houses is Collinsville," he informed her. "The Sacramento river comes in there, and you go up it to Rio Vista an' Isleton, and Walnut Grove, and all those places Mr. Gunston was tellin' us about. It's all islands and sloughs, connectin' clear across an' back to the San

Joaquin."

"Isn't the sun good," Saxon yawned. "And how quiet it is here, so short a distance away from those strange foreigners. And to think! in the cities, right now, men are beating and killing each other for jobs."

Now and again an overland passenger train rushed by in the distance, echoing along the background of foothills of Mt. Diablo, which bulked, twin-peaked, greencrinkled, against the sky. Then the slumbrous quiet would fall, to be broken by the far call of a foreign tongue or by a gasoline fishing boat chugging in through the mouth of the slough.

Not a hundred feet away, anchored close in the tules, lay a beautiful white yacht. Despite its tininess, it looked broad and comfortable. Smoke was rising for'ard from its stovepipe. On its stern, in gold letters, they read Roamer. On top of the cabin, basking in the sunshine, lay a man and woman, the latter with a pink scarf around her head. The man was reading aloud from a book, while she sewed. Beside them sprawled a fox terrier.

"Gosh! they don't have to stick around cities to be happy," Billy commented.

A Japanese came on deck from the cabin, sat down for'ard, and began picking a chicken. The feathers floated away in a long line toward the mouth of the slough.

"Oh! Look!" Saxon pointed in her excitement. "He's fishing! And the line is fast to his toe!"

The man had dropped the book face-downward on the cabin and reached for the line, while the woman looked up from her sewing, and the terrier began to bark. In came the line, hand under hand, and at the end a big catfish. When this was removed, and the line rebaited and dropped overboard, the man took a turn around his toe and went on reading.

A Japanese came down on the landing-stage beside Saxon and Billy, and hailed the yacht. He carried parcels of meat and vegetables; one coat pocket bulged with letters, the other with morning papers. In response to his hail, the Japanese on the yacht stood up with the part-plucked chicken. The man said something to him, put aside the book, got into the white skiff lying astern, and rowed to the landing. As he came alongside the stage, he pulled in his oars, caught hold, and said good morning genially.

"Why, I know you," Saxon said impulsively, to Billy's amazement. "You are.. .."

Here she broke off in confusion.

"Go on," the man said, smiling reassurance.

"You are Jack Hastings, I 'm sure of it. I used to see your photograph in the papers all the time you were war correspondent in the Japanese-Russian War. You've written lots of books, though I've never read them."

"Right you are," he ratified. "And what's your name?"

Saxon introduced herself and Billy, and, when she noted the writer's observant eye on their packs, she sketched the pilgrimage they were on. The farm in the valley of the moon evidently caught his fancy, and, though the Japanese and his parcels were safely in the skiff, Hastings still lingered. When Saxon spoke of Carmel, he seemed to know everybody in Hall's crowd, and when he heard they were intending to go to Rio Vista, his invitation was immediate.

"Why, we're going that way ourselves, inside an hour, as soon as slack water comes," he exclaimed. "It's just the thing. Come on on board. We'll be there by four this afternoon if there's any wind at all. Come on. My wife's on board, and Mrs. Hall is one of her best chums. We've been away to South America--just got back; or you'd have seen us in Carmel. Hal wrote to us about the pair of you."

It was the second time in her life that Saxon had been in a small boat, and the Roamer was the first yacht she had ever been on board. The writer's wife, whom he called Clara, welcomed them heartily, and Saxon lost no time in falling in love with her and in being fallen in love

with in return. So strikingly did they resemble each other, that Hastings was not many minutes in calling attention to it. He made them stand side by side, studied their eyes and mouths and ears, compared their hands, their hair, their ankles, and swore that his fondest dream was shattered--namely, that when Clara had been made the mold was broken.

On Clara's suggestion that it might have been pretty much the same mold, they compared histories. Both were of the pioneer stock. Clara's mother, like Saxon's, had crossed the Plains with ox-teams, and, like Saxon's, had wintered in Salt Intake City--in fact, had, with her sisters, opened the first Gentile school in that Mormon stronghold. And, if Saxon's father had helped raise the Bear Flag rebellion at Sonoma, it was at Sonoma that Clara's father had mustered in for the War of the Rebellion and ridden as far east with his troop as Salt Lake City, of which place he had been provost marshal when the Mormon trouble flared up. To complete it all, Clara fetched from the cabin an ukulele of boa wood that was the twin to Saxon's, and together they sang "Honolulu Tomboy."

Hastings decided to eat dinner--he called the midday meal by its old-fashioned name--before sailing; and down below Saxon was surprised and delighted by the measure of comfort in so tiny a cabin. There was just room for Billy to stand upright. A centerboard-case divided the room in half longitudinally, and to this was attached the hinged table from which they ate. Low bunks that ran the full cabin length, upholstered in cheerful green, served as seats. A curtain, easily

attached by hooks between the centerboard-case and the roof, at night screened Mrs. Hastings' sleeping quarters. On the opposite side the two Japanese bunked, while for'ard, under the deck, was the galley. So small was it that there was just room beside it for the cook, who was compelled by the low deck to squat on his hands. The other Japanese, who had brought the parcels on board, waited on the table.

"They are looking for a ranch in the valley of the moon," Hastings concluded his explanation of the pilgrimage to Clara.

"Oh!--don't you know--" she cried; but was silenced by her husband.

"Hush," he said peremptorily, then turned to their guests. "Listen. There's something in that valley of the moon idea, but I won't tell you what. It is a secret. Now we've a ranch in Sonoma Valley about eight miles from the very town of Sonoma where you two girls' fathers took up soldiering; and if you ever come to our ranch you'll learn the secret. Oh, believe me, it's connected with your valley of the moon.--Isn't it, Mate?"

This last was the mutual name he and Clara had for each other.

She smiled and laughed and nodded her head.

"You might find our valley the very one you are looking for," she said.

But Hastings shook his head at her to check further speech. She turned to the fox terrier and made it speak for a piece of meat.

"Her name's Peggy," she told Saxon. "We had two Irish terriers down in the South Seas, brother and sister, but they died. We called them Peggy and Possum. So she's named after the original Peggy."

Billy was impressed by the ease with which the Roamer was operated. While they lingered at table, at a word from Hastings the two Japanese had gone on deck. Billy could hear them throwing down the halyards, casting off gaskets, and heaving the anchor short on the tiny winch. In several minutes one called down that everything was ready, and all went on deck. Hoisting mainsail and jigger was a matter of minutes. Then the cook and cabin-boy broke out anchor, and, while one hove it up, the other hoisted the jib. Hastings, at the wheel, trimmed the sheet. The Roamer paid off, filled her sails, slightly heeling, and slid across the smooth water and out the mouth of New York Slough. The Japanese coiled the halyards and went below for their own dinner.

"The flood is just beginning to make," said Hastings, pointing to a striped spar-buoy that was slightly tipping up-stream on the edge of the channel.

The tiny white houses of Collinsville, which they were nearing, disappeared behind a low island, though the Montezuma Hills, with their long, low, restful lines, slumbered on the horizon apparently as far

away as ever.

As the Roamer passed the mouth of Montezuma Slough and entered the Sacramento, they came upon Collinsville close at hand. Saxon clapped her hands.

"It's like a lot of toy houses," she said, "cut out of cardboard. And those hilly fields are just painted up behind."

They passed many arks and houseboats of fishermen moored among the tules, and the women and children, like the men in the boats, were dark-skinned, black-eyed, foreign. As they proceeded up the river, they began to encounter dredges at work, biting out mouthfuls of the sandy river bottom and heaping it on top of the huge levees. Great mats of willow brush, hundreds of yards in length, were laid on top of the river-slope of the levees and held in place by steel cables and thousands of cubes of cement. The willows soon sprouted, Hastings told them, and by the time the mats were rotted away the sand was held in place by the roots of the trees.

"It must cost like Sam Hill," Billy observed.

"But the land is worth it," Hastings explained. "This island land is the most productive in the world. This section of California is like Holland. You wouldn't think it, but this water we're sailing on is higher than the surface of the islands. They're like leaky

boats--calking, patching, pumping, night and day and all the time. But it pays. It pays."

Except for the dredgers, the fresh-piled sand, the dense willow thickets, and always Mt. Diablo to the south, nothing was to be seen. Occasionally a river steamboat passed, and blue herons flew into the trees.

"It must be very lonely," Saxon remarked.

Hastings laughed and told her she would change her mind later. Much he related to them of the river lands, and after a while he got on the subject of tenant farming. Saxon had started him by speaking of the land-hungry Anglo-Saxons.

"Land-hogs," he snapped. "That's our record in this country. As one old Reuben told a professor of an agricultural experiment station: 'They ain't no sense in tryin' to teach me farmin'. I know all about it. Ain't I worked out three farms?' It was his kind that destroyed New England. Back there great sections are relapsing to wilderness. In one state, at least, the deer have increased until they are a nuisance. There are abandoned farms by the tens of thousands. I've gone over the lists of them--farms in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut. Offered for sale on easy payment. The prices asked wouldn't pay for the improvements, while the land, of course, is thrown in for nothing.

"And the same thing is going on, in one way or another, the same land-robbing and hogging, over the rest of the country--down in Texas, in Missouri, and Kansas, out here in California. Take tenant farming. I know a ranch in my county where the land was worth a hundred and twenty-five an acre. And it gave its return at that valuation. When the old man died, the son leased it to a Portuguese and went to live in the city. In five years the Portuguese skimmed the cream and dried up the udder. The second lease, with another Portuguese for three years, gave one-quarter the former return. No third Portuguese appeared to offer to lease it. There wasn't anything left. That ranch was worth fifty thousand when the old man died. In the end the son got eleven thousand for it. Why, I've seen land that paid twelve per cent., that, after the skimming of a five-years' lease, paid only one and a quarter per cent."

"It's the same in our valley," Mrs. Hastings supplemented. "All the old farms are dropping into ruin. Take the Ebell Place, Mate." Her husband nodded emphatic indorsement. "When we used to know it, it was a perfect paradise of a farm. There were dams and lakes, beautiful meadows, lush hayfields, red hills of grape-lands, hundreds of acres of good pasture, heavenly groves of pines and oaks, a stone winery, stone barns, grounds--oh, I couldn't describe it in hours. When Mrs. Bell died, the family scattered, and the leasing began. It's a ruin to-day. The trees have been cut and sold for firewood. There's only a little bit of the vineyard that isn't abandoned--just enough to make wine for the present Italian lessees, who are running a poverty-stricken milk ranch on the leavings of the soil. I rode over it last year, and cried. The beautiful

orchard is a horror. The grounds have gone back to the wild. Just because they didn't keep the gutters cleaned out, the rain trickled down and dry-rotted the timbers, and the big stone barn is caved in. The same with part of the winery--the other part is used for stabling the cows. And the house!--words can't describe!"

"It's become a profession," Hastings went on. "The 'movers.' They lease, clean out and gut a place in several years, and then move on. They're not like the foreigners, the Chinese, and Japanese, and the rest. In the main they're a lazy, vagabond, poor-white sort, who do nothing else but skin the soil and move, skin the soil and move. Now take the Portuguese and Italians in our country. They are different. They arrive in the country without a penny and work for others of their countrymen until they've learned the language and their way about. Now they're not movers. What they are after is land of their own, which they will love and care for and conserve. But, in the meantime, how to get it? Saving wages is slow. There is a quicker way. They lease. In three years they can gut enough out of somebody else's land to set themselves up for life. It is sacrilege, a veritable rape of the land; but what of it? It's the way of the United States."

He turned suddenly on Billy.

"Look here, Roberts. You and your wife are looking for your bit of land. You want it bad. Now take my advice. It's cold, hard advice. Become a tenant farmer. Lease some place, where the old folks have died and the

country isn't good enough for the sons and daughters. Then gut it. Wring the last dollar out of the soil, repair nothing, and in three years you'll have your own place paid for. Then turn over a new leaf, and love your soil. Nourish it. Every dollar you feed it will return you two. Lend have nothing scrub about the place. If it's a horse, a cow, a pig, a chicken, or a blackberry vine, see that it's thoroughbred."

"But it's wicked!" Saxon wrung out. "It's wicked advice."

"We live in a wicked age," Hastings countered, smiling grimly. "This wholesale land-skinning is the national crime of the United States to-day. Nor would I give your husband such advice if I weren't absolutely certain that the land he skins would be skinned by some Portuguese or Italian if he refused. As fast as they arrive and settle down, they send for their sisters and their cousins and their aunts. If you were thirsty, if a warehouse were burning and beautiful Rhine wine were running to waste, would you stay your hand from scooping a drink? Well, the national warehouse is afire in many places, and no end of the good things are running to waste. Help yourself. If you don't, the immigrants will."

"Oh, you don't know him," Mrs. Hastings hurried to explain. "He spends all his time on the ranch in conserving the soil. There are over a thousand acres of woods alone, and, though he thins and forests like a surgeon, he won't let a tree be chopped without his permission. He's even planted a hundred thousand trees. He's always draining and ditching

to stop erosion, and experimenting with pasture grasses. And every little while he buys some exhausted adjoining ranch and starts building up the soil."

"Wherefore I know what I 'm talking about," Hastings broke in. "And my advice holds. I love the soil, yet to-morrow, things being as they are and if I were poor, I'd gut five hundred acres in order to buy twenty-five for myself. When you get into Sonoma Valley, look me up, and I'll put you onto the whole game, and both ends of it. I'll show you construction as well as destruction. When you find a farm doomed to be gutted anyway, why jump in and do it yourself."

"Yes, and he mortgaged himself to the eyes," laughed Mrs. Hastings, "to keep five hundred acres of woods out of the hands of the charcoal burners."

Ahead, on the left bank of the Sacramento, just at the fading end of the Montezuma Hills, Rio Vista appeared. The Roamer slipped through the smooth water, past steamboat wharves, landing stages, and warehouses. The two Japanese went for'ard on deck. At command of Hastings, the jib ran down, and he shot the Roamer into the wind, losing way, until he called, "Let go the hook!" The anchor went down, and the yacht swung to it, so close to shore that the skiff lay under overhanging willows.

"Farther up the river we tie to the bank," Mrs. Hastings said, "so that when you wake in the morning you find the branches of trees sticking

down into the cabin."

"Ooh!" Saxon murmured, pointing to a lump on her wrist. "Look at that. A mosquito."

"Pretty early for them," Hastings said. "But later on they're terrible. I've seen them so thick I couldn't back the jib against them."

Saxon was not nautical enough to appreciate his hyperbole, though Billy grinned.

"There are no mosquitoes in the valley of the moon," she said.

"No, never," said Mrs. Hastings, whose husband began immediately to regret the smallness of the cabin which prevented him from offering sleeping accommodations.

An automobile bumped along on top of the levee, and the young boys and girls in it cried, "Oh, you kid!" to Saxon and Billy, and Hastings, who was rowing them ashore in the skiff. Hastings called, "Oh, you kid!" back to them; and Saxon, pleasuring in the boyishness of his sunburned face, was reminded of the boyishness of Mark Hall and his Carmel crowd.

CHAPTER XII

Crossing the Sacramento on an old-fashioned ferry a short distance above Rio Vista, Saxon and Billy entered the river country. From the top of the levee she got her revelation. Beneath, lower than the river, stretched broad, flat land, far as the eye could see. Roads ran in every direction, and she saw countless farmhouses of which she had never dreamed when sailing on the lonely river a few feet the other side of the willowy fringe.

Three weeks they spent among the rich farm islands, which heaped up levees and pumped day and night to keep afloat. It was a monotonous land, with an unvarying richness of soil and with only one landmark--Mt. Diablo, ever to be seen, sleeping in the midday azure, limping its crinkled mass against the sunset sky, or forming like a dream out of the silver dawn. Sometimes on foot, often by launch, they criss-crossed and threaded the river region as far as the peat lands of the Middle River, down the San Joaquin to Antioch, and up Georgiana Slough to Walnut Grove on the Sacramento. And it proved a foreign land. The workers of the soil teemed by thousands, yet Saxon and Billy knew what it was to go a whole day without finding any one who spoke English. They encountered--sometimes in whole villages--Chinese, Japanese, Italians, Portuguese, Swiss, Hindus, Koreans, Norwegians, Danes, French, Armenians, Slavs, almost every nationality save American. One American they found on the lower reaches of Georgiana who eked an illicit existence by fishing with traps. Another American, who spouted blood and

destruction on all political subjects, was an itinerant bee-farmer. At Walnut Grove, bustling with life, the few Americans consisted of the storekeeper, the saloonkeeper, the butcher, the keeper of the drawbridge, and the ferryman. Yet two thriving towns were in Walnut Grove, one Chinese, one Japanese. Most of the land was owned by Americans, who lived away from it and were continually selling it to the foreigners.

A riot, or a merry-making--they could not tell which--was taking place in the Japanese town, as Saxon and Billy steamed out on the Apache, bound for Sacramento.

"We're settin' on the stoop," Billy railed. "Pretty soon they'll crowd us off of that."

"There won't be any stoop in the valley of the moon," Saxon cheered him.

But he was inconsolable, remarking bitterly:

"An' they ain't one of them damn foreigners that can handle four horses like me.

"But they can everlastingly farm," he added.

And Saxon, looking at his moody face, was suddenly reminded of a lithograph she had seen in her childhood. It was of a Plains Indian, in

paint and feathers, astride his horse and gazing with wondering eye at a railroad train rushing along a fresh-made track. The Indian had passed, she remembered, before the tide of new life that brought the railroad. And were Billy and his kind doomed to pass, she pondered, before this new tide of life, amazingly industrious, that was flooding in from Asia and Europe?

At Sacramento they stopped two weeks, where Billy drove team and earned the money to put them along on their travels. Also, life in Oakland and Carmel, close to the salt edge of the coast, had spoiled them for the interior. Too warm, was their verdict of Sacramento and they followed the railroad west, through a region of swamp-land, to Davisville. Here they were lured aside and to the north to pretty Woodland, where Billy drove team for a fruit farm, and where Saxon wrung from him a reluctant consent for her to work a few days in the fruit harvest. She made an important and mystifying secret of what she intended doing with her earnings, and Billy teased her about it until the matter passed from his mind. Nor did she tell him of a money order inclosed with a certain blue slip of paper in a letter to Bud Strothers.

They began to suffer from the heat. Billy declared they had strayed out of the blanket climate.

"There are no redwoods here," Saxon said. "We must go west toward the coast. It is there we'll find the valley of the moon."

From Woodland they swung west and south along the county roads to the fruit paradise of Vacaville. Here Billy picked fruit, then drove team; and here Saxon received a letter and a tiny express package from Bud Strothers. When Billy came into camp from the day's work, she bade him stand still and shut his eyes. For a few seconds she fumbled and did something to the breast of his cotton work-shirt. Once, he felt a slight prick, as of a pin point, and grunted, while she laughed and bullied him to continue keeping his eyes shut.

"Close your eyes and give me a kiss," she sang, "and then I'll show you what iss."

She kissed him and when he looked down he saw, pinned to his shirt, the gold medals he had pawned the day they had gone to the moving picture show and received their inspiration to return to the land.

"You darned kid!" he exclaimed, as he caught her to him. "So that's what you blew your fruit money in on? An' I never guessed!--Come here to you."

And thereupon she suffered the pleasant mastery of his brawn, and was hugged and wrestled with until the coffee pot boiled over and she darted from him to the rescue.

"I kinda always been a mite proud of 'em," he confessed, as he rolled his after-supper cigarette. "They take me back to my kid days when I

amateured it to beat the band. I was some kid in them days, believe
muh.--But say, d'ye know, they'd clean slipped my recollection.
Oakland's a thousan' years away from you an' me, an' ten thousan'
miles."

"Then this will bring you back to it," Saxon said, opening Bud's letter
and reading it aloud.

Bud had taken it for granted that Billy knew the wind-up of the strike;
so he devoted himself to the details as to which men had got back their
jobs, and which had been blacklisted. To his own amazement he had been
taken back, and was now driving Billy's horses. Still more amazing was
the further information he had to impart. The old foreman of the West
Oakland stables had died, and since then two other foremen had done
nothing but make messes of everything. The point of all which was that
the Boss had spoken that day to Bud, regretting the disappearance of
Billy.

"Don't make no mistake," Bud wrote. "The Boss is onto all your curves.
I bet he knows every scab you slugged. Just the same he says to
me--Strothers, if you ain't at liberty to give me his address, just
write yourself and tell him for me to come a running. I'll give him a
hundred and twenty-five a month to take hold the stables."

Saxon waited with well-concealed anxiety when the letter was finished.
Billy, stretched out, leaning on one elbow, blew a meditative ring of

smoke. His cheap workshirt, incongruously brilliant with the gold of the medals that flashed in the firelight, was open in front, showing the smooth skin and splendid swell of chest. He glanced around--at the blankets bowered in a green screen and waiting, at the campfire and the blackened, battered coffee pot, at the well-worn hatchet, half buried in a tree trunk, and lastly at Saxon. His eyes embraced her; then into them came a slow expression of inquiry. But she offered no help.

"Well," he uttered finally, "all you gotta do is write Bud Strothers, an' tell 'm not on the Boss's ugly tintype.--An' while you're about it, I'll send 'm the money to get my watch out. You work out the interest. The overcoat can stay there an' rot."

But they did not prosper in the interior heat. They lost weight. The resilience went out of their minds and bodies. As Billy expressed it, their silk was frazzled. So they shouldered their packs and headed west across the wild mountains. In the Berryessa Valley, the shimmering heat waves made their eyes ache, and their heads; so that they traveled on in the early morning and late afternoon. Still west they headed, over more mountains, to beautiful Napa Valley. The next valley beyond was Sonoma, where Hastings had invited them to his ranch. And here they would have gone, had not Billy chanced upon a newspaper item which told of the writer's departure to cover some revolution that was breaking out somewhere in Mexico.

"We'll see 'm later on," Billy said, as they turned northwest, through

the vineyards and orchards of Napa Valley. "We're like that millionaire Bert used to sing about, except it's time that we've got to burn. Any direction is as good as any other, only west is best."

Three times in the Napa Valley Billy refused work. Past St. Helena, Saxon hailed with joy the unmistakable redwoods they could see growing up the small canyons that penetrated the western wall of the valley. At Calistoga, at the end of the railroad, they saw the six-horse stages leaving for Middletown and Lower Lake. They debated their route. That way led to Lake County and not toward the coast, so Saxon and Billy swung west through the mountains to the valley of the Russian River, coming out at Healdsburg. They lingered in the hop-fields on the rich bottoms, where Billy scorned to pick hops alongside of Indians, Japanese, and Chinese.

"I couldn't work alongside of 'em an hour before I'd be knockin' their blocks off," he explained. "Besides, this Russian River's some nifty. Let's pitch camp and go swimmin'."

So they idled their way north up the broad, fertile valley, so happy that they forgot that work was ever necessary, while the valley of the moon was a golden dream, remote, but sure, some day of realization. At Cloverdale, Billy fell into luck. A combination of sickness and mischance found the stage stables short a driver. Each day the train disgorged passengers for the Geysers, and Billy, as if accustomed to it all his life, took the reins of six horses and drove a full load over

the mountains in stage time. The second trip he had Saxon beside him on the high boxseat. By the end of two weeks the regular driver was back. Billy declined a stable-job, took his wages, and continued north.

Saxon had adopted a fox terrier puppy and named him Possum, after the dog Mrs. Hastings had told them about. So young was he that he quickly became footsore, and she carried him until Billy perched him on top of his pack and grumbled that Possum was chewing his back hair to a frazzle.

They passed through the painted vineyards of Asti at the end of the grape-picking, and entered Ukiah drenched to the skin by the first winter rain.

"Say," Billy said, "you remember the way the Roamer just skated along. Well, this summer's done the same thing--gone by on wheels. An' now it's up to us to find some place to winter. This Ukiah looks like a pretty good burg. We'll get a room to-night an' dry out. An' to-morrow I'll hustle around to the stables, an' if I locate anything we can rent a shack an' have all winter to think about where we'll go next year."

CHAPTER XIII

The winter proved much less exciting than the one spent in Carmel, and keenly as Saxon had appreciated the Carmel folk, she now appreciated them more keenly than ever. In Ukiah she formed nothing more than superficial acquaintances. Here people were more like those of the working class she had known in Oakland, or else they were merely wealthy and herded together in automobiles. There was no democratic artist-colony that pursued fellowship disregarding of the caste of wealth.

Yet it was a more enjoyable winter than any she had spent in Oakland. Billy had failed to get regular employment; so she saw much of him, and they lived a prosperous and happy hand-to-mouth existence in the tiny cottage they rented. As extra man at the biggest livery stable, Billy's spare time was so great that he drifted into horse-trading. It was hazardous, and more than once he was broke, but the table never wanted for the best of steak and coffee, nor did they stint themselves for clothes.

"Them blamed farmers--I gotta pass it to 'em," Billy grinned one day, when he had been particularly bested in a horse deal. "They won't tear under the wings, the sons of guns. In the summer they take in boarders, an' in the winter they make a good livin' coin' each other up at tradin' horses. An' I just want to tell YOU, Saxon, they've sure shown me a few. An' I 'm gettin' tough under the wings myself. I'll never tear again

so as you can notice it. Which means one more trade learned for yours truly. I can make a livin' anywhere now tradin' horses."

Often Billy had Saxon out on spare saddle horses from the stable, and his horse deals took them on many trips into the surrounding country. Likewise she was with him when he was driving horses to sell on commission; and in both their minds, independently, arose a new idea concerning their pilgrimage. Billy was the first to broach it.

"I run into an outfit the other day, that's stored in town," he said, "an' it's kept me thinkin' ever since. Ain't no use tryin' to get you to guess it, because you can't. I'll tell you--the swellest wagon-campin' outfit; anybody ever heard of. First of all, the wagon's a peacherino. Strong as they make 'em. It was made to order, upon Puget Sound, an' it was tested out all the way down here. No load an' no road can strain it. The guy had consumption that had it built. A doctor an' a cook traveled with 'm till he passed in his checks here in Ukiah two years ago. But say--if you could see it. Every kind of a contrivance--a place for everything--a regular home on wheels. Now, if we could get that, an' a couple of plugs, we could travel like kings, an' laugh at the weather."

"Oh! Billy! it's just what I've been dreamin' all winter. It would be ideal. And... well, sometimes on the road I 'm sure you can't help forgetting what a nice little wife you've got... and with a wagon I could have all kinds of pretty clothes along."

Billy's blue eyes glowed a caress, cloudy and warm; as he said quietly:

"I've ben thinkin' about that."

"And you can carry a rifle and shotgun and fishing poles and everything," she rushed along. "And a good big axe, man-size, instead of that hatchet you're always complaining about. And Possum can lift up his legs and rest. And--but suppose you can't buy it? How much do they want?"

"One hundred an' fifty big bucks," he answered. "But dirt cheap at that. It's givin' it away. I tell you that rig wasn't built for a cent less than four hundred, an' I know wagon-work in the dark. Now, if I can put through that dicker with Caswell's six horses--say, I just got onto that horse-buyer to-day. If he buys 'em, who d'ye think he'll ship 'em to? To the Boss, right to the West Oakland stables. I 'm goin' to get you to write to him. Travelin', as we're goin' to, I can pick up bargains. An' if the Boss'll talk, I can make the regular horse-buyer's commissions. He'll have to trust me with a lot of money, though, which most likely he won't, knowin' all his scabs I beat up."

"If he could trust you to run his stable, I guess he isn't afraid to let you handle his money," Saxon said.

Billy shrugged his shoulders in modest dubiousness.

"Well, anyway, as I was sayin' if I can sell Caswell's six horses, why, we can stand off this month's bills an' buy the wagon."

"But horses!" Saxon queried anxiously.

"They'll come later--if I have to take a regular job for two or three months. The only trouble with that 'd be that it'd run us pretty well along into summer before we could pull out. But come on down town an' I'll show you the outfit right now."

Saxon saw the wagon and was so infatuated with it that she lost a night's sleep from sheer insomnia of anticipation. Then Caswell's six horses were sold, the month's bills held over, and the wagon became theirs. One rainy morning, two weeks later, Billy had scarcely left the house, to be gone on an all-day trip into the country after horses, when he was back again.

"Come on!" he called to Saxon from the street. "Get your things on an' come along. I want to show you something."

He drove down town to a board stable, and took her through to a large, roofed inclosure in the rear. There he led to her a span of sturdy dappled chestnuts, with cream-colored manes and tails.

"Oh, the beauties! the beauties!" Saxon cried, resting her cheek against the velvet muzzle of one, while the other roguishly nuzzled for a share.

"Ain't they, though?" Billy reveled, leading them up and down before her admiring gaze. "Thirteen hundred an' fifty each, an' they don't look the weight, they're that slick put together. I couldn't believe it myself, till I put 'em on the scales. Twenty-seven hundred an' seven pounds, the two of 'em. An' I tried 'em out--that was two days ago. Good dispositions, no faults, an' true-pullers, automobile broke an' all the rest. I'd back 'em to out-pull any team of their weight I ever seen.--Say, how'd they look hooked up to that wagon of ourn?"

Saxon visioned the picture, and shook her head slowly in a reaction of regret.

"Three hundred spot cash buys 'em," Billy went on. "An' that's bed-rock. The owner wants the money so bad he's droolin' for it. Just gotta sell, an' sell quick. An' Saxon, honest to God, that pair'd fetch five hundred at auction down in the city. Both mares, full sisters, five an' six years old, registered Belgian sire, out of a heavy standard-bred mare that I know. Three hundred takes 'em, an' I got the refusal for three days."

Saxon's regret changed to indignation.

"Oh, why did you show them to me? We haven't any three hundred, and you know it. All I've got in the house is six dollars, and you haven't that much."

"Maybe you think that's all I brought you down town for," he replied enigmatically. "Well, it ain't."

He paused, licked his lips, and shifted his weight uneasily from one leg to the other.

"Now you listen till I get all done before you say anything. Ready?"

She nodded.

"Won't open your mouth?"

This time she obediently shook her head.

"Well, it's this way," he began haltingly. "They's a youngster come up from Frisco, Young Sandow they call 'm, an' the Pride of Telegraph Hill. He's the real goods of a heavyweight, an' he was to fight Montana Red Saturday night, only Montana Red, just in a little trainin' bout, snapped his forearm yesterday. The managers has kept it quiet. Now here's the proposition. Lots of tickets sold, an' they'll be a big crowd Saturday night. At the last moment, so as not to disappoint 'em, they'll spring me to take Montana's place. I 'm the dark horse. Nobody knows me--not even Young Sandow. He's come up since my time. I'll be a rube fighter. I can fight as Horse Roberts.

"Now, wait a minute. The winner'll pull down three hundred big round iron dollars. Wait, I 'm tellin' you! It's a lead-pipe cinch. It's like robbin' a corpse. Sandow's got all the heart in the world--regular knock-down-an'-drag-out-an'-hang-on fighter. I've followed 'm in the papers. But he ain't clever. I 'm slow, all right, all right, but I 'm clever, an' I got a hay-maker in each arm. I got Sandow's number an' I know it.

"Now, you got the say-so in this. If you say yes, the nags is ourn. If you say no, then it's all bets off, an' everything all right, an' I'll take to harness-washin' at the stable so as to buy a couple of plugs. Remember, they'll only be plugs, though. But don't look at me while you're makin' up your mind. Keep your lamps on the horses."

It was with painful indecision that she looked at the beautiful animals.

"Their names is Hazel an' Hattie," Billy put in a sly wedge. "If we get 'em we could call it the 'Double H' outfit."

But Saxon forgot the team and could only see Billy's frightfully bruised body the night he fought the Chicago Terror. She was about to speak, when Billy, who had been hanging on her lips, broke in:

"Just hitch 'em up to our wagon in your mind an' look at the outfit. You got to go some to beat it."

"But you're not in training, Billy," she said suddenly and without having intended to say it.

"Huh!" he snorted. "I've been in half trainin' for the last year. My legs is like iron. They'll hold me up as long as I've got a punch left in my arms, and I always have that. Besides, I won't let 'm make a long fight. He's a man-eater, an' man-eaters is my meat. I eat 'm alive. It's the clever boys with the stamina an' endurance that I can't put away. But this young Sandow's my meat. I'll get 'm maybe in the third or fourth round--you know, time 'm in a rush an' hand it to 'm just as easy. It's a lead-pipe cinch, I tell you. Honest to God, Saxon, it's a shame to take the money."

"But I hate to think of you all battered up," she temporized. "If I didn't love you so, it might be different. And then, too, you might get hurt."

Billy laughed in contemptuous pride of youth and brawn.

"You won't know I've been in a fight, except that we'll own Hazel an' Hattie there. An' besides, Saxon, I just gotta stick my fist in somebody's face once in a while. You know I can go for months peaceable an' gentle as a lamb, an' then my knuckles actually begin to itch to land on something. Now, it's a whole lot sensibler to land on Young Sandow an' get three hundred for it, than to land on some hayseed an' get hauled up an' fined before some justice of the peace. Now take

another squint at Hazel an' Hattie. They're regular farm furniture, good to breed from when we get to that valley of the moon. An' they're heavy enough to turn right into the plowin', too."

The evening of the fight at quarter past eight, Saxon parted from Billy. At quarter past nine, with hot water, ice, and everything ready in anticipation, she heard the gate click and Billy's step come up the porch. She had agreed to the fight much against her better judgment, and had regretted her consent every minute of the hour she had just waited; so that, as she opened the front door, she was expectant of any sort of a terrible husband-wreck. But the Billy she saw was precisely the Billy she had parted from.

"There was no fights" she cried, in so evident disappointment that he laughed.

"They was all yellin' 'Fake! Fake!' when I left, an' wantin' their money back."

"Well, I've got YOU," she laughed, leading him in, though secretly she sighed farewell to Hazel and Hattie.

"I stopped by the way to get something for you that you've been wantin' some time," Billy said casually. "Shut your eyes an' open your hand; an' when you open your eyes you'll find it grand," he chanted.

Into her hand something was laid that was very heavy and very cold, and when her eyes opened she saw it was a stack of fifteen twenty-dollar gold pieces.

"I told you it was like takin' money from a corpse," he exulted, as he emerged grinning from the whirlwind of punches, whacks, and hugs in which she had enveloped him. "They wasn't no fight at all. D 'ye want to know how long it lasted? Just twenty-seven seconds--less 'n half a minute. An' how many blows struck? One. An' it was me that done it. Here, I'll show you. It was just like this--a regular scream."

Billy had taken his place in the middle of the room, slightly crouching, chin tucked against the sheltering left shoulder, fists closed, elbows in so as to guard left side and abdomen, and forearms close to the body.

"It's the first round," he pictured. "Gong's sounded, an' we've shook hands. Of course, seein' as it's a long fight an' we've never seen each other in action, we ain't in no rush. We're just feelin' each other out an' fiddlin' around. Seventeen seconds like that. Not a blow struck. Nothin'. An' then it's all off with the big Swede. It takes some time to tell it, but it happened in a jiffy, in fess In a tenth of a second. I wasn't expectin' it myself. We're awful close together. His left glove ain't a foot from my jaw, an' my left glove ain't a foot from his. He feints with his right, an' I know it's a feint, an' just hunch up my left shoulder a bit an' feint with my right. That draws his guard over

just about an inch, an' I see my openin'. My left ain't got a foot to travel. I don't draw it back none. I start it from where it is, corkscrewin' around his right guard an' pivotin' at the waist to put the weight of my shoulder into the punch. An' it connects!--Square on the point of the chin, sideways. He drops deado. I walk back to my corner, an', honest to God, Saxon, I can't help gigglin' a little, it was that easy. The referee stands over 'm an' counts 'm out. He never quivers. The audience don't know what to make of it an' sits paralyzed. His seconds carry 'm to his corner an' set 'm on the stool. But they gotta hold 'm up. Five minutes afterward he opens his eyes--but he ain't seein' nothing. They're glassy. Five minutes more, an' he stands up. They got to help hold 'm, his legs givin' under 'm like they was sausages. An' the seconds has to help 'm through the ropes, an' they go down the aisle to his dressin' room a-helpin' 'm. An' the crowd beginning to yell fake an' want its money back. Twenty-seven seconds--one punch--n' a spankin' pair of horses for the best wife Billy Roberts ever had in his long experience."

All of Saxon's old physical worship of her husband revived and doubled on itself many times. He was in all truth a hero, worthy to be of that wing-helmeted company leaping from the beaked boats upon the bloody English sands. The next morning he was awakened by her lips pressed on his left hand.

"Hey!--what are you doin'?" he demanded.

"Kissing Hazel and Hattie good morning," she answered demurely. "And now I 'm going to kiss you good morning.. .. And just where did your punch land? Show me."

Billy complied, touching the point of her chin with his knuckles. With both her hands on his arm, she shored it back and tried to draw it forward sharply in similitude of a punch. But Billy withstrained her.

"Wait," he said. "You don't want to knock your jaw off. I'll show you. A quarter of an inch will do."

And at a distance of a quarter of an inch from her chin he administered the slightest flick of a tap.

On the instant Saxon's brain snapped with a white flash of light, while her whole body relaxed, numb and weak, volitionless, sad her vision reeled and blurred. The next instant she was herself again, in her eyes terror and understanding.

"And it was at a foot that you struck him," she murmured in a voice of awe.

"Yes, and with the weight of my shoulders behind it," Billy laughed.

"Oh, that's nothing.--Here, let me show you something else."

He searched out her solar plexus, and did no more than snap his middle

finger against it. This time she experienced a simple paralysis, accompanied by a stoppage of breath, but with a brain and vision that remained perfectly clear. In a moment, however, all the unwonted sensations were gone.

"Solar Plexus," Billy elucidated. "Imagine what it's like when the other fellow lifts a wallop to it all the way from his knees. That's the punch that won the championship of the world for Bob Fitzsimmons."

Saxon shuddered, then resigned herself to Billy's playful demonstration of the weak points in the human anatomy. He pressed the tip of a finger into the middle of her forearm, and she knew excruciating agony. On either side of her neck, at the base, he dented gently with his thumbs, and she felt herself quickly growing unconscious.

"That's one of the death touches of the Japs," he told her, and went on, accompanying grips and holds with a running exposition. "Here's the toe-hold that Notch defeated Hackenschmidt with. I learned it from Farmer Burns.--An' here's a half-Nelson.--An' here's you makin' roughhouse at a dance, an' I 'm the floor manager, an' I gotta put you out."

One hand grasped her wrist, the other hand passed around and under her forearm and grasped his own wrist. And at the first hint of pressure she felt that her arm was a pipe-stem about to break.

"That's called the 'come along.'--An' here's the strong arm. A boy can down a man with it. An' if you ever get into a scrap an' the other fellow gets your nose between his teeth--you don't want to lose your nose, do you? Well, this is what you do, quick as a flash."

Involuntarily she closed her eyes as Billy's thumb-ends pressed into them. She could feel the fore-running ache of a dull and terrible hurt.

"If he don't let go, you just press real hard, an' out pop his eyes, an' he's blind as a bat for the rest of his life. Oh, he'll let go all right all right."

He released her and lay back laughing.

"How d'ye feel?" he asked. "Those ain't boxin' tricks, but they're all in the game of a roughhouse."

"I feel like revenge," she said, trying to apply the "come along" to his arm.

When she exerted the pressure she cried out with pain, for she had succeeded only in hurting herself. Billy grinned at her futility. She dug her thumbs into his neck in imitation of the Japanese death touch, then gazed ruefully at the bent ends of her nails. She punched him smartly on the point of the chin, and again cried out, this time to the bruise of her knuckles.

"Well, this can't hurt me," she gritted through her teeth, as she assailed his solar plexus with her doubled fists.

By this time he was in a roar of laughter. Under the sheaths of muscles that were as armor, the fatal nerve center remained impervious.

"Go on, do it some more," he urged, when she had given up, breathing heavily. "It feels fine, like you was ticklin' me with a feather."

"All right, Mister Man," she threatened balefully. "You can talk about your grips and death touches and all the rest, but that's all man's game. I know something that will beat them all, that will make a strong man as helpless as a baby. Wait a minute till I get it. There. Shut your eyes. Ready? I won't be a second."

He waited with closed eyes, and then, softly as rose petals fluttering down, he felt her lips on his mouth.

"You win," he said in solemn ecstasy, and passed his arms around her.

CHAPTER XIV

In the morning Billy went down town to pay for Hazel and Hattie. It was due to Saxon's impatient desire to see them, that he seemed to take a remarkably long time about so simple a transaction. But she forgave him when he arrived with the two horses hitched to the camping wagon.

"Had to borrow the harness," he said. "Pass Possum up and climb in, an' I'll show you the Double H Outfit, which is some outfit, I'm tellin' you."

Saxon's delight was unbounded and almost speechless as they drove out into the country behind the dappled chestnuts with the cream-colored tails and manes. The seat was upholstered, high-backed, and comfortable; and Billy raved about the wonders of the efficient brake. He trotted the team along the hard county road to show the standard-going in them, and put them up a steep earthroad, almost hub-deep with mud, to prove that the light Belgian sire was not wanting in their make-up.

When Saxon at last lapsed into complete silence, he studied her anxiously, with quick sidelong glances. She sighed and asked:

"When do you think we'll be able to start?"

"Maybe in two weeks... or, maybe in two or three months." He sighed with solemn deliberation. "We're like the Irishman with the trunk an' nothin'

to put in it. Here's the wagon, here's the horses, an' nothin' to pull. I know a peach of a shotgun I can get, second-hand, eighteen dollars; but look at the bills we owe. Then there's a new '22 Automatic rifle I want for you. An' a 30-30 I've had my eye on for deer. An' you want a good jointed pole as well as me. An' tackle costs like Sam Hill. An' harness like I want will cost fifty bucks cold. An' the wagon ought to be painted. Then there's pasture ropes, an' nose-bags, an' a harness punch, an' all such things. An' Hazel an' Hattie eatin' their heads off all the time we're waitin'. An' I 'm just itchin' to be started myself."

He stopped abruptly and confusedly.

"Now, Billy, what have you got up your sleeve?--I can see it in your eyes," Saxon demanded and indicted in mixed metaphors.

"Well, Saxon, you see, it's like this. Sandow ain't satisfied. He's madder 'n a hatter. Never got one punch at me. Never had a chance to make a showin', an' he wants a return match. He's blattin' around town that he can lick me with one hand tied behind 'm, an' all that kind of hot air. Which ain't the point. The point is, the fight-fans is wild to see a return-match. They didn't get a run for their money last time. They'll fill the house. The managers has seen me already. That was why I was so long. They's three hundred more waitin' on the tree for me to pick two weeks from last night if you'll say the word. It's just the same as I told you before. He's my meat. He still thinks I 'm a rube, an' that it was a fluke punch."

"But, Billy, you told me long ago that fighting took the silk out of you. That was why you'd quit it and stayed by teaming."

"Not this kind of fightin'," he answered. "I got this one all doped out. I'll let 'm last till about the seventh. Not that it'll be necessary, but just to give the audience a run for its money. Of course, I'll get a lump or two, an' lose some skin. Then I'll time 'm to that glass jaw of his an' drop 'm for the count. An' we'll be all packed up, an' next mornin' we'll pull out. What d'ye say? Aw, come on."

Saturday night, two weeks later, Saxon ran to the door when the gate clicked. Billy looked tired. His hair was wet, his nose swollen, one cheek was puffed, there was skin missing from his ears, and both eyes were slightly bloodshot.

"I 'm darned if that boy didn't fool me," he said, as he placed the roll of gold pieces in her hand and sat down with her on his knees. "He's some boy when he gets extended. Instead of stoppin' 'm at the seventh, he kept me hustlin' till the fourteenth. Then I got 'm the way I said. It's too bad he's got a glass jaw. He's quicker'n I thought, an' he's got a wallop that made me mighty respectful from the second round--an' the prettiest little chop an' come-again I ever saw. But that glass jaw! He kept it in cotton wool till the fourteenth an' then I connected."

"--An', say. I 'm mighty glad it did last fourteen rounds. I still got all my silk. I could see that easy. I wasn't breathin' much, an' every round was fast. An' my legs was like iron. I could a-fought forty rounds. You see, I never said nothin', but I've been suspicious all the time after that beatin' the Chicago Terror gave me."

"Nonsense!--you would have known it long before now," Saxon cried. "Look at all your boxing, and wrestling, and running at Carmel."

"Nope." Billy shook his head with the conviction of utter knowledge.

"That's different. It don't take it outa you. You gotta be up against the real thing, fightin' for life, round after round, with a husky you know ain't lost a thread of his silk yet--then, if you don't blow up, if your legs is steady, an' your heart ain't burstin', an' you ain't wobbly at all, an' no signs of queer street in your head--why, then you know you still got all your silk. An' I got it, I got all mine, d'ye hear me, an' I ain't goin' to risk it on no more fights. That's straight. Easy money's hardest in the end. From now on it's horsebuyin' on commish, an' you an' me on the road till we find that valley of the moon."

Next morning, early, they drove out of Ukiah. Possum sat on the seat between them, his rosy mouth agape with excitement. They had originally planned to cross over to the coast from Ukiah, but it was too early in the season for the soft earth-roads to be in shape after the winter rains; so they turned east, for Lake County, their route to extend north through the upper Sacramento Valley and across the mountains into

Oregon. Then they would circle west to the coast, where the roads by that time would be in condition, and come down its length to the Golden Gate.

All the land was green and flower-sprinkled, and each tiny valley, as they entered the hills, was a garden.

"Huh!" Billy remarked scornfully to the general landscape. "They say a rollin' stone gathers no moss. Just the same this looks like some outfit we've gathered. Never had so much actual property in my life at one time--an' them was the days when I wasn't rollin'. Hell--even the furniture wasn't ourn. Only the clothes we stood up in, an' some old socks an' things."

Saxon reached out and touched his hand, and he knew that it was a hand that loved his hand.

"I've only one regret," she said. "You've earned it all yourself. I've had nothing to do with it."

"Huh!--you've had everything to do with it. You're like my second in a fight. You keep me happy an' in condition. A man can't fight without a good second to take care of him. Hell, I wouldn't a-ben here if it wasn't for you. You made me pull up stakes an' head out. Why, if it hadn't been for you I'd a-drunk myself dead an' rotten by this time, or had my neck stretched at San Quentin over hittin' some scab too hard

or something or other. An' look at me now. Look at that roll of greenbacks"--he tapped his breast--"to buy the Boss some horses. Why, we're takin' an unendin' vacation, an' makin' a good livin' at the same time. An' one more trade I got--horse-buyin' for Oakland. If I show I've got the savve, an' I have, all the Frisco firms'll be after me to buy for them. An' it's all your fault. You're my Tonic Kid all right, all right, an' if Possum wasn't lookin', I'd--well, who cares if he does look?"

And Billy leaned toward her sidewise and kissed her.

The way grew hard and rocky as they began to climb, but the divide was an easy one, and they soon dropped down the canyon of the Blue Lakes among lush fields of golden poppies. In the bottom of the canyon lay a wandering sheet of water of intensest blue. Ahead, the folds of hills interlaced the distance, with a remote blue mountain rising in the center of the picture.

They asked questions of a handsome, black-eyed man with curly gray hair, who talked to them in a German accent, while a cheery-faced woman smiled down at them out of a trellised high window of the Swiss cottage perched on the bank. Billy watered the horses at a pretty hotel farther on, where the proprietor came out and talked and told him he had built it himself, according to the plans of the black-eyed man with the curly gray hair, who was a San Francisco architect.

"Goin' up, goin' up," Billy chortled, as they drove on through the winding hills past another lake of intensest blue. "D'ye notice the difference in our treatment already between ridin' an' walkin' with packs on our backs? With Hazel an' Hattie an' Saxon an' Possum, an' yours truly, an' this high-toned wagon, folks most likely take us for millionaires out on a lark."

The way widened. Broad, oak-studded pastures with grazing livestock lay on either hand. Then Clear Lake opened before them like an inland sea, flecked with little squalls and flaws of wind from the high mountains on the northern slopes of which still glistened white snow patches.

"I've heard Mrs. Hazard rave about Lake Geneva," Saxon recalled; "but I wonder if it is more beautiful than this."

"That architect fellow called this the California Alps, you remember," Billy confirmed. "An' if I don't mistake, that's Lakeport showin' up ahead. An' all wild country, an' no railroads."

"And no moon valleys here," Saxon criticized. "But it is beautiful, oh, so beautiful."

"Hotter'n hell in the dead of summer, I'll bet," was Billy's opinion. "Nope, the country we're lookin' for lies nearer the coast. Just the same it is beautiful... like a picture on the wall. What d'ye say we stop off an' go for a swim this afternoon?"

Ten days later they drove into Williams, in Colusa County, and for the first time again encountered a railroad. Billy was looking for it, for the reason that at the rear of the wagon walked two magnificent work-horses which he had picked up for shipment to Oakland.

"Too hot," was Saxon's verdict, as she gazed across the shimmering level of the vast Sacramento Valley. "No redwoods. No hills. No forests. No manzanita. No madronos. Lonely, and sad--"

"An' like the river islands," Billy interpolated. "Richer in hell, but looks too much like hard work. It'll do for those that's stuck on hard work--God knows, they's nothin' here to induce a fellow to knock off ever for a bit of play. No fishin', no huntin', nothin' but work. I'd work myself, if I had to live here."

North they drove, through days of heat and dust, across the California plains, and everywhere was manifest the "new" farming--great irrigation ditches, dug and being dug, the land threaded by power-lines from the mountains, and many new farmhouses on small holdings newly fenced. The bonanza farms were being broken up. However, many of the great estates remained, five to ten thousand acres in extent, running from the Sacramento bank to the horizon dancing in the heat waves, and studded with great valley oaks.

"It takes rich soil to make trees like those," a ten-acre farmer told

them.

They had driven off the road a hundred feet to his tiny barn in order to water Hazel and Hattie. A sturdy young orchard covered most of his ten acres, though a goodly portion was devoted to whitewashed henhouses and wired runways wherein hundreds of chickens were to be seen. He had just begun work on a small frame dwelling.

"I took a vacation when I bought," he explained, "and planted the trees. Then I went back to work an' stayed with it till the place was cleared. Now I 'm here for keeps, an' soon as the house is finished I'll send for the wife. She's not very well, and it will do her good. We've been planning and working for years to get away from the city." He stopped in order to give a happy sigh. "And now we're free."

The water in the trough was warm from the sun.

"Hold on," the man said. "Don't let them drink that. I'll give it to them cool."

Stepping into a small shed, he turned an electric switch, and a motor the size of a fruit box hummed into action. A five-inch stream of sparkling water splashed into the shallow main ditch of his irrigation system and flowed away across the orchard through many laterals.

"Isn' tit beautiful, eh?--beautiful! beautiful!" the man chanted in an

ecstasy. "It's bud and fruit. It's blood and life. Look at it! It makes a gold mine laughable, and a saloon a nightmare. I know. I... I used to be a barkeeper. In fact, I've been a barkeeper most of my life. That's how I paid for this place. And I've hated the business all the time. I was a farm boy, and all my life I've been wanting to get back to it. And here I am at last."

He wiped his glasses the better to behold his beloved water, then seized a hoe and strode down the main ditch to open more laterals.

"He's the funniest barkeeper I ever seen," Billy commented. "I took him for a business man of some sort. Must a-ben in some kind of a quiet hotel."

"Don't drive on right away," Saxon requested. "I want to talk with him."

He came back, polishing his glasses, his face beaming, watching the water as if fascinated by it. It required no more exertion on Saxon's part to start him than had been required on his part to start the motor.

"The pioneers settled all this in the early fifties," he said. "The Mexicans never got this far, so it was government land. Everybody got a hundred and sixty acres. And such acres! The stories they tell about how much wheat they got to the acre are almost unbelievable. Then several things happened. The sharpest and steadiest of the pioneers held what they had and added to it from the other fellows. It takes a great many

quarter sections to make a bonanza farm. It wasn't long before it was 'most all bonanza farms."

"They were the successful gamblers," Saxon put in, remembering Mark Hall's words.

The man nodded appreciatively and continued.

"The old folks schemed and gathered and added the land into the big holdings, and built the great barns and mansions, and planted the house orchards and flower gardens. The young folks were spoiled by so much wealth and went away to the cities to spend it. And old folks and young united in one thing: in impoverishing the soil. Year after year they scratched it and took out bonanza crops. They put nothing back. All they left was plow-sole and exhausted land. Why, there's big sections they exhausted and left almost desert.

"The bonanza farmers are all gone now, thank the Lord, and here's where we small farmers come into our own. It won't be many years before the whole valley will be farmed in patches like mine. Look at what we're doing! Worked-out land that had ceased to grow wheat, and we turn the water on, treat the soil decently, and see our orchards!

"We've got the water--from the mountains, and from under the ground. I was reading an account the other day. All life depends on food. All food depends on water. It takes a thousand pounds of water to produce one

pound of food; ten thousand pounds to produce one pound of meat. How much water do you drink in a year? About a ton. But you eat about two hundred pounds of vegetables and two hundred pounds of meat a year--which means you consume one hundred tons of water in the vegetables and one thousand tons in the meat--which means that it takes eleven hundred and one tons of water each year to keep a small woman like you going."

"Geel!" was all Billy could say.

"You see how population depends upon water," the ax-barkeeper went on.

"Well, we've got the water, immense subterranean supplies, and in not many years this valley will be populated as thick as Belgium."

Fascinated by the five-inch stream, sluiced out of the earth and back to the earth by the droning motor, he forgot his discourse and stood and gazed, rapt and unheeding, while his visitors drove on.

"An' him a drink-slinger!" Billy marveled. "He can sure sling the temperance dope if anybody should ask you."

"It's lovely to think about--all that water, and all the happy people that will come here to live--"

"But it ain't the valley of the moon!" Billy laughed.

"No," she responded. "They don't have to irrigate in the valley of the moon, unless for alfalfa and such crops. What we want is the water bubbling naturally from the ground, and crossing the farm in little brooks, and on the boundary a fine big creek--"

"With trout in it!" Billy took her up. "An' willows and trees of all kinds growing along the edges, and here a riffle where you can flip out trout, and there a deep pool where you can swim and high-dive. An' kingfishers, an' rabbits comin' down to drink, an', maybe, a deer."

"And meadowlarks in the pasture," Saxon added. "And mourning doves in the trees. We must have mourning doves--and the big, gray tree-squirrels."

"Geel!--that valley of the moon's goin' to be some valley," Billy meditated, flicking a fly away with his whip from Hattie's side. "Think we'll ever find it?"

Saxon nodded her head with great certitude.

"Just as the Jews found the promised land, and the Mormons Utah, and the Pioneers California. You remember the last advice we got when we left Oakland' 'Tis them that looks that finds."

CHAPTER XV

Ever north, through a fat and flourishing rejuvenated land, stopping at the towns of Willows, Red Bluff and Redding, crossing the counties of Colusa, Glenn, Tehama, and Shasta, went the spruce wagon drawn by the dappled chestnuts with cream-colored manes and tails. Billy picked up only three horses for shipment, although he visited many farms; and Saxon talked with the women while he looked over the stock with the men. And Saxon grew the more convinced that the valley she sought lay not there.

At Redding they crossed the Sacramento on a cable ferry, and made a day's scorching traverse through rolling foot-hills and flat tablelands. The heat grew more insupportable, and the trees and shrubs were blasted and dead. Then they came again to the Sacramento, where the great smelters of Kennett explained the destruction of the vegetation.

They climbed out of the smelting town, where eyrie houses perched insecurely on a precipitous landscape. It was a broad, well-engineered road that took them up a grade miles long and plunged down into the Canyon of the Sacramento. The road, rock-surfaced and easy-graded, hewn out of the canyon wall, grew so narrow that Billy worried for fear of meeting opposite-bound teams. Far below, the river frothed and flowed over pebbly shallows, or broke tumultuously over boulders and cascades, in its race for the great valley they had left behind.

Sometimes, on the wider stretches of road, Saxon drove and Billy walked to lighten the load. She insisted on taking her turns at walking, and when he breathed the panting mares on the steep, and Saxon stood by their heads caressing them and cheering them, Billy's joy was too deep for any turn of speech as he gazed at his beautiful horses and his glowing girl, trim and colorful in her golden brown corduroy, the brown corduroy calves swelling sweetly under the abbreviated slim skirt. And when her answering look of happiness came to him--a sudden dimness in her straight gray eyes--he was overmastered by the knowledge that he must say something or burst.

"O, you kid!" he cried.

And with radiant face she answered, "O, you kid!"

They camped one night in a deep dent in the canyon, where was snuggled a box-factory village, and where a toothless ancient, gazing with faded eyes at their traveling outfit, asked: "Be you showin'?"

They passed Castle Crags, mighty-bastioned and glowing red against the palpitating blue sky. They caught their first glimpse of Mt. Shasta, a rose-tinted snow-peak rising, a sunset dream, between and beyond green interlacing walls of canyon--a landmark destined to be with them for many days. At unexpected turns, after mounting some steep grade, Shasta would appear again, still distant, now showing two peaks and glacial fields of shimmering white. Miles and miles and days and days they

climbed, with Shasta ever developing new forms and phases in her summer snows.

"A moving picture in the sky," said Billy at last.

"Oh,--it is all so beautiful," sighed Saxon. "But there are no moon-valleys here."

They encountered a plague of butterflies, and for days drove through untold millions of the fluttering beauties that covered the road with uniform velvet-brown. And ever the road seemed to rise under the noses of the snorting mares, filling the air with noiseless flight, drifting down the breeze in clouds of brown and yellow soft-flaked as snow, and piling in mounds against the fences, ever driven to float helplessly on the irrigation ditches along the roadside. Hazel and Hattie soon grew used to them though Possum never ceased being made frantic.

"Huh!--who ever heard of butterfly-broke horses?" Billy chaffed. "That's worth fifty bucks more on their price."

"Wait till you get across the Oregon line into the Rogue River Valley," they were told. "There's God's Paradise--climate, scenery, and fruit-farming; fruit ranches that yield two hundred per cent. on a valuation of five hundred dollars an acre."

"Geel!" Billy said, when he had driven on out of hearing; "that's too

rich for our digestion."

And Saxon said, "I don't know about apples in the valley of the moon, but I do know that the yield is ten thousand per cent. of happiness on a valuation of one Billy, one Saxon, a Hazel, a Hattie, and a Possum."

Through Siskiyou County and across high mountains, they came to Ashland and Medford and camped beside the wild Rogue River.

"This is wonderful and glorious," pronounced Saxon; "but it is not the valley of the moon."

"Nope, it ain't the valley of the moon," agreed Billy, and he said it on the evening of the day he hooked a monster steelhead, standing to his neck in the ice-cold water of the Rogue and fighting for forty minutes, with screaming reel, ere he drew his finny prize to the bank and with the scalp-yell of a Comanche jumped and clutched it by the gills.

"Them that looks finds," predicted Saxon, as they drew north out of Grant's Pass, and held north across the mountains and fruitful Oregon valleys.

One day, in camp by the Umpqua River, Billy bent over to begin skinning the first deer he had ever shot. He raised his eyes to Saxon and remarked:

"If I didn't know California, I guess Oregon'd suit me from the ground up."

In the evening, replete with deer meat, resting on his elbow and smoking his after-supper cigarette, he said:

"Maybe they ain't no valley of the moon. An' if they ain't, what of it? We could keep on this way forever. I don't ask nothing better."

"There is a valley of the moon," Saxon answered soberly. "And we are going to find it. We've got to. Why Billy, it would never do, never to settle down. There would be no little Hazels and little Hatties, nor little... Billies--"

"Nor little Saxons," Billy interjected.

"Nor little Possums," she hurried on, nodding her head and reaching out a caressing hand to where the fox terrier was ecstatically gnawing a deer-rib. A vicious snarl and a wicked snap that barely missed her fingers were her reward.

"Possum!" she cried in sharp reproof, again extending her hand.

"Don't," Billy warned. "He can't help it, and he's likely to get you next time."

Even more compelling was the menacing threat that Possum growled, his jaws close-guarding the bone, eyes blazing insanely, the hair rising stiffly on his neck.

"It's a good dog that sticks up for its bone," Billy championed. "I wouldn't care to own one that didn't."

"But it's my Possum," Saxon protested. "And he loves me. Besides, he must love me more than an old bone. And he must mind me.--Here, you, Possum, give me that bone! Give me that bone, sir!"

Her hand went out gingerly, and the growl rose in volume and key till it culminated in a snap.

"I tell you it's instinct," Billy repeated. "He does love you, but he just can't help doin' it."

"He's got a right to defend his bones from strangers but not from his mother," Saxon argued. "I shall make him give up that bone to me."

"Fox terriers is awful highstrung, Saxon. You'll likely get him hysterical."

But she was obstinately set in her purpose. She picked up a short stick of firewood.

"Now, sir, give me that bone."

She threatened with the stick, and the dog's growling became ferocious. Again he snapped, then crouched back over his bone. Saxon raised the stick as if to strike him, and he suddenly abandoned the bone, rolled over on his back at her feet, four legs in the air, his ears lying meekly back, his eyes swimming and eloquent with submission and appeal.

"My God!" Billy breathed in solemn awe. "Look at it!--presenting his solar plexus to you, his vitals an' his life, all defense down, as much as sayin': 'Here I am. Stamp on me. Kick the life outa me.' I love you, I am your slave, but I just can't help defendin' my bone. My instinct's stronger'n me. Kill me, but I can't help it."

Saxon was melted. Tears were in her eyes as she stooped and gathered the mite of an animal in her arms. Possum was in a frenzy of agitation, whining, trembling, writhing, twisting, licking her face, all for forgiveness.

"Heart of gold with a rose in his mouth," Saxon crooned, burying her face in the soft and quivering bundle of sensibilities. "Mother is sorry. She'll never bother you again that way. There, there, little love. See? There's your bone. Take it."

She put him down, but he hesitated between her and the bone, patently looking to her for surety of permission, yet continuing to tremble in

the terrible struggle between duty and desire that seemed tearing him asunder. Not until she repeated that it was all right and nodded her head consentingly did he go to the bone. And once, a minute later, he raised his head with a sudden startle and gazed inquiringly at her. She nodded and smiled, and Possum, with a happy sigh of satisfaction, dropped his head down to the precious deer-rib.

"That Mercedes was right when she said men fought over jobs like dogs over bones," Billy enunciated slowly. "It's instinct. Why, I couldn't no more help reaching my fist to the point of a scab's jaw than could Possum from snappin' at you. They's no explainin' it. What a man has to he has to. The fact that he does a thing shows he had to do it whether he can explain it or not. You remember Hall couldn't explain why he stuck that stick between Timothy McManus's legs in the foot race. What a man has to, he has to. That's all I know about it. I never had no earthly reason to beat up that lodger we had, Jimmy Harmon. He was a good guy, square an' all right. But I just had to, with the strike goin' to smash, an' everything so bitter inside me that I could taste it. I never told you, but I saw 'm once after I got out--when my arms was mendin'. I went down to the roundhouse an' waited for 'm to come in off a run, an' apologized to 'm. Now why did I apologize? I don't know, except for the same reason I punched 'm--I just had to."

And so Billy expounded the why of like in terms of realism, in the camp by the Umpqua River, while Possum expounded it, in similar terms of fang and appetite, on the rib of deer.

CHAPTER XVI

With Possum on the seat beside her, Saxon drove into the town of Roseburg. She drove at a walk. At the back of the wagon were tied two heavy young work-horses. Behind, half a dozen more marched free, and the rear was brought up by Billy, astride a ninth horse. All these he shipped from Roseburg to the West Oakland stables.

It was in the Umpqua Valley that they heard the parable of the white sparrow. The farmer who told it was elderly and flourishing. His farm was a model of orderliness and system. Afterwards, Billy heard neighbors estimate his wealth at a quarter of a million.

"You've heard the story of the farmer and the white sparrow" he asked Billy, at dinner.

"Never heard of a white sparrow even," Billy answered.

"I must say they're pretty rare," the farmer owned. "But here's the story: Once there was a farmer who wasn't making much of a success. Things just didn't seem to go right, till at last, one day, he heard about the wonderful white sparrow. It seems that the white sparrow comes out only just at daybreak with the first light of dawn, and that it brings all kinds of good luck to the farmer that is fortunate enough to catch it. Next morning our farmer was up at daybreak, and before, looking for it. And, do you know, he sought for it continually, for

months and months, and never caught even a glimpse of it." Their host shook his head. "No; he never found it, but he found so many things about the farm needing attention, and which he attended to before breakfast, that before he knew it the farm was prospering, and it wasn't long before the mortgage was paid off and he was starting a bank account."

That afternoon, as they drove along, Billy was plunged in a deep reverie.

"Oh, I got the point all right," he said finally. "An' yet I ain't satisfied. Of course, they wasn't a white sparrow, but by getting up early an' attendin' to things he'd been slack about before--oh, I got it all right. An' yet, Saxon, if that's what a farmer's life means, I don't want to find no moon valley. Life ain't hard work. Daylight to dark, hard at it--might just as well be in the city. What's the difference? Al' the time you've got to yourself is for sleepin', an' when you're sleepin' you're not enjoyin' yourself. An' what's it matter where you sleep, you're deado. Might as well be dead an' done with it as work your head off that way. I'd sooner stick to the road, an' shoot a deer an' catch a trout once in a while, an' lie on my back in the shade, an' laugh with you an' have fun with you, an'... an' go swimmin'. An' I 'm a willin' worker, too. But they's all the difference in the world between a decent amount of work an' workin' your head off."

Saxon was in full accord. She looked back on her years of toil and

contrasted them with the joyous life she had lived on the road.

"We don't want to be rich," she said. "Let them hunt their white sparrows in the Sacramento islands and the irrigation valleys. When we get up early in the valley of the moon, it will be to hear the birds sing and sing with them. And if we work hard at times, it will be only so that we'll have more time to play. And when you go swimming I 'm going with you. And we'll play so hard that we'll be glad to work for relaxation."

"I 'm gettin' plumb dried out," Billy announced, mopping the sweat from his sunburned forehead. "What d'ye say we head for the coast?"

West they turned, dropping down wild mountain gorges from the height of land of the interior valleys. So fearful was the road, that, on one stretch of seven miles, they passed ten broken-down automobiles. Billy would not force the mares and promptly camped beside a brawling stream from which he whipped two trout at a time. Here, Saxon caught her first big trout. She had been accustomed to landing them up to nine and ten inches, and the screech of the reel when the big one was hooked caused her to cry out in startled surprise. Billy came up the riffle to her and gave counsel. Several minutes later, cheeks flushed and eyes dancing with excitement, Saxon dragged the big fellow carefully from the water's edge into the dry sand. Here it threw the hook out and flopped tremendously until she fell upon it and captured it in her hands.

"Sixteen inches," Billy said, as she held it up proudly for inspection.

"--Hey!--what are you goin' to do?"

"Wash off the sand, of course," was her answer.

"Better put it in the basket," he advised, then closed his mouth and grimly watched.

She stooped by the side of the stream and dipped in the splendid fish. It flopped, there was a convulsive movement on her part, and it was gone.

"Oh!" Saxon cried in chagrin.

"Them that finds should hold," quoth Billy.

"I don't care," she replied. "It was a bigger one than you ever caught anyway."

"Oh, I 'm not denyin' you're a peach at fishin'," he drawled. "You caught me, didn't you?"

"I don't know about that," she retorted. "Maybe it was like the man who was arrested for catching trout out of season. His defense was self defense."

Billy pondered, but did not see.

"The trout attacked him," she explained.

Billy grinned. Fifteen minutes later he said:

"You sure handed me a hot one."

The sky was overcast, and, as they drove along the bank of the Coquille River, the fog suddenly enveloped them.

"Whoof!" Billy exhaled joyfully. "Ain't it great! I can feel myself moppin' it up like a dry sponge. I never appreciated fog before."

Saxon held out her arms to receive it, making motions as if she were bathing in the gray mist.

"I never thought I'd grow tired of the sun," she said; "but we've had more than our share the last few weeks."

"Ever since we hit the Sacramento Valley," Billy affirmed. "Too much sun ain't good. I've worked that out. Sunshine is like liquor. Did you ever notice how good you felt when the sun come out after a week of cloudy weather. Well, that sunshine was just like a jolt of whiskey. Had the

same effect. Made you feel good all over. Now, when you're swimmin', an' come out an' lay in the sun, how good you feel. That's because you're lappin' up a sun-cocktail. But suppose you lay there in the sand a couple of hours. You don't feel so good. You're so slow-movin' it takes you a long time to dress. You go home draggin' your legs an' feelin' rotten, with all the life sapped outa you. What's that? It's the katzenjammer. You've been soused to the ears in sunshine, like so much whiskey, an' now you're payin' for it. That's straight. That's why fog in the climate is best."

"Then we've been drunk for months," Saxon said. "And now we're going to sober up."

"You bet. Why, Saxon, I can do two days' work in one in this climate.--Look at the mares. Blame me if they ain't perkin' up already."

Vainly Saxon's eye roved the pine forest in search of her beloved redwoods. They would find them down in California, they were told in the town of Bandon.

"Then we're too far north," said Saxon. "We must go south to find our valley of the moon."

And south they went, along roads that steadily grew worse, through the dairy country of Langlois and through thick pine forests to Port Orford, where Saxon picked jeweled agates on the beach while Billy caught

enormous rockcod. No railroads had yet penetrated this wild region, and the way south grew wilder and wilder. At Gold Beach they encountered their old friend, the Rogue River, which they ferried across where it entered the Pacific. Still wilder became the country, still more terrible the road, still farther apart the isolated farms and clearings.

And here were neither Asiatics nor Europeans. The scant population consisted of the original settlers and their descendants. More than one old man or woman Saxon talked with, who could remember the trip across the Plains with the plodding oxen. West they had fared until the Pacific itself had stopped them, and here they had made their clearings, built their rude houses, and settled. In them Farthest West had been reached. Old customs had changed little. There were no railways. No automobile as yet had ventured their perilous roads. Eastward, between them and the populous interior valleys, lay the wilderness of the Coast Range--a game paradise, Billy heard; though he declared that the very road he traveled was game paradise enough for him. Had he not halted the horses, turned the reins over to Saxon, and shot an eight-pronged buck from the wagon-seat?

South of Gold Beach, climbing a narrow road through the virgin forest, they heard from far above the jingle of bells. A hundred yards farther on Billy found a place wide enough to turn out. Here he waited, while the merry bells, descending the mountain, rapidly came near. They heard the grind of brakes, the soft thud of horses' hoofs, once a sharp cry of the driver, and once a woman's laughter.

"Some driver, some driver," Billy muttered. "I take my hat off to 'm whoever he is, hittin' a pace like that on a road like this.--Listen to that! He's got powerful brakes.--Zocie! That WAS a chuck-hole! Some springs, Saxon, some springs!"

Where the road zigzagged above, they glimpsed through the trees four sorrel horses trotting swiftly, and the flying wheels of a small, tan-painted trap.

At the bend of the road the leaders appeared again, swinging wide on the curve, the wheelers flashed into view, and the light two-seated rig; then the whole affair straightened out and thundered down upon them across a narrow plank-bridge. In the front seat were a man and woman; in the rear seat a Japanese was squeezed in among suit cases, rods, guns, saddles, and a typewriter case, while above him and all about him, fastened most intricately, sprouted a prodigious crop of deer- and elk-horns.

"It's Mr. and Mrs. Hastings," Saxon cried.

"Whoa!" Hastings yelled, putting on the brake and gathering his horses in to a stop alongside. Greetings flew back and forth, in which the Japanese, whom they had last seen on the Roamer at Rio Vista, gave and received his share.

"Different from the Sacramento islands, eh?" Hastings said to Saxon.

"Nothing but old American stock in these mountains. And they haven't changed any. As John Fox, Jr., said, they're our contemporary ancestors. Our old folks were just like them."

Mr. and Mrs. Hastings, between them, told of their long drive. They were out two months then, and intended to continue north through Oregon and Washington to the Canadian boundary.

"Then we'll ship our horses and come home by train," concluded Hastings.

"But the way you drive you oughta be a whole lot further along than this," Billy criticized.

"But we keep stopping off everywhere," Mrs. Hastings explained.

"We went in to the Hoopa Reservation," said Mr. Hastings, "and canoed down the Trinity and Klamath Rivers to the ocean. And just now we've come out from two weeks in the real wilds of Curry County."

"You must go in," Hastings advised. "You'll get to Mountain Ranch to-night. And you can turn in from there. No roads, though. You'll have to pack your horses. But it's full of game. I shot five mountain lions and two bear, to say nothing of deer. And there are small herds of elk, too.--No; I didn't shoot any. They're protected. These horns I got from the old hunters. I'll tell you all about it."

And while the men talked, Saxon and Mrs. Hastings were not idle.

"Found your valley of the moon yet?" the writer's wife asked, as they were saying good-by.

Saxon shook her head.

"You will find it if you go far enough; and be sure you go as far as Sonoma Valley and our ranch. Then, if you haven't found it yet, we'll see what we can do."

Three weeks later, with a bigger record of mountain lions and bear than Hastings' to his credit, Billy emerged from Curry County and drove across the line into California. At once Saxon found herself among the redwoods. But they were redwoods unbelievable. Billy stopped the wagon, got out, and paced around one.

"Forty-five feet," he announced. "That's fifteen in diameter. And they're all like it only bigger. No; there's a runt. It's only about nine feet through. An' they're hundreds of feet tall."

"When I die, Billy, you must bury me in a redwood grove," Saxon adjured.

"I ain't goin' to let you die before I do," he assured her. "An' then we'll leave it in our wills for us both to be buried that way."

CHAPTER XVII

South they held along the coast, hunting, fishing, swimming, and horse-buying. Billy shipped his purchases on the coasting steamers. Through Del Norte and Humboldt counties they went, and through Mendocino into Sonoma--counties larger than Eastern states--threading the giant woods, whipping innumerable trout-streams, and crossing countless rich valleys. Ever Saxon sought the valley of the moon. Sometimes, when all seemed fair, the lack was a railroad, sometimes madrono and manzanita trees, and, usually, there was too much fog.

"We do want a sun-cocktail once in a while," she told Billy.

"Yep," was his answer. "Too much fog might make us soggy. What we're after is betwixt an' between, an' we'll have to get back from the coast a ways to find it."

This was in the fall of the year, and they turned their backs on the Pacific at old Fort Ross and entered the Russian River Valley, far below Ukiah, by way of Cazadero and Guerneville. At Santa Rosa Billy was delayed with the shipping of several horses, so that it was not until afternoon that he drove south and east for Sonoma Valley.

"I guess we'll no more than make Sonoma Valley when it'll be time to camp," he said, measuring the sun with his eye. "This is called Bennett Valley. You cross a divide from it and come out at Glen Ellen. Now this

is a mighty pretty valley, if anybody should ask you. An' that's some nifty mountain over there."

"The mountain is all right," Saxon adjudged. "But all the rest of the hills are too bare. And I don't see any big trees. It takes rich soil to make big trees."

"Oh, I ain't sayin' it's the valley of the moon by a long ways. All the same, Saxon, that's some mountain. Look at the timber on it. I bet they's deer there."

"I wonder where we'll spend this winter," Saxon remarked.

"D'ye know, I've just been thinkin' the same thing. Let's winter at Carmel. Mark Hall's back, an' so is Jim Hazard. What d'ye say?"

Saxon nodded.

"Only you won't be the odd-job man this time."

"Nope. We can make trips in good weather horse-buyin'," Billy confirmed, his face beaming with self-satisfaction. "An' if that walkin' poet of the Marble House is around, I'll sure get the gloves on with 'm just in memory of the time he walked me off my legs--"

"Oh! Oh!" Saxon cried. "Look, Billy! Look!"

Around a bend in the road came a man in a sulky, driving a heavy stallion. The animal was a bright chestnut-sorrel, with cream-colored mane and tail. The tail almost swept the ground, while the mane was so thick that it crested out of the neck and flowed down, long and wavy. He scented the mares and stopped short, head flung up and armfuls of creamy mane tossing in the breeze. He bent his head until flaring nostrils brushed impatient knees, and between the fine-pointed ears could be seen a mighty and incredible curve of neck. Again he tossed his head, fretting against the bit as the driver turned widely aside for safety in passing. They could see the blue glaze like a sheen on the surface of the horse's bright, wild eyes, and Billy closed a wary thumb on his reins and himself turned widely. He held up his hand in signal, and the driver of the stallion stopped when well past, and over his shoulder talked draught-horses with Billy.

Among other things, Billy learned that the stallion's name was Barbarossa, that the driver was the owner, and that Santa Rosa was his headquarters.

"There are two ways to Sonoma Valley from here," the man directed. "When you come to the crossroads the turn to the left will take you to Glen Ellen by Bennett Peak--that's it there."

Rising from rolling stubble fields, Bennett Peak towered hot in the sun, a row of bastion hills leaning against its base. But hills and mountains

on that side showed bare and heated, though beautiful with the sunburnt tawnniness of California.

"The turn to the right will take you to Glen Ellen, too, only it's longer and steeper grades. But your mares don't look as though it'd bother them."

"Which is the prettiest way?" Saxon asked.

"Oh, the right hand road, by all means," said the man. "That's Sonoma Mountain there, and the road skirts it pretty well up, and goes through Cooper's Grove."

Billy did not start immediately after they had said good-by, and he and Saxon, heads over shoulders, watched the roused Barbarossa plunging mutinously on toward Santa Rosa.

"Geel!" Billy said. "I'd like to be up here next spring."

At the crossroads Billy hesitated and looked at Saxon.

"What if it is longer?" she said. "Look how beautiful it is--all covered with green woods; and I just know those are redwoods in the canyons. You never can tell. The valley of the moon might be right up there somewhere. And it would never do to miss it just in order to save half an hour."

They took the turn to the right and began crossing a series of steep foothills. As they approached the mountain there were signs of a greater abundance of water. They drove beside a running stream, and, though the vineyards on the hills were summer-dry, the farmhouses in the hollows and on the levels were grouped about with splendid trees.

"Maybe it sounds funny," Saxon observed; "but I 'm beginning to love that mountain already. It almost seems as if I d seen it before, somehow, it's so all-around satisfying--oh!"

Crossing a bridge and rounding a sharp turn, they were suddenly enveloped in a mysterious coolness and gloom. All about them arose stately trunks of redwood. The forest floor was a rosy carpet of autumn fronds. Occasional shafts of sunlight, penetrating the deep shade, warmed the somberness of the grove. Alluring paths led off among the trees and into cozy nooks made by circles of red columns growing around the dust of vanished ancestors--witnessing the titantic dimensions of those ancestors by the girth of the circles in which they stood.

Out of the grove they pulled to the steep divide, which was no more than a buttress of Sonoma Mountain. The way led on through rolling uplands and across small dips and canyons, all well wooded and a-drip with water. In places the road was muddy from wayside springs.

"The mountain's a sponge," said Billy. "Here it is, the tail-end of dry

summer, an' the ground's just leakin' everywhere."

"I know I've never been here before," Saxon communed aloud. "But it's all so familiar! So I must have dreamed it. And there's madronos!--a whole grove! And manzanita! Why, I feel just as if I was coming home... Oh, Billy, if it should turn out to be our valley."

"Plastered against the side of a mountain?" he queried, with a skeptical laugh.

"No; I don't mean that. I mean on the way to our valley. Because the way--all ways--to our valley must be beautiful. And this; I've seen it all before, dreamed it."

"It's great," he said sympathetically. "I wouldn't trade a square mile of this kind of country for the whole Sacramento Valley, with the river islands thrown in and Middle River for good measure. If they ain't deer up there, I miss my guess. An' where they's springs they's streams, an' streams means trout."

They passed a large and comfortable farmhouse, surrounded by wandering barns and cow-sheds, went on under forest arches, and emerged beside a field with which Saxon was instantly enchanted. It flowed in a gentle concave from the road up the mountain, its farther boundary an unbroken line of timber. The field glowed like rough gold in the approaching sunset, and near the middle of it stood a solitary great redwood, with

blasted top suggesting a nesting eyrie for eagles. The timber beyond clothed the mountain in solid green to what they took to be the top. But, as they drove on, Saxon, looking back upon what she called her field, saw the real summit of Sonoma towering beyond, the mountain behind her field a mere spur upon the side of the larger mass.

Ahead and toward the right, across sheer ridges of the mountains, separated by deep green canyons and broadening lower down into rolling orchards and vineyards, they caught their first sight of Sonoma Valley and the wild mountains that rimmed its eastern side. To the left they gazed across a golden land of small hills and valleys. Beyond, to the north, they glimpsed another portion of the valley, and, still beyond, the opposing wall of the valley--a range of mountains, the highest of which reared its red and battered ancient crater against a rosy and mellowing sky. From north to southeast, the mountain rim curved in the brightness of the sun, while Saxon and Billy were already in the shadow of evening. He looked at Saxon, noted the ravished ecstasy of her face, and stopped the horses. All the eastern sky was blushing to rose, which descended upon the mountains, touching them with wine and ruby. Sonoma Valley began to fill with a purple flood, laying the mountain bases, rising, inundating, drowning them in its purple. Saxon pointed in silence, indicating that the purple flood was the sunset shadow of Sonoma Mountain. Billy nodded, then chirruped to the mares, and the descent began through a warm and colorful twilight.

On the elevated sections of the road they felt the cool, delicious

breeze from the Pacific forty miles away; while from each little dip and hollow came warm breaths of autumn earth, spicy with sunburnt grass and fallen leaves and passing flowers.

They came to the rim of a deep canyon that seemed to penetrate to the heart of Sonoma Mountain. Again, with no word spoken, merely from watching Saxon, Billy stopped the wagon. The canyon was wildly beautiful. Tall redwoods lined its entire length. On its farther rim stood three rugged knolls covered with dense woods of spruce and oak. From between the knolls, a feeder to the main canyon and likewise fringed with redwoods, emerged a smaller canyon. Billy pointed to a stubble field that lay at the feet of the knolls.

"It's in fields like that I've seen my mares a-pasturing," he said.

They dropped down into the canyon, the road following a stream that sang under maples and alders. The sunset fires, refracted from the cloud-driftage of the autumn sky, bathed the canyon with crimson, in which ruddy-limbed madronos and wine-wooded manzanitas burned and smoldered. The air was aromatic with laurel. Wild grape vines bridged the stream from tree to tree. Oaks of many sorts were veiled in lacy Spanish moss. Ferns and brakes grew lush beside the stream. From somewhere came the plaint of a mourning dove. Fifty feet above the ground, almost over their heads, a Douglas squirrel crossed the road--a flash of gray between two trees; and they marked the continuance of its aerial passage by the bending of the boughs.

"I've got a hunch," said Billy.

"Let me say it first," Saxon begged.

He waited, his eyes on her face as she gazed about her in rapture.

"We've found our valley," she whispered. "Was that it?"

He nodded, but checked speech at sight of a small boy driving a cow up the road, a preposterously big shotgun in one hand, in the other as preposterously big a jackrabbit. "How far to Glen Ellen?" Billy asked.

"Mile an' a half," was the answer.

"What creek is this?" inquired Saxon.

"Wild Water. It empties into Sonoma Creek half a mile down."

"Trout?"--this from Billy.

"If you know how to catch 'em," grinned the boy.

"Deer up the mountain?"

"It ain't open season," the boy evaded.

"I guess you never shot a deer," Billy slyly baited, and was rewarded with:

"I got the horns to show."

"Deer shed their horns," Billy teased on. "Anybody can find 'em."

"I got the meat on mine. It ain't dry yet--"

The boy broke off, gazing with shocked eyes into the pit Billy had dug for him.

"It's all right, sonny," Billy laughed, as he drove on. "I ain't the game warden. I 'm buyin' horses."

More leaping tree squirrels, more ruddy madronos and majestic oaks, more fairy circles of redwoods, and, still beside the singing stream, they passed a gate by the roadside. Before it stood a rural mail box, on which was lettered "Edmund Hale." Standing under the rustic arch, leaning upon the gate, a man and woman composed a picture so arresting and beautiful that Saxon caught her breath. They were side by side, the delicate hand of the woman curled in the hand of the man, which looked as if made to confer benedictions. His face bore out this impression--a beautiful-browed countenance, with large, benevolent gray eyes under a wealth of white hair that shone like spun glass. He was fair and large;

the little woman beside him was daintily wrought. She was saffron-brown, as a woman of the white race can well be, with smiling eyes of bluest blue. In quaint sage-green draperies, she seemed a flower, with her small vivid face irresistibly reminding Saxon of a springtime wake-robin.

Perhaps the picture made by Saxon and Billy was equally arresting and beautiful, as they drove down through the golden end of day. The two couples had eyes only for each other. The little woman beamed joyously. The man's face glowed into the benediction that had trembled there. To Saxon, like the field up the mountain, like the mountain itself, it seemed that she had always known this adorable pair. She knew that she loved them.

"How d'ye do," said Billy.

"You blessed children," said the man. "I wonder if you know how dear you look sitting there."

That was all. The wagon had passed by, rustling down the road, which was carpeted with fallen leaves of maple, oak, and alder. Then they came to the meeting of the two creeks.

"Oh, what a place for a home," Saxon cried, pointing across Wild Water.

"See, Billy, on that bench there above the meadow."

"It's a rich bottom, Saxon; and so is the bench rich. Look at the big trees on it. An' they's sure to be springs."

"Drive over," she said.

Forsaking the main road, they crossed Wild Water on a narrow bridge and continued along an ancient, rutted road that ran beside an equally ancient worm-fence of split redwood rails. They came to a gate, open and off its hinges, through which the road led out on the bench.

"This is it--I know it," Saxon said with conviction. "Drive in, Billy."

A small, whitewashed farmhouse with broken windows showed through the trees.

"Talk about your madronos--"

Billy pointed to the father of all madronos, six feet in diameter at its base, sturdy and sound, which stood before the house.

They spoke in low tones as they passed around the house under great oak trees and came to a stop before a small barn. They did not wait to unharness. Tying the horses, they started to explore. The pitch from the bench to the meadow was steep yet thickly wooded with oaks and manzanita. As they crashed through the underbrush they startled a score of quail into flight.

"How about game?" Saxon queried.

Billy grinned, and fell to examining a spring which bubbled a clear stream into the meadow. Here the ground was sunbaked and wide open in a multitude of cracks.

Disappointment leaped into Saxon's face, but Billy, crumbling a clod between his fingers, had not made up his mind.

"It's rich," he pronounced; "--the cream of the soil that's been washin' down from the hills for ten thousan' years. But--"

He broke off, stared all about, studying the configuration of the meadow, crossed it to the redwood trees beyond, then came back.

"It's no good as it is," he said. "But it's the best ever if it's handled right. All it needs is a little common sense an' a lot of drainage. This meadow's a natural basin not yet filled level. They's a sharp slope through the redwoods to the creek. Come on, I'll show you."

They went through the redwoods and came out on Sonoma Creek. At this spot was no singing. The stream poured into a quiet pool. The willows on their side brushed the water. The opposite side was a steep bank. Billy measured the height of the bank with his eye, the depth of the water with a driftwood pole.

"Fifteen feet," he announced. "That allows all kinds of high-divin' from the bank. An' it's a hundred yards of a swim up an' down."

They followed down the pool. It emptied in a riffle, across exposed bedrock, into another pool. As they looked, a trout flashed into the air and back, leaving a widening ripple on the quiet surface.

"I guess we won't winter in Carmel," Billy said. "This place was specially manufactured for us. In the morning I'll find out who owns it."

Half an hour later, feeding the horses, he called Saxon's attention to a locomotive whistle.

"You've got your railroad," he said. "That's a train pulling into Glen Ellen, an' it's only a mile from here."

Saxon was dozing off to sleep under the blankets when Billy aroused her.

"Suppose the guy that owns it won't sell?"

"There isn't the slightest doubt," Saxon answered with unruffled certainty. "This is our place. I know it."

CHAPTER XVIII

They were awakened by Possum, who was indignantly reproaching a tree squirrel for not coming down to be killed. The squirrel chattered garrulous remarks that drove Possum into a mad attempt to climb the tree. Billy and Saxon giggled and hugged each other at the terrier's frenzy.

"If this is goin' to be our place, they'll be no shootin' of tree squirrels," Billy said.

Saxon pressed his hand and sat up. From beneath the bench came the cry of a meadow lark.

"There isn't anything left to be desired," she sighed happily.

"Except the deed," Billy corrected.

After a hasty breakfast, they started to explore, running the irregular boundaries of the place and repeatedly crossing it from rail fence to creek and back again. Seven springs they found along the foot of the bench on the edge of the meadow.

"There's your water supply," Billy said. "Drain the meadow, work the soil up, and with fertilizer and all that water you can grow crops the year round. There must be five acres of it, an' I wouldn't trade it for

Mrs. Mortimer's."

They were standing in the old orchard, on the bench where they had counted twenty-seven trees, neglected but of generous girth.

"And on top the bench, back of the house, we can grow berries." Saxon paused, considering a new thought "If only Mrs. Mortimer would come up and advise us!--Do you think she would, Billy?"

"Sure she would. It ain't more 'n four hours' run from San Jose. But first we'll get our hooks into the place. Then you can write to her."

Sonoma Creek gave the long boundary to the little farm, two sides were worm fenced, and the fourth side was Wild Water.

"Why, we'll have that beautiful man and woman for neighbors," Saxon recollected. "Wild Water will be the dividing line between their place and ours."

"It ain't ours yet," Billy commented. "Let's go and call on 'em. They'll be able to tell us all about it."

"It's just as good as," she replied. "The big thing has been the finding. And whoever owns it doesn't care much for it. It hasn't been lived in for a long time. And--Oh, Billy--are you satisfied!"

"With every bit of it," he answered frankly, "as far as it goes. But the trouble is, it don't go far enough."

The disappointment in her face spurred him to renunciation of his particular dream.

"We'll buy it--that's settled," he said. "But outside the meadow, they's so much woods that they's little pasture--not more 'n enough for a couple of horses an' a cow. But I don't care. We can't have everything, an' what they is is almighty good."

"Let us call it a starter," she consoled. "Later on we can add to it--maybe the land alongside that runs up the Wild Water to the three knolls we saw yesterday."

"Where I seen my horses pasturin'," he remembered, with a flash of eye. "Why not? So much has come true since we hit the road, maybe that'll come true, too."

"We'll work for it, Billy."

"We'll work like hell for it," he said grimly.

They passed through the rustic gate and along a path that wound through wild woods. There was no sign of the house until they came abruptly

upon it, bowered among the trees. It was eight-sided, and so justly proportioned that its two stories made no show of height. The house belonged there. It might have sprung from the soil just as the trees had. There were no formal grounds. The wild grew to the doors. The low porch of the main entrance was raised only a step from the ground. "Trillium Covert," they read, in quaint carved letters under the eave of the porch.

"Come right upstairs, you dears," a voice called from above, in response to Saxon's knock.

Stepping back and looking up, she beheld the little lady smiling down from a sleeping-porch. Clad in a rosy-tissued and flowing house gown, she again reminded Saxon of a flower.

"Just push the front door open and find your way," was the direction.

Saxon led, with Billy at her heels. They came into a room bright with windows, where a big log smoldered in a rough-stone fireplace. On the stone slab above stood a huge Mexican jar, filled with autumn branches and trailing fluffy smoke-vine. The walls were finished in warm natural woods, stained but without polish. The air was aromatic with clean wood odors. A walnut organ loomed in a shallow corner of the room. All corners were shallow in this octagonal dwelling. In another corner were many rows of books. Through the windows, across a low couch indubitably made for use, could be seen a restful picture of autumn trees and yellow

grasses, threaded by wellworn paths that ran here and there over the tiny estate. A delightful little stairway wound past more windows to the upper story. Here the little lady greeted them and led them into what Saxon knew at once was her room. The two octagonal sides of the house which showed in this wide room were given wholly to windows. Under the long sill, to the floor, were shelves of books. Books lay here and there, in the disorder of use, on work table, couch and desk. On a sill by an open window, a jar of autumn leaves breathed the charm of the sweet brown wife, who seated herself in a tiny rattan chair, enameled a cheery red, such as children delight to rock in.

"A queer house," Mrs. Hale laughed girlishly and contentedly. "But we love it. Edmund made it with his own hands even to the plumbing, though he did have a terrible time with that before he succeeded."

"How about that hardwood floor downstairs?--an' the fireplace?" Billy inquired.

"All, all," she replied proudly. "And half the furniture. That cedar desk there, the table--with his own hands."

"They are such gentle hands," Saxon was moved to say.

Mrs. Hale looked at her quickly, her vivid face alive with a grateful light.

"They are gentle, the gentlest hands I have ever known," she said softly. "And you are a dear to have noticed it, for you only saw them yesterday in passing."

"I couldn't help it," Saxon said simply.

Her gaze slipped past Mrs. Hale, attracted by the wall beyond, which was done in a bewitching honeycomb pattern dotted with golden bees. The walls were hung with a few, a very few, framed pictures.

"They are all of people," Saxon said, remembering the beautiful paintings in Mark Hall's bungalow.

"My windows frame my landscape paintings," Mrs. Hale answered, pointing out of doors. "Inside I want only the faces of my dear ones whom I cannot have with me always. Some of them are dreadful rovers."

"Oh!" Saxon was on her feet and looking at a photograph. "You know Clara Hastings!"

"I ought to. I did everything but nurse her at my breast. She came to me when she was a little baby. Her mother was my sister. Do you know how greatly you resemble her? I remarked it to Edmund yesterday. He had already seen it. It wasn't a bit strange that his heart leaped out to you two as you came drilling down behind those beautiful horses."

So Mrs. Hale was Clara's aunt--old stock that had crossed the Plains. Saxon knew now why she had reminded her so strongly of her own mother.

The talk whipped quite away from Billy, who could only admire the detailed work of the cedar desk while he listened. Saxon told of meeting Clara and Jack Hastings on their yacht and on their driving trip in Oregon. They were off again, Mrs. Hale said, having shipped their horses home from Vancouver and taken the Canadian Pacific on their way to England. Mrs. Hale knew Saxon's mother or, rather, her poems; and produced, not only "The Story of the Files," but a ponderous scrapbook which contained many of her mother's poems which Saxon had never seen. A sweet singer, Mrs. Hale said; but so many had sung in the days of gold and been forgotten. There had been no army of magazines then, and the poems had perished in local newspapers.

Jack Hastings had fallen in love with Clara, the talk ran on; then, visiting at Trillium Covert, he had fallen in love with Sonoma Valley and bought a magnificent home ranch, though little enough he saw of it, being away over the world so much of the time. Mrs. Hale talked of her own Journey across the Plains, a little girl, in the late Fifties, and, like Mrs. Mortimer, knew all about the fight at Little Meadow, and the tale of the massacre of the emigrant train of which Billy's father had been the sole survivor.

"And so," Saxon concluded, an hour later, "we've been three years searching for our valley of the moon, and now we've found it."

"Valley of the Moon?" Mrs. Hale queried. "Then you knew about it all the time. What kept you so long?"

"No; we didn't know. We just started on a blind search for it. Mark Hall called it a pilgrimage, and was always teasing us to carry long staffs. He said when we found the spot we'd know, because then the staffs would burst into blossom. He laughed at all the good things we wanted in our valley, and one night he took me out and showed me the moon through a telescope. He said that was the only place we could find such a wonderful valley. He meant it was moonshine, but we adopted the name and went on looking for it."

"What a coincidence!" Mrs. Hale exclaimed. "For this is the Valley of the Moon."

"I know it," Saxon said with quiet confidence. "It has everything we wanted."

"But you don't understand, my dear. This is the Valley of the Moon. This is Sonoma Valley. Sonoma is an Indian word, and means the Valley of the Moon. That was what the Indians called it for untold ages before the first white men came. We, who love it, still so call it."

And then Saxon recalled the mysterious references Jack Hastings and his wife had made to it, and the talk tripped along until Billy grew

restless. He cleared his throat significantly and interrupted.

"We want to find out about that ranch across the creek--who owns it, if they'll sell, where we'll find 'em, an' such things."

Mrs. Hale stood up.

"We'll go and see Edmund," she said, catching Saxon by the hand and leading the way.

"My!" Billy ejaculated, towering above her. "I used to think Saxon was small. But she'd make two of you."

"And you're pretty big," the little woman smiled; "but Edmund is taller than you, and broader-shouldered."

They crossed a bright hall, and found the big beautiful husband lying back reading in a huge Mission rocker. Beside it was another tiny child's chair of red-enameled rattan. Along the length of his thigh, the head on his knee and directed toward a smoldering log in a fireplace, clung an incredibly large striped cat. Like its master, it turned its head to greet the newcomers. Again Saxon felt the loving benediction that abided in his face, his eyes, his hands--toward which she involuntarily dropped her eyes. Again she was impressed by the gentleness of them. They were hands of love. They were the hands of a type of man she had never dreamed existed. No one in that merry crowd of

Carmel had prefigured him. They were artists. This was the scholar, the philosopher. In place of the passion of youth and all youth's mad revolt, was the benigance of wisdom. Those gentle hands had passed all the bitter by and plucked only the sweet of life. Dearly as she loved them, she shuddered to think what some of those Carmelites would be like when they were as old as he--especially the dramatic critic and the Iron Man.

"Here are the dear children, Edmund," Mrs. Hale said. "What do you think! They want to buy the Madrono Ranch. They've been three years searching for it--I forgot to tell them we had searched ten years for Trillium Covert. Tell them all about it. Surely Mr. Naismith is still of a mind to sell!"

They seated themselves in simple massive chairs, and Mrs. Hale took the tiny rattan beside the big Mission rocker, her slender hand curled like a tendril in Edmund's. And while Saxon listened to the talk, her eyes took in the grave rooms lined with books. She began to realize how a mere structure of wood and stone may express the spirit of him who conceives and makes it. Those gentle hands had made all this--the very furniture, she guessed as her eyes roved from desk to chair, from work table to reading stand beside the bed in the other room, where stood a green-shaded lamp and orderly piles of magazines and books.

As for the matter of Madrono Ranch, it was easy enough he was saying. Naismith would sell. Had desired to sell for the past five years, ever

since he had engaged in the enterprise of bottling mineral water at the springs lower down the valley. It was fortunate that he was the owner, for about all the rest of the surrounding land was owned by a Frenchman--an early settler. He would not part with a foot of it. He was a peasant, with all the peasant's love of the soil, which, in him, had become an obsession, a disease. He was a land-miser. With no business capacity, old and opinionated, he was land poor, and it was an open question which would arrive first, his death or bankruptcy.

As for Madrono Ranch, Naismith owned it and had set the price at fifty dollars an acre. That would be one thousand dollars, for there were twenty acres. As a farming investment, using old-fashioned methods, it was not worth it. As a business investment, yes; for the virtues of the valley were on the eve of being discovered by the outside world, and no better location for a summer home could be found. As a happiness investment in joy of beauty and climate, it was worth a thousand times the price asked. And he knew Naismith would allow time on most of the amount. Edmund's suggestion was that they take a two years' lease, with option to buy, the rent to apply to the purchase if they took it up. Naismith had done that once with a Swiss, who had paid a monthly rental of ten dollars. But the man's wife had died, and he had gone away.

Edmund soon divined Billy's renunciation, though not the nature of it; and several questions brought it forth--the old pioneer dream of land spaciousness; of cattle on a hundred hills; one hundred and sixty acres of land the smallest thinkable division.

"But you don't need all that land, dear lad," Edmund said softly. "I see you understand intensive farming. Have you thought about intensive horse-raising?"

Billy's jaw dropped at the smashing newness of the idea. He considered it, but could see no similarity in the two processes. Unbelief leaped into his eyes.

"You gotta show me!" he cried.

The elder man smiled gently.

"Let us see. In the first place, you don't need those twenty acres except for beauty. There are five acres in the meadow. You don't need more than two of them to make your living at selling vegetables. In fact, you and your wife, working from daylight to dark, cannot properly farm those two acres. Remains three acres. You have plenty of water for it from the springs. Don't be satisfied with one crop a year, like the rest of the old-fashioned farmers in this valley. Farm it like your vegetable plot, intensively, all the year, in crops that make horse-feed, irrigating, fertilizing, rotating your crops. Those three acres will feed as many horses as heaven knows how huge an area of unseeded, uncared for, wasted pasture would feed. Think it over. I'll lend you books on the subject. I don't know how large your crops will be, nor do I know how much a horse eats; that's your business. But I am

certain, with a hired man to take your place helping your wife on her two acres of vegetables, that by the time you own the horses your three acres will feed, you will have all you can attend to. Then it will be time to get more land, for more horses, for more riches, if that way happiness lie."

Billy understood. In his enthusiasm he dashed out:

"You're some farmer."

Edmund smiled and glanced toward his wife.

"Give him your opinion of that, Annette."

Her blue eyes twinkled as she complied.

"Why, the dear, he never farms. He has never farmed. But he knows." She waved her hand about the booklined walls. "He is a student of good. He studies all good things done by good men under the sun. His pleasure is in books and wood-working."

"Don't forget Dulcie," Edmund gently protested.

"Yes, and Dulcie." Annette laughed. "Dulcie is our cow. It is a great question with Jack Hastings whether Edmund dotes more on Dulcie, or Dulcie dotes more on Edmund. When he goes to San Francisco Dulcie is

miserable. So is Edmund, until he hastens back. Oh, Dulcie has given me no few jealous pangs. But I have to confess he understands her as no one else does."

"That is the one practical subject I know by experience," Edmund confirmed. "I am an authority on Jersey cows. Call upon me any time for counsel."

He stood up and went toward his book-shelves; and they saw how magnificently large a man he was. He paused a book in his hand, to answer a question from Saxon. No; there were no mosquitoes, although, one summer when the south wind blew for ten days--an unprecedented thing--a few mosquitoes had been carried up from San Pablo Bay. As for fog, it was the making of the valley. And where they were situated, sheltered behind Sonoma Mountain, the fogs were almost invariably high fogs. Sweeping in from the ocean forty miles away, they were deflected by Sonoma Mountain and shunted high into the air. Another thing, Trillium Covert and Madrono Ranch were happily situated in a narrow thermal belt, so that in the frosty mornings of winter the temperature was always several degrees higher than in the rest of the valley. In fact, frost was very rare in the thermal belt, as was proved by the successful cultivation of certain orange and lemon trees.

Edmund continued reading titles and selecting books until he had drawn out quite a number. He opened the top one, Bolton Hall's "Three Acres and Liberty," and read to them of a man who walked six hundred and fifty

miles a year in cultivating, by old-fashioned methods, twenty acres, from which he harvested three thousand bushels of poor potatoes; and of another man, a "new" farmer, who cultivated only five acres, walked two hundred miles, and produced three thousand bushels of potatoes, early and choice, which he sold at many times the price received by the first man.

Saxon receded the books from Edmund, and, as she heaped them in Billy's arms, read the titles. They were: Wickson's "California Fruits," Wickson's "California Vegetables," Brooks' "Fertilizers," Watson's "Farm Poultry," King's "Irrigation and Drainage," Kropotkin's "Fields, Factories and Workshops," and Farmer's Bulletin No. 22 on "The Feeding of Farm Animals."

"Come for more any time you want them," Edmund invited. "I have hundreds of volumes on farming, and all the Agricultural Bulletins... . And you must come and get acquainted with Dulcie your first spare time," he called after them out the door.

CHAPTER XIX

Mrs. Mortimer arrived with seed catalogs and farm books, to find Saxon immersed in the farm books borrowed from Edmund. Saxon showed her around, and she was delighted with everything, including the terms of the lease and its option to buy.

"And now," she said. "What is to be done? Sit down, both of you. This is a council of war, and I am the one person in the world to tell you what to do. I ought to be. Anybody who has reorganized and recatalogued a great city library should be able to start you young people on in short order. Now, where shall we begin?"

She paused for breath of consideration.

"First, Madrono Ranch is a bargain. I know soil, I know beauty, I know climate. Madrono Ranch is a gold mine. There is a fortune in that meadow. Tilth--I'll tell you about that later. First, here's the land. Second, what are you going to do with it? Make a living? Yes. Vegetables? Of course. What are you going to do with them after you have grown them? Sell. Where?--Now listen. You must do as I did. Cut out the middle man. Sell directly to the consumer. Drum up your own market. Do you know what I saw from the car windows coming up the valley, only several miles from here? Hotels, springs, summer resorts, winter resorts--population, mouths, market. How is that market supplied? I looked in vain for truck gardens.--Billy, harness up your horses and

be ready directly after dinner to take Saxon and me driving. Never mind everything else. Let things stand. What's the use of starting for a place of which you haven't the address. We'll look for the address this afternoon. Then we'll know where we are--at."--The last syllable a smiling concession to Billy.

But Saxon did not accompany them. There was too much to be done in cleaning the long-abandoned house and in preparing an arrangement for Mrs. Mortimer to sleep. And it was long after supper time when Mrs. Mortimer and Billy returned.

"You lucky, lucky children," she began immediately. "This valley is just waking up. Here's your market. There isn't a competitor in the valley. I thought those resorts looked new--Caliente, Boyes Hot Springs, El Verano, and all along the line. Then there are three little hotels in Glen Ellen, right next door. Oh, I've talked with all the owners and managers."

"She's a wooz," Billy admired. "She'd brace up to God on a business proposition. You oughta seen her."

Mrs. Mortimer acknowledged the compliment and dashed on.

"And where do all the vegetables come from? Wagons drive down twelve to fifteen miles from Santa Rosa, and up from Sonoma. Those are the nearest truck farms, and when they fail, as they often do, I am told, to supply

the increasing needs, the managers have to express vegetables all the way from San Francisco. I've introduced Billy. They've agreed to patronize home industry. Besides, it is better for them. You'll deliver just as good vegetables just as cheap; you will make it a point to deliver better, fresher vegetables; and don't forget that delivery for you will be cheaper by virtue of the shorter haul.

"No day-old egg stunt here. No jams nor jellies. But you've got lots of space up on the bench here on which you can't grow vegetables. To-morrow morning I'll help you lay out the chicken runs and houses. Besides, there is the matter of capons for the San Francisco market. You'll start small. It will be a side line at first. I'll tell you all about that, too, and send you the literature. You must use your head. Let others do the work. You must understand that thoroughly. The wages of superintendence are always larger than the wages of the laborers. You must keep books. You must know where you stand. You must know what pays and what doesn't and what pays best. Your books will tell that. I'll show you all in good time."

"An' think of it--all that on two acres!" Billy murmured.

Mrs. Mortimer looked at him sharply.

"Two acres your granny," she said with asperity. "Five acres. And then you won't be able to supply your market. And you, my boy, as soon as the first rains come will have your hands full and your horses weary

draining that meadow. We'll work those plans out to-morrow Also, there is the matter of berries on the bench here--and trellised table grapes, the choicest. They bring the fancy prices. There will be blackberries--Burbank's, he lives at Santa Rosa--Loganberries, Mammoth berries. But don't fool with strawberries. That's a whole occupation in itself. They're not vines, you know. I've examined the orchard. It's a good foundation. We'll settle the pruning and grafts later."

"But Billy wanted three acres of the meadow," Saxon explained at the first chance.

"What for?"

"To grow hay and other kinds of food for the horses he's going to raise."

"Buy it out of a portion of the profits from those three acres," Mrs. Mortimer decided on the instant.

Billy swallowed, and again achieved renunciation.

"All right," he said, with a brave show of cheerfulness. "Let her go. Us for the greens."

During the several days of Mrs. Mortimer's visit, Billy let the two women settle things for themselves. Oakland had entered upon a boom, and

from the West Oakland stables had come an urgent letter for more horses. So Billy was out, early and late, scouring the surrounding country for young work animals. In this way, at the start, he learned his valley thoroughly. There was also a clearing out at the West Oakland stables of mares whose feet had been knocked out on the hard city pave meets, and he was offered first choice at bargain prices. They were good animals. He knew what they were because he knew them of old time. The soft earth of the country, with a preliminary rest in pasture with their shoes pulled off, would put them in shape. They would never do again on hard-paved streets, but there were years of farm work in them. And then there was the breeding. But he could not undertake to buy them. He fought out the battle in secret and said nothing to Saxon.

At night, he would sit in the kitchen and smoke, listening to all that the two women had done and planned in the day. The right kind of horses was hard to buy, and, as he put it, it was like pulling a tooth to get a farmer to part with one, despite the fact that he had been authorized to increase the buying sum by as much as fifty dollars. Despite the coming of the automobile, the price of heavy draught animals continued to rise. From as early as Billy could remember, the price of the big work horses had increased steadily. After the great earthquake, the price had jumped; yet it had never gone back.

"Billy, you make more money as a horse-buyer than a common laborer, don't you?" Mrs. Mortimer asked. "Very well, then. You won't have to drain the meadow, or plow it, or anything. You keep right on buying

horses. Work with your head. But out of what you make you will please pay the wages of one laborer for Saxon's vegetables. It will be a good investment, with quick returns."

"Sure," he agreed. "That's all anybody hires anybody for--to make money outa 'm. But how Saxon an' one man are goin' to work them five acres, when Mr. Hale says two of us couldn't do what's needed on two acres, is beyond me."

"Saxon isn't going to work," Mrs. Mortimer retorted.

"Did you see me working at San Jose? Saxon is going to use her head. It's about time you woke up to that. A dollar and a half a day is what is earned by persons who don't use their heads. And she isn't going to be satisfied with a dollar and a half a day. Now listen. I had a long talk with Mr. Hale this afternoon. He says there are practically no efficient laborers to be hired in the valley."

"I know that," Billy interjected. "All the good men go to the cities. It's only the leavin's that's left. The good ones that stay behind ain't workin' for wages."

"Which is perfectly true, every word. Now listen, children. I knew about it, and I spoke to Mr. Hale. He is prepared to make the arrangements for you. He knows all about it himself, and is in touch with the Warden. In short, you will parole two good-conduct prisoners from San Quentin; and

they will be gardeners. There are plenty of Chinese and Italians there, and they are the best truck-farmers. You kill two birds with one stone. You serve the poor convicts, and you serve yourselves."

Saxon hesitated, shocked; while Billy gravely considered the question.

"You know John," Mrs. Mortimer went on, "Mr. Hale's man about the place? How do you like him?"

"Oh, I was wishing only to-day that we could find somebody like him," Saxon said eagerly. "He's such a dear, faithful soul. Mrs. Hale told me a lot of fine things about him."

"There's one thing she didn't tell you," smiled Mrs. Mortimer. "John is a paroled convict. Twenty-eight years ago, in hot blood, he killed a man in a quarrel over sixty-five cents. He's been out of prison with the Hales three years now. You remember Louis, the old Frenchman, on my place? He's another. So that's settled. When your two come--of course you will pay them fair wages--and we'll make sure they're the same nationality, either Chinese or Italians--well, when they come, John, with their help, and under Mr. Hale's guidance, will knock together a small cabin for them to live in. We'll select the spot. Even so, when your farm is in full swing you'll have to have more outside help. So keep your eyes open, Billy, while you're gallivanting over the valley."

The next night Billy failed to return, and at nine o'clock a Glen Ellen

boy on horseback delivered a telegram. Billy had sent it from Lake County. He was after horses for Oakland.

Not until the third night did he arrive home, tired to exhaustion, but with an ill concealed air of pride.

"Now what have you been doing these three days?" Mrs. Mortimer demanded.

"Usin' my head," he boasted quietly. "Killin' two birds with one stone; an', take it from me, I killed a whole flock. Huh! I got word of it at Lawndale, an' I wanta tell you Hazel an' Hattie was some tired when I stabled 'm at Calistoga an' pulled out on the stage over St. Helena. I was Johnny-on-the-spot, an' I nailed 'm--eight whoppers--the whole outfit of a mountain teamster. Young animals, sound as a-dollar, and the lightest of 'em over fifteen hundred. I shipped 'm last night from Calistoga. An', well, that ain't all.

"Before that, first day, at Lawndale, I seen the fellow with the teamin' contract for the pavin'-stone quarry. Sell horses! He wanted to buy 'em. He wanted to buy 'em bad. He'd even rent 'em, he said."

"And you sent him the eight you bought!" Saxon broke in.

"Guess again. I bought them eight with Oakland money, an' they was shipped to Oakland. But I got the Lawndale contractor on long distance, and he agreed to pay me half a dollar a day rent for every work horse up

to half a dozen. Then I telegraphed the Boss, tellin' him to ship me six sore-footed mares, Bud Strothers to make the choice, an' to charge to my commission. Bud knows what I 'm after. Soon as they come, off go their shoes. Two weeks in pasture, an' then they go to Lawndale. They can do the work. It's a down-hill haul to the railroad on a dirt road. Half a dollar rent each--that's three dollars a day they'll bring me six days a week. I don't feed 'em, shoe 'm, or nothin', an' I keep an eye on 'm to see they're treated right. Three bucks a day, eh! Well, I guess that'll keep a couple of dollar-an '-a-half men goin' for Saxon, unless she works 'em Sundays. Huh! The Valley of the Moon! Why, we'll be wearin' diamonds before long. Gosh! A fellow could live in the city a thousan' years an' not get such chances. It beats China lottery."

He stood up.

"I 'm goin' out to water Hazel an' Hattie, feed 'm, an' bed 'm down. I'll eat soon as I come back."

The two women were regarding each other with shining eyes, each on the verge of speech when Billy returned to the door and stuck his head in.

"They's one thing maybe you ain't got," he said. "I pull down them three dollars every day; but the six mares is mine, too. I own 'm. They're mine. Are you on?"

CHAPTER XX

"I'm not done with you children," had been Mrs. Mortimer's parting words; and several times that winter she ran up to advise, and to teach Saxon how to calculate her crops for the small immediate market, for the increasing spring market, and for the height of summer, at which time she would be able to sell all she could possibly grow and then not supply the demand. In the meantime, Hazel and Hattie were used every odd moment in hauling manure from Glen Ellen, whose barnyards had never known such a thorough cleaning. Also there were loads of commercial fertilizer from the railroad station, bought under Mrs. Mortimer's instructions.

The convicts paroled were Chinese. Both had served long in prison, and were old men; but the day's work they were habitually capable of won Mrs. Mortimer's approval. Gow Yum, twenty years before, had had charge of the vegetable garden of one of the great Menlo Park estates. His disaster had come in the form of a fight over a game of fan tan in the Chinese quarter at Redwood City. His companion, Chan Chi, had been a hatchet-man of note, in the old fighting days of the San Francisco tongs. But a quarter of century of discipline in the prison vegetable gardens had cooled his blood and turned his hand from hatchet to hoe. These two assistants had arrived in Glen Ellen like precious goods in bond and been receipted for by the local deputy sheriff, who, in addition, reported on them to the prison authorities each month. Saxon, too, made out a monthly report and sent it in.

As for the danger of their cutting her throat, she quickly got over the idea of it. The mailed hand of the State hovered over them. The taking of a single drink of liquor would provoke that hand to close down and jerk them back to prison-cells. Nor had they freedom of movement. When old Gow Yum needed to go to San Francisco to sign certain papers before the Chinese Consul, permission had first to be obtained from San Quentin. Then, too, neither man was nasty tempered. Saxon had been apprehensive of the task of bossing two desperate convicts; but when they came she found it a pleasure to work with them. She could tell them what to do, but it was they who knew how do. From them she learned all the ten thousand tricks and quirks of artful gardening, and she was not long in realizing how helpless she would have been had she depended on local labor.

Still further, she had no fear, because she was not alone. She had been using her head. It was quickly apparent to her that she could not adequately oversee the outside work and at the same time do the house work. She wrote to Ukiah to the energetic widow who had lived in the adjoining house and taken in washing. She had promptly closed with Saxon's offer. Mrs. Paul was forty, short in stature, and weighed two hundred pounds, but never wearied on her feet. Also she was devoid of fear, and, according to Billy, could settle the hash of both Chinese with one of her mighty arms. Mrs. Paul arrived with her son, a country lad of sixteen who knew horses and could milk Hilda, the pretty Jersey which had successfully passed Edmund's expert eye. Though Mrs. Paul ably

handled the house, there was one thing Saxon insisted on doing--namely, washing her own pretty flimsies.

"When I 'm no longer able to do that," she told Billy, "you can take a spade to that clump of redwoods beside Wild Water and dig a hole. It will be time to bury me."

It was early in the days of Madrono Ranch, at the time of Mrs. Mortimer's second visit, that Billy drove in with a load of pipe; and house, chicken yards, and barn were piped from the second-hand tank he installed below the house-spring.

"Huh! I guess I can use my head," he said. "I watched a woman over on the other side of the valley, packin' water two hundred feet from the spring to the house; an' I did some figurin'. I put it at three trips a day and on wash days a whole lot more; an' you can't guess what I made out she traveled a year packin' water. One hundred an' twenty-two miles. D'ye get that? One hundred and twenty-two miles! I asked her how long she'd been there. Thirty-one years. Multiply it for yourself. Three thousan', seven hundred an' eighty-two miles--all for the sake of two hundred feet of pipe. Wouldn't that jar you?"

"Oh, I ain't done yet. They's a bath-tub an' stationary tubs a-comin' soon as I can see my way. An', say, Saxon, you know that little clear flat just where Wild Water runs into Sonoma. They's all of an acre of it. An' it's mine! Got that? An' no walkin' on the grass for you. It'll

be my grass. I 'm goin' up stream a ways an' put in a ram. I got a big second-hand one staked out that I can get for ten dollars, an' it'll pump more water'n I need. An' you'll see alfalfa growin' that'll make your mouth water. I gotta have another horse to travel around on. You're usin' Hazel an' Hattie too much to give me a chance; an' I'll never see 'm as soon as you start deliverin' vegetables. I guess that alfalfa'll help some to keep another horse goin'."

But Billy was destined for a time to forget his alfalfa in the excitement of bigger ventures. First, came trouble. The several hundred dollars he had arrived with in Sonoma Valley, and all his own commissions since earned, had gone into improvements and living. The eighteen dollars a week rental for his six horses at Lawndale went to pay wages. And he was unable to buy the needed saddle-horse for his horse-buying expeditions. This, however, he had got around by again using his head and killing two birds with one stone. He began breaking colts to drive, and in the driving drove them wherever he sought horses.

So far all was well. But a new administration in San Francisco, pledged to economy, had stopped all street work. This meant the shutting down of the Lawndale quarry, which was one of the sources of supply for paving blocks. The six horses would not only be back on his hands, but he would have to feed them. How Mrs. Paul, Gow Yum, and Chan Chi were to be paid was beyond him.

"I guess we've bit off more'n we could chew," he admitted to Saxon.

That night he was late in coming home, but brought with him a radiant face. Saxon was no less radiant.

"It's all right," she greeted him, coming out to the barn where he was unhitching a tired but fractious colt. "I've talked with all three. They see the situation, and are perfectly willing to let their wages stand a while. By another week I start Hazel and Hattie delivering vegetables. Then the money will pour in from the hotels and my books won't look so lopsided. And--oh, Billy--you'd never guess. Old Gow Yum has a bank account. He came to me afterward--I guess he was thinking it over--and offered to lend me four hundred dollars. What do you think of that?"

"That I ain't goin' to be too proud to borrow it off 'm, if he IS a Chink. He's a white one, an' maybe I'll need it. Because, you see--well, you can't guess what I've been up to since I seen you this mornin'. I've been so busy I ain't had a bite to eat."

"Using your head?" She laughed.

"You can call it that," he joined in her laughter. "I've been spendin' money like water."

"But you haven't got any to spend," she objected.

"I've got credit in this valley, I'll let you know," he replied. "An' I

sure strained it some this afternoon. Now guess."

"A saddle-horse?"

He roared with laughter, startling the colt, which tried to bolt and lifted him half off the ground by his grip on its frightened nose and neck.

"Oh, I mean real guessin'," he urged, when the animal had dropped back to earth and stood regarding him with trembling suspicion.

"Two saddle-horses?"

"Aw, you ain't got imagination. I'll tell you. You know Thiercroft. I bought his big wagon from 'm for sixty dollars. I bought a wagon from the Kenwood blacksmith--so-so, but it'll do--for forty-five dollars. An' I bought Ping's wagon--a peach--for sixty-five dollars. I could a-got it for fifty if he hadn't seen I wanted it bad."

"But the money?" Saxon questioned faintly. "You hadn't a hundred dollars left."

"Didn't I tell you I had credit? Well, I have. I stood 'm off for them wagons. I ain't spent a cent of cash money to-day except for a couple of long-distance switches. Then I bought three sets of work-harness--they're chain harness an' second-hand--for twenty dollars

a set. I bought 'm from the fellow that's doin' the haulin' for the quarry. He don't need 'm any more. An' I rented four wagons from 'm, an' four span of horses, too, at half a dollar a day for each horse, an' half a dollar a day for each wagon--that's six dollars a day rent I gotta pay 'm. The three sets of spare harness is for my six horses. Then... lemme see... yep, I rented two barns in Glen Ellen, an' I ordered fifty tons of hay an' a carload of bran an' barley from the store in Glenwood--you see, I gotta feed all them fourteen horses, an' shoe 'm, an' everything.

"Oh, sure Pete, I've went some. I hired seven men to go drivin' for me at two dollars a day, an'--ouch! Jehosaphat! What you doin'!"

"No," Saxon said gravely, having pinched him, "you're not dreaming." She felt his pulse and forehead. "Not a sign of fever." She sniffed his breath. "And you've not been drinking. Go on, tell me the rest of this... whatever it is."

"Ain't you satisfied?"

"No. I want more. I want all."

"All right. But I just want you to know, first, that the boss I used to work for in Oakland ain't got nothin' on me. I 'm some man of affairs, if anybody should ride up on a vegetable wagon an' ask you. Now, I 'm goin' to tell you, though I can't see why the Glen Ellen folks didn't

beat me to it. I guess they was asleep. Nobody'd a-overlooked a thing like it in the city. You see, it was like this: you know that fancy brickyard they're gettin' ready to start for makin' extra special fire brick for inside walls? Well, here was I worryin' about the six horses comin' back on my hands, earnin' me nothin' an' eatin' me into the poorhouse. I had to get 'm work somehow, an' I remembered the brickyard. I drove the colt down an' talked with that Jap chemist who's been doin' the experimentin'. Gee! They was foremen lookin' over the ground an' everything gettin' ready to hum. I looked over the lay an' studied it. Then I drove up to where they're openin' the clay pit--you know, that fine, white chalky stuff we saw 'em borin' out just outside the hundred an' forty acres with the three knolls. It's a down-hill haul, a mile, an' two horses can do it easy. In fact, their hardest job'll be haulin' the empty wagons up to the pit. Then I tied the colt an' went to figurin'.

"The Jap professor'd told me the manager an' the other big guns of the company was comin' up on the mornin' train. I wasn't shoutin' things out to anybody, but I just made myself into a committee of welcome; an', when the train pulled in, there I was, extendin' the glad hand of the burg--likewise the glad hand of a guy you used to know in Oakland once, a third-rate dub prizefighter by the name of--lemme see--yep, I got it right--Big Bill Roberts was the name he used to sport, but now he's known as William Roberts, E. S. Q.

"Well, as I was sayin', I gave 'm the glad hand, an' trailed along with

'em to the brickyard, an' from the talk I could see things was doin'. Then I watched my chance an' sprung my proposition. I was scared stiff all the time for maybe the teamin' was already arranged. But I knew it wasn't when they asked for my figures. I had 'm by heart, an' I rattled 'm off, and the top-guy took 'm down in his note-book.

"We're goin' into this big, an' at once,' he says, lookin' at me sharp. 'What kind of an outfit you got, Mr. Roberts?'"

"Me!--with only Hazel an' Hattie, an' them too small for heavy teamin'.

"I can slap fourteen horses an' seven wagons onto the job at the jump,' says I. 'An' if you want more, I'll get 'm, that's all.'

"Give us fifteen minutes to consider, Mr. Roberts,' he says.

"Sure,' says I, important as all hell--ahem--me!--'but a couple of other things first. I want a two year contract, an' them figures all depends on one thing. Otherwise they don't go.'

"What's that,' he says.

"The dump,' says I. 'Here we are on the ground, an' I might as well show you.'

"An' I did. I showed 'm where I'd lose out if they stuck to their plan,

on account of the dip down an' pull up to the dump. 'All you gotta do,' I says, 'is to build the bunkers fifty feet over, throw the road around the rim of the hill, an' make about seventy or eighty feet of elevated bridge.'

"Say, Saxon, that kind of talk got 'em. It was straight. Only they'd been thinkin' about bricks, while I was only thinkin' of teamin'.

"I guess they was all of half an hour considerin', an' I was almost as miserable waitin' as when I waited for you to say yes after I asked you. I went over the figures, calculatin' what I could throw off if I had to. You see, I'd given it to 'em stiff--regular city prices; an' I was prepared to trim down. Then they come back.

"Prices oughta be lower in the country,' says the top-guy.

"'Nope,' I says. 'This is a wine-grape valley. It don't raise enough hay an' feed for its own animals. It has to be shipped in from the San Joaquin Valley. Why, I can buy hay an' feed cheaper in San Francisco, laid down, than I can here an' haul it myself.'

"An' that struck 'm hard. It was true, an' they knew it. But--say! If they'd asked about wages for drivers, an' about horse-shoein' prices, I'd a-had to come down; because, you see, they ain't no teamsters' union in the country, an' no horseshoers' union, an' rent is low, an' them two items come a whole lot cheaper. Huh! This afternoon I got a word bargain

with the blacksmith across from the post office; an' he takes my whole bunch an' throws off twenty-five cents on each shoein', though it's on the Q. T. But they didn't think to ask, bein' too full of bricks."

Billy felt in his breast pocket, drew out a legal-looking document, and handed it to Saxon.

"There it is," he said, "the contract, full of all the agreements, prices, an' penalties. I saw Mr. Hale down town an' showed it to 'm. He says it's O.K. An' say, then I lit out. All over town, Kenwood, Lawndale, everywhere, everybody, everything. The quarry teamin' finishes Friday of this week. An' I take the whole outfit an' start Wednesday of next week haulin' lumber for the buildin's, an' bricks for the kilns, an' all the rest. An' when they're ready for the clay I 'm the boy that'll give it to them.

"But I ain't told you the best yet. I couldn't get the switch right away from Kenwood to Lawndale, and while I waited I went over my figures again. You couldn't guess it in a million years. I'd made a mistake in addition somewhere, an' soaked 'm ten per cent. more'n I'd expected. Talk about findin' money! Any time you want them couple of extra men to help out with the vegetables, say the word. Though we're goin' to have to pinch the next couple of months. An' go ahead an' borrow that four hundred from Gow Yum. An' tell him you'll pay eight per cent. interest, an' that we won't want it more 'n three or four months."

When Billy got away from Saxon's arms, he started leading the colt up and down to cool it off. He stopped so abruptly that his back collided with the colt's nose, and there was a lively minute of rearing and plunging. Saxon waited, for she knew a fresh idea had struck Billy.

"Say," he said, "do you know anything about bank accounts and drawin' checks?"

CHAPTER XXI

It was on a bright June morning that Billy told Saxon to put on her riding clothes to try out a saddle-horse.

"Not until after ten o'clock," she said "By that time I'll have the wagon off on a second trip."

Despite the extent of the business she had developed, her executive ability and system gave her much spare time. She could call on the Hales, which was ever a delight, especially now that the Hastings were back and that Clara was often at her aunt's. In this congenial atmosphere Saxon Burgeoned. She had begun to read--to read with understanding; and she had time for her books, for work on her pretties, and for Billy, whom she accompanied on many expeditions.

Billy was even busier than she, his work being more scattered and diverse. And, as well, he kept his eye on the home barn and horses which Saxon used. In truth he had become a man of affairs, though Mrs. Mortimer had gone over his accounts, with an eagle eye on the expense column, discovering several minor leaks, and finally, aided by Saxon, bullied him into keeping books. Each night, after supper, he and Saxon posted their books. Afterward, in the big morris chair he had insisted on buying early in the days of his brickyard contract, Saxon would creep into his arms and strum on the ukelele; or they would talk long about what they were doing and planning to do. Now it would be:

"I'm mixin' up in politics, Saxon. It pays. You bet it pays. If by next spring I ain't got a half a dozen teams workin' on the roads an' pullin' down the county money, it's me back to Oakland an' askin' the Boss for a job."

Or, Saxon: "They're really starting that new hotel between Caliente and Eldridge. And there's some talk of a big sanitarium back in the hills."

Or, it would be: "Billy, now that you've piped that acre, you've just got to let me have it for my vegetables. I'll rent it from you. I'll take your own estimate for all the alfalfa you can raise on it, and pay you full market price less the cost of growing it."

"It's all right, take it." Billy suppressed a sigh. "Besides, I 'm too busy to fool with it now."

Which prevarication was bare-faced, by virtue of his having just installed the ram and piped the land.

"It will be the wisest, Billy," she soothed, for she knew his dream of land-spaciousness was stronger than ever. "You don't want to fool with an acre. There's that hundred and forty. We'll buy it yet if old Chavon ever dies. Besides, it really belongs to Madrono Ranch. The two together were the original quarter section."

"I don't wish no man's death," Billy grumbled. "But he ain't gettin' no good out of it, over-pasturin' it with a lot of scrub animals. I've sized it up every inch of it. They's at least forty acres in the three cleared fields, with water in the hills behind to beat the band. The horse feed I could raise on it'd take your breath away. Then they's at least fifty acres I could run my brood mares on, pasture mixed up with trees and steep places and such. The other fifty's just thick woods, an' pretty places, an' wild game. An' that old adobe barn's all right. With a new roof it'd shelter any amount of animals in bad weather. Cook at me now, rentin' that measly pasture back of Ping's just to run my restin' animals. They could run in the hundred an' forty if I only had it. I wonder if Chavon would lease it."

Or, less ambitious, Billy would say: "I gotta skin over to Petaluma to-morrow, Saxon. They's an auction on the Atkinson Ranch an' maybe I can pick up some bargains."

"More horses!"

"Ain't I got two teams haulin' lumber for the new winery? An' Barney's got a bad shoulder-sprain. He'll have to lay off a long time if he's to get it in shape. An' Bridget ain't ever goin' to do a tap of work again. I can see that stickin' out. I've doctored her an' doctored her. She's fooled the vet, too. An' some of the other horses has gotta take a rest. That span of grays is showin' the hard work. An' the big roan's goin' loco. Everybody thought it was his teeth, but it ain't. It's straight

loco. It's money in pocket to take care of your animals, an' horses is the delicatest things on four legs. Some time, if I can ever see my way to it, I 'm goin' to ship a carload of mules from Colusa County--big, heavy ones, you know. They'd sell like hot cakes in the valley here--them I didn't want for myself."

Or, in lighter vein, Billy: "By the way, Saxon, talkin' of accounts, what d'you think Hazel an' Hattie is worth?--fair market price?"

"Why?"

"I 'm askin' you."

"Well, say, what you paid for them--three hundred dollars."

"Hum." Billy considered deeply. "They're worth a whole lot more, but let it go at that. An' now, gettin' back to accounts, suppose you write me a check for three hundred dollars."

"Oh! Robber!"

"You can't show me. Why, Saxon, when I let you have grain an' hay from my carloads, don't you give me a check for it? An' you know how you're stuck on keepin' your accounts down to the penny," he teased. "If you're any kind of a business woman you just gotta charge your business with them two horses. I ain't had the use of 'em since I don't know when."

"But the colts will be yours," she argued. "Besides, I can't afford brood mares in my business. In almost no time, now, Hazel and Hattie will have to be taken off from the wagon--they're too good for it anyway. And you keep your eyes open for a pair to take their place. I'll give you a check for THAT pair, but no commission."

"All right," Billy conceded. "Hazel an' Hattie come back to me; but you can pay me rent for the time you did use 'em."

"If you make me, I'll charge you board," she threatened.

"An' if you charge me board, I'll charge you interest for the money I've stuck into this shebang."

"You can't," Saxon laughed. "It's community property."

He grunted spasmodically, as if the breath had been knocked out of him.

"Straight on the solar plexus," he said, "an' me down for the count. But say, them's sweet words, ain't they--community property." He rolled them over and off his tongue with keen relish. "An' when we got married the top of our ambition was a steady job an' some rags an' sticks of furniture all paid up an' half-worn out. We wouldn't have had any community property only for you."

"What nonsense! What could I have done by myself? You know very well that you earned all the money that started us here. You paid the wages of Gow Yum and Chan Chi, and old Hughie, and Mrs. Paul, and--why, you've done it all."

She drew her two hands caressingly across his shoulders and down along his great biceps muscles.

"That's what did it, Billy."

"Aw hell! It's your head that done it. What was my muscles good for with no head to run 'em,--sluggin' scabs, beatin' up lodgers, an' crookin' the elbow over a bar. The only sensible thing my head ever done was when it run me into you. Honest to God, Saxon, you've been the makin' of me."

"Aw hell, Billy," she mimicked in the way that delighted him, "where would I have been if you hadn't taken me out of the laundry? I couldn't take myself out. I was just a helpless girl. I'd have been there yet if it hadn't been for you. Mrs. Mortimer had five thousand dollars; but I had you."

"A woman ain't got the chance to help herself that a man has," he generalized. "I'll tell you what: It took the two of us. It's been team-work. We've run in span. If we'd a-run single, you might still be in the laundry; an', if I was lucky, I'd be still drivin' team by the day an' sportin' around to cheap dances."

Saxon stood under the father of all madronos, watching Hazel and Hattie go out the gate, the full vegetable wagon behind them, when she saw Billy ride in, leading a sorrel mare from whose silken coat the sun flashed golden lights.

"Four-year-old, high-life, a handful, but no vicious tricks," Billy chanted, as he stopped beside Saxon. "Skin like tissue paper, mouth like silk, but kill the toughest broncho ever foaled--look at them lungs an' nostrils. They call her Ramona--some Spanish name: sired by Morellita outa genuine Morgan stock."

"And they will sell her?" Saxon gasped, standing with hands clasped in inarticulate delight.

"That's what I brought her to show you for."

"But how much must they want for her?" was Saxon's next question, so impossible did it seem that such an amazement of horse-flesh could ever be hers.

"That ain't your business," Billy answered brusquely. "The brickyard's payin' for her, not the vegetable ranch. She's yourn at the word. What d'ye say?"

"I'll tell you in a minute."

Saxon was trying to mount, but the animal danced nervously away.

"Hold on till I tie," Billy said. "She ain't skirt-broke, that's the trouble."

Saxon tightly gripped reins and mane, stepped with spurred foot on Billy's hand, and was lifted lightly into the saddle.

"She's used to spurs," Billy called after. "Spanish broke, so don't check her quick. Come in gentle. An' talk to her. She's high-life, you know."

Saxon nodded, dashed out the gate and down the road, waved a hand to Clara Hastings as she passed the gate of Trillium Covert, and continued up Wild Water canyon.

When she came back, Ramona in a pleasant lather, Saxon rode to the rear of the house, past the chicken houses and the flourishing berry-rows, to join Billy on the rim of the bench, where he sat on his horse in the shade, smoking a cigarette. Together they looked down through an opening among the trees to the meadow which was a meadow no longer. With mathematical accuracy it was divided into squares, oblongs, and narrow strips, which displayed sharply the thousand hues of green of a truck

garden. Gow Yum and Chan Chi, under enormous Chinese grass hats, were planting green onions. Old Hughie, hoe in hand, plodded along the main artery of running water, opening certain laterals, closing others. From the work-shed beyond the barn the strokes of a hammer told Saxon that Carlsen was wire-binding vegetable boxes. Mrs. Paul's cheery soprano, lifted in a hymn, doated through the trees, accompanied by the whirr of an egg-beater. A sharp barking told where Possum still waged hysterical and baffled war on the Douglass squirrels. Billy took a long draw from his cigarette, exhaled the smoke, and continued to look down at the meadow. Saxon divined trouble in his manner. His rein-hand was on the pommel, and her free hand went out and softly rested on his. Billy turned his slow gaze upon her mare's lather, seeming not to note it, and continued on to Saxon's face.

"Huh!" he equivocated, as if waking up. "Them San Leandro Porchugeeze ain't got nothin' on us when it comes to intensive farmin'. Look at that water runnin'. You know, it seems so good to me that sometimes I just wanta get down on hands an' knees an' lap it all up myself."

"Oh, to have all the water you want in a climate like this!" Saxon exclaimed.

"An' don't be scared of it ever goin' back on you. If the rains fooled you, there's Sonoma Creek alongside. All we gotta do is install a gasolene pump."

"But we'll never have to, Billy. I was talking with 'Redwood' Thompson. He's lived in the valley since Fifty-three, and he says there's never been a failure of crops on account of drought. We always get our rain."

"Come on, let's go for a ride," he said abruptly. "You've got the time."

"All right, if you'll tell me what's bothering you."

He looked at her quickly.

"Nothin'," he grunted. "Yes, there is, too. What's the difference? You'd know it sooner or later. You ought to see old Chavon. His face is that long he can't walk without bumpin' his knee on his chin. His gold-mine's peterin' out."

"Gold mine!"

"His clay pit. It's the same thing. He's gettin' twenty cents a yard for it from the brickyard."

"And that means the end of your teaming contract." Saxon saw the disaster in all its hugeness. "What about the brickyard people?"

"Worried to death, though they've kept secret about it. They've had men out punchin' holes all over the hills for a week, an' that Jap chemist settin' up nights analyzin' the rubbish they've brought in. It's

peculiar stuff, that clay, for what they want it for, an' you don't find it everywhere. Them experts that reported on Chavon's pit made one hell of a mistake. Maybe they was lazy with their borin's. Anyway, they slipped up on the amount of clay they was in it. Now don't get to botherin'. It'd come out somehow. You can't do nothin'."

"But I can," Saxon insisted. "We won't buy Ramona."

"You ain't got a thing to do with that," he answered. "I 'm buyin' her, an' her price don't cut any figure alongside the big game I 'm playin'. Of course, I can always sell my horses. But that puts a stop to their makin' money, an' that brickyard contract was fat."

"But if you get some of them in on the road work for the county?" she suggested.

"Oh, I got that in mind. An' I 'm keepin' my eyes open. They's a chance the quarry will start again, an' the fellow that did that teamin' has gone to Puget Sound. An' what if I have to sell out most of the horses? Here's you and the vegetable business. That's solid. We just don't go ahead so fast for a time, that's all. I ain't scared of the country any more. I sized things up as we went along. They ain't a jerk burg we hit all the time on the road that I couldn't jump into an' make a go. An' now where d'you want to ride?"

CHAPTER XXII

They cantered out the gate, thundered across the bridge, and passed Trillium Covert before they pulled in on the grade of Wild Water Canyon. Saxon had chosen her field on the big spur of Sonoma Mountains as the objective of their ride.

"Say, I bumped into something big this mornin' when I was goin' to fetch Ramona," Billy said, the clay pit trouble banished for the time. "You know the hundred an' forty. I passed young Chavon along the road, an'--I don't know why--just for ducks, I guess--I up an' asked 'm if he thought the old man would lease the hundred an' forty to me. An' what d 'you think! He said the old man didn't own it. Was just leasin' it himself. That's how we was always seein' his cattle on it. It's a gouge into his land, for he owns everything on three sides of it.

"Next I met Ping. He said Hilyard owned it an' was willin' to sell, only Chavon didn't have the price. Then, comin' back, I looked in on Payne. He's quit blacksmithin'--his back's hurtin' 'm from a kick--an' just startin' in for real estate. Sure, he said, Hilyard would sell, an' had already listed the land with 'm. Chavon's over-pastured it, an' Hilyard won't give 'm another lease."

When they had climbed out of Wild Water Canyon they turned their horses about and halted on the rim where they could look across at the three densely wooded knolls in the midst of the desired hundred and forty.

"We'll get it yet," Saxon said.

"Sure we will," Billy agreed with careless certitude. "I've ben lookin' over the big adobe barn again. Just the thing for a raft of horses, an' a new roof'll be cheaper 'n I thought. Though neither Chavon or me'll be in the market to buy it right away, with the clay pinchin' out."

When they reached Saxon's field, which they had learned was the property of Redwood Thompson, they tied the horses and entered it on foot. The hay, just cut, was being raked by Thompson, who hallo'd a greeting to them. It was a cloudless, windless day, and they sought refuge from the sun in the woods beyond. They encountered a dim trail.

"It's a cow trail," Billy declared. "I bet they's a teeny pasture tucked away somewhere in them trees. Let's follow it."

A quarter of an hour later, several hundred feet up the side of the spur, they emerged on an open, grassy space of bare hillside. Most of the hundred and forty, two miles away, lay beneath them, while they were level with the tops of the three knolls. Billy paused to gaze upon the much-desired land, and Saxon joined him.

"What is that?" she asked, pointing toward the knolls. "Up the little canyon, to the left of it, there on the farthest knoll, right under that

spruce that's leaning over."

What Billy saw was a white scar on the canyon wall.

"It's one on me," he said, studying the scar. "I thought I knew every inch of that land, but I never seen that before. Why, I was right in there at the head of the canyon the first part of the winter. It's awful wild. Walls of the canyon like the sides of a steeple an' covered with thick woods."

"What is it?" she asked. "A slide?"

"Must be--brought down by the heavy rains. If I don't miss my guess--" Billy broke off, forgetting in the intensity with which he continued to look.

"Hilyard'll sell for thirty an acre," he began again, disconnectedly.

"Good land, bad land, an' all, just as it runs, thirty an acre. That's forty-two hundred. Payne's new at real estate, an' I'll make 'm split his commission an' get the easiest terms ever. We can re-borrow that four hundred from Gow Yum, an' I can borrow money on my horses an' wagons--"

"Are you going to buy it to-day?" Saxon teased.

She scarcely touched the edge of his thought. He looked at her, as if he

had heard, then forgot her the next moment.

"Head work," he mumbled. "Head work. If I don't put over a hot one--"

He started back down the cow trail, recollected Saxon, and called over his shoulder:

"Come on. Let's hustle. I wanta ride over an' look at that."

So rapidly did he go down the trail and across the field, that Saxon had no time for questions. She was almost breathless from her effort to keep up with him.

"What is it?" she begged, as he lifted her to the saddle.

"Maybe it's all a joke--I'll tell you about it afterward," he put her off.

They galloped on the levels, trotted down the gentler slopes of road, and not until on the steep descent of Wild Water canyon did they rein to a walk. Billy's preoccupation was gone, and Saxon took advantage to broach a subject which had been on her mind for some time.

"Clara Hastings told me the other day that they're going to have a house party. The Hazards are to be there, and the Halls, and Roy Blanchard...."

She looked at Billy anxiously. At the mention of Blanchard his head had tossed up as to a bugle call. Slowly a whimsical twinkle began to glint up through the cloudy blue of his eyes.

"It's a long time since you told any man he was standing on his foot," she ventured slyly.

Billy began to grin sheepishly.

"Aw, that's all right," he said in mock-lordly fashion. "Roy Blanchard can come. I'll let 'm. All that was a long time ago. Besides, I 'm too busy to fool with such things."

He urged his horse on at a faster walk, and as soon as the slope lessened broke into a trot. At Trillium Covert they were galloping.

"You'll have to stop for dinner first," Saxon said, as they neared the gate of Madrono Ranch.

"You stop," he answered. "I don't want no dinner."

"But I want to go with you," she pleaded. "What is it?"

"I don't dast tell you. You go on in an' get your dinner."

"Not after that," she said. "Nothing can keep me from coming along now."

Half a mile farther on, they left the highway, passed through a patent gate which Billy had installed, and crossed the fields on a road which was coated thick with chalky dust. This was the road that led to Chavon's clay pit. The hundred and forty lay to the west. Two wagons, in a cloud of dust, came into sight.

"Your teams, Billy," cried Saxon. "Think of it! Just by the use of the head, earning your money while you're riding around with me."

"Makes me ashamed to think how much cash money each one of them teams is bringin' me in every day," he acknowledged.

They were turning off from the road toward the bars which gave entrance to the one hundred and forty, when the driver of the foremost wagon hallo'd and waved his hand. They drew in their horses and waited.

"The big roan's broke loose," the dryer said, as he stopped beside them.

"Clean crazy loco--bitin', squealin', strikin', kickin'. Kicked clean out of the harness like it was paper. Bit a chunk out of Baldy the size of a saucer, an' wound up by breakin' his own hind leg. Liveliest fifteen minutes I ever seen."

"Sure it's broke?" Billy demanded sharply.

"Sure thing."

"Well, after you unload, drive around by the other barn and get Ben. He's in the corral. Tell Matthews to be easy with 'm. An' get a gun. Sammy's got one. You'll have to see to the big roan. I ain't got time now.--Why couldn't Matthews a-come along with you for Ben? You'd save time."

"Oh, he's just stickin' around waitin'," the driver answered. "He reckoned I could get Ben."

"An' lose time, eh? Well, get a move on."

"That's the way of it," Billy growled to Saxon as they rode on. "No savve. No head. One man settin' down an' holdin his hands while another team drives outa its way doin what he oughta done. That's the trouble with two-dollar-a-day men."

"With two-dollar-a-day heads," Saxon said quickly. "What kind of heads do you expect for two dollars?"

"That's right, too," Billy acknowledged the hit. "If they had better heads they'd be in the cities like all the rest of the better men. An' the better men are a lot of dummies, too. They don't know the big chances in the country, or you couldn't hold 'm from it."

Billy dismounted, took the three bars down, led his horse through, then put up the bars.

"When I get this place, there'll be a gate here," he announced. "Pay for itself in no time. It's the thousan' an' one little things like this that count up big when you put 'm together." He sighed contentedly. "I never used to think about such things, but when we shook Oakland I began to wise up. It was them San Leandro Porchugeeze that gave me my first eye-opener. I'd been asleep, before that."

They skirted the lower of the three fields where the ripe hay stood uncut. Billy pointed with eloquent disgust to a break in the fence, slovenly repaired, and on to the standing grain much-trampled by cattle.

"Them's the things," he criticized. "Old style. An' look how thin that crop is, an' the shallow plowin'. Scrub cattle, scrub seed, scrub farmin'. Chavon's worked it for eight years now, an' never rested it once, never put anything in for what he took out, except the cattle into the stubble the minute the hay was on."

In a pasture glade, farther on, they came upon a bunch of cattle.

"Look at that bull, Saxon. Scrub's no name for it. They oughta be a state law against lettin' such animals exist. No wonder Chavon's that land poor he's had to sink all his clay-pit earnin's into taxes an' interest. He can't make his land pay. Take this hundred an forty.

Anybody with the savve can just rake silver dollars offen it. I'll show 'm."

They passed the big adobe barn in the distance.

"A few dollars at the right time would a-saved hundreds on that roof," Billy commented. "Well, anyway, I won't be payin' for any improvements when I buy. An I'll tell you another thing. This ranch is full of water, and if Glen Ellen ever grows they'll have to come to see me for their water supply."

Billy knew the ranch thoroughly, and took short-cuts through the woods by way of cattle paths. Once, he reined in abruptly, and both stopped. Confronting them, a dozen paces away, was a half-grown red fox. For half a minute, with beady eyes, the wild thing studied them, with twitching sensitive nose reading the messages of the air. Then, velvet-footed, it leapt aside and was gone among the trees.

"The son-of-a-gun!" Billy ejaculated.

As they approached Wild Water; they rode out into a long narrow meadow. In the middle was a pond.

"Natural reservoir, when Glen Ellen begins to buy water," Billy said.

"See, down at the lower end there?--wouldn't cost anything hardly to throw a dam across. An' I can pipe in all kinds of hill-drip. An'

water's goin' to be money in this valley not a thousan' years from now.--An' all the ginks, an' boobs, an' dubs, an' gazabos poundin' their ear deado an' not seein' it comin.--An' surveyors workin' up the valley for an electric road from Sausalito with a branch up Napa Valley."

They came to the rim of Wild Water canyon. Leaning far back in their saddles, they slid the horses down a steep declivity, through big spruce woods, to an ancient and all but obliterated trail.

"They cut this trail 'way back in the Fifties," Billy explained. "I only found it by accident. Then I asked Poppe yesterday. He was born in the valley. He said it was a fake minin' rush across from Petaluma. The gamblers got it up, an' they must a-drawn a thousan' suckers. You see that flat there, an' the old stumps. That's where the camp was. They set the tables up under the trees. The flat used to be bigger, but the creek's eaten into it. Poppe said they was a couple of killin's an' one lynchin'."

Lying low against their horses' necks, they scrambled up a steep cattle trail out of the canyon, and began to work across rough country toward the knolls.

"Say, Saxon, you're always lookin' for something pretty. I'll show you what'll make your hair stand up... soon as we get through this manzanita."

Never, in all their travels, had Saxon seen so lovely a vista as the one that greeted them when they emerged. The dim trail lay like a rambling red shadow cast on the soft forest floor by the great redwoods and over-arching oaks. It seemed as if all local varieties of trees and vines had conspired to weave the leafy roof--maples, big madronos and laurels, and lofty tan-bark oaks, scaled and wrapped and interwound with wild grape and flaming poison oak. Saxon drew Billy's eyes to a mossy bank of five-finger ferns. All slopes seemed to meet to form this basin and colossal forest bower. Underfoot the floor was spongy with water. An invisible streamlet whispered under broad-fronded brakes. On every hand opened tiny vistas of enchantment, where young redwoods grouped still and stately about fallen giants, shoulder-high to the horses, moss-covered and dissolving into mold.

At last, after another quarter of an hour, they tied their horses on the rim of the narrow canyon that penetrated the wilderness of the knolls. Through a rift in the trees Billy pointed to the top of the leaning spruce.

"It's right under that," he said. "We'll have to follow up the bed of the creek. They ain't no trail, though you'll see plenty of deer paths crossin' the creek. You'll get your feet wet."

Saxon laughed her joy and held on close to his heels, splashing through pools, crawling hand and foot up the slippery faces of water-worn rocks, and worming under trunks of old fallen trees.

"They ain't no real bed-rock in the whole mountain," Billy elucidated, "so the stream cuts deeper'n deeper, an' that keeps the sides cavin' in. They're as steep as they can be without fallin' down. A little farther up, the canyon ain't much more'n a crack in the ground--but a mighty deep one if anybody should ask you. You can spit across it an' break your neck in it."

The climbing grew more difficult, and they were finally halted, in a narrow cleft, by a drift-jam.

"You wait here," Billy directed, and, lying flat, squirmed on through crashing brush.

Saxon waited till all sound had died away. She waited ten minutes longer, then followed by the way Billy had broken. Where the bed of the canyon became impossible, she came upon what she was sure was a deer path that skirted the steep side and was a tunnel through the close greenery. She caught a glimpse of the overhanging spruce, almost above her head on the opposite side, and emerged on a pool of clear water in a clay-like basin. This basin was of recent origin, having been formed by a slide of earth and trees. Across the pool arose an almost sheer wall of white. She recognized it for what it was, and looked about for Billy. She heard him whistle, and looked up. Two hundred feet above, at the perilous top of the white wall, he was holding on to a tree trunk. The overhanging spruce was nearby.

"I can see the little pasture back of your field," he called down. "No wonder nobody ever piped this off. The only place they could see it from is that speck of pasture. An' you saw it first. Wait till I come down and tell you all about it. I didn't dast before."

It required no shrewdness to guess the truth. Saxon knew this was the precious clay required by the brickyard. Billy circled wide of the slide and came down the canyon-wall, from tree to tree, as descending a ladder.

"Ain't it a peach?" he exulted, as he dropped beside her. "Just look at it--hidden away under four feet of soil where nobody could see it, an' just waitin' for us to hit the Valley of the Moon. Then it up an' slides a piece of the skin off so as we can see it."

"Is it the real clay?" Saxon asked anxiously.

"You bet your sweet life. I've handled too much of it not to know it in the dark. Just rub a piece between your fingers.--Like that. Why, I could tell by the taste of it. I've eaten enough of the dust of the teams. Here's where our fun begins. Why, you know we've been workin' our heads off since we hit this valley. Now we're on Easy street."

"But you don't own it," Saxon objected.

"Well, you won't be a hundred years old before I do. Straight from here I hike to Payne an' bind the bargain--an option, you know, while title's searchin' an' I 'm raisin' money. We'll borrow that four hundred back again from Gow Yum, an' I'll borrow all I can get on my horses an' wagons, an' Hazel and Hattie, an' everything that's worth a cent. An' then I get the deed with a mortgage on it to Hilyard for the balance. An' then--it's takin' candy from a baby--I'll contract with the brickyard for twenty cents a yard--maybe more. They'll be crazy with joy when they see it. Don't need any borin's. They's nearly two hundred feet of it exposed up an' down. The whole knoll's clay, with a skin of soil over it."

"But you'll spoil all the beautiful canyon hauling out the clay," Saxon cried with alarm.

"Nope; only the knoll. The road'll come in from the other side. It'll be only half a mile to Chavon's pit. I'll build the road an' charge steeper teamin', or the brickyard can build it an' I'll team for the same rate as before. An' twenty cents a yard pourin' in, all profit, from the jump. I'll sure have to buy more horses to do the work."

They sat hand in hand beside the pool and talked over the details.

"Say, Saxon," Billy said, after a pause had fallen, "sing 'Harvest Days,' won't you?"

And, when she had complied: "The first time you sung that song for me was comin' home from the picnic on the train--"

"The very first day we met each other," she broke in. "What did you think about me that day?"

"Why, what I've thought ever since--that you was made for me.--I thought that right at the jump, in the first waltz. An' what'd you think of me?"

"Oh, I wondered, and before the first waltz, too, when we were introduced and shook hands--I wondered if you were the man. Those were the very words that flashed into my mind.--IS HE THE MAN?"

"An' I kinda looked a little some good to you?" he queried. "I thought so, and my eyesight has always been good."

"Say!" Billy went off at a tangent. "By next winter, with everything hummin' an' shipshape, what's the matter with us makin' a visit to Carmel? It'll be slack time for you with the vegetables, an' I'll be able to afford a foreman."

Saxon's lack of enthusiasm surprised him.

"What's wrong?" he demanded quickly.

With downcast demurest eyes and hesitating speech, Saxon said:

"I did something yesterday without asking your advice, Billy."

He waited.

"I wrote to Tom," she added, with an air of timid confession.

Still he waited--for he knew not what.

"I asked him to ship up the old chest of drawers--my mother's, you remember--that we stored with him."

"Huh! I don't see anything outa the way about that," Billy said with relief. "We need the chest, don't we? An' we can afford to pay the freight on it, can't we?"

"You are a dear stupid man, that's what you are. Don't you know what is in the chest?"

He shook his head, and what she added was so soft that it was almost a whisper:

"The baby clothes."

"No!" he exclaimed.

"True."

"Sure?"

She nodded her head, her cheeks flooding with quick color.

"It's what I wanted, Saxon, more'n anything else in the world. I've been thinkin' a whole lot about it lately, ever since we hit the valley," he went on, brokenly, and for the first time she saw tears unmistakable in his eyes. "But after all I'd done, an' the hell I'd raised, an' everything, I... I never urged you, or said a word about it. But I wanted it... oh, I wanted it like ... like I want you now."

His open arms received her, and the pool in the heart of the canyon knew a tender silence.

Saxon felt Billy's finger laid warningly on her lips. Guided by his hand, she turned her head back, and together they gazed far up the side of the knoll where a doe and a spotted fawn looked down upon them from a tiny open space between the trees.