The scene of this novel, which tells the tragic love story of Tamsin MacDonald, a ruddy-haired, freckled, and sturdy heroine of Scottish ancestry, and Kirk Regard, is laid on the Yukon. Tamsin and Kirk fall in love as children and are found kissing by Kirk’s father by adoption, who thrashes Kirk. This lesson brutalizes him for life and when older he goes after many women, but always returns to Tamsin. After one affair he kills the husband Olafssen in self-defence, and in a panic he conceals the body. This killing lies like a shadow across his life. Later he tries to marry Tamsin, but once more his father intervenes. How suspicion for the murder of Olafssen turns at last towards Kirk, how Tamsin persuades him to go to Dawson City to confess and what happens in the end must be left for the reader to discover.

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THE WORLD IS YOURS

Chapter One

That dusk and magic spot where history mates with legend is strangely difficult to find. One needs to seek long between its tall and twilit trees and over its green ancient mosses, and then may catch no more than a gleam of Spirit Truth, white-limbed and virgin or grotesquely male and lapped in wild-beast skin, flying still deeper into the thicket.

White limbs or wild-beast hide: this, it seems, is life as men and women know it. All ghostly god-like legend, all heroic and hideous history can do no more for us than simply present the surface, leaving us to interpret by our own alembic—grossly, it may be, or with a thin and antic cunning, or through one clear instant of vision—what power worked in those unforgotten souls to raise them above the common level of mankind.

In Yukon Territory men will talk for many years yet of MacDonald’s Tamsin and Kirk Regard. Men old with that oldness which sees its youth god-high against the sun: making more fur in one winter than any other between Fort Yukon and Whitehorse made in two; washing up gold enough on the Stewart or the Pelly to buy Vancouver out—only it got lost someway; seeing on far ranges mountains of raw metal that stood above the snow like the plated ark of shittim wood and, returning thence, forgot the way and never raised those shining heights again. Or, in some hushed spruce forest numb with cold, trapping the one legendary perfect silver-fox and:

“I give it to MacDonald’s Tamsin, sure’s I live. That’s what I done with it... an’ proud to.”

No matter where they start, this handful of old fellows who
loved Tamsin so well upon the Kanana, it is certain that her name will break through somewhere. They will surely claim love-passages with her now that she is quit of all earthly love; nodding satyr heads and blinking horny eyes or, reverent and slow over their pipes, uncorking memories which have grown richly personal with keeping, richly untrue. In those mumbling talks in the brown warmth of the log shacks or by the camp-fire with the quick moonlit gleam of the river beyond Kirk and Tamsin will be the sacrifice upon the altars, and the little flames will run red in the leaves as she always loved to see them do.

Men called her MacDonald's Tamsin from the beginning. So soon as her gaily-embroidered moccasins could patter over the new sappy sidewalks of Dawson's First Avenue she was to be seen under the lee of MacDonald like a small blossomed twig projecting from the roots of a gnarled pine. But she had been produced through no such airy fantasy. There was also and very properly MacDonald's wife who had scaled the White Pass with him in the first year of the Klondyke rush, cut hands and knees to the bone almost apologetically on those steep glassy edges, and slept during most of that hurtling journey of four hundred miles from Lake Lindemán down the broad and shallow Yukon River into Klondyke.

In addition to wife and baby MacDonald had on the raft a horse and a husky pup, a cooking-stove and a black half-rigged tent. In the white smother and threat of Miles Canyon, with boats splintering on the mid-way rocks and men clawing with drowning hands at the smooth brown walls, both animals showed fear and the stove fell over-board; but when MacDonald, sailling into blue and placid water below the rapids at Whitehorse, inquired under the tent for his helpmate, he found her sleeping beside the sleeping child.

"She'll do," he said, congratulatory into his beard. And do she did; unconscious of self-adjustment as she kept house for
him under the black tent and later, when the canvas city of Klondyke moved across that stream and extended awkwardly into a Dawson City of streets and tempestuous buildings, in the store he built out of knees of broken boats, flattened cracker-tins and odd lengths of sheet-iron and did such good trading on First Avenue.

Tamsin loved this calm person perfunctorily and occasionally watched her embedded to the elbows in dough or water. But there was nothing here for that already insatiable temper around which one of the most tragic and burning episodes in history was playing itself out. A wild-fire of passions, a giant of toppling moods went by her. She saw men scream and laugh and dance, fall about her drunken, leap goatishly with the women they spent themselves upon, kill and be killed. She saw the ice come year after year and the roaring town increase. She saw beauty, sacrifice and visions; incredible ugliness; good and evil. But she never saw inside the Tinky-Tink, that gay and famous saloon kept by Aggie and Mat Colom, Kirk’s foster-parents. MacDonald and Mat—who had a surprisingly tender conscience for all his sins—took very good care of that.

Kisses Tamsin had, and blows which she generally returned. Playmates among bearded men and enemies among children. But Kirk was never her enemy. He flicked through Dawson, erratic as sunlight, a tall dark ruddy child with thick tilted brows that gave him an elfish look; with fierce tempers and prides and unaccountable wild terrors which he told to no one but Tamsin. When she found him trembling in the scrub, afraid of his shadow or of some dark saying of the men, she would sit rocking his black head in her fat arms until the mood passed and he would jump up, often knocking her over, for she was fat and unsteady in those early days, and scamper off like a rabbit to shout and fight with other boys.

Usually he threw stones at her if she followed, but she bore him no malice. She loved him, and there were never any half-
way houses for her. Only loves and hates. She loved Maling, Sergeant of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, for no especial reason, just as she hated Jerry Hoskins, who tried to placate her with candy. She tolerated her mother, who seemed to take no interest in the matter, and copied MacDonald to the best of her powers, thrusting her chubby hands through her pinafore-belt as he did with his leathers before she rolled down First Avenue distributing morning greetings.

She had ‘Howdy’ for the Indians who behind their bronze impassive masks saw their Tron Deg River lose its claim to be Good Place for Wood almost as rapidly as it became Klondyke in the mouths of white men. To the drivers thrashing their teams up the part-stumped streets it was ‘Damfine mornin’, buddy,’ but to the lovely ladies walking the highway with bustles and floating ribands no one ever said anything but ‘Wa-al, me ducky de-ar.’ Yet generally before she could take their kisses a Mounty, hard, red and upright as sealing-wax, would reach out of that murmuring river of people for ever flowing along the boardwalks and lift her high above contamination by a handful of calico or furs according to season.

The Mounty then found it urgent to seek the nearest candy-store before Tamsin’s language shocked him overmuch, and there he would set her right-end up on a rickety floor and say:

“You’re a bad little girl, but I love you. Give her the kind with nuts in it, Mike.”

They were all alike, these candy-stores; with gaudy chocolate-boxes in the window and curtained rooms behind which, like the Tinky-Tink, were barred doors to Tamsin. Yet, in common with most Dawson houses, they had a property which enchanted her. Within one magical night they could grow from mean scowling hovels into two-storied splendours, so that from the river they showed to the anxious newcomer as prosperous dwellings and sold themselves at inflated prices before
their buyer was near enough to find their height one board thick with painted windows.

Tamsin heard one day MacDonald’s outburst concerning this eternal concussion between ignorance and craft. She brought it on herself when Constable Wishart, having carried her home, tried to impress on MacDonald the wisdom of tethering her somewhere.

“Na, na,” said MacDonald. “Let the lassie grow up wi’ her eyes open an’ I’ll not fear for her.” He looked down from his gaunt height. “But I’ll whup ye gin ye go in the Tinky-Tink, ye know, Tamsin.”

“Sure,” said Tamsin. “Feyther, I want you’ll make our wee house look big from the river like the others do.”

Then Wishart gathered something of MacDonald’s notions of the dignity of man; but nothing came to Tamsin except the discouraging certainty that MacDonald would not put a false front to his store, for those who did had neither pride nor honour. “Only bellies,” he said.

“I got a belly,” exclaimed Tamsin, conscious that she had been neglected long enough. “It’s hung’rin’ for candy now.”

Wishart looked helplessly at MacDonald. “If I had a child up here I’d go sick-crazy. Kirk saw the shooting at Colom’s last night, you know. That little kid . . .”

Tamsin had already heard of it from Kirk. Through description she knew the inside of the Tinky-Tink almost as well as Kirk did. A dazzling place it was; all gilt mirrors and plaster Cupids which, having voyaged in barrels from some Art Emporium Outside, were a little chipped even before young Cornell began shooting at them, and when discouraged by the chuckers-out shot him too. Kirk had all the fascinated horror of bloodshed that is the curse of a bold and highly-strung child, and he had acted it out for Tamsin between mouthfuls of purple saskatoons in the fall-tinted scrub on the flanks of the Dome.

“Lily Maud she wouldn’t dance with Cornell, and he gave
her his poke and she took that and then she wouldn’t. And she went away, laughin’ over her shoulder like this. And Cornell he caught ahold of the big Cupid and he shook it and called it a lie. Why would he do that, Tamsin? And Barney tried to pull him off, and he out with his gun and shot the Cupid. And the head fell off and all the powdery stuff flew about, and then he shot Barney, but Barney’s head didn’t fall off. He dropped in his tracks like this.” Kirk crashed down among the saskatoons, looked up with haunted eyes. “He was plumb dead, but he bleeded. The bleed was still there this morning, Tamsin.”

“They might have let the dogs lick it up. Dogs like bleed,” said Tamsin, thoughtfully. She always liked to be generous to everything. “Seems a pity to waste it.”

“If Barney’d been killed a bit later they’d have had to put him in cold storage till spring,” said Kirk. His voice faltered. “Where d’you s’pose they’d have put him, Tamsin? In one of the old shacks in the scrub? My! He’d a been cold! Would he have h’anted around, Tamsin, if they’d kept him above ground?”

“Eh, ye’re a goop,” cried Tamsin, wide-eyed. “Barney’s ways up in the skies by now. Ridin’ a comic, I wouldn’t wonder.”

“Ohs,” said Kirk with a dazzled breath of relief. Barney standing before the Throne, plucking at a harp with thick reluctant fingers, had somehow seemed quite as terrible as Barney in hell or haunting in the willow-scrub. But Barney astride a rearing comet, with red hair blown and wide mouth grinning, could be considered even with pleasure. Suddenly his tears ran down. He had not known until then how deeply he had feared for Barney.

Tamsin saw the tears and received a clout on the head for not minding her business. And then Kirk was off, leaping, shouting, laughing like a wild thing among the tar-paper shacks and the bushes. Again Tamsin had stood between him
and that ancient earth-inheritance of fear which was never very far from him. He did not understand that fear, any more than he understood the necessity to defy it sometimes. To dart out of nights into the scrub strange with shifting moonlight and there strut and mouth and threaten silently until a greater silence, a greater mystery than himself drew its huge primeval shape indolently, soullessly out of the void and reached clammy fingers to destroy him. Then he fled, inwardly shrinking and with heart battering his ribs, to the hot noisy kitchens of the Tinky-Tink. Here some busy cook would thrust a platter of food at him and, grasping it with both hands, he would scurry along dark narrow landings to his bed curtained off the long washing-place; feeding among the blankets like a young animal. Then he would lie, curled and wakeful, listening to the distant stridency of the band, holding his mind on to the noise of it because it deadened those stealthy echoes, stealthy steps that were always waiting for him round corners.

This Tinky-Tink, crowded with eager eyes and foolish laughter, with shouts and quarrels and kisses and stale smells of scent and smoke, was his one haven from the adorable and terrible Out-doors, just as Mat and Aggie Colom were his only human appeal. They had picked the baby up in the gutter of a dark Seattle street, chosen a name for him out of a cheap magazine, and trailed him with them over the North, bewildered and angered by the child’s strange passionate temper and proud of his straight handsome body and quick ways. That the Tinky-Tink was known as “some hell” was, he learned, a point to brag about. That Aggie Colom was called a ‘tight-wad’ interested him less.

He was half-asleep that night he heard the Coloms quarrelling in the washing-place and realized with a shock of dismay that Aunt Aggie was ‘picking-on’ Uncle Mat. Beyond regarding them as the fulcrums moving his world and powerful as gods Kirk had not established any definite notions about the
Coloms, and his horror was as great now as though the Dome behind the city had moved under its shaggy growth and gone to fisticuffs with the river. Sharp-eyed as a fox he peered round the curtain, tremulous at the thought that they believed themselves alone and feeling very much as though he were seeing them undressed. Their faces looked undressed, somehow.

Mat Colom in the loose grey trousers and brown velvet jacket he always wore—it was too tight and he never had a waistcoat—was splashing his usually jolly red face in a basin and snarling at Aggie.

"Have some sense, won’t yer? A man’s gotta make himself pop’lar if he wants ter run a joint like this."

"Popular," shrilled Aggie. For a fat woman she had a very inadequate voice. "Sure it’s popular to neglect all the dance-girls so they’re talkin’ of it an’ go hellin’ around with that Lily Maud." She made a step and Kirk saw with horror that her hands opened and shut as though springs controlled them instead of human muscles. "You’ve fell for her, you old heathen. Don’t tell me! I say you have." Her voice ran on in a high wild stream and Kirk was profoundly puzzled. Lily Maud was the Show Girl of the Tinky-Tink and everyone fell for her. What was wrong about that?

Mat scrubbed his face with the towel. His little eyes looked horrible. Wicked, somehow, and yet scared.

"Quit it," he said, over and over. "Quit it before I make you."

"Yep! You’ll make me, will you? You’ll make me the day you fire that slut out here an’ not a minute afore. Think I’m havin’ them games goin’ on under me very nose, you old reprobate?"

She seemed to swell in the pale yellow light, and she was a very large woman at any time. To-night she had a green muslin dress very bunchy behind and very low on fat pink shoulders. There were chains of raw nuggets on her fat pink neck and arms, and her hair was fuzzed out in a big greyish
bush above her pale eyes and done up in a big knob at the back. Kirk thought her splendid and he supposed that he loved her, although Tamsin told him that he really loved Uncle Mat who beat him one day and gave him sweets the next.

Mat, Kirk saw with sudden amaze, seemed rather frightened. Himself had a deadly familiarity with many fears, but he had confidently expected them to pass with boyhood. If a man like Uncle Mat, with a black moustache and loud voice and a powerful way of helping the chucker-out when things got too gay, could fear there was surely no security anywhere. It was his first step into the pitfalls of life, and he never forgot it. After Aggie had gone at last, heaving down the narrow passage like a great green hill smelling of cheap scent, he lay quaking, his sympathies entirely with the man, while Mat stood staring at the towel in his hands. For a long time he stood, and again his face was wet although he had dried it once. Then, with a kind of groan, he crushed the towel, pitched it under the basin and tramped off down the passage.

Kirk tried to understand. Curled in the dark like a bright-eyed squirrel he nibbled this new nut. Other men with wives fell for Lily Maud. Black Wynn had a wife. So had Sunny Bill and probably lots of others. But their wives were Outside and that probably made the difference. Goin’ on under me very nose, Auntie Ag had said. Yes, that must be it. It was right to have Lily Maud to be fallen for or Uncle and Aunt wouldn’t have her. But you mustn’t fall in front of your wife. That was the mistake. Kirk had got it now. His keen busy little brain pigeonholed the discovery and he went serenely to sleep.

Mat Colom was still more alarmed when the Cornell shooting occurred. The Mounted Police ruled the North with a large comprehension but a firm hand, and they were not pleased with Mat. Nor was he pleased with himself.

“T’d chuck the Tinky-Tink,” he told MacDonald. “Ter-
morrer I'd chuck it if Aggie's allow. Tain't right all this publicity Lily Maud's gittin'."

Between Mat and MacDonald existed a long and faithful friendship actively discouraged by their wives. They walked now on the muddy foreshore where glistening pools brought down the autumn glory of the hills and the river sank a thousand fathoms with inverted depths of sky. MacDonald knew that if Mat went off now he would take Lily Maud, who would bleed him white. A kind heart had old Mat, and always his own worst enemy—until he married Aggie. It was only human that such as Mat should turn to the Lily Mauds of life, but he wouldn't do this if MacDonald could help it.

"Aye," he said, "Cornell's no the first man to mess himself up through that bunch o' jades you've got, though mind ye I winna say as they dinna rin on the spears. But it's shook ye up some, Mat. Why not git an Injun an' take a spell in the woods like ye done since afore?"

"Not since I married Aggie I ain't. When I had Injun Kate it was differunt. I wisht I had her now, Mac. She sure was good to me. I ain't white-livered, yer know, an' I done my share of hellin' around, but that kid . . . he weren't twenty, an' I kip thinkin' in a few year it might be Kirk. I do love that boy, Mac. I'm fonder o' him than if he was me own if he'd had to have Aggie to mother him."

"Sure," said MacDonald. A genial sinner, Mat, even if MacDonald's douce wumman wouldn't have him in her house. "I wush ye'd go to the woods, though," he said, watching the blue smoke curl over Dawson City and its bizarre life. Why should men slave and sweat on those yellow hills the month through for what they spent at the Tinky-Tink in a night? MacDonald could not blame them. They were made that way. But, being innately religious, he could not blame God either. "Ah, weel," he said, lighting up his pipe. "Life's a queer thing. But I wush ye'd cut it all, Mat."
Some years later Mat Colom did cut it, and with MacDonald and Tamsin took Kirk to the summer woods. Suddenly in the fall before the douce wumman in MacDonald’s house became terribly ‘the first woman in the new cemetry’ and took her baby with her. MacDonald was not a weak man, but the shack was lonely and so many pleasant young ladies offered to ‘do’ for him and Tamsin. He thought it over for a while, sitting through the winter with his long gaunt legs bent before the stove and glancing now and then at Tamsin with her lesson-books. “Aye,” he said at long last. “Aye-e,” as though he accepted a load that would take strong carrying, but it was years before Tamsin knew that he had that night accepted the straight and narrow way for her sake.

In spring he sold the good-will of his store, bought a half-decked boat and said to Mat Colom:

“What aboot it, auld mate? There’s room aboard for you and Kirk?”

Through these years which had brought Kirk to fourteen and Tamsin near to twelve that great tide which had poured to the North had slackened, turned and commenced to trickle painfully back. Already a sharp nose could scent the irrevocable elements of decay and already the sharper men were getting out, for no town crashes quicker than the one built upon gold. Mat Colom knew it, but he did not want to leave.

“Aggie’s chattin’ o’ goin’ while the goin’s good,” he said, reluctantly. “She reckons to be visitin’ Outside. We’re well heeled.”

“And what do ye reckon to do yerself?”

Mat kicked at a hole in the boardwalk. His hot blood and easy virtue generally did the reckoning for him, and the present Lily Maud had been too much even for Aggie, who was preparing to throw in the towel. Mat was soft, or Aggie would never have caught him in the gay heyday of his manhood, and MacDonald decided that La Flamme should not have him now to pick his bones. He said:
“If you don’t come ye’ll have young Kirk go t’hell. He is sure headed for’t, Mat.”

Aggie went out by the first boat, and MacDonald fought La Flamme for Mat. It was a fierce battle and a long one, for freedom was a dangerous gift to Mat, and the Tinky-Tink without Aggie was a joyful place. Kirk, now man-high and full of good looks and laughter, was beginning to attract the women, and MacDonald would have thought twice about taking these two if he had not trusted Tamsin. Although brought up to ‘gude Presbyterian prayers’ she was principally pagan; but she seemed to have annexed the Yukon for herself and entrenched her stout spirit upon the eternal hills, pronouncing from there her blessings and anathemas. Since his wife’s death Tamsin had ‘cared for’ MacDonald remarkably well. She went through Dawson and among the shanties scattered along the flanks of the Dome without fear, and it was she who, hearing a shot from Dick the Duke’s shack, had walked straight in to find him dying on the newspapers that made his only bedding and brought at once from the Tinky-Tink the girl his stiff lips were crying for.

Tamsin knew considerably more of life than Kirk with his queer reticences and inhibitions, his queer shyness with women. There was much of the unhhandled colt in Kirk; much of the idealist. MacDonald saw it for an inevitable and passing phase in most boys, and he saw what a few more years at the Tinky-Tink would do to both Kirk and Mat Colom. “We must take them, Tamsin,” he said, consulting her as he never had consulted his wife; and when Tamsin said: “Aye, feyther,” he felt it as good as done. This red-headed happy girl of his had been his faithful mate since the very early days when he had whipped her for springing the fur-traps men set on the Dome and seen the first seedling of philosophy sprout in her with her cheerful answer: “Aye; you must whup me an’ I must spring the traps. Maybe we both got to do just what we think right.”
The marshfire light flickering and blazing about them from babyhood had taught Kirk and Tamsin to look on the weaknesses of men with boredom and disdain. Their real life was still secure with Nature, and MacDonald wondered sometimes what would happen when Tamsin learned to love. Kirk would probably love good and plenty. His temperament assured it. For Tamsin, thought MacDonald, pondering the terrible sanctities of the human soul, it was more likely to be a heart wrenching once for all.

Between them they rescued Mat, the man with his blue eyes like winter ice and the girl to whom all life was loveliness, and took him to the magic woods. Here their pitched tents stood like inverted convolvulus bells on the short moss by the river, and that first night the men sat with their pipes on the bank while the children hunted early berries through the long sweet glow of twilight. MacDonald sat silent, his gaunt knees linked in his arms, and felt the air about him tremendous with the breath of spring. Buds seemed to push as he turned his eyes and dryad flowers open. They raised pale faces wondering to the evening skies laced with the loose-flung skeins of birds winging North to their nesting on the tundras. The blue flowing dusk brought down an anxious tremulous twittering; there were soft rustles in the bushes; secret breaths. As always the forests were haunted by their own, but it was not MacDonald who felt the interloper. Mat Colom sat with his grizzled head in his hands and groaned.

"Guess I was cut out f'r a sinner from the first trump. Why didn't you leave me to it?" he said, heavily.

"Rats," said MacDonald. After stale years in a mining-town he had come back to life standing pure at its source, and he was more content than he had ever hoped to be. "Hark to they bairns," he said.

Elfin calling, elfin laughter flowed like water through the shadows. The wizened trees stood silent, infinitely wise, infinitely old. MacDonald had a momentary strange pang of
fear. It seemed that Someone went beneath the branches, old
and wise as they, bearing in his hands the cup that all who
love life must drink.

For many days, many miles, they went on up the rivers,
seeing flecks of human life now and again and, more rarely,
that other crowded life all around. Miners rocked their
cradles on grey-dazzled sandy spits. Indian fishing-camps
were full of brown vigour and barking dogs and red and
yellow canoes over-turned on the bright edge of the water.
The heavy bucks stood with inscrutable eyes under the drying
scaffolding, and of evenings the young women round the
cooking-pots had more than momentary allure in the firelight.
Towards the white lands they went; through chains of lakes
and up rapids where Kirk took his turn with the men on the
trackrope and Tamsin stood at the long sweep and steered.

Glaciers in forgotten ages of mammoth and aurochs had
worn the hills down to blunt butts void of beauty. But now
spring-time had bannered them over in gay colours, and
everywhere Tamsin saw bronze of sticky young poplar-leaves,
sage-green of willow, bright green of cottonwood, maple and
saskatoon. She wreathed her head with the little pink-eyed
twin-flower, and never mended the tears in her frock, and
always ruled her men. It was a proper kind of world this with
baren iron-stone heights where lonely jack-pines stood wried
by tempest, and prim little maidenly Yukon spruces were
noisy with the red squirrels, and moose, their new antlers yet
in the moss, swung silently on splay hooves down the runway
to drink at the river.

Below a white majesty of mountains they camped in a log-
but some hill-gouger had built for his squaw, and while
MacDonald took an axe and hacked windows out of the blank
walls Tamsin looked with disfavour on the sticks, leaves and
grasses brought in by nesting pack-rats and wolverine.

"Will ye make me a whisk-broom right now?" she demanded
of Mat. "I'm no likin' this place much."
In the shapeless faded blue frock that veiled the immaturity of her figure she looked more than her years, Mat thought. Fifteen at least, she looked. Old as Lily Maud when first she came to the Tinky-Tink. Lily Maud was dead these five years, but she troubled Mat still as she had in life. "If ever I loved a woman it was her, damn her," he thought. "My, Tamsin. You're growin' up."

"I can't help that. Uncle Mat, I want a whisk-broom the worst way." He cut her one, and she kissed him with sweet pouting lips, damp like a baby's. There was a powder of little golden freckles on her nose, and the bright curling ends of her hair tickled his cheek. He flung away abruptly and went down to get a swig from the rum-cask still in the boat. MacDonald did not drink, but he never asked impossibilities of others.

Mat sat on the cut-bank among the saskatoons and drank and shivered once or twice in the heat. He was not a heavy drinker, but he needed a little. "An' I need a little fun," he thought disconsolately. "God knows I'm not a bad man... to speak of, but I do like a little fun."

In the light breeze the trees bowed assent with courteous remoteness. They were used to the stoic endurance of their comppeers, moose and lumbering bear, squirrel and wolverine. This thing that lamented on the grass, mopping a red face, did not come within their ken. They felt in him no echo of the masterful beast-voices of the primeval past, no hint of the music of unborn bird-songs to come.

There was a cry back in the woods and Kirk came leaping down the runway, naked as the wind, with Tamsin after him, a clout around her slim body. Into the river they went headlong, a quiver of light, a flash of laughter, the broken end of a song. Cradling the tin cup in his hands Mat watched them, and presently their gay and fearless innocence touched in him deeper issues. That's the way folk ought to be an' never can, he thought. Adam and Eve before the Fall, beautiful without and within.
Kirk pulled Tamsin to him by her long braid. Uncouth as a seal he ducked and splashed her. She swam from him like an arrow, turned and came back through flying spray. Around them the little spruces stood, dark candles at a shrine. Here was the altar of youth; and the Balms of Gilead shook their honey-sweet leaves before it and the little willow-wrens sang like spirits possessed.

Mat suddenly knew that his life had come to a point where he could not bear it. He rose and lumbered off hurriedly to MacDonald, where he cleaned his gun in the shack door. Tall goldenrod leaned heavy yellow heads against the doorway, staring with steady eyes. Blue butterflies dipped and whirled. A squirrel ran up the roof and dropped a pine-cone. MacDonald with his long mahogany face and spare limbs was at home here. Mat knew that he could never be. For one thing he was too fat.

"I'm too fat," he said, bitterly. "That's what's the matter."

"Ye are, an' it may be. What are ye aimin' at noo?"

Excepting Tamsin, MacDonald loved this hot-natured, soft-hearted man better than anyone, although he never could tell why. But Mat was his own enemy and no one else's, and that cannot be said of many men.

"I want," said Mat, "to go home. Mac. you better let me go right away."

MacDonald considered gravely. The devil was not yet sweated out of Mat, perhaps would never be. But he was not the man to renounce a cure half done.

"Give it a try a wee while longer," he said, and saw to it that Mat was kept busy, setting fish and trap-lines, slicing a young moose for pemmican, caulking the boat and shooting fool-hens. Himself did the cooking, and Tamsin casually kept house, and tamed gophers and squirrels, and went off alone in the woods, forbidding Kirk to follow.

What strange trysts she kept she could not have told. But she knew that the woods were her own place, and their voices
were for her to hear. In primitive dawns perhaps a Tamsin walked here, catching echoes of yet more primitive years; feeling in her veins the tremor of early leaves shaping; the groping of beasts heaving out of the slime. Gods there must have been, too, in those days, for Tamsin heard them yet, nearly saw them... oh, so nearly, when she stood with held breath and watched twilight come down the glades. A fine place for gods, these sparse and ancient forests where no human foot before had trodden the dry deep moss or broken the slender stems of the water-avons beside the springs.

Kirk was like the Pan of the picture-books, thought Tamsin. Thin and bright-eyed, with torn and shaggy trousers fitting close to his narrow hips, and a round brown column of throat, and a Jews’ harp for his warm young mouth. And this small iridescent butterfly was Psyche, sipping among the pink wide-eyed roses.

Tamsin went on her knee with clasped hands, and Kirk, scrambling down the wooded draw behind, halted, not knowing why. A man might have thought of virgin invocations, a maiden’s mystery. Kirk thought only that the sun, lying on her as though it loved her, had in some way made her, not Tamsin, but girlhood itself, dazzling, sacred. Spring, passing overnight into summer, passed less rapidly than Kirk from coltish boyhood into the purification of first love. Trembling, he knelt by her where she sat on a mossy log. The butterfly was gone, but magic remained in the warm flowing silence.

“I wish we could live up here for ever,” said Tamsin, dreamily.

The suspended blood in Kirk rushed along his veins, shouting that it was a grief and crime that Tamsin should not have what she desired. He said thickly:

“If I could manage it I’d... I’d do anything on earth to manage it, Tamsin.”

“Dear Kirk,” said Tamsin, absently. She had forgotten him. She broke into one of her wordless chirruping songs,
and he lay at her feet, marvelling that soft lips could curve
like this, a slim throat rise and fall, a music beyond all magic
fill the listening air. A gopher popped out of the end of the
log and sat up like a plump pepper-and-salt pillar with paws
clasped on his round stomach and yellow nose working. A
red squirrel stopped chattering up in the balsams and sat on
the end of a branch, his tail over his head. Kirk thought:
"They all know it. Trees n' everything. Music . . . magic . . .
Tamsin."

He felt giddy, tumultuous and yet afraid to move.
The far sky smiled, leaning down. The pool fed from a
spring in the fern trembled. All this motionless world was
throbbing with new promises, impulses. Kirk felt enormously
alive and yet afraid with a new kind of afraidness. He groped
for her hand, and the touch shot a more physical ecstasy
through him. He whispered with a dry throat:
"I love you."

"Dear Kirk," said Tamsin. She stopped singing and smiled
at him kindly. She might, and often did, chase him with the
broom or throw things at him, but among her gods in her
own woods she was always kindly. Kirk got on his knees. He
whispered:
"May I kiss you?"

She gave him her lips simply as in the days when Aggie
Colom or the douce wumman had ordered them to kiss and
make friends. Her wide grey eyes were a little wondering
although she did not recognize the reverence in his clumsy
kiss. Then she sprang up.

"Time to go back . . . but it's so lovely here," she said.

Kirk went with her in silence, but his feet were shod with
wings. Everywhere was a marvel of flowers. Frail pipissima,
oxalis, columbines and water-avons slim and tall. Saskatoon
and strawberry like a great flock of white stars, and out in
the clearing a wilderness of roses. Their lucent pinky light
shone from every side and their faint scent moved mysteriously
in the air, Kirk thought their eyes turned to follow him walking by Tamsin through that hushed radiance. The lake when they came to it was red as fire and the hills beyond hot gold. Kirk thought his heart would burst with the wonder and glory. It seemed terrible to think that Tamsin must go in and cook food.

He tried to help her and upset the kettle, and she hit him a crack with a billet of wood. This made him feel better, but he could not sleep in his usual bed on the living-room floor. MacDonald and Mat Colom had a lean-to behind, and for Tamsin they had done something with a partition near the stove. Going softly Kirk went out to lie in the blue grass until the mosquitoes drove him into the river. His body rebelled, but not his spirit. Long days in the open, solitude, the turn of the year, his strongly-developing body had all served to hasten the inevitable moment. Kirk was made of the stuff that would love tumultuously, but there is rarely anything tumultuous in a boy’s first love. Usually it is a shy and delicate thing and far less sensuous than that of a girl.

The cock-grouse had long ceased their drumming in the ground-juniper. They were about the shack of mornings now with their broods and Tamsin let the fluffy grey babies peck from her yellow porridge-bowl with Kirk crouched beside her, holding his eager breath. In these days the sun no more than dipped behind the round-headed hills to rise again through pink clouds and walk the same azure sky. And so he saw again the little boat creeping on up side-streams, sailing across lakes, halting a night or two at Indian camps where the over-loaded dugouts splashed over twilit lavender patterned with silver thread.

MacDonald never wanted to go back, and no more did the children. But continually Mat Colom grew more restless. He saw the childish love-idyll that MacDonald never saw, and obscure instinct moved in him to make him bully Kirk and pet Tamsin. Once, finding her alone in the shack, he put his arms round her and kissed her. And although she kissed him
back as she had once been used to do he did not turn up at the Scriptural reading which MacDonald insisted on every night. He walked by the river, and thought of the Tinky-Tink and La Flamme, and heard the wild geese go clanging over, and wondered why man was made to find so little peace in his life.

MacDonald, gaunt and sinewy, cut wood and tracked the boat and shot a grizzly, and was grimly, silently happy; and for the children the elders kept the indifferent place of elders which was far outside their fairy-land. Together they bathed in the radiance of their own glory, and it was only Kirk who ever thought of the blasting end when they must go back to common life again with the delicate miracle of their love all spoiled by the gabbling world. His brain felt it less than his spirit. Of his body he was not fully aware yet, except that he bubbled with all manner of reckless doings when Tamsin was near and felt listless when she was away.

They lay on a sunny hill-side eating blue-berries which Tamsin took with her lips like a bird because the touch of fingers destroyed their bloom, blue as the sky.

"It's as if you bruised the lovely things," she said. Kirk had her long braid in his hands, moving his lips along it.

"Seems it ought to make better music than the jews' harp," he said, half-wondering that music did not burst from its warm silky depths. He liked that she should braid her hair, shutting all its red-gold wealth up tightly. Tamsin was never very free with any of herself. She rarely gave kisses, rarely let him touch her. Now he took her round brown arm and put his lips to that.

"This should make lovelier music still."

"Don't! You tickle." She pulled her arm away, then suddenly flung it round him. "Oh, Kirk. Oh, Kirk. How I wish we could stay here always."

They leaned together, looking down. His dark face with the strong black tilted eyebrows was grave. Her peachy bloom
was powdered with freckles and her soft mouth half-open. Among the reeds in the lake below duck swam reflected in the translucence; great shining mallards and little bright butterball, stately pintail and others. In all the great world of warm naked hills and gleaming water and distant sky there was no sound, no other life. Gently, securely peace seemed to rise about them, enclosing them. Kirk dared not breathe or some subtle witchery would be gone. Tamsin said, dreamily:

"My own land. When I die I will walk in the Yukon for ever."

"Don't talk of dying." Kirk felt that he could not bear even to remember that there was death. He held her tight, and for once she let him. "Oh, Tamsin, I do love you. Don't you know I do. Tamsin, let's stay here, just you and me. I'm a real fine shot. I guess I could do for you all right, and we'd find a shack somewheres. Tamsin . . . couldn't we?"

"It would be bonny," admitted Tamsin. "Aye, lad, it would be bonny."

On the next evening Kirk, hunting alone after fool-hen, found the shack. It was deep-set by the shadowy trail and in the twilight tall columbines and goldenrod were mystical about it, and between brown weathered logs an open door invited. Kirk stepped in. Two bunks nailed to the further wall, a slab table set in the earthy floor, a rusty stove with a few pans and kettles lying round it, and in the corners piles of shredded fir-cones which had fed squirrels and rats throughout the winter. That was all, but to the tall boy trailing his gun, glancing round with glowing eyes, it was a place of glory. It was a home for him and Tamsin. It was . . .

Who can interpret a boy's mad fancies, or his glorious certainty of the unattainable? Kirk went back with wings at his heels. Love had for him a quality, a colour which it could never have taken anywhere but here, with great spaces to make it seem great to him, and the silence of half a world to give it dignity, and a sense of skies and of wandering gods to
turn it queerly sacred. Kirk who all his life had seen at the Tinky-Tink what men called love never thought of his own as even remotely allied. He would probably be sensuous later. Down in Dawson he had often pulled girls about roughly; kissed them to hear them squeal, and then pushed them off in a sudden disgust. He had the name among boys of being a "good sport, but darned stiff with the ladies." He knew in his own mind that he was rather afraid of women. There was Cornell, and Dick the Duke, and Uncle Mat in the washing-place—women behind all that. Best keep off 'em, thought Kirk.

But Tamsin. But this. Of course there had never been anything like this in the world before. Kirk planned when he would tell Tamsin. Not until night, he thought; when the two men were asleep in their hammocks swung under the big Balm of Gilead where the boat was tied, and Tamsin asleep under the half-deck, and himself in his blanket by the red glow of the long tree-trunk that they always found for a fire. Then he'd creep down through the fragrant darkness and across the slip of dark water, and find her, all rosy and warm with sleep, and tell her and take her away. "I may have to fight MacDonald," he thought, "but maybe Uncle Mat will help." Then a better idea came. "Suppose we let 'em think we're drowned. I could leave an old shirt on the bank. Then they'll go back to Dawson and let us be."

He began to quiver with visions opening out. Tamsin and he together for ever; growing to man and woman; bringing up children to run in the woods the way the Indians did. He had not thought of all that before, and for a while it made him serious. Then excitement shot up in him, and that night he flaunted in birch-streamers and made wild music.

The two men, smoking pipes just beyond a little clearing, saw the two at it. Tamsin, as usual, with roses and other flowers stuck all over her, was wooing the trees; whispering to them, patting their trunks and whirling away in sheer gladness of living. To-night Kirk had dressed the part, too. With
a boy’s love of the grotesque he had bound horns of white birch-bark on his forehead and tossing streamers of it at ankles and waist. Followed by a tumbling coyote pup which he had tamed he pranced round the magic circle where Tamsin played, shaggy as Pan, blowing erratic melody on his jews’ harp. Round he went, never invading the circle, leaping, capering, butting the air; in shadow and out to the pallid light, his warm brown glowing face and thin young graceful body earnest and absorbed. What he was doing he could not have told, but all his body knew. He was bent on some high emprise which should keep Tamsin safe for ever. The enchantment in his blood insisted that he would never tire of weaving this secret circle about her.

The men on the edge of the clearing watched; saw the puppy lumbering after, his foolish tongue lolling, but true to his wild silence. Mat Colom burst out in sudden fury:
“What’ un hell’s he goin’ around her like that fur?”

“Eh, they’re but bairns,” said MacDonald, smiling. He loved Tamsin with a strong love, and he knew that Mat loved Kirk, too.

“Kirk’s nigh fifteen. He looks eighteen. And Tamsin ... Damned if I likes these goin’s on.”

“Don’t be an auld wife, Mat. They’re all right.”

He strode over the clearing, grabbed up the puppy and cuffled it until it yelped, snatched the horns from Kirk’s head and ground them under his heel.

“Git ter bed outer this. I ain’t havin’ no boy o’ mine act that crazy. Git off, I tell yer.”

He launched a blow at Kirk’s head. Kirk dodged it with skill born of long practice and capered away. Beyond the clearing sounded again the thin mocking music of his harp. Mat Colom walked down to the boat, hung his hammock under the broad scented Balm and turned in. He lay shivering because he knew that he had wanted to choke the life out of Kirk, “I must get away home outer here,” he thought.
Kirk curled up by the fire until all the night was asleep. He had forgotten Mat’s tempers. He felt buoyant, lifted above the earth. By a tree in the trail he had hid his gun, an extra knife, a bag with flour and salt, a couple of bear-robins. Indians constantly passing up and down would supply the rest. Now there was nothing to do but creep down and arouse Tamsin, and he crept, the puppy trailing silently at his heels.

She was so dead-asleep that he had to shake her again and again before she roused.

“Come,” he whispered urgently. “Put on your clothes and come. Don’t make a noise.”

Bewildered and sleepy she obeyed, asking no questions; and they were up the bank with the puppy faithful behind when a shadow loomed between them and Mat Colom said: “What’s goin’ on here?”

Kirk was stunned, but he held his tongue. He thought: “We’ll never get away if I tell.” Mat caught Kirk with one hand and Tamsin with the other.

“Git you back ter yet bed this minit,” he said, harshly, and thrust her down the bank, where she fell asleep again on the deck, having scarcely known that she had been waked.

Mat dragged Kirk across to the hammock where MacDonald was sitting up with his grizzled hair all awry.

“Tell him where you was goin’ with Tamsin this time o’ night,” said Mat. His voice was thick, and he had Kirk’s arms pinioned behind him as Kirk had often seen him do when running men out of the Tinky-Tink. It hurt so terribly that Kirk feared to open his lips in case he cried out, but he whispered, quavering: “We... we weren’t up to any harm.”

“Don’t lie to me, you young——” Mat’s voice went up in a strange scream. He poured out accusations of a kind not new to Kirk although he had never dreamed that they could be applied to himself. He could not really think it now, blinking in the bewilderment that had so suddenly crashed down into his lovely dream. MacDonald, frowning under
drawn brows, thought how pitifully young and thin and dazed he looked, and said:

"Gie ower, mon. It was juist some bairn's ploy, mebbe. He dinna lee."

"He won't lie when I've done with him. Wait till I get my belt off, you young devil."

MacDonald lay down, turning his back.

"Dinna kill him, Mat," he said, and left the boy to what he thought was justice. But when he heard that beating back among the trees; heard Mat's brutal cursings and accusings he bit his grizzled moustache and worked his hands. Mat, not a doubt of it, was beating out his own devils along with Kirk's, and quite possibly it had been no more than a childish ploy. MacDonald himself was sure of it, but mebbe it was as well to make surer—and they had all been out in the wild too long. Mat had said so a dozen times.

"Now... you stay there," said Mat, flinging the boy down at last and tramping away. Kirk lay still among the strawberry-leaves, and the puppy came whispering to lick a small trickle of blood where the belt-buckle had torn the skin.

All night Kirk lay there. The physical pain was not much greater than he had borne under Mat's drunken tempers before now, but something had broken in his mind. That bright bubble of beauty which he had shared with Tamsin was broken, quite gone. He was sick with pain, but he was not angry and rebellious as he usually was after Mat's beatings. Mat had influenced Kirk's soul quite as deeply as he had intended; but, like other stupid people who set out to control others, he had no notion of the direction in which he had sent it. "Beasts," thought Kirk out of a red mist. "Animals. That's what he said we are. No God nor nothin'. Animals——"

He lay staring at the dark that brimmed around and in him until the sun came up. Then he rose stiffly, washed face and hands at the river, and came with dripping head to breakfast when Tamsin called. The men were silent, not looking
at him. He looked at Tamsin through the dark of his soul and looked away again. She was nothing but a freckled little girl in a soiled frock, with sleep in the corners of her eyes. Nothing but a little animal eating rather greedily. The Tamsin of yesterday was gone, like everything else.

"Tamsin," said MacDonald, his mouth full of bannock. "Ye'll pack oop directly. We're awa hame the day."

"We're no'!" cried Tamsin. She was nervous, having found herself dressed on the deck just now and not remembering how she got there. But the scowling faces invited no confidences. Likely I walked in my sleep, she thought.

"Haud yer tongue," said her father with unusual sharpness.

"I won't." She spilt her hot tea on her leg, sprang up with a yelp of pain and anger. She stood, shouting out her disappointment and nervous anger, her red hair all over the place, her hands clenched. These months of freedom had spoiled her, thought MacDonald, taken her back to the naughty loose-tongued little girl he used to whip. Eh, he should have had them all out of here sooner! He said levelly:

"Go pack yer bag this minute, an' if I hear anither chirp out o' ye I'll whup ye."

Tamsin hesitated, glanced round on the unfriendly faces. Then she gave a gulp and rushed off with arm over her eyes to hide her tears. MacDonald arose with a sigh.

"Reef oop they hammocks, Kirk," he said. "Bide . . . I'll pit some balsam on yer back fust."

Kirk submitted in silence. When MacDonald asked if it hurt he laughed with a touch of hysteria. "What's hurtin'," he said, defiantly, and MacDonald went off, muttering in his beard. These young things facing life with such queerly pathetic courage! What was a man to do about it!

When everything was stowed aboard Tamsin came to Kirk standing apart on the bank with heavy eyes on the rippling water. He looked heavy, with shoulders humped and black head low between them.
“What’s got you all?” she asked petulantly. “What’s happened?” She had an uneasy feeling that her being dressed last night had something to do with it, but she could not remember, could not ask.

Kirk did not move. He hated her. Hated everything. She would never be told of the shack in the woods now. He made a pitiful effort to snigger, to grin knowingly as he had seen the Dawson boys do, saying ugly things. But the torn and trampled loveliness of his visions was still too great a grief for that. He could only turn on her like an uncouth boy.

“Oh, git out. I’m sick o’ you,” he said.

He expected a cuff on the head; hoped for it. But she only stared with her wide eyes; then turned a little pale under the freckles and climbed slowly down the bank and into the boat.

MacDonald pushed off with Mat Colom at the sweep. In the middle of the stream they set sail and ran smoothly down before a freshening wind. Sky, hills and river were flat in the opaque light of midday. They offered no farewell, showed no regret. Tamsin did not come from under the half-deck for a last look at those white peaks she was leaving, those enchanted valleys. Kirk, hunched in the nose of the boat, stared sullenly at the water. “There ain’t nothing bad I won’t do now,” he was thinking: “I’ll learn him.” MacDonald trimmed the sheet and on the decked space Mat swung the sweep, hour after hour, his moccasined feet taking his weight heavily, the long sweep groaning in the rowlock.

Bemusedly he laboured with his thought.

“Adam an’ Eve leavin’ Paradise, an’ the Lord chose me to bring the fiery sword. I sure done the best I knew how. I wonner . . .” He watched the boy with troubled tender eyes as they passed into the shadow of tall timber. “I niver did know before as the sins of the foster-fathers was visited on the chillun, too. Seems a bit tough, that. Not a fair deal, is it, Lord?” He tried to straighten up his flabby body. “Must take a pull,” he thought. “I sure do love that boy. I’m doin’
the best I know how, but I reckon I must do better. Reckon I must take a pull on me..."

He sighed, swinging the sweep. The water muttered. The little boat sailed on, in and out of the shadows, away from Paradise. On the half-deck the troubled old angel with the fiery sword blinked bewilderedly.
Chapter Two

In Nineteen-Twenty old Dawson was dead as Nineveh, but young Dawson City still was dying hard, although each year fewer tourists came down the Yukon River on the “palatial river steamers” to take snapshots of the Midnight Sun. It almost seemed, thought the hotel-keepers, that the sun might as well stop staying up until midnight.

Young Dawson, leaving the rotting water-front with its First and Second Avenues to ghosts of the past, had cleared many little tar-paper shacks out of the scrub nearer the Dome and there built a hospital, a school, churches (for no one loves all his neighbours when he worships), a spacious graveyard, and a fine block of Mounted Police Barracks. It had done some spiritual conversion too. Dawson had its Mission House, its Elk Club, Sewing Societies, Sons of the Yukon and Girls’ Friendly. Also it had abolished most of the gilt mirrors and all the plaster cupids from the Hotel Royal Queen which once (to its regret) had been Mat Colom’s Tinky-Tink Saloon. Dawson, in a word, had reformed, and found the exchange a good deal of a relief and a certain milestone on the road to dissolution.

In the general room of the Hotel Royal Queen a young woman sat under the tarnished gilt-and-cherub ceiling waiting for Kirk Regard. Ladies usually sat up on the half-landing where a few rugs, cane chairs and pot-plants made an atmosphere which the proprietor considered more suitable to the sex. But this young woman never did what was considered suitable. She preferred the smoke-room where the curtained alcoves had given place to a long front of double windows where men sat smoking in deep leather arm-chairs to watch the passers-by. On this chilly fall evening not many passed, but the chairs were full. Occasionally someone—a Mountie, a prospector, a clerk of the Administration, an
engineer off one of the dredges—got up and silently went to
the bar. They all wondered who Dierdre Cass was lying in
wait for, but none spoke to her, for they had long learned that
it was wiser to let Dierdre make the first move. She was
difficult enough to evade even if a man did not invite
destruction.

This evening she did not appear to see any of them. She sat
perfectly still, her pale face pointed like a fox’s mask propped
on her thin hand, her narrow reflective eyes looking at nothing,
her thin black-clothed body a little tense. Folk said she had a
touch of Russian as well as Indian in her blood, and this was
likely enough; those great days when Baranoff the Russian
held his court at Sitka for the slaying of the fur-otter having
left a good many repercussions in the way of mongol eyes and
excitable temperaments throughout the North. Her father
ran one of the gold-dredges now operating among the shingle-
heaps of the smothered Klondyke River, and that was all men
knew of her ancestry, for Cass was not a talkative man.

The heavy double doors swung, letting in a blast of cold
air and Sergeant Plume very smart and bulky in his tight
scarlet and dark blue. Having established himself spiritual
guardian of Dawson as the Law had established him physical
he went straight to Dierdre, pulling off his stetson to show a
broad ruddy face with twinkling eyes and a blunt nose.

“Waitin’ for someone, Miss Cass? Will I do?”

“No,” she said, not moving.

Plume stared down at her. For the witless Magdalens of
this world he had a pity as warm and broad as his face; but
for Dierdre Cass, scampering like a wild goat on the edge of
the precipice and yet too cunning to fall over, he had nothing
but disgust. She had spoiled too many good men and would
yet, the durn little devil. He considered it his duty to find out
who she was at the spoiling of now.

“Who are you waitin’ for?” he asked, abruptly.

“Kirk Regard.”
Plume let out a short whistle. Regard, one of the best Big Game Guides of the North, could look after himself if any man could, but he was still out on the Kluane with his hunting-party.

"Reckon you're settin' right thar for a spell, then, Kirk ain't back yet."

"His party's in the dining-room. And here he is himself."

She stood, and Plume turned to watch the meeting. He was vexed. After hard months in the mountains a man like Regard would be far safer helling around with the boys on his first night in town than flirting with Dierdre Cass. Plume knew well enough what sight and touch of a woman meant after long abstinence, and he shouldered forward now, adding to the storm of greetings.

"My! Kirk; you're lookin' fine. Come an' have a wet. An' dinner's on to me, boy."

But this self-possessed young man, talking, laughing, refusing, would, it appeared, have none of Sergeant Plume. He flung off his furs, showing a sinewy alert body in close-fitting leathers, and below the black tilted brows his eyes were amused. He took Dierdre's elbow in his hand and turned her about with jaunty possessiveness.

"Come along, I'm hungry," he said, and marched her off to one of the curtained recesses in the eating-room. He walked with moccasined feet, light and springy, like one used to narrow trails, and Dierdre Cass slid her lean dark body alongside him like a snake.

"Well! What do you know about that?" said Plume, trying to laugh.

Kirk drew the curtains of the recess, frowning at the indoor smell of the stuff, of cooking, of humanity. Like some thin ghost on the edge of his excitement and pleasure hovered still the crystal angel of the wild.

Dierdre linked her arms about his neck, leaning back, letting her eyes speak for her. Smouldering eyes under narrow brows
in a face duskily-pale as the walrus-ivory men make trinkets of to sell in Skagway and other towns of the North. Herself of the trinket-class she was hanging herself on a man’s neck and Kirk had the wit to see it. He had learned to see many things up and down the world, throughout the Great War, in hospitals, brothels and canteens, and always he found women ready to be kind to him. Dierdre was not specially kind, nor did he specially like her. But he was careless in his choosings and, despite another, she would do.

“Kiss me, then,” he said, “and let me feed. I’ve not had a bite since sun-up.”

She dropped her arms and turned away. He caught her roughly and kissed her mouth, twice, three times. Then he thrust his head through the curtain and called the waiter. When food was brought she was sitting at the table, her eyes still as a snake’s, her chin in her thin hand.

“My! I’m peckish,” said Kirk, beginning on the stewed caribou-meat and the circle of little vegetable-dishes.

“You men,” said Dierdre, reflectively, “you do make me laugh.”

“Laugh away, honey. You’d have waited for me there all night.”

“I know.”

Her voice had a wistful fall and he looked sharply up. Always when she saw him after long absences he made her catch her breath as though, invisible about that strong warm-coloured body, were presences, ancient, terrible, and yet most divinely glad. He was a different Kirk when a few days in Dawson had rubbed from him that mysterious bloom. Then she could remember that he was a coming man among the Big Game Guides, with important parties assigned to him by the Administration and millionaire tips worth putting into the Bank. Then she could remember that he was no better than other men; probably, if twice-told tales were true, a little worse. But it was her business to marry him, all the same.
As he looked at her the rapt far-off expression on his face exchanged for something warmer.
“Lyin’ awake dreamin’ of me nights, honey?” he enquired.
“Too often, Kirk.”
“Splendid liar you are, Dierdre.”
Talk went easily now. When the meal was done he sat smoking, his arm about her thin shoulders. He liked the feel of her yielding softness just as he liked the intentness of her pursuit. She meant to catch him, did she? Well, let her try. He had dodged grizzly bears before now.
Beyond the curtained alcove moccasined feet pattered. Rough voices rose and fell. From the street came the hoot of an automobile. Men and women again with all their complications instead of the bleak and terrific majesty of the hills. Instead of red fierce dawnsings and cold sunsets and the strain of guiding America’s Big Men after Big Game through dangerous solitudes here were slackness and warmth and a woman’s hand lingering on his neck. Vaguely he knew that Yukon’s wastes had to him something the quality of women. They drew him so that he could not leave them alone, and yet he distrusted, sometimes feared, often hated them.
A transcendent thing there must be somewhere in life, but it went by him. Often through the War he thought that he had found it. Endurance, courage, sacrifice . . . surely all the verities were there. He and men like him were to win the War, save the world. But the War had not been won. That was clear already. And the world had not been saved. That was clearer still. Again, with love. He had forgotten that first desperate storm of desire and denial just as he had forgotten the girl. There had been so many since, and yet he could never be sure that any were love, any more than he could be sure what he had been put into the world for. His life was as full as the next man’s and often it felt so strangely empty. He kissed Dierdre absently and wished that he felt hotter. During
these last weeks he had looked forward so keenly to kissing a woman.

She stirred under the perfunctory kiss, saying maliciously: "I s'pose you'll go down the Kanana now and see your foster-parents, and the MacDonals. I hear every man is raving about that girl Tamsin."

"I'm booked to go to Macpherson with the Patrol Party."

He was not interested to talk of Tamsin: her ways and his had parted so long ago. When he had returned to Dawson from that summer on the Kluane he had hated everything, although now he hardly remembered why. Something that old Mat Colom had done or said. In Dawson he had become a byword for mischief and trouble, and MacDonald had sent Tamsin out to a Vancouver school. He had never seen her since, nor desired to, and a little later he had gone off as a horse-rustler with Hansen the Guide and lived among stables and pack-ponies ever since. Nor had he seen much of the Coloms since old Mat had "taken religion" and started a fox-farm on the Kanana, where Aggie would certainly quarrel with everyone as she always had done. A dull life, but all civilized life was dull, anyway.

"Hell," he said, suddenly restless. "Any place where we can dance or anything?"

"Not to-night. To-morrow the Y.M.C.A. is giving a small . . ."

"Aw! You make me tired. I wish I was down in Ketchikan. This durn good little burg . . ."

Dierdre accepted the ancient role of placation and told him what the millionaires of his party said of him while they stood about in the general room, waiting for their dinner.

"They sure do think you a smart guide, Kirk. There was one fat man said he'd been up twice with Hansen and never got such heads . . ."

Kirk listened tolerantly. He knew his worth to the last dollar, but it was well that others should know it too. He
began to feel happier. After all, it was good to be back, good to be appreciated. After all, there were not many men whom the Police Patrol would have asked to accompany them to Macpherson. When Dierdre stood up at last he held her hand, laughing up at her.

"You're hopin' I'll ask is your dad away on the dredge to-night, honey."

"You're always so sure of yourself. There are times when I hate you, Kirk."

"There are times when I love you, Dierdre, and this is one of 'em. Too bad, nothing lasts. May I come home with you?"

"Only to the door. Dad is away."

"My! Aren't we the good girl! Well . . ."

They put on their furs and went out into the thinly-lit streets. Kingly, remote, the Dome looked above them; its head against the stars. Up among those white hills from which Kirk had so lately come those stars would be bright and sharp as needles, cruelly watching the slow closure of the rivers, the steady pressure of increasing snow, the secretive advances and retreats of the Glories above a frozen world. Soon the lower side-streams and the Yukon would be throwing ice. Soon all transportation would cease and for a long eight months the Yukon would be locked in on itself and Kirk with it. One of the panic moments from which he was never entirely free caught him, walking by the dark river with the girl.

For the first time he wondered if he could ever really settle down with Dierdre. She, at least, would never be painfully conscious as he was of the ghosts of past generations at their door. Ghosts of gold-seekers with famished eyes and desolate laughter: of Baranoff the Russian, holding barbarian court among the dead at vanished Sitka; of the Æons behind that, back to the beginnings when men first arose on their feet, snarling with white fangs, and wrestled naked with beasts, and overthrew them—and so paved the way for Dierdre and Kirk Regard. He laughed suddenly.
“Funny, when you think of it,” he said. And when Dierdre lifted puzzled eyes he stooped and kissed her.

In the electric cold a spark passed between their lips. She cried out and he kissed her again. But he had turned away before the door shut. That was enough of Dierdre for one night.

Yet this tall empty world felt emptier without her. He walked slowly. Now that the long intense inspiring effort of the last months was over he was at a loss, his wheels run down, his mind a muddled liaison of sensuousness and an aching for those clear heights again. What manner of men were they who had been responsible for this fool and devil and struggling honest man who called himself Kirk Regard? Jesters all. And what did he owe them? From one day to another he never knew.

Implacable stars gleamed in a sky incredibly far. Frail wildfire flicker ran along the forehead of the Dome. Somewhere up there Kirk and Tamsin had been used to gather cranberries and saskatoons. Tamsin? It was years since he had thought of her. A little freckled girl in a soiled frock she was, with a hell of a temper and sleep in the corners of her eyes. Once, on the Kluane, he believed that he had thought her rather wonderful. He had a habit of doing that with girls—for a time.

Scattered street-lamps held sharp points of light in the dark. Between them lay great masses of shadow; backs of stores and houses; empty selections, clumps of trees and scrub; the great block of the Administrative Buildings behind the Barracks. In the Administrative Buildings he had seen a man tried for his life, Killed someone, apparently. To a man who had seen as much legalized killing as Kirk there were greater crimes.

Dead was old Dawson. Dead as last year’s flowers, last year’s love. Kirk had a mind to walk on deserted First Avenue where MacDonald’s store had been. He wished Dierdre had not spoken of the MacDonalds. Although his brain forgot his heart remembered that there had been gleams of spiritualness,
veils of loveliness in those early days. Sometimes, when he had been afraid of the dark, Tamsin had rocked his head in her little fat arms.

On First Avenue loose planks in the boardwalk flapped under his feet. In places the boardwalk was rotted into holes, but there had been enough snow that day to show them, to throw up a faint gleam like glare-ice into the gaunt sockets which had once been gambling-dens, eating-houses, saloons and stores of sorts. In the black gaze of the windows he saw himself pass like a wraith. Behind open doors strips of wallpaper flapped and rats rustled. Log houses canted sideways on sun foundations. Tottering hotels had had their painted bars torn out to prop the next drunken building. And the crazy little shack of beaten-out tins and the knees of drowned boats still stood. MacDonald’s Store—for MacDonald the Scot had never wasted money on externals.

Kirk went in, tentatively, as though opening a long-closed door. The place smelt badly. A huge pack-rat squeaked and scampered, stared with green eyes from the top of a rusty stove. Nothing here of Tamsin. Nothing even of MacDonald. Tamsin was now a tall girl whom all men raved about. Kirk considered that. If he saw her now he would likely rave too—for a time. Suddenly he knew that he did not want Tamsin in that harem. . . . It was here she had sat, under the broken stair, cradling his frightened head in her little fat arms. Lord, but it was queer how he remembered that. . . .

Walking back to the hotel he was still restless; glad that he was soon to lead the Dawson Patrol over the range to Macpherson on the Canadian side. The Sergeant who usually led was already on the Mackenzie, and Orange, next in charge, was new to the trail. The Patrol considered itself lucky to retain Kirk’s services, it said. And Kirk agreed. Of course it was lucky to get him.

Long ago the Mounted Police earned the gratitude of the North. Now they were earning it from film-producers and
the suppliers of cheap magazines as well. Not their fault, poor chaps, thought Kirk, squatting before one of the fires on their first-night camp. Well-set-up and cleanly, although they were not spectacular.

"Wouldn't you like to act for the Movies, Orange?" he asked.

Orange, examining a suspected blister on his heel, lifted a wind-reddened face and smirked faintly.

"Maybe I will, some day," he said with a hint of swagger.

"Put me on as a super when you do." Kirk yawned, flinging a clod of snow at a husky scratching just beyond the rim of light. Trust him to uncover another man's weakness. Orange thought he owned all the good looks in the world. Fenier, too; and Scudery, the big corporal with a continual grievance. They had their fool's side for certain, just like every other man. Having satisfactorily established human relationship to this vast silence, this white dignity of snow, Kirk curled up in his sleeping-bag and just stopped short of thanking God that he was not as other men.

A few nights later a wandering prospector came into camp, slightly frost-bitten and talking of his soul. It had been a long and hard day, with the steel runners striking a thin persistent note in the thin and frosty air and a thermometer dropping fast, and the Patrol was tired. They were tolerant of the prospector and his soul, being used to men who talked of all things, from candied cherries to El Greco paintings. But they grew annoyed when the prospector left his soul for theirs.

"What I say's this. A man's gotta re'lize he has a soul or go under," said the prospector earnestly out of his beard. "What I mean ter say... these hills an' things... They git a man down if you don't re'lize your soul."

"Ever hear of 'em getting an animal down?" asked Kirk. "If there's one place where a man can't afford to own a soul it's in the Yukon."

Almost he believed it, but he would have said it, anyway.
Scudery complained that he had no use for sky-dogs. “Want to bury a man living. That’s what they want.”

“Well, I’ve no quarrel with sky-dogs,” said Orange, handsomely. “Reckon I’ve no quarrel with anyone who has a belief. That kind of thing just doesn’t interest me. That’s all.”

Behind his small neat head the monstrous hills reared to the dark cavern of the sky where a newly-unleashed wind went mourning. Who unleashed it? wondered Kirk, looking at Orange.

“There’s things in the hills,” mumbled the prospector, turning his gentle sunken eyes on the others. “Sounds and shadders an’ laughin’ . . . I dunno. . . . You can’t leave the hills once they’re into your bones, but they take yer wits in the end. I knew a feller once,” he said, dreamily. “He thought he was the year changin’ seasons an’ he kept on goin’ around on a hill-top till he dropped in his tracks. I buried him there. An’ my mate, Pat O’Conner—any of you ’member Pat? Well, I guess mebbe you’re too young. He got the notion a musk-ox was a rag-carpet hangin’ on the line in his own back-yard and he follyed it off into the Barrans. My! I was that peeved! He never come back. . . . An’ there was another chap. . . .”

A horned Arctic owl sheered by; jewelled eyes set in a noiseless mass of white feathers. Round the shoulders of the hills the wind was whimpering.

“I reckon mebbe a’ Artic owl’s the soul of someb’dy,” said the prospector, and Kirk got up. This, he felt almost wildly, was too much. Souls . . . yes, he supposed we had souls and be damned to it; but why did the Yukon make him feel that it had a soul too? Some half-formed huge blundering soul moving uncouth and blind upon the mountains. Even the smell of snow and hills was live, like breath.

“Guess I’ll turn in,” he said, and lay in his blankets wishing that he had gone down to Ketchikan: to the eternal rattle of the stamping-machines in the dark mines above the water, the clatter of canning-factories, the bubbles upon the brimming
bowl of life. For a man who confesses to a soul it could not
even be said that he was thankful for small mercies. Turning
he felt by his hand the flute which had long taken the place of
his jews' harp. Softly he blew into it and was rewarded by
seeing the prospector jump up with a scream.
“Eh! Have yer come at last?” he cried. “Mary . . .”

The Patrol passed on, crossing the spoor of ermine, rat and
mink, sly marten and the luckless rabbit on which the whole
North feeds. Wolves howled round their camp-fires. Caribou
drifted across the eternal white like dust-clouds. Snow fell
and froze into powder. A silver moon rode the sky all day
among the scampering Glories that began to take colour as
daylight lessened. Those endless majestic heights shouldering
each other silently against darkening skies began to affect
even light-hearted Orange, and when at last they reached Peel
River and turned up its glassy surface to Macpherson every
man shouted to his team and broke into an eager run.

The snow-covered blocks of the Police Post buildings
among their gaunt willows had red light streaming from the
windows. In the corral dogs were tonguing and the straining
teams answered. In the trampled grey snow about the Post a
woman’s figure showed as she ran from the kitchen to the
potato-shed in the hill. Scudery said:
“My! Has the Old Man taken a wife?” But Kirk knew that
woman for an Indian by the way she moved.

The mess-room was a good place to be in that night, with
the long stove pipes exuding heat and a gay red roar from its
open mouth. The scarlet tunics, the blue breeches with the
yellow stripe, the glint of the brass buffalo-head collar-badges
were all good to see, just as the smell of tobacco-smoke and
wood-smoke, of heated men and frosty air when the door was
opened were good. Kirk felt happy and restless, enjoying the
sense of life, of shelter from the great Outside, and wondered
when he would see the woman. She was squaw, someone said,
of Olafssen, a huge Swede who had just mushed in from
Hershel and had been allowed to camp in the potato-shed because of the strong cold.

Presently they were playing cards and Kirk, who had learned in many lands, took all Olafsson’s spare cash. The man stood up, a grotesque hairy creature in bright mackinaw coat and leather chaps such as the Indians use.

“You do it a-purpose,” he cried. “You give me back.”

“Come and take it,” suggested Kirk, grinning.

Olafsson came, and it took five men to separate them and return the Swede to his potato-shed. Orange said severely:

“You’ll get yourself killed some day, Regard?”; and when, a little later, they had all gone out about their business, Kirk sat over the blazing fire and wondered if he would mind very much.

Excitement had died down now. He was tired and, for the moment, out of a job. The others had whitefish to thaw out for the dogs’ suppers, wood to haul from the pile, the water-butts to fill with snow. They had detail work to do in the office, and a breed who had stolen another man’s cache—very nearly a capital offence in the North—to be visited in the cells. Only for Kirk there was nothing. In the red firelight and the dim yellow of the lamplight he slouched luxuriously in the big chair, blowing idly into his flute.

“It’s a long, long way to Tipperary,” the music ran, and he thought: “It’s a durn sight longer road to Content. Wonder if there is such a place anywhere.”

From the kitchen door came an ecstatic grunt and Kirk looked up to see Olafsson’s squaw standing with a steaming kettle in her hand. He continued to play, watching her from the corners of his bright eyes. In this rugged place she looked absurdly young—sixteen at a guess. Her black hair had a curl in it, her thick lips were warm red instead of the usual brown and her hands delicious small bunches of puddiness. Step by step she came near, the kettle dribbling, paused by his chair with a finger in her mouth.
"I Ooket," she whispered, shyly.

"Are you, now? You're a mighty pretty girl, Ooket."

Ooket giggled. She took her damp finger from her mouth and touched his cheek with it.

"I be liking you," she remarked.

"You're not the first, my dear, though they're not all so ready to say so." He caught the little fat finger and smiled at her. "And yet I'm not much like Olafsson, you know."

"I don't be liking him."

Steps sounded in the kitchen. She pulled free and vanished, while the cook, on the trail of the dribbling kettle, followed with maledictions. Kirk went on blowing idly into his flute and thinking. The girl had undoubtedly been missionary-taught and would have been missionary-married. What a lot of harm those fellows did under their earnest and impossible struggle for purity and righteousness. Left to herself Ooket would have stayed with her kind; been swapped back and forth, possibly, and none the worse for it. Now . . . the Lord help her.

During the time the Patrol spent at Macpherson Kirk did not in any way assist the Lord. When Ooket showed a desire to enter his amusements he did not prevent her, partly from indifference and partly from the pleasure of angering Olafsson who complained to everyone but Kirk. Since their fight he had not cared to interfere personally with Kirk.

"Well, get right along with her and don't talk any more nonsense," said Boone, Sergeant in charge, at last. "You can't blame a man if he will pass the time o' day with her, 'pecially since she has a rather coming-on disposition, like most Injun girls. You get off with her right now, Olafsson."

"I go wi' de Dawson Patrol," said Olafsson, sullenly.

"All right. They're leaving in the morning." Boone looked down the long yard dim with blue mist where the loaded and covered sleds lay like seals on the tramped snow. A few men were still at work, blowing on their fingers as they thrust the stiffened hide-lacings through the eye-holes of the canvas-
covers, and from the corral came the barking of the dogs, answering a coyote somewhere back along the river. "Regard's goin' too, you know, so you've only yourself to blame if you find more trouble."

"Don' like Regard," said Olafsson.

His English was poor and he confined himself to short sentences. He stood like a clumsy animal in his furs, peering with small eyes. In his red pendant ears the round brass rings worn by many sailors seemed ridiculous, Boone thought. He said sharply:

"Well, an' I guess he don't like you any, neither. You kip out of his way."

Emerson, the Dawson Sergeant who had awaited the Patrol at Macpherson, had bought there a team of young dogs which Kirk was to drive back. He had trouble in starting them, and the Patrol, accompanied by Olafsson's outfit, was already out of sight before he mushed off down the river, leaning against the light wind as though he loved it, running beside the big Labrador team like a hare.

"He'll have to quit that when he gets along a piece," said a Corporal, watching. But the cook laughed, going back to his pans. "Reckon he won't quit till he's caught up on Ooket," he thought.

Kirk had no intention of quitting. He never loved loneliness, and the world was enormous to-day, with a diffused light that perverted distance, bringing near the sullen mountains until they seemed to stoop, lending an interested ear for his coming, and removing as though they fled in fear the little spruces beside the river although he could plainly smell their piney fragrance. Before him the trail where so many runners had passed wound steel-grey and he felt a curious reluctance to follow it. Grim and bare-toothed as a trap it looked, with the life that gave it meaning out of sight ahead among the snow-swollen heights and hollows.

Now the Fort with its warmth and jollity was sunk behind
and in all the vast and motionless universe there was nothing but the tiny black bunch of specks that was a dog-team and Kirk Regard. Thinking this Kirk was on his guard immediately. A man must not make these comparisons among mountains. Mountains were too strong. They took advantage unless one was of the elect and earth-bound like the prospector or animal-bound like the lone hunter. Kirk was neither. He needed humanity with him to ward-off the unconscious dread of the unseen that always lay darkly in his heart, but with a mate there was nowhere he would not go. Seeking his mates now he hurried up the dogs, fancying that in this silence his voice fell back on him like a stone, and choking down that fancy. He would surely overtake the Patrol before nightfall. Surely they would wait.

Among the great splayed marks of snowshoes he saw occasionally the prints of Ooket's light moccasined feet and, defying the silence, sang love-songs to them, feeling that he challenged Olafsson. When they all sat together over the camp-fires that night he would sing them again:

"Egypt! If you don't want me,
Why will you haunt me
The way you do!"

But he had almost forgotten what Ooket looked like already.

With a preoccupied air the mountains drew shadows about their feet. Their heads never ceased to watch him. Occasionally they sighed. It grew colder. The pallid lights thinned and faded. In the shadows the dogs stumbled and whined. They were unused to his handling and would not steady down. Kirk accepted the inevitable and made camp in a clump of balsams for the night. Like every man he had food for himself and his dogs, but without a tent a long trek would be impossible and the Patrol must certainly wait for him tomorrow. Even now, around their fires, they would be listening, expecting him to trek in. Nervously his tired limbs went tense
at the thought. He half rose. Maybe he could do it yet. But the
black hollows ahead forbade, and he pulled the sleeping-bag
over his head again.

It was the next mid-day before he found the cold ashes of
the Patrol camp, and the sight drove him into sudden frenzy.
He leapt along, lashing his team and shouting, with the crazy
echoes flinging back from the sheer ironstone heights and
rumbling off over the snowfields. Along the glacier-tops the
sun was busy with javelins, stabbing and jabbing here and
there as if seeking someone to kill. Kirk’s sled, bouncing along
the frozen trail, would be an attractive mark. . . .

Presently he found himself talking aloud. “The silence,” he
said, “is excessive. With a good deal less of it there would
still be too much.” Then he caught himself up. If twenty-
four hours could do this to him what would twenty-four days
do? But that, of course, was unthinkable. If the Patrol did
not wait at the next camp he would turn back. But it must
wait, was probably waiting now. Certainly he would sit at
their camp-fires that night. The grade was steep and the
frozen trail slippery and uneven, so that he could not make
such good time as the Patrol had done. He pushed on
feverishly, urging the dogs; and slowly the long shadows
drew up the long valleys and the intense hush deepened, and
only the mountains seemed waiting in their age-long patience
for the passing of this ephemeral life which dared intrude
upon their reverie.

Kirk was exhausted, the blood throbbing in his ears when
he made camp at last in the sheer darkness; coaxed a small fire
out of a few willow-sticks and some moss and thawed out the
whitefish for the dogs. They fell on the food, snarling. The
snarling increased in his ears until it was the ancient cries of
creatures heaving out of chaos, turning amid all this sullen
negation of life upon themselves in a terrified fury of destruc-
tion. Memories that lie sunk in the brain-cells of us all were
stirring; the insensate brutishness of flesh, the power of
winds, the cruelty of seas and rivers, the stealthy approach of the unseen. He had a sudden fear of looking over his shoulder; looked defiantly and saw nothing. Now it was at the other shoulder...

He began to sing ribald songs until the beat in his ears was a crazy jazz. He steeped himself in hot and lusty thoughts, warding off that silent pressure about him. He called up the dogs and wrestled with them in a passion to get his hands on something alive. With the first dimness of dawn he was off again, following Ooket’s footmarks among the snowflakes beginning to fall. He had a furious feeling that Ooket owed him something because, nearer the wild than he, she would know none of its terrors.

The snow fell, wavering, reluctant, as though hesitating to soil itself with earth. At first Kirk cursed it, shook his fist at it, spat tobacco-juice upon its whiteness. Then, as he tired, a strange peace slowly possessed him. The jazz band died to the melody of the distant flutes; the drifting flakes took gracious shapes, had gleams of light as though unseen hands attended him with delicate tapers. There were rosy tints among the white, like the heaped masses of flowers—rhododendrons, azaleas—he had once seen in Kew Gardens. Their faint fragrance was in his nostrils and that immortal music in his ears. He felt himself climbing through clouds to the crest of heaven; giant-strong and secure. But there was still something to be done. He did it, with an effort, for his voice was blurred.

“Lord,” he said, “I’m a sinful man.” And went on, rocking with weariness; now seeing the crystal wings of angels and now rivers of blood. All day he climbed, stiffened with cold, but still the dim peace held him. The trail had grown very faint and thin, yet it led him on, and it must have been midnight when he staggered into a sudden dark bluff of trees and saw a little red blink of fire in the heart of it.

He fell by the fire, forgetting even his dogs; and when a cup was put to his lips at last he said vaguely: “Who is it?”
Somebody giggled, and he looked to see Ooket crouched over him like a small animal in her furs and about them both the dark trees standing sentinel. She chattered explanation but it took him some time to grasp that she and Olafssen had left the Patrol at the last camp. The trail he had followed since dawn had been theirs alone. He began to laugh.

"Why for?" demanded Ooket.

"Oh, nothin'. Ways back I thought I was Christian climbin' out of the slough, that's all. Where's Olafssen?"

"He going after caribou. I feeding your dogs, Kirk. Now I feeding you."

"Why did he leave the Patrol?"

"S'pose it me," she answered, peeping through her fingers. "It would be." He stared at her. "And when he turns up it will be you again. I'm in a nice mess now. You little devil."

"Wah, wah," cried Ooket, outraged. She flung her arms round him. "I loving you, Kirk. I having very loving blood, me."

In her natural setting between the flame-flicker and the dark pines she was touched with enchantment. Kirk reached his lips to kiss her and almost in the act he slept again.

A blizzard beat the trees without when he woke, and such dawn as there was no more than made manifest the dark pines clotted with snow and the mighty fire where the huskies lay and Ooket was cooking bacon.

"Now we eating an' then we kissing," she said, cheerfully.

Kirk rose, shaking the stiffness from his limbs. He inspected his team, but Ooket had cared for them. He looked out through the thick defence of spruces to the whirling snow and then returned to the tent-fly stretched between branches by the fire.

"Well... I guess it's him an' me for it now. I can't go back and I can't go on for I don't know this trail. Damn you, Ooket."
"I hoping he no come back," said Ooket, wiping greasy fingers on her furs.

"Yes, I know your morals all right. How'd we reach Dawson without him?"

"I knowing the trail. Injun trail. More short'n Patrol trail."

"The deuce you do!" Kirk was startled. This, then, was the trail which the Police had sought for years. The trail which Ferguson of Herschel and his men had lost their lives over a few years back. "How long this way?"

"Not knowing. Fif . . . twelf . . . ten days perhaps."

"You Injuns never have any notion of time. Eat and sleep when there's food. Trek when there isn't. That's all life means to you."

He spoke savagely, venting his dismay on the woman as Adam did, as Lucifer presumably did, if we had the rights of that story. Through the day he was anxious and sullen, repelling Ooket and keeping his loaded Remington near at hand. Olafsson, no doubt, would shoot at sight, but it behoved Kirk to get his shot in first. And he must not shoot to kill, although Olafsson would have no such qualms.

The blizzard continued. It seemed to be in Kirk's brain, bewildering him. "It ain't fair," he said, several times, disclaiming responsibility. But in his heart he knew that it was quite fair. The angels he had invoked, had led him safely down his chosen path, but they were under no obligation to attend him further. As the second night drew in and Ooket became more urgent he knew that they did not so attend him.

"I hating Olafsson. Well, you know how it is, Kirk. He making me cross all taimen I no liking be cross," she leaned to him with her dark fathomless eyes, the heritage of those centuries of cunning and patience which are the lot of the Indian woman. "Well, now, Kirk; s'pose you shooting Olafsson when him coming? Then I going Dawson with you all right."

"Maybe that's the morals of most women if they had the
spunk to say it. I guess I've done enough shootin' in my time, though. Nor I don't want to be bumped off by the Mounties for it, neither."

"Me never telling," said Ooket. She leaned against him, yawning. "I making up fire an' we go to bed," she said.

On the third day the storm passed and the sky was a clear pale-blue and the air like crystal. Kirk walked to a deep undercurrent of a sound that was not wind and ran out to the edge of the drifted snow to see a herd of caribou feeding up the opposite hill. He could hear clearly the stroke of the sharp hoof as it cut away the snow to bar the grey succulent reindeer-moss and the loose rattle of horns as the heads moved. The yellowish-dapple coats stood out like dirty smudges on the dead white of the snow and he ran back for his rifle. Fresh meat was probably going to save their lives now. He dropped a buck with his first shot, and the slow feeding movement became a lumbering rush as the herd raced down the valley in a cloud of snow that flew up like dust. Kirk went back complacently to Ooket.

"I'll take out the sled," he said, and then a sudden growling of the dogs turned him to see Olafssen stepping into the clearing.

"Wah, wah," remarked Ooket with a gesture that flung hope beyond the stars.

Olafssen fired at once. He had a full clip, and one bullet took the tip of Kirk's ear and another drilled his sleeve before Kirk could get his Remington up. Then there were no more shots, for Olafssen crumpled slowly without a word and lay at Kirk's feet.

"Wah, wah," whimpered Ooket like a coyote-pup. She crept to Olafssen, poking him with a soft finger. "Him going off dead," she announced with satisfaction.

"Dead my eye," said Kirk. He knelt, moving hurried hands over the still body. But he had seen too much death not to know it at once. The dogs moved about, stiff-legged and with
hackles up, scenting blood. Ooket stood up, brushing the snow from her furs.

"Him going off dead all right. Now we going Dawson," she said, cheerfully.

Kirk sat back on his heels staring. His attitude and tilted brows gave him something the appearance of a satyr, but he was a very distressed and rather frightened man. He had not meant to kill, but skill and instinct had been too strong. And now Olafssen was dead and he must go into Dawson and say so. He had very little pity for Olafssen. If the man had been a better shot it would have been Kirk who lay there . . . but Olafssen would have had more justification. Kirk saw already that his own plea would not be so simple. What was he doing in Olafssen’s camp, this man who had never been known to lose a trail?

"Now we going off Dawson," chuckled Ooket.

Kirk glanced up at her. "Is that all you care?" He had a sudden crazy desire to laugh. It was for this little bitch that a man was dead and the life—almost certainly the liberty—of another man in danger. "Oh, hell," he said warily, getting up. He had no thought of evading issues. His everyday unconscious building-up of character had rather inclined him to rush on them. He felt that impulse now.

"Well, get busy," he said to Ooket. "He’s crow-bait all right and we’ll have to plant him. Where’s that shovel?"

"Ground too hard. Leaving him for the wolves," suggested Ooket, looking down on the dead face already frozen into its scowl of hatred.

"Well, by gum! I’d like to raise a little hell around you, my lady. Maybe it’d do you good. Here . . . get out of my way if you don’t want me to step on you."

"Wah, wah . . ." Ooket threw herself on Kirk and was received by a cuff on the ear.

"Can’t you wait till he’s cold? Gosh, I don’t wonder the missionaries get sick sometimes, seeing some of the material
they have to deal with. Well . . . go away from me if you don’t like it. Where’s that shovel?”

Even as Ooket he knew that Yukon soil freezes from three to four feet down in winter; but this pile of stones brought down by a long-past avalanche would at least give protection from the wolves. He worked furiously, clearing a trough, and when he came back Ooket had wrapped the dead man in his blanket and was striking the tent. She smiled at Kirk. His slap had pleased her better than Olafsson’s jealous pawings, and she felt that she had achieved all the morality the Mission could have wished for by not considering Kirk as her husband while Olafsson lived.

“You my ’usbin now,” she said, happily.

Kirk made no answer. The full current of his blood was directed toward the present. It was late when the maimed and ghostly ceremonial was over, but he would not spend the night near that dark cairn in the pines. Grimly he broke trail under Ooket’s direction, sweating his devils out as best he might, and grimly he discouraged her over the camp-fires every night. The ghost of Olafsson did not stalk between them, for the times had used him to blood and slaughter in his youth. But other companions came. Companions that have walked with man out of the blind past and will go with him into the blind future, tormenting, staying him with all the long-begotten and forgotten knowledge of the centuries.

“If they shut me up for killing Olafsson I shall go mad,” he said, knowing it quite surely. There were times when he could not bear the control of a hand. “Unless Ooket tells no one’d ever know,” he said, watching her tramping ahead down the level of the valley. The trail was less difficult than that of the Patrol; the white walls and passes not so steep, the way more generous of trees. But he calculated that they must now be far behind the Patrol, and when they struck the route again who was to know they had ever been off it? Unless Ooket told. . . .
Still the mighty concourse of mountain-giants watched him, but he could defy them now. It was unaccountable the difference that Ooket made there, and yet it was true. He was all man now, with a man's hot life and longings and a man's dread of death. When they came at last to the Patrol route he had made up his mind and all the turbulence of his blood spoke for him when he sat the matter before Ooket at the mid-day halt.

"I know just where we are now, Ooket. Not ten miles out of Dawson. We mustn't come in together, you know, or we'll both be put in gaol."

"Wah, wah," said Ooket, startled. She had been much depressed by his treatment on the trail. But it was the way of men to be brutal then, and she was still ready to be friends. "But I want you for my 'usbin."

"I couldn't be your husband if we were jugged. And that's what would happen. No. We must part now, my girl, and if ever you let out a chirp about this you'll have all the Mounties in Yukon after you with claws. See?"

"I must talk," protested Ooket, dropping her strip of pemmican.

"Sure. I'll tell you what to talk. Now, listen. There'll be Indians passing all the time now, and you'll go into Dawson with them. And you'll say you quarrelled with Olafssen and he went off. And as he didn't come back you went on alone. That's safe and sense. You're not to bring me in. You never saw me on the trail. Remember that."

Ooket sat sulkily silent. Kirk went over and relaced the lashing on his sled. Coming down a frozen creek to the right was a straggling handful of Indians on their way to Dawson. He hurried back.

"Ooket! I don't want to mess up your thoughts—if you have any. But I want to know if you understand."

"I never seeing you," said Ooket, crossly. "And Olafssen not coming back. If I say seeing you you go in prison."
“Sure. And you too. We’d never see each other again.”

“Wah, wah. We seeing each now, Kirk?”

“Sure. Some day. Now, on you go and join those nitches comin’ down that draw. I shall beat it. They musn’t see me.”

He drew a long breath as she mushed obediently away. He had no fear of Oooket, for your true Indian always prefers not to tell, even without a reason. Those imponderable ranges would keep their secret, although the Police might—and would—inquire for Olafsson later. No white man knew that trail and what an Indian found on it he would keep to himself. When Kirk reached Dawson he had only to tell the Patrol that he’d fallen in with Indians and come on with them. “I’m safe,” he said, turning back on the trail until the Indians were past. It was, he felt, as simple as all that.

He mushed into Dawson two nights later, passing with another knot of hunters by the Klondyke with its heaps of shingle monstrous under the moon, and so up to the Barracks. He felt older and yet in some way stronger than when he had left the town. He had had his wrestle with Fate and beaten her, and a strange excited defiance was on him still.

Plume met him at the door; peered beyond him; stared.

“My! You’ve made quick time,” he said. “Killed off the others, have you?”

“What d’you mean? Aren’t they here?”

“Nary one of ’em. How should they? You’re two days ahead of schedule. What the—— Gosh A’mighty, Regard! You’ve found that Injun trail! I might ha’ guessed you would. And the others wouldn’t try it, eh? Well, son; you will lead the Patrol over it next year sure’s you live. Say. . . . What you laughin’ at that way? . . .”
Chapter Three

Along the Yukon rivers civilization usually begins with the gaunt brown wood-piles that feed the steamers. Around them accretions form gradually in the scrub: a small store, gaudy with tin advertisements, where the Northerner will find a full outfit for his sled and rare tourists buy Indian ‘souvenirs’ occasionally made by the Indians. There will be a Telegraph shack, too, very neat with white-wash, a handful of white-man huts and possibly a Mounted Policeman and a missionary. But these last are luxuries and nowhere to be lightly considered.

Yukon River steamers are glorious with three tiers and brass and paint, and they tow their freight in long brown barges by pushing it ahead up the winding ways. ‘Luxurious accommodation,’ assert the prospectuses, putting the stewards into buttons and supplying the best hotel food along with the toothpicks. And the stewards, pursers and stokers—who may be the sons of prominent citizens getting themselves through the winter University courses by their summer efforts—see to it that all goes well. This is the way to Dawson and the Midnight Sun. This, to many people, is the only Yukon.

But the Yukon where Tamsin lived now was the real Yukon and no other. Men sought it up the Kanana which, like most of the side-streems, is deeper, fiercer and wider than the Yukon River which it supplies. Or up the lonely Pelly or the Stewart or many more, travelling on those small abandoned sisters of the big steamers which are transport reduced to the last simplicities. The Takhina, which served the Kanana, was no more than a rickety oblong box with a lesser box above where the stove-pipe funnel ran through, and a tar-paper roof where passengers sat until the sun stuck them to it while the wood-fuel covered them with smuts if it did not set them afire.
On a hot June day Kirk Regard was sitting among the men on the roof of the Takhina as she came gasping up the Kanana into the little town of Knife strung between the river and the mountains, but Tamsin was not in the eager crowd of whites and Indians who waited on the landing to welcome the mail-bags, the freight, the passengers—all those precious links with the outer world that seemed so far away. Even had she known that Kirk was coming she might not have been there, for to-day she was a rebel against all men since they seemed to think that a woman had nothing to do with her life except marry them. She sat high on the flanks of Tall Thing, that sturdy ironstone mountain which threw its warm shadow sheer across the river at sunset and told herself with her natural honesty that it could be for three things only that she was considered so valuable.

First, she was the one white girl in a hundred miles, and that, to the ordinary male meant much. Her father was a rich man. Jerry Hales and Shock Thompson would want her for that. And she could cook, which to lonely men who live out of tins perhaps meant most of all. “But I will be damned,” she said with as much bitterness as she ever came by, “if I mean to be married for those reasons.”

She sat with chin in hands, gradually discarding her troubles and letting the peace of this, her chosen world, absorb her. MacDonald had always called her a pagan, and assuredly to her this great splendour of lakes and rivers and mountains where man could make no mark had for her a half life of its own. She felt it when a sudden stir of wind ran in the grasses like a throbbing heart, when a sudden burst of sunlight through a cloud seemed bringing a definite message from heaven to the earth and to herself. And when the dark hills shook with thunder, and the lakes whipped into foam, and storm came roaring over the torn trees on the rims of the draws she knew that some reckless miner had driven a pick into the Yukon’s secret Guidman’s Croft and let the Elementals free.
The gods, thought Tamsin—be they few, many or only one is a matter for each man’s liking and for herself she preferred a lot—must be nearer to the humans who stray by twos and threes into their abode than to the humans who throw up around them the dead breastworks of cities and therein clamour and struggle and fight until they could not hear the trumpets of a thousand gods. Sometimes, she knew, when she lay very still with earth’s beating heart against her own, she heard inner whispers, felt inner pulses that were not her own. And then it seemed for an instant that she was near the vital Mystery at the root of all; that she and God and earth were one as they had been in the beginning and might be again if man could ever again become sinless. But there was little chance of that, as she knew from her own tempers.

"I called Stewart a fool," she thought, regretfully. "Now, why need I have done that, for he must have known it anyway."

For two years now she had been keeping off Stewart, that repressed long grey man of the Telegraph whom MacDonald so much admired, and though Stewart had taken her refusal hard MacDonald would take it harder. "Why," cried Tamsin, "can’t they let me alone? I’m not beautiful, but I might at least be allowed to go by myself and think beautiful things."

She looked a big girl, sitting in the sunlight on the broad hill like Gudrun or some other Norseman goddess, and the great knot of her rich bronze hair was untidy and her blue overall and large kindly mouth berry-stained. Her grey eyes, half-veiled by their full white lids and often fiery, were dreaming now while silence builded above her its quiet roof of peace. Far down the river seemed of a quality more buoyant than air. Great skies of tinted cloud swam in it, and bare ruddy hills patched with flowers. There were flowers about her, under her strong, quiescent hands: little grey anemone-ghosts, golden cups of the rock cistus, pale bluebells in the red-top grass, water-avons like slim maids caught at bathing where a narrow creek ran among mossy logs, and three tall amber columbines
standing together, trembling a little like winged fairies under a spell.

Tamsin cast herself flat to kiss the feet of the columbines, and far above her sounded faintly the half-triumphant, half-frightened twitter of small birds flying North to their mating on the flowery tundras near the Pole. Swan and wavey flew before the dawn, but these tired little travellers would be whitethroat sparrows, waxwings, the lesser swallows... Tamsin’s heart began to fly suddenly with their tiny wings. High on their airy ways she felt herself go with them into the Great Silence, and lay awhile, losing the cares of earth, knowing the glory of the eternal for one transcendent moment. Then she got up with a long sigh as though dragged back by the hair from where she would be, took up her lard-pail of blueberries and came leaping down through the tough juniper-roots secure as a wild goat.

Stewart, the grey lonely man, saw her come as he trudged back to his Telegraph shack, and thought of some bright fleet ship getting out on adventurous seas, of laughter and glad wild shouts. But she had said that all this was not to be for him, so he took from the shelf in the shack a telegram that had been waiting for Kirk Regard and gave it to the young man as he came up the boardwalk between Aggie and Mat Colom.

The old folk clung to Kirk with a pathetic joy which shamed him. He forgot how many years since he had seen them, but it was not since he returned from the war. Aggie was fatter, redder and more quarrelsome than ever, but Mat had faded from his high colour and big bullying ways into a grey soft acquiescence and a gentle wistful voice.

“You sure have grewed a fine man, Kirk,” he was saying. “It was me made a man o’ you, you know. You was headed all wrong till I took holt. I sure leathered the devil outer you, boy, I guess.”

“For the land’s sake!” screamed Aggie. “Picking on the
child the minute he’s got his feet ashore. . . . Here’s Mr. Stewart, Kirk.”

By now Kirk had met all Knife—except Tamsin, and already he was wondering why he had obeyed the sudden impulse which brought him here. During the long journey by the Yukon steamer and the small snuffling Takhina he had had much time to think and his thoughts had been uneasy.

When Ooket came into Dawson without Olafsson the Police, whose duty it was, asked questions, and Ooket’s dull wits trapped her into admissions that they had parted on the secret Indian trail. Why then, demanded the Police, had Regard not seen them? But Kirk, having denied all knowledge of them, could not retreat now. “Likely there’s a shorter way yet. Make Olafsson take you next year,” he said, and so silenced them for the time. But a ricked knee kept him in Dawson, where he grew further entangled with Dierdre and had to let another man take over his Guiding contracts. And so, when the rivers opened, he fulfilled a foolish and but half-confessed desire to have Tamsin rock his head in her arms again, and came up the grey turbulent river through the wild passes to Knife.

He read the Dawson telegram with Aggie clucking at his ear. It said: “If Olafsson doesn’t come in expect you to lead us this winter,” and was signed from the Barracks. He crushed it up, saying violently:

“No. I said No before. Tell ’em again.”

“You must write out the message, Mr. Regard.”

“Oh!” Kirk felt himself redden under the surprised eyes. “Oh! Sure. I’ll bring it along presently. That’ll be time enough?”

“Certainly. No hurry, I imagine.”

Kirk silently damned the fellow and his stare, going on between the chorusing Coomos to the jumble of poles, netting and outhouses of the fox-farm. The Indian village was just beyond, among the ragged poplars and saskatoons, and the
place smelt badly. Kirk, made nervous by the whole atmosphere, became very jocular.

But Stewart, walking up to Miss Tinney’s Rest-house for supper, was pondering over the young man’s manner while he sat down by Challis, the Mounted Policeman, and waited for the burly Indian girl to surround his plate with little dishes. Regard had looked so startled, lost his geniality so quickly that one might almost suspect fear. He asked Challis:

“Know anything of the Dawson Patrol Route, Challis?”

“Why . . . there was a man lost on or near it last winter, I believe. His squaw came into Dawson saying he’d left her. Probably she murdered him. Lord,” cried Challis, enviously, “some fellows have all the luck. If there is anything to discover it’s not yours truly will get a look-in, and I would give my soul for a thumping good murder-case.”

Challis wanted promotion so as to go Outside and marry the girl he was engaged to. Steward said dryly, working his lean jaws over tough caribou-meat:

“First one I hear of I’ll let you in velvet.”

Had that been fear in Regard’s eyes? He would not confess to himself that he was already jealous of this bronzed handsome fellow with the military crispness still lingering about the natural ease of the mountaineer: but warm splendid youth was so likely to succeed where his own stiff age had failed, and he was sore and dizzy yet with the refusal he had been hoping against for years. He loved Tamsin, he felt, as no younger man could love her; and when in his shack he got out his books on Free Thought and settled down to study he could not do it. Every lonely man in the North must attach himself mentally to something—Economics, chess, religions—or go mad. Stewart, who had wasted his powers in his time, was trying to make up now, but to-night he was only thinking:

“Why did that fellow look like that? He was badly rattled. Was he on that new trail last winter when the man was lost?”
Going round the fox-farm with Mat Colom, Kirk soon recovered his courage and was amazed that he had ever lost it. Of course, since they made such a point of it, he must lead the patrol. It would be easy to avoid the bluff, and once he had gone through with it the spectre would be laid. His natural boldness rose again above his imaginings, and he could listen to old Mat and feel the comfort of home and love sink into him.

Kirk never knew that it was the episode on the Kluane which had driven Mat to religion. By stripes he had tried to drive Kirk the same way until Kirk ran off with the Game Guides, and then he had sent out to Vancouver for "religious books." The bookseller, from a sense of humour or a desire to rid himself of old stock, had given him Samuel Butler and the mystic William Blake, and even with the Bible which Tamsín had added to save him from dementia Mat found it hard going. Among the tall nesting-boxes and the drifts of yellow sand masking the burrows he was wistfully voluble.

"Not all I'd like 'em to be, they ain't. You're a good boy, Kirk, an' I learned you, but it don't seem like I cud learn them foxes. The Great Blake say one law for the ox an' the lion is oppression, so I ain't goin' by any law in their feedin' since. Mebbe cross-feedin' will breed cross-foxes. I don't reckon anyone ever thought o' that."

Kirk looked at the graceful creatures flicking in and out of their burrows. Disfigured as they were naturally by the bare patches and brown felt lumps of their summer moult he could not tell their value, but with something of his affection for the old man he tried to console him. Mat shook his head.

"You 'member Jacob's precept of the peeled wands and the ring-straked, boy? But he weren't out for silvers, mebbe, an' I didn't get one, and Aggie took the wands for staking her peas.... I wouldn't go in that yard. The vixen's a terror. I calls her Ololon arter Blake's Daughter of Inspiration,
for I never knows what she will do next. Killed all her pups las’ year, she did . . .”

“Yes,” said Kirk, absently. He thought of Tamsin, but supper was half over before Aggie in the midst of her scandals came on Tamsin’s name, saying in her noisy clattering way:

“My! I jest hope MacDonald’s going to have luck with her, but ’tain’t likely. I guess she’ll come to trouble the way she’s heading now.”

“Tamsin’s a good girl,” said Mat, raising mild eyes from his beans and bacon. “You’ll like her, Kirk. She’s gen’rous-minded.”

“Yep, You’re as bad as the rest,” snapped Aggie. “No man has any sense when she’s around making eyes. They’s jest six white women in Knife an’ all married but her. That’s what’s wrong with Tamsin. Well; the foxes are a poor lot, ain’t they, Kirk? Mat’ll never git anywheres wi’ anything. Always lost more’n he made.”

“I ain’t lost you, Aggie,” murmured Mat. “An’ I have often been permitted ter see the atmosphere o’ falsehood which exhales from hell.”

“What’s that you’re saying, you old heathen?”

“Jest quotin’ the Great Blake. Hell’s all right. It’s in the Bible.”

“An’ it’s meant to stay there, I guess,” retorted Aggie, but she was silenced. Her husband’s excursions into metaphysics always daunted her a little, and the quiver of Mat’s left eyelid gave Kirk a new idea of him. The old fellow had not become such a fool as he looked.

“Tamsin an’ me,” said Mat proudly, “we’re huntin’ the Truth together. I guess that’s nothin’ never goin’ to be a mite of use to a man without he’s hunted it and found it hiself. It don’t stay with him else. Me and Tamsin . . .”

“For the land’s sake!” cried Aggie, flouncing off to the kitchen: “I do get my ears full of your Tamsin and then some.”
Mat rolled to his feet and got his pipe out. He said gently:

"Now, boy, we'll go around to the store an' see her."

MacDonald was very busy with the new freight which came by the Tatkinia. He had a light plough and some farm implements to bring up as well, and there was a crate of chickens for Mrs. Sheridan, who followed Sheridan with the loaded barrow, crying triumphantly:

"Fresh eggs at four dollars each this winter. You'll see."

"I'll buy Tamsin one for Christmas," shouted MacDonald: but he was half through his unpacking in the dusky store before she came in very quietly, and by then he was a little anxious.

"Whaur hae ye been, lassie?" he asked with unusual tenderness. Tamsin said sternly:

"What this town wants is a Young Ladies' Seminary."

"For the love of Mike!" cried MacDonald, nearly dropping his pipe.

"Then perhaps I'd have some peace. Feyther . . . look."

She stood before him with head bowed and both her thumbs turned down. It was her general way of announcing her rejection of someone, but to-night she was so meek that MacDonald sat back on his heels and stared. Twigs and mosses clung to her hair and her blue overall. There were faint smudges suggesting tears on her fair-skinned face. Those thumbs were berry-stained. Tamsin had been on the hills expiating some secret guilt. He cleared his throat nervously.

"Tamsin, it . . . it wouldn't by any chance happen to be Stewart this time, would it?"

"Well, that's what I thought," said Tamsin, rueful and apologetic. "But it just went and was."

MacDonald turned back to the apple-barrels in silence. Not until now did he realize how strongly he had built on that douce wise-like callant for Tamsin instead of one of these lightsome rootless young springs who would drag her so carelessly through the usual morasses of life. He ventured:
“Ye’re sure? Mebbe . . . wi’ anything sudden like that a maid . . .”

“He’s been equally sudden for two years now. All but the words, and they were few enough.” She hastily repressed a giggle. This, she could see, was serious. She knelt by MacDonald among the straw, bringing her fresh warm lips close. “Feyther dear,” she coaxed. “Kiss your Tamsin, feyther de-ar.”

“Kirk’s come,” said MacDonald, his words expressing more than he knew.

Tamsin turned scarlet and rose hastily. Upset already, she felt indignantly that this was just too bad. For Kirk, her unforgotten boy-lover of the Kluane, she had always felt that she would need especial preparation. A great lonely glorious day on the hills, perhaps, with the scent of pines, the majesty of clouds, the sweep of immortal distances impregnating her with their divine and serene vagrancy. Ugly stories of Kirk had drifted up the Kanana, humiliating that delicate instinct which had kept him so long among the true loves of her childhood, and with youth’s insatiable desire to reform the world she had seen herself reforming Kirk. Now sudden reaction made her feel vicious; and when Mat Colom brought Kirk in with the air of one ushering the Prince of Wales, Tamsin, her back to the wall in more senses than one, was prepared to be difficult.

“So you’re back from the war at last,” she greeted him civilly.

His bright dark eyes were on her steadily. Weighing her, Tamsin knew. Finding her wanting, she bitterly hoped. He capitulated, easily.

“Oh, I knew I should have come three years ago. I’ve no excuse.”

“They expected you.”

“Dear old souls.” He was smiling now, prepared to be friendly, leaning an elbow on the counter. “Never mind them.
You've not changed so much, Tamsin. You always had a pretty voice.”

“Oh, hell,” exploded Tamsin, with an intensity that alarmed herself. “I've had all I want of that talk for one day.”

His eyes opened. They seemed a bright flame, enquiring, searching—especially searching.

“Sorry,” he said, deferentially. Too deferentially, she felt. He was putting it on, both manner and words. This was not the natural Kirk. He made a slight salute with his hand and went back to Mat Colom, and Tamsin, serving an old Indian woman with a packet of cereal, tried to keep her eyes from him and could not.

He, too, had not changed so much. The same narrow hips and springy walk and bare brown throat and high-held bare black head. He had not dressed the part, like the Takhina's spruce engineer. He was the Kirk of the woods still, in his loose brown shirt and belted trousers and gay mackinaw. No. That was wrong. He had changed. On him were marks of indelible change. “He's experienced. He knows it all,” thought Tamsin in rebellious dismay at her own ignorance. Silently beginning to put up her defences she made out a long list for horse-faced old Miss Timney who kept her 'Rest-house for Travellers' from becoming a rough-house by means of hands like flat-irons and a heart as big as all Knife.

In the dim light of the oil-lamps the old log store hummed with life. Miners moved about, chewing, jesting. Indian children came with noiseless feet below many layers of dingy petticoats. Sheridan, the hawk-nosed American hunter who killed for the district, came, buying a thin-bladed sheath-knife. Challis came, a sudden scarlet tanager in the gloom. Prospectors came for groceries out of the pork-barrels and sacks camped like red-brown cinnamon bears in the corners. Kirk sat on a distant barrel, watching Tamsin, amused to know that she was acutely conscious of his eyes. He forgot
that something humble and young and frightened in him
had so lately wanted the help of her strong spirit. He remem-
bered that he was a man and wanted her kisses and meant
to have them. For so long he had deliberately lowered his
values that he saw nothing but a physically desirable Tamsin,
firm, fair, pliant, a little untidy, a great deal challenging.

Mat Colom ambled over to speak to Tamsin of Kirk. His
literature had soaked through him so completely that the least
squeeze dripped something of it as a sponge drips water.
The present squeeze was bringing out the Prodigal Son.

“But he never prodigaled over much, Tamsin. He’s a good
boy. I orter know. I raised him. It took doin’, but I sure did
it.”

“I haven’t noticed him stealing anything,” admitted Tam-
sin, feeling that Kirk would know how well her figure looked
as she lifted her arms to set up a row of Royal Dominion
Ammunition cartons on the shelf, and glad that he should
know. With every ounce of herself she was being defiant,
and he would know that, too. Then, suddenly ashamed,
suddenly unhappy, she pleaded headache when asked to spend
the evening with the Coloms ‘and talk to Kirk,’ and went
through into her own house, slamming the heavy door between.

MacDonald, too, was undesirous of talking to Kirk whom he
already saw as a danger. Kirk’s reputation was not good and
Tamsin was strong-willed. He sat smoking while Tamsin
virtuously darned his socks, and more than once he sighed.
An engagement to that douce body, Rab Stewart, would have
set everything right.

In the middle of the night he heard sounds and went
paddling out to the living-room to find Tamsin and a water-
pail. She moved about, a tall strong white girl in her night-
gown, with a shining rope of hair falling far below her waist
and a green pot that dribbled on her stand of flowers in the
window. MacDonald growled:

“Are ye daft, lass?” following up as she turned a flushed
face and the light of grey eyes on him with an anxious: "Are ye sick?"

"I was thirsty," said Tamsin. She looked confused. "Then I remembered that the flowers were. It's too hot to sleep, anyway."

"Tits! But ye must sleep. Ye're washin' the morn, ain't ye?"

"Yes. Perhaps it was thinking of that made me thirsty. Oh, feyther, dear, go back to bed. You need new pyjamas so badly."

Although routed MacDonald momentarily stood his ground.

"I'm not that vexed wi' ye aboot Stewart, lassie."

"De-ar feyther," said Tamsin, non-committally. Her smile was faint. She turned and trickled more water over the dim upturned faces against the glass.

MacDonald returned to his room, dipping himself a drink from the water-butt as he passed through the kitchen. But he could not detach his mind from the feeling that he had somehow interrupted a conference in the living-room. Inexplicably he had the notion that Tamsin sought those warm damp leafy odours of geranium, stocks and balsams for the same stimulation and consolation that she appeared to find in the hills. A wee thing uncanny, his Tamsin, he thought, troubled. Time she was wed . . . if it could only be Stewart.

Although long since worn down to tireless bone and gristle MacDonald could not feel himself old. He had worked stealthily for years to make Tamsin a rich woman, although he did not intend that the young fellows should know it. Dead as the Yukon was just now, with Klondyke petered out and Mayo and the rest hanging on by their eyelids, he was 'grub-stake angel' to a dozen prospectors in the hope that they might 'strike it rich' somewhere. He bred sled-dogs, too, and in the corral behind the house they sometimes barked half the night against the wild coyote-cries in the hills, or May Colom's foxes. He had built his own motor-launch,
and several wood-camps along the Yukon and White Rivers had licences out in his name. Mat Colom he had helped more than once. He had a tenderness for Mat which did not extend to Kirk.

"Damed if I'll have that birkie tak' my Tamsin," he muttered, uneasily conscious that he would surely give her into Kirk's arms himself if Tamsin so desired. He dozed at last, to awake to a flood of bright yellow sunshine and a mocking chorus of whiskey-jacks encouraged, one might almost say led, by Tamsin singing out in the washing-tent.

Tamsin washed that morning as though she punished something which natural pride prevented her from acknowledging to be herself.

"What is it to me?" she said bitterly, out of the steam that cloaked her like a Delphic oracle: "What is it to me if he has come here? He'll be off by the next boat to his pleasures." She wrung out a sheet in firm brown hands, looked darkly on the twisted neck of it and pitched it superbly into the bluening water. Beyond the ragged rose bushes Tall Thing and Barbary Top lifted their stony shoulders against dazzling sky, but this morning Tamsin forewent her morning rite of blowing them kisses. Something in her was repelled at the very thought of kisses. She pegged the clothes out, singing loudly to delude herself; then went to lie, pink and steaming, in the roofless back-verandah where a smoking pail of leaves and grass protected her from the mosquitoes and a few niggardly cottonwoods from the sun.

And here Kirk found her, eating cookies and showing a good deal of the backs of firm white stockings as she lay.

"Howdy," she greeted him carelessly, and pushed over the cookie-plate. Kirk lit a cigarette and sat back against the wall. He was wondering if after all Tamsin was merely a greedy big girl with no style as once she had been a greedy little one. He was wondering if Dierdre wouldn't have been better fun. Maybe he'd marry Dierdre after all. And then he remembered
that fun had never contented him for very long. Nothing contented this mind of his that was apt to get itself into such sweats over imagining things; swarming after-lives, clammy ghost-breathings, soundless whispers, mysterious hauntings by half-forgotten sins and heroisms. There had once been a quality in Tamsin which could turn horrors into glories. He began to talk casually, feeling for it in her rather stiff answers.

"Old Sophia's breed son was killed in the war," said Tamsin. "She has one of those Flander's Poppies broadsheets up in her shack with his photograph pinned on to it. You'd be in Uncle Mat's house just like that if you hadn't come back." She looked at him as though considering whether he wouldn't, on the whole, be better there. "Going to be a rough time for the next generation, isn't it? Too many derelicts left."

"We'll surely do the best we can, I guess," said Kirk, repressing fury.

"Nice kitty," remarked Tamsin, amiably, gazing over the river.

Hot and untidy, she was exhibiting no sex-appeal whatever. Kirk, who had always found all he wanted of that put in his way, was justifiably resentful; began to protest, began to choke. Then he saw that Tamsin had moved the smudge so that the smoke should make him do just that, and began suddenly to laugh.

"Aw right, I give in. You're one up on me now, Tamsin."

"Well," said Tamsin, a little shamed. "I suppose we had to get introduced all over again."

"Fine! Let's shake hands on it." He held hers firmly, slipping down on the verandah beside her. Yes, he thought, a little excited, there was certainly something electric, vital, in the clasp of those strong fingers. Bodily and mentally Tamsin had always been good to hold on to. Casting about for something to seal their friendship he pulled the telegram from his pocket.
"I got to go along an' send an answer d'rectly. What shall I say?"

He watched anxiously while she read. Wandering superstitions in his blood suggested that to make her arbiter might bring him luck, do something. . . . She knit her fair straight brows. Because already she wanted him to stay she knew that she would die rather than let him know it.

"Seem to be quite a pet of theirs, don't you? 'Tisn't everyone would pay for your company, I should guess. Well . . . any reason why you shouldn't go?"

"Oh, lord, no." He laughed jerkily. "Two-three reasons why I should, likely. Seem to be hoodooed onter me, anyways. Well . . . I'll take it along."

It was a full hour before he took it, and then he met Mat Colom ambling along the board-walk in search of him.

"Seems like I can't feel sartin you're here, boy, if I don't see yer some place," he said, disconsolately. "Sam Butler he says as in high philosophy one should niver look at a knife without consid'rin' it also a piece o' string an' vice versa; but I find that blamed hard someways. I can't niver look at no one an' consider it's you, an' do my best I can't niver look at Aggie an' consider she's Tamsin, though I don't deny as life'd be livelier ef I could."

"You think a lot of Tamsin, don't you?" said Kirk, walking beside him. He believed that he would soon think a lot of her himself.

"You bet I do. Tamsin helps me pursue the Truth, boy. It sure is a rough hunt, too. Gits us both down, sometimes."

"The Truth?" said Kirk, absently. Yes, that girl was full of it.

"Pontius Pilate was arter it too. Same old Truth. Dunno ef he ever found it, though I guess it's lyin' around somewhere."

"Why d'you want it? A pretty thorny bed-fellow, I should guess."
“Aggie’s that. But she ain’t the Truth. No, sir. Well, it makes a man yearn to confess his sins, an’ I’m confessin’ right along. Tamsin says I make ’em up, an’ I do allow that after soakin’ in a bit of the Old Testament I’m apt to git goin’ some.” He looked at Kirk shrewdly. “Ef iver you wa’n’t confess, boy, don’t you do it to Tamsin. The Great Blake says as the Spectre is in every man . . . a ravening lust continually. Insane . . . brutish . . .”

“I guess he’s about right. Where’s the Telegraph? I must send a wire and then I’ll be right along to dinner.”

Mat described a circle round the horizon with a wave of his fat arm, and Kirk went off quickly over the flapping boardwalks. Curious how Tamsin had already given him back something of his old security. In uncritical boyhood he had felt that she was fastened firm to a reality at the back of chance and time, and although her old reserves were stronger now she could make him feel it still. He drew a breath of something nearer content than he had known for years. The hot still day about him had a new strange beauty. It smelt of roses, and that was natural, with roses everywhere and the songs of birds. The clear river reflected the great ironstone heights, the blue sky, and it had a song, too. His lips took up the song, putting words to it:

“The Bells of St. Mary’s, Oh, list, they are calling
The young loves, the true loves that come from the sea. . . .”

And that brought him to the door of Stewart’s house where Stewart was sweeping out his room. Stewart felt himself stiffen before this young man’s easy grace and good looks. Kirk asked for a telegraph-form, and Stewart stood, still stiffly, watching him scribble. The sun showered through the door on his black tilted brows and clear brown skin. If Tamsin saw him fresh like that how would she look again at Stewart’s grey-wolf age?

By an effort he kept from comment on reading that wire of
acceptance. But he puzzled over it for an hour. First a violent refusal amounting almost to scare. Now an acceptance leaving no proviso for the return of Olafsson. Kirk had merely wired that he would be in Dawson by the last boat, which almost suggested that he did not expect Olafsson to return. And would he stay here all summer? And what of Tamsin if he did? Desolate loneliness and disappointment had enlarged the attractions of Tamsin in Stewart's eyes, but there is no doubt that she had at that time a queer way of haunting men; coming back to the mind again and again, like memory of a sweet spring evening, a frosty winter’s night. There were lights and darks in her, they said. Not easy to get to the bottom of MacDonald with her pagan love of great mountains and her soft domestic ways with sick animals and little children and old people.

MacDonald’s efforts to get to the bottom of her never came to much. He knew that Kirk had been with her on the verandah; but when he came from the store to the mid-day smell of coffee and fried fish that mixed so deliciously with odours of warm grass and young leaves through the window, Tamsin, although buoyant, did not speak of him.

"Heaps of swan and wavey going over when I began washing," she said, spreading a checked cloth on the kitchen table. "That’s when I love them best... just wild voices dropping out of a grey dawn sky."

"Ye wild lass! I’ll warrent ye’d like to be one of ’em."

"Oh, my, no." Tamsin poured smoking potatoes from the top of the double boiler. "Too much fun down here."

She looked superbly innocent, serene, with her green sleeves rolled down over the round white arms and that great coil of shining hair newly braided. MacDonald thought:

"'Twas nae fun kep’ ye awake the night, I reckon." He said: "Wull we have the Coloms around for supper, Tamsin?"

"That’s a good idea. And we’ll ask the Sheridans and a few more in after. I’ll iron you out a clean shirt. Yes.
Kirk ought to meet people, and they won’t go to Aunt Aggie’s.”

“Show’s their sense. That wumman’s pisen. Poor dear auld Mat. I’m glad ye’re gude tae him, lassie, an’ I hope as Kirk wull be, now.”

He watched the effect of that fly, but Tamsin did not bite. When he had gone she stood in the living-room, looking critically round, trying to see it with Kirk’s eyes. Kirk, accustomed from youth to such grandeur as the Tinky-Tink and hotels Outside, would, Tamsin feared, think it a poor place, for over the furnishing of it she and MacDonald had had their only battle, and it still raged at times. It was MacDonald who insisted on the duck-gun and the Savage sporting-rifle over the door, the bear-skins on the floor, the gaudy Indian fire-bags, hunting-belts and carved hatchets on the walls: and Tamsin had retaliated with heaps of gay cushions, a muslin drape for the cottage piano, a plaster cast of Psyche, chintz curtains, and a yellow silk lampshade. A clash somewhere, she felt forlornly, but she could not give up the Psyche, and MacDonald would not give up the duck-gun.

“Eh! He’ll have to take it or leave it,” she said, decisively, and forgot them both before the room was filled that night.

It was the kind of gay evening Kirk had never known except in the North. They played Spin-the-Plate, with Tamsin telling the ridiculous story of the Caravan Party and every man trying to catch the plate before it fell when his name was said. Kirk was the Dog’s Tail, and Tamsin had him on the floor so often that presently everyone was laughing at him, and even the old prospector in blue dungarees who had ‘happened in’ and sat stilly with moccasined feet planted on a bear-skin, too shy to go or stay, exploded into a shrill He, he. Tamsin sat on the long piano-stool with Mrs. Sheridan, a brisk little woman with bird-eyes and nose. Men called Mrs. Sheridan the Whiskey-Jack, and she was not unlike that quarrelsome bird, but because she was the only person
in Knife who could stand up to Aggie Colom she was usually welcome at parties.

To the warm approval of everyone she had routed Aggie in the first five minutes when Aggie was scolding Tamsin for her frequent visits up to the deserted mining-town of Aroya to see the old doctor who lived there alone.

"First-Aid he teaches you, does he?" cried Aggie. "A girl's First-Aid is to keep herself decent, I guess, and not go around with an arsenic-stick cauterizing Injun warts. And as to the morals of that man . . ."

"Well, I reckon you ought to be pleased," chirped Mrs. Sheridan. "Next time doc. is going to teach her to cauterize tongues, and then there'll be no more of those scandals that worry you so good and plenty, Mrs. Colom."

Aggie, resplendent in purple silk and raw-nugget chain, turned crimson, but she was a little afraid of Mrs. Sheridan, who, she said witheringly, had a man to protect her. Tamsin gathered them all into Spin-the-Plate rather hastily, and MacDonald smoked and considered again the wisdom of letting Tamsin see so much of that queer shifty-eyed old hermit-doctor with the manners and hands of a gentleman. But Tamsin would always do as she thought right, and if she thought it right to learn how to dose sick Indians it was not MacDonald could stop her.

He watched her when Kirk took the flute which had replaced the jews' harp of Kluane days, and played with Tamsin soft simple old melodies. Tamsin's green frock left her firm white arms and neck a little bare; and Kirk, for the first time in store clothes, had a dark slim springy grace that suited well with the warm young lips against the flute and the fire in his dark eyes. Reluctantly he listened to Mar's stertorous whisper at his ear.

"A fine pair, ain't they, Mac? I sure do think they're pretty near as well-matched as ever I see. I have conversed about this wi' the angels, like the Great Blake, an'
I sartinly do like to see them two so understandin' together. Yes, sir."

MacDonald did not. He grunted into his beard, drawing deep breaths on his pipe. He had heard a good deal of Dierdre Cass from the Tahlkina's captain, but he would not hurt old Mat until the time came. And if the time ever came when he and Mat should quarrel he would lay that to Kirk's account, too. As the evening went on he watched Tamsin's changing face and began to fear that there might be much to lay to the account of that young Kirk.

Tamsin, feeling Kirk so near her shoulder, the warmth of his body close to her own, found herself beginning to battle against some strange possession; losing ground, floating out, enchanted yet terrified, on some new stream. In the old classics of the North she heard his voice clear through the rough choruses. They sang Red-Wing:

"The moon shines to-night on pretty Red-Wing,
The breeze is sighing, the night-birds crying.
For afar 'neath his star her brave is sleeping
While Red-Wing's weeping her heart away. . . ."

And now it was:

"The Bells of St. Mary's, Oh, list, they are calling
The young loves, the true loves that come from the sea.
And oh, my beloved, when red leaves are falling
The joy-bells shall ring out, ring out
For you and me."

"Pretty nice, that," cried Mat Colom, clapping his fat hands, and Kirk stooped, smiling into Tamsin's eyes under his thick black brows.

"I'll say it is," he murmured. "Now . . . this one," and they sang:

"With a mate like you, So good and true,
I'd like to leave it all behind, And find
A little grey home in the West . . . ."
Tamsin could bear it no longer. She struck suddenly into nonsense:

"At the Battle of the Nile
We were singing all the while
At the battle of the Nile... ."

The laughing chorus came in with:

"We were singing all the while
At the Battle of the Nile
We were singing all the while... ."

And leaving them all shouting it against each other she escaped to the kitchen to get supper, finding her heart throbbing as though she had run a race.

Supper-rites were always very much the same. Brown cookies on red plates; bread-and-butter on blue. Biscuits and angel-cake and crullers on any she could find. A tall yellow pitcher for the cocoa which would presently boil up richly with the milk; egg-sandwiches . . .

Waiting for the water to boil she opened the netting-door and stepped outside, thankful that Kirk had not followed her, trying to cool her burning cheeks. The tremendous sensation of excitement still held her, and the impact of her tingling live self into this tideless sea of silence that stretched away into eternity gave her a sudden check. She quivered, looking about her. Beyond the rail fence, the vague rusty scrub, the indigo belt of lower woods, Tall Thing was inchoate against dead daffodil sky. His brothers were equally indefinite, lifeless; curve of the zenith was empty lilac scattered with a few pale stars, the draw where she went berrying a black bottomless gash. There was a burnt dry aridity in the air; a smell of lonesomeness.

Her world that she loved was dully denying Tamsin, so that even the tall cache and the tent-rigged wash-house and the familiar pails and pans set upright along the wall seemed overtaken by a numb change, indifferent, obscure. For the
first time she saw the earth as so many people always see it: no triumphant stimulating part of humanity and the certain whole, but an insensate heavy mass of soil and stone with no message for her, no help.

"For mercy's sake, Tamsin," cried Mrs. Sheridan from within. "The kettle's boiling over."

A hand came on her arm, and the man who had so subtly despoiled her of her sanctuary drew her back into the heat of complex life again.
Chapter Four

The hot weeks went by upon the Kanana as summer in the Yukon always goes. All day and far into the night the sun stood in a brassy sky, and under it the men cut and rafted lumber for the wood-piles, painted walls, patched roofs, and cut and dried the water-hay for the winter-feed of their few animals. Under it white women and Indian women were out on the hills, gathering berries—blueberries, raspberries, cranberries, saskatoons—to preserve them for the winter-feed of their men. On all the bars miners dug in the silt and washed out by cradles, looking anxiously to make the winter's grub-stake. Bears came lower on the flanks of Tall Thing after the scarlet soap-berries. Fox, lynx and coyote went higher, and in the evenings moose or caribou sometimes swam the river, shouldering gleaming silver lines on the level violet flood.

The quiet men who passed up and down always left something for Tamsin. Blueberries, skinned ducks ready for the oven, flowers tied in clumsy bunches, a little brown bear-skin, pale nuggets of placer-gold, and silken cushions worked painfully in patterns learned in hospitals overseas. Only Kirk brought her nothing, and she did not want it. By now she knew that himself was enough, but what he knew she could not guess. Nor did he know himself. Sometimes he felt that through Tamsin he was receiving more than he could hold from this mysterious universe which surrounds us like a skin and of which we know no more than our bones know of our skin until we happen to sustain a compound fracture. Kirk occasionally believed that he must have suffered just that on the Kluane. Some bone of his spirit smashed by that shock had there pierced through the invisible skin, destroying the mystery, teaching him more than he ought to know.

He could not rest away from Tamsin, and yet he thought often of that dark girl, Dierdre, with her lean-hipped body
sliding round corners and her slant eyes below brows black and narrow as waxed thread. He thought of Ooket’s soft bunched fingers and her secret knowledge of men that is the heritage of a race of slaves. And he thought of other girls...

“I could never be faithful to any one,” he thought, “and I ought to get right out of here at once. Tamsin is a darn sight too good for this.”

But he did not go.

He protested against Tamsin taking her learning from that old Doctor O’Kane up at Aroya.

“Aw! He’s no doctor. I got my ears full of him all over the North. An English Army surgeon or somethin’ with no legal right to practise in Canada. Lived down on the Lower Yukon before the Klondike was thought of, and stuck up a board with Doctor on it in a sand-bank. Miners and that came five hundred mile to have him cure them of scurvy or op’rate on them. He had the cheek to do it, too. Must have made his pile a dozen times.”

“What has he done with it since you know so much?” demanded Tamsin.

“Aw!” He gave her a quick look, walking beside her through the moonlight town. “I dunno. Spent it. Gave it to some woman to hang around her neck, I guess. That’s what we all do.”

“Yes. And don’t care when the weight of it breaks her back,” said Tamsin, sharply. Kirk was troubling the calm waters of her soul with his sayings in these days. A volcano in him, she felt, that any moment might rise and overwhelm her. Her pulses throbbed like the Indian drum beaten outside Tommy Tom’s shack as they passed the Indian village, reached the landing shadowed by the smudgy petuna-purple light, and climbed into MacDonald’s launch.

MacDonald never let Tamsin make the ten-mile trip up the Kanana and Lone Lake to Aroya alone; but since Kirk came
he had taken the place of Dick Dan, the Indian boy who usually ran the motor, and in spite of Aggie’s protests that “Tamsin’s jest stringin’ you like she does all the fellers,” he kept it. He knew well enough what Tamsin’s honest eyes were telling him now.

He set the motor going, and the little launch ran swiftly through the sedges that grew in a night and bloomed in a day to the open river where reflections of the great sky and hills came down in strong deep colours until the launch seemed to be penetrating monstrous caverns underground.

Underground caverns of a man’s mind, thought Kirk, leading him the devil knew where. He squatted in the middle of the boat, watching Tamsin at the tiller. She sang softly:

“Once I was part of the music I heard
On the boughs, or sweet between earth and sky,
For joy of the beating of wings on high
My heart shot into the breast of a bird.”

He looked at her with speculative eyes. There was that in her, but there was also the woman who could—maybe would—give everything to the death. She was not yet conscious of that, but nearing it, he thought; fiddling with the motor; hearing through the far-stretched stillness the faint crashings of moose or bear plunging down some run-way to drink; feeling the long cool wash of air about him after the terrible heat of the day.

They talked little, for the hush of the great world bound them: Kirk into uneasy definance, Tamsin into communion with it. The sun was low, but it would do no more than hide for a half-hour behind Tall Thing at this midsummer, and a silver moon already walked in the blue of the sky. The boat ran up on the beach beside Dead Aroya. Dark buildings sagging already stood up along the foreshore, tangled already in quick-growing scrub. Ghostly houses glimmered behind. Echoes went with them over the silent boardwalks among the
shacks and torn tents, frame-houses and tall shells of empty-eyed hotels smothering now in weeds and creepers as they smothered in snow throughout the stark winters. Tamsin said:

"Feyther and I were here when the boom broke, you know, and we preferred to stay through the winter. Anyhow, the prices the boats were charging for a passage just before the ice came was ridiculous. People had to go just with what they stood up in—and standing it was, too, wi' the boats packed like herrings. A few came back in spring for their gatherings, but most just had to cut their losses."

Kirk nodded. It was the same all over the North when a gold-boom broke and the speculators Outside refused to put up more money. He walked among the litter which winds had swept back and forth down the desolate ways and thought that in this pallid light which would not get any darker Aroya was worse than the lonely Dawson Trail.

"I missed the folk that winter," said Tamsin. "But I went around and shut all doors and windows against the squirrels and wolverines. O'Kane's opened them since. He's slept in every house by now, I guess. Last time I came he was here, in Miron's store."

She went into a room where a butcher's cleaver lay on the counter and hooks rusty-red from the meat that had once hung there crossed a beam above. Rats had gnawed where the blood had dripped and nested under the counter. The place, even when Tamsin called up the rickety stair, was silent as the grave.

They went on down the half-stumped streets where pink foam of roses and saffron froth of rock-cistus pushed among the granite out-crops. From the scrub either side half-submerged dwellings peered under sagging brows.

"Guess they'll talk of us when we're gone," said Kirk, uneasy in the grey shadows. Tamsin laughed. Her imagination found the glories of the world, not the horrors.
“O’Kane says he hears ’em. He says he hears the drunken ghosts go shouting down the streets at night on their ways home from the hotels.”

“He would.” Kirk went up broken steps to the platform of the Golden North Hotel whose unbroken windows stared at them coldly. “Let’s look around here a piece.”

Tamsin opened a door and went into the restaurant with all the delight of a showman. A faint swirl of leaves and papers rose on the bare floor and fell again. A pack-rat ran up the wall, paused with bushy tail hanging to blink bright eyes at the two in the door, and dipped off through a hole. On the bar stood glasses and bottles, a cork-screw pinning down a sheaf of discoloured bills, a man’s hat with the crown eaten away. On the covered tables along the walls were brown stains as though food had been spilt when the diners left suddenly. Some animal, probably a wolverine, had dragged the cloth from one table and made havoc of the heap on the floor. Kirk fancied the savage triangle-headed brute crunching glass and cutlery here in the dark in mockery of man’s dominion. The place was dead as a place can only be where man has once been alive.

“The Indians won’t come in Aroya. They think it’s haunted,” said Tamsin, going through to the corridor. “Mrs. Berry used to make me tea in this wee room, and I guess all the lads that ever came through gave her their pictures. And just look at ’em now.”

The small half-stripped room where she stood was strewn with nibbled books, photographs, music, torn curtain-strips, children’s toys, the bones of a silk umbrella. Tamsin picked up a faded carte-de-visite.

“My. He was a lad,” she said, reflectively. “I wonder what happened him.”

To Tamsin, whose spirit never really lost touch with those high gods on the hills of dawn, there was nothing here but the ordinary law of change. Summer goes and Fall comes. Fall
goes and winter comes, and so it is with the people of the North. She went singing up the bare stair presently, but Kirk stood still. His more developed knowledge of life felt here a most terrible atmosphere of warning. The whole town, he felt, was repressed into a submission that was not resignation, a silence that was not peace, just as man is repressed and conquered by life.

His quick blood rebelled at that oblivion which must sweep over him and all mankind. He almost ran up the echoing stairs, seeking Tamsin. Along the upper corridor he glanced into rooms where tattered coats still hung on nails and squirrels had nested in the straw mattresses, and women's gear was half-spilled from the open drawers. By a window Tamsin stood, rolling a blue faded ribbon in her fingers. In the grey light she seemed already a ghost. Her blue dress, losing colour, blurred her outlines. She seemed remote, escaping him. With an impulse that was almost fear he went forward and caught her in his arms.

Momentarily she submitted, with a soft little sigh. Then, as passion roused in him, he held her roughly, raining kisses on her face. She fought him then, cried out, and he laughed, gripping her tight.

"Did you call me, Miss Tamsin?" asked a voice from the door; and Kirk loosed her, seeing a man stand there: a small spare man with a curiously courtly manner and red-rimmed eyes either side a thin veined nose. He pulled at his long grey moustache with a thin veined hand, looking at man and girl with a cool cynical appraisement.

Tamsin, pushing back her hair, stammered out something. Kirk believed that she introduced him to Doctor O'Kane. "I . . . I want to ask you what I can do for auld Sophia, Doc. Kirk, will you go down and start up the motor? I'll be right along."

"Would you like me to return with you, Miss Tamsin?" said the man in that same cool courtly voice.
"No, and be damned to you!" shouted Kirk. He ran down the stair and out into the night. In a land where women are few and well-regarded he had behaved like a brute, and that this polished and sardonic old gentleman should know it was not the least of his misery. Girls for amusement he had found in plenty, but Tamsin was another matter, and her submission, her soft little sigh, frightened him now he thought of it. She had been ready to give love and had found only passion. What would she do to him for that?

As he went down the ghostly ways the spirits of men such as he stepped from their empty dwellings and stood in a hushed phalanx to watch him pass; weak foolish hot-blooded men, like all of us, and, like all of us, capable of divine moments. Heavily he got into the launch and set it chugging, but its puny voice in this great silence pouring endlessly over half a world made him shudder. A puff of fragrance blew warm against his lips, and he remembered Tamsin's lips and shuddered again.

Tamsin came down through the dark buildings with O'Kane, and Kirk set his teeth. If she brought that man along as protector he felt that his soul was for ever damned. But she sent the tow-rope spinning into the boat, and followed it alone, crying good-night to O'Kane as she settled down to steer.

O'Kane called after them, a dim grey ghost in the ghostly town.

"A peaceful voyage," he said; and Kirk heard faint mocking laughter that seemed to come from the empty streets as the boat shot away.

Both sat silent as the night world slid by; an enchanted primeval world that heard God's voice when first He called it out of chaos and has remained indifferent to other voices since. Rocks and broken timber lay on the barren foreshores like the cast-away weapons of giants dead long ago. Up on the hill-sides the stunted trees were primeval: pinched-pointed little Yukon spruce; juniper that creeps on the ground
with the scrub-willow; spindling saskatoon near as high as
the dwarf poplars; written skeletons of larger trees dead in
past fires. Pallid evening stood among them with haunted
eyes.

So Kirk saw it: saw shadows move like panthers across the
slope to squat darkly in his heart. But Tamsin saw them
through her own clear eyes, and welcomed them as the blessed
realities that arbitrate between man and his Maker: "Eh,
mountains, rivers an' trees; they're what one needs to hang on
to," she thought, trying to quiet the tumult in her heart.

They passed the Assukum, that old two-decker slain in its
last struggle to reach the dying Aroya and long since shot
by outgoing ice floes up the bank and in amongst the scrub
to become the nesting-place of the little furtive creatures of
the wild. Many such Kirk had seen on the Yukon rivers, and
he and Tamsin passed her indifferently, not knowing what
she was going to mean to them one day. Not until they opened
the home stretch with Knife shining pale across the pale water
did Kirk speak.

"It was . . . just a moment's . . ."

"Dinna speak of it again."

Her voice was more Scotch, as always when she was moved.
Kirk knew that he should leave it there, but, insatiable collector
of emotions as he was, he could not. He came to her side.

"You are very mad with me, Tamsin?"

"Eh, forget it, lad." She drew back, wincing, as though he
touched something too sacred. "And don't do it again, for
I'm a fair deil when I am mad."

"Tamsin, I've always respected you above . . ."

"Damn it all! What kind o' handling do the girls you don't
respect get, then? Stop that motor, you fool, or we'll be into
the bank."

She sprang out before they touched the bank and was
speeding up the shadowed street to her home where Mac-
Donald, who slept early and log-heavy, did not hear her come
in. But Aggie Colom heard the launch, and prodded Mat awake.

"What did I tell yer o' yer precious Tamsin? Keeping Kirk outer his bed till near midnight! That's the sort she is."

"Tiger, tiger, burnin' bright," murmured Mat, and slept again.

Stewart also had heard the launch and did not sleep after. Night is the usual time for Northern picnics and outings, the summer days being too hot and filled with hurrying labour. But those two had gone alone. He wondered if Challis would speak of it as he drew his chair up noisily to the breakfast-table to summon Miss Tinney who presently flapped in, her horseface shining and a row of little dishes like roosting birds down her arm.

"Shredded wheat, fish and chips . . . there's fresh waffles . . . berries . . ." She dealt them out rapidly. "Ever git Tamsin MacDonald to make you sourdough biscuit, Mr. Stewart? She got that old sourdough box her mother used at the Klondyke in their kitchen right now."

"She made me one," said Challis. "I couldn't eat it."

"You're chechako. It had a right to indigestion you. Coffee . . . ."

"I'm no chechako now," said Challis, slightly annoyed. "If only I had a chance . . . ." He turned to Stewart. "They're sending us a description of that man who was lost on the Dawson Winter Trail in case he comes out this way," he said. "Not much hope of it, I should think."

"Yes?" Stewart would not allow his sudden eagerness. "Perhaps you might let me see it? Just in case you were away and he passed through."

"Well. No harm in that, I suppose. He wore big brass earrings, like so many foreign sailors. . . ."

Challis spread the paper, and Stewart took notes. He thought of Kirk Regard, and yet it gave him a start when Challis named him.
"I'm going to Aroya this afternoon with Regard. An Indian fishing-camp has settled in just below. Want to come?"

"Can't, thanks. Young Blair is sick."

Stewart had rescued young Blair from spoiling himself in an Indian village and taught him how to take Morse messages. He went back now to dose him for summer colic with something recommended by Tamsin, and then sat in the door, his lean legs crossed, watching the white and brown men who passed in the bright morning. All over the world were the watchers and the passers-by, he thought: lives following lives, generations on the heels of generations; men and women with their fierce passions and tragic silences; all going on with eternal contact of the flesh and eternal isolation of the soul. Sitting there he felt he knew their travail, saw the blind and shadowed way the nations went, a multitude greater than all the pollen blown on the winds of the world. "And Tamsin among them," he thought. "Just as blind . . . that precious girl."

Mat Colom came to send a night-letter for Aggie. He talked of Kirk.

"I lammed the devil outer him. He wanted it, but he sure is a good boy now. I bin a bad man meself. I ha' ploughed wickedness an' reaped iniquity, though I dunno a man oughter call his wife that. But I'm strugglin' all the time, jes' as I struggled wi' Kirk." He rambled on innocently about Tamsin and Kirk on the Kluane, and when he left at last Stewart went with him to the door, and saw down on the river Chief Bill Boss's launch driving against a stiff breeze with full sails spread. Truly Indian, that, and truly representative of the lives of many men, including himself. He went back into the shadowed room with his gaunt face grim. Almost certainly old Colom had grossly exaggerated a boy's sins in order to emphasize his pride in the man he had made. Stewart was level-headed enough to know this, and to know that he did not want to know it.
"I want to believe harm of that fellow," he told himself.
"It's natural I should, for he's going to take Tamsin from me."
And then he laughed harshly, realizing that he had never had her.

Probably Kirk would not have gone with Challis if Tamsin had not been gentler than usual that morning. They picked berries with the Sheridans and the whole Jackson family on the flanks of Tall Thing where Sheridan set his bear-traps among the vermilion soap-berries which quarrel with the stomachs of all but bears and Indian children. In the bluegrass a stray cock-grouse was drumming to his mate, late in the season although it was. A very loving or a very undaunting bird. One who tried to make the lady happy. Kirk watched the brown feather contortions, the flip and flutter of spurred feet in the dust, and wondered grimly if he was as ready to abase himself before Tamsin if she wished it.

"Better not," he thought, feeling his blood suddenly leap and hurry. "I'd be tied up maybe before I knew. And then . . . I dunno . . ."

He watched Tamsin with the children about her like June bugs. There were blue butterflies, too, pale green of the upper woods, scents, vague threadings of bird-song. The right place for that big buoyant girl, here among beauty, with children about her.

If he spoke to Tamsin now he would ask her to marry him.
His thought swerved suddenly to lean-hipped Dierdre with her amative eyes and stayed there.

Tamsin knelt to drink at a stream the colour of old sherry as it ran above brown stones. Swallows wove invisible incantations around her head. Her eyes were clear as the water when she walked on with him behind the others, and he knew that she was gallantly trying to put them back where they had been before last night. She began to talk tentatively of the people up here: Christian Science, chess, Free Thought: Challis's belief that a murder-case would deliver him; Aggie
Colom's belief in the world as a scandal-mart; Sheridan's belief that the earth is flat.

"And I have all my gods." She sketched them for him delicately. The blue river-god, lazy, splendid, communing with the clouds whose shadows came and went on his breast. The hill-gods, bluff blunt-headed old chaps in ironstone armour and patched cloaks of tough juniper and firs. The tree-gods, dark, secretive, hearing the wild cries of the night. The strong glad gods of the wind and the early morning.

"Squirrels were over the roof early, so I went out and chased them off. My, I certainly do love warm grass under my bare feet. The hills and river were still dreamin' in a wide grey ghostly light, Kirk, and there were pinky clouds around the sun. I had to kneel," her voice shook a little, "for it was like the world before man came and who was I to look at that?"

Unconsciously she was wooing the deeply-submerged god in himself, and he knew it and was afraid. Her strength he needed, but not set against his weakness. He said roughly:

"Your pet gods were there, I suppose—getting drunk on Olympus."

"Gosh!" cried Tamsin. She stopped, stamping her foot. Her eyes blazed. "Talking to you is like tearing off sticking-plaster that's been on a week. Quit off wi' you, my lad. You gar me grue."

"I'm sorry," he began, instantly penitent.

"Dom your sorry! Quit off!"

He went, raising his cap elaborately. She followed, sobbing in her throat, clenching her hands. She knew the Kirk of old, with his hot sudden malice and generous regrets, and she guessed that it was himself he was scourging now. But because she knew now that the boy she had loved was become the man whom she would for ever love she was bewildered, uncertain. And her peaceful world had been less secure since Kirk came.
Among the pink pipsissima-flowers Tamsin went on her knees, on her face. She lay there a long time.

Aggie Colom saw her shining face as she passed, later, swinging her berry-pails, and called out:

"For the love of Mike! Who you bin carrying on with, Tamsin MacDonald?"

"Only God," said Tamsin with her clear smile.

"Mark my words," screamed Aggie after her, "you'll come to a bad end, blasphemin' that away. Mark my words!"

Tamsin neither heard nor marked them. Her soul was at peace again.

Challis took Kirk up to Aroya in Chief Bill Boss's launch, for Police on the side-stations have to hire their own locomotion. The launch was noisy, but Challis talked above it of hidden stills and forest fires.

"If I go turn the district out to help with a fire," he complained, "the bill goes into the Government and I get rowed for the expense. If I let it be and the fire wipes out a settlement I'm rowed again. Get it in the neck either way. Then it's against the law to supply Indians with drink, but I know that old rascal up at Aroya is doing it right now. They are getting it someplace, and why would he stay in that ghastly hole if he didn't have a still there?" Against the level claret-colour of the river Challis' keen young face showed almost wild. "By God, I'm fed up with this. Wish I could get a chance on that Olafsson business," he said.

Already he had questioned Kirk there, and Kirk had told the same story he had told to the Dawson Patrol. The matter no longer troubled Kirk, for, like all men who live by quickness of hand and mind, he knew that mistakes cost lives and decisions save them. He had made his decision and now must take his chance, as he did when stalking a grizzly, as he had done when going over the top in France. The vital matter was Tamsin at present, and here he could make no decisions. He knew enough about women to be aware that she loved him.

*The World is Yours.*
He knew enough of himself to be aware of the difference in his own standards. His loves were fierce, short, desirous and soon over. Tamsin's would be like the hill-fires that worried Challis; running secret and hid along roots and little tendrils in the peaty soils for days, weeks, with only a wisp of smoke now and again to mark their passage until the moment came and half the hill-side was afire. He thought of Tamsin like that and was shaken, knowing that he must see it. He thought of her again, gallant, generous and happy, and knew he could never forgive himself if he did that to her. For he would fail her in the end. He knew that he must fail her. He had chased so many loves. How could he settle to one?

High on either side the hills stood bare with patches of yellow-brown scrub cast about them like the pelts of animals about giant-naked limbs. Cloud-shadows fingered them lightly, enquiringly; drifted off on the breath of some wind unfelt below. A few Indian fishing-boats spilling over with fat bodies, doubled in the river—all but the smell of them—passed slowly. A grey bleached building which had once drawn water for a mine stood against black pines with a pebble beach in front. The launch rounded a bluff and sounds came into the quiet evening. Aroya lay in its dark hollow with the torn hills behind, and on the shore a missionary was holding a service at the new Indian camp.

Challis damned the missionary, but he could not break into the service. He saw a feather of smoke on the dark hill and went after it, leaving Kirk with the launch. "These nitchies are always lighting fires and I have to put 'em out," said Challis, going off, red as his coat.

Kirk went over the thin ghosts of anemones and bronze columbines to the camp, and on the edge of it he ran into the old doctor, O'Kane, who greeted him like a friend.

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and there's his ambassador come to declare his own glory," said O'Kane.
“Shall we attend service, Mr. Regard? I can’t remember doing such a thing since I married.”

He pulled his long grey moustaches, smiling at Kirk. A lingering aroma of quality and polish hung about his wreckage and he smelt of drink. Kirk wondered how he dared live up here alone. Alone in the nights when moonlight fingered into the empty eye-sockets of broken cabins, and ghosts companioned hilariously with their drunken shadows down the sounding corridors of those big shells of the taverns, or crept among the litter of the city’s out-going and along the trails wide in the scrub as though the feverish feet still beat along them. He could face a grizzly any day, but he could not have faced what O’Kane must meet here day and night along with his own soul.

He stood silent, brown nervous hands thrust into the leather belt about his narrow waist and black brows drawn in a frown, and O’Kane considered dryly what this young man might be doing with Tamsin MacDonald. The possibilities which those two vigorous natures could beget between them interested him, and he had an admiration for Tamsin which curbed his tongue and sometimes his thoughts before her. The Athenians wore golden grasshoppers in their clothing to prove that they were sprung direct from Attic soil. Tamsin needed no such exotic proof. She had something of the stern terrible simplicity of the Yukon itself.

“Let us step up a bit and hear what this sky-dog is saying,” he said.

Services like this were common in the Yukon where the patient missionary must follow his drifting congregations; catching here a handful of miners rocking on the river-bars, there a colony of white folk tied down by dredges and machinery into isolation, and everywhere Indians that gather and depart like the birds. Here hastily run-up drying stages where split fish were already blackening in the sun and a clutter of tarpaulins, tents and patched nets flung over the blossoming
roses might betoken a stay of no more than a few weeks, and the Indians gathered round the missionary at his portable harmonium were a miserable lot. Gaudy cottons and filthy rags, broken plug hats and weathered expressionless faces with all the high emprise of the early Indians gone. The missionary was singing in his strong young voice:

“Oh, that will be Glory for me,
Glory for me, Glory for me.
When by His Grace I shall look on His face,
That through the ages is Glory for me.”

“Now, how much would you imagine that means to them?” said O’Kane. “And yet any priest will tell you God is not mocked. The white man has taken away the gods they made for themselves and given them a God which they can’t by any possibility understand—which no one can by any possibility understand. A Parliamentary manœuvre. A circus stunt. I shall ask that fellow up to supper. You and Challis will be staying?”

The missionary—his name was Clauson—promised to come when he had christened some children, and Kirk went up with O’Kane into Aroya.

“This place will do,” said O’Kane, stepping into a house. “I slept here last week and I have a larder handy. Rustle a fire in the back room, will you, Mr. Regard?”

Kirk filled rusty kettles from the river and broke over his knee wood that had once helped to build a dwelling. There was something colossal and yet horrible in this old sinner’s taking a whole town for his usage; supping at the tables of other men; sleeping in rooms that were maybe their holy of holies; warming his toes at their stoves while the wind and snow went down the empty streets and homeless ghosts pressed lank faces against icy panes in the moonlight. O’Kane brought out a bottle from under a shelf.

“Part of my permit,” he said. “I don’t drink the rot-gut
that Challis says I sell to the Indians." The lines down his
thin cheeks creased in a small smile. "Oh, yes. I know Challis
says so. Don't you believe him?"

"Well; I guess you'd be a mutt if you didn't run a still up
here."

"I think you and I are going to be friends," observed
O'Kane, looking at him with those sunken red-rimmed eyes.
"Mighty nice of you. Shall I get some supper?"

He stepped to the door; raised his rifle at a couple of fool-
hens sitting on a nearby balsam, and dropped them both with
shock by barking the bough just beneath them. He felt a
foolish youthful desire to show this courtly evil-looking old
gentleman whom Tamsin liked that he could keep his end up
without patronage. As he wrung their necks and proceeded
to skin them O'Kane was still smiling, and Kirk knew
that his bluff was seen through. By the time Challis came
in, angry and smoke-dried, he was nearly as surly as
Challis.

"Those damn hens, you never know when you've got 'em,"
he raged.

"Like sin," said O'Kane, gravely. "Tell Clauson about
them. He is supping with us, Challis. No doubt you heard
him conducting a service at the fishing-camp just now."

"Oh, is he, damn him," said Challis, crossly. "Well, he's not
going to conduct any service over me, if I know it."

He squabbled bitterly with Clauson over supper.

"No, sir. Hanged if I believe in Mission schools. An Indian's
only moral when he's down to brass tacks. Keep him busy
hunting food and his squaw busy tending kids and they're
decent. But give 'em English ways that spoil their hunting
instincts and where are they? The boys go as deck-hands on
the river-steamers and earn big money. What do they do with
it? I wish I had just a part of what they waste on smokes and
candy. The girls want pianos they can't play and smart shoes
they can't wear and the Lord knows what beside. No Indian
buck ever has the money for all those frills, so the girls go to
the first white man who has. Then the joke is on the Missions,
I take it."

"The English race must missionize something," said
O'Kane. "It's an integral part of the national make-up."

"I don't deny that Indian girls are one of the tragic problems
of the North," agreed Clauson. "But I guess we must just do
the best we can."

He looked troubled, filling his pipe with big scarred hands.
Kirk thought of Ooket and suddenly hated what man had made
of the whole Indian race. He also attacked Clauson. Indians
had been fine enough in the early days. Those Indians who
fought the pioneers were men, and the pioneers were stout
fellows, too. Their names stood like landmarks across the
country. Kirk rang those names out like gold coins. Ogilvie,
Kitchen, Kennicott: Schwatka, on his clumsy raft, re-christen-
ing the wilderness by book and Bell; Alexander Campbell,
who walked all the roads back to England to tell her that the
Indians had burned out the first—and last—Hudson Bay
Post on the edge of the Yukon . . ."

"But for any sake," cried Clauson. "I guess our profession
was through near as early, and often with their wives, too.
Bishop Bompas, Canham, Archdeacon Kirby . . ."

"The H.B.C. beat 'em everywhere. Their initials mean
Here Before Christ," Kirk reminded him. Clauson went a
little red.

"There are heroes everywhere," he cried.

"Very ordinary life-histories," suggested O'Kane.

"There are no ordinary life-histories. Each man is a saga
to himself——"

"To himself, Exactly," agreed O'Kane. "In any case life is
little more than a criminal waste of energy on the part of some
clumsy giant Power. A misdirected waterfall."

"We can harness the waterfall and light a city," cried
Clauson.
“To illuminate our vices,” assented the doctor with a little bow.

Challis moved restlessly. Disliking Clauson on principle he yet disliked this bull-baiting still more. Kirk was amused. Here were the concrete forces of Good and Evil in the persons of this sky-dog who believed in everything and this experienced old sinner who believed in nothing. Very well, then, let the best cause win. O’Kane said, softly:

“The last belief men of your temperament lose is the belief that God can’t work without them.”

“So you do believe in God,” said Clauson on a sudden deep note.

Against the grey light Kirke saw O’Kane’s moustache lift like antennae with which he was feeling for the other man’s vulnerable part.

“Certainly I believe in some kind of Supreme Being. You surely don’t imagine that mankind would be capable of getting the world into its present hideous state without help?”

Challis got up abruptly and went out. At home he walked to church with his Dorothy through green fields. He preferred to smoke on the foreshore now and think of her and them. Kirk sat silent on the floor, drawing sticks together with his moccasined toes which he kept prehensile as a monkey’s. A man, he knew, must be supple from end to end if he would live long at the Big Game Guiding. Clauson was not supple anywhere. He hammered away in honest earnestness at O’Kane, and the doctor met him with probes and sharp stiletto. Kirk ceased to listen. In the growing dusk he saw shapes, shadows, movements, as he was apt to do when he was tired and his inner self aroused as Tamsin had roused it. Gradually drawing itself together out of nothing as it often did he began to feel what to him was the real spirit of the Yukon: the most ancient god of all gods, entrenched here in its last lonely stronghold. He fancied it squatting there in the dim dust
behind Clauson; an earless, eyeless, brainless lustful Thing, indestructible, relentless; the Flesh-God, whom men still secretly recognized, despite their prayers.

"God has put us here to help ourselves," said Clauson, earnestly: "The world is a bigger Co-operative Society than you think, Doctor O'Kane. Wild oats is all the Lord chooses to make of our best grain if we don't put our own mind to the business."

"Regard," said O'Kane, rising and yawning a little, "haven't you heard all that Mr. Clauson can tell us at your mother's knee? But I'll be bound you didn't hear all that I could tell you at your father's. Tarry at Jericho until your mental beard is grown, Mr. Clauson—I am sure you'll remember the Biblical reference—and we will listen to you with pleasure. May I put you up here for the night?"

Clauson got up, distressed and angry.

"Yes. I remember, Doctor O'Kane. But you've not caught and stripped and shaved me. Don't think it. Those who follow my Master will be going up and down the land long after those who follow yours are forgotten."

"I follow no masters," said O'Kane, blandly. "I have always preferred the feminine equivalent."

Kirk laughed, and the young missionary turned slow eyes on him.

"May God forgive you, Doctor O'Kane. Good-night," he said, and went out into the dark.

O'Kane, moving like an exhausted satyr, stooped to blow up the fire in the rusty stove. Even on this sultry night his thin blood could not warm him. But how hot it must have been once, Kirk thought. And that squatting Thing was still there, whetting its appetites like a knife against its hairy hide. Nature; that's what it was. How can a man get away from his nature?

"Yes. I think you and I shall be good friends, Mr. Regard," said O'Kane, smiling.
"Old beast," said Challis, as the launch slipped back to Knife through the stillness.

Kirk thought the same, but he said, perversely:
"He amuses me, I guess."

"He makes me sick at the stomach. I don't know how Miss Tamsin can stand him."

"You don't reckon he shows her what he showed us, do you?"

"She must know it's there. She's no fool."

Kirk considered this. Maybe she did. Maybe in Tamsin as in other folk there was something that could be attracted by evil; some stealthy secret ugliness of the mind. He felt the lighter and the heavier for that idea. It brought her down to him. "Well, and isn't that where I want her?" he asked himself, savagely.

The launch slipped on. Silence was complete except for the rare wild laugh of a loon on its lone crazy flight off in the shadows. Grey river and mountains held the world. The sound of an engine came suddenly. MacDonald's launch ran past with Tamsin standing at the tiller.


Challis turned with a sigh of relief. He too wanted to get away from his thoughts. Kirk wondered if he too felt a sudden rush of clean freshness come into the night. Both men were whistling as the little launch followed the larger one crowded with people.

On the sandy beach Sheridan, Colom, MacDonald and Jackson women set out dishes and unpacked baskets, while the men went back in the woods for spring water and set light to a great tree lying out on the sand and hung kettles above the fire on stick-tripods. There was a long line of throbbing fire from end to end of the tree as they ate supper, and behind it river and mountains turned dark against the pale sky. On the far side of the fire Kirk watched Tamsin with the glow on her
face. She looked tremendously happy, although more quiet than usual. He screwed his flute together presently, and then they were all singing *Three Blind Mice*, and:

“The animals went in two by two,
(Down the river of Jordan).
The grizzly bear and the kangaroo,
(Down the river of Jordan).”

He heard Tamsin clear and musical, leading the chorus:

“There’s one more river, and that’s the river of Jo-or-dan.
There’s one more river. *One* more river to cross.”

Was there only one more river for the two of them to cross, he wondered, and what would it be? He went to her when *Clementine* and *Pretty Redwing* were done and everyone talking loudly.

“It’s good to be here, Tamsin,” he said, low at her ear.

She smiled, touching his hand a moment; but she did not speak, and he was content to sit by her, watching the flickering light on her round firm throat and chin, and hearing old Ma’ commiserating with Challis.

“Yeah, Yeah. Them hill-fires is like the fires in man, I guess. He passes from immense to immense, puttin’ on po-protean changes o’ form. The Great Blake says so, though I dunno was he ever in the Yukon. Fires’ll be bad this year, Challis, wi’ all the heat we’ve had, I wouldn’t wonder.”

MacDonald, lying his length on the sand, called out:

“Ye can putt thae fires oot wi’ all the whiskey ye’re findin’ in yer secret stills, Challis.” And because matters for jest are rare in the North and this jest had only been going a year everyone laughed at Challis. Ma’ said, seriously:

“It’s man’s natur’ to be always huntin’ somethin’, I guess. Maybe it’s what we’re here for. Huntin’ food . . . an’ Truth . . . an’ experyence . . .”

“And fleas,” added Mrs. Sheridan, making a dab at a sandhopper.
Raised on an elbow MacDonald looked at Mat consideringly. He never got used to wild coarse-fibred old Mat Colom of the Tinky-Tink going this road. Mat was completely honest over his search for the truth, and even the dullest people take on a certain power when they are honest. And Mat was more than honest, thought MacDonald. He was educated. No one on the Kanana, with the possible exception of Stewart, had Mat’s learning. MacDonald had tried the Great Blake himself, and so he knew.

Light from the long burning body of the log struck the water into fiery gleams, but the woods behind were cowled in a dark silence. Birds slept sweetly there, passing perhaps into the unknown with barely a chirp when some roving sharp-toothed little animal brought to them death. Thinking of little round heads innocent under the feathers Tamsin saw Kirk stand before the blaze like a spirit encircled in hell-fire. She called him to her in sudden panic, and then was ashamed. It dismayed her to find how much she was thinking of Kirk, but when he sank down by her in the shadow, asking his questions, she was weak enough to confess her thought.

“If I was in hell, Tamsin,” he said, holding her with his bright eyes; “what would you do? Pray me out, or wade in and grab me by the hair?”

“Both,” she said. And then, hastily: “Neither.” And when he laughed, with his eyes still on her, she had no more to say. She found, as she knew other women must have found, a flavour in Kirk’s talk, an elemental force backing his lightest word that stirred her more than she wished to be stirred.

“Eh; there’s a veery singing,” she said. “A queer fall its note has. Too human to be a bird.”

“Sometimes,” said Kirk very softly, “I wonder if you’re human enough to be a woman.”

“Time to pack an’ go, folks,” cried Sheridan, and the picnic was over. But there would be others—plenty of them. Tamsin felt that she could not bear to leave this half-way house
between light and dark if she were not certain that there would be plenty more picnics.

"Have a care, my girl. You're getting mushy," she warned herself, and raced Challis along the beach to the launch like a glowing Atlanta.

Even Aggie Colom sat silent as the little beach and the dying fire and the tall trees stood quietly back into the gloom. The aromatic scent of pines accompanied them on the water. Very far up the pale sky was secretly preparing for dawn. Kirk, sitting by Tamsin, had her hand close in his. Mystery dimmed the hills. . . .
Chapter Five

"I told Clausen there wasn't no harm in Mrs. Sheridan," said Miss Tinney, rapidly paying dirty dollar bills over the store counter. "Every once in a while, I says, she takes spells of thinking the Injuns are all bound for instant damnation, an' off she sets with her port'ble harmonium an' Chief Bill Boss's launch an' sings Rescue the Perishin' around the fishin'-camps. . . . That's seven, an' I guess I'll take another box of crackers. No; not a mite of harm in her. Mostly she just aims to be the best-dressed woman on the Kanana. I'll lay she is, too."

"Here! What about Tamsin?" asked MacDonald, with his grim smile.

"Tamsin? She can't dress. She don't need to. Folk never see Tamsin's clothes, for they're too busy seein' her. I'll lay that young Regard sees her, Mr. MacDonald, an' one of these days you'll likely find him taking her away that quick you can't see him do it."

"Likely. And likely not. Shall I send these right away?"

"Why . . . I'd like it. And there'll be a prospector in to outfit. Yep; I'm grub-staking him, an' I don't care who knows it. He reckons there'll be good gravels found on the Pelly yet, an' them as gets front seat . . ."

"I wouldn't reckon too much on it," said MacDonald, gravely.

A gambler at heart, Miss Tinney could not 'keep it learned' that the gay inconsequent days of that sport are over. MacDonald knew to his grief that all through the North the successful prospector now silently boards an outgoing steamer with his poke and sells his rights to some Syndicate Outside which, in due time, sends in the necessary plant operated by certificated engineers, controls it by long-distance wires, and soullessly withdraws men and scraps machinery when the lode
is worked out. No glory of discovery left now, thought MacDonal, who never found much glory to discover in men. He glanced at Stewart, who was buying wire from Jasper, and was suddenly startled to see how old he looked. Or maybe it was that young Kirk, who had a knack of making other men look washed-out and old.

He heard Kirk and Tamsin at the piano through in the house now, but his belief—stronger than himself—remained. Tamsin must surely know a good man from a bad when she saw him. Yukon and himself had taught her that much. A lad to make play with and a man to marry. That was all there was to it, thought MacDonal, setting the store to rights soberly and giving directions to Jasper, the hump-backed little assistant. Then he tore the day’s slip off the Arctic Transportation Almanac, and went in to find Tamsin arguing with Kirk about Clauson, who had yesterday conducted a service at Knife.

“It was not for Mrs. Sheridan to suggest praying in our hoose because it is the biggest, fether. Kirk says she has an unstanchable desire for bettering her neighbours that thick you can see it around her like smoke. I say that with all her bobbin’ and bowin’ over her prayers she’s no more than an auld hen pickin’ up peas.”

“I could wish you had mair reverence for yere elders, Tamsin,” said MacDonal, unusually austere.

Tamsin opened her mouth and eyes, glanced at Kirk rocking himself astride a chair, and began to giggle. She and Kirk were always giggling like a couple of bairns, thought MacDonal, and grunted and frowned.

“You mean yourself, maybe,” said Tamsin. “And Auntie Ag. And Mr. Stewart. As a fether I love you, but as a diplomat you’re not worth shucks, my dear.”

“I asked Stewart to come with us to the Sagish camp,” said MacDonal, feeling in some way put on his mettle. “He says he canna get awa.”
"Now, who says he hasn't any tact!" cried Tamsin. She still seemed amused, particularly lightsome, and if Stewart had looked old she looked like glowing youth itself. MacDonald, who was not a sensitive man, yet felt an electric atmosphere in the room. She and that black-a-vised birkie had been at the love-making, likely. He wished for the hundredth time that Kirk had not been coming with them to camp down at Sagish Lake. But he could not ask Mat to leave him behind, and it was Mat's only escape from Aggie in the year.

"Uncle's always cleared for action. A sound man," said Tamsin, mischievously. She thrust her hands through the belt of her trim overall and walked whistling to the window. Not so unlike the sturdy little girl of the Dawson days, MacDonald thought, and although too big for whipping now she was still over-venturesome with her tongue at times. He stood, feeling himself for the first time odd man out in his own house, and then went through to the kitchen, knowing that the dark eyes and the grey would meet again directly he had gone.

"Eh-ho," he sighed, dipping a drink from the water-butt. The cry that knows not law cannot be gainsaid, but even when a man believes in the Ultimate Good—which is the Ultimate God—it is natural for him to doubt the wisdom of that law at times.

Tamsin prepared for the yearly camp at Sagish with almost worshipping hands. The Sheridans and Mat always came with them, and these four would be all day at the fishing and shooting while she and Kirk had the Yukon to themselves. She packed groceries and shook out her simple frocks, thinking: "I must make a big baking of those cookies he's so fond of. He likes me in blue. This green will look just right on the hills. . . ."

If she had been quite sure of him there would have been less that feeling of high adventure. But he blew hot and cold, this dark-thoughted restless man; and if sometimes she felt
that they walked together on the top of the world, holding infinity in their hands, there were times too when he hurt her so much that she thought desperately: "My lad, I could almost wish to see you running after another girl if she'd torment you the way you're doing me."

For more than Tamsin the Yukon had a definite character; a kind of inevitableness which dislocated human plans with a fine unconscious irony. On the rivers men drifted together, talked dogs, pegamite dykes, hill-gouging and drink, slid away and drifted on to return when the current served. And for all its sameness nothing ever was the same when they came back. Tamsin, on the last night before Sagish, felt that when she came back nothing would be the same, and she had a strange, feeble conviction that all these men who dropped in as people always did at MacDonald's were seeing the last of the old Tamsin. Challis was there, begging a seat on the launch to-morrow. . . . "The Indians say there's an old chap sick at the end of Sagish Lake, and I must hunt him," he said. Challis, Stewart thought, had never been hammered into that purely executive and practical mould. He must have been cast, and if ever he went after a man he would go until he got him, for he would not know how to stop.

Stewart sat in a corner, listening to the singing, the laughter, the talk. He remembered a bitter thing he had read in a book. "Here I am, an old man in a dry month, being read to by a boy, waiting for rain."

But that bold young Pan with his flute to a warm mouth ripe for kisses would never read to him, any more than the rain of Tamsin's love could fall on him now.

To Tamsin this hot smoke-dimmed room seemed letting in great vistas. Smells of the pelts of wolf and wolverine and the deer that run and never are tired shook her spirit with their wildness. The music of Kirk's flute went with her down winding ways . . . shadowy ways . . .

She went out to give instructions to old Jasper, who looked
after the store so competently with MacDonald away. The day had been very hot; but here on the back porch was cool evening, its vast clear skies full of peace, and no sound between the great mountains folded into sleep but the occasional splash of a fish breaking the serene surface of the river.

"Yes, it will be all right, Jasper," she said. "We both trust you."

"I'll do my best, sure." Jasper's wizened face looked up adoringly. "I bin always remember to water your flowers and feed the chickens and the dogs. I bin always remember to do all I can, Miss Tamsin."

"Yes, Jasper. I know you will," she said absently; and when he was gone she walked over to the corral and stood looking through the unchinked logs where the green lights of the dogs' eyes came and went. Someone came out through the kitchen verandah and over the dry grass, and her blood fled winged along her pulses. Then he spoke, and the tumult died.

"Tamsin," said Stewart, abruptly. "I ask you again. Will you marry me?"

Tamsin dragged her hands from him and wrung them together.

"It wanted only this! No! . . . No, Mr. Stewart. For any sake never ask me any more. I'm not marrying. Never will I be marrying at all. . . ."

She ran from him, and Stewart walked back through the village to his shack where the forlorn neatness and silence gave an added chill.

"We've been good friends. She might have been kinder," he thought. Then: "What's that about her never marrying? What's Regard about? Or is it that he dare n't marry?"

He sat long in the shadows, trying to piece together all that he knew of Kirk Regard.

Next morning came a little note from Tamsin: "I was tired
and surprised. Please forget it and be friends still with your awful stupid Tamsin MacDonald."

He went down next evening to see MacDonald's party off to Sagish; and to the very heads of the hills and the few clouds floating in the blue the world was steeped in that strange intensity of rose-colour which is the true Yukon sunset and makes magical the detail of everyday affairs. Rough shacks and dwellings seemed sanctuaries for immortal home-fires, shock-haired Indian children playing with empty cans had the wonder in their eyes, a fawn caribou-skin nailed to dry on the end of the landing-shed was a fiery buckler before the Lord.

Stewart saw those voyagers at the launch already moving in a magic sphere. MacDonald, capless, coatless, energetic, was some lit-eyed rover who sees his dreams upon horizon. Mrs. Sheridan was a thin dark adventurer, triumphant in the glow. Chalis's tunic was fused in it as he helped MacDonald stow dunnage aboard. Mat Colom leaned on the rail, his fat hands folded there, his face expressing a peace for once untroubled by Aggie, who had refused to see him off.

The launch itself seemed a fairy barque, freighted with fantasy, floating in ether, and Tamsin, on the edge of the tall reeds like thin flames, was coaxing Bran, the big husky, aboard. But she turned and ran to Stewart, a gleaming tremulous Tamsin with that strange light on her face and no word to say when she got there.

"It was like you to write," said Stewart with an effort. "I'm grateful."

"Oh," said Tamsin. She hung in the wind like a tall yacht, shy for once. "Goodbye," she said.

"Goodbye." Stewart gripped her hand hard. "Be careful, my darling," he wanted to tell her. "There will be fewer conventions at Sagish. Physical attraction is a meaningless term to you, but that's what he feels. It's not really love." Instead he said: "I hope you'll have a good time. There's nothing better than to be young."
Kirk, with his hand on the string of the launch's whistle, was making the echoes ring. He stood on the roof, his white shirt drawing the radiant colour into him. Imperiously he seemed calling Tamsin to come with him to his frolic.

The launch churned a pinky froth into ripples and went away into that long blurred mystery of rose-colour, with Kirk Regard still standing up there, the wind in his black hair, the wild light on his body—a reckless Apollo playing with his whistle upon the fibres of the hills.

Through Challis the first note struck at Sagish was tragedy, for the miner he had come to find was dead. Over the sinewy old body he empanelled a skeleton jury of the men and decided for Natural Causes.

"He must be as old as Tall Thing. Where can we bury him so the women won't see?" he said.

Tamsin came out of the spruces that hid the shack she was putting in order. She said calmly:

"That grey rock just above the lake would be a bonny place, and Mrs. Sheridan wants we shall make a prayer and a hymn. We've chosen the hymn.

Hypnotized, they realized that to Mrs. Sheridan it was an Occasion, but Tamsin went through it with her usual unconscious simplicity. When the earth was smoothed Mrs. Sheridan sprinkled roses and scarlet leaves, but Tamsin took her rifle and loosed over the grave.

"He lived by shooting. He has a right to that," she said, and walked away with Kirk as the echoes ceased to reverberate round the quiet lake.

It was still hot at Sagish, with wood-smoke drifting from unseen fires in the hills, and moose out on the slews among the rich grasses. But pine scent was sharp in the evening airs, and birds coming south again loitered round the shack of mornings, and the glacier heights across the bay held a chill blue light. Duck, which had come a few nights back like an
inspiration, flew low across the lavender of the water, their feet trailing it in long silvery lines.

"When I am dead I shall often come back here," said Tamsin, happily.

"May I come too?" said Kirk.

He took her elbow in his palm, walking on the yellow sand, and vibrations went through her, because by now she was unable to think of life or death without him. And because to both MacDonalds death was as natural as life and as sublime she demanded of MacDonald that night over the fire outside the shack:

"Feyther, when I die will you bury me away down at Carcross? The men who found the Klondyke are there, and I'd like to be. I don't want a white marble wolverine over me like Dawson Charlie, or a lump of brown toffee rock like Skookum Jim . . . and with the railings and all sliding away in the sand, too. Feyther, I'd prefer just a heap of sand and roses, and then maybe the gophers'd nest there and the wee squirrels come eating the buds."

"For the land's sake, Tamsin," cried Mrs. Sheridan, craning her sleek black head. "I simply hate to think of burials."

"Tits! 'Tis only the body," said MacDonald in his abrupt way. "Sure I will, Tamsin, if you go first. But give me a grave like the Father of the Yukon, auld Bill McQuesten. He's on Auld Man Rock in the Lower Yukon River. 'Leave me lyin' with the ice grindin' and the water thunderin' agin me till the Judgment day,' he said. 'And they surely have.'"

Challis thrust his heel into a smouldering log, and night stood visible about them in the sudden glow. Kirk watched Tamsin with arms linked about her knees, and her broad white forehead taking the firelight and losing it as she swung back and forth, humming a little tune. Challis said:

"I suppose if McQuesten and his mate hadn't followed the
first miners round with their portable trading-post—and fed them—there would never have been mining in the North."

"Aye, but there would," said MacDonald. "You don’t choke a set man off that easy. He’ll never give over seeking gold."

"It’s a mighty queer thing," said Sheridan in the thick voice which he used so seldom, "how Carmacks and t’others that near killed themselves for the Klondyke gold got so little good out of it."

"None of us did," said MacDonald. "And that’s often the way wi’ what we sweat our hearts out over, I’ve obsairved."

Tamsin lifted herself lightly, and slipped away into the scented silence beyond. But when Kirk followed on noiseless moccasined feet she stopped with a faint shiver as though recognizing a stronger claim, then suddenly held up her hand so that a stone on it gleamed like a spot of blood in the starlight.

"Old Kate Carmacks gave me that in Carcross, Kirk. What do you think then of the man who sent away from him the woman who laboured with him through those bitter times when Klondyke was making? Carmacks took him a white wife Outside and sent his native wife back to the Yukon, loaded up with jewellery and ither truck she’d no use for . . . and left her to die in a shack with no one to close her eyes. Is that how a man treats a woman?"

"Now, Tamsin: don’t get het up." He took her hand, playing with it. "Old Kate was an Indian, and you know that hotels Outside wouldn’t have her because she blazed her way along the corridors with a clasp-knife. He would never have made good with her. He had to send her back."

"He’d not have made good without her in the beginning. Didn’t she first find the gold? But a man forgets that, it seems."

"What’s bitin’ you now, dear heart?"

"I . . . don’t know."

She stood silent, as though waiting for him to interpret. But he did not speak; and then she loosed her hand gently
and stepped away from him, losing shape and substance among the murmuring bushes that enfolded her like lovers. And Kirk, his head bent, returned to the fire.

He sat by Challis on the tramped grass and heard MacDonald retelling an epic of the early days. Sex-attraction could never have meant much to hard-faced MacDonald, for he remembered Tamsin’s mother as a plain dull soul. Surely one of those hill-gods she loved must have fathered Tamsin. Kirk thought of her off alone in the woods with a grief in his heart. And yet he would not go to tell her what he knew she longed to hear. He considered marriage, Tamsin in Dawson, long months at the Big Game Guiding, Dierdre when he came home. “No, I can’t do it,” he thought, and immediately felt his limbs twitching to go in search of Tamsin.

“So that’s whaur we ran a tunnel through into the conglomerate,” said MacDonald. “That lad Grant an’ me we sunk a shaft fifty feet through shear deposit, and windlassed all the material oop by hond. Nobody ever got tae bed-rock there, but we were stayin’ with it. Then Grant got snow-blind an’ I ricked my back, so we crawled down to the nearest camp wi’ Grant half-carryin’ me an’ me leadin’ him, an’ no food for near a week . . . nor ’bacca. But I’m hangin’ on to that claim yet, and one day I’ll mebbe go up and try it out with a Number Five Keystone placer drill instead of shaftin’. I wouldn’t wonner but there’s a paystreak blanket stretchin’ a thousn’ mile aince ye can tap it.”

“The Mother Lode?” asked Challis.

“Not a bit of it. Na. The Mother Lode’s quartz . . . or wull be gin ever they find it. I’m talkin’ of placer. Alluvial, ye ken.”

All his life Kirk had heard those unconquerable dreams of the old miners. A Mother Lode from which all the gold found on Klondyke is merely the perspiration. A thousand-mile placer blanket of pure metal that men might roll up like a pack. Uranium in quantities to stagger the world; biotite,
silver ores, precious stones. . . . They were good medicine for a man, these colossal imaginings, and he tried to interest himself in the talk. But his mind went back to Tamsin and would not obey his will.

In the shadowy undergrowth where stray things touched by firelight seemed to float—separate shining fir-needles, a bunch of crumpled poplar leaves, the round startled eye of a wild rose—vast forces seemed moving, calling to him and Tamsin. His will conjured up Dierdre with her thin clinging arms, her thin red mouth, and rejected her. The eternities were with Tamsin, and to-night he knew it.

When MacDonald and Tamsin came here alone to catch big fish in their seasons in a lake clear as skies displaced except where the ouanminiche swam in the brown thickets of reeds Tamsin usually refused beds, lamps and anything else which occurred to her. Unless MacDonald caught her at it she would take her blanket and sleep under the stars; hearing the little creatures of the wild about their business; watching bright-helmeted armies such as townsfolk never see march royally across the firmament; wakened now and again by sniffs, enquiring, soliloquizing, stealthy patters near at hand, or single crashes distant and definite, and at last sleeping until the dawn wind sharp from the glaciers woke her.

This time she must keep the house with Mrs. Sheridan, but she could not keep her bed. The stir in her spirit drove her barefoot to the door when the camp was still; and there by the red end of the fire she saw Kirk lying with wide eyes looking at the stars.

Daily they hunted bear and moose and duck, and of evenings after the fish ceased rising they took the launch and went up the river; past creek-openings where lonely miners came from their shacks to listen to the faint singing and laughter, round headlands where Indian camps winked bright eyes and dogs were yelping at the prowling coyotes in the hills, to quiet beaches starred with pools and willow-thickets where the men
dragged great logs together and fired them and they ate supper of fresh-picked berries and fish fried over the flames, and were very merry. Mat Colom was happiest of all, and he often said so.

"Seems like at home I don't always feel like I could fight my way outer a paper bag," he said, feeding little sticks into the fire. "My brain don't function right wi' Aggie around, I guess. Sam Butler he says Melchizedec was that happy because he was an orphan. I wonder was he a bachelor, too. That feller Dant' now . . . him that chased a girl called Be'triss through hell . . . I guess he didn't know when he was well off."

MacDonald's straight trap of a mouth twisted into a smile. Old Mat enjoyed pitying himself just as much as he enjoyed repenting his sins. He had brought his books with him, and together he and Tamsin occasionally sought the Truth still, although she was usually off somewhere over the hills with Kirk. Even when she was with him MacDonald felt that the essential part of her was with Kirk; and he watched her tenderly in his new anxiety as she and Kirk sat with Mat between them and the three heads bent over the Great Blake in the firelight.

"No, boy," insisted Mat with his gentle vagueness. "I guess them three pints has sense enough for me and then some. There's Sam'al Butler he says we are all like thistledown blown by the wind, an' here the Great Blake says 'The thistle is my brother.' Then there's the Bible with 'All flesh is grass,' which in the light o' the other two surely means 'All grass is flesh.' So spuds and beans and things is surely cannibalism, an' I won't eat any more."

Tamsin put her arms round him and hugged him to hide her laughter. Kirk said gravely: "I wouldn't judge they were. You see, the only greens specified are those we don't eat. Likely they're mentioned purposely so's to make it clear we can eat the others."
"That so?" said Mat, relieved. "Well, I never did want to
eat grass nor thistles that I call to mind ..."

MacDonald saw the laughter in those two pairs of eyes that
were always seeking each other, and he got up and went down
to look at his nets with a miserable anger boiling in him.
It is by the little subtle things that women express their souls,
and he knew well enough what Tamsin's soul was expressing
now. He had always recognized that our ideas come to us
down even more varied channels than our blood and that God
alone knows from what centuries of wasted strengths, tragic
opportunities, mysterious and pregnant lonelineses Man has
wrested the idea that he can stem or speed the inexorable laws
that govern life. Man, MacDonald was coming to believe,
cannot govern his life except according to the law. And the
present law was saying youth to youth in the sweet o' the
year. What was MacDonald to set his face against that?

Challis returned to Knife with a passing boatload of Indians,
but Kirk and Tamsin hardly knew that he was gone. They
were purely vagabond, meeting together this spring and
summer, incredibly swift as it always is in the North, packing
the whole new life of things into a staggering two or three
months. Kirk, walking alone one day, saw butterflies, bugs
and beetles in the blue grass all about this eternal yearly
business of love and mating, just as the animals were fussing
over the next stage of it: the feeding of their young. By his
foot lay a scrap of blood-dabbled rabbit-fur where a fox had
lately struck. Caught on a rose-bush was a tiny bunch of pale
feathers torn from a bluebird's breast by some pouncing
marten or mink. There was the remains of a dead fish dropped
by an eagle. Each generation providing for the next. Each
generation fooled into the same old game as he was preparing
to be fooled . . . or was he? He did not know.

Responsibilities, claims, settling down. . . The footloose
spirit in him rebelled. Everywhere rose-bush and saskatoon
and high-bush cranberry were prodigal with fruit, hurrying
to propagate their kind while the short fierce summer lasted. Everywhere birds called and fish leapt in the lakes and rivers. The full tide of creation was in the air, on the land, beating its wings around his head, across his brooding eyes.

“She’s too good for me,” he muttered, wondering if he believed it. “I guess my folks must have been a bad lot.” He felt vaguely that the dice had been loaded against him from his cradle; took lazy aim and shot a porcupine, carrying the loutish and prehistoric creature to Tamsin sitting lower down the hill, her bare head aflame in the sunset. The evening was very still. Some Indians paddling by were small as insects down on the wide dark of the lake. Tamsin, watching the last lights fade on the hills, wondered if they too got low and discouraged like folks at the end of the day.

Now there came hourly a perfect passion of colour upon the hills. Goldenrod dazzled everywhere. Wide pink puddles of fireweed lay under willows of brassy flame; thick-leaved cotton-woods were cloth-of-gold, mosses in the slews had turned lavender and lilac and warm purples. About the fishing-shacks saskatoon was cardinal and juniper was russet, and the roses opened among polished carnation leaves. One solitary jack-pine stood sombre among dark balsams, but the lichen on their boles was amber, umber and blood-red.

The lake took all this and more as though used to it; but Tamsin, when the launch glided softly among little islands after the duck, never ceased to marvel that these could come up from their divings as they went down. With all these wells of intense colour that took them it seemed impossible that some should not stay on their sleek wings.

“Ware duck,” said MacDonald sharply, and the launch, carrying its own way with the motor cut off, slid round a headland into a feeding multitude that rose among the silvery reeds in a long curving swathe. The guns were busy right and left after great gaudy-plumaged mallard trailing a ripple as they heavily lifted, butterballs bouncing into the willows,
jaunty black-and-white Siwash settling again with faint splashes, teal zigzagging. Presently the noise and the echoes were over, and in the silence which is always waiting to flow in again over the Yukon the men gathered the bodies which floated like tiny puffs of Chinese embroideries on a shield of red lacquer and jade. MacDonald pricked his ears.

"Fush rising," he said. "I'll have anither try at the hyas tyee the night."

For years MacDonald had patiently angled for this Trout Chieftain of Sagish, and he was closely examining his gear as Tamsin rowed him in the dug-out to the deep hole near the shacks where the monster usually lay.

Mat and Sheridan were skinning butterballs and Kirk bringing wood when shouts and shrieks from the lake took them down at a run to see MacDonald, who, alternately trying to balance the dug-out and gaff an apparent volcano, was bellowing:

"Haud him, Tamsin. Buffalo him. Land o' Glory, ye'll have us over. Dom ye, Tamsin; I've grown auld waitin' on that fush. . . . Haud him . . . ."

A blaze of language usually reserved for his dog team followed as he missed a gaff, and Tamsin, reeling wildly, shot into the lake with a lurch which sent him out the other side. He swam round to find her treading water and struggling with her fingers in the great red gills.

"I've done ye, feyther," she sputtered. "Feyther, auld dear, I've sure wiped your eye at last. Get me ashore, will ye, for I'm busy myself."

Everyone helped salvage a triumphant and breathless Tamsin flung this and that way by the flapping fish while MacDonald stood with water cascading off him and complained:

"To catch my fush an' then bid me bring her in! Did iver a body hear the like o' that?"

Prouder than if he had caught it himself he cleaned the
monster and hung it up. It extended to Tamsin’s knees, and she was a long-built girl. But he refused to guess its weight.

“Eh, let it grow,” he said. “It’ll sure be the biggest fush ever struck in Yukon afore all Tamsin’s friends are dune with it.”

Tamsin, her long damp hair loosely braided as when she was a girl, cooked butterballs to the semblance of crisp brown doughnut, made johnny-cake and, with Mrs. Sheridan, fed her men. She was gayer than Kirk had seen her yet, teasing MacDonald, shocking Mrs. Sheridan when she and old Mat talked the Great Blake’s hell between them. The brief day of the mosquito was over, and as blackflies do not bite at night it was possible to sit round the fire in the blue gloaming and be at peace. But Tamsin would not be peaceable. She wanted to laugh, to cry, because everything was so perfect and must so soon be past.

“Eh, you know what Indians do when they’ve had a streak of luck,” she said. “They dance. You needn’t dance, feyther, seeing that your luck’s not so noticeable as mine. Come, Kirk. Come, Uncle Mat, Mr. Sheridan . . .”

She seized a tin dish for a drum and commenced to circle the fire, chanting monotonously the Indian burden: “Um-pum-pa, Um-pum-pa, Um-lo-la”; striking the tuneless drum and shuffling with the men after her taking the chorus. Kirk had known Indians keep this up for hours, but almost at once he realized Tamsin’s wicked intention to make her following giddy by narrowing the circle. Round and round they went. Then old Mat sat suddenly, looking surprised, and Sheridan stepped out.

“Gee! This makes me sick in the stomach,” he said, and went down to the lake, reeling a little.

The circle was close about MacDonald now, with Kirk keeping up through sheer determination and longing to shake Tamsin. Then she stepped fleetly aside, leaving him alone
bawling "Um-pum-pa" into MacDonald's grizzled beard. MacDonald looked with a grim smile.

"Eh," he said, "Ulysses was the wise man when he tied himself tae the mast, but I doubt Tamsin wud hae jowkit him off it some way."

They sat closer round the fire after that. Kirk played Dixie, La Paloma, Greensleeves and other fond and foolish airs such as reveal glimpses of the wandering heart of men; and the high sweet flute-notes rose against the dark, soulless sometimes as bird-music and again, Tamsin thought, as tender and passionate as cries from those reed-maidens Pan cut and blew wild souls into. Mist turned thin and ghostly. Behind, the two little fishing-shacks made a weak bid for life and vanished into the night. Closer and closer swept up the awful sublimity of the Silent Places, laid on her their hands of warning and memory. An Arctic owl drifted by, a dim raft of foam with eyes of beryl. Mat Colom sighed, feeding the fire. MacDonald drew grass-blades through his horny hands until they protested in frightened whispers. Even Mrs. Sheridan was moved. She cried:

"Sakes, if that don't make me want to live Outside a little while an' see life! Set me in an auto dolled up fit to kill an' let me spark around Vancouver a piece and I reckon I wouldn't want to call the king my uncle."

"My!" Kirk put down his flute with a laugh. "Sheridan'll surely hate me if I go giving you those notions. Tamsin, what have you got out of it?"

In the firelight he could see her white throat and arm and the bounteous curves of her strong young body, but he could not see her face. She said at once, as though obeying him in spite of herself:

"I . . . I was wishing all the folks with troubles could come out here till the hills talked to them and the great rivers made them think great things . . . and till all the quiet of the world came into them and stayed with them always."
She spoke with the delicate intensity of conviction, and Kirk's laugh was forced.

"Lord; I play the flute to keep the quiet off of me," he said.

He found her when the camp was going to bed down by the lake with her arms round a gnarled little Yukon spruce about twice her height. She was talking to it as she often talked to the trees when alone.

"Like wee auld maiden ladies with skirts tucked in for fear o' mice . . . that's what you're like, my dearies." She put her lips to the rough bark coaxingly. "In two days I'll be gone, my bonny wee tree, but will you think of me sometimes and remember my kisses?"

"I would remember them, Tamsin. Kiss me now, and we'll never forget it."

She turned slowly, with wide eyes and parted lips as though the whole of her drank in his dearness.

"I know, I . . . know," she breathed. Then her hands went over her face. "Not to-night. Not just now," she said, almost inaudibly.

That sensitiveness in Kirk which often took him so much further than he could stay felt that Tamsin, having looked straight and unexpectedly at love, was driven to veil her face before its wonder. He went away, knowing that when Tamsin gave that kiss it would be on her side at least a pledge and a sacrament. And he was uneasy, knowing that although he meant to have that kiss he was not at all sure that he wanted it in this way.

Because on this last day they were all to hunt moose the camp was astir before the dawn. The air struck chill and the shallows were faintly filmed with ice. Half the end of the lake was filled with a white confusion of life, and MacDonald said briefly:

"Waveys goin' South. Our marchin' orders, fowk."

"My! It's an awfu' thing to be civilized," cried Tamsin, poignantly.
MacDonald looked at her radiant face, loose hair and bare feet.

"Time ye were back to it, ye wild thing," he said, fondly.

"She's thinkin' of the kiss I will give her to-night," Kirk thought.

On the misty crest of the hill it was as though God, having lately commanded *Let there be Light*, was beginning to think the world, so that it was coming softly and experimentally into being; with mountain-tops unsure yet on their translucent bases, lakes airy shadows that seemed to move, giant shoulders and flanks of nearby granite emerging gleaming for a moment and then sinking back into that cauldron of golden mist. Woods showed as an instant's bright thought and faded, a blue vivid sky came and went, sound had not yet impinged on this vast inspiration.

Tamsin, clinging to poplar saplings for fear this flowing light would carry her off into space, knelt to drink at a thin thread of silver that slid over the edge of the world and found her face brushed by wet late water-avons, tall and slenderly white as maidens caught at their bathing. They fitted this exhalation of a world better than the voices and tramping feet now going by her unseen; but when Kirk leaned his dark warm face and the steel barrel in his armpit out of the fog she got up and went with him as though, God's world having suddenly come to fruition, it was natural that he should be the first man in it.

Last night Kirk had seen a large bull-moose heading West, and he led them at a rapid pace across the hills, sure with a sureness that baffled Tamsin that he would be found among the slews and little valleys lying out from the Tyee Glacier some sixteen miles away. It was a long trail; but the men with heavy Savage sporting rifles under their arms and the women with their little .303 Winchesters had been bred on the hills. They passed a slope where Kirk and Sheridan had trapped and skinned a grizzly a few days before. Coyotes
sprang away from the body and flickered off through the coarse yellow grass like streaks of itself blown free, and over the huddled bones circled butterflies blue as forget-me-nots. They toiled up granite saddlebacks through an atmosphere as radiantly deceptive in distance as though it belonged to pantomime, with long coloured spurs lying against far-off dazzling horizons like dragons before the footlights. Once, between hills, they looked down on an uncharted lake with two dug-outs—inch-long at this height—loaded to the plimsol mark with Indians and their outfit going some mysterious otherwhere. And always, threading the naked earth, narrow through the reindeer-moss or cardinal leaves of the blueberries, went the little mysterious trails of the wild; soft-footed, soft-snouted creatures which men so rarely see.

Heat blazed out of a brilliant sky although the chill of glaciers was in the air. Mat Colom sat down to mop his head and drink from his flask. He said, reflectively:

"The Great Blake says as Eve dwells no longer in Adam’s bussum. He mus’ pursue her unceasin’ly. Reckon you’ll find yer bull-moose is a lady after all, Kirk boy."

Further along the steep shaft of the hill they saw him, down in a green valley with brown peaty pools where slim yellow poplars watched their beauty like narcissus and patches of wild rose burned. Snowshoe rabbits flicked their white scuts in and out of the blossoming grasses; and among them the moose stood still, sun on the rough fawn of his hide and goatish tail, his great ears moving against the blackflies, pools of light in the wide shovels of his horns, prehensile nose sniffing the clean air.

Strung out to the posts Kirk assigned them they went down; Tamsin, MacDonald and Kirk up-wind and the others behind to cut him off. And still he was there, down among the puffs and squirts of carmine and pink and burnt-umber of turning foliage, tossing his horns lightly or treading with his splay feet in cool mud while snowshoe rabbits played about him like
pale little flames. Tamsin thought afterwards that she must have been tired or the squirrel that jumped out from a rotting trunk startled her. She lost her balance; snatched at a branch that broke in her hand, snatched at Kirk and went headlong with him down through the crashing scrub.

Kirk, on his back with the wind almost knocked out of him, saw that dun mountain of flesh heave by as the moose leapt him, and pumped his high-power Remington into it with an instinct quicker than thought. The same instinct and the same rifle which had killed Olafsson; and then he turned as he lay, momentarily dazed, blinking at Tamsin, who stared from her hands and knees, while behind her the moose blundered to the rim of a pool, sank gradually until his great head lay in it and the water bubbled with crimson froth.

“Gee!” cried Sheridan, hurrying up with MacDonald. “I never did see a man handle a gun that quick before.”

“I guess mebbe you’ve practised some,” said MacDonald, handsomely trying not to show disappointment, for he had promised that moose to his old Savage.

Kirk was nervous, thinking of Olafsson. He blundered out:

“Oh—just a fluke. I don’t much care ‘bout doin’ what’s easy to do or winnin’ what’s easy won.”


It was late before the moose was skinned and the great horns packed on Kirk’s shoulders, the pelt on MacDonald’s, and lumps of the dark rich meat hung all around Sheridan. Even Mat Colom carried his share; and so they went towards Sagish through a world sunk in a grey delicate hush like a moth’s wings and distances standing away, mysterious, remote. It was the dead moment in the North when twilight is not yet gone nor the multitude of stars come; but Tamsin felt her blood hurrying as though some most vital salt of life had been injected into it, and on the edge of a hill just above Sagish she stood, letting the others go by. A miner had once
been drifting in the hill, and raw little holes showed in its side like the nests of cliff-swallows. Kirk turned back to her, grotesque with the great horns rising behind his head, saying:

"Don’t let’s go down yet, Tamsin. It means the end o’ all this. Wait an’ see the moon rise from here, anyways. Shall we?"

"They’ll wonder what’s happened us."

"Not they. Your father’ll know you’re safe wi’ me."

He did not know it himself, but Tamsin brightened. This adventure seemed in some way what she had been waiting for.

"Eh. That’ll be fine. Kirk, I know what we will do. We’ll build a wee fire here above the world and make our sacrifice to the gods of Sagish before we leave them."

She was palpitating, shining. Kirk thought: "She’s gettin’ ready to give me that kiss in her own wild way," and then was ashamed of his grossness. That kiss would be given, but it would not be in her mind to make it gross. Tamsin with those queer pagan thoughts of hers meant to place their pledge upon an altar of some sort, sanctify it with an offering of a sweet savour. His heart began to beat faster, his brain to reel slightly. Extravagances and daring are in the blood of all men who adventure far, who live in the distant places. He felt himself primitive man in the world alone with his primitive woman, and said quickly:

"I’ll do whatever you want. What first?"

"Sticks for the fire," said Tamsin eagerly.

She seemed so alive, so glowing that he could almost believe her frequent assertion that she drew earth’s life into her. He set the great horns down and went to work in the blurred pale light, with the woods dark below them and storm-wrack gathering behind the hoary heads of the white peaks to the east. His chance would come presently, but this was Tamsin’s hour. Tamsin who, like Thompson’s colt, must swim the river every time she wanted a drink. If she chose to
go this way around for a kiss, he thought, let her. It would be the sweeter when it came.

He lit the fire, noting the time by his wrist-watch as the red flames leapt between his hands. Already it was late; the descent would be slow through those close woods of rotting logs and lumber where so many fires had run; MacDonald would be wild . . . and what did he care? He would have her now, and the future could see to itself as it always had done before. He had never been a man to miss the present because of that.

Tamsin had forgotten time. She felt her gods about her, with this dark warm one greatest of all. She dropped twigs, flakes of granite, crumbled earth into the heart of the fire. Then she pulled a long hair from her shining head and burned that.

"You too, Kirk," she said, and drew him down beside her with the firm soft clasp of her hand. "It's our sacrifice."

Kneeling, he obeyed, watching her rapt face. Tamsin, heir to the great simplicities, was a large calm goddess of the ancients, seeing in all their majesty the gods she propitiated. But Kirk felt acutely conscious that he only saw Pan's satyrs whisking their scuts, heard down the steeps their bleating laughter.

Clouds came down like dark angels with folded wings. A spark of flame leapt among the dying twigs and showed a tear on Tamsin's cheek.

And then Kirk had his arms about her and his lips on hers. It was such a kiss as he had never before given or taken, would never give or take again, because his heart was suddenly crying:

"You're a million million times too good for me, but I love you . . ."

"I love you. I love you, Tamsin, Tamsin," he said.

Presently the clouds unfolded their wings. There was a clap of fury from the sky, a rush of rain, lightning forking along
the raging storm. In the last flare of firelight before the flames died with a hiss Kirk saw Tamsin stand with her arms up and laughter on her streaming face.

"They're jealous," she cried. "They can't be as happy as we are. They can't. They can't!"

She cried it like a challenge. With her soaking clothes wrapped round her by the wind and the livid flicker across her face she seemed inspired, a joyous reckless part of the storm. Kirk remembered the miner's shack he had seen just below the drifts in the hill. There they could shelter from this battering downpour. He shouted it in Tamsin's ear and ran with her through the blind and whimpering woods where the stiff brush bent and whipped and the rolling thunder echoed. Jagged flashes of light showed them the shack, and as Kirk pulled wider the sagging door a tawny shadow with greenish eyes shot by with a snarl.

"A lynx," cried Tamsin, scrambling in. "Why did we let it go! All the animals of the woods should be with us here to-night."

"I guess there's never room for a man an' a lynx within the same walls," said Kirk, fastening the door. The mocking devil in him warned him that soon there might not be room for himself and Tamsin. "I'll behave," he told himself, and found that he was immediately making plans to break that promise as he kicked together rubbish blown in by the wind through the years and got a fire going.

Tamsin, who had wrung out her skirts and shaken herself as unconcernedly as a young animal, went round the shack, looking at the tattered coloured prints upon the wall. They were crudely vulgar as only stuff from the lowest-grade papers can be, and she flung them on the fire.

"Eh, the poor body," she said pitifully. "Maybe he thought them bonny. I never like coming in places where a man leaves his secret thoughts behind him this way. So ugly they're apt to be . . . and with such beauty outside if he'd only look
for it.” She sat by the fire which Kirk had made big with
logs, stripped off her soaked stockings and stretched her feet
to the blaze. Her toes were prehensile as an Indian’s from
going so much in moccasins, and she crooked them delicately
about the ends of twigs to push them into the fire. It gave her
a primitive angle, but she had suddenly calmed into a woman
who comes home to sit with her man at her own fireside.
“It’s a kind wee shack,” she said, reflectively. “Kirk, if
you had your flute now you could play us both into
Paradise.”

“Aren’t we there now?” He sat by her, drawing her against
his shoulder. “You remember my jews’ harp at Klunae,
Tamsin? And, you never knew, dear, but I found a shack in
the woods for you at Klunae. I planned to run away with you
so we could stay there alone for ever and ever.”

“Did you? Did you? Had it begun with you even then,
lover?” Her voice was low and awed. “Kirk, why didn’t I
guess it? And . . . why didn’t you . . . run away with me
then?”

“Uncle Mat . . . don’t you remember my rousing you one
night, Tamsin? And he caught us, and . . .” He held her
tight, murmuring: “He pretty near lammed the soul out of
me. He . . . he made everything ugly to me for years. That’s
why I behaved as I did in Dawson. That’s why . . .
since . . .”

She stooped her head and kissed his hand.

“Eh, my poor lad,” she whispered.

She lay back in his arms while he covered her face with
kisses. The steam rose from their drying clothes in a thin
cloud, enveloping them in mystic union, Tamsin thought,
wondering that a heart so full of joy did not break with it.

Anciently the Greeks held that character is the only Fate:
that by the mass of petty indulgences, petty rejections which
his years have been heaping up, a man stands or falls when
his test finally comes. Kirk’s heap of rejections had been small,
They were nothing to stand on now. He was hot in pursuit of Tamsin, wanting her kisses while yet the grinning imp within his blood remembered Dierdre, remembered how easily past loves had been spilled and lost in the sand. To Tamsin, partaking here of her sacrament with dreamy, smiling eyes and tender lips he was saying:

"Never any sense in thinkin' too much of past or future, is there, sweetheart? Just take the minutes as they come . . . ."

"Folk don't generally seem able to take their minutes here and there without paying for them with their years, lad," she said, dreamily.

"'Pay! Nothin'. He laughed impatiently. "Sure they can. This minute belongs to us, Tamsin. I guess your Gods sent it. We don't need worry about the future, do we? Let's be happy now. Listen what I read some place. 'I am the Lord of Life an' Life is warm.' There! I'm the lord o' your life, Tamsin. I guess you know it. Say it, then."

She repeated it; trembling as he drew her closer, cheek to cheek, while without the shack the night was full of trumpets.

The waveys off Sagish Lake were going over, far wild voice in a wild sky when Kirk and Tamsin came down the hill through a rain-washed morning all blowing blues and gold. Sheridan, that silent hunter, stared at them stepping delicately like deer over the slash. Sun was golden-brown on their uncovered arms, necks, faces. Their eyes shone as though they had found a new world. But Sheridan, knocking out tent-pegs, understood that this was very far from being a new world and MacDonald would certainly have something to say about it.

"Well, for goodness' sake," cried Mrs. Sheridan, bouncing out of the shack. "Nice goings-on, I will say. MacDonald's looking for you with a gun, Mr. Regard. Where have you been at all?"

"You hadn't ought of kep' Tamsin out all night, boy," quavered old Mat. But Tamsin just dropped Kirk's hand and
walked right on into the shack. Her face had a queer look, like sleep-walking, Mat thought. And Kirk too was grave.

Kirk was wondering just what Tamsin had done to him up in the shack to give him much the same awe of her that he had of the Yukon. She had cradled his head in her young arms as she used to do as a child; she had talked and loved and mothered him; she had laughed and teased and been a gay and rapturous girl. But there had been a loveliness to it all, a crystal simplicity which had exacted from him a most unaccountable reverence. Never before had the gracious beauty of love so shone before his eyes. Some imperishable magic she had invoked, going back like other racial instincts to the days when men walked with God. In that little dark smoky shack Kirk had felt, strangely unafraid, the presence of God, and he could not forget it. Perhaps, he thought, bewildered and yet happy in a new way; Tamsin truly drew from some diviner source, was conscious of those higher powers she so firmly believed in.

He had come to the outer world again seeing a chaste, troubling beauty in it. The trembling of rain in the leaf-cups, the thin trills of birds were ethereal, of heaven. For a little he had walked with Tamsin, uplifted in this new ecstasy; but with every downward step through the tangling undergrowth to the entangling life of men he began to doubt. The standard was too high, the grade too steep. He could never make it. A miserable pride told him that he would suffer at seeing himself cheap in Tamsin's eyes and yet he would cheapen himself. The dog would return to its vomit, and not even Tamsin could prevent it.

Hesitating, he walked slowly towards the strip of yellow beach, and MacDonald climbed out of the launch where he had been tinkering with the motor and looked at him. MacDonald had not slept all night and his face showed it. He knew, as Kirk did, that the North is far more rigid in its conventions than is the big world Outside. He knew, as Kirk
must know, how small a thing can be blown into a scandal by idle breaths.

"I hope you weren't nervous about Tamsin," said Kirk, too nervous himself to be other than jaunty. "We couldn't tackle all that raft of wet stuff last night, so we found a shack and waited for the light."

"Ay-ee," said MacDonald, slowly. "Gin onythin' had gaed wrang I kenned ye'd hae loosed aff a shot or twa tae give us the direction. But we'd no hint whaur tae find ye. I'll say no fren' o' mine'd kept her oot this way."

"Better than giving her a broken leg."

Kirk began to show defiance. He knew too well what MacDonald expected him to say and he would not say it. Unhappily he knew that he did not want to say it. Already memory of those hours up in the shack were chilling him. Love, he felt resentfully, was meant to be a physical attraction and not a communion of saints.

"H'm." MacDonald's blue eyes were pin-pricks in the hard weathered face. "I guess she's no such a fule as that comes tae. Tamsin! Here!"

Tamsin came, so gloriously unconscious of anything resembling shame that by natural corollary she inflicted it on the men. She looked at Kirk as though they shared a miraculous and God-given secret, and MacDonald's voice softened in spite of himself.

"I'm no that pleased wi' either of ye, Tamsin. Ye're ower auld for they games the noo. There's Mrs. Sheridan wantin' ye tae reed the shack up, an' I guess ye might gie Sheridan a hond wi' the tents, Kirk."

He looked after them puzzled as they walked away. Tamsin moved as though on air, but young Kirk was hang-dog. What had they been at? "I'll git it frae them aince we're hame," he thought, climbing back into the launch.

The motor kept Kirk busy all the way home, spitting and sulking as if it resented his hands. Mrs. Sheridan was silent,
scenting scandal as only virtuous women can. Mat looked 
troubled, and MacDonald at the wheel was an implacable old 
Viking with no eyes for Tamsin chirruping her wordless songs. 
Tamsin felt that she was passing over new boundaries, setting 
in fresh survey- pegs. A hotter stranger consciousness was 
upon her now. She thought: "Life after life . . . Kirk and 
me together. Going on . . . Kirk . . ."

She watched the way with dreaming eyes. Rain had tar-
nished the colour on the hills. It was gone, that bright clear 
glory which had lit the earth like an unworn sun. Fireweed 
stood draggled like grey and faded women; goldenrod was a 
conquered warrior shorn of its flaunting plumes. The yellow 
poplar-pillars were smudged with brown, and everywhere 
leaves smitten into tawny, black and dull prune dropped in 
abrupt shoals through the windless air to lie on the thin films 
of ice close to the bank.

Tamsin thought: "We'll go down to Dawson together," and 
then with a shock of remorse she remembered MacDonald 
and went to him straightway. MacDonald had felt the evening 
chill and put his coat on. But that did not warm his heart. 
Nor was he much easier when Tamsin slipped an arm about 
his neck.

"I want to stay here with you, feyther dear."

"Weel . . . dinna talk till we're through the Trumpet."

Roaring, a bottle-neck of green waters took them between 
rock-walls and out again. MacDonald felt for Tamsin's hand. 
"Aye . . . Tamsin," he said, tenderly.
Chapter Six

Now the cold weather was near Miss Tinney had put Stewart and Challis at a small table between stove and window, leaving the long table to prospectors, hunters and other flotsam. From there Challis the law-bringer could see a good deal of his domain down the one street of Knife, and Stewart had an uninterrupted view of the long ugly room.

To-day it seemed more desolate than usual, because soon now Tamsin would certainly be home, and then, Stewart felt, there would be more to hope or fear. It was not possible that young Regard would have missed his chance. And so it was not for Stewart that Tamsin would make a home. For the rest of his days he would feed here, where the naked whip-sawn walls had great gaudy advertisements of Dominion Royal Ammunition showing all the animals of the North in Noah's Ark promiscuity and the few fly-specked almanacs with dates of past years torn off made the only other adornments. Coldly aloof, this place asserted that men came here to fill their stomachs and nothing else. After all, thought Stewart bitterly, what else do we come on earth for—the most of us?

"I hope Miss Tinney has something decent to-night," said Challis, pushing his chair about noisily as a summons. "I haven't had a proper feed for two days."

Challis had been searching Indian camps up and down the Kanana, trying to trace the stills from which the Indians were certainly getting drink. The Mounted Police rarely consider this their job, but Stewart knew that Challis was restless. Probably he and the young Policeman had the dullest and emptiest lives on all the Kanana.

"I pumped that old doctor all I knew up at Aroya," said Challis, disconsolately, "but not a chirp could I get out of
him. Old beast... sleeping in other men’s beds and living in other men’s houses all his time. I think he’s mad.”

“He’s saner than most of us,” said Stewart, dryly. “He knows how to get something for nothing. A whole bunch of Indians came down on the Indian village in the night. I guess no one in Knife got any sleep for their dogs. They had hooch, too. I could smell it.”

“Good egg,” said Challis, revived. His fresh boyish face took on a keen almost cruel look.

Stewart thought: “What sort of life is this where a man can only win what he wants through the miseries of others? Challis now, on the track of Kirk Regard, supposing there was anything in that story...”

Miss Tinney came in, slapping down a plate of meat and surrounding it with the little dishes of corn, chips, green salad and pickles. She grew the best vegetables in Knife, although MacDonald ran her a close second; and in a land where turnips grow as large as pumpkins and potatoes as large as turnips, this, the community considered, was saying a great deal.

“I guess the MacDonalds’lII be fair sick to come home,” she said. “Sour-doughs clean through, those two are. Can’t keep ’em off the trail for long. If Tamsin marries young Regard, I reckon she’ll go Big Game Guiding with him, too.”

Stewart felt his hard dry skin flushing. That idea which had come into his mind suddenly grew. “After all, what harm in telling Challis?” he thought. “Regard had a right to prove himself innocent before he takes Tamsin.” With eyes on his plate, he said, carelessly:

“I suppose Regard does mean to take the Patrol over that new cut.”

“He’s contracted for it, hasn’t he? Say, this salad is good!”

“He has contracted now, certainly. But when I gave him their wire on the day he came, he went right up in the
air and shouted 'No! No!' as if the devil was after him. Next day, after thinking it over, he came round with an acceptance."

Challis had laid down his knife and fork. His round eyes stared.

"The deuce!" he said, slowly. "Say, what do you know about that?"

"I thought it queer. Likely it was natural. He'd had enough of that trail in once, I take it."

"H'm," said Challis. He continued to eat slowly.

Chewing the notion, thought Stewart, feeling himself panting as though he had made great physical effort. But he controlled himself sternly. Assuredly if Regard was innocent, he had a right to prove it before he took Tamsin.

They finished their meal in silence, and then Challis got up, pulling down his tunic briskly.

"Come along and hunt up that new bunch of Indians, shall we?" he asked.

Grimly Stewart went with him. The thing was said now, but he had to watch the Policeman's reactions, although Challis was still silent as they walked down through the claret-coloured evening together. Suddenly Challis said:

"Not one damn thing is there for me to do up here but look the other way when fellows break the game-laws as they did at Sagish . . . and putting out hill-fires, and burying Indians. . . ."

Again he was silent.

Stewart thought: "He means to work up that idea about Regard, and he's trying to excuse himself for it."

The Indians' village as they neared it looked lonesome. In bunches the Indians had lately been pulling out for the high country and the winter trails to make their fur, and a vague film of neglect was spreading over the place where empty trails were foul with litter of rusted cans and old rags. The sense of flight was in the air, and the dug-out and canoes of
the newcomers, being still loaded, only added to the feeling of migration and farewell.

To Challis with his young healthy horror of decay there was hideous tragedy in these remains of a once proud and mighty nation now brought as low and worthless as the worn-out pots and pans. The place stank, and at Chief Bill Boss's frame-house with the platform Indians were lying everywhere, playing cards, playing Little Sticks, drinking, chewing gum. Challis had been into that house once, and he knew that behind the dirty lace curtains the only furnishings were a broken treadle sewing-machine, a big fly-spotted oleograph of Queen Victoria and a gramophone. Just as well, too, with all those women and babies. How many of the brown glossy young women carrying round-eyed babies went to Chief Bill Boss's account Challis could not guess. An Indian's family is dissection-proof except by the old women when a wedding is in the offing.

Then they could make tragedies, those old crones like the three squatting in the open round a funnel of sewn-together caribou-skins which they were smoking over a fire of deadwood. Tamsin had once shown Challis a letter written by Dick Dan, the boy who sometimes took her up to Aroya in MacDonald's launch, when the old crones had destroyed his hopes.

"My lover Isbel" (wrote Dick Dan),

"I ben'y near ver' sad for you. I not ever making marry you now, my lover, because my grandmother saying you my sister. Good-bye. I hope you marry some nice boy.

"Your lover . . ."

Nothing in it, probably; but the missionaries had been trying to engineer the marriage and the old women would not have their privileges as match-makers abused. Yet everything in the way of humanity was abused here. Up on the platform in the light of lanterns and red pipe-dottles, showed the intent
seamed and wooden faces with locks of black hair falling across them; dogs hunting fleas, decayed caribou-horns over the door, and a huddle of big clumsy fellows with the broad flat nostrils and cheekbones, the slanting eyes of a mongol breed.

"Are those the strangers? I never saw their type before," he asked Stewart.

"Loucheux from the North. All Loucheux are mongol and cross-eyed," said Stewart. "They won't stay long with this Siwash crowd."

Among the women leaning on the men Stewart noticed one girl bending forward in the light. She was quite pretty for an Indian, and large brass ear-rings swung either side her plump cheeks. This surprised him because Indians, although excessively fond of gimcracks, like them where they can admire them with their own eyes. "I never saw an Indian girl with ear-rings before," he thought. "And those are more like the kind a sailor wears."

Then suddenly he thought of Olafssen, the lost Swedish sailor who had worn big brass rings in his ears.

The girl moved back into the shadows. Challis had not noticed her and the two men walked away. He said with disappointment:

"Nothing doing here, and they'll be gone by morning, likely."

He went back to his lonely barracks, and Stewart stood a while in the scrub and the dying roses before he turned again towards the village. He was remembering what he had heard of the girl who had come into Dawson without Olafssen. Challis, in common with all the Yukon Police, had received a copy of the record and he had shown it to Stewart. The girl's name was Ooker, and in the description there had been no mention of the ear-rings. Then . . . Stewart pieced it out, she had been afraid to wear them there. Why? Because they would prove that Olafssen was dead. A girl may leave her
man and go with another as this one had evidently done, but she is not likely to take his ear-rings unless he no longer needs them. Stewart remembered that in the telegram Regard had sent he had been surprised to find no mention of the proviso “unless we locate Olafssen.” Kirk Regard knew, as Ooket did, that Olafssen would not want his ear-rings any more.

He arrived at that with a sudden jerk that left him giddy. Until he had smoked his pipe through he stood there, and because each man’s soul is his own Judgment Seat he suffered considerably. He knew that if he could fasten suspicion on young Regard he would do it; and he knew that this was not in any way for the sake of justice, but solely to part him from Tamsin. He went on at last down the darkened ways. The men were quarrelling now over their cards on the platform. The old women were huddled with shawls over their heads by the drying skins. By another fire that streamed sparks up into the night among the scrub a few young bucks were parcelling up the sticks of dried fish for the winter dog-feed. In and out of the light women moved in their dark clothes.

Stewart edged round the noise and bustle seeking the girl with the ear-rings. He found her at last under a saskatoon bush, her arm round the neck of a big Loucheux, and waited. When she got up and moved away he followed. If she was the girl he thought she was she would not be averse to a bit of flirtation with a white man. He stepped out.

“Good-evening, pretty little girl. I saw you on the platform,” he said.

Ooket stared at him with that loftiness of dumb insolence which all Indians have in perfection. He noticed that the holes in her ears were newly pierced and the scars unhealed. He tried again:

“You’re lucky to have that big Loucheux to look after you now that Olafssen’s dead, Ooket.”
She gave a little squeak and her small puddy thumb went into her mouth. Her face was frightened now, but she said nothing. They stared at each other, and civilization in the one was out-faced, out-matched by centuries of experience and secrecy in the other. She said at last:

"You go being polite to me. Big swell an' all dat. I not liking Kudi so terrible much. Pity . . . I t'ink it pity. I liking you, big swell."

Stewart gaped. This was Ooket, right enough, from all reports he heard of her, and the little jade was turning the tables on him quickly.

She sidled up and took his hand.

"It's not marry or that sort. I nodings. But I laiking white man all taime. Pity dat, eh? I wantum. Kudi not so terrible much. You more nice, eh?" She stroked his hand with her pudgy fingers. "You nice, big swell."

"Nicer than Olafsson? Or Kirk Regard?"

"Not knowing dem nai'mes," said Ooket. She giggled. "What you nai'me?" she asked, reaching up to draw her wet finger down his lean cheek. "I honest-to-God good girl," she coaxed.

Stewart was routed.

"Then you go back to Kudi," he said, hastily, and walked off, hearing her giggle behind him.

As he passed the platform Chief Bill Boss was very noisy, his grey head and thick flabby face dangerous in the lantern-light.

"Too much you win. Too niddle I win. No catching fun, dis," he cried, flinging down the cards, rolling to his feet with immovable face but glittering eyes. "We make odor play," he said. "Little Stick, perhap. I got lotta t'ing to play with, me."

Stewart slipped silently away. With the emotional childishness of the Indian there was nothing that Bill Boss would not stake, and with the swaggering conceit of the Indian he would
never allow that another could get the better of him. Ooket could have, thought Stewart ruefully, and went back through the thickening shadows to sit in his quiet shack and wonder what he had gained. Before young Blair came in from a game of dominoes with Challis he had decided upon two things. Undoubtedly Olafssen was dead, and almost certainly Regard shared that knowledge with Ooket. Further than this he would not let himself go. “It’s up to Challis now,” he thought, sternly.

In the next afternoon the launch came up over the tall seeded rushes and the shrunken river. The air was sharp with fresh snow on the heights, but the sun dazzled warm, although not so warm and dazzling as Tamsin’s face when she sprang ashore with young Regard behind her. The men, bronzed and ragged, were tumbling out, and Stewart, wishing that Tamsin had stopped to speak instead of rushing off like that, gave a hand to Mrs. Sheridan as she jumped ashore, and said, conversationally:

“Had a good time?”

“Oh, my! yes.” Mrs. Sheridan tittered. Then she pursed her mouth, looking prim. “I guess I’m not the only one had a good time,” she said.

Mat Colom climbed out ponderously. His shirt was dirty and torn and there were no buttons left to his waistcoat, but his soft old face was very genial until Aggie cried:

“Mat, you come right along home this minute and be cleaned up. Sakes! If you don’t look like you was a bit of the woods yourself.”

“The Great Blake he said once: ‘When I come home I met a Mighty Devil,’ ” remarked Mat with a wink at Stewart as he was led away.

Stewart helped the men unload tents and ropes and fishing gear. Sheridan was always silent, but Regard had a good deal to say about the motor and the big fish Tamsin had caught. He seemed to be avoiding MacDonald, who looked old and
hard and unhappy. There was a sense of unease, of something withheld.

Stewart went back to his shack believing that MacDonald was upset because Kirk and Tamsin had come to an understanding. He felt that he had forgotten what a splendid-looking fellow young Regard was. He moved beautifully, and if his mouth and skin were rather too much like a girl’s he had those black-kinked brows and bold dark eyes to make a man of him. And if he had killed Olafsson and Challis discovered it through Stewart’s hints, how was Tamsin going to feel about it? Stewart had enough to keep him occupied to-night without any excursions into Christian Science.

Sagish had returned Mat something of his self-respect, and he actually defied Aggie, who was wanting to know what Mrs. Sheridan had looked like that for.

“Yeah; you can say ‘Quit that talk,’ but I’ll lay Tamsin’s been up to something, only you men are that crazy about her you won’t tell. Mrs. Sheridan’s goin’ around like a turkey on a hot plate, wi’ her mouth all shut up. I guess I’ll go right over after supper an’ find out what’s happened.”

“You’ll find out a darn sight more than ever was,” retorted Mat, but he went up to the store feeling discouraged. MacDonald had been glum all the way home, and in any but his old friend Mat would have resented this. Wasn’t Tamsin surely going to marry Kirk, although naturally MacDonald would miss her?

The Loucheux Indians, as Jasper told him disgustedly, were all about the place like skeeters, and when Mat went into the store he found everyone busy, outfitting, grub-staking with promise of pay in next year’s fur, haggling over the heap of pelts which Kirk was helping MacDonald turn over on the floor. Because there had been no Hudson Bay Company in the Yukon since Alexander Campbell made his heroic bid for it and lost it every storekeeper in the country bought furs, although most of these were poorly cured and often trap-
marked. MacDonald, stalking about his little world, gaunt and grey, with his mouth in a straight line and his eye hard for a man, chose out marten, mink and wolverine, rejected red fox and wolf, while the Loucheux stood about, grunting like animals, rubbing moccasined feet against calloused ankles, chewing powerful tobacco as intently as animals chew the cud.

For almost three hours Tamsin at the counter thought in blankets, knives, shells and groceries, and spoke in cents and dollars. There was a thin sprinkle of women with the secret wisdom in their slant eyes which long centuries of civilization has mislaid. There were a number of scrofulous children chewing gum and decked with all manner of bright little wool knots over their skin coats. The dim little store smelt of raw skins and tobacco. The requirements of these people were of the wild. There was a harsh sense of coming winter in the close air.

Tamsin and Kirk found time for a word together here and there, and when all was done and the store left to Jasper, Mat went through with the others into the house.

"My! if you ain't a tumultuous vestal all right, Tamsin," he said, admiringly. "Not a mite tired, I surely believe. I did read somewheres that the planets are whippin'-tops for folks to play with, an' you certainly do look like you'd bin playin' with planets. Don't she, Mac?"

He asked it half-wistfully, but MacDonald's nod was grim.

"Come out here a minute," whispered Kirk, and drew Tamsin through the kitchen out on the back porch. Mat's soft bulk heaved in a sigh. Loverin'; that's what they would be at. And why shouldn't they? He looked anxiously at his old friend, searching for some method of approach to what he wanted to say. But long struggles with the Great Blake had overlaid his clarity of mind. He began, filling his pipe with nervous hands:

"You 'member Joel Smith, Mac? Him that poled his raft
'bout a thousand mile up the Yukon 'cause he'd had a difference with the W. P. & Y. Company an' he said he weren't goin' to be browbeat by any steamer that ever snorted. So he poled. Well... I ain't snorted—not really—at Aggie in years."

"Better for you if you did, likely," said MacDonald, indifferently.

"Yeah. Well, Sam Butler says somewheres as definitions are a kind o' scratchin' and gen'ly leave the place sorer. I guess Aggie's a definition, for I've often experyenced just that. It takes a woman to fight a woman. Mebbe that's why the Lord didn't design 'em to live together. I dunno."

"Likely." MacDonald's temper was still cranky. He walked about the room, hung up his old Savage over the door again. Next year at Sagish there might be no Tamsin. Mat sighed.

"Kirk's a good boy, Mac. All I got's to be his, though Aggie don't know it. You 'member how the Eskimo called Sir John Franklin Sir Gallywag, meanin' Man who don't molest our women. I can't jest think where I read that... ."

"What the deil are ye talkin' of?" cried MacDonald, turning on him blackly.

"We-ell, I guess Kirk's a real good boy, Mac. I orter know. I trained him, though it took some doin'. I reckon mebbe I can give him a sum down when he marries. All I got's his, Mac... 'cept Aggie."

MacDonald stopped walking; stood with hard thumbs in his leather belt staring down at the soft old body that seemed to shrink a little under his eyes.

"If ye're tryin' tae bribe me ye may as weil ken right noo that I ha' naethin' tae do wi't. I dinna ken what they twa are aboot. They've not troubled tae speak tae me of their arrangements."

The words wrung his heart suddenly as though Tamsin, pink and laughing at her wash-tub, had twisted it in her firm young hands. Mat said, simply:

"Well, what is there to speak about? If you can't see love
stickin' out of them half a mile, I can. Mebbe I've had more
experyence . . . ."

"See here; you're not a fool. Ye ken that Sheridan
wumman'll talk o' that night's werk on the hills, don't ye?
Weel, mebbe Kirk thinks he has cut the ground fra under
ma feet. I dinna ken. But when he or Tamsin tell me they're
going tae mairry I'll ken what tae say tae ye. An' if Kirk
dinna tell me I reckon I'll ken what tae say tae him. He's not
treated her right, Mat. Weel; that's all I'm sayin' the noo.
Gude-night."

When Mat was gone Tamsin came through the curtains
from the kitchen, her hair shining round her like a star, her
glowing face trying to be grave.

"Feyther, look," she said, solemnly, and stood before him
with both thumbs up. Then she ran to him, holding him
tight round the neck. "Eh . . . kiss your Tamsin, for I'm
that happy I could bust."

"So ye've fixed it up then?" demanded MacDonald.

"Why . . . what else?" to Tamsin those intimate kisses in
the shack pledged far beyond words. "And I'm sorry we stayed
out, dear, but we thought . . . ."

"Whaur's Kirk?"

"I chased him away home. I thought you and I would like
to-night just to ourselves, feyther dear."

"And that's cost her something," thought MacDonald,
gratefully. Although still sore and unapproving he was relieved.
At least there would be no need for talk. "Weel, weel; I'll
see him to-morrow, I guess. Are ye too grown-up-feelin' tae
sit on ma knee the night, lassie?"

In letting Tamsin out of his arms that night Kirk felt as
though something of himself had gone with her, and he felt
curiously young and humble and lonely as he walked up the
street and turned into the narrow scrub trail leading to the
fox farm. She stirred his senses till he burned—but so many
women had done that
“She’s got hold of the real things, an’ I haven’t,” he thought.
“I dunno as I want ’em, but I do know I’ll never do any
good without her now.”

He thought of Dierdre looking over her shoulder, drawing
him with her cozening eyes into hot, amorous kisses, furtive
handlings and pettings. That was the kind of thing he was
headed for all his life, and he liked it at the time if he did
loathe it always on looking back. It seemed to him so extra-
ordinary that a man could loathe and love a thing at the same
time. He was all a tumult of longing and distrust and passion
and a desperate desire to get somewhere with his feet on rock
and out of this bog. He felt that he could not do without
Tamsin. He felt that perhaps he could not for long do with
her. She might rid him of these terrors and devils and secret
miseries. She might presently bore him, and he would treat
her ill, and that would shame him and sink him lower than
anything had done yet.

“What’s a man to do. Life’s always layin’ traps for us,” he
groaned, going up between dim wafts of fragrance, dim wisps
of smoke, vague wire-netting round the poles, and the sour
odour of foxes. He had played lover and ridden away so often
that he did not recognize as absolute any pledge except the
final one: *I Kirk, take thee...* No; it couldn’t be Dierdre
now. He knew at least that much.

As he went up the trail two Indians followed him, noiselessly
dipping in and out of the scrub. Sunk in his thoughts he did
not hear nor see them, but Challis did and followed in a
curiosity not entirely idle. Stewart had put ideas in his head
which would not have come of themselves, but being there
they stuck. The Indians—a man and woman in many furs—
did not disclose themselves when Regard went into Colom’s
house; but a little later they knocked and were admitted, and
although Challis waited some time they did not come out.
It was very cold in the scrub, and he was hungry and very
tired after a long day up-river. Reason told him that the two
had probably made a strike somewhere and wanted a grub-
 stake or perhaps had a silver-fox for sale. Challis yawned,
 beat his numbed hands together and went away. He felt
 disconsolately that he never had any luck.

Aggie Colom had gone to probe what information she could
from Mrs. Sheridan, and Kirk found Mat alone in a soft heap
at the table where his books were spread. The light shone
through his scant hair and his big red ears and over his stub
hands with the broken nails, and Kirk wondered with a
tenderness that was half envy what blind alley of the truth
this poor old traveller was shambling down now. Mat said,
gladly:

"Sit down, boy. Ain't this a nice homey place when we
get it all to ourselves? Not as I wish yer Auntie Ag any harm,
for I sure was warned about her. But she was on hand an' I
wantin' a woman to run the roadhouse, so I married her and
hoped for the best, though I didn't get it. My, my!" he cried,
suddenly sitting up as he thought of the venom Aggie would
be preparing to spit, "ain't she a calamity, though! Boy, in
spite of all the religion I been gettin', I just wonder why I
don't snatch her bald-headed sometimes."

"Golly! I wish you would." Kirk laughed, feeling for his
pipe. Old Mat and Tamsin; both after the real worthwhileness
of life. He sat by him, putting an arm over the fat shoulder
and wondering why he so sincerely loved Mat, this you-
be-damned-old-sinner-turned-saint. Mat began to talk of
Tamsin.

"You hadn't ought of kep' her out all night, boy, MacDonald
was real her up about it. But I says: 'He's a good boy an' he
sure cain't help lovin' her. I guess she pulls like gravitation.
Sam Butler he says as any man can do great things if he
knows what they are. She'll show you, boy. She's showin' me,
but jest you remember that she's got a temper, too."

"Maybe she could show me," said Kirk, under his breath.
He kept his arm about Mat, wishing that there was less
tenderness in his own make-up and not knowing that there is usually too much humanity in the man who is driven by his passions. "How's the Truth getting along, old chap?"

"Why . . . I'm still dippin'. There's the Bible talks of a way of escape from a man's troubles' an' I been huntin' for that way. Tamsin says she reckons it's courage. She says there ain't no way o' meetin' a thing but facin' up to it. What do you think, boy?"

"Does she say that?" said Kirk, a little startled.

"She surely do, an' mebbe she's right. But I guess she ain't had experience yet. She's jest a raw girl reely in them ways. The Great Blake he says . . . here: I'll read it." He read slowly: "What is the price of experience? Do men buy it for a song? Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No, it is bought with the price of all that a man hath. I've sung an' danced in the street, but that didn't git me nowheres. Now I'm buyin'. I've give up drink an' cussin' an' women an' gittin' shut of Aggie, an' mebbe I'll be experienced enough some day to find the Truth. What d'you think, boy."

"I'll lay you will. But . . . a slow game isn't it, uncle?"

"We-ell, I ain't reformed yet, an' that's a fac'. Besides, how's a man always to know he's on the right track? Look at David, now. He pleased God, but I reckon he didn't please Uriah the Hittite."

"Sure thing. Uncle, you do go to the nubbin of things." Kirk sat on the table-edge and laughed. For all old Mat's insecurity of thought there was an atmosphere of security here. Mat, at least, was trying for understanding, and Kirk felt the new impulse quickening in him, taking colour and form as young leaves do. All things lovely and of good repute. If he had not always loved these things he loved them now—in Tamsin. That glory up in the shack . . . why not believe that he could feel it again—with Tamsin? He rose, eager to go to her, claim her before them all.

"Somebody knocking," said Mat. "Let him in, Kirk."
Kirk opened the door. Two Indians slid in and closed it. Mat saw Kirk stiffen as if he had been hit, while the girl put a finger in her mouth.

“Wah, wah,” said Ooket, desolately. Until she saw him again she had forgotten how desirable the white man was. “I loving you, Kirk.”

“Get to hell out of here,” said Kirk. His voice had a strange breathless sound, Mat thought. The Loucheux lurched forward with the step of one more used to the wild than the settled camps. He smelt of the wild places, but he had some English in his guttural throat.

“Why gitta hell outa here?” His eyes stared under his low forehead. “You give me sooneahs, you Regard. Heap money you give me.”

“Wah! wah!” wailed Ooket. It was hard work being an honest-to-God good girl. Because she had made clear to Kudi her position as a lawful widow it was no right reward that she should have to witness this. And even if she had told Kudi that it was Regard who spoke to her last night, was not that better than letting him think she had picked up an entirely new man?

“Did you hear me tell you to get out?” said Kirk.

Mat looked up at him. His face was hard and dark, but a tremor passed over it and the Loucheux was more at his ease. In his rough-and-tumble days Mat had learned men better than he would ever learn books, and he said now:

“He’s got a case, boy, that feller has. Don’t you git him too het up. What’s he wantin’?”

“Blackmail, I suppose. He hasn’t a case.”

“Give a howl for Challis, then,” said Mat, reasonably. “Here, you!” He lifted himself with a sudden hot feeling that he was big Mat Colom, proprietor of the Tinky-Tink again and Kirk the little large-eyed boy at his knee. “I’m goin’ to set the Moun ty on ter you, nitchie,” he said.

“No . . . don’t.” Kirk stood, his brows drawn down,
trying to think. Ooket had undoubtedly given him away to the Loucheux; but the Police would not believe anything she told them now. She had fed them too many lies. He was safe if he did not lose his head. The Loucheux dragged Ooket forward. Her baby face was frightened and she was between giggles and tears. The large brass rings in her ears bobbed ridiculously under her round wool cap. Mat sat heavily back in his chair, wondering why his body felt so shaking and fat. He said again:

“That feller’s got a case, Kirk. Best let him tell it. And the girl knows you. Who is she?”

Kirk did not answer. Ooket spoke as though Kudi were literally jerking the words out of her.

“I honest-to-God good girl. I not knowing terrible lot. I not liking Olafsson that terrible much. I not saying . . .”

Her sniffling rose to a bellow. She rubbed her face with both pudgy hands, and Kirk noticed the ear-rings that had been Olafsson’s with a new shock of dismay. Ooket had not been able to resist taking those rings, but she had had to explain them to her new man. Like a sharp dark picture in his brain he saw the soulless little creature there in the bloody snow among the pines, robbing Olafsson with greedy hands while himself made the trough in the stones, and he realized that they would be proof even to the Police that she had seen Olafsson dead.

“Well, git right along wi’ you!” commanded Mat Colom. He sat upright now, his hand clenched on the table. “What’s this about Olafsson? Wasn’t he the man what disappeared on the trail? Got lost, eh?”

“Aha. Him lost oll right,” sobbed Ooket.

“Dat feller kill heem,” said the Loucheux, unemotionally. “Stay oll night in Olafsson’s camp, dat feller. Olafsson come home an’ be kill. Bang!”

“Aha. Kill him oll right,” sobbed Ooket.

“Tellin’ the truth, I take it, Kirk?” asked Mat Colom.
"It was his life or mine. He shot first." Kirk lounged up to the Loucheux and laughed in his face. "Listen here, pitchie. You say I shot Olafsson. All right, I say Ooket shot him. In two minutes I call in the Mounty and I say: Here, you take this girl. She killed Olafsson and she's wearing his ear-rings. And they're the proof she killed him."

"Wah! wah!" cried Ooket. Kirk kept his eyes on the man, seeing there a dawning consciousness of the dominant race, a dawning doubt. "I good girl," wailed Ooket, rubbing her hands over her eyes.

"So she is. She had to do it. Now, you be kind to her and take her right out of this place sharp, and then I won't tell the Mounty. Give me those ear-rings, Ooket."

"No, by dam," cried Ooket, piercingly. She was roused now. Kirk stood still with his hand out.

"Give me those ear-rings. Don't you understand they're your death-warrant?" They were his own, but he could bluff her into fear.

"I liking. I not giving. I . . . ."

Kirk made a step and his eyes suddenly blazed.

"Did you hear what I said? Take them out of her ears, you pitchie, and give them to me."

Under his battered plug hat the man was still staring as though hypnotized. He fumbled at Ooket as bidden; but with a shriek of pain she pushed him off, slowly released them and dropped them into Kirk's waiting hand.

"Now . . . get out," said Kirk.

The man backed to the door. His heavy brain was bemused. There was no trail in the woods he could not follow, but he collapsed under straight attack. Ooket followed, sobbing despairingly:

"Wah! wah! I honest-to-God good . . . ."

Kirk slammed the door on them and turned back into the room. He stood a moment, slipping the ear-rings into his trouser-pocket, and then moved about, stoking up the stove,
setting an almanac straight on the wall, whistling a little. A fight of this kind was always exhilaration to him, and he had come out of it well. There could be no more trouble. But he felt somewhat uneasy, seeing Mat Colom humped in his chair like an old idol about to give judgment. He remembered how it had shaken Mat when young Cornell killed Barney at the Tinky-Tink, and hardened himself for what was bound to come. Mat said at last:

“Mebbe you’ll give me the rights o’ this now, Kirk.”
“Vous’ve got them. It was just as I said. He was pumping a whole clip at me. I had to stop him.”
“Wouldn’t disablin’ of done, boy?”
“What time had I to think of that?”
“Mightn’t you of took a chanst? You’re that peart wi’ a gun.”

“I hadn’t time to think, I tell you.” Kirk kicked a blazing stick back into the stove. “Besides, I was mad at him,” he added under his breath.

Mat nodded. He knew that kind of madness. He went on heavily:

“What was you doin’ in that feller’s camp, anyways?”
“I got on to the wrong trail . . . the shorter trail the Patrol want me to take them over this winter.”

“Then if they knew you saw Olafssen on that trail, why don’t they suspect somethin’?”

“They don’t know. They asked me if I’d seen him, of course. I told them I hadn’t.”

“You . . . my land, boy,” cried Mat, turning in his chair and looking up at the man by the stove. “What in the nation did yer do that for? Why not of told ’em it was his life or yours? Any man’d understand that. But . . . but . . .” his toneless old voice began to shake, “it’ll look mighty ugly if it comes out now . . . after all this while.”

“It won’t come out. What proof have they? Of course I’d have done better to have told, but . . . I’d been fooling
around some with Ooket at Macpherson, and I thought likely they'd suspect . . . reasons."

Mat nodded heavily. That explained it. And yet . . .

"I could of wished you'd told 'em, boy. Likely they'd of brought it in self-defence, an' so soon after the war, too, an' you snipin' over there all the time, and all the cases of shell-shock folks is claimin'. It'll take some straightenin' out now, I'm thinkin'."

"It can't be straightened out," said Kirk, impatiently, "and no one is going to try. I've been around it and around it, and I know it can't. I don't care a hoot about Olafsson. It was him or me, and he shot first. But I couldn't expect them to take it as a straight yarn in Dawson now. Forget it, old son, and let's be thankful Auntie Ag didn't turn up in the middle of it. That sure would have let the cat out of the bag."

"Oh, dear! And I been thinkin' yer that happy, boy."

The tremulous old voice broke, and Kirk came over and put an arm about the stooped neck. He felt freer, more cheerful than he had done since he killed Olafsson, for Ooket had been the only leak, and now her bolt was shot. And she was a natural siren, the little devil. He had no fear of her suffering at the hands of that big oaf.

"Dear old chap," he said, patting the fat shoulder. "So I am happy. Why wouldn't I be with you . . . and Tamsin?"

His heart leapt suddenly and warmly to Tamsin. There lay the proper way for a man, and not with such as Ooket who had got him into this.

"But, boy . . . why, boy . . ." Mat swung round like a clumsy windmill. "Don't you see . . . you can't go marryin' Tamsin now, boy."

"I can't what?"

"You can't be that mean to her. Any old time it might come out, dear. Don't you see? You can't have Tamsin livin' on the aidge of that volcaner. It wouldn't be right. You an' me . . . we can stand it. We're men."
His old blurred face looked up anxiously. Kirk checked his rising irritation. After all, he thought, it had been a pretty good shock for the old chap. He said, gently:

"Now, don't you get worryin' about me and Tamsin. That's my business. Forget it as I'm going to. Let's get along with that readin'."

"You can't marry her, Kirk. It ain't right. The Great Blake . . ."

"Damn your Great Blake." Reaction setting in suddenly warned Kirk that he couldn't stand any more. "That's enough. I'm going to bed. Good-night."

He walked across to the door of his bedroom. Old Mat got up, clutching the table, for it seemed to be swimming away.

"Kirk . . . now, you listen to me, Kirk. I won't have it. If you bring Tamsin inter this I'm goin' right around to Challis, Kirk. I will so."

"What's that?"

"I'll tell Challis. This can't be hangin' over Tamsin all her life. An' MacDonald trusts us. He trusts us, boy. I told him I'd enquired of the angels like Blake says an' I'd found you was a good boy. I told him just that. D'yer think he'd let you have Tamsin if he knew what we do? Boy, he'd inform agin you that very minute."

"Now," said Kirk, coming into the room, "I've listened to you and you'll listen to me. I'm not going to have any interference here. You seem to forget I'm not a child any more. I'm going to marry Tamsin and you're going to hold your tongue, an' that's all I got to say to you."

To Mat his face looked dark and yet strangely white. He seemed taller, some way, with his head up and his eyes fierce under the dark tilted brows. Mat recognized that here was a man set upon his own ways.

"Tell Challis yerself, then," he said.

"Like hell I will! Come, old chap, I don't want to have to get mad . . ."
"Then you'll leave Tamsin if you don't tell Challis. I mean it, Kirk. Before God I'll give you up if you kip' on wi' this." He pointed an accusing finger. Fat, bent and broken-hearted as he looked, Kirk yet saw in him something of the mystical power of the old prophets. "Kirk, you're a man what's broke the Law an' you gotta pay for that. An' you gotta pay like a man. I won't have Tamsin payin' for yer as she would if this come out after you'd married her. I'd give you up first, Kirk. Before God."

"You're crazy!"

"I wish I was." Mat collapsed into his chair suddenly. He stared at Kirk. "I wish I was," he repeated, desolately.

"And what about Tamsin? Won't hurt her to have me go off this way, will it?"

With the hot unreason of a young man he forgot that he had been considering this very thing not so long ago. He remembered only that he had seen the Land of Promise and the bright way to it and that this old man stood between as he had stood long ago on the Kluane.

"It surely will hurt her. But she'll git over it. She's that young, an' she has compensations. I dunno as a woman's love do last long wi'out a right smart of stokin'. Seemingly not, fr'm all I've observed."

There was silence for a few minutes. Both men were very still. Then Kirk said in a low voice:

"You wouldn't do this to me, Uncle Mat?"

"I have opened my mouth to the Lord an' I can't go back," said Mat. Not for nothing did his mind revert to the tragedy of Jephtha's daughter. He lifted his weary eyes. "You better light out of here before that Injun girl gits after yer again. Likely she'd make trouble." He thought a minute. "If you take Bill Boss's launch an' git down to the Landin' right away you'll catch the steamer from the Kesikat going down ter meet the Dawson boat. The Tahkina will be three days yet. Pack your kit, Kirk."
"I shall not tell Challis."
"Then pack your kit."

Kirk stood staring as though he saw a world that was not this world. Then he turned abruptly and shut himself into his room.

Mat Colom sat still, his white head drooped on his breast, staring at nothing.
Chapter Seven

Chief Bill Boss's launch took Kirk down to the Landing where about midnight the little boat from Kesikat stopped to wood-up before going on down to the Yukon River. Kirk went aboard her, stiffly conscious of cold, hunger and the smell of dogs. The breeds moving about on the cut-bank went like dark thoughts in a clouded mind—his own mind, he thought, and stumbled aft among hay-bales and stacked white-fish and bundles of furs to the galley.

Here he found the cook, son of a Toronto lawyer, who was putting himself through his winter course at Victoria College by the earnings of difficult summers. To him these hard-fleshed, far-eyed men who walked out of the horizon with gun in the armpit and walked off again as lightly as men board and leave trolley-cars in cities were a matter of constant wonder and respect. He greeted Kirk gladly.

"Have some coffee? I've just made pailfuls for the hands. You know how the Indians won't do one darn thing unless you feed 'em. Here's johnny-cake...."

Kirk ate ravenously. He had a dim notion that the emptiness which seemed to pervade the whole of him might somehow be stopped in this way. The cook, ladling out coffee, talked duck-shooting, botany, the colour on the hills. He showed Kirk some white gull-feathers which he had dyed a shabby purple.

"I'm experimenting in dyes with lichens and things. Chemistry, that's what I'm going in for," he said, enthusiastically.

"Fine," said Kirk, absently. What was life but experiment, anyway? One experiment after another until something blew you up or did for you somehow.

The captain and engineer came in for coffee. The captain,
who rarely spoke and sang Tamáhauser and Lohengrin to the
hills as he stood at his wheel, nodded briefly. The engineer
said: "Hello, Regard. Didn’t know you were in these parts," and
buried his face in a mug of coffee without waiting for an
answer. To these men passengers were of infinitely less
interest than the freight, for they were responsible for the
freight. Kirk, stimulated by food into the beginnings of
thought, discovered in himself a dull inclination to be
responsible for nothing. A casual and satiric Fate had used
old Mat—perhaps the person who loved him best—to wrench
Kirk’s life from its sockets, and there was no longer, it seemed,
any use in trying to bluff Fate.

“Well,” said the engineer hotly, in answer to something,
“don’t blame me if her boiler goes through the roof next
time we hit a sandbank. She’s only tied together with twine;
anyway.”

He went out grumbling, and presently the engines took up
their crazy clanking again, while the captain, his meditative
wild eyes fixed on vacancy and his hair flowing back as though
blown by the wind of his imaginings, conned his tiny craft
through the shallows of the drying river like a soul wandering
among clouds in the night. The cook said:

“I’m trying to get an orange feather. I’ve tried calcium and
the Lord knows what, but something always goes wrong, I
guess.”

Kirk got up, suddenly furious. Something always does go
wrong, he wanted to tell the cook. That’s what we are here
for. Playthings for the power Tamsin called Nature and old
Mat, The Truth, and Mrs. Sheridan, God. He went on deck
drearly, feeling that he desired huge and destructive pleasures;
sloughs of iniquity into which he could cast himself and
drown. Once he had read in a Whitehorse paper something
about “This game of consequences to which we must all sit
down.” What had happened to him now was the direct con-
sequence of his flirtation with Ooket at Macpherson, and that
was the more or less direct consequence of his thrashing on the Kluane which had come on him through the purest moment of idealism he had ever had in his life. His mind went heavily back to Tamsin there, and the grinning devil in his blood asked him what would have been the result of his taking Tamsin to the shack? Something ugly would have come out of it, undoubtedly—and there was your reverence and idealism for you! Everything wrong everywhere.

He sat on deck, huddled in a pile of clean sacks, and watched the morning come, feeling the oppression of the centuries on him. The world was chill and desolate. The river grew from grey to paper-white, and either side it the squat hills looked like faces. Cloud-shadows brought changing grins to their crooked mouths and their leathery cheeks wrinkled under patches of greyish scrub. Mysteriously and almost as rapidly as pantomime-changes colour and glory were going from the North, and it was commencing to wrap its stark old bones in its winter coverlet of snow.

Kirk wondered why he stayed in the North when it had such power to make him fear and hate it. Destiny, he supposed. Those forefathers of whom he did not know anything must have lived here to put it in his blood like this. Tamsin had been born at Carcross in the Yukon, and drew in understanding of it with her first consciousness. His fathers must have suffered here, Kirk felt. Sons of those Gentleman Adventurers who went with Prince Rupert to the first trading in the North-West, perhaps: sons of the wild-eyed Russians who hunted the fur-otters along the frozen coasts when Baranoff was king in Sitka; sons of those Frenchmen who made the fur trail from Montreal to Vermillion through two thousand miles of forest and lake and mountain in the early seventeenth century, when Indians and wild animals had all that wilderness for their own. Some among dauntless or terrified forgotten men must have fathered him, he felt, leaving him as an unescapable legacy their fear and defiance.
of the North and their sense of being irretrievably bound up
with it.

The Kesitkat steamer dropped him at Gopher on the
Yukon River and scuttled off again, hoping to make another
trip before the side-streams began throwing ice in quantities.
Kirk watched her go with disgust. It seemed a special brutality
of Fate to have sent him out into chaos on a tin-can like that.
Still struggling to keep Tamsin from his mind, he went into
the store—which with a few Indian huts and a telegraph shack
made the whole of Gopher—and there found Doctor O’Kane
smoking over the black stove. Kirk had no wish to see him,
for he would certainly speak of Tamsin, but the old man
looked up, his rheumy eyes glittering with relief.

“You have come to prevent a suicide, I think, Mr. Regard,”
he said, courteously. “I have been considering my sins here
alone for the last three days, waiting for the outgoing steamer,
and they have become somewhat oppressive.” He laughed
noiselessly, looking more like a starved ghoul than ever, Kirk
thought. “Are you coming my way, Mr. Regard?”

“No,” said Kirk. He pulled an oil-drum forward and sat
down, opening the stove door. The red leaping glow was like
returning to life after the blank negation outdoors. “I wish
I could,” he said, suddenly. Any of those places Outside—
Juneau, Vancouver, Ketchikan—had plenty of foulness where
a man could wallow to the forgetfulness of everything. “God!
I wish I could!”

O’Kane rubbed his bony chin with a bony hand, looking
shrewdly. He had heard a good deal of this young man and
Tamsin Macdonald, and Regard did not look like an accepted
lover. “Who is she waiting for?” he thought. “To play Danae
to some Jove among her hill-gods? For this is a personable
bit of flesh with a gamey enough flavour to him to attract
women.” It was said that young Regard had attracted many
women, and perhaps that was the trouble. Tamsin had more
than a streak of old Macdonald’s Puritanism.
“Why don’t you come?” he asked, silkily. “I would be very glad of a mate to help me see life a little in Ketchikan after my penance at Aroya.”

“Can’t. Got to take the Mackenzie–Dawson Patrol over a new way.”

“Someone tried that a few years ago and lost the whole bunch, I remember. That Mouty–Ferguson of Hershel—was too good for an end like that. But men will try the impossible. Once off the trail in those ranges and it’s finish, I understand.”

“I won’t lose it.” Kirk sat frowning, playing with the thought that he could—if he tried. Lead to death all those men of the Law who would give death to him if they knew what he knew. My! What a gamble! What an exit!

“Soon they’ll make connection by aeroplane. Did you see the first one that ever came North in Dawson this summer?”

“No. They’ll never use them in those mountains, I guess. You dunno the first things ’bout the storms they get or you’d see that.”

He felt quarrelsome, dazedly trying to fight off that great tragedy in the back of his mind beside which what he was going to on the Patrol was a small matter. Tamsin . . . how was it with Tamsin . . . ? He tossed off the fiery drink the storekeeper brought him, and took another.

“Oh! That’s better,” he said.

The storekeeper mixed his permit with stuff distilled by himself. It had red ink and tobacco and bay rum in it, and O’Kane sniffed and put it aside. But the woodsmen, coming in from hauling and stacking the wood-pile for the river steamers, swallowed it down in great thankful gulps. It made them talkative and noisy, and the small dirty store soon filled up with the smell of tobacco and wood smoke and of heated men and raw pelts hanging in the rafters, and all the other miscellanies of a Northern store. One of the woodsmen was an English officer known along the rivers as “The Army,”
just as O'Kane was largely known by tradition as "The Navy." Each had the spruceness and decision of their birth and trade, and each hated the other for the disgrace they had severally brought on England.

As it grew dark and the air outside colder the men crowded round the stove and talk took on the hard horse-radish flavour of the country. Tobacco smoke, thick as incense, dulled the gaudy mackinaws and the wind-reddened faces and the eyes grown dreamy with long looking over vast distances. Gold and the North was their world, and for them there was now no other.

"Take the Mounties now," said an old miner. "They look after Yukon like they was its granny. Ten Mounties keep Yukon in better shape than five times their number in U.S.A. Police over the Alaskan border, and the Yanks air the first to say so. I've heard 'em. My! I'd just hate one of your Mounties on my trail, I've heard 'em say."

"Sometimes," said an engineer who had been in Labrador with Grenfell, "we got away with it in Yukon, spite o' the Mounties. Me an' another chap—name o' Darrow—ran four launches on the Yukon built out of truck picked up on the Klondyke trail. You remember that, Doc.? You was tinkerin' folk down at Whitehorse, an' Darrow an' me used to go along White Pass an' Lake Lindeman every night, gatherin' up machinery the chechakos chucked away an' buildin' it into boats. They looked some funny, but they sure hauled the freight all right."

O'Kane nodded. The chechakos also had usually looked some funny by the time they came under his hands. Bank-clerks, office-boys, shop-hands staggering with their unset limbs and untried bodies over that awful Pass, dying of starvation and dysentery and frost-bite around his doors. But where were the men who had won through the gainers? It amused him to tell the end of Darrow. "... It was Bill Hunt found him out on the Pelly. Called in at his shack one winter
evening and found that the coyotes had had most of Darrow and all the tobacco. Bill expressed his annoyance to me later. He had been counting on a smoke for the whole week."

"Bill was not quite a brute," said The Army coldly. "He packed out all Darrow's personal stuff and sent it to his people."

"Quite likely. It was just that streak of sentimentality which ruined him." O'Kane pulled his long moustaches reflectively, leering a little at The Army, who sat straight as a ramrod still—damn him. "Distraction is the panacea, sir, for us all, and poor old Bill was always an admirer of the ladies. But we are all liable to go yapping after it into our neighbour's pocket or"—there was a little raillery at The Army now—"sniffing after it into our neighbour's kennel."

The Army turned dull red, but before he could speak Kirk suddenly roused out of a half-daze and said hotly:

"If a feller don't look after his possessions he has a right to lose 'em, I guess. All history ain't much more than stealin' o' some sort, an' I reckon most everything we get is taken from someone else first. A man'd never get anywhere if he always acted plumb straight."

"Quite! Oh, quite!" said O'Kane, delightedly. Something had apparently touched the quick in young Regard. He was all ablaze and full of fight again, and—lord, what a beauty he was with his colouring and his springy movements like a young bull-moose in the woods! "Now, what has happened between him and Tamsin?" he thought. Aloud he said: "I agree that the man who lives placidly within his own boundaries never makes history. Rarely a living. Far more fame has been achieved by breaking laws than by making them. You, I take it, Regard, are a legitimate descendant of Vitus Behring, the Dane; Captain George Vancouver; and other heroes who founded their careers on more or less gentlemanly piracy."

"If he'd sailed with Behring," said The Army, and Kirk's
excited mind had a sudden vision of that rough wild voyaging over green seas and past smoking headlands of savage foam, "he would have called the landfalls he made Mercy Bay and Thank God Harbour just as they did. Pirates they might have been, but they had their religion."

"Sure. And they knew how to use it, too," said Kirk. He laughed. "Like them I guess I'd have bartered a prayer an' a handful of beads for a dozen priceless sea-otter pelts any day. Mighty fine thing, religion—when you know how to use it."

Drink, heat, the sudden rush of a new idea were jostling in him. He wanted to cross swords with something, tumble into a fight. He looked at The Army expectantly, but that bald elderly man with the still eyes shook his head.

"Aftermath of the war—that's what's the matter with you young men. You've improved on the old maxim, 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God,' by adding: 'But the wise man saith it with his lips.' All wrong, you know. All wrong."


"Every land has need of religions before it can build a nation."

"Yukon will never build a nation, my dear sir. Far from it. Speaking broadly, there are no young men and no old women up here, and you can't build a nation without both of these. Classify the inhabitants, Army. Classify them. Who are they? The men who work for the Whitehorse & Yukon Line. Miners and prospectors—a naturally homeless lot. The few who, like yourself, live here and there as chance takes you. Tourists, and the handful who, like Regard and the store-keepers, live on them. The inhabitants are in no shape to improve or cultivate. Many go Outside every winter, anyway. Those who stay have no ambition. If they had they wouldn't be here. A dead land, Army. A dead land."

The one oil-lamp was burning badly, filling the place with
a red smoky glare through which everything showed like the collection of some rakish devils in a dissolute purgatory. Shelves full of canned foods, white cartons of ammunition, dull grey shirts, drab underwear. Corners full of molasses and apple barrels, boxes of potatoes and machinery. Rafters hung with dog-harness, uncured pelts, iron-shod canoe-poles, folded tents and bunches of jack-knives. Round the fire crowded the tired men with their hard disillusioned faces, and ironstone cups in their rough hands, smoking, chewing, spitting. Bottles of the doctored stuff they drank stood on an upended barrel among them.

"And if there ever was religion," ended O'Kane, quietly, "mankind had killed it."

"Aw! What's the matter wi' you?" burst out the store-keeper, suddenly. A quiet man usually, he seemed galvanized by this. "What's the matter wi' all you clever duds . . . beatin' us up this way? Why don't some o' you feel once in a while? Feel . . . an' git busy at helpin' us along? What are your sort lyin' around like you was half-dead for? The world's got enough dead men livin' in it to-day, a'ready."

"You're right, it has," said a deep voice out of the shadows. O'Kane smiled. He enjoyed baiting the natives.

"I have no desire to help you because I don't believe in the divinity of mankind. Nothing is real after we cease to believe in it, just as everything is real while we believe in it. There you have your reason for the rise and fall of religions. Like everything else that is purely imaginative creation they depend entirely upon our belief at the moment. Good, evil, enterprise, our bodies . . . the moment we cease to believe in them they cease to exist."

The men were silent. Mostly uneducated and full of blundering confusions, they were abashed before this keen, sophisticated brain that ranged where they could not follow. O'Kane was a wizard with his hands, as half the North knew, and he could bewitch with his tongue, too. Now he had given
them gloomy discomfort in place of the cheer engendered by the whiskey; and he leaned back with a little cough of content, pulling at his long moustache, watching the grotesque shadowy things in the rafters with half-closed rheumy eyes.

"Worse than any of his poisons," thought The Army, getting up in relief as the whistle of a steamer sounded long and shrilly out of the night. "Jump for it, you fellows," he said, and led them out to the wood-pile.

Kirk stood watching the steamer from Dawson sweep up, her three tiers arrogant with white paint and brasses, her searchlight swinging full ashore. Planks came out like a tongue, and then the usual ritual of a Northern wooding-up began. Back and forth pattered the laden breeds on noiseless feet. The night was full of pretty women, well-dressed men, crowding into the store to buy curios, staring with amused curiosity on the natives.

Kirk lounged by the door in the full gleam, defiant, returning stare for stare. Seen in the full light of O'Kane's experienced talk, men and women were futile things. All life was futile, for where did it get a man, anyway? These laughing girls . . . and what was Tamsin but a girl? A while back he had been dreaming of going straight to Tamsin and pouring out his confession in the belief that she could make him whole.

She couldn't. Nothing could. These fragile rose-petals dropping in a shower each time he moved his shoulder could do as much. And what did it matter? What, thought Kirk, with the poison of O'Kane still working in him, did anything matter? A slim woman in filmy black paused by him.

"Are you a hunter? I've always wanted to see a hunter," she said.

She had a light cloak over polished arms and shoulders, and she spoke as though he were a new animal at a zoo. Kirk said, sulkily:

"What for?"
"They're so cute. Oh, my! I do think a hunter must be cute," said the lady. "Are you a hunter?"

"Anyways, I ain't a lady. I don't hunt men," said Kirk, violently.

He crashed off into the scrub, hearing her little squeak of dismay.

"That'll learn 'em to stare at me," he thought.

O'Kane came by, carrying his neat grip. He said in his thin courteous tones:

"I regret extremely that you are not coming out with us. It would have done you good." He peered round into Kirk's face. "Bluff the world if it owes you anything," he said. "Don't let it bluff you, Regard. You're far too clever. Goodbye. Remember me to the Dawson ladies."

He dissolved into the shadows, chuckling. Kirk was thinking of Dierdre when he went aboard the boat for Dawson which passed some hours later.

He slept without dreams, and awoke next morning to a flurry of snow on driving wind and an aching longing for Tamsin. It seemed incredible that he had left her; gone tamely away and left her to face the music—and Aggie Colom. He had not thought of that before, and the shock of it almost made him cry out. He walked the Texas deck in the blinding snow, feeling as mentally blind. The boxed-compass feeling which had possessed him since Mat Colom's decision would not pass. He knew that it had been fear drove him out: the fear which shook men's souls in the war-trenches, which had shaken him often enough in this implacable land. The shadow of it was on him yet, and sudden cold sweat broke on him at the thought that the fanatic in Colom might send him to Challis in any case. And behind and over all was that crying, tearing longing for Tamsin.

The idea came that he would wire to her when the steamer swung inshore where a lonely telegraph-shack stood on a strip of bare beach and unloaded a distressed-looking youngster
who would encounter his intimate devils there through the long winter when the river was locked in ice. But he gave that up, as he gave up one plan after another. He could neither write nor wire to Tamsin anything but the truth, and he dared not tell her that. "I'll write to Mat. He'll come round. He must come around to it," he thought, and then went back over the whole matter again.

The shrunk river was muddy and full of snags and sand-banks. The sky was muddy, letting fall occasional flurries of snow. Heavily and with hoarse breathings the steamer threaded the tricky channels, pushing her two barges laden with Dawson's winter food ahead of her. The hills either side grew barer and more rocky: a pair of bony jaws sucking the steamer in. They passed a long raft of chained logs, and the man on it stood by a little stove, his shoulders covered with snow. He was going perhaps a hundred miles to sell his wares, and he had stuck up his flag—the torn crimson sleeve of a silken bath-robe—to cheer him or to defy the world. They left him behind, his little bright banner floating. "A man needs be at peace with himself," Kirk thought, "to travel like that."

They stopped to wood-up where the wood-pile stood lonely against bare willows, and a young policeman walked out of the willow-bluff with a prospector whom he had brought from somewhere back of beyond.

"Quite a nice old chook," he explained airily to the officer who came ashore to superintend the work. "Just forgets everything, y'know, so he'll have to go Outside and be put in a Home. Here . . . oh, I say, Regard. You're pretty well wised up to the North. Ever run across this old gink anywhere?"

He snapped open his pocket-book briskly. In his service blue-and-khaki and jaunty stetson he looked as though he had just come from Barracks instead of a month's tramp through the hills. Kirk remembered meeting him once in
Dawson, but his old bit of salvage he did not know. Perched on a fallen log like a beetle in a mackinaw coat, it was silent, with grey-bearded mouth dropping open and a wealth of content in its faded eyes. Almost certainly an old-timer and a Klondyker who had possibly given his poke to Lily Maud at the Tinky-Tink when Kirk was a little boy. Undoubtedly he had lived hard and made history and abolished himself so completely that he had forgotten even his name. Oblivion. That was what the Yukon had forced on this man who came stealing her gold.

“Not a stiver of identification about him,” complained the policeman in his fresh English voice. “Oh, hell! I wish someone would tattoo these fellows before they’re let loose Inside. And dickens only knows what year he came in. I reckon my report is liable to be a bit sketchy.”

“I’ve seen him around ever since I came in,” said the officer. “Don’t know his name, though. He never talked of himself.”

“These chaps never do. One would imagine they were all bigamists or escaping from some other kind of justice. Come along, my pet. We’re going on the pretty steamer.”

The awful sublimity of this land seemed to trouble the Mounty as little as the future joys and sorrows of his captives ever did. Kirk thought of the tragic twilight which would shortly be cast by eternal doors and houses on this blurred and simple spirit used to the night winds and the breath of spring across the hills, and he felt a moment’s pity. Better have left him to die among his cradles and pans, where perhaps in dreams he still washed gold for a ghostly Lily Maud.

Later, when he sat alone on the Texas deck, soft steps came round the corner, and the old prospector looked at him with those bleared and gentle eyes.

“What have you lost?” he whispered. “I’ve lost my name. What have you lost?”
Kirk did not answer. He knew what he had lost too well. The ancient peered at him through dim veils of time. He murmured:

“A woman used to sing once, and there will always be to-morrow night. I guess she called me Dear once. Maybe that’s my name. Anybody ever call you Dear?”

“A thousand times.”

“Oh!” A film of disappointment spread over the tawny-grey face so like that of a mild lioness. “Then likely I just dreamt it. I do’ know.” He shuffled away; turned back with withered hand curved to his bearded lips. “I’ve lost my name. What have you lost?” he whispered, and drifted off down the stairs.

Kirk returned to Dawson in a dangerous mood. He had quarrelled and laughed and sung and played cards in the stifling little smoke-room all the way down, and his mouth had a bad taste and his eyes were reddened and sullen. He felt that there was no more vice or virtue in him. Nothing but a permanent dry-rot. And again he was a savage rebel against circumstance, and of nights he lay awake in his bunk and writhed and sweated, thinking of Tamsin and the curse on him. Once he wished that Mat Colom was dead, but that mood did not last. He could still see something fine in old Mat denouncing him to his own grief; standing, a crumpled old sagging figure, on the cut-bank as Bill Boss’s launch carried Kirk away.

Dawson was dreary, with snow-covered slushy flats and the trees on the Dome fading into a brown dullness. Soon they would be bare, as Kirk himself felt bare. And there would be several months to get through here before he could take out the Patrol, although on the slips a few small boats were already snugged down for the winter. He knew that he must find work; plenty of it, or unusual evil would befall him. Possibly he would even marry Dierdre if left to himself.

A bitter Adam flung out of Eden without the woman, he
reported at the Barracks, and then went up to the Livery
from which the stages would run later down to Whitehorse.

"We brought down a big bunch of horses on the Alice.
Can you give me a job with 'em?" he asked, and Payne, the
man in charge, hailed him with delight.

"No one I'd like better. But we didn't expect you down
so soon. Heard you'd fixed it up with MacDonald's daughter
up on the Kanana, didn't we, you fellows?"

"Fixed nothing," said Kirk, hastily. If old Mat got hold
of that story he'd likely go to Challis yet. Mat was a fool, but
so true it is that the fools are the best hell-makers.

"Not planning double harness, eh?" said Payne, with a grin
at the stablemen.

"No. Never. Can you give me a couple of months' contract?
Right. I'll be down in the morning."

He went to the Arcade Café for dinner; but there was no
one to whom he cared to talk, and again his mind began to
run on Dierdre. Well, he thought, why not? She could not
be hurt, and she might help cauterize the hurt in him. He
remembered her one frosty evening down the river, crouched
over a camp-fire like some little forest animal in her furs, her
slender brown hands like naked paws weaving an incantation
before the flame. He remembered her mushing along by the
lonely Klondyke, a small inscrutable idol packed into the
sled with her triangular haunting face. He remembered her
kisses, and flung on his mackinaw suddenly and turned out
into the brittle white silence.

Good family-wise Dawson was at home with its doors shut.
The streets were empty as Kirk passed. The sound of his
footsteps and of a distant dog barking echoed loud and clear.
On the side-path stood a sled with its high curved nose for
holding firewood, and the smell of sap from bleeding logs
was sharp and clean. After childhood a man or a woman
cannot go on living without wondering what it is all for.
Kirk wondered what it would mean when all this mess of
days and doings came out in the wash. The making of fires to warm the house, the marriage-bed, the kissing of lovers under the trees of summer, the grim struggles of the long trails, the lonely deaths ... and the new generations eternally arising to do it all over again.

Cass lived close to his dredges near the Klondyke side. Kirk passed his house and went over the bridge into that dying cluster of dwellings which had been the first Klondyke City. Here, where that mighty forest of tents had once sprung in a night, chasing the Indians to the hills, only the Brewery and a few stores remained. It was certain that prohibition was already dooming the Brewery; the stores would pass as a natural consequence, and another of man’s efforts would crumble, like man himself, back into the uncaring earth.

It was not a good place for a man to think in unless his courage was high, but Kirk, who had never felt less brave, stayed there a long time. All about him were the old rotting scaffoldings where cranes had once swung the stuff freighted down off Bonanza into the lading scows below; and he remembered how monstrous and full of strength and life they had seemed to him as a child, and what excitement it had been to see the steamers round the point of Billy Chicken’s Island, bringing fresh swarms of men to the teeming city. All noise and colour and strain here then, and now only grey silence with a few crows flying, and an old Indian dug-out in a roofless shed where he and Tamsin once used to play. Nothing here now but these grim forgotten altars once raised to that insatiable spirit in man which, like a restless wind, blows back and forth upon the earth for ever.

He thought of Tamsin, with her blue torn pinafore and tumbled red hair and shining eyes, climbing in and out of the dug-out, and could not bear it. He must find resource in other women to take him out of his ache for Tamsin. He went back to Cass’s small frame-house standing desolately among the grey scrub, knocked on the kitchen door, and pulled it
open at once. Dierdre was there, beating batter in a thick green bowl by the window. Her thin body looked like something cut from black paper and pasted on a pale-yellow background. She looked at him silently out of the corner of her eyes, and half reluctantly he felt that she moved him with a twinge of the old desire.

“Ain’t you surprised to see me?” he said, roughly jocular.

“No. I knew you were back.” She moved towards the stove. “Will you stay to supper, Kirk? Pop and Charlie will be pleased to see you.”

“Charlie?” he asked, flinging his cap and rough short jacket into a corner. Dierdre glanced at him again. There were Indians down on the Alaskan Coast who claimed that she had been born in some mysterious fashion of the Raven Totem-Bird, and the men who knew her liked to play with that notion. She laid the bowl aside and wiped her hands on her checked apron, deliberately, like that bird of her reputed dark ancestry whetting his beak.

“Didn’t you know I was married to Charlie Wagner last month, Kirk?”

“Married? Like hell you’re not!”

He stared, feeling bitterly outraged, disappointed, baffled in some way. For years now Dierdre had always been on hand for a man to amuse himself with, and he felt that he needed that amusement now, could not do without it. Dierdre laughed softly, mysteriously. She was soft, dark, mysterious always, with a suggestion of secret power which brought men back to her again and again, although rarely with love. She held up her thin hand now, showing the broad band on the finger, and then that hand brushed his arm as she reached a billet of wood for the stove, and the touch went through him like an electric shock. He caught at her.

“Why?” he asked, hotly.

Her narrow lids drooped over the dark glimmer of her eyes.

“You mustn’t ask me that. Likely I thought Tamsin
MacDonald would never let you go again. Likely I didn't think of you, anyway. Pop wants we should live here for a while now. It's convenient, Charlie being on the dredge, too. Let me go, Kirk. They'll be in for supper presently."

He flung himself into a chair like a sulky boy.

"So you're goin' to chuck all your old friends," he grumbled.

"I need them more than ever," she said, quietly. "Charlie's away most of the time now he's engineer on No. Two Dredge. They're planning to work double shifts till the snow stops 'em."

Kirk considered that. Wagner was a dull clumsy fellow who had worshipped Dierdre for years and would never attempt to control her. She could not live without men about her, and a flirtation now would be less dangerous, would not commit him to anything seriously. Not wanting to think this way, he thought it just the same. His arm went round her waist. He said, half jestingly:

"Well, one kiss to show you mean that." And their lips met as the sound of heavy boots came tramping up to the door.

At Knife Kirk had not been missed until Aggie Colom went to call him for breakfast and found his bed undisturbed and all his clothes gone. She hurried Mat in from his feeding of the foxes, sat him in a chair and questioned him hotly. Trying weakly to evade her, he hardly knew what he said, and she was putting her own interpretation to his answer when Tamsin came in glowing and asked for Kirk. Aggie turned, looking at her in silence, and there was something so portentous in the big woman's manner, something so terrifying in old Mat's crushed attitude in the chair, that Tamsin suddenly felt the earth sinking under her feet.

"What's happened?" she cried, high and shrilly. "Where's Kirk? Is he . . . dead?"

"Dead?" cried Aggie, with a screech of laughter. "I'll lay he's not! Mighty fly an' alive Kirk is, sure. Live enough to git up and git out with all his kit by Bill Boss's launch las'
night. My, my! the joke sure is on to you this time, Tamsin MacDonald. Reckoned you could catch our boy an' tie him up, did you? Well, I'll say you got him that worried he had to run for't. . . ."

"Now, Aggie! Now, now . . ."

Aggie took the words from Mat's trembling lips.

"Now! What's the matter wi' you? You've told me you don't know nothing about it an' I believe you. When did you ever?" She seemed to swell until she filled the tiny room, glaring at the girl who had deprived her of the only creature she had ever really cared for. Suddenly she spread her hands, smirking until her fiery face seemed more grotesque than human. "So good an' pleased with yourself you always are, Tamsin, but I guess you've missed this bus. I guess Kirk had to show you where you got off an' you've alighted right there. . . ."

"Uncle Mat," said Tamsin, feeling that she began very loud, and dropped to a whisper, "why has Kirk gone?"

"I dunno, dearie. I dunno. I dun . . . ."

"He's kep' saying that right along," said his wife contemptuously. "I can tell you if you . . . ."

"Uncle Mat! Listen to me! Why did he go?"

"Why now, why now, Tamsin," said Mat desperately. "Mebbe he felt it was about time. Mebbe he thought things was pilin' up . . . an' he thought it safer to go. I dunno, dearie. I dunno."

"Yeah! You said it!" cried Aggie triumphantly. "Safer to go like a thief in the night 'thout sayin' good-bye to the folk that reared him. Do you see what that means, Tamsin? He's had all he wants of you an' then some. He never did like what's easy got, an' likely you've heard him say it."

"You are a very stupid woman," said Tamsin, distinctly. "Too stupid for anyone to get angry with." She stepped out of the door with her head high. "There will be a wire for me the minute Kirk gets some place where he can send it, and
I'll get feyther to bring it around, for I don't choose to talk to you any more."

She walked off without seeing where she went. Soon she was on the flanks of Tall Thing, where the clean bitter odour of pine-woods blew on her and red squirrels scolded in the dark boughs. Already cottonwood gold was tarnished and the yellow circles of poplar leaves blackening. There was a sweet remote chill in the air. She walked down a trail and came on an open space spread with the grey ghosts of anemone-whorls and the pale shrunk faces of rock-cistus. They seemed watching her like beings of this strange in-between world where she moved. She whispered:

"Kirk is gone. He thought it safer to go. He never did like what was easy got." She stood listening for some denial of that, but none came. He was not dead—her mind felt along the ways heavily. He had been alive enough to get up and get out with all his kit, leaving no message for her. "Perhaps," she said, slowly, "I'd understand if I could feel. Funny. I'm all sort of dead-feeling." She struck the back of her hand against the rough bole of a balsam whose harsh green shadowed her. "Why don't I feel that?" She went on striking. "Now . . . I feel that. Soon I'll understand. Kirk has gone because . . . because . . . soon I'll understand. . . ."

Later, finding herself sunk down at the foot of the tree, she was startled. "Gracious! The sun's low, and here I am, and Kirk surely trying to get me on the wire from somewhere, and Stewart raising the town for me."

She hurried back through the clear and frosty evening, remembering with relief that MacDonald was off for the day, duck-shooting. No one would know but that she had been quietly at home, doing her work and trusting Kirk. She brushed twigs off her dress, called up a smile, and went into the telegraph shack. Stewart came from the inner room, where he had been brooding over this news which Aggie Colom had already trumpeted about Knife.
"I came . . ." began Tamsin cheerfully. Then, seeing his grey grave face, she went whiter. And yet Stewart had thought her white before. "I expect a wire from Kirk," she said, trying to keep her voice from shaking. "Has it come yet?"

"No . . . I'm sorry. Later on, perhaps . . . ."

"It doesn't matter. I only just . . . Thanks; it doesn't matter at all."

Stewart stood to watch her go down the board-walk and saw her sway once or twice. Then he shut his door smartly and went back to think of what Aggie Colom and Mrs. Sheridan had said. And finally he thought of Ooket and Olafsson's gilt ear-rings.

Macdonald came back through a wine-coloured windless evening to hear of Kirk's departure almost before he set his foot ashore. Challis told him, thinking to spare Tamsin; and Macdonald, after one grey stare, went off at a great pace to the fox-farm, where he found old Mat in the outhouse, boiling up mush for the foxes. Through the steam in that dark place the two long-tried friends looked at each other, and Mat Colom knew that they had come to the parting of the ways. Flat ignorance of everything had served with Aggie, who was hungrily ready to spread the news in her own way. It would not serve with Macdonald, that old grey wolf so jealous for his child.

"Whaur's Kirk?" said Macdonald; and Mat's soft old legs gave under him and he collapsed heavily on an upturned box.

"I dunno, Mac. I dun——"

"Why did he go awa?"

"I dunno. I——"

"You can swallow that lie. I hanna kenned ye all these years not tae ken when ye're lying. Now . . . ye'll tell me why he went."

"No, Mac. No. Don't ever ask me to do that. I can't do it. You wouldn't want to know, Mac. It'd only hurt you bad."

His own hurt was so deep that he could not think clearly,
and it was not the fault of his old blundering sorrowful soul if MacDonald began to get his values wrong. For a moment MacDonald stood motionless, as though something had struck him hard. Then he said, harshly:

"When did he go?"

"It warn't so late, Mac. No, I guess it warn't so late at all." Mat spoke eagerly, as though this were a palliative. "Him an' me were jest settin' talkin' a spell, and Aggie was around visitin' Mrs. Sheridan, an' ... an' ... Kirk reckoned he'd go right now, an' ... I helped him take his kit along to Bill Boss's launch an' ... he went, I guess. Leastways, he ain't around now as I knows of."

"Did ye talk aboot—Tamsin?"

"I can't tell you, Mac. An' I won't. Ask me till Doomsday an' I'll never tell you."

Although the force which had defied Kirk last night was long spent, MacDonald recognized the quality of determination in the old shaking face and voice. Nor would pride and fear allow him to press the matter.

"You've helped your boy to put shame on my daughter," he said, slowly. "How much more there is to it I dinna ken yet, but I'll find oot. Never fear for that. She's weel rid o' him, onways, an' I'm weel rid o' you. Never ca' me friend ony mair in this world, Mat Colom."

As he went out he heard Mat cry, and turned to see him standing with raised hands in the steaming place.

"Mac, Mac! I had enquired o' the Lord all day long about this, but He won't answer me. . . ."

MacDonald walked on, his head low between his gaunt shoulders. It was not the Lord of whom he meant to enquire, but Tamsin. "Thrash the rights o't oot o' her gin there's no ither way," he said between his teeth. Under these chilly stars, amid the wandering scent of stricken herbs and grasses, he remembered that first winter in Dawson after Maggie died. "Wull ye be a good girl noo, Tamsin?" "Aye, feyther . . . if
I can," and a gulp and a smile along with it. Lord God A'mighty! Who'd choose to have a woman child?

He walked into the house and latched the double doors after him.

"Tamsin," he barked, hearing her move in the kitchen; "come your ways in here. I want speakin' to ye." Then, as she stood between the parted curtains, he softened in spite of himself. "Sit ye doon, lassie. Ye look . . . tired."

"I'm not tired," said Tamsin. Holding the dark curtains, she stood there in the green cotton frock that Kirk had liked her to wear. Shadows about her neck and the loose hair on her temples were greenish. She looked very ill, MacDonald thought.

"I hear 'twas ye're Auntie Ag told ye Kirk was gone. She's an ill wumman. I'll lay she gave ye hell. Sit doon, noo . . . aye, I wush ye would. . . ."

"Have you anything important to say? I'm getting supper."

Her quiet voice seemed to remove him miles away. He cleared his throat, spat, pulled his grizzled beard. Then he said, jerkily:

"Did ever he talk tae ye of mairrage?"

"I . . . ." She looked momentarily startled. "I don't re-
member."

"Ye'd remember if he put it in straight words. Did he?"

"No."

"Do ye ken why he went?"

"No."

"Can ye give a guess? . . . Can't ye? Dom it, Tamsin, ye must have a notion. Ye're no blate. Why would ye come tellin' me ye were hand-fast if there was naething said and naething . . . dune?"

Tamsin came forward slowly and sat on the piano-stool. She glanced at the music, struck a note or two. MacDonald felt baffled. He began again:

"Mat Colom says he helped Kirk cairry his dunnage to the
launch. He winna tell me mair. Weel . . . what hae ye got tae
tell me yersel’?"

"Nothing," said Tamsin, flatly. She struck a few more notes,
then a chord which sounded defiant to MacDonald. Muttering
in his beard, he turned down the smoking lamp and came
nearer.

"When I start oot anywheres I’m liable to keep right on
goin’ till I git there, Tamsin. Ye ken that weel. Noo, a young
mon’s not apt tae rin aff an’ leave the girl he’s been keepin’
company with till all the world’s talkin’ without there’s
something gaed almighty wrang. Can ye no give a guess at it?
Come noo. Tell me."

"There’s nothing to tell."

"Ain’t there? Ain’t there, by God!" He caught her shoulder,
giving it a shake. "What happened at Sagish? Think now.
That night ye never came hame? What happened then? Come
through with it."

"We sat in the shack. We made a fire."

"Ye made love, too. Didn’t ye?" He shook her again.

"Yes."

"Weel? What else? Do ye no hear me? Oot wi’t, an’ we’ll
catch him yet. I’ll send Challis ayfter him. I’ll get Stewart
chasing him on the wire if ye’re a richt tae have him back . . ."

"Oh!" Tamsin looked straight up at him now with her
white brow in a pucker. She did not flush, but her lips drew
disdainfully down. "You’ve been reading too much modern
literature, feyther. I’m not that modern."

"Well, weel, weel!" said MacDonald, relieved and awkward.
He sought for his pipe and dropped into a chair. Tamsin
went on striking chords, and as he watched her his relief left
him. Fool, dommed auld fool that he was! Why did the world
consider one thing only the tragedy of love? It was the highest
of Tamsin and not the lowest that Kirk Regard had betrayed,
and if her love had had more of the physical in it she might
have been suffering less. The drops came on his forehead now,
watching that silent suffering, and then he saw that her hand
on the keys was bruised and slightly bleeding.

"For ony sake, lassie! What ha' ye dune tae you hond?"

"I don't know." Tamsin glanced down. "Oh . . . I went in
the woods . . . and I didn't seem able to feel myself, somehow.
So I hit it against a tree until I could. It's all right."

"God ha' maircy!" said MacDonald. He took his head in
his hands. "Why ever did I hae a wumman bairn! A rough
auld deil like me!"

Tamsin came over and patted his shoulder. For the first
time her voice shook.

"Poor old feyther! It's all right, feyther." She tried to
laugh. "I no Waly, waly up the bank female, feyther. I'll do
fine. Just let me be a wee while . . . with the hills. We'll
do fine, the hills and I. And . . . I love you, feyther. We'll
do fine . . ."

She went slowly back into the kitchen, dropping the cur-
tains behind her.
Chapter Eight

The winter came slowly, with crisp frosty days that tingled the blood and made Kirk too conscious of himself. At the Livery Stables they found him quarrelsome and wrong-headed, although too useful to lose. The White Pass and Yukon Company, which for years had carried the winter mails three times a week, were economizing now. It didn’t pay, they said, what with the small number of passengers and the upkeep of thirteen road-houses with their attendant men, and the travelling vet. Even yet there were almost one hundred and fifty horses, including the freight and feed teams and the travelling blacksmith’s outfit. And the Government subsidy for the mails had always been something of a gold brick, said Dupree, watching Kirk administer a horse-ball without applying the twitch. It was much to have a man who understood horses like that and could bring them in from exercise with hocks uncut by the hard surface snow.

Yet Dupree found this young man difficult to handle, and as Kirk stepped back now, drawing a hairy arm across his sweating forehead and surveying the horse with satisfaction, he wondered how many of the ugly stories about him were true. That women ran after him was probable enough. He had the kind of hot life and bold good looks they liked, and a curious nervous superstition at times that gave him tenderness. He was always tender with animals, and they loved him. Here, in the hot dusky stable horses turned their big soft eyes as he came in and whinnied gently. Dupree thought that probably women were something like that with Kirk Regard. Word had come down from the Kanana that there had been trouble between Regard and old MacDonald’s daughter, and there was likely to be trouble between Regard and Dierdre Cass, who had lately married the engineer on No. Two Dredge. They were always about together, and she generally
rode one of the horses to exercise. Dupree hoped that Wagner wouldn’t shoot him up or something when he found out what people were saying; and for the rest he was minded to let Kirk alone as much as possible, knowing as well as old Thomas Aquinas ever did that “In every manne there lurketh his Wilde beaste.”

In the Stables Kirk was happier than anywhere else through the days when the Patrol waited for the snow to harden, and he tried to forget Tamsin in Dierdre’s kisses. It had come to that again now in the last week before he was to go, for Dierdre found a stealthy excitement in discovering how much further a married woman dared venture than a girl, and Kirk was a reckless guide and her Charlie still supremely content. She rode with Kirk daily. He took her to the Orpheum Picture House when her men were on night-shift; and together they laughed over The Kid from the Klondyke, and Kirk told her in whispers of Cornell shooting the plaster cupids in the Tinky-Tink so long ago.

“That was the real stuff,” he said. “I can remember Lily Maud walking away now, and Cornell sobbing as he pulled out his gun. I wonder what they did with him. I guess I never heard.”

“I believe you’d shoot a man for a woman’s sake,” whispered Dierdre. They were holding hands in the hot dark as they always had done, and he turned the ring on her finger, answering absently:

“Likely . . . if I cared enough.”

He knew that he was caring more than ever for Tamsin, even while trying to drown her memory in Dierdre’s smiles. He had never heard what had happened on the Kanana when he left, nor did he know what Tamsin had heard about him since. But he could guess. All Dawson was now looking on Charlie Wagner as a too-complacent husband, and Sergeant Plume and others had tried to warn Kirk. But he was not in a mood to take warnings. The dark past and the dark future were
shadowing too close about him now, and soon he would have to go out into the great silence, with the cold and the endless mountains pressing about him, and the thought of dead Olafssen ahead to wake the unquiet superstitions in his blood. Dierdre loved to play on those superstitions. They broke down his selfish arrogance and brought him nearer for the time, and although she had married Wagner because her youth was passing and he was an easy choice, she never cared for him as she did for this hot-eyed careless-tongued man.

"I think your forefathers must have broken a great many laws," she told him once, "and you're paying for all their defiance. You have a dark spirit, Kirk, for all you laugh and joke so much." She looked at him from the corners of her eyes. "I love that darkness. It makes you different from everyone else," she said.

"Maybe," said Kirk. He wondered, sitting with elbows on knees, and hands in the thick black forest of his hair. Something of sin and blackness and broken laws there must be born into his blood or he could never be betraying Tamsin as he was with this betrayal of Dierdre. They had ridden out to-day to Old Inn, which had had its roaring days when ten thousand men grubbed gold out of the Klondyke River faces, and gone in through the sagging door to the smell of rottenness and the chill of a dead place that had once been quick with life. Dierdre moved about, touching with thin impersonal fingers the things once handled by men long gone away, and his eyes followed her a little wonderingly. Perhaps there really was no more faith in women than there was in men. Perhaps Tamsin was already consoling herself with Stewart, and all his anguish of remorse and longing no more than one of the grim jokes life loves to play. Dierdre said, slowly:

"When the Russian Baranoff came with all the lords and ladies across Siberia and Behring Strait to make a Court in Sitka while their men killed the sea-otter, there was a daughter
who sat on Baranoff’s knee. He put rich sea-otter skins on her and raw jewels and gold, and I guess she looked fine. But there was a Frenchman who had brought his sword way across the wilderness from Montreal, and he had just your tilt of the head, but Baranoff’s daughter had your eyes. So they loved, and Baranoff killed them both, and the Indians snucked their child away, and that’s where you come from, Kirk.”

“Maybe,” he said again. He frowned, looking at her. Even now the physical part of her tormented him as Tamsin’s fresh big generous young body had never done. Although he often hated her, he could not keep away from Dierdre. There was haunting in her narrow thin bones that he could so easily break, and in the queer cold scent that clung about her and the soft pressure of her red and narrow mouth. Her eyes were watching him now with her small sleek head turned over her shoulder, and in her he saw something mysterious, eternally feminine, alluring.

“You might be Baranoff’s daughter yourself,” he said, and held out his arms.

The horses whinnied at last against the increasing cold, and as the two went out to them a man came tramping over the shingle from No. Two Dredge. In this grey light which cast no shadow he looked gigantic in his furs... a strange neolithic animal full of hurrying vengeance. Dierdre leaned to Kirk as he lifted her into the saddle.

“Now we’re in for it,” she said, half-mocking. “Charlie made me promise last night I wouldn’t go around with you any more.”

“For God’s sake! Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I meant to show him where he gets off. An’ I will.” She laughed a little—a soft cruel laugh. “You leave him to me. I’ll fix him.”

“Not on your life!” Kirk was furious with her, with himself, with his luck. He had not guessed that Wagner was suspicious.
"I can't leave you to it. Good heavens!" he cried. "Were you mad to take such a risk?"

"Never you mind what I was." She stooped suddenly and kissed his mouth. "My! I love you, Kirk! Now... get out of it, smart. I won't have you speaking to him now."

"I must. I... I..."

"Will you go, you fool?" Her long eyes blazed at him. "Think I can talk to him before you! Light out of it!"

Kirk swung himself up reluctantly. He said:

"Send him to me after. That's only fair."

But he rode away as he was told, seeing Dierdre turn her horse and go to meet her husband. He felt dazed and shaken. Like all men who follow their tempers hotly for a season, realization had come with a jolt. He had never meant to go too far. Over and over he told himself that, knowing that more than half the blame was with the woman, and yet he would never tell blundering honest Charlie Wagner so. I must take what he gives me, he thought, and then remembered that the matter would be no longer secret now. Everyone would know. Tamsin would know. He had a sudden vision of Tamsin. "Lover," she called him, standing with shining eyes on the great sunny hillside. "Eh, lover; now we'll do big things together, you and me..."

And this was what he had done.

He rode on under the grey sagging sky over the stony wilderness man had made of a once bright river. Rusty boilers and other scrapped machinery thrust grotesque angles out of the snow. Dredges already snugged down for the winter had wandered abroad here, spewing up behind them huge mountains of shingle to choke the small streams creeping blindly down. The pale mountains gleamed coldly with frost, but the stunted timber along the shores was black. A dead place...

Under the icy shadow of the Dome he dismounted at a little log-cabin in the scrub and went in. Strips of the newspapers of '99 still hung on the rough walls, and on the slab
table under the glass-bottle window squirrels had fed since Dick the Duke lived here. Dick the Duke had had bright hair and a strange soft English voice and a way of being good to children, and here he had destroyed himself because of some bold-eyed girl... or because of something else. Kirk the man, standing where Kirk the boy had played, guessed now that it had really been because of something else. Something that the soft-voiced English boy had lost and knew that he would not get back any more. What have you lost? I have lost my name... . . .

The whisper came to him out of the frozen stars, the icy night. He dragged on down to the steaming Livery that smelt of hay cut perhaps on the Kanana this summer and of a bran mash Jenkins was making for a coughing horse. The travelling vet., who had come down on the last stage from Whitehorse, was in the yard, saying to Dupree, the boss:

"That Jenkins is an awful shine as a stableman. I guess I'll have to report him. Seemed generally half-kippered, isn't he?"

"Well, they're none too easy to get, and so I tell you," said Dupree, crossly. "Oh, here, you, Regard. Dierdre Cass brought in her horse just now all of a lather. Next time you take her riding you be on hand to rub him down. See? Get busy on him right away."

Sullenly Kirk rubbed down the steaming bay and fed the horses, working with mind and fingers equally numb. The Whitehorse stage had left that morning, but there was always work at the stables: always sick horses to be doctored and exercised, harness to be mended and things got in readiness for the incoming stage. For now the Yukon River was frozen tight as a drum, the last steamer was snug on the Whitehorse slips until next June, and the tentative pony-stage of the light snow had given place to the regular winter stage with its six-horse team and its possible eighteen passengers and 7,500 pounds of goods and mail to be run on schedule, no matter what the weather. It was as dark now as it would be
with the glair-ice and the Glories lighting the pale world, and Kirk was just realizing that he needed food when Dupree came into the stable.

“A hurry-call for you from the Barracks, Regard. I guess you can go.”

“Damn them! I’m going to eat first,” thought Kirk. But he went. Now that the Patrol was so near he was practically under Police orders that he might get fully into training. The lives of about ten men were probably going to depend on that before long, and between them Sergeants Plume and Orange had fined him down to springy bone and muscle that nothing could tire. But he felt tired now as he walked down to the red-brick building and saw Orange moving in the yard about a couple of sleds.

“Good egg!” cried Orange cheerfully. “Jump into your furs, man, and come along. An Indian says old Muggy’s dying up at the Gentle Annie, and I guess we’ve got to go and bring him in.”

“Send a sky-dog, can’t you?” snarled Kirk. “It’s his job.”

“Why, we’ll surely turn him on to Muggy once he’s in hospital. No time for prayers now. This is going to be just what our teams want, Kirk. They haven’t had enough night-work yet. Get your furs.”

“Like hell I won’t till I’ve had some grub.”

“Well, don’t go getting all pink inside.” Orange was still good-natured. “Go rustle something out of the kitchen.”

Kirk went in, slamming the door. He gulped coffee, ate a slab of bannock, lit a pipe, and came out surly as he went. He had planned to hunt up old Ennett and get drunk to-night, and long clean quiet hours under the endless eyes of the sky were terrifying to think of. He got his dogs from the corral, harnessed them, rolled into his furs on the sled. Orange was already starting, and cried:

“Here! Give me room, can’t you! Remember they’re young dogs.”
“You can go to hell!” shouted Kirk.

He swung into the lead, the steel runners screaming and jarring over the frozen snow of the yard, and headed up towards the Klondyke River and the Old Inn. Orange was young, with a good opinion of himself and his position. He was to be in charge of the Patrol and did not mean to have any insubordination among its members, and he muttered vengeance on Kirk as he followed. “If I don’t take it out of your hide yet, my friend!” he thought.

All up the river Kirk kept ahead, guiding the half-tried team with his voice. Orange, struggling with his own, heard him at it, sternly, monotonously: “Gee, Buck, Haw, Buck. Haw, you devil . . . Haw. Mush along . . . .”

Even in the regulation fur coat, cap and gloves, with several pair of wool stockings under his moccasins, Orange found it cold. He was not looking forward to the Winter Patrol with any pleasure. Twenty-four days going and about eighteen back, with a fortnight’s spell at Macpherson, was the usual thing, and it remained to see how much would be saved by the new trail. Orange, who was sociable and sybarite, hated the long silent treks in the bitter cold, the discomfort and lack of cleanliness.

“But I’m eternally damned if I’m going to have insolence, too,” he thought, as they climbed out of the river to the plateau.

For a while they ran along the Whitehorse trail, where the dogs went eagerly over the beaten snow. But when they turned into the woods Kirk had to get out and break trail. This is exhausting work at best, but to-night Orange had no mercy. “I’ll learn him to swear at me,” he thought, sitting tight. A weak point of light showed through the spruces at last, touching their red frosty cones to a twinkle. Orange anchored his sled by turning it on its side, opened the door, and went into the shack. Then, with sudden reverence, he pulled off his cap, but Kirk, following, perversely refused to do the same.
Even the crudest elements take on a certain majesty when they are sufficiently simple, and although death is always more simple than life, death in Muggy's shack owed nothing to anything but its own tremendous power, and did not need to. A lantern stood on a shelf among cobwebs and rubbish that had blown in through the window stuffed with old rags. On more rags and trash an old dead man lay peacefully with the weak yellow flicker on his face, and an old live man stooped over him with trembling hands on his trembling knees. The live man, shrivelled and bleached like a leaf a long time in water, was One-Thumb Smith, who rocked on the bars up at Bounding Creek. Muggy, who had been in the North long before Kate Carmack's found the Klondyke gold, wore still that placidity of expression which marks all wood-dwellers on his gaunt strong face.

Smith raised himself with an effort; looked with doubting wistful eyes.

"Well, I guess it was his time to go," he said, forlornly. "Rip didn't have nothin' on him. Too bad I couldn't get him a sky-dog, but I said a prayer over him on the chanst."

"We'll have a sky-dog plant him all right, Smith," promised Orange.

"He ain't to be planted in Dawson. Muggy he always figured that he wanted to lie in Whitehorse cem'try," said Smith. He tottered to a stool and sat down. "Before he went jest now he said: 'Git me out to Whitehorse, mate.' An' I will. I figured ter take him acrost the hill an' catch the stage at Horner's Roadhouse. I got a pack-pony, an' I guess I kin do it, too. . . . only I oughter be startin' right away."

He looked round feebly. His lips were blue. Like Muggy, he was an old man.

"Aw!" said Kirk, violently. "What's all this? Stick him in a hole some place, can't you? The man's dead."

"He's goin' ter be buried in desecrated ground," said Smith,
with a sudden flash. "In desecrated ground in Whitehorse cem'ry. I promised."

"Desecrated! That's good!" Kirk laughed, and Orange looked at him sharply. His laugh was wild, and he looked wild enough. Probably he'd had a shot or two of that boot-polish and eau de quinine rum old Ennett made, and that was at the bottom of his tantrums. Old Smith rocked his wizened body until his shadow did a pale stealthy dance on the log wall.

"I want he shall be buried in Whitehorse. I'm goin' to catch that stage. He was my mate..."

"Aw! Can that snivellin'?" shouted Kirk.

Orange said, sharply: "Don't be such a brute, Regard. Naturally he wants to do what's best for his friend."

"What's best. Oh, sure. We all want to do what's best, don't we?"

He bent over the dead man, and Orange thought he had never seen Regard look so blazingly full of life and splendid manhood. He had a sudden idea, and was pleased at its maliciousness.

"Well, I reckon there's no reason why you can't take him over the hill to catch the stage. Shorter than bringing him in to Dawson, and you can make Horner's before the stage leaves in the morning."

"What in hell are you horning into this for, Orange? Muggy's not my friend. Smith can take him if he goes, I guess."

"Guess again," said Orange, blandly.

He had no particular reason for this except to annoy Kirk, and by the dark look on the other's face he saw that he had done it. For the moment Kirk had it in mind to refuse, for although the Police have power to annex a man for especial help, Orange was exceeding his powers here. Then he remembered that, with the Patrol before him, he would do well not to antagonize Orange, and this stung him deeper than any-
thing else. Never before had he had to truckle to any man, but now . . .

"Well," he said, violently, to Smith, "where's that pack-pony? Don't imagine I'm toting him on my back, do you? Where's that pony?"

During the loading-up of Muggy for his last journey it was on Smith that Kirk continued to pour his invectives. He would not speak to Orange.

"Aw! What you twitterin' about that way? Muggy won't be worryin' over his body any. Glad to be quit of it, I guess. He never was a charmer. . . . You an' your civilization! What did it do for Muggy while he lived? Didn't even teach him to kip his body clean, and it don't ever teach folks to kip their minds clean. . . . Git out of my way there, or I'll step on you, likely. . . ."

"I want he shall be buried proper. You'd like a proper grave yourself."

"Me!" The deadliness of Kirk's invective directed against Smith would have amused Orange if he had not felt that he was some way in a private dissecting-room with this wild-eyed nervous man as the subject. Regard, he saw, was het up good and thoroughly, and he would have taken his decision back but that he feared to rouse Kirk further. "Me?" said Kirk. "A kyote's belly can be my grave for all me!" He drew the straps tight over the still figure that lay along the pack-saddle. "What do we pretend to respect in folks, anyway? Gen'ly something they haven't got. Quit tugging that pony's head, will you!" He stood up from buckling the strap, his dark wind-swept face clear in the lantern light, and Orange's unimaginative soul had a moment's uneasiness, as though something tremendous was at stake in this man, although he had not the least clue to it. "Aw!" said Kirk. "When Life takes the trouble to grow us up, it had ought to look after us better. Giddap!"

He struck the pony smartly on the flank, and it bounded
away into the scrub with Kirk running lightly at its side. Smith said, weakly:

"That's no funeral pace. He ain't acting right by Muggy. He ain't acting right."

Orange put Smith into Kirk's sled and set off for Dawson, leading the way.

"Your team'll follow home if you don't go talking to 'em," he said, and he did not speak again, for he was still furiously uneasy. He had no fear that Kirk, now climbing the torn white face of the opposite hill like some wild huntsman of legend bearing his awful trophy home, might lose his way. All trails seemed instinctively plain to Kirk, who could go to his destination straight as any migratory bird. Then why had he been lost on the Patrol Trail? Orange's rather lazy mind had fingered that puzzle before and dropped it. He considered it for a few minutes now, then yawned, then smiled. His own young-man arrogance and sense of the fitness of things was pleased at the way he had overridden the young-man arrogance of Kirk Regard. Dawson might be less pleased, because Kirk would have to be paid for his trip. Orange considered that also; also dropped it. He could—and would—blame Smith for that.

Kirk kept the pony going through the dark woods, along the hilltop. Above him stared those mindless, endless eyes of the sky, all concentrating on him until his keyed-up soul and body almost felt them prickle. Trees groaned in the grip of the frost. For hundreds of miles there seemed no sound but the puny sounds made by himself and the pony. The dead man on the pack-saddle now seemed to be Olafssen, now himself.

"Where am I goin'? What am I doin'?" he thought.

Tamsin said that only in the North has one a chance to discover one's real self. Who but some fool incapable of the act would ever want to do that? "Not me," thought Kirk, and felt the implacable North discovering him at every step.
Again and again he tried to defy it; whistled, sang mockingly at Muggy:

“Peter Coffin’s dead an’ cold.
The gray sand’s a-pilin’.
He lies no deeper than the mould.
The gray sand’s a-pilin’ high. . . .”

But his voice died away in the long silence, and the North brought up its memories again. Long blades of crimson twilight piercing dark forest where he had walked with his arm round a woman’s waist. Implacable stars in an inky sky where the coloured Lights danced wantonly; and himself, reduced to insect value and size, staggered over vast empty wildernesses of snow, following the trail of Ooket’s little feet. A wide river yellow with dawn, the peace of it broken suddenly by the crazy cry and crazy flight of a loon like some damned and blackened soul hurrying into the void . . . and himself that damned soul. Little inch-deep trails of the lesser creatures winding through the frail fragrance of flowers across a sunny slope, and Tamsin, her hands full of the flowers, kneeling there, smiling up at him. Belling on hot evenings of moose mating, and Dierdre slipping along beside him, her thin hand in his. “God!” he cried, passionately. “I don’t want her. I want Tamsin.” But God never answered. He had been invented, apparently, just for men to blaspheme by and dotards like old Mat to puzzle over. Old Mat, who had spoiled the two most perfect desires of Kirk’s whole life.

Going down to Horner’s Roadhouse in the dark hour before the late dawn, wind caught him on the bare hills in icy gusts out of the south, and he stopped to breathe the pony at an old Indian burying-ground where a small spruce bluff gave shelter. Time and prowling animals had destroyed the peaked wooden covers of the graves and the broken pots and pans once under them were now scattered about. Kirk looked at the rubbish bitterly. “That’s all their religion amounts to now,” he thought. “Give their dead the refuse they’d other-
wise throw on the dump, instead of their very best and most cherished things.” Well, that was all that most folk gave their gods anymore—all except Tamsin. He felt wildly that if he could only get to Tamsin and lay his head on her warm soft breast and feel her kind hands in his hair, he would be glad to die. But Dierdre as well as Olafsson was between them, and whatever the dead Olafsson might have in store for them, Dierdre would not let him be. This, he knew instinctively, was different from any of his other affairs. Dierdre was too clever to allow herself to be talked about for nothing.

“My God! How I hate her!” he thought, helplessly. “Layin’ a trap for me, that’s what she was . . . and I’ve fell in.”

The pony tossed its head with a jingle of steel, whinnied on a shrill high note; and suddenly a superstitious fear of this place chilled Kirk and made the hair wet on his forehead. Faint lights seemed to move over the broken crockery, the bits of iron, and the shadows were a den of wild things stepping softly about as Dierdre stepped, glancing with her sly mysterious eyes. Kirk struck the pony sharply and went pelting down the stony hill, fancying that he heard soft laughter behind.

The gaunt two-story frame-house was all lit up as he came to it. About the stables waggled lanterns, as the men fed and harnessed the horses. Kirk sought out Chesterfield, who kept the Roadhouse and had been an English officer in the war, and explained Muggy. Chesterfield called the driver, who decided that if they could “get him boxed in time I reckon I can take him. Only six passengers where there’s room for eighteen.” He stood chewing his plug while Kirk and Chesterfield worked on the lengths of raw pine in an outhouse and gave it as his opinion that the W. P. & Y. was in a tight corner.

“They’ll be economizin’ more yet, now that tourists are headin’ for Honolulu and sech-like instead of the Midnight Sun. You better take up goat-breedin’, you two. Millionaires
ain't that keen on Big Game any more. A poor lot of heads came out this year, I'm told."

"Goats stink," said Kirk, ripping the saw through sappy wood.

"So do men, you better believe. Well, I'm thinking of agriculture for mine. There never was any place in the world where you could grow such cereals."

"I haven't heard they've invented a mountain-plough yet. Where'd you get your flat country?"

"You can get anything if you look for't," contended the driver, chewing. "Say . . . brought that corpse down through the woods to-night, did you? I thought all the fellers who'd gone to the war had lost their nerve. Saw things up there, didn't you? I do myself, sometimes."

"There's been a lot of trash talked about men never bein' the same after the war. I guess most of him's the same already," said Kirk. "Got them nails handy, Mr. Chesterfield?"

Chesterfield had seen a shadow pass over the young man's face and guessed that for him at least all was not the same. He said:

"No animal forgets quicker than man . . . or makes the same mistakes more often."

"Other animals don't gen'ly live to make mistakes more'n twice," said Kirk. "Maybe better if we was the same," he added under his breath.

Chesterfield looked at him with interest. There was a kind of marsh-light brilliancy about Regard which would—and, he had heard, did—appeal to most people. He wondered what he had seen and thought up there in the woods alone with the dead man. Well, many an ass has entered Jerusalem, but it is not recorded that even one of them reverenced the Burden he bore.

Kirk went back to Dawson by the incoming stage, leaving the pony for any to collect who cared. "Not my business," he
told Chesterfield curtly; and Chesterfield saw him go, wonder-dering if this young man had not in some way made a grand slam of his commitments and now come to the consequences. Like everyone else, he had heard about Regard and Mac-Donald's Tamsin, and thought it a queer thing... and queerer yet that he should now he hanging around a recently-married woman. Yet he was sorry for Regard, so evidently violently at issues with his world and as certain to be smacked by the undiscriminating hand of Time into the same dead level of acceptance as himself had been—as every man and woman who passes maturity almost certainly has been.

At the Stables a grinning boy greeted Kirk with: "Say, Wagner is looking for you with a gun. You better watch out."

"You better attend to your own business," answered Kirk, but he felt his spirits rise. Any definite action would be a relief after the miseries of these last months which had drifted him so crazily on to the rocks. "To fight over a woman I hate as I do her—gosh! what a joke!" he thought, going gloomily about the work of rubbing down and feeding horses, putting away harness, forking hay for bedding. He wondered what it was in man that made him so continually do and say what he had no wish to. Himself had not meant to lie about Olafssen, and yet he had done it. He had not meant to go so far with Dierdre, and yet he had done it. He did not love any woman but Tamsin, yet all his words and actions were putting her farther from him.

"A curse on me. That's what it is," he thought, taking the lantern at last to cross the dark yard. Coming from the dim warmth, he could not see the yard clearly, but someone moved there. Someone said in Wagner's slow thick voice: "Take that, you —-!" and hit him a blow under the ear that sent him sprawling in the snow and muck.

He was up again instantly and rushing at the other man, and then a shout brought the stablemen running to form a ring and set up lanterns on the gate-posts. The mill they were
waiting for had begun, and they did not mean to miss it. For several days betting had occupied their lazy hours, and more were in favour of Wagner, that slow stolid ox of a man. Also, he undoubtedly had right on his side—they were still sufficiently primitive up here to believe that this counted.

Kirk was hardly conscious of the eager faces, dim in the flickering light. He was finding for the first time some ease-ment of the wretchedness and remorse and despair which had been crazing him, and he took and received the rattling blows with bitter intentness. When he could see anything for the blood which soon began to run into his eyes from a cut on the forehead, he saw Wagner's broad fair stupid face with the round ox-eyes and the cut and swelling lips, and drove at them again and again with all his strength. But Wagner had thews like an ox and the slow battering-ram temperament, and the younger and more emotional man steadily realized that he was spending himself against them with very little result.

"There's a curse on me," he thought, knowing that the thought weakened him and yet unable to throw it off. The men yelled at him:

"Hit him, Kirk! Go for'm! We're backin' you!" while others shouted: "Wagner! Wagner! You've got him beat, Charlie! Keep at him!"

Kirk felt dimly that the whole thing was indecent, altogether wrong. He slipped in the greasy muck, fell, and rose again, feeling the foulness of the mud as part of the general uncleanness of his own body and soul. He began to hit wildly, and then again he was down and could not get up, although Wagner kicked him with his heavy boot before going away sobbing. Kirk heard that strange thick toneless sobbing somewhere off in the dark, and thought it was himself, until men dragged him up and into the stable, where they rubbed him down with wisps of hay and gave him brandy. They were pitying him, damning him with faint praise: "You sure did
your best, old chap. Charlie don’t know when he’s beat, an’
that’s a fact. . . ."

He shook them off. "You leave me be. I’m all right. I’ve
got to go down to the Barracks an’ report."

He heard their protesting cries: "For the Lord’s sake! You
can’t go like that, man. You’re all beaten up."

"I’m goin’," he said, and went staggering off over the frozen
board-walk towards the bright light shining from those solid
brick walls. He felt a perverse pleasure in advertising his
shame; hoped that the Sergeant would upbraid him, give him
a chance to be insolent. He wondered if he was going to finish
the night in cells, and rather looked for it.

But Sergeant Plume had handled men for a good many
years. He received Kirk’s report urbaneley, although Kirk’s
swelling eyes could hardly see him standing in his red jacket
before the blazing fire. He had known that this was waiting
for Regard, and was not sorry that the young fool had got it
so severely. Justice must be upheld, thought Sergeant Plume,
although he privately believed that Dierdre was chiefly to
blame. "These women!" he thought, half wonderingly, and
wished he knew just what had happened between Regard and
MacDonald’s daughter on the Kanana.

Kirk slept little that night, and he could not dismiss Tamsin
from his mind at all. When she heard the whole of this, as she
certainly would do, what would she think of him then? And
what had she been thinking of him ever since he left her?
"Aw, women," he told himself defiantly. "I guess you can
buy ’em enywhere by the bunch. Look at Ooket. Look at
Dierdre. How’m I to know she’s a mite better? Taken up
with Stewart or someone by now, prob’ly."

Through the three days which elapsed before they took the
trail he sullenly doctored his hurts and fell into an unnatural
state of forced heroics. Fate, he felt, was against him. Very
well, then, he would defy Fate. He would arrange for the
Patrol to camp in that spruce bluff, and if they found what
was left of Olafsson he would confess the affair and be damned to them. "Then we'll see what's going to happen," he thought, and felt nervously through the long days of marching that he could hardly wait for it to happen. He was still stiff, but he forced himself to break trail for more hours at a time than any of the others, feeling that only in some such way could he get back his much-needed self-respect. Orange, who had been so directed by Plume, let him go much his own way.

"The road to Endor is the oldest road," said the Sergeant, "and I guess that young spark just hadn't enough to keep him busy. Let him tire himself good and plenty, and he'll be all right."

So daily Kirk broke trail ahead of the long teams, while icy skies stood above with a moon shining like a silver coin among the restless silver prickles of the stars, and the Northern Lights blew up in great white billows to the zenith and there caught colour and twitched their silken skirts and danced like ladies at a ball. Sometimes there were blizzards; and, struggling against the cutting sleet with head down, Orange wondered what would be the end if this moody difficult man in charge mistook the new trail and led them into some deep blind alley as that other Patrol had been led. But Kirk made no mistakes. He took them off at the fork as though it had been paved with asphalt, and brought them up and over the mountains and down the frozen stream without a falter. And then Orange, who had never been very severely tried himself, wondered how it was that a man who was such a superb dog-musher and pathfinder could have so little control over his own passions.

Gradually these great dumb formless masses of mountains asserted their power over Kirk again. The never-changing whiteness was in some way more terrifying than ever before, and through it the Patrol seemed to go as a tiny futile line of insects hauling chips of wood, and guided by things in short fur coats and long black wool stockings, who looked
more like women's cotton-spool on two pins than anything else. It seemed impossible that it could matter what happened to them . . . or to him. The Yukon didn't care. God didn't care. Tamsin wouldn't care. When, very tired at night, he sometimes imagined himself leading the Patrol astray on purpose, so that they should go on lifting one foot after the other and flitting the snow from the snowshoe heel until food was done and the dogs died and each man lay where he fell. He wondered if Orange would shoot him when he discovered they were lost. But each morning he rose with the others, and helped to beat the frozen tents into folds and lay them on the sleds and lace them with the stiffened thongs, and each day he led them down the trail to the spruce bluff.

Tramping silently one behind the other through this dead world, a man had to think his own thoughts and bear them as best he might. Constable Smith, they all believed, slept as he walked. Orange was awed by the stern never-ending heights, and sometimes spoke in whispers, glancing round as though fearing to shake down on them this heavy weight of silence. Sometimes they all whistled and sang catches; but more often as they wound deeper into this immense silence they walked as silently. Here and there the trails of snowshoe rabbits, mink and marten criss-crossed the white, and by setting traps at night or an occasional shot they got fresh meat now and again. Because in this eternal shadowless white, projections gave no warning, they often stumbled, and a bruise in this cold was a painful thing; and Kirk's forehead was still swollen and sore by the cuts from Wagner's knuckles. But towards the tenth evening he led them down the fan-shaped valley to the spruce bluff and told Orange they must camp there.

It gave him a strange sense of peace to see the tents go up in the spruce bluff, the big fires blaze and the sticks of white-fish set to thaw for the dogs stepping about hungry with greenish eyes. He sat, contented at last, hearing all the jovial
sounds of men who are at home anywhere and afraid nowhere, and knew that he, too, was no longer afraid. Now he had flung down the glove to the Yukon, and whether she would ignore it was not in his choice any more. In some way the knowledge gave him a sense of release that he had not felt since he shot Olafssen.

The men whistled and sang and joked. While kettles boiled and meat sizzled and men beat the snow out of robes and gear, young Weatherby was singing *The Crazy Toddle Foxtrot* which Kirk had often danced with Dierdre at The Arcade.

"You are my baby, and I love you; yes I do, yes I do.
You drive me crazy. You really do, really do, really do,"
sang young Weatherby joyously. Those sorts of amours had never troubled Weatherby yet, thought the man who had let them break his life for him. He thought of Dierdre coming into the place with the black folds of her cloak settling about her like the wings of the dark raven-bird of her ancestry and her sleek dark head turning this and that way like a bird’s. He thought of Tamsin chirruping and whistling to the squirrels, her round white throat swelling. And of Ooket, and of a little cocotte in France beating the snow from her red wool mittens before she ran to kiss him, and of nights in Vancouver with a girl whom he had picked up in the street. She had a way of pushing back his dark hair with a long pale hand. . . .

In the red light Orange was doctoring his feet. Behind him the stiff little spruces stood like the prim maiden aunts Tamsin had called them. Kirk thought of Tamsin with a curious calm. He felt nearer to her now that he was no longer running away from his fate. After the foot ritual, which Orange never allowed any man to neglect, they fed, and then, with the icy night close about them, crowded round the fires to smoke and talk, letting the dogs prowl where they chose. Wolfish of breed although they were, they would not forsake
the fires which made scarlet beds in the frosty snow and sometimes shot up long flames to sparkle red in icicles far up in the spruces.

The last days had been hard going, with thaws which meant a hold-up every time, and forced marches when frost hardened the surface again. But Orange was well satisfied. They were already three days ahead of schedule, and the grades had been no worse than on the ordinary route. And neither he nor anyone else knew that by next year there would no longer be need of the Mackenzie-Dawson Patrol. Wireless would have sent it, like any other epics of the past, into oblivion.

Backed up to a tree, Orange took down notes painstakingly. Kirk felt that Orange was geared never to trip a notch in the wheel of his daily round, and in spite of his clumsy furs he still looked neat and brisk. They had an amazing knack of keeping clean and neat and competent, these Mounties, and they talked easily of many things. Poker and dogs and trails, Outside and women, the dog-mushing contest up at Nome, rifles, gravels, diseases and religions. Orange told of a log raft laced with willows on which he and Smith had once tried to cross a side-stream, but the thing battered to pieces in the rapids and nearly drowned them. Kirk had a joke about a hatter he had found drifting out on the Kluane when he was guiding there a year ago.

"Wild-lookin' chap sittin' an' suckin' his hairy checks an' staring at my party. At last he said: 'Fellow come by about two year ago an' told me that was a war on. Is that a fact?' I had a dude from Chicago that trip an' he thought he'd git a rise. 'Why,' he said, 'he must a-been thinkin' of the Boer War, but I guess that's been over quite a time. Must a-been a queer sort o' chap who'd take the trouble to mention that war,' he said. 'Wal,' said the hatter, chewin' a piece, 'I guess every man's queer if it comes to that. I guess the impressions his finger-prints make ain't no more varied than the impressions he makes on other men.' 'Aw. Really?' says the dude.
'And what kind of impression do I make on you?' 'Wal,' says the hatter, 'since yer wanter know, I git the impression that you're a damned liar. I served with the American's of the Foreign Legion right along through the Great War.' My! I was pleased to see that dude take a fall. He surely had sickened me some.'

"I know his sort," said Smith. "They swell around in Injun chaps and a whole storeful of ironmongery, while your real old sourdough don't generally carry nothing more dangerous than a toothpick. Olafsson was another of that kidney. You cert'nly could hear him clank when he walked."

It was natural that there should have been much talk of Olafsson in the Patrol, and Kirk had trained himself not to wince at the name. Orange was watching, for he could not lose the suspicion that Regard knew more than he chose to tell. Yet he was sitting there easily in the firelight, his strong hands linked under his knees, smoking, talking, chaffing and seemingly more at peace than he had been since they left. "Getting the poison of that woman out of his blood, I suppose," thought Orange. "Pity such a fine chap should choose to mess himself up so." And then someone said:

"You mark my words, we've not heard the last of Olafsson yet. I bet you. A fatalist, that's what he was; and if he aimed to git some place he surety got there. Yes, sir. If he's livin' he'll turn up yet, an' if he ain't his h'ant will. Ah, a mighty determined cuss Olafsson was. Yes, sir."

"Well, this is a good place for haunts if he came this trail," said young Weatherby, yawning. "And that reminds me . . ."

One story followed another until they went to cutting spruce-boughs for bedding, and laid the thawed robes atop, and made the fires up and called in the dogs. Weatherby and Macky went after the dogs; found them scratching and sniffing at a hole among the tree-roots with something scattered around them that sent Weatherby back to Orange at a run. His light eyes were frightened, and it did not need
his words to tell Kirk that the Yukon had betrayed him again.

"Will you come, sir? A . . . a skeleton, I think," stammered young Weatherby. Kirk went with them among the swinging lanterns. It was safer to give no cause for suspicion to these cheerful comradely men who would change so sternly and so rapidly if once they knew the truth. Orange especially would give him no more quarter than one of these wolf-eyed huskies would give a weak member of their tribe who had displeased them. It would, Kirk remembered, probably mean promotion for Orange before all was done.

"Carefully now," Orange was saying anxiously. "Don't touch anything till I examine . . . curse these dogs, they've scattered the bones all over the shop. Yes . . . it's human remains right enough. . . ."

With faces ghostly in the lantern-light the men stood about the stony heap where Orange knelt. But presently he rose.

"Get the dogs tied up, men, and we'll investigate this in the morning," he said. "Nothing to be done now."

Young Weatherby giggled nervously as they went back to the fires.

"We've got our haunt all right," he said. Orange said nothing, and the men were unusually boisterous as they turned in. But Kirk, lying between Weatherby and Orange, with the acrid odour of the spruce rising through the robes as the heat of their bodies increased, found himself calm and ready for sleep. This did not surprise him. It had never been danger at short range which frightened him, and danger was near now. Or was it? He began to suspect that this was probably the best thing which could have happened. Orange, always full of deductions and cut-and-dried opinions, would feel certain that Kirk would not have chosen this camp if he had known. Also—and he really thought of this for the first time—would there be anything to identify Olafsson? Ooket had had his ear-rings, which were now at the bottom of the Kanana, and Orange would look for them. Wolves had
probably been at work before the dogs. Thinking it over Kirk dropped off to sleep.

The cold crept nearer. Out of the black skies star-points stared down on the vast solitudes where little animals followed the trails of wandering Indians and white men for pitiful scraps of food. The dogs barked once or twice, hearing rustling in the scrub, and lifting their sharp noses from the shelter of bushy tails to sniff. But the men slept on. Black shadows brimmed the deep draws. Below the gripping ice thin streams of creeks and rivers felt their blind way, and on the hillside the branches of a jack-pine splintered and fell with the frost. The sound thundered into Kirk's dreams and turned to Judgment Day with Tamsin sitting up beside God. But when he reached his hands to her he knew that she was the Yukon itself, very white and cold and strong, and not to be turned from her purpose by any pleading. Yet her tears fell on him like ice, her kisses froze his mouth; and when he woke he found that in truth his lips were frozen by his breath.

The camp was nervously at work early. There was a general air of crisp busyness under the good smell of frying meat and boiling coffee and resinous burning wood. Then with spades and a blanket they all went back among the stiff little trees. But little could be learned from what animals and weather had left of Olafsson. The whitened bones had been gnawed over by hungry wolves, the frost had made them rotten, the scraps of clothing were bleached and withered into wisps. There was a hole in the skull which might have been made by a bullet; yet even that was uncertain; and although Orange searched a good two hours for the ear-rings he had to give it up at last. They wrapt all that had been Olafsson decently in a bear-robe and put it on a sled; and while they sat over their midday meal and wondered whether or not it was Olafsson and what he had been murdered with, Kirk wondered in how far he was suspected, and was not surprised a little later to hear Smith say:
“Wonder how much Regard knows about this. Orange looks like he’s got somethin’ up his sleeve.”

“Try again, sonny,” said Fieldlake, patiently working the frost out of the dog-harness. “Orange’s always acting like he’s got something up his sleeve. It keeps him interested, I guess. But you may bet your bottom dollar Regard wouldn’t have made the camp here if he’d anything to hide. That feller wasn’t born yesterday.”

And this, Kirk realized now, would be his trump card.

They met blizzards now: Chinook winds that brought down avalanches of soft snow and made going almost impossible, and again frosts that hardened the surface only sufficiently to cut the dog’s feet when they sank through. Day by day they wound like a trail of ants along the bottom of the vast slopes, and made their tiny camps in some frozen willow-thicket threaded with rabbit-spore and wantoned over all night long by the dancing Glories, or headed uphill where timber was thicker and a larger fire could better keep off the wolf-pack which had followed them all the day. On the lower Peel they saw and shot a caribou; and that night the Patrol marched into Barracks, all dogs and men in good order, as later reported in the Police Blue Books, having been led over a new trail by Kirk Regard at a gain of seven days and augmented their number by the bones of “some man unknown.”

For days the Patrol and the Fort Detachment surmised and talked, while “the man unknown,” on a couple of boards in an outhouse, was painstakingly put together again by the Corporal-in-Charge and Smith, who confessed to some knowledge of anatomy. Photographs were taken, and all the pitiful scraps of evidence, including three bullets, ticketed and filed. But without the ear-rings there was no overwhelming proof. The Yukon, it seemed, had no mind to give up another of many dark secrets that it held.

The long days with that grim burden on the sled had shaken Kirk more than he expected. He did not understand
why the fear of detection was now less than the fear that he never would be detected and would have to carry this shadow with him all his life long. Tamsin had exorcised it, and probably could again; but between her was Dierdre and the Thing on the sled and old Mat and the whole Yukon—the Yukon that stared at him by day and listened to him by night and would never let him go. He did not know if any suspected him, but he was asked no questions in addition to those questions and answers already on the Dawson books, and it was only Orange who seemed to watch him with especial interest.

One day he sat on his bunk with the kit he had been sorting all about him and stared through the window at the white way he had come. The hills looked ancient and ghostly monsters squatting about the Fort like watchers at a ring-side. Dogs prowled over the snow. Through the faint windy light they seemed to blow back and forth, silently as smoke. Shadows of the wild, they foreshadowed that greater wild which is the undiscovered country of the heart. Kirk felt his own heart suddenly as a blank and desolate wilderness. All that was weak and young in him—and in most humans a certain residue of these qualities persists until the last—urged him to throw in his hand and be done with it: to get even with himself again, once and for ever. He stood up slowly, as though drawn by that desire to his feet; turned towards the door. Then in the passage he heard young Weatherby singing, and the song was one he had often sung with Tamsin.

"With a pal like you, so good and true,
I'd like to leave it all behind, and go and find
A sweet little nest somewhere in the West,
And let the rest of the world go by."

Kirk sat down again. If he only could! And perhaps he could. Hot life stirred in him again. Why hadn't he taken Tamsin in spite of Mat Colom? Why didn't he go back and try to take her now? It seemed incredible now that he had
run as he had and not faced it out to old Mat. It seemed incredible that he should be planning now to knuckle under in this way.

From the kitchen came the smell of cooking and a shout of laughter. Kirk squared his shoulders and went out whistling. He felt himself suddenly more of a grown man than he had felt in his life before. In the summer he would go back and take Tamsin.
Chapter Nine

Now the Kanana was locked in ice tight as a drum. For Challis and other younger men the steely-white mid-winter days with their brilliant moons and frolicking lights were champagne, but for such as Stewart the cold got into their bones and their hearts. He came up the Kanana now, driving slowly, his team as tired as himself, for he had had five hard days in the hills, locating a break in the wires of his section. He had gone out in a snowstorm with his coils of wire; laboured, half-starved and half-frozen, through drifts and over the icy unevenness of slews and into woods where his snowshoes tripped him every minute. He had slept of nights in rotting shacks littered with the desolation of past occupants, and his mind felt as desolate as he came home under the sickly light of a shadowed world promising more snow.

Now that the wires were clear again he would hear the latest Dawson news of Kirk Regard, and it was likely to be uglier than the last. Running about with a newly-married woman whose husband was already branded as too complaisant, Dawson had said, and Stewart was in the mood to believe it. He was ready, eager, to believe anything against young Regard in these days which had so changed Tamsin. "She’ll be around before I’ve been home an hour," he thought. "She won’t ask a thing, but there she’ll stand with her eyes hungry for a message from him. There never will be a message, and I wish I had the courage to tell her so." He thought: "I certainly ought to tell MacDonald what I’ve heard." But he was not at ease now with MacDonald, who had grown gaunter and grimmer since his break of the lifelong friendship with Mat Colom and the trouble that had fallen on Tamsin. And he was not at ease with Tamsin, who now seemed indifferent while she waited, like a soul under a
spell, for the message that would never come to set her free.

Stewart had seen no more of Ooket and her Loucheux, and Challis had evidently not marked them. A notice offering a reward for information about Olafsson had been up at the Police Barracks for some time; but it was not likely that any of the Indians could read, and in any case they were mostly gone to the woods now and the Indian village lay empty under the cold blowing of the wind as Stewart’s team ran past it, unheeding the howling of a few old and starving dogs unfit to take the trail. In other years Tamsin had always gone to the village and succoured the dogs, and that she had neglected it now seemed to mark the difference in her more than anything. “It’s not like her to have no pity for others,” thought Stewart, wondering if he would ever be able to induce her to have pity for him as he drove up to his lonely door and set about the feeding and corralling of his weary huskies.

He was in a bitter temper when he went down to Miss Tinney’s Resthouse for supper, hurryng over his work for fear that Tamsin should come. He felt that he could not bear her eyes to-night, and meant to spend the evening in Miss Tinney’s private room if she asked him, as she often did. But Miss Tinney set the food before Stewart and Challis sourly and went tramping back to her room, where Aggie Colom was having tea. She knew that Aggie had come to enrich the poisonous story which was already spreading up the creeks, where a few men remained for the winter, thawing out the frozen muck raised by their summer’s work, and she intended to speak her mind when occasion arose. But she had not expected that Aggie would begin by insolence to Ida.

Ida was a black bearskin which covered nearly the whole of one wall, and was modestly referred to by Miss Tinney as “a love-gift.” Miss Tinney gave it her private confidences and affection, and when Mrs. Colom hinted that it had bugs
in it and was a loathing to all refined natures she set in motion more than she was well able to meet.

Miss Timney, in the act of pouring coffee, stayed her hand and removed the johnny-cake to the far side of the table, following it up with the bread-and-butter and the soda-scones. Aggie's florid face turned purple.

"Well, for goodness' sake," she cried, shrilly. "Ain't I having enough trouble wi' Mat without incivilities among neighbours? Seems like there ain't one of you can stand a mite of truth."

"If we could we wouldn't be coming to you for it," retorted Miss Timney, giving the reply courteous, and then Aggie Colom bit.

"I know the truth you're after. You're wild to know whay Kirk left that MacDonald girl the way he did. Well, you won't know it from me."

"I guess I would if you knew it yourself," returned Miss Timney, sipping her cooling tea, and beyond the thin wall of the eating-room the two men sat up and looked at each other.

"Well, I guess I do know it, too," cried Aggie, goaded. "Everyone knows what that girl is. She carried on with him up on the Kluane when she weren't no more than a child, and Mat thrashed Kirk for it when it was Tamsin needed it. And again at Sagish . . . you should hear Mrs. Sheridan tell it. Never let him alone . . . keeping him out on the hills all night . . . ."

"Keeping him out! Poor little Kirk! My, you do make me laugh."

"Well! Kirk's a gentleman and he don't like that sort of thing. So he just went off quiet to be shut of her and . . . you keep off me, Evelyn Timney! The whole blame's Tamsin's, an' I ain't going to have my boy's character assaulted and never say a word . . . ."

By the hurried movement of the chairs the men behind the
wall believed that it was Mrs. Colom who was about to be assaulted and sprang up. Miss Tinney’s childish treble rose in a crow of fury.

"Get out of my house, woman. Get out this minute and never come back. You could skin me . . . you could tack me right up there on the wall along of Ida, and then you’d never make me believe harm of Tamsin MacDonald. That Regard . . . yes. You brought him up, and I’ll lay there’s no harm in him but you put it there. Tamsin found it out, I reckon, and sent him off. My, my! I’d be mortified to have your nature, Mrs. Colom . . . ."

"You wouldn’t be that het up if you didn’t know I spoke truth, Miss Tinney . . . ."

"Truth! Truth!" Stewart was reminded of old Mat’s gentle anxious search for the Truth. It would be easier to find it even in the mystic Blake than in Aggie. "If ever this lie comes to MacDonald’s ears I’ll tell him you started it . . . though he’ll likely guess that for himself. And if he don’t go right after you with a gun I will. If you’ve finished your tea, Mrs. Colom, I’m not wanting to detain you."

"Cat!" cried Aggie Colom, evidently struggling into her furs.

"Criminal!" retorted Miss Tinney.

And then the back door slammed, and Miss Tinney found some relief to her feelings in a violent poking of the stove. Challis said in a low voice to Stewart:

"Did you ever hear anything of this before?"

"No," said Stewart, choked.

"I have. It’s all up and down the Creeks. I’ve heard it everywhere in these last months, and I’ll bet that woman started it. I wish," said Challis plaintively, "that I could find out why Regard went off that way."

"Maybe I could tell you."

Challis stared. The man was trembling and breathing unevenly. Evidently he was very much moved, and Challis
remembered suddenly that Stewart was supposed to be sweet on Tamsin MacDonald. He said, carelessly:

"Come along over and have a smoke." But when they sat before the red stove at the Barracks he hardly knew how to begin. Stewart sat with his bony wrists on his bony knees, looking into the fire, and he seemed to have forgotten Challis. He had even forgotten his pipe.

"You said you knew something special about Regard?" suggested Challis when he thought the silence had lasted long enough.

"It may be about him. I don't know. I do know that Olafsson's wife was here the night he left."

"Olafsson's wife? The Indian girl? Why didn't you tell me?"

"You saw her, too. She was down at Bill Boss's when we went to see the gambling."

"I don't remember. How did you know her?"

"She was wearing big brass ear-rings like those described as Olafsson's." Stewart lifted his face now, and Challis saw how dark and ravaged it showed. "I don't suggest anything. I don't say that Regard saw her. But why would she wear his ear-rings if Olafsson was still alive? And why did Regard go off like that unless he did see her?"

Challis moved suddenly. He remembered the two Indians going up to Colom's shack. Yes; it was more than likely that Regard had seen Olafsson's wife. But even then . . .

"How can you be sure it was the girl Ooket, Stewart?"

"I went back and spoke to her. I wanted to make certain."

"You should have told me."

"Not at all. She had already been questioned and acquitted. There was no warrant against her."

"It was not known that she had the ear-rings. They are listed in the description of Olafsson."

Stewart said nothing. Challis sucked his pipe, thinking hard. It was clear that Stewart had wanted to have some weapon
against Regard in case it was needed. Now he apparently thought the time was come to hand it on. Challis began to feel excited. He asked more questions, but Stewart had nothing to add, and presently he got up and went out with a brief good-night. Challis shivered a little and poked the fire. Stewart had left a feeling of chill behind him. He had been as hard and rigid as the ice, and as relentless. “He believes Regard killed Olafssen. Now, do I believe it?” thought Challis, and sat thinking for a long time. Before he went to bed he knew that he did believe it and that he was going to handle this matter without reference to Dawson. It would mean so much to him. Promotion and Dorothy if he could put it through. It would not be easy; for Heaven knew where Ootker was now, and not until the Indians brought in their fur after Christmas would there be much chance of enquiry. He considered Mat Colom again, and dismissed the idea. Better not warn him in any way.

He stood up at last, pulled Dorothy’s photograph from his breast-pocket and stared for long at the well-loved face. The way to her had to lie over another woman’s heart, but life was like that. “She’s better off without him,” he thought, and then suddenly felt that warm vital presence of Kirk Regard so near and clear that he started. “It’s not like me to imagine things,” he thought, uncomfortably. “Of course it’s a pity... fine chap in lots of ways...” But he was whistling cheerfully as he prepared for bed. What a chance! The first real chance of his life!

The seed that Aggie Colom had sown along the rivers and through Knife came in time to Mat Colom’s ears. Mat was a troubled old man in these days, but he did make one attempt to reprove Aggie and was routed in the usual way.

“Well, if you know so much more’n anyone else why don’t you git up and tell it?” She glared at him with those small cruel eyes, and he knew that she would never forgive him for keeping her out of his secret. “He’s my boy as much as yours,
an' I'm not havin' things said about him when I know he ain't to blame."

"I been a bad man," said Mat, sadly, "and I surely am reapin' the relics of it now, though I cud wish as you wan't one of 'em, Aggie." He pottered painfully out into the white icy night to see that all was right with the foxes. From tall boxes in the trees and from burrows sharp noses poked and bright eyes gleamed as he passed among the netting-yards, and usually he stopped to greet each one by name. But to-night there was one name only in his mind.

"Kirk boy, what am I to do about it? What am I to do? It don't seem right anyways I look at it, but what else cud I a-done? I cudn't give you up, Kirk boy. I surely cudn't." He raised his bleared distressed eyes to the cold imperious stars and poured his trouble out. "Lord, if I'd died twenty year ago it sartinly would ha' took my soul a right smart while to git acquainted with the angels, but I been camped on their trail for quite a time now. Lord, can't you send an angel to direct my incomin's an' outgoings, for I sure am in a hell of a fix. Lord, Thou knowest as I consider the Bible an' the Great Blake my parallel bars an' take my contortions between 'em daily, but The Truth don't seem to git no clearer, someway, an' I do' know what to do."

He waited, his trembling hands holding to the gate-top, looking up at the stars, down across the earth. That clear illimitable silence which is the North flowed coldly down the slope, through the dark shadows of houses where men dwelt, over the frozen river empty of life and lost itself endlessly among the stars above the pale hills. Dimly he felt how monstrous a thing is silence. Silence dividing the living from the dead: dividing the living from the living; dividing this stupid blundering old man who was Mat Colom from everything he loved. He stood, bent and hunched, struggling with that constant temptation to tell MacDonald and so have his old friend beside him once more. Life when complicated by
Aggie seemed too much to be borne alone, and for all his acquaintance with the angels they seemed woefully incompetent now. He fought that temptation down at last and went back to the house; not consciously relieved, and yet with a vague sensation that he had done right.

It was the next day when Tamsin came to call on Stewart, and he met her with strange eyes before which, unconsciously, her own fell. She knew that now she only thought of Stewart and of everyone as means by which she might hear of Kirk, and she said with an effort:

“So you’ve mended the wire, Mr. Stewart. Is it clear now?”

“Yes. Won’t you sit down?”

She took the chair he pushed forward, and sat gasping a little as though she had been running, and he watched her closely. Of his own experience he knew the tragedies that hot wild youth may bring upon itself, and it was in sharp rebellion against that knowledge that he had said what he did to Challis. Now, seeing Tamsin with all her glad bravery beaten out of her, he would have unsaid it, but—like other of man’s mad catastrophies—it was too late. She asked, nervously:

“Have you any Dawson news? Anything special, I mean?”

He had been enquiring of Dawson for young Regard when she came in, and the busy operator had promised to attend to him presently. Stewart hoped that Tamsin would be gone before then, and said lightly:

“Oh, no. Nothing at all.”

“Then,” said Tamsin, twisting her hands together, “I want you to ask, Mr. Stewart. I want you to ask about Kirk Regard. I must know.”

Her voice had changed to a hard desperate note that frightened him. He stood still, his hand on the table, looking down at her.

“Why must you know?” he asked, gently.

“Because I can’t be left like this. Because . . .” She hesitated. For a brown healthy girl she had grown very pale
in these last months, and he knew that she never went on
the hills now. That great source of communion with her gods
and her strength seemed closed, and to him it was unspeakably
terrible that a young fly-by-night like Kirk Regard had the
power to do it. "Because," she said again, and he guessed
that she had been making up her mind to this for some time
and now meant to go through with it, "I know that he would
never have left me of his own choice. Something has come
between us and I must find out what it is. Tell me what you
have heard . . . anything . . . everything."

"He has been working in the Dawson Stables. He is going
on the Patrol to the Mackenzie."

"I knew that. What else?"

"Oh . . . the usual thing. He's good with horses and
popular with . . . with everyone. He's well."

"What else?"

It was so unlike Tamsin, this shameless greedy pushing of
the question, and Stewart burned with shame and grief for
her and hate of Kirk Regard. The telegraph began to clatter
and he took up the key. "Dawson speaking. Dawson, Dawson,
Dawson," it clattered, and he glanced at her in alarm.

"I may be some time. I'm sorry. Perhaps you would like
to come back later?" But she still sat there, as if too tired to
move, and it was with her hungry eyes on him that he learned
what had happened in Dawson before the leaving of the
Patrol. His informer was a little envious of Kirk, a little
scornful and sarcastic. "Nice bit of scandal for a good young
city like ours, what? Wagner's going around with both eyes
bumped up and his wife trying to pull wool over them. She
will, too. Regard went off chipper as a whiskey-jay. You can't
worry that lad . . ." Stewart clicked off a brief answer, put
down the key and turned to Tamsin.

"The Patrol left two days ago," he said.

Tamsin gave a low cry, and for a moment he thought she
would fall. But her eyes never left his face.
“There’s more than that. I’ve been watching you. I must know,” she said.

Stewart stood frowning and biting his lips. He was stirred and angry, and almost angry with Tamsin, too. She was forcing this on him.

“Well, if you will know I suppose you will, and you’re bound to hear it soon or late. He’s been carrying on with a married woman and had to fight the husband a few days before he left. There seems no doubt that he was to blame.”

“Who is she?”

“Dierdre Cass—that was, Mrs. Wagner now.” He walked about, not daring to look at Tamsin. In the window was a geranium that she had given him. He pinched off a leaf or two absently, then said in his harsh, dry voice: “You may rely on me not to repeat anything of this, and it will take some time for it to be known up here now the steamers are not running. I am sorry. I would not have told you if I could have helped it.”

“Thank you,” said Tamsin at last. She stood up, and now her face was flushed. “Thank you,” she said again, vaguely, and walked out. Stewart watched her going with uncertain feet down the boardwalk, but at the corner she did not turn towards home. She raised her face towards the hills; and then he saw her go to them, and dropped on a chair feeling suddenly exhausted and broken down. Sitting with head in his hands he found unaccustomed tears slipping down through his hard fingers, and it was long before he rose and stared at himself in the small glass on the wall. He saw a grey face seamed with more than age; tired eyes and grizzled hair, and he was remembering a song that young Regard had sung.

“Where is your mandolin, Pierrot?  
I gave it to a younger long ago.”

Young Regard with his warm bright darkness singing that at Tamsin’s knee, and Tamsin looking down on him with proud shining eyes. . . .
“Oh, my God!” said Stewart helplessly, and turned away.

Tamsin walked on the snowy hills among the jackpines like battered Japanese umbrellas—always battered, always as much alone as human souls, the jackpines—and there she tried to think clearly. It was not possible that she should think clearly, because her mind had been so concentrated on Kirk’s return that this wrenching dislocation was at first almost a physical agony. She walked herself to a standstill, crying his name over and over, and at last came home with dragging feet to cook MacDonald’s supper, MacDonald looked at her anxiously across the table.

“Are ye tired, lass?” he asked.

“I’m fine, feyther. Will you have another cup?”

There was a new sharp note in voice and manner which startled and in some way relieved him. Anything was better than the heavy dull absorption which shut him out so completely from her sorrow. “She’s heard somethin’ an’ it’s rousin’ her temper,” he thought, pityingly. “Eh, gin she could get in ane of her auld randies agin that birkie it’d dae her all the gude in the world.”

He tried to talk, but she was not expansive and he knew better than to force her. Sighing, he took his book and pipe and sat by the stove while Tamsin washed up and put away the things and brought her sewing. But she did not sew. She sat looking at the leaping flame through the open stove door as she had sat for many nights now. For hours she would stay like that, making herself part of her surroundings as though she drew from them some sullen power; and MacDonald, knowing well where her thoughts had gone, tried to remember that the young are always selfish and that grief is sharper then.

“She’ll wear through it,” he thought, and found some comfort in the knowledge that she had been to the hills again. “They may help her, though she winna let me do it,” he thought with a gleam of hope, and watched her fondly, his
big fair strong girl of whom he had always been so proud. Somewhere he had read of "A mountain girl, beaten with winds, chaste as the hardened rocks wherein she dwells," and thought, "That's my Tamsin," but his pride was sorely troubled now. "'Tis so unlike her to let all the world see her trouble," he thought, never having experienced an overwhelming passion himself nor knowing that Tamsin was quite unconscious that the world saw any difference in her. She had continued faithfully to do her work both in and out of the house, and that her heart was no longer in it seemed no one's business but her own.

Something in her was always asking for that help which all souls in agony so desperately desire—and could not take if it was offered—and dimly she knew that of her own power only she must fight her way back to strength and sanity—sometime. She had refused to meet that sometime, but now she must meet it. Staring at the fire and seeing Kirk's laughing face in the flickering flame she knew that the battle was near and would have to be fought to its close. Then she felt MacDonald's eyes on her and could not bear it. "To-morrow I'll go out again. I must be alone," she thought, with that old longing for open spaces moving in her as sap moves in a tree after the long numbing of the winter.

MacDonald saw her go with her dog-team next morning, and went to the Store with a lighter step. In youth the ordinary brutalities of life seem to have a peculiar and personal cruelty, as he knew well, and each love-denied man and maid believes their world come to an end. "But they wed anither after all and train up their families the better for't," he thought, and began again to dream of Tamsin wedded to that ducie man, Stewart, and bringing his grandchildren about his knees.

Tamsin took her dogs at a gallop up the frozen river, the runners humming merrily over the level ice and the keen wind stinging colour into her face while the fur of her artiki blew back. Either side the great hills were still ghostly and

*The World is Yours.*
unsubstantial under their heavy snow; but light and shade were beginning to show, and the sun was back in the sky. Again there would be life and beauty in the world, and the youth in her knew and welcomed it, although her heart cried out in rebellion because she felt so old... so old...

She stopped just below the Asulkum where she and Kirk had spent so many joyous hours a few months—years—aeons ago, anchored the sled by overturning it, and patted the dogs who lay down placidly in the traces and covered their sharp noses with their plumy tails. Then she pulled herself up the cut-bank by the tough snow-buried bushes and climbed by a paddle-wheel to the deserted deck. Rats squeaked and ran as she went below, and squirrels bounced out, scolding. She looked around while the dimness slowly took shape and form. The old Asulkum, out of its element and filled with rubbish instead of its designed occasions like so many folk in this queer world of ours, presented queer knobs and angles. Tamsin thought of pictures she had somewhere seen of idols: not idols like humans, but like human thoughts—all distorted and confused and unfulfilled.

“That’s how it is with him,” she thought. “He’s seeing something all wrong somehow, but I don’t know what it is. I don’t know.”

Against the curving side of the saloon ran the bench with rotting cushions where Kirk had once found a squirrel’s cache. She remembered him standing there, cracking the nuts with his strong white teeth and laughing at her, and the desolating need of him swept over her like a torrent, casting her down alongside the bench with groaning hands where his had searched. Suddenly tears came, the first she had wept since he left her, and she crouched there, torn and rent by them, until she could weep no more. Still she crouched in the dark and the cold.

“I think it will kill me to lose him,” she thought. “Maybe I will die now.”
Numbed and broken she thought that she hoped for death, willed it. But presently the icy cold seeking her blood brought instinctive rebellion. Across wastes of negation life seemed to call imperiously and she obeyed; opened her eyes and got stiffly to her feet. They were deadened with cold, and she began to stamp them and to beat her hands; and as the numbness left her body she found that her tears had washed it also from her brain.

"My! I'm a coward," she thought, horrified. "I've fallen down on my job. Me that thought I was so strong."

She clambered painfully out and started homeward under the glittering stars. Body and soul still felt bruised all over, but a new element seemed to have come into life. Her reading with old Mat had filled her mind with unrelated ideas, but an assertion of Samuel Butler's that "We are always dying and being born again" came on her with sudden force. She felt as though she had done just that in the Askhum, and her strong young body and spirit could not but welcome the new-birth pangs. She found herself sobbing often as the sled flew down the dark river, but they were healing tears. Already her mind was beginning its immortal task of re-creation. She thought:

"I know that I can help him yet. I know there's something behind all this that he's running from as he always did run from things that frightened him. Not physical things... I'll go to Uncle Mat. I'll get hold of it some way and help him yet."

She was too essentially virgin to be jealous of Dierdre Cass or all the other women of the world. She knew that she had the essence of the real Kirk, just as she knew his weaknesses. He had not hid much from her during those long intimate months; and it was those months of talk and exploration of each other's secret souls that she longed for—could not do without. She was too physically weary to think clearly, but she thought: "I could even do without his kisses if
we could have those talks again,” and believed that she meant it.

The Yukon, having got her to itself, was putting in its claims again. Around her stood the mountains like constant and reassuring friends. Above her in powerful swathes of light moved the Glories. Surely some huge brain was thinking in those meditative widths of wonder, those flashing brilliances darting from star to star as though enquiring of them concerning heavenly things. Across these far fields of silence Tamsin’s gods were afoot to-night, and once again she heard them call, although dimly and very far away. “My goodness; if it isn’t crazy to be afraid of anything with all this to back me up,” she thought. “I’ll find some way to put it straight if only I can be brave enough. That’s what it all comes back to in the end . . . courage.”

Now that her power to think and plan had come back she turned the whole force of it down the one channel. If she died for it she would find out why Kirk had gone, and then she would know how to get near him again. “From the beginning we were meant for each other,” she thought, feeling as youth so often feels, that she and Kirk were two immensely important hieroglyphics on this vast human scroll of the world, capable of interpreting the meaning of the whole human pageant if they could find the key. “We can do so much together. We have such a chance up here,” she thought, for the foundations of her life with Nature had been well and truly laid, and that immensity of it which frightened Kirk was a reservoir to her deep and brimming with power.

For the first time in months she sang at her washing in the shed, and MacDonald, coming up the yard with a couple of snowshoe rabbits that he had just shot on the hill, turned in eagerly to look at her. Unmistakably some miracle had been at work. Tamsin had weathered her sour adventure and now the sun would shine again.

“Have you a message for Uncle Mat, feyther?” cried
Tamsin, shaking out his wet flannel shirt. "I'm going up to see him when he'll be out with the foxes in a while."

MacDonald stared and frowned. A wall had grown up between the two families which he had no wish to breach. But he had still less wish to wipe that brightness from Tamsin's face.

"I hear they're quarrellin' like the devil these days," he said at last. "Did ye think ye might get them taegither again, mebbe?"

"Eh, feyther, de-ar, don't you know it's only Samson, not Tamsin, could get those Coloms together? And then he would surely bring the house down."

MacDonald guffawed heartily. Jests from Tamsin had become as rare as roses in December. He waived the question of Mat and held the rabbits up. Tamsin made a face.

"You must skin them for me, feyther. Eh, how I hate them when they're all limp and skinned. Like dead babies, they are."

"Ye be glad of 'em whiles they're plenty, my lass. Only two mair seasons before the Disease Year, an' then Injuns an' all has to suffer as ye ken weel. Juist the Biblical Seven Years of Plenty, an' then no rabbuts, an' few fur-bearin' animals. An' when the Injuns can't mak' their grub-stake it's bad for me wi' the rest. Weel . . . ."

He went away, and a little later Tamsin walked through the little grey town which seemed miraculously to have recovered its old beauty. Snow and frost, those white thoughts of God, had been at their work about men's dwellings, so that even the Sheridans' shack looked as though it surely housed angels. Sun spread the streets with a golden glory like the new Jerusalem, and all the hills were silver patterned in burning gold. Through the sharp bright air a flock of snow-bunting twittered and pecked, rose like a little white cloud and darted into the blue as though they knew their way straight to heaven. Tamsin walked in a new security and peace.
Life was a strange and difficult thing, but a God who could make all this magic in a night was still God.

She was whistling softly:

"Marching through the gates of the New Jerusalem,"
as she passed up the snowy trail between bushes to the wire pens and old Mat in his tattered lynx-paw coat and cap scraping out the last of the steaming mush for the eager foxes. Behind him she said:

"Luvah looks like having a splendid pelt this year, Uncle."

Mat turned quickly. His dim eyes grew dimmer with tears and love to see her there again after these barren months, with her voice and her smile of the old kindness.

"My, my! If it ain't Tamsin," he cried, dropping the pan. Then shadow fell like a blight on his radiant face, and Tamsin guessed his thought.

"I just came to say Howdy," she said, quickly. "And how's the Great Blake getting on?"

"Why . . . poorly." He still looked at her with suspicion, fearing that presently she would ask about Kirk. "I was wonderin' if mebbe I got some more books to help in elucidatin' . . . ."

"Mercy, no! The two religions you have already are as bad as Sedlidz powders, and a third would blow you right through the roof. . . ." She took his arm, feeling how dishonest she was. She hardly seemed to feel affection for him or anyone now with this great passion driving her. How, she thought, could she lead the talk round to Kirk. But innocently Mat himself opened the way, saying:

"I do wisht, Tamsin, that the Lord would provide in Yukon cities of refuge like he did in Chronicles and other parts. Fine notion they was, too, an' I'll lay they had a good healthy population. Mostly young men."

"Any special young men?" she asked, lightly.

"No. Oh my, no." From his haste she knew where his
thought lay. "Not on your life. I was allegoricalizin'. A city of refuge for the sperrit..." He looked across the hills to the pale blue of the sky, wrinkling his eyes in the crystal dazzle of light. "For the sperrit," he repeated, softly.

Tamsin felt her face burn. This gentle muddled old seeker after wisdom was further along the trail than herself who had once so confidently led him. She patted his hand as they walked down the yards where the foxes flicked in and out of the burrows, watching with furtive eyes. Mat said:

"You 'member somethin' we read onst in a Whitehorse paper, Tamsin, an' you learned it? 'Bout plaguein' the sperrit."

"I remember." She repeated it. "'And so shall our commission be accomplished which from God we had... to plague His heart until we had unfolded the capacities of His spirit.'" She shivered a little. "Uncle Mat, why are you thinking of that?"

"I dunno, dearie. I dunno. Sam Butler he says as life is one long process o' gettin' tired. I guess I'm a mite tired, mebbe."

"So am I." She spoke with sudden boldness, standing with him behind a shed where they could not be seen. "And we both know why. Uncle, what can we do to bring Kirk back? What can we do?"

"Only the Lord knows," he said, under his breath. Then, following his own thoughts as he always did his eyes searched her anxiously. She looked worn and shadowed, and he had no doubt that she knew what Aggie was saying. Only Kirk could refute those wicked things, and Kirk was far away. "I couldn't help it, dear," he said, piteously. "Chasin' ba'r or chuckin' out at the Tinky-Tink ain't a mark to consortin' wi' Aggie. Talk o' fightin' yer way outer a paper bag! I'll lay Aggie could fight her way outer a engine-biler before the best will in the world could get her cooked. Sam'el Butler he says a man can live easy wi'out his legs, but he can't live for ever wi' a pea in his shoe..."
“Yes, yes.” Tamsin was used to these excursions. She shook his arm gently. “I was asking you about Kirk, Uncle Mat.”

To hear his name spoken out loud by herself turned her almost giddy. It seemed to shout against the sky. She heard Mat’s voice meandering on. “... So I do think you’d do best to hitch yerself up ter someone soon, dear. Stewart’s a fine man. I guess you’d not do better than Stewart.”

“Is that your notion of bringing Kirk back to me?” she said, with an impatient laugh. And then, for the sheer relief and joy of repeating his name to someone who cared, she went over and over it. “Kirk, I mean. Kirk. Oh... Kirk Regard...”

Mat blinked at her, his mouth falling open with the greatness of this new thought. Of course it would bring Kirk back, for then his dreadful vow would be at an end and he could sleep o’ nights without sweating through half-conscious nightmares that he had given Kirk up to Chaldis. With Tamsin married Kirk would come back and read the Great Blake and the Bible with him until they had unfolded the capacity of his spirit. He began to glow, for the memory of his own amorous days had been thoroughly blurred by Blake and Samuel Butler, and he had always been convinced that men and women rarely married where they loved best, anyway.

“Why, yes,” he said, decidedly. “I guess it might.”

“What? What are you saying?”

“I guess Kirk’d come back if you was married,” said Mat, now in full career after this new notion and seeing his boy’s salvation in it. With Tamsin safe and Kirk home they would surely soon find The Truth together.

“Uncle Mat!” Tamsin caught him by the shoulders, shook him. Her face was flaming. “Did he tell you that? Did he tell you he—didn’t want to marry me?”

“Why... I dunno.” Mat came back from his excursion with an effort. “I guess not. No, dear; I guess he never said
that. But he can’t marry yer, Tamsin. Don’t yer ask him to, dear. It’d only bring trouble. I guess mebbe he ain’t a marryin’ man. ...” Trying to guard his secret from those blazing searching eyes he muddled on. “There’s a heap men never meant for marrying, Tamsin. ... They’s jest built that way. He likes yer, dear. He likes yer mighty well, but he can’t marry yer. He jest can’t marry ...”

“You needn’t keep on saying that,” said Tamsin with slow bitterness. “Stop saying that. You talk as if he was the only man in the world. He isn’t.”

Then she gave a sudden gulp and rushed off, because her heart was crying, “But he is. He is,” and she feared lest she might throw herself into Mat’s arms and beg him, pray him, say any shameless thing so long as he would promise to bring Kirk back. She almost ran down the street, through the house and into her room; falling on the bed and beating the pillows with her clenched fists, biting the sheet to keep her crying quiet. It seemed that all the agony of the world was sweeping over her. She burned with shame, she sobbed with desolation, and through all ran the aching conviction that she would sooner see him come back to scorn her than never see him again. Visions of him went by her in a mocking dance. Kirk kneeling a knee on the piano-stool, playing his flute to her singing, the whole of him easy, glad and lithe as a bird on a bough, Kirk with his rough black head and black brows tilted in half-mocking dismay when she scolded him. Kirk—dearest of all—squatting in the scented juniper of a summer night like a Pan of the hills and talking out to her his dark whimsical hopes and fears. Kirk holding his own among the men; in argument, in the shooting, in the cutting of water-hay, or the tales of the outer places. Always, it seemed, since her babyhood, there had been that strange wild elusive spirit leaping, coaxing, sulking in the background of her life.

“If I’m never to see him again I’ll die,” she said, lying like
a log while the red sunset crept up the plain little furnishings of her room, lingered a while on the whitewashed ceiling and then the world turned grey. Tamsin got up, washed her face and brushed her hair and went out to cook supper. MacDonald must be fed although the skies might fall.

Constructive thought was always difficult with Tamsin, who relied so firmly on feeling; but for days to come she struggled valiantly to resolve something out of her chaos. Her mind went over and over all that Mat had said, trying to read new meanings into it, to elaborate and excuse. His mind, she knew, was like that of many women: full of odds and ends of devotions, simple trusts, vague certainties, firm confusions. But he was honestly seeking the real things at the bottom of this muddle called Life, and she knew that he would never set out to deceive her.

And over and over she sifted out those days at Sagish. It had been she who had invited, she who had precipitated the crisis. Kirk had been decent to her on that night in the shack when so many men might not have been decent. He had made love just as he probably made it with any girl who was compliant, but he had never spoken of marriage. For a day or so she writhed under this knowledge; and then, because of her desperate need, she began remaking the loved one in her mind as women always have done and will do.

Kirk, she thought, had always dreaded ties and restrictions. So often he had talked of his strange dread of the unknown. He was bold to recklessness with anything he understood, but it was very possible that he saw in that mystical bond of marriage more than she did and would not accept it. Unripe, bewildered, and as yet only half-conscious of physical love she struggled towards understanding. Perhaps he felt marriage too big and yet too limiting a thing, and couldn't bring himself to tell her. That was like a man, just as it was like a man not to think what people might say. She hoped no one had seen anything or was saying anything, but it was possible.
Thinking herself very practical and wise, she admitted that it was possible.

Through the next weeks she fingered forlornly with her problem. It was not in her to turn love to hate, and so, piteous and distressed, she had to find excuses. "He's not the marrying kind. Uncle Mat said so, and he would have done it long ago if he'd liked. Then he never wanted that of me. Only the big things we so often talked of. And friendship. And memories. And he said I could help him . . . and then I drove him away by thinking he meant . . . other things. . . ."

She burned with shame before the image of a Kirk too delicate-minded to consider love, and went on building up out of her innocence and mysticism and protecting tenderness a totally impossible lover who would shatter at the first touch of reality. Here her dreaming on the hills harmed her. They had lost for her the contact of real life, and so it was that she presently began tremulously to consider the rest of Mat's suggestion. Mat had said that if she was married Kirk might come back, and she was sufficiently famished by now to believe that it would be infinitely easier to see him as a friend only than never to see him at all. Like any other woman blinded by love she twisted every thought, every word to the one end; and, returning at night from long tramps in the snowbound woods or up the icy river where the austerity of Nature stood up before her like a white-faced nun, something of that virgin chill returned to her blood. She was ready to prove to Kirk that she would accept friendship only, and to do that she would marry Stewart, the old grey man who would, of course, be so much less like a husband than a father.
Chapter Ten

The effects of a great passion are incalculable. Because the whole of Tamsin was turned on the notion of getting Kirk back she did not hesitate at all in her purpose. She felt that she had been walking for years through some black stony cavern, and now that she saw light at the end it would be madness not to rush to it, no matter what might be in the way. Later, when she had learned her lesson, it seemed to her impossible that she should have been so utterly blind, so incredibly stupid and self-centred—she who thought she had trained her life to think of others.

She threw out little sops to that thought as she hurried on. It would make MacDonald so happy if she married Stewart. The breach would be healed between him and Mat Colom. Stewart’s declining days would be comforted . . . for to Tamsin on the edge of twenty, fifty was aged beyond compare. She felt no emotion towards that grey man and did not imagine that he felt any for her. He wanted something to tend and cheer him, that grey man. Something between a nurse and a child. Well, she could do that . . .

But she was too honest to deceive herself. All this would not have counted if she had not come to believe it the only way to bring Kirk back. Life on these stark virgin hills had kept her mind so acutely virgin that she began to see her passion for Kirk as merely a more splendid form of the spiritual ideal. Something of the monk in queer wild restless Kirk was there? Very well; then she would match it with a nun in herself. A nun who would put away the longing to hold him in her arms and, like the old stories of delicate lords and ladies, live their married lives with a drawn sword between.

Lying awake through long nights the nun-project did not seem so easy to achieve. She wanted him: wanted his kisses, the sheer physical look of him, and fought the more fiercely
because she wanted. There was fanatic stuff in Tamsin along with her warm passions, and although she grew thinner and whiter she soon found ecstasy in the battle. And an old word read somewhere stayed always in her mind. "The world is yours," it said; "but you must pay for what you buy."

Well; she would buy. Buy the old friendship with Kirk again. Buy the right to help him out of his sloughs as she had always done. Now she began to see this as the proper logical way. The Holy Grail, the highest peak, even the football goal were not achieved without self-sacrifice. You must pay for what you buy.

She opened the back door on the chill icy world and lifted her arms worshipping to the sun, pale but definite above the shoulder of Tall Thing, and her thoughts swung up to it with gallant impossible fantasy. She saw herself and Kirk, climbing through the years, working out the brute and the dullard and the sluggard because of that sword between which would never cease to cut her flesh, until Death met them at last upon the heights with great suns and warm winds bearing them off into the great spaces. . . . Oh, that bright starry ending and beginning again!

Kneading her dough, filling the stove with billets, passing here and there quickfoot with her shining head and blue overall, she sang at her work until MacDonald got the habit of coming in on clumsy pretences just to look at her. She was making him happy again, and there was the beginning. Now she must make Stewart happy, too.

Stewart was a silent man; austere and heavy in his attitude to women, and she would not have had him otherwise. She began to woo him, lightly, frankly, and perhaps it was not his fault if he was startled at first. He knew enough of humanity to suspect that Aggie Colom's tellings were not all lies; but he knew enough of himself to realize that he could forgive Tamsin that—forgive her almost anything if she would turn to him at last. His youth was long gone; but he felt himself
grow younger every day while the Chinooks of spring blew
their wild harmonies down the valley, sweeping the river ice
clear and black as onyx and opening up sunny spaces for the
snow-birds to peck in. Now Tamsin sang again to the men
in the evenings, and talked and laughed with Stewart in the
store, and let him do for her little things . . . little things
big with meaning to them both, for Tamsin did not much
care to be waited on.

For a long time the telegraph was silent about Kirk Regard,
although Challis had Dawson letters concerning Regard and
Wagner and showed them all to Stewart, asserting that Kirk
was no better than he should be and it would give Challis
much pleasure to “hunt him.”

“The way he’s treated Miss MacDonald is enough for me,”
said Challis, strutting about in his blue and scarlet with eager
eyes.

He was not in the shack when the wires clattered out news
of the Patrol’s return with what was supposed to be the
remains of Olafssen, and Stewart was glad of that as he took
down the long Police message which must go to Challis
presently. There was to be a reward for the apprehension of
Ooket now, but Stewart’s knowledge of the centuries of
silence and repression that go to the making of Indian women
told him that the Police would make nothing of her unless
she was still mad enough to wear the ear-rings. It came on
him with a sudden shock that this tiny link was the only vital
one, and it was himself who had secured it and passed it on
to Challis.

“I’d rather have taken Tamsin with my hands quite clean,”
he thought, uncomfortably, and then felt a queer impelling
desire to get her promise before he gave Challis the message.
He had now no doubt that Kirk had had a hand in the
killing of Olafssen, and Challis would have none. The dis-
covery of the skeleton had only hardened conviction, yet it had
hardened it.
Already it was evening, but in the cold shadowy shack he hastily got into clean socks and shirt, shook a few drops of young Blair’s brilliantine on his sparse grey hair and tied on a blue tie. “Spring plumage, you old fool,” he thought, but he went out with a swagger and a stiff smile. Hadn’t Tamsin already shown him which way she wanted the wind to blow; and although he was unused to women—for the old episodes of his youth seemed to belong to another man so distant they were—he felt less nervous than he expected as he came into the dim-lit store where MacDonald was squabbling with some Indians.

“Tak’ ’em to Dawson, then,” he shouted. “Try Dawson gin ye want better prices. I’m no givin’ them. Aye . . . tak’ ’em an’ find oot that wha spits agin the wind spits in his ain face.” To Stewart he said: “Tamsin, is it? She’s gane oot tae Hugon’s wood-camp tae order seven cords. She said mebbe she’d be late seein’ the munc’s full. But I’d as lief ye went an’ brought her safe hame, Stewart. My team’s at the door yet.”

He looked old to-night, with his lined and withered neck and stringy hands. He was just one year older than Stewart, and Stewart went out with a sudden sick memory of Kirk Regard with his round brown throat singing, his young lips making music like the pipes of Pan.

Where is your mandolin, Pierrot? Almost he saw the youngster laugh, mocking, and he groaned as he climbed stiffly into the sled. “Oh, God! what have I to offer her in place of all that?” he thought.

The moon was a silver plate, pouring down a queer ghostly radiance which gave fragility and mystery even to the naked willows, the runty little spruces. Up the flank of Tall Thing a coyote was baying with that broken howl which is the cry neither of full dog nor full wolf but of one who is bastard son of both. There were plenty of men just as unable to manage a decent bark or a decent howl as that coyote, and
many times Stewart had felt himself to be one of them. He felt that he must not think of that now, or courage would fail him. He would think of the chill clean smell of the snow and the fir-trees; of these fluttering lights crossing the inky sky in saffrons, cardinals and greens; of the fantastic play of shadow among the trees; of this great silence of earth listening unmoved to the anxious heart-beats of man.

The wood-camp showed up through the thick spruces, lit like an incandescent burner by the lamp and stove inside and turning the snow around in the colour of rubies. Felled trees stripped of their slash lay by the trail, and a great ghostly heap of stacked lumber stood beyond. In the tent a phonograph was blaring The Duck-trot Toddle, and Stewart thrust his head in between the tics. Tamsin had gone on, said the men, to the old Power House some three miles farther away.

Stewart started again with the sensation of chase stirring him. Tamsin flying through the woods with himself after her as a man has always gone after the one woman became suddenly a real and vital occurrence. He shouted to the dogs, feeling the sweat break on his forehead. He laughed and whistled. Who said he was old? By all the powers that make a man he was not old.

The black heap of the old buildings rose sagging against the white hills, and all about it was the shadowy incoherence of a dead mine. Dead mines and abandoned machinery everywhere in the North, thought Stewart, growing suddenly grave. “Waste of money, of effort, of men. Well; isn’t that what life does with most of us in the end?”

Tamsin’s dogs lay in the snow by the overturned sled, and they clamoured a little as Stewart went into the great cavern where a little fire of leaves and rubbish burned below the overhanging shapes of engines, wheels, rotting driving-belts and other things. By the fire was Tamsin, full length and propped on an elbow like Brunhilde. She was looking out through the opening into the night, but he felt with an uneasy
sense of awe that she did not see him. Tamsin at her com-
munings with the invisible was not the Tamsin of houses.
'The passion that left the earth to find itself in the sky'—was
that the secret of this girl whom he desired to bind down to
his middle-aged bed and board?

He sat on a knee of decaying wood which had once helped
to brace the monstrous wheel canted into the earth beside him
and waited. But the place was oppressive; Tamsin in her
splendid poised silence was nerve-racking. He blurted out:

"Shall I mend the fire, Tamsin?"

She turned her eyes on him slowly, and the Scotchman in
him remembered the old song of Kilmeny:

"For Kilmeny had seen she knew not where,
And Kilmeny had seen what she could not declare."

"Yes. If you like," she said, absently. But she seemed to
have forgotten him again as he gathered sticks and made the
flames leap up. He felt not for the first time that there is
something strangely remote about women. They rarely dis-
close even their bodies to each other as men do so easily, and
never, he believed, their entire soul. Always they kept some-
thing withheld, he thought: a secret something schooled in
the ancient mysteries.

"Tamsin," he said, hastily, forgetting all that he had meant
to advance of reason and persuasion, "will you marry me?"

"Do you want me, Mr. Stewart?"

She seemed as though answering him from very far away.
Kilmeny! This was not what he had looked for, not what he
was well able to meet. He went down on one stiff knee and
put his arm round her.

"Tamsin. Listen. That's what I came for. To tell you again
that I wanted you. You know that I do want you?"

"Yes," she said, with a long sigh. She sat up, brushing her
hand across her eyes.

"Then . . . will you marry me, Tamsin?"
“Yes. If you want me, Mr. Stewart.”

She did not seem fully here yet. She moved her hands over the fire slowly, as though magicking something out of the red glow. Above and about them both the flame-flicker brought out and hid those swart dusty images . . . engines . . . great desperate defeated thoughts of men’s brains. He took her suddenly and fiercely in his arms as though defying them and kissed her. He kissed her lips and, giddy with their soft fragrance, did not know that they never kissed him back. He said things, incoherent awkward things that seemed foolish in his own ears; laughed as foolishly and helped her to her feet.

“Now we’ll go home,” he said, triumphantly. “It’s too cold here for my little girl.”

In spite of love these few minutes in the old Power House had chilled his elderly veins, but Tamsin was warm and soft and pliant and incredibly young. Her face glowed now, and again he put his arm round her. It seemed now that he could not do without touching her.

“We’ll be married soon? Soon, Tamsin?”

“Whenever you like,” she said, eagerly. “Yes, Mr. Stewart.”

“You must call me Rab now. Say it, Tamsin.”

“Rab,” she said, frankly. She smiled at him. “Now I’m going home, Rab. Catch me if you can.”

She was into her sled and away through the dark-cowled forest before he could get his team untangled and his stiff limbs tucked in the covers. He felt that he had reason to be content. He had won the right to make her his wife as soon as he chose; to hold her, take her kisses. But the long sourness of loneliness and doubt would not leave him for that. It had been so easy that there must be something behind, he thought, struggling not to think it. He had come prepared with so much of persuasion and demand . . . and where had it all gone to? He had not even asked her to love him. He knew that he had not dared.
He put the dogs in the corral without seeing MacDonald and went to Miss Tinney's for his supper. Later, when he was warm and surer of himself he would go to the Store. Nervously he told Miss Tinney his news, and she stared hard, rubbing her nose.

"Well!" she said. "Well!" Then: "This sure is your lucky day, Mr. Stewart. There's cranberry-pie for supper, too."

He felt the something lacking in tone and words and said, defiantly:

"She's not doing it because of Mrs. Colom's lies. She hasn't heard them."

"I'd not think the worse of her if she was." Now Stewart almost felt the implication that she would think better of them both. "I'm sure I hope you'll be happy," she added, primly, going away.

Stewart ate a lonely meal in great irritation and a kind of panic which sent him presently down to the Store to see if it was all real. But MacDonald left no doubt of that. His rejoicings were almost explosive, and he breached his new permit to pledge the two in strong whiskey. Tamsin sang to them, laughed, talked, was gay as she had not been since Kirk left, and that old suspicious devil in Stewart stirred again. It was surely not natural that she should be so glad to exchange himself for Kirk Regard. What was she after, anyway? And then she passed him by, smiling down at him frankly, and he was all giddy and melted and humble again at her nearness, her dearness, the clean outdoor scent of her bright hair.

Tamsin was still lifted up by her exultation. She had never felt saner, surer of herself. "We have to win out for ourselves. No one else can do it for us," she thought. "I've won out. I know where I am now, and it's all fine . . . fine."

She sat with glowing eyes on the music-bench, singing Stewart his favourites. Some day now she would sing them again with Kirk, and the melody would be the deeper because
of the depths into which she had gone to fetch it. Unconsciously she strayed into *Auld Robin Gray*; stopped in consternation on the second line and ran out to the kitchen to get supper. MacDonald reached a sinewy hand to grasp Stewart’s.

"Eh, mon, but this mak’s me michty happy," he said.

"D’you think I can make her happy?" asked Stewart, feeling suddenly pinched and grey. "I’m only fifty-two, but I’m old for my years, and she’s . . . so young."

"Hoots! She’ll coax ye young agin. Never fear. Tamsin’s no blate. A lad tae play wi’ but a mon tae mairry, an’ she kens it. Never ye fear."

So Stewart tried to persuade himself that he was comforted, and MacDonald, smelling very strongly of whiskey, took Tamsin on his knee when the grey lover was gone and held her tight.

"Losh," he said, tenderly. "What wull I dae wi’oot ye, bairn."

"But you don’t have to do without me." Tamsin laughed at the absurdity of that. "Why should you? Mr. Stewart marrics us both."

"Tits! What are ye thinkin’ of! Stewart’s a mon, an’ I’d no affront him that way. Nor I dinna fancy playin’ second fiddle maself. . . ."

"You’ll never do that."

"Aye, but I wull." MacDonald held her off, suddenly searching. "A wumman’s ain mon comes first . . . or should dae. Ye’ve no right tae mairry him gin ye dinna think that, Tamsin."

"Oh, I’ll take care of him," she promised, blithely. She felt a match for any man to-night. She pulled MacDonald’s hair, sitting on his knee with her warm coaxing face close to his rugged one. "Feyther dear, I want that you should go around and tell Uncle Mat about this. It . . . it’s fair silly to stay ill-friends now there’s no more cause."
“Eh? What’s that?” said MacDonald, startled. He considered, biting the corner of his beard. Tamsin was right, as she so generally was. Besides, he felt that it would certainly give him enormous pleasure to see Aggie Colom’s face when she learned that Tamsin had given her boy the go-by. “Weel . . . gin ye’ll come along, tae.”

“Ah! I always said you had no courage where Auntie Ag was concerned, fether!”

“Eh, get awa with ye,” said MacDonald, and went to bed laughing for the first time in many months.

But he did not sleep, for at once his keen brain began planning. The sooner Tamsin was wed the better, and then there could be no more of that talk of her and Kirk Regard. MacDonald had heard but a few stray words, but he knew by his own experience of men what men would say this winter round the camp-fires and over the shack stoves and along the trails. There was no ugly scandal they would not be saying when they met for a drink together, and for months the thought of that had burned him like hot irons. Now Tamsin would be a decent married woman, God bless her dear heart; with that young scoundrel well forgotten and a fine man whom MacDonald could trust, and money enough and to spare.

Tossing under the covers he continued to plan and think. Stewart must give up the Telegraph. It was no job for a married man and Tamsin couldn’t live in that shack. They had better come here, and likely Stewart could run the store with help from Jasper and Tamsin while MacDonald fulfilled the dream of his life and went to look for the Mother Lode.

“Never aince since I came into this country have I been what you may call free,” he thought. “Now’s my time, an’ by heck I’ll do it. I’ll miss her less on the trail than between walls, anyways.”

He sighed with deep content, thinking of the wild places, Slews turned by moss and berries into spilled jewel-boxes
that no other man had seen. . . . He had always loved colour, and there was endless colour in slews and on hills green with spring and pink with roses and dazzling with purple fireweed and goldenrod. And in deep piney woods he’d hunt fur, too, and maybe he’d get one of those new Remington high-power rimless .24 A rifles just to see how much better his old ironmongery was. But he’d never chance a grizzly with anything but the Savage. He would follow up the trails of prospectors he had staked, and talk of pegamite and diotite and uranium, and maybe happen on a pink stretch of hillside that would be pure cobalt, as Watson had done on the Kesikat five years ago. And he’d sit with Indians in their tepees and spit where he liked and never need to button up his shirt when folk came in.

“Eh, I’ve been civilized too long . . . and that darn stove must be oot,” he thought, getting up to ram more billets in the stove standing on its iron plate in the living-room. Tamsin’s plants would freeze yet if the fire went out. He remembered Tamsin standing there on a summer night with her hair in a braid, dribbling water on the flowers. But there was no sign of her to-night, and her door was fast shut. “Dreamin’ of her man,” he thought contentedly, looking from the window on the white night. Already the snow was going and there were blow-holes in the ice. By and by would be duck again among the reedy sand-banks and scrub willow. He would find duck where he was going, but maybe he would never shoot Siwash. Pert little devils, the Siwash, but Tamsin loved them. They enjoyed life so much, she always said.

A loon came laughing and racketing down the dim sky like one of those dark thoughts men are for ever turning up in themselves. MacDonald thought of Kirk—wild, rootless, careless, and so set on what he was going to do that he never heeded what he was doing. Plenty of men like that, trampling everything down. . . .

“But he hasn’t trampled her for all his damned trying,”
thought MacDonald, padding back to his cold bed. This would soon be Tamsin’s marriage bed, and maybe when he came back there would be a younger or two tumbling around. A glorious mother she would make, although he could wish Stewart were a little younger. Not too young, though. A proved man was always better, especially with so much money to handle. He would give Tamsin a fair slice as a marriage-portion, but the bulk Stewart would administer on trust for himself. He might want it later if he didn’t find the Mother Lode.

He stretched and yawned, feeling utterly at peace. People in cities were still hankering after the Eight Beatitudes, the papers said. Weel; ony man could have them if he cared to look. He had only to come back to the wide spaces and be content with the little things instead of being driven as men had been driven too long through the old crowded hells.

“To-morrow I’ll jest see have I ony canoe-paddles,” thought MacDonald drowsily, and fell asleep.

He had meant to meet Mat Colom stiffly; but when Mat came, slow and pottering, into the Store next morning MacDonald knew suddenly how much they both had missed the old friendship and went to him at once.

“Tamsin’s mairryin’ Stewart. Gie us yere gude washes, Mat,” he said.

Mat started, stared, fumbled for his hand and held it tight in his two soft trembling ones.

“I’ve prayed for this, Mac,” he said. “I’ve prayed for this . . .”

“Weel, weel.” MacDonald was embarrassed. “That boy o’ yours didna mean sae much tae her after all, ye see.” Then he added, handsomely: “Ye can bring Aggie aroun’ taenight gin ye’ve a mind tae.”

“Sure. Sure. We’ll come around . . .” Incoherent and wiping his eyes Mat went through into the house to find Tamsin, and flung his arms about her with a sob. Now his
purgatory was ended and his oath absolved, and Kirk could come back.

"Now he'll come back, darlin'," he cried, gladly.

Tamsin sat on a chair suddenly because her knees shook. For a moment shame and anger swept her, so that she sat with bent head, feeling that she could never forgive Kirk. How dared he make her love him if he was going to revolt against fulfilment like this? How dared he tell Uncle Mat? Then that terrible starved longing for him began again. Any way he chose to come—any way was better than no way. She had had the thirst of one who drinks stale water rather than none. If it gave her fever she did not care so long as her thirst was satisfied. But she did not know that already she had the fever. She asked greedily:

"You do think he'll come now?"

"Well, I dunno why not." Mat's blunted senses could no longer conceive of love; but he was always very conscious of fear for Aggie kept that alive in him. Love came and departed, but fear remained. He would write at once and tell Kirk that there was no longer cause for fear . . . "Tamsin," he said, earnestly: "For a great whiles my Emenation fr'm within has been weepin' incessantly for his sin, but I'll tell him it's all right now an' confirm it with a thund'rous oath. I guess I ain't forgot all of them yet."

"Uncle Mat. Does . . . does Kirk think marriage . . . wrong?"

"Why . . . it'd be wrong for him, honey. Feelin' the way he does it'd be . . ." Mat stopped. He couldn't be too cautious here, especially now the Police had started offering more rewards. "Man is a fallen god that remembers heaven," he said, "an' the sign of his fall is his visible body. The Great Blake says so, but I'll surely be glad to see Kirk's visible body agin, for I dunno how else one would know he was around. He's been made to sow the thistle for wheat an' the nettle for a nourishin' dainty, but I guess he's improved some.
Yes, sir. He's sure been put through it. Now; d'you reckon he might mebbe come to the weddin' if you wrote askin' him, Tamsin?"

"I . . . I don't know." Suddenly she felt giddy, stifled, as though she could not bear that. No . . . No. She could not go through it if he were there, and yet she was eager, frantic to go through it. Not in the least understanding herself she got up, laughed, kissed Mat and went back to her work.

"My! Won't Aggie be peeved," cried Mat, hurrying off to tell her. And it was from Aggie Colom only that Tamsin did not receive congratulations through the following days, although Miss Tinney's were faint enough to surprise her. Miss Tinney, standing on the chilly boardwalk, rubbing her red nose with the tips of her woollen gloves, opined that marriage was heaven or hell. No half-way house in it, said Miss Tinney, although a girl never thinks of that when she's buying her trousseau.

"I won't have a trousseau," said Tamsin, amused. This dear awkward old maid with her views on marriage! Feeling very wise, Tamsin explain: "There's no one to buy from up here but feyther, and although he'd give me the whole store I don't want it. Why should a girl dress up just because she is going to be called Mrs. instead of Miss?"

"Tamsin, do you love that man?"

"It's for him to ask me that. Not you," said Tamsin, surprised that she should feel angry. Unabashed, Miss Tinney went on:

"You've got to love your man good an' plenty up here, Tamsin. Down in cities one can get along pretty well, I guess. Go out one door as he comes through the other if you feel that way. But in the North it's like there's just one door for you both. No gettin' away. He's liable to turn up any time, an' you got to be always ready for that. Yes, sir."

"Dear Miss Tinney!" Tamsin patted her arm. There was something pitiful in this starved old woman giving advice to
one who knew it all. She felt that now there was no more to
know. Life would go on with Stewart much as it had done
with MacDonald. "I'm very happy, really," she said. "I really
am."

"Sacrament or sacrilege," said Miss Tinney, mysteriously,
and stalked off. She began to say something the same to
MacDonald when he came to see her a little later; but he so
cut the ground from under her feet by his requests and
demands that Stewart, arriving for supper, found her collapsed
in the parlour and hysterically appealing for help to the
bearskin Ida.

"I never did know the beat of that man," she cried, taking
a distracted face out of Ida's folds. "Why's he want the hull
nation to the weddin'?"

"Does he?" asked Stewart, horrified.

"Does he? I guess you ought to know." She sat down,
regarding him with a new dislike. "Fixed it all up for next
month, he says; and that's jest before the ice breaks an' all
the trails in a mess an' Injuns comin' in all the time like one
thing. I reckon you're all mad. But I s'pose when a man' old
he gets scared to wait."

Stewart stiffened. This spite was more like Aggie Colom,
who was busy telling all Knife that Tamsin was lucky to get
any man at all. "If you knew what I know . . ." Aggie was
saying. Miss Tinney gave a long blasting sigh.

"Well," she said, resignedly, "I guess you might better ask
Tamsin to come right down and consult with me, seeing I've
apparently got to feed and put up everyone for a hundred
miles around. An' every Injun to be fed and git a stick of
tobacco. And his own piano comin' down and a dance after
the weddin'. My; you'd think that man had a hull string of
banks. I'd hate to be as danged slick over everything as he is.
And before I'd be so ready to get rid of Tamsin. . . . Well,
you just tell her to come right along, will you? I'll have to
have this room painted over, I guess."
She watched him go out, stiffish, greyish, his lean veined hand clenched up, and sighed again, thinking of Kirk and Tamsin swinging hands as they came lightly down a sunny hillside like Children of the Morning.

"There's many a man goes out after ba'r and comes home with a rabbit," she said. "But I'd give somethin' to know why Tamsin had to."

Stewart, protesting to MacDonald, got no comfort. MacDonald said, quietly:

"I want all the folk around should see Tamsin. There's some only knows her by what's said about her. I'd like you to help me all you can, Stewart."

He turned again to his account books, and Stewart went away, abashed. So that silent angular man had known what was being said all the time and had held his hand with the large dignity that belonged to both MacDonalds until he thought he had found a way of refuting it. For a jealous moment that left him shaken Stewart wondered if that was why they had accepted him so gladly, but he crushed that thought. MacDonald had liked him long before, and Tamsin was above any double-dealing. Tamsin, he felt, had much the qualities she was for ever finding in the Yukon; a grandeur of simplicity; a calm certitude.

"She did care for that young scoundrel," he said half-aloud, tramping through the cold and empty evening to his shack. "But now she's put him out of her mind as he has done with her."

It seemed suddenly that the words took life, flew chuckling about him in the white and frosty air, leap-frogged derisively over the stiff willow-thickets. "Put him out of her mind . . . her mind . . . her mind . . ." He heard them echoing, and shut himself into his shack with a slammed door and a sense of mocking laughter pursuing him. The telegraph instrument was clacking and he went to take the message. And after that was done he should have put in a call to Dawson, for
MacDonald's notice of the wedding for the Dawson papers had been lying on the shelf since yesterday. But he dropped the key and went over to sit by the stove. He could not send that message while there was still time for Regard to come. In a week, ten days, when the regular mails had stopped and blow-holes came in the thinning ice, then let Regard try it if he dared.

"It's not a case of trusting her," he thought, forgetting to light the pipe between his teeth. "We don't want unpleasantness, that's all."

But he knew that it was not all.

Challis came with congratulations and cheerful talk.

"If you don't mind my saying so, Stewart, it's a damn good thing Miss MacDonald has come to her senses and taken the better man. Regard's a hound, though he surely is a bright hound. To camp the Patrol just where he knew the skeleton to be was a stunt that every man couldn't carry off, although of course it was the cleverest thing he could do to avert suspicion. He'd glory in it, too. I can imagine him laughing up his sleeve."

Until this moment Stewart had thought Regard foolish. All the daring and delights of youth were so far from him that he could only imagine caution. Now he said, grudgingly:

"You may be right—supposing he knew anything about it. We have no right to think so, and . . . and I hope he doesn't, Challis."

"Oh, sure! Now you've got the girl," thought Challis. "But what about me?" He swung his leg, sitting on the table, and said, wickedly: "I certainly am most uncommonly obliged to you for putting me on the trail, Stewart. Without the information that the girl was wearing ear-rings, and without the knowledge that Regard cleared out directly after he'd seen her we'd have precious little to go on. She and her man may be in any day now, and I'll have to arrest her, but no one ever got anything out of an Indian by questioning. Let him know
you know it all and then he'll give up. It's the only way, and I can do it, thanks to you."

"Don't thank me," said Stewart, irritably. "And keep my name out of it, for God's sake."

"Oh, certainly." Challis could understand that. For Tamsin's sake he would rather keep the thing quiet, too. It is not necessary for a woman to be good in order to rouse chivalry in a man, and indeed it is often the other way, but the young man did feel a chivalrous pity for Tamsin. This grim old grey fellow was not the right mate for her, and he guessed that she had taken him out of pride more than anything else. He got up. "I may have to call on you to identify the girl if she comes in, Stewart. The kind of description the Police puts out is apt to be a bit scarce sometimes."

And leaving Stewart to think uneasily over that he went away.

A busy woman is usually a happy one, and through the next month Tamsin was so very busy that she was quite sure that she was happy. The life she had led so long kept its claims on her. Mat Colom, her father, Stewart—the three old men she had always been good to were made happy now. This counted for much with Tamsin, who could not conceive a time when she would not care though she made them unhappier than they had ever been in their lives. Each chore she did now, each change in the old house where she was to live with Stewart was no more than a step on the way to Kirk, and she knew it and felt it and was not afraid. Kirk had condensed for her into an elixir so intense and fiery that the intoxication could never fully leave her, and yet she had already persuaded herself that she would never feel that intoxication any more.

She sat on her narrow bed watching the white clouds drift high above Tall Thing and thought: "This is how nuns feel when they take the veil. They put away the earthly thing they
care for most and then they are content. I am content.” It would be much like taking the veil to be married to the old grey man, Rab Stewart, and yet she could still have her friendships and so she was more fortunate than any nun. She looked round her little plain room with its bare whip-sawed walls stuck all over with snapshot photographs. There was no need to take down even those of Kirk. This would be her private shrine as it ever had been. Stewart would not come here. Gentle as he always was and kind, he would understand that even a married woman must have some place of her own. He had dropped back now into his stiff shy silence, and she was glad, for his nervous kisses had made her remember too keenly the quality of those others.

She sighed, then jumped up, thrusting back her thick hair. “Come now, get along with it, Tamsin,” she said, and went out to help in the arranging of the new store-room which MacDonald was adding to the house. “For it winna dae for ye to tak a can o’ beans frae the Store gin ye like, noo, Tamsin,” he said. “Yer husband wull hae tae render accounts tae me, noo.”

The wedding-night came soon enough, with Knife packed by Indians and whites whom wild tales of MacDonald’s munificence had brought down the uncertain ice and over the thawing trails to drive the last elements of sanity out of Miss Tinney in the crowded Rest-house. Women in pink satin and blue silk frocks treasured up since their last trip Outside possibly ten years ago rode in on horses, behind or beside their men. Others came in dog-sleds, the fur artiki over their finery; and in Miss Tinney’s back room they were all demanding hot irons to smooth out their crumpled skirts and hot coffee to smooth their tempers. Many who had not met for years were kissing or quartelling in that back room; and Miss Tinney, still in curling-pins and a wrapper, slammed the door on them and hustled the Indian maids in the kitchen.

“Come Christmas an’ we’ll be ready, maybe,” she said,
grimly. "For the Land's sake, Tamsin! Haven't you gone home to dress yet?"

"It won't take me five minutes to slip into my frock," said Tamsin, flushed, and competently doing five things at once. "We'll be ready all right, dear Miss Tinney. I've mixed the hot biscuit and flapjacks."

"It sure might be me goin' to be married instead of you, I'm that het up," grumbled Miss Tinney. "I'm sartin that haunch o' moose won't be cooked on time, Tamsin, and one o' my sponge-cakes went sad on me. . . ."

Challis, seeking Ooket and her Loucheux in the swarming Indian village or where muffled figures moved over the dirty trodden snow, realized that he was not likely to discover them without the help of Stewart whom he had left distracted in his shack, trying to staunch a razor-cut. They were all alike, these brown high-cheeked flat-nosed faces, these muttering voices that never made clear words, these stealthy movements that never seemed to lead anywhere. Ooket was almost certainly here, for no Indian could resist a spread, but without her ear-rings few white men could pick her out from fifty others. Stewart could. He had an uncanny knowledge of faces.

"I must get hold of him after the wedding," thought Challis and raced off to his shack in the sudden terror of every best man who believes that he has surely mislaid the ring.

Getting Tamsin MacDonald married seemed to entail great responsibilities on Knife.
Chapter Eleven

"I, THOMASINE, take thee, Robert . . ."

This, Tamsin felt, was absurd. She had never been called Thomasine in her life. They were marrying some other girl to Rab under the bower of spruce-branches in the living-room with all the Eskimo ivories and Indian fire-bags blinking on the walls in the lamp-light and the familiar wild odour of cured pelts rising from floor and chair-backs in the heat. The heat stifled her; but Rab's fumbling fingers were cold as they pushed the ring on. And the ring was cold. She felt a shiver run through her, and then everyone was laughing and crowding and kissing and calling her Mrs. Stewart, and her father's cheek was wet where it brushed hers.

This was terrible. She had never known fether to cry except when her mother died. And of course Tamsin MacDonald was dead now. Here and for ever was the end of Tamsin MacDonald . . .

Between shoulders she saw old Mat watching her with a queer formless gravity, and she smiled at him uncertainly. Only he and she knew the real meaning back of all this. Only he and she knew that it was done to bring Kirk back. He came to kiss her, whispering: "I been enquirin' o' Los, the Sperrit o' Prophecy, dear, an' she says it's all goin' fine." Then it surged up again, all the unreal noise and heat and laughter and colour, and presently the young men were dragging Stewart and herself on a sled heaped with bear-robies down to the Rest-house.

They make jokes that at another time would have turned her crimson. They shouted and cheered and sang, these young men who had so often wanted to marry her themselves; and the married women—there were no girls up here—flung the jests back as they walked beside, carrying lanterns to light the dim white way under the moon. But Challis, hauling with
them on the leather trace-lines, heard the young men grumbling to each other: "What's his sort doin' on this stampin'-ground?" they said. And: "How's he come to barge in when we couldn't?" And: "I'll lay thar's suthin' in them tales 'bout Regard after all . . . ."

The Indians stood-by watching: shaggy-haired men in worn furs, their dark wild eyes doubtfully gazing; women and children in any gaudy garment from a long mustard-coloured ulster buttoned to the feet to three tiers of flannel and fur, tasselled with bright wool and surmounted by a purple silk jockey-cap. It was the faces which unnerved Stewart as he sat stiffly, gripping Tamsin's hand. Strange secret untameable faces, their jutting contours polished bronze in the shifting light, presented one after another as he was dragged by. "The next will be Ooket," he thought.

And presently the next was Ooket, indiscreetly gay with a great necklace of false stones. But the ear-rings were gone from her ears. "That doesn't matter. I know she had them," he thought, feeling sick as Tamsin's hand clutched his trustfully. By and by, he supposed, he would have to tell Challis . . .

At the open door with a flood of light behind Miss Tinney met them, all pink frills to her square bony shoulders. Mrs. Sheridan fluttered round in bright yellow with a lot of burnt neck and arms; and inside was Aggie Colom who had refused to attend the wedding, her pig-eyes red and malicious above a billowing purple garment.

"So you've gotten a man at last, Tamsin MacDonald," she cried, shrilly. "I'll say you've been tryin' long enough."

Stewart felt a sudden easement of his trouble about Ooket. He stepped up to Aggie, and "My! but he looked ugly," the women said, watching.

"Yes? Here's the man. What do you want to say, Mrs. Colom?" he asked.

"I was speakin' to Tamsin," sputtered Aggie.

_The World is Yours._

I
“That is the same as speaking to me now, and I’ll be glad
to have you remember it. I am sure that it will always give
me pleasure to listen to anything you may say of my wife,
Mrs. Colom, but those who speak of her in a way that does
not please me will very shortly find a law-suit on their hands.”

He went back to Tamsin standing, he thought, in her
fragrant maidenhood like a rose in snow, and left Aggie
gaping. He knew that he had used the one weapon to frighten
her. MacDonald might have gone for her with a gun and she
would have promptly pushed old Mat between, but even
Aggie Colom’s tongue would guard her pocket. Mrs. Sheridan
who went about ‘saving situations’ as she considered it,
cried loudly:

“Now, folks; here’s the tables groaning with good things.
Aren’t we going to sit down?” and Stewart gravely took
Tamsin’s hand and led her to her place. He was always
acutely sensitive to the limelight, but pride and anger gave
him courage now. Among the bustle and chatter, the grinding
of eagerly pushed-in chairs and the gusts of laughter he saw
her smiling at him and went giddy with ecstasy. “My very
own girl now. Mine!” he thought.

The young men were looking at him sideways through
the steam of the hot meats. This old fellow with his talk
of lawyers when everyone knew that Aggie Colom should
have been ridden out of town on a rail. And after their frequent
visits to the whiskey-barrel in MacDonald’s store they would
have rejoiced to do it.

For a while there was no sound but the clatter of knives on
plates and the heavy tramping round of the waiting Indian
girls. These men and women had travelled far to stoke them-
selves on Miss Tinney’s famous cooking. Great haunches of
moose and bear, ham and caribou disappeared as quickly as
the geese and swan and duck, and after them came the pies.
Meat-pies, berry-pies, mince-pies, angel-cake, strawberry
short-cake, hot biscuit, jellies, waffles, sausage-rolls, washed
down with pints of hot coffee and all the whiskey that the permits of half-a-dozen men could bring together. It will be long before Tamsin MacDonald’s wedding feast is forgotten in the Yukon.

Challis, anxious about the Indians who would be moving on after the remains of the food had been turned over to them and despairing of getting Stewart to identify Ooket to-night, looked at the silent company and felt that matters were going heavily.

“Pretty dumb, aren’t they?” he said to Miss Timney, and received a surprised stare as she splashed out steaming cups of coffee.

“Sakes alive, man! You don’t expect folks to talk when they’re eatin’,” she said.

Certainly they were eating, these bunches of miners, hunters, river-hands, in creased tweeds, mackinaws, even blue dungarees or corduroys as they sat over their plates with hair sleeked by bear’s grease and flushed shaven faces. The women made a better showing. Not one from the farthest river-bars but had contrived some little feminine dainties. Queer things, women, thought Challis, watching Tamsin sitting with her grey ridged bridegroom at the table-end. Tamsin laughed and talked. She looked happy, fragrant as though some bud of desire had suddenly flowered in her.

“She can’t love him,” thought Challis. “Not after all I saw between her and Regard. What is it? Does she know about Olafssen? But she wouldn’t give him up for that if I know her.”

He wondered if Regard had forgotten her. Men, he had found, did not usually forget those frank grey starry eyes with the little dark line circling the iris. Tamsin had beautiful eyes. She turned them on him now, smiling.

“And it’s through her husband that we’re going to catch her lover,” thought Challis, with an unusual tingling of his nerves, “My! What do you know about that!”

Sheridan, that silent tireless hunter, rose to give the health
of bride and bridegroom in a nervous little speech which Mrs. Sheridan knew that she could have done much better. He had little to say of Stewart, but he was nearly enthusiastic over Tamsin... "For besides being the finest girl in Yukon the bride has caught the biggest fish that even Sagish Lake... ."

Shouts, stamping and cheers drowned him, and he sat down thankfully. Then Stewart was up, and Challis almost pitied him. Stewart was no fool. He had known well enough that he dared not touch liquor to-night, and he knew in that remote sensitive mind of his that every man here considered that Tamsin had thrown herself away. But he was deeply, savagely in love, Challis thought. His words had a harsh brevity as though he defied them all. "She's mine and I mean to keep her," he seemed to say.

"Yes. But what if young Regard comes back and wants her, old fellow?" thought Challis. .

Big Jere, a tiny wizened old prospector, was on his feet now, getting off a little story of how Tamsin had tended him when he came in snow-blind from 'ways off behind Llewellyn Glaisher,' and he gave an old toast that Tamsin loved.

"Here's to the man whose hand is firm when it grasps my own With a grip of steel that makes me feel I'm not in the world alone.
Here's to the woman whose smile put the sombre clouds to rout,
Who's good and fair and kind and square to the girl who's down and out."

The crockery danced, and the room rang to fist-thumpings and the roars of approval, and Stewart knew that they were all for Tamsin. There were more poetical toasts; queer things he felt them to be, with a strange wistful tang of strength and simplicity. And then the topical ones.

"Mr. and Mrs. Stewart. May Misfortune never dump her tailings on them."
"Hi, Tamsin! Here's hoping Good-luck will grub-stake you to the end of your days."

"May you never go out after b'ar an' come home with a rabbit."

This, Challis felt, was only too clearly what Tamsin had done. He got up. "Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the Prospector's Epitaph. He never cheated any but himself, or beat a store bill, so I guess he'll take a chance on a new trail. Good-luck to you, Stewart."

He saw the flush of gratitude on Stewart's gaunt face, and realized that the man was unnerved, defiant. "He's not the sort for her. He'll be jealous of her popularity, I wouldn't wonder," thought Challis. "Poor old Stewart!" And then Mat Colom, very startling in a new red and purple mackinaw, persisted in being heard.

"I've knewed Tamsin ever since she was born as Eve was born to Adam. The Great Blake says as all feminine creations are emanations of the masculine and the Four Mighty Ones are in every man, so I guess woman gets a right smart piece of 'em too. She gen'ly contrives to get a bit of everything. . . ."

He was drowned by laughter and dragged down by Aggie, still shouting: "Luvah . . . that's one of 'em, an' she's Human Love governed by E-motion an' don't you forgit it, Tamsin . . ."

MacDonald made no speech. He tried, and broke down for the first time in his life. His sleds, already loaded in the backyard, seemed to him suddenly a menace, even a wickedness. While the room was being cleared for dancing he went out into the still cold and stared blankly at the stars. In a few hours he would be trekking off under them, leaving his own girl to sink or swim as she might. "Dom it; I should a-held on here tae see hoo it pans oot," he thought, desperately, and then knew, even more desperately, that Tamsin was no longer his business. Then her arms came slipping round his neck, and he turned to grip her long in a silent hug before they went
in again to the calling fiddles and the feet tapping. This was
their real good-bye, he thought, and he had not asked her
anything, said anything, dumb auld fool that he was.
She flew by presently in some man's arms; her great
mass of bronze hair a little loosened, her close white frock
showing her buoyant outlines, her round firm neck and
arms. She looked a little dazed, he thought, with her eyes
rather wide and her breast rising and falling in quick short
breaths, and her brief uncertain smiles for one and another.
Tamsin was feeling dazed. Something was settled and done
with for ever now, but she could not feel sure what it was.
Even when Stewart held her stiffly, stepping gravely round
and round, his hard forehead beaded by the heat of the crowded
noisy room she had no real sensation of his nearness. All these
people were here to see her bound to him, but she did not feel
bound. She knew as she had often known, that her body and
spirit were different things, and her spirit was away up on the
hills behind Sagish with Kirk.
At her ear Rab said, urgently: "Tamsin, Tamsin; is it true?"
She did not answer, and his terrible doubts assailed him again.
After all that bright crusade of youth from which she had
drunk with young Regard how could it be possible that she
really cared for him. "Tamsin," he whispered: "do you love
me? Do you?"
She looked at him then, suddenly startled by an anxious
humility that she had not seen in him before, and a conscious-
ness of how very little she had been thinking of him swept
over her. He was feeling intensely, this stiff reticent old man,
and she had not known, had not cared.
"Oh, Rab," she said, impulsively; "I will try to be all you
want me to be. I will. I will."
Then the music stopped and she was gone, laughing, looking
back with a gay promising nod of her bright head. But she
was a little tremulous as she sought MacDonald, a little
frightened for the first time. She meant to try in all honesty
to give Rab all the care and consideration and obedience that she gave MacDonald, but how if he suspected her? She flung that thought from her with terror. It was not possible. He was so grateful to her...

"Feyther de-ar," she patted his arm, trying to laugh. "It's the Lancers next, feyther, and you're leading out Auntie Ag... ."

"Na, na, Tamsin. Na, lassie. Naething daeing. Tell me tae lead oot a jack-rabbit an' I'll try, but... ."

"Then she'll lead you out. In fact, I think that's how I put it to her and she said she'd rather lead out a loon. So you'll both be unhappy to please me, darling, and that will make you happy, won't it? An' I have Uncle Mat... ."

In the empty latter days when there was no more Tamsin, Stewart could always call up that dance in the big disordered room with astonishing clearness. He could remember just how the tight amber satin wrinkled under the arms of Mrs. Sheridan pounding the piano; how the two fiddlers, discarding coats and vests, laboured with the bows until the sweat ran down their red-lined faces; how dust flew from the boards so that someone was always sneezing and the men swung the women with the ancient dog-team cries:

"Gee, Dolly. Gee, Fanny. Haw, Fanny. Mush... ." And then would follow the helter-skelter up the middle with Tamsin in the lead; head up, some loose white drapery about her shoulders flying, her red lips curved in laughter, her strong pliant young body poised like some merry Amazon with her heterogeneous panting company behind her.

Challis was one of them: a scarlet tanager joined for the time to a bluebird who was wife to some hillside gouger out on the Creeks. Stewart wondered later why he had not even then seen the doom of all this in Challis' eyes...

Going away the men were whistling The Moon Shines To-Night on Pretty Red-Wing, as they packed their women into the sleds and on to the horses under the cold white
heaven-fires. Jests went lumbering round; curiously cir-
cumspect and formal among the men and rather easier among
the women. In all mixed occasions, thought husbands and
fathers, women have the advantage, being naturally bolder
with the tongue. The Indians were still there, immovable
in the cold, and Challis made a last desperate attempt to speak
to Stewart.

"If you see the girl Ooket anywhere, Stewart . . . ."

"What?" said Stewart, unheeding. He was wrapping Tamsin
for the procession down to the Store headed by both fiddlers,
and Challis dropped back. To-morrow, he hoped, would be
time enough.

Ooket and her Loucheux were close to him, had he been
able to recognize them; their faces greasy with food, their
eyes dulled with it. To-morrow they would all sleep about the
Indian village until the sun was high, and then they would
pull out for the far North and the long summer.

Everyone sang and laughed as the bridal pair were marched
home over the frosty boards with MacDonald hurrying ahead
to pile more billets into the stove. "So now the Kanana has
put the rubber-stamp of approval on our marriage," cried
Tamsin on the door-step. "Sakes, I didn't guess there were
so many congratulations in the world as I've listened to
to-night. Thanks ever so, folks. You've been lovely to me.
Good-night."

She dismissed them as a queen might do, thought Stewart,
going in to find her in MacDonald's arms. She did not cry,
but she held him close with a strange feeling of dizziness.

"You'll come back soon?" she whispered.

"Sure," said MacDonald. But he had no intention of doing
that. "No the sort tae horn in betune husband an' wife afore
they're settled, I guess," he thought. To Stewart he said only:
"Ye've got the best thing in Yukon, Rab. Tak' care o't," and
went out hastily, slamming the door behind.

Tamsin looked round, pushing back her hair.
“It feels—funny,” she said. She laughed uncertainly.
“There has always been feyther—coming in, you know.”

Stewart felt suddenly like hot fluid cased in iron. He said with incredible stiffness:
“You must be tired. You’d like—to retire. I shall have a pipe first.”

“Oh, yes. All right.” She fluttered about, moving a chair, a photograph; blew him a kiss from between the curtains leading to the bedrooms and vanished.

Stewart dropped into MacDonald’s leather chair and lit his pipe with shaking fingers. Emotion and exertion had exhausted him amazingly. His mind, less supple than Tamsin’s, less direct than MacDonald’s, momentarily refused to obey him. Disgust and despair at his ruined years; humbleness, wonder, trembling eagerness were all at work in him, driving him this and that way. “I’m not old,” he thought, savagely. And then, piteously: “I am old, and she is so young. So young . . .”

He listened to Tamsin moving behind the curtains, and the hammering of his pulses drove him to his feet. He walked up and down between the flowering window-boxes and the glowing stove. “It’ll be all right. All right,” he told himself. “I’ll be good to her. God knows I mean to be good to her.”

In her small familiar room next MacDonald’s, Tamsin had stood a minute looking at the shut door. But Stewart’s reality had passed with the sight of him. Here, in her own place, with Tall Thing watching starry-headed beyond the window and Kirk watching starry-eyed from the wall, were the only realities. She turned swiftly and flung off her wedding-trappings as though the last of that grotesque business went with them; huddled a warm blue gown over her night-dress and sat down by the open window, leaning herself on her elbows to look out at the night. Slowly that starry silence calmed the tumult in her, lifted her on broad wings of strength and peace.

Up there on the snowy haunch of Tall Thing all life lay
seemingly arrested; but deep within that giant body was already the stirring of new life secretly building up into fresh glories to be. No death anywhere; no real frustration. Only re-creation, eternal, mysterious, indestructible; only the fading of one headland beyond the horizon and the lifting of another. Only the passing of one flower and the glow of another rising above its crispy ghost.

"I can never be young again," thought Tamsin with the wisdom of her twenty years. "But now I can give Kirk all he will take. I can give him friendship... and help him. And that's all I really want." Something far back in her mind seemed refusing to sanction that. She insisted: "Yes; I do mean that. I've made sure that I mean it. This makes sure."

She looked down at the broad gold band on her finger; pressed it against her eyes in a valiant effort to call up Stewart's face. But it was Kirk's face that came; so gay, so young with laughter that before she knew it she was torn with an agony of tears.

But the tears were dried when later she opened the door at Stewart's knock and went out to him with a smile.
Chapter Twelve

Back in Dawson from the return trail Kirk came to realize the puniness of man’s powers in the fight against Fate and the necessity laid on him to continue it eternally, thereby hammering himself a soul out of plastic matter. Not that Kirk was regarding his soul just now. He was too relieved at the saving of his skin, for although the hunt was up he knew that it could not lead the Police anywhere. They could not identify the skeleton. They would learn nothing from Ooket now that the ear-rings were gone. That one link connecting up the whole business lay at the bottom of the Kanana, and short of being confronted with it nothing would move Ooket. He understood the Indian temperament well enough to know that.

Also he was now safe from Dierdre. Occasionally he saw her at the Adelphi or elsewhere, her thin arm and shoulder like a bat’s wing shadowed on the wall, her long predatory eyes roaming from one man to another. But they gleamed only triumph at him, and at last he understood. It had been Dierdre’s force behind that bearing from Wagner. All the venom of her revenge because Kirk had not loved, had not married her, was in it, and he could guess how her words and looks had penetrated that dull clod with fire—for an hour or two. There was no fire in Wagner now. Dierdre, the respectable matron, was having such a slow time that Kirk almost pitied her—when he thought of her.

But that was seldom, for all his thoughts were on Tamsin now. In some way he felt curiously refreshed, curiously cleansed by what had happened on the trail. Superstition, always about him like a veil, averred that he had put the matter in the hands of Fate, and Fate had marked out for him his way. It led straight to Tamsin; to pastures of starry
and immortal happiness, with all his sins and troubles shed like a tattered cloak by the wayside.

There was only old Mat to win over, and nightly Kirk wrote him long explanatory letters which he tore up next day. He was writing in the corner of Billy’s Pool-Room when a newcomer spoke first in his hearing of those wandering lies of Aggie Colom’s which had grown somewhat stale in Dawson since he had been away, and that the newcomer escaped breakage was only due to the united struggles of the community. Then he rushed to his shack, still scarlet and breathing flame, and began to throw his belongings into a gunny-sack. He was going to Tamsin. That very night he would go. That very hour . . .

But Fate, however accommodating she might have been, did not provide stage-coaches at will and by morning the old puzzle was just as deep again. If Kirk went to Tamsin, Matt would denounce him. The fact stood stark between them and no argument would change it. Although it killed him—and it might—Mat, like a Roman father or something, would go to Challis.

“Seems like I must wait till he dies,” thought Kirk, bitterly, and tried his hand at a letter to Tamsin.

But this was even worse. What could he say to Tamsin branded by Aggie Colom as ‘too easy’ and forsaken by him because she offered more than he cared to take? Supposing she had heard nothing, why should he enlighten her? And if she had, what was he to say, since the one thing she would expect of him could not be said? The curse is surely on me, he thought, and realized through the next days that he could do nothing else but wait. Something, he thought with a gambler’s optimism, would turn up. Sure to. . . .

But he could not stay in Dawson until the turn of the year took him out to the Guiding again. All these places where he had run with the child Tamsin were haunted places, tearing his heart. He loved her deep and truly now, and alternately
he cursed and prayed and found what peace he might in the hardest work to which he could lay his eager hands.

This year the W. P. & Y. ceased their regular service, for Dawson was dying faster than they had thought. In all the four hundred miles between Dawson and Whitehorse there were no more cooks in the road-houses, no more men in the great stables, and yet some restless travellers there would always be on that road. Kirk leased some of his pack-horses to a Dawson man who was prepared to run a few stages; took a miner and his wife and went down to Big Thumb Portage to keep open the road-house there. Likely there'll be folk enough to make it pay, he thought. And he was right.

Before many months now the mysterious witchery of spring would be at work, preparing for the stupendous break-up of the rivers. The heavy ice which had laid like a dead thing for so long would stir and quiver and hear the Voice that moved between it and a sky newborn into blueness and rosy clouds. And, like a blind and mindless beast, the ice would obey, groaning and heaving and, with many stoppages and slow-grinding persistence, drag its ever lessening bulk down the long, long river-ways through Alaska to Behring Sea. Last of all old stubborn Lake Laberge would yield to summer, and the first steamer off the Dawson slips would follow the ice out through its bottle-neck into Whitehorse. And then there would be no more need of the road-houses. And by then, thought Kirk, something will surely have happened to put things right.

At the road-house work was hard enough to keep him nearly content, and the rough man-life about him was good for his new spirit. They were always taking a chance, these hunters who came with their sacks of furs from the loneliness, these miners drifting South for a while with their specimens and their half-empty pokes, these indomitable bag-men always hoping to make a living. And on nights when the stage pulled in there were the good smells of steaming horses,
of bran mashes and red-top hay and sweated harness. Once in a while there were some of his own string to pet and examine, and Kirk was fond of his horses and happy to see them hardening well for the summer’s work.

He kept the stoves hot indoors, and there were usually two or three round them nightly; quiet men with the dim light on their weathered skin and rough hair and in those wonderful eyes of the dweller in large spaces, eyes steady almost to blankness, and yet so startlingly alive. Their talk ran much on chances, and under the sedatives of warmth and smoke Kirk could make himself believe that his own chance would soon come. He had the worker’s respect for a worker; but for young Haynes, traveller for the big Taylor-Drury Company which does for the Yukon what the Hudson Bay does elsewhere, he had the worker’s contempt for a snob, and to bait Haynes on the nights he came through was a definite pleasure.

“Of course I’m only trying it a few times for experience,” said Haynes out of his plump security. “My people wouldn’t stand for my taking a job like this at any price.”

“Figurin’ to go Outside next trip an’ turn gentleman, likely?” suggested Kirk with considering eyes on young Haynes’ cigar and signet-ring.

“My dear chap! I hope I’m one already. But possibly one has to be born of gentlefolk to recognize them, y’know.”

Someone laughed, but Kirk was unperturbed. He said, cordially: “Sure. I guess maybe I didn’t know what they were like myself until once I happened on a whole town full of ‘em.”

“Really?” cried Haynes, amazed. “Where on earth could that be?”

“Why . . . along the Alaskan Coast.” Kirk leaned on the wall and his face was reminiscently happy. Now he was going to destroy Haynes, hair and limb. “It was this way. In all Injun towns there used to be just one big bug, and he had a totem-pole with all his fam’ly history carved on it, and
the rest of the folk looked up to him something fierce—almost as if they were made of different flesh."

"A feudal lordship. How interesting! Exactly what I mean when I . . . ."

"Sure. Well, in time the young bucks got workin' in steamers and canneries an' made enough to bring home presents to their squaws—silks an' sham jool'ry and suchlike that the big bug's squaws couldn't afford."

"They had their blue blood and their totem-poles. Infinitely better."

"Sure. And they sat around in their blue blood under their totem-poles and said so until they sure got those nitchies peeked some, an' they all felt they must have poles too or bust. My! they went for those poles bald-headed. Sold their land, killed their friends, bartered their wives an' daughters, bribed their wizards. The notion of sittin' under their own totems all dolled up in silk an' jools fair tickled 'em to death. Well, they got 'em at last; a hundred feet high an' all painted an' carved over with family hist'ry stolen from someone else. And then were they in the soup? I'll say they were. All bein' gents they had no one to look up to. An' all bein' thieves an' liars they couldn't look up to themselves."

"I take no interest in uncivilized peoples," said Haynes, abruptly.

"Lordy! They wasn't uncivilized! Ain't I just telling you how they acted like white folks right along?" Kirk thrust billets in the stove, and Haynes, puzzled, saw how grave he was.

"They're as civilized as we are, now. Lit their fires with their totems an' gone in for lace-curtains an' pianos. Back of the curtains they sleep in skins and play mouth-organs an' contract phthisis, but the public don't know it any more than they know the private life of others who set out to be gentlefolk. Those nitchies have learned that most folk respect a man just for the junk he can gather round him. They've rose to the same status as the feller who buys himself into the Peerage
or wears a signet-ring with someone else's crest on it. Those are that man's totem-poles all right, even to the stolen crests . . ."

"Look here!" Young Haynes started up, suddenly enlightened. "If you are meaning to insult me, Mr. Regard . . ."

"Why . . . what do you know about that?" Kirk turned plaintive eyes on the others who were laughing. "I was just telling a yarn everyone knows."

Haynes hesitated, scarlet and uncertain. Then he elaborately immersed himself in a week-old Dawson paper and tried to ignore the chuckles. A prospector remarked that he hadn't seen a paper in donkey's years and asked for news.

"Dunno. Never have time to look at papers," said Kirk, drawing on his pipe with satisfaction. Haynes had been making him tired for some time, and men remembered later that they had never seen him so alive and full of mischief as just then. A man from Dawson said:

"I saw 'bout MacDonald's Tamsin in one lately. A fine kid she was, an' now she's a married woman. Seems queer, don't it?"

"It would if she was," said Kirk, lightly. "But she's not."

"Yeah. She is, too . . . or on the aidge of it. Where your ears been pasturin' that you've not heard that yet, Regard? She's marryin' the Telegraph Operator up at Knife. I just forget his name . . .""

"Was it Stewart?"

Kirk heard his voice unusually loud and harsh and saw the men stare in sudden startled concern. Of course they were all remembering Aggie Colom's stories, and while not putting too much weight to them they were curious and abashed. It is not etiquette to inquire into a man's private life in the Yukon. The Dawson man said, hastily:

"Stewart? Of course it was. Sticking to the Scotchies, I remember thinking. The Scotchies always did well for themselves. Ike, do you remember that Scotchy on Happy Meg
pup who cleaned up a fortune and didn't lose it again? Ferguson, wasn't it?"

They all warmly remembered Ferguson. They all began talking of him trying hard to be tactful. Kirk left them and walked out into the night forgetting to shut the door. The cold roar of wind on his face steadied him almost at once, and that fighting quality which always waked when the danger was near enough told him what to do. He must go at once to Knife and stop this marriage although old Mat made Challis put the handcuffs on him right away. He was acutely glad later that selfishness had no part in that thought. "She doesn't love him. She's doing it to stop that scandal since I wouldn't stop it," he thought. "My! what sort of a man do you call yourself, Kirk, to let it come to this?"

He thought of Tamsin as he had seen her last: her eyes drowsed, her lips still a little open with the ecstasy of his kiss; and suddenly the night seemed warm with summer scents and moonlight, and her voice, broken with love, was in his ears. He shook off that vision with an effort, for he had gone weak clear through. The cagerness to get to her again overshadowed everything now. Let him once see her and not Stewart, not old Mat, nor Challis, nor the Law of the North could keep them apart. All the pulses of his body knew it, and all his brain that was now half-mad with haste.

How soon could he get there? Four . . . five days? If he took the stage next morning down to Gopher maybe he could catch the pony-jitney up to Knife. Or if that had ceased running he'd borrow a horse . . . walk, anything. Sometimes the ice went out early on the side-streams and then he might make it by canoe. No matter. Let him get to Gopher first. He thought of sending her a wire from the Telegraph-shack at the next stopping-place, but he vetoed that. Stewart would take the message at Knife, and how could he trust Stewart there? At best it might only hurry up the wedding. And he could get there as soon—sooner than a letter.
He did not go to bed that night. There were a thousand things to see to before he went out on the stage next morning, leaving his head stableman in charge at the road-house. There was little work now, and if there was more Doherty must manage it, Kirk was going to Tamsin.

And the first thing he heard in Gopher was the news of her wedding.

He could not stay in the hot jovial road-house. Mechanically he took his coat as he passed through the entry, and mechanically he walked through the motionless night along the trail as though still going to her. But he knew that he would never go now.

"I've saved myself and lost her," he told himself, over and over. And sometimes just: "I've lost her."

He heard himself repeating it aloud as he walked. After a time it had no meaning whatever and yet he fancied that it had had one when he started. There was a man in France . . . he had been mortally hit, yet for a while he kept walking just like this, repeating just like this some sentence which Kirk did not remember. Then he dropped, kicked for a minute and lay still. And the rest went marching on.

Things did not march here. They sat still and looked at him, this man who had betrayed Tamsin. The sky, sown with star-seed, was callously remote. The hills, shawled by cloud into a dark shapelessness, were like exhausted Indians after the obscenity of a potlatch. Nothing moved in the white waste of the valley. Nothing spoke from the black fire up the slope. From Kirk's shoulders sticks snapped away brittlely as he pushed under some cottonwoods, and then an owl planed by on noiseless wings and near at hand sounded a faint shriek as some small creature met its death-blow.

Kirk turned back at last, his mood changing. The inevitable reaction was making him blindly savage now. Tamsin was not the sort to be bludgeoned into marriage by fear of what folk might think. That was not her quality. Either she had dis-
covered that she liked Stewart best or she wanted to revenge herself on Kirk. Kirk could understand that kind of defiance, but it maddened him.

“All right, my dear,” he said aloud. “We’ll see who gets buffaloed at this game. Not me, I’ll swear. Keep your Stewart.”

He tried to imagine Tamsin married to Stewart; all the wayward young delight of her tied to that stiff grey man, and his helpless fury grew. From the beginning of time, he thought, it was woman who had been the destruction of man’s hopes and beliefs and reverences. He would go to Tamsin; not to touch her, but to tell her with the icy conviction that now was creeping over him that she had destroyed his trust in women. They’re all out to get the most they can, he thought, and remembered that he had once heard O’Kane say that. O’Kane, he believed, was still in Ketchikan, greasing the ropes down which unfledged youth slid to damnation. He presently decided to go down and help O’Kane. There would be some fun in that.

“Hell! Let me go someplace quick and get drunk,” he thought, aching with misery and humiliation.

Within a few days he passed through Skagway and was landed by a little coastal boat under the tall dark crags of Ketchikan.

Technically all these Alaskan towns were under prohibition, but Kirk knew how to overcome that. And so did O’Kane or he had not stayed Outside so long. Wondering in what condition he would find the man, Kirk left the deserted canneries where the boat had dropped him and walked through the wet and windy night along the trestle-trail up the canyon to the town. He passed a mailman like a cloaked gnome pushing a small cart, and two huge negroes laughing raucously. After that were only pale glints from far-apart lamps on the streaming hoarding, smell of rotting leaves and earth from the woods that hung like a thunderstorm on the steep cliff to his right, and the roar of the dark river below meeting the dark sea under the houses that stood to his left on tall stilts.
All the world here was dark as a loon’s wing. Kirk almost fancied that presently it would scream like a loon and rise up flapping with his own dark thoughts for company. At the end of the trestle-walk stood the familiar totem-pole and tall tree with the veiled hut beneath it and roads forking to right and left. Kirk halted at the fork. But he did not take the trail that ran by the cliff and over the river to places of doubtful delight. He went on into the town and found O’Kane’s lodgings.

O’Kane’s room was gay with liquor and light and smoke. He was having a supper party for three pigeons about to be plucked and Gladys. There was no doubt about Gladys. Assuredly she lived among those airy structures over the river like some small defiant bird pecking away regrets. She pushed out her scarlet lips at Kirk; pulled him down on the lounge beside her and lit him a cigarette, never ceasing her chatter to the three boys. They were all half-dazed with drink; but O’Kane with his lids drooped over his rheumed eyes had never looked more astute, thought Kirk, feeling the squalor of the situation as a personal insult after the clean North. Just now he welcomed insult. Tamsin and life had insulted him, but he would show them that he could insult himself when he so chose. Furious as a spoiled boy he thought that the insults he would presently heap upon himself would make anything they could do look like missionary work.

“Why are you here, nice man?” murmured Gladys. Her round eyes were friendly as she poured him a drink. “You’re a fool to come to this old wretch to be fleeced, you know.”

“The biggest fools are the best hell-makers. That suits me.”

“Poor baby! Some girl give you the mit, eh? Well, I guess there are plenty more girls around. Drink this, son. It’ll help you grow up.”

Kirk took the glass, smiling at her impudence. After her own mad fashion this girl had courage. Poor little devil, sailing her battered barque with its gay pirate-flag through such rough
waters. But O'Kane had fallen pretty low to have her sort in his rooms.

He sat drinking, ignoring her as he watched the players, and presently she flounced up indignantly and went over to one of the boys, sitting on the arm of his chair.

"How goes it, buddy?" she asked, her hand about his neck.

The boy, a callow young Englishman, looked up nervously.

"I need a mascot badly. Please stay here," he said.

The game went on, with O'Kane lighting one cigar after another, pushing one filled glass after another towards his guests. A shameless exhibition, Kirk thought. Two of the youngsters were Americans from one of the canneries; raw and deliberate, with a touch of Yankee cunning. The English boy had apparently come North to "see life!" His blue eyes, now dilated with drink, still looked on Gladys with admiration, on O'Kane with respect. Even when he was forced to retire, cleaned-out for the time, he kept his nervous courteous smile.

"I'm afraid I need more practice," he said, ingenuously.

"Watch me win it off him, son," said Kirk, sitting down.

Up and down the world he had learned all O'Kane's tricks and more, and he meant to teach this old vulture with the drooping moustache a lesson. With grim concentration he did it, rising when the night was far spent with his pockets stuffed with bills.

"Don't go, Regard," said O'Kane, pulling at that moustache until the roots turned white.

"I wasn't thinkin' of it, I guess," Kirk held out a bill to Gladys. "Take that English kid to his hotel," he murmured. "An' don't lose him by the way."

Their eyes met in a stare. Then Gladys nodded. So the English boy, very sick and shaky, was delivered safely at his hotel and after the others were gone Kirk sat down again opposite O'Kane.

"Want another dust-up, Doc.?" he asked.

O'Kane looked with his thin lips drawn in an acid smile.
"There is no limit to what man may possess by fully possessing his potentialities. You and I might get on excellently well, Regard."

"Meaning . . .?"

"I have a spare room," said O'Kane, formally. "If you have not already made your arrangements it would give me great pleasure to have you remain here."

For a little Kirk looked at him, bright-eyed and silent. O'Kane thought: "He's wondering if a fifty-fifty basis is good enough." Kirk thought: "This way to hell is as good as another, I guess." Aloud he said:

"All right. But no more Gladys. Two grown men can do without that."

"Well, well; disillusionment is the first drink after the feeding-bottle and the last drink before the gruel of senility. I should have imagined you in the between stage, but perhaps I was wrong. You play a very clever game, Regard."

Kirk went out early next morning, intent on buying Tamsin a wedding-present which he would send with a graceful note. A very graceful and charming note which should yet be compact of all the contempt and irony merited by her conduct. He found this note not so easy of composition, and finally left it while he searched the town, choosing at last a small fish of the brown walrus-ivory set into a gold brooch. Tamsin would not forget Sagish when she saw that, and she would know that he did not, either. Strangely enough those Sagish days had stepped forward in his brain now with a burning clearness, an indescribable longing...

With each attempt the note became more impossible. He finally produced:

"With glad good wishes for your wedded happiness. From your old friend, KIRK REGARD."

This, in his distorted condition, seemed to convey something of dignified sarcasm, even if it missed the apex aimed
at. He sneered while writing it, mailed it with a strut of defiance, and returned to O’Kane in the same exalted atmosphere, determined to extract what excitement he could out of his days.

“If I can keep movin’,” he thought, feverishly. “That’s it. Keep movin’ an’ don’t think . . .”

He was lonely as he had never before been lonely. Like many of us he preferred to dodge memories or to hand them over to a friend for dispersion. But here was no friend and no way of dodging except by depraved means which revolted him even while he savagely used them. Through dreary days and nights he tried to destroy in himself those dim imaginings which had always troubled him—fond and furtive ghosts ever ready to spring a gin before his escaping feet. Fate, he told himself, was waiting for him. She would get him in time. Old Mat had known it when he sent him away. Tamsin had guessed it when she married Stewart. Orange and Plume were expecting it. They were only biding their time. He saw himself pitted against a gigantic Juggernaut, with Tamsin far on her hills with her face turned from him; and alternately he cursed and defied and fled his fears while daily helping O’Kane to fleece his fellows.

O’Kane was pleased with him. His own enfeebled body often clouded his own powers; but Kirk was strong as a young lion and ruthless as a coyote. O’Kane said, stretching his yellow claws:

“The froth and dregs of the whole Coast pass continually through this town. Why not through our hands? Here, as you may have already observed, Regard, we have bastard Spanish from New Mexico, Chinese, Japanese, polyglot from the Bermudas, negroes . . . and all the other races. Do they not owe us a living? I think so.”


He had no return of the pity which had saved the English
boy. It began to seem no more than just and logical that 
those who could not stand up to life should be flung aside like 
all other worn-out things in this country. Mining-towns, 
steamers, power-houses, log-cabins, machinery, men . . . 
y any and everything she had done with the North scrapped and 
cast away. Used, tested, found wanting, abandoned. That 
was the ordinary trafficking of life. Nature did it. And according 
to Tamsin, Nature was God.

"Well, then," thought Kirk, pulling his chair in to the table 
opposite the feverish faces. "What can Tamsin expect?"

On the Kanana Tamsin was expecting only what she feared, 
after the way of women whose life has been shaken to its 
foundations. And what she feared now was the return of Kirk. 
Except that the pain was too great she could have laughed at 
h her belief that marriage would settle her problems. It had 
made them insolvable, and the only fact that she salvaged 
out of her first few wedded months was the certainty that she 
did not want to see Kirk again. Stewart had a wistful, a delicate 
tenderness with her, but he was the triumphant husband of a 
young wife and could not forget it.

"Bless you, darling. You’ve made me young again," he said, 
gratefully. And Tamsin smiled with that woman-cunning so quickly learned at need, and buried *Auld Robin Gray* at 
the bottom of the music-box, and found the words singing 
drearly through her heart all the day.

"It’s not Rab’s fault," she thought with the stout justice 
that so rarely failed her. "Because I was crazy is not reason 
why he should suffer."

Going about the old familiar tasks she had performed for 
MacDonald, hanging Stewart’s blue shirts on the line where 
she had been used to hang MacDonald’s checked ones, she 
tried in vain to listen to the birds making their small meditative 
chorals among the roses, to the brown bees humming top-
heavy in the clover, to the diapason of the wind down the 
furry shoulders of Tall Thing. But she was dumb and blind.
She could only feel with the anguish of youth: "I said I was prepared to pay for what I bought, and I've bought nothing, for all my payment. What a joke!"

Kirk's brooch gave her a new shock of terror. It seemed a forerunner of himself; something gay and friendly and sentient of the old days breaking into the new habitation she was trying to build about her spirit. She sat with it in her lap, thinking desperately: "He mustn't come. Not till I'm stronger. Strong and old and more used to Rab." She rocked herself with folded arms on her bosom for the ache there seemed like a physical one. "I didn't know I loved him that much. I didn't know. I'll get over it. One gets over anything. Only . . . he mustn't come."

Kirk did not come, and life flowed on. The ice went out and birds passed at dawn, gentle wild voices far on the morning sky. Up in the blue small white clouds went like wandering sheep, folded at night into the comforting sunset glow. Canoes and dug-outs brought their bright painted sides upon the river; Indians appeared, thick as the birds, and set up their fish scaffolding below the village; Tall Thing and his lesser brothers burst into an ecstasy of flowers, frail as gossamer, short-lived as a dream. All these, thought Tamsin, were part of that far fantastic lovely life wherein a girl had lightly dreamed and planned and believed that she could turn the world to her liking.

"And now . . . what am I to do now?" she was asking herself the long days through.

She had ceased to ask her gods. For here they were immortal jesters now and her hills no more than waste land set apart for evil things like the temens of a pagan temple. Upon those hills she had dreamed the evil thing that would destroy her, and the gods had not prevented. She felt that she would go to them no more.

She thought of the long, long line of gods, from red Baal up to the sad Christ. God after god lifted by man's fancy and
falling at last from his defeated arms. "Not one can stand if we don’t hold it up," she thought, drearly, going down to the Indian village to tend an ailing child.

Dogs were in the Indian village; dozens of them, tied so close under the budding roses that they could scarcely scratch. Tamsin did not loose them as once she used to do. "They aren’t tied any tighter than I am," she thought. Canoes lay doubled on the water with small white clouds moving about them like fishes, and everywhere the long scaffoldings reflected themselves in a queer bright cubism. The rose-pink sunset of the Yukon steeped even the sagging huts and the black nets laid over the bushes in strange glory, and old women and children were warm Rembrandts and Murillos. On the high and shaky platform where Tommy Tom played nightly at Little Sticks Mrs. Sheridan had set up her portable harmonium and was leading a prayer-meeting.

"Oh, give me the old-time religion. Oh, give me the faith that I know,"

she sang, lustily, with a handful of stolid women grunting behind her.

Tamsin turned into Sophia’s musty shack resentfully. What had the white man ever given the Indian but drink, disease and immorality? They had taken from his own faith, his own religion and now tried to offset their stupendous obligations by this petty tinkering. She was not surprised to find herself thinking like this. A few weeks... a month or so... had made her feel so old, so coldly wise, so changed.

The weathered expressionless whole of Sophia was much more like an oil-painting than anything so mobile as a woman, but over the dosing of her child she spoke unemotionally of her eldest daughter who had run off with a white miner.

"Aha, Kenias him mighty mad wit’ me."

"With you? Why? She’s his daughter, too."
“Aha. Him say Alice no good. Me no good. Oll woman no good. Seeck of ’em oll, he say.”

She hunched on the floor by her sick child, the stolid Indian personification of acquiescence. Tamsin looked at her rebelliously.

“If we didn’t always take it for granted that the woman is to blame . . . I . . .” Then she shut up her lips and went out abruptly to meet Mrs. Sheridan, climbing triumphantly down from the platform and mopping her face heartily.

“My, Tamsin. It was surely a good meeting,” she cried, hurrying forward over the rubbish and the tumbling children. “I had six of ’em singing. If only you’d give me a hand I’d do it every day. It’s fierce that we don’t get a regular preacher oftener.”

“Tommy Tom gambled his newest wife away to Skookum Pete last week,” said Tamsin, perversely. “Maybe he’ll win her back when you’ve taken your harmonium off his platform.”

Mrs. Sheridan mopped her face delicately. She looked uncertain. Tamsin was young enough to leave her moods lying about on the surface and of course all Knife saw that things were going there just as might have been expected. “But they’ll shake down,” thought Mrs. Sheridan, always optimistic. “The first year is the worst. A baby or two’ll settle her all right. I’d have settled quicker if I’d had some.” Her unshakable desire to better the world worked in her, but she was a little afraid of Tamsin.

“I got up a new set of Biblical pictures by the Takhina,” she said, tentatively. “Maybe you’d help me distribute them. There’s a family of white folks come into Beaver Creek . . .”

Tamsin moved off. “No, thank you. I don’t think they’d do any good,” she said over her shoulder.

“Why, Tamsin MacDonald,” screamed Mrs. Sheridan. “What’s come to you!” Then, reflecting, she nodded her head. Sure, she thought. That’s what’s come. She’s not Tamsin MacDonald any more. She’s Tamsin Stewart when she ought
a-been Tamsin Regard. Well! I guess I always knew there was something in that story.

Hurrying home—she always hurried on principle—to cook her man’s supper she considered the probable return of Kirk Regard. “But I’d save her,” she thought. “I’d snatch her right out of his arms. A branch snatched from the burning.” Cheerfully seeing her own part in this she gave Sheridan an extra good supper.

The air was dampish, sickish, tasteless as though it needed salt. The whole day had needed salt, thought Tamsin, turning up through the tall scrub to the fox-farm. From the enormous darkening canopy of the sky silence fell to brim the hollows and slip stealthily away over the river, so that the sharpness of light and sound in the netting yards presently struck on her tired senses like blows. But she never forewent her nightly visit to old Mat, although, through that instinctive sympathy he always had with her, he did not speak of Kirk’s return now. From the shed where he was boiling cabbage-stalks and mush he peered through the red glare.

“Why, if I wasn’t just wantin’ you, Tamsin. Thar’s that thar Mendel . . . I surely can’t make out from him whether the red ought always to be recessive to the silver or not . . . .” He came to greet her, thrusting his battered hat off his grey wisp of hair above the soft old withered face. “I wish Kirk’d come. He’d understand. He’s a good boy. I taught him. He . . . .”

Stopping abruptly he fetched a long sigh. Kirk, too, had gone astray, as every man certainly did. He looked at Tamsin. That was a good marriage. He made it. But Tamsin did not look to-night as though she found it good.

“Thar’s Los an’ Entharmon,” he said, reminiscently. “Prompters o’ human desires an’ passions an’ always putting in their oar someplace. It’s necessary to watch out for ’em, I guess.” Maybe, he thought, Tamsin had not quite gotten over her love for Kirk. She was not so old as himself, and there
had once been a Lily Maud whom he had found it hard to
forget. He put his hand lovingly on her arm. "I reckon
you're missin' your dad, dear," he said.

"I get letters." Tamsin roused herself. "If I'm dull, Uncle
Mat, it's just because there's so much of the Yukon in me.
I have to lie dormant in the winter just as it does, but when
spring comes . . ."

"Aye," said Mat, gravely; "but it's come, my dear."

"Why, of course." Tamsin forced a laugh. "I forgot."

A heavy step sounded on the path and Stewart's tall gaunt
body showed through the shadows. He had come to look for
her. Always, it seemed to Tamsin, he was looking for her,
easy if she was out of his sight as though he suspected her
of hearing something, telling something.

"Any news?" he asked, speaking lightly, but Tamsin's
nerves read suspicion in his voice.

"Mendel's Law doesn't work with the foxes," she retorted.
"I don't know of anything else." Then for very fear she shook
herself into action and chattered and laughed as they walked
home.

"Rab, do you remember that winter we had bonfires on
the lake and did an Indian dance? And that time when Mrs.
Sheridan and I dressed as Indians and mushed down to
Sheridan's wood-camp and begged for skirts and trousers
till he took his gun to us. Do you remember . . .?"

Stewart was always willing to remember, always ready to
smile at the young gay wife who, for all her docility, was not
easy to understand. Yet he liked her better so. She stimulated,
entranced him. A half-discovered country with endless
glorious vistas. A man would never get to the end of Tamsin,
he thought, pressing her arm gratefully.

"This summer I plan to roof in the back verandah, dar-
ing," he told her. "And if you'd like a new wash-house . . ."

"Oh, my, no. I've always washed in a tent. Don't change
things." Kirk had lain by her on that back verandah, drowsy in
the strong sun. He had often helped her wring out clothes in the steamy tent. Then she remembered. Rab would feel hurt, and so she thanked him and protested that there was nothing she would like better than a roof to the back verandah. Rab was so kind. He was always thinking of things.

"Who would I think of but my wife?" he said, opening the door for her.

It still stirred him to say 'my wife'; to pay her little attentions, hear her moving about the house. It stirred him to see her sit later, some domestic sewing in her hands, talking to two prospectors who had 'happened in' from the Store as people always had done in MacDonald's house. One was an old-timer from Dawson who had known Tamsin as a child, and he talked eagerly, his gnarled hands on his spread knees.

"You remember your dad always said there was nothin' couldn't come out of Yukon, Tamsin, and I reckon he was dead right. Why, jest the other day I was doin' a bit of hill-side gauging an' I struck a biotite vein croppin' out right at the head of Appoller Crik. An' I took some prospects down to a man I know that had a scintilloscope an' 'There's uranium in that, or I miss my guess," I said. There was, too."

"Yep," said the other, sourly. "Mebbe there's nothing couldn't come out o' Yukon . . . if we could get it out. But when England let the Yanks get a stranglehold on us both ways so we can't get out over White Pass without using their trains an' we can't get out through the Alaska end 'thout using their steamers . . ."

Stewart ceased to listen. It was his way to sit silent, but never until now had he had such content with which to fill his mind. Even the bugbear of Ooake seemed to have vanished—as she had done. The Store, with Jasper's help, was doing well; and day and night there was Tamsin with her rare waywardnesses, her swift submissions, her reserves and shyness which he did not want to penetrate. Women had not before
given him the opportunity to reverence them. He rejoiced to reverence Tamsin; to feel in all he did not understand of her some sweet and gallant instinct to which he might find the clue some day; to realize how the harsh sourness of his years was melting in gratitude for all she was and did to him.

He sat, cradling his pipe in a long lean hand, his lean jaw sunk on his chest, and thought how strangely and swiftly he was discarding his cold disbeliefs in the Ultimate Good—which after all might be the Ultimate God. Very truly our ideas come to us down even more varied channels than our blood, and no man knows from what centuries of wasted strength, tragic opportunities, mysterious and pregnant lonelineses Man has wrested the idea that he can stem or speed the inexorable laws that govern life. For he can’t do it . . . never could have done it. He cannot govern his own life except according to the Law. He cannot govern anyone else’s even by that, for it is the acid test of the thinking soul that it only knows just what laws it must obey.

Yes. Law was omnipotent . . . and good . . . and God. And it was Tamsin who had taught him so—God bless her.

He said something of the kind later when the men were gone and she was moving about in the swift competent way she had, straightening things for the night. She stopped, a yellow cushion held against her breast and looked at him under her level brows.

“I think one of the laws is that we must stand alone. Don’t depend on me too much, Rab.”

“You mean . . . if you were to die?”

“No.” She hesitated, and he saw her face turn white. “I mean that though we may let others choose our outer life in a way I believe that we absolutely must choose our own judgments and beliefs and . . . decisions. If some day I felt that I must obey some law that you . . . you didn’t want me to . . . what then?”

“I don’t know.” He frowned, startled a little. “I hope
that I would not attempt to put pressure on you. I hope so. I don’t know. But, my darling girl, any law that you might choose to obey would only make me worship you the more. You don’t begin to know yet what an opinion I have of my wife.”

He fancied he saw her shiver. But she was laughing, fitting the cushion into its place.

“My, my! Some day I’ll put Auntie Ag behind the door to listen to you. Maybe she’d get a better opinion of me then.”

“Tamsin,” he said, suddenly, “I have so often dreaded . . . wondered . . . it was not anything she said about . . . about you and Regard that . . . decided you, was it? You . . . didn’t hear anything?”

He stared at her, his face grey and blank, his body stiff. Through all these months he had tried not to say it, but it was said now. And behind his anguish was a kind of relief. He knew that he could never feel her quite close, quite his own until this was said and answered.

She was looking at him, very white, but honestly bewildered.

“What she said? How do you mean? Did she say anything in particular?”

“Then you never heard . . . She says so many things I was afraid . . . That’s all right. That’s all right.” He was incoherent in his thankfulness, gathering her in his arms. But this insatiable jealousy would not be quite laid yet.

“You’re sure, darling? Quite, quite sure?”

Tamsin steadied her lips.

“I am quite sure, Rab.”

He seemed to throw off a weight. She saw him completely happy, trusting her, and thought that it was extraordinary how much untruth could be implied by absolutely truthful words.
Chapter Thirteen

Weather had long since obliterated into smoky grey that Reward for the apprehension of Ooket which hung on the front wall of the Police shack, and Challis had good reason for not renewing it. This was his game, and he did not intend that any passing prospector should acquire knowledge which would enable him to turn Ooket over direct to the Dawson authorities. Anything that Challis could say after that would probably get him into trouble for not reporting it sooner.

Puzzling it over he decided that he must have more knowledge before he arrested Ooket; and then, arriving in Dawson with both hands full, he would certainly receive what he deserved for his 'long and patient investigation.' But knowledge was hard to get, and he grew rebellious through these early spring days when wind came like warm laughter and all the naked woods burgeoned suddenly into promise. Then desire for Dorothy tormented him, and at last he decided to bludgeon something out of old Mat Colom.

The world was jocular with birds, delirious with scent. The dogs in the corral were noisy and quarrelsome with the spring-fever. Challis walked smartly over the boardwalks and up the muddy trail to the fox-farm. Along the foreshore of the Indian village launches, canoes and brown dug-outs lay like puppies nuzzling their mother. Everywhere fish-drying scaffoldings were going up, and women smoking caribou-skins, and boats pushing out to set nets in the bright river. Among these folk, thought Challis, would certainly be some who had seen Ooket with her ear-rings; and, armed with a little more detail from Colom—such as the name of her Loucheux, for instance—he would presently go down and cross-examine them. Challis still believed himself a match for the Indian mind, and felt very alert and determined as he
knocked on the Colom door and was greeted affably by Aggie.

"Come right in, Mr. Challis. My! I'm that glad to see you. I got something so important to say I was thinking of coming around."

Aggie's red mottled face and scanty frizz of hair and spiteful little eyes seemed less repulsive to Challis. Because to him there was only one matter of importance just now he sat down eagerly, thankful that old Mat was in the yards. Now he was going to get it all from this woman and his long winter of discontent was ended.

"Well, that's good hearing," he said, genially. "I'm all attention, Mrs. Colom."

Aggie pulled her chair close, smoothing down her soiled apron with her vast red hands and burst into a long confused story about a prospector who had stayed inside all the winter.

"... And if he don't live by runnin' a private still for the Indians how do he live, Mr. Challis? Tell me that. These Indians are getting bootleg somewheres, sure as day, and Tommy Tom was that rude to me yesterday you'd never believe it. Mrs. Sheridan says that Burke says that Walls as good as confessed that he ..."

"I don't believe for one minute that Walls has a private still," said Challis, sharply. He was bitterly disappointed. This confounded woman would swear away the reputation of a regiment in a week. "Maybe the Indians are celebrating their return with a shot or two of hair-oil or red ink, and there's spirit enough in those to upset any native just out of the woods. But Walls keeps the Ten Commandments in better shape than many people I know, Mrs. Colom, though I won't say he's not occasionally maligned by those who ought to know better."

He realized his mistake before he had finished speaking. He had antagonized this woman and she might have been of use to him. She continued stroking her apron, looking down at her dirty red hands.
“Some folks,” she remarked to them, “thinks they knows that much about everything that they’ve jest gotta walk out on the railroad-ties a piece an’ Parlyment’ll send ’em home in a coupe with bouquets.”

“I didn’t mean . . .,” stammered Challis. “Of course you know much more about the North than I do. . . .”

“I should hope so,” said Mrs. Colom. “An’ then I wouldn’t need to know much.”

“I just meant that I had never seen anything to make me suspect . . .”

“Some folks’ horizons is that darned limited they have ’em squinting.”

In despair Challis got up to go, but hung in the wind as Colom came in.

“We’ve been talking about bootleg whiskey, Mat,” he said, with an attempt at jocularity. Mrs. Colom said nothing.

“Why-y,” said Mat, disinterring numerous unrelated articles from his pockets and laying them along the table with a look of interest as though wondering how they got there; “I don’t reckon there’s any proper whiskey any more . . . Gosh! If here ain’t my teeth! I was wonderin’ where I’d mislaid ’em.” He inserted a lower plate with satisfaction.

“No. It ain’t whiskey like it was when I was at Nome, and old Moll . . . Aggie, I guess that’s your garter, ain’t it? I dunno how I got it . . . That sure was the stuff old Moll had, and we with swallers like Aaron’s rod that swalleyed all the other rods. . . .”

“I’m going down to MacDonald’s for groceries,” said Aggie, rising with a flounce. “And you better not let the double-boiler go dry, Mat, or you’ll have no dinner. Good-bye, Mr. Challis.”

“Well, well,” said old Mat, placidly. He pottered over through the warm brown light to the stove and raised the lid of the boiler. “If Aggie wants to pick on anybody ’bout suthin’ I guess it’s gen’rally me, anyways.” He lowered him-
self softly into a chair as the outer door slammed and began hunting on the table for his pipe. "Sit down agin, Challis. I ain’t seen you up around here this long whiles. How’s things movin’ in your line, eh?"

Challis was in no mood to waste more time.

"They’re not moving. Mat, do you know why young Regard left Knife?"

He watched the old blurred face keenly, but he was disappointed. It showed only amused weariness.

"My, my!" said Mat, filling his pipe. "Aggie asks me that ’bout three times a day. An’ I give her the same answer as I give you, sir. I reckon I do . . . some."

"Then is there any truth in the stories Mrs. Colom spread?"

"S’pose you tell me jest why you’ve a right to ask these personal questions, eh?" said Mat, equably.

"I’ve none at present. But . . . if either of you knows anything incriminating the girl Ooket it might be wise for you to remember that there is such a thing as being found accessory after the fact. Supposing that she’s criminal and you know it, that is."

Mat turned his bleared innocent eyes from the bubbling boiler to the young man. He seemed to be comparing them.

"I dunno what I can tell you," he said at last. "Sam Butler he says there’s no such source of error as persuit of the absolute truth."

"I’m only wanting what you may know of the ordinary truth, Mat."

"My boy," said Mat, laying a hand earnestly on Challis’ knee. "I’m finding every day that I don’t know much o’ that, neither. The deeper I go inter the Great Blake . . . ."

"Well," said Challis with irritation, "at least you can tell me why Regard left Knife."

"Why sure. He left because I told him to."

"You told him to?"

"Sure I did. He’s my boy, ain’t he?" Mat got up and went
over to inspect the boiler which was dribbling on to the stove. “He got me het up. He got me that het up I could a’ broke a pane of glass.” He turned with the lid in his hand, speaking plaintively. “When I was a young man I’ll say we lived wild. Yes, sir. We certainly did. But I guess that that War made all we did look like a Quaker’s Meetin’, an’ you must know that, bein’ there yourself. Kirk, he’d been carryin’ on since he come back in a way I didn’t like, an’ I didn’t choose he should marry my old friend’s darter. ‘If ever she found out she’d kill herself . . . or you. So you get out of it quick ‘fore it’s too late,’ I told him. An’ by’n by he saw that for himself an’ he went. So there you have it, an’ I dunno what it’s got to do wi’ you, anyways.”

Challis was silent for a minute. It sounded plausible, for the greatest sinners are always hardest on others. Then he hazarded:

“Rather rough on Miss MacDonald to let those stories about her go around, wasn’t it?”

“When you say ‘let’ . . .” Mat was now prodding into the boiler with a fork, “you’re talkin’ through your hat. I didn’t start ’em, an’ I couldn’t stop ’em, an’ no decent man ever believed ’em, anyways. Say . . . look here, Challis; wouldn’t you think this puddin’s come untied or somethin’? It’s mighty thin-appearin’.”

“I know nothing about puddings,” said Challis, curtly.

He went away with a jingle of spurs, and Mat lifted his fat arms with a breath of relief, and then wiped his forehead. “No,” he thought. “An’ you don’t know nothin’ ’bout men neither, young feller. Thinkin’ I’d give my boy away!” He chuckled. “Guess I’ve shet his mouth, an’ I didn’t tell no lies nor nothin’.” Then he grew grave. “Don’t like him connectin’ up Kirk an’ that Injun gel, though . . . my sakes; I guess Aggie won’t like the behavin’ of this puddin” . . . .”

Challis’ mouth was shut, but not his mind. Old Mat’s implication had been that Regard was an evil liver, but it
could just as easily hold for the other thing, too. Quite conceivably Mat might hold that a murderer was no fit mate for Tamsin; might even threaten to expose Regard if he persisted. “Never know what these fanatics are capable of,” thought Challis, comfortably, going in search of Stewart.

He saw much less of Stewart now. So much less that he might have thought Stewart was avoiding him if everyone were not laughing at his preoccupation with his young wife. Or Challis, at any rate, laughed.

“When these old men get it they surely do get it bad,” he thought, half-contemptuously, swinging along in the sweet wind to the yard behind the Store where Stewart was making a kitchen-garden. Breaking his back digging in that unfriendly soil and carrying water to grow lettuces and peas for Tamsin. “Better a dinner of herbs where love is,” thought Challis, wondering if Tamsin still cared for young Regard. He was not a cruel man. Not even unkindly. But he had his own way to make and he did not see very deep. It seemed to him likely that Stewart would be glad to have Regard out of the way for good and all, seeing that there was always the danger that he might come back. And Stewart’s ways of love-making, decided Challis, would never be able to compete with Regard’s —who had been the first, anyway. As for a woman’s stability in such matters, he felt himself very wise in considering that none could ever be depended on . . . excepting Dorothy.

It was hot in the sun of the sheltered yard, and Stewart, late come from the cool dark Store, was blinking as he pains-takingly drew lines on his little patch and dibbled in potatoes and peas. He straightened his stiff back with an effort, but his gaunt face was extraordinarily enthusiastic as he rubbed the earth from his arms and spoke of Canadian Wonders and Little Giants.

“I never imagined there was so much interest in gardening, but I realize that I’m descended from Adam all right,” he said, smiling.
“Being domestic seems to suit you, anyway. Where are your Christian Science books?”

“Gathering dust on a shelf. This is a saner way to work out problems, old chap. Try it.”

“I guess it wouldn’t help mine any . . . I’ve just been sounding old Colom about Regard, Stewart.”

Even yet Stewart disliked having to think of Kirk Regard.

“Ah?” he said, non-committally, stooping to mark out another line with pegs and string. His garden was as stiff and precise as himself. He moved like a man who has lost his spring, and Challis thought: “He’s afraid of Regard.” Aloud he said:

“Well, I believe he knows a sight more than he will let on, and it struck me that if you’d suddenly confront him with what you know we might get at something.”

“I’ll do no such thing,” said Stewart, hotly. Even his ears looked hot under the battered hat.

“Well, I may have to require it of you some day.”

“You’re not working up the case. That’s Orange’s job. You are not empowered to require anything.”

He turned to sort out some little packets that lay in the wheelbarrow. Challis was angry. It had been an unlucky morning.

“I have the right to require you to make a written declara-
tion that you saw the girl Ooket wearing Olafsson’s ear-rings and spoke to her.”

“I can’t swear that they were Olafsson’s ear-rings. . . .”

“Shucks. You know they were. You can describe them, anyway.”

“What do you want the written declaration for?”

“Why . . . it would give me something certain . . .”

“You’d have to turn it in to Orange right away, you know. It’s his case.”

Stewart went on sorting seeds. Challis stood, discomfited. Stewart was logically right, as he had a way of being, and
Challis most certainly did not want to help Orange. He had come to look on this as his own case.

"Anyway," he said at last, "I can ask this of you. According to the terms of the Reward it is your duty to report to the nearest Policeman if you see Ooket anywhere. Indians will be passing up and down daily now. If Ooket or the Loucheux happen to come under your observation you must let me know at once, Stewart."

Stewart looked at the earth on his hands and wished he could cleanse his mind of Kirk Regard's affair as easily as he could clean them.

"All right," he said, reluctantly.

"Most of 'em call in to buy something. You'll watch out?"

"All right."

After Challis was gone Stewart stood looking round his patch of worked soil. Under the sun-glare it seemed paltry, arid, a foolish thing in the midst of this great wild land so prodigal with its own growth. What he had said long ago to Challis had appeared at the time so small a thing. But who can say what is a small or a large matter until he see the consequences? Stewart did not see them yet, but he was afraid.

"If there could be a child . . . something to make the bond between us certain," he thought, and went to work again until Tamsin called him in to dinner.

Because she was very young and very much alive life was already setting up its old claims with Tamsin. Despite herself Spring ran in her veins as it ran upon the hills and she could not deny it. The hills called and called until one day she slipped out and climbed Tall Thing again, and although the beauty of the world up there almost broke her it began the cure. Here were the flowers, a sweet nun-like sisterhood, ministered to by blue little butterfly acolytes that went busily between frail gold cups of rockcistus in the granite crevices and tall purple-gowned delphiniums waiting among forget-me-nots and bluebells for the chalice. Here great bronze
bees tumbled through masses of crystal and lilac and pinky-white, fragile as dreams and fine as spray, yet greeting their lovers with abandonment, loosing their scents on the dreaming air. And over all was a shiver of light and shade, a mystery of fragrance, a very passion of life.

Everywhere was that unmistakable odour of melting snows, warming earth. Tamsin saw across the lower tops a dazzling gleam of a bare coloured ridge where radiance quivered like a new force in nature, of snow-capped hills floating like a fleet of galleons in full sail on the infinite blue seas of sky, and that strange intense half-human life of the hills became real to her again. Something seemed to go by her in the wind; something laughed with the sunlight through a cloud, something stirred with soft running feet in the grasses. A definite Something with a message.

She sat, pushing the heavy hair back from her temples and taking great breaths. She felt as though she had been dead down there in the house, shutting herself deliberately away from all that life still held. And up here had been this great embracing Life all the time, communing serenely with Eternity, waiting to take her back, greeting her tenderly as one greets a strayed child. She looked about her, feeling that she had not seen for a long time. The jack-pine above her was withered and blackened, but it stood firm. The tough juniper about her feet crept low to resist the storms. But it was fragrant and green. The warm earth beneath her palm had been frozen all the winter. It was supporting young life now ... 

Silence folded about her, bringing its message of eternity, immortality, of bitter waters and the wine of life; of timeless spirits and of eager bodies so swiftly by Time removed.

Tamsin went down at last, walking blithely, swinging a great bunch of flowers. The twilight seemed to increase her height and splendid outlines until, Stewart thought, she might well have been Guthrun or Thora coming home to the Viking halls of Asgaard.

*
Something had happened to her up on the hills. They had become real again, vital again with their urgent strength and meaning. Sometimes she loved them, oftener she fought them for they would not let her be with her sorrow. But she could never forget them or ignore them any more. "The gods are not dead," they told her when she looked through her window at the sunrise. And when storms came down at night and the heavens ran water they thundered: "God is not dead."

Yes; something had happened to her. There was refreshment in being healthily angry again where for long she had felt only a sick indifference. Stewart coming in one day to find her with her hair wild, stamping and scolding at an overturned pot on the floor, did not know that he was witnessing a resurrection. In fact, he was distressed.

"Oh, leave me be, ye loon," cried Tamsin, growing Scotcher, as she always did when moved. "Even a saint'd curse at this. My clean floor! Oot o' my way, mon, till I mop it up."

But as he hurried off she began to laugh. A real laugh such as she had never expected to know again. And after that in some way life was different.

It did not hurt less, she thought. Perhaps it hurt more, now that her senses were quick again. But, just as she had done after Kirk left her, that unquenchable spirit began to build once more, only this time it was not as a girl builds or dreams.

"I can never build on dreams again," she thought, helping Stewart to make up the monthly accounts from the store, walking with him round to play cards at the Sheridans. "I'm a woman now, with a woman's obligations and experiences. I must build on those."

All this which she had chosen for herself was unalterable and she was valiant enough to submit without pitying herself, even thought she could not help her bitter moments.

"I've got to find something to live by," she thought, lying awake through the hot nights long after Stewart was sleeping
by her side. Sometimes she raised herself on her elbow, looking down at him in the moonlight. His hair was thin and very grey on the high temples. His lined colourless face had a worn look, older in repose when the keen quiet eyes were shut. His chest and arms had the thick hair of a strong man. And he was a strong man, both physically and mentally. Rab had fought many devils before she knew him. It would be wicked of her to confront him with any more. Nor was there need since Kirk had not come back . . . never would come now.

A smile flickered on the sleeping face and Tamsin knew that Rab thought of her. She did not hate him as she had done at first. According to his lights he was good to her, even generous. Good and generous as Kirk had never been. She lay with arms behind her head, listening to Rab’s quiet breathing and thinking of Kirk. Kirk, that strange nebulous quantity of her childhood, who had condensed for a moment into an elixir so ardent, so magical that the draught she had drunken of him would leave a part of her intoxicated for ever. Then, swift as light, he had dissolved again; vanished to offer that drink at other lips, to smile, half-tender, half-bold, into other eyes. And for Tamsin was left the quiet life of the Kanana and her old man.

But life was not always quiet here. Tommy Tom married a new wife and held a potlatch, which is forbidden by law. But because there were no cells at the Police shack, Challis could only go down and fling in the river such bottles of hooch as he could find while dark eyes watched him immovable out of the shadows. A grizzly came down Big Thing and clawed up a prospector who was brought in, half-dead, for Tamsin to patch as best she could, there being no doctor within a hundred miles since O’Kane was still in Ketchikan. Then a passing surveyor gave Mat the Chaldean Oracles and he babbled of Ynges and ‘inefiable at-one-ments’ until Aggie threw the book behind the fire.

“And if I could get hold of the fellow what gave it to the
old fool he’d go there too,” she cried, holding Mat back with one brawny hand and poking the flames with the other. Tamsin, being there, laughed and applauded, but old Mat was helping her more than she knew, all the same. His earnest simplicity, his humbleness was an atmosphere about him now, and one that it did her good to enter.

“That thar Truth sartinly do take a heap o’ huntin’, dearie,” he would say, looking up with mild anxious eyes. “Soon’s I think I got salt on its tail off it goes agin. But I’ll jump on him around the corner yet.”

“Will you know it when you see it,” wondered Tamsin.

“Surely. A man don’t always reckonize a lie, but he jest couldn’t mistake the Truth. The Great Blake says as it don’t come by argument. You must feel it. I guess, Tamsin, that when I happen on it I’ll feel it all right.”

“I don’t know. We know so little. We don’t even know our own minds . . . .”

She was beginning to realize that to know one’s own mind is the rarest attainment of humanity. Shoals of men and women, she thought, drift through life and never bring up against the stream, never find their grip on reality nor sort out those confused bundles of scraps which they cherish as their ‘opinions.’ Certainly she had not drifted. She had plunged instead: into life, into work, into love, riding the waves with a high heart, tossing the spray of delight from bright confident eyes. And now had come the end of all that with her marriage to Stewart, but she did not know her own mind yet. She only knew that she could not hear Kirk’s name without a quiver. And she knew that she must do the best she could for that Self which had been put in her care . . . . she and all the other myriad bewildered women who have to make something out of nothing. Yet she did not know her feeling for Stewart. She respected him. She did not hate him. She could not imagine that she would ever love that grey man.

“If I could hate or despise him it would be easy. I could
leave him then,” she thought. But it is in that terrible mid-
meadow of flowers and thorns that so many women must
walk all their lives long.

One day when Stewart had gone out with the new operator
to mend a telegraph-wire Tamsin went down to have supper
with Miss Tinney. Miss Tinney’s mind was a good one to
get into when a person was discontented with her own.
Full of vague certainties and firm superstitions she barged
through the days, keeping her road-house from becoming a
rough-house by sheer force of personality and always hoping
for some spectacular occurrence. There was a strange soft
streak in Miss Tinney. Tamsin had sometimes heard her on
the hills of a summer evening, singing love-songs in that
cooing voice which went so ill with her big bony body and had
fled that she might not be seen. But the old woman’s point of
view was always vigorous and generally a refreshment to the
soul.

She put Tamsin into a big chair with a clean antimacassar
and several pillows and pressed food on her energetically.
“I guess you don’t eat enough, Tamsin. You’re looking
a mite peaked these days.”

“Spring is often rather trying,” said Tamsin, avoiding her
eyes. So far as she had ever been mothered Miss Tinney
had done it, but she could not bear to be mothered now.
To cry out her troubles had never been Tamsin’s way, even
when they were not so intimate as now.

Miss Tinney bit into a cruller, wiped her lips and said:
“I hope you don’t mind me saying it, Tamsin. I mean it
modestly, I’m sure. But I do hope you’ll soon have a family,
dear. That’s such a very settlin’ and satisfyin’ arrangement
for a young married woman, I think.”

“Unmarried people usually talk like that,” Tamsin laughed
nervously. “It took a Queen Victoria to preach virtue and
virginity. Queen Elizabeth doesn’t appear to have said much
about either.”
Miss Tinney shot her a quick glance and then looked at the bear-skin, dark and dim against the farther wall.

"I got a notion Ida must have had a whole heap of families, Tamsin. She's that sympathetic you can't think. Settin' here alone I talk to her no end. You always heard that she was a love-gift, didn't you?"

"Yes." It was part of the curriculum at the road-house for men to chaff Miss Tinney about her unknown lover.

"Well, now, Tamsin. I'm goin' to tell you what I never told no one else, but I have a reason." She stooped close to Tamsin's ear. "She never was."

This was easy to believe, but Tamsin expressed polite surprise. Miss Tinney got up, moving rapidly about the room.

"Tamsin, I'm goin' to tell you somethin'. I told you I had a reason. I guess maybe it's my duty, though I never did like duty more than most folk, an' so I'll yell you. Ida wasn't a love-gift. I took her over as a bad debt. I never had no love-gifts, but I had a husband. Tamsin, I was married to Doc. O'Kane somewheres around forty years ago.

Tamsin leaned back among the cushions and stared at her. Unsatisfied romance had evidently driven Miss Tinney crazy, but she might have made a better story than this. Miss Tinney nodded energetically.

"Yep. I know. Sounds a mite tall, don't it? Maybe you don't believe me, an' I'd scarcely believe myself sometimes if it weren't that I'd had to keep him right along these twelve year an' more. He was a fine-lookin' man forty year ago, Tamsin, with a sort of flavour to him . . . I dunno. Young Regard has it too, an' them kind can do a whole heap with women. An' I was just turned twenty and kinder pretty, they said. So . . . we were married, and after a year he ran off an' I hunted along till I found him. I was young then. You don't catch me goin' after men now. No, sir. Well, I trailed him someplace, and I didn't let on for fear he'd keep running. And when I got there he was away and I felt sorrier
despondent, hankerin' for him. I was lovin' him hard all the
time. So the folk I was stayin' with took me along to see a
young woman who'd got a new baby. They said it'd cheer me
up. Well, I can't exactly say that it did, Tamsin, for that
young woman went by his name and her baby was his, too."

Tamsin came across silently and put a hand on Miss Tinney's
arm. They stood together, looking at the cloud-shadows
slipping down Tall Thing.

"She'd been married to him jest a year, poor thing," said
Miss Tinney, very briskly. "And there was the child and
mighty peart it was, too. So o' course I couldn't say a word,
an' I jest came North, workin' my way right along. At last I
settled here at the Store . . . you'll remember it was from
me your father took it over. An' after a bit I had Ida . . . who
was a bad debt off a man I grub-staked an' he couldn't pay
up, but she's been worth it. And we got along fine, me an'
Ida, till one day he turned up . . . Julian did."

The big bony body shivered slightly and Tamsin stood
helpless.

"And I believed that no one could be worse off than I am,"
she thought.

"We sure did have a hell of a row," said Miss Tinney,
reminiscently. "He wanted to 'resoom marital relations' as he
called it, but I wasn't havin' none. How could I, an' him
desertin' me near twenty year an' carryin' on the Lord knows
how. But . . . well, I dunno. Once a man's been your
husband I guess you feel you got to help him if he needs help.
And Julian sure did need it. He was on his uppers an' a cough
like the dickens. Yes, sir; he had so. I had to feed an' clothe
him from the Store . . . that was before your father took
over. An' I give him money an' told him that if he ever set
foot in Knife agin supplies would stop. So he went off an'
dug in at Aroya, an' he's always pesterin' me, an' I guess
he knows that if he got real sick I'd go right up an' tend him.
I s'pose I'm a soft fool, but there's some things a woman can't
get away from. And once in a while he goes Outside like he
is now, an' I don't miss him, though I must say it costs some.'

"He is in Ketchikan, isn't he?" said Tamsin, gently.
Her heart was full of pity, but she was wondering why Miss
Tinney had considered it her duty to 'loosen up' just now.

"There an' Juneau an' maybe Vancouver. Where he can
do most in hellin' around. Now, Tamsin, you'll have to know
jest why I had to get this off my chest. Kird Regard is with
him. He's with Julian, an' he couldn't be any place worse."

Tamsin shut her eyes. Everything seemed to be slipping
away. Miss Tinney put an arm round her and pushed her down
into a chair.


"I'm selfish . . ." said Tamsin, struggling. "Not thinking
only of you——"

"I don't want you to think of me. My, no! I'm capable of
thinkin' of myself all I want an' then some. But that's my reason
for tellin' you, an' if I've done right I don't know. Kirk's a
fine lad; but he's that hot-headed, an' I guess he's got a grudge
again life since you sent him off the way you did . . . if you
did, but I'm not askin', remember. An' I don't want to have
Julian muckin' him up the way he is . . . an' with my money,
too. Kirk, he's hittin' the high spots proper. So I hear from
the folk I have watchin' Julian an' givin' him money when he
has to have it. It's about time them two were out of that, an'
I can bring Julian back tomorrow by raisin' my little finger,
for he knows when it's wise to come to heel. An' I guess I
could make him bring Kirk too if I set my mind to it, for he
has a mighty queer power over young men, Julian has. But
what I got to know first . . . how about you, Tamsin?"

Her voice was grave. She seemed no longer the ugly erratic
old woman whose doings were fair game for any mirth, but
some priestess cognizant of the solemn charges laid upon the
human will.

"I . . .?" said Tamsin.
Her voice failed, and Miss Tinney clucked her tongue.

"Life's a mess. It sure is. Well . . . I guess you got to see straight, dear, so far as you can. Stewart's your man now, an' how far you an' young Regard cared for each other I don't know an' it's not my business, anyway."

"I oughtn't to care," cried Tamsin, convulsed. "I ought not to."

"And that's no help," said Miss Tinney, gruffly.

She stood, her flat feet rather far apart, staring down. Tamsin was thinner, paler and far less boisterous in these days. She had entered into woman's dominion and found the burden heavy on her young shoulders. Stewart was undoubtedly a good husband: but youth needed youth and there was a beckoning waywardness about that Regard fellow . . .

"I guess I done wrong to mention it," she thought. "They were made for each other, those two, an' if I bring him back . . . But I won't have Julian corruptin' him wi' my money any more." Aloud she said:

"I guess I done wrong, Tamsin. Forget it. But I thought you sendin' him off the way you did . . . ."

"I didn't," said Tamsin, very low. She was wrung with a dull anguish. "I never thought he could leave me. We'd been . . . I never thought anything could part us, and in the morning he was gone."

"Land sakes!" cried Miss Tinney. She sat down, staring at the girl with her hands on her bony knees. Were Aggie Colom's stories true, then? "Tamsin," she said, faintly, "don't you go tellin' me you been a bad girl."

"I feel that I am now . . . since I married Rab."

Tamsin's voice was muffled in the cushions. Miss Tinney drew a long breath and dashed her hand across her forehead. Life was a mess, sure enough.

"Then why in the nation did you marry him . . . if there weren't no need?"

"I . . . I found out that he didn't love me . . . Kirk didn't. 
Uncle Mat told me. It had been all my fault... and I suppose he thought I went too far, and he... was... disgusted..."

"Lord A'mighty! A man think that way! Tamsin, you're nothin' but a baby yet." She thought, rapidly. "Well, I guess he better not come, anyways. But I'll hike Julian out of that right smart."

"You must get Kirk away too. Miss Tinney, you must. It's all right. It is quite all right. Oh, don't think I'm weak about it. I'm very strong and understanding, really, but..."

"There, there, honey. Have a good cry. It'll do you heaps of good."

She put her arms about the girl, stroking the bright hair. But Tamsin did not cry. She stared straight before her, and there was a long silence. Then she got up, trying to smile.

"I think you are the finest woman I know, Miss Tinney. And I'm the most selfish. And... Doctor O'Kane has always been good to me and perhaps you'll find him grateful some day. And... Kirk and I were friends up at Dawson when we were little, and I've always known that he... felt some things strangely. So... if getting him out of the towns means that he comes back with the Doctor it doesn't matter. We can just be friends again."

"Well, it's for you to say, Tamsin. But can you do that? He's liable to make love to you again, you know. I guess I seen his sort before. They can't live without making love."

"He would not do that to me now," said Tamsin. She pulled on her hat, settling the little curls under it with a quiet dignity that impressed the elder woman. "Good-bye, Miss Tinney, dear. And... thank you very much."

She went out brightly, with a little set smile that Miss Tinney appreciated. Married women both, they were back under the necessary veils again. For pride's sake there must be no more confidences. She watched the tall buoyant figure in blue cotton and broad white hat pass down the street, and
chucked her tongue again before she bustled to the kitchen to hurry the Indian maid with the supper.

“Well, now; I’ll say in this life one always has to take a chance . . . and a gun,” she thought. “But . . . I dunno. Make a woman unhappy enough an’ she’ll do anything.”
Chapter Fourteen

"For Noah he often said to his wife when they went out to dine:
'I don't care where the water goes if it doesn't get into the wine.'"

Singing, whistling, playing a few notes on his flute Kirk moved about the room where O'Kane sat thinking over Miss Tinney's letter. Three lines and a half only, but they were enough. Evelyn rarely commanded, and never did it twice; but O'Kane knew that he must return at once to Aroya, bringing Kirk with him or he would very soon wish that he had.

He was annoyed and yet partly relieved. He and Kirk were doing well; but the young man was erratic and would possibly dissolve the partnership any day, whilst if O'Kane returned at Evelyn's desire he might be able to screw something more out of her for that reason.

"A love-letter?" asked Kirk, sitting on the arm of a chair. He did not wait for an answer, but began blowing Pretty Red-Wing meditatively into the flute.

"The moon shines to-night on Pretty Red-Wing.
The breeze is sighing, the night-birds crying.
But afar 'neath his star her brave is sleeping
While Red-Wing's weeping her heart away. . . ."

The joke was, he thought, that Red-Wing was doing nothing of the kind. She had married Stewart and forgotten her brave who—he told himself so daily—had also forgotten her. He strayed into La Paloma, taking the tricky tripping love-song through all its coaxing measure until O'Kane said sharply:

"For God's sake stop that!"

Kirk's tilted brows went up. "Certainly," he said with exaggerated politeness. He thrust the flute into his pocket and
took out a deck of cards, making them idly with practised hands. O'Kane thought:

"He's restless for something. Possibly he'd go if I told him Tamsin wanted him." He said: "Someone says that a man's place in civilization is shown by his attitude to women. He considers her either as something to live with or something to live for. What is your particular attitude, Kirk?"

Kirk laughed. "So it was a love-letter," he said.

O'Kane looked at him, pulling at his moustache. Kirk had a faunish irresponsible look perched up there with the blue shirt-collar open at the brown throat and a sudden flush on the warm skin making his dark eyes brighter. He was a man of moods, but they were the moods of a strong man. Kirk would drink and make love and fool around, but he could be as hard as nails, too. O'Kane thought for a moment, then said:

"I have decided to return to Aroya. Do you feel like accompanying me? It seems probable that Tamsin Stewart would be glad to see you."

"Who says that?" demanded Kirk. He had not heard Tamsin called so before, and it startled him more than he had expected.

"My correspondent," said O'Kane, dryly.

Kirk stood up, stretching and yawning in an effort to seem unconcerned. They kept strange reticences between them, these men, and he could not ask if O'Kane's correspondent was Tamsin. It was not unlikely. There had always been a queer friendship between them, and the old man spoke of her with an affection and respect that he gave to no other woman. And Kirk had known that the marriage could not turn out well. He told himself with a sudden inner trembling that he had always known it.

"Well, if you're set on deserting me I guess I must think up something," he said, carelessly, caught up his hat and went out.
They had come for a few days to a little village outside Vancouver, and here the world was all sea and silence and madroña trees in bloom.

Kirk walked along the shore, smoking, thinking. He had never had any desire for platonic intrigues, although he had known men who gather them as one gathers first fruit or the last flowering of roses. He could not go back to the Kanana and be that kind of friend to Tamsin. And if life had brought him to the point of feeling no particular shame in anything deeper he knew that Tamsin would never be brought to it. Tamsin, like O’Kane, carried a kind of moral atmosphere; but whereas O’Kane created a miasma of evil such as Kirk had been living in for months Tamsin would soon have Kirk out of that. He knew quite well that any underhand connections which down here he might lightly think of would take on a very different complexion face to face with Tamsin.

It was possible, he thought, that he might win her away from Stewart. She must be tired of that stiff old stick by now. But it would not be done without pain to them both. It would be a stupendous and agonizing thing to Tamsin, dragging her very roots out, and he did not feel that he wanted to do that to her. She had always been the stable force in his life and in some way he felt her behind him yet, secure as the hills. If he brought her down they would both tumble into ruin, and yet, if he went back to the Kanana he knew that he would try to do that very thing.

He sat on a rock, poking with bits of stick at the pink and yellow sea-anemones down in the clear pools and found an outlet to his mood in watching the lovely sensitive things shiver and curl up in their efforts to escape the stick. He would not want to torment Tamsin as he was tormenting the sea-anemones, but already he was coming to believe that he would do it. Some sea-gulls were flying over the beach, their shadows driven before them by the low sun. They brought little shellfish from the river and beat them on the rocks
until they cracked. Then, their gluttony satisfied, they veered and mewed and screamed again, flying over the still sea.

Kirk got up with a sigh. The killing of Olafsson never troubled him, for that had been done in self-defence and he had no fear of capture now. But what he might do yet to the girl who had been his playfellow troubled him a great deal. "I know what I am," he said, half-aloud. "I could never be content with a little. I always want the whole thing."

Women, he thought, were extraordinarily different, yet many men still spoke of 'the sex' as though they were all one. Of those who had come into his life lately Gladys, that loyal little privateer, would give him every cent she had if he needed it. Ookct and Dierdre would take all he possessed and then leave him. Tamsin would do neither. She would bid him work for his living like a man, force him up on his feet with her love and her scorn. How she would hate the life he was living now, picking money from men's pockets by the sheer cold light of his brain. There were many times when he hated it himself.

He went slowly along the beach, thinking of the child Tamsin, of the strange boy who had been himself. Curiously he turned the searchlight of experience on that boy, trying to fathom what he must have been like. But all connected with that time was now a dim greyness, although he knew that then it had seemed the very heart of the rainbow himself. How he had loved Tamsin up there on the Kluane. Groping here and there with memories he saw a fantastic immature boy obscurely stirred by the same emotions that so often moved him now. But to that boy they had been strange and beautiful; steeped in a lovely significance so that the simplest acts of life, even the movement of his young body, had been a holy joy.

Well, all that had gone long ago . . .

But he loved Tamsin yet. She was too closely mixed with all the searching longing part of him to be forgotten or despised. Why she had married Stewart he could not guess, but he was
going to find out. His blood began to hurry and his breath to quicken now that he knew certainly that he would go. Walking fast he knew that he must go soon.

Again this season he had handed over his Big Game contracts with that recklessness of the future common to him. He had felt that he could not bear weeks and months out on those silent condemning hills of Yukon that Tamsin loved so much. They were far too alive for that.

Coming home he saw the Lions stand up, still white above Vancouver. Night was marching on them with trumpets of pulsing colour. Iris-tinted and ivory her banners blew on the dark turquoise of the sky. On dreaming sea and land the splendour was so intense that almost it was sound. For a little it was there, filling the round world with exultant glory. Then it passed, swift and complete as though those heavenly musicians had put up their instruments and gone, and it was through a peaceful grey twilight that Kirk walked back into the village. Six days later the Takhina was taking him with O’Kane up the Kanana again.

Miss Tinney had received a night-letter from O’Kane. It said: “Arriving about tenth with goods as per requirement,” and she went straight up to tell Tamsin, feeling how like Julian it was to make that covert sneer at the young man and wondering much in what shape the goods might be. Tamsin, whom she found hanging a basket of clothes on the lines strung between the cottonwoods along the river and the back porch, immediately showed the same fear. She said, low and hastily, as she spread a white sheet against the dazzling sun:

“If he’s sick . . . or needing money . . . you’ll see to it and let me settle with you?”

“Money nothin’! My! no, Tamsin. Don’t you go hornin’ into that business for your life. No, sir. An’ you kip quiet over me tellin’ you. I’d hate like pisen to have that Aggie Colom guessin’ one thing about this. And I guess I’d not tell Stewart, neither. He’ll find out soon enough.”
Tamsin shook out a blue shirt of Stewart’s and pegged it up soberly.

“I see. Yes. You are quite right,” she said. But the elder woman went away, shocked to the point of dismay at the sudden radiance of the girl’s face and eyes. It was Youth stood there in the bright sunlight and the blowing wind, and she was bringing Youth back to it in the glowing dangerous form of Kirk Regard.

“My! I guess I done wrong sure enough, but it’s too late now,” she thought, disconsolately, and then was stopped by old Mat Colom hurrying along the boardwalk to the Store. Mat, too, was radiant.

“Kirk’s comin’,” he cried. “My boy’s comin’. Los, the Sperrit o’ Prophecy, told me an’ confirmed it wi’ a wire from him las’ night. He’s a good boy, Kirk is, Miss Tinney. I ought to know. I made him. Aggie’s goin’ to get him up some real swell meals. I got to buy . . .”

He disappeared into the Store, trembling with excitement, and Miss Tinney rubbed her nose in vexation and went home. “If I could get Julian to keep Regard up at Aroya,” she thought. “But I don’t see how. Well, I guess this is goin’ to be a mess an’ maybe you’ll think you didn’t make it, Evelyn Tinney.”

True to her determination never to have O’Kane at the Roadhouse she arranged with Tommy Tom to take him straight on in the launch to Aroya. But by the time the Takhina arrived—having grounded in the drying river and been tracked off by all the crew and passengers excepting O’Kane—Tommy Tom had tired of waiting and had gone off for a night’s fishing. So Kirk went up to the fox-farm with the rejoicing Coloms, and O’Kane sat in Miss Tinney’s back-parlour for the first time in many years. The years had thinned and chiselled O’Kane down to a mere skeleton; but it was a suave and polished skeleton in well-cut clothes who leaned back in the rocking-chair with a narrow leg over one knee and regarded her humorously with red-rimmed eyes.
"Why this sudden passion for young Regard, Evelyn?" he asked. "Do I see a rival there?"

"You kin see anythin' you like so long's you don't see it in my house," retorted his wife, sitting stiff on the edge of her chair.

"'Let us be flexible, my dear Grace. Let us be flexible,' as Henry James says. I wonder which of the Graces you are—or which I thought you when I married you."

"If you'd thought me a moron you'd not have been far out, I guess."

"Still implacable? Well, well! What does the poet say? 'She is a woman therefore to be won.' You had better let me win you over again, Evelyn. I assure you that a woman holds a much solider social position if there is a husband attached. Of course I am ready to agree with you that any man born of woman is—in your own charming language—not worth shucks, and every time I save a life I see the joke of doing so. But until we evolve something else I really don't see what more can be done about husbands."

"Do you call yourself a husband? A sufferin' calamity, that's what I call you."

"Exactly. I am. I suffer quite a good deal. As a young man I'll own I preferred a more violent method of going to pieces . . . a less elegant dissipation of my powers than—for purely physical reasons—I now desire. You would find me a delightful husband, Evelyn, if you will keep me here."

"I'll keep you here," said Miss Timney, looking at the clock, "for jest so long as it takes Tommy Tom to git back from his fishing. I guess that'll be most any time now."

"You're a hard woman, Evelyn." He smiled, tugging his moustaches with both thin hands. "Now please don't retort that it was I made you hard. That is the retort obvious, and I always hated the obvious. And character goes deeper than that."

"Yes." She was suddenly rather terrible, staring at him
gauntly under the shadeless light. "I guess it do go deeper. I guess it goes so deep I'd rather not talk about it. We're through, you an' me."

"Come, now. Don't I deserve something for bringing young Regard back to you?"

"It ain't for me. It's . . . ." She stopped with blunt awkwardness. O'Kane watched her, pulling on his moustaches. He seemed visited by a new idea. At last he said, reflectively: "I must go around presently and pay my respects to young Mrs. Stewart. Of course, she is still blindly happy? But—as we know from experience, don't we?—after two people have explored each other's minds in the faithful deadly fashion of happily-married folk what is there left, in God's name? I also admit that, in consequence of the closeness of their union, the distance between man and wife naturally grows so great with time that it is not necessary for even their best friends to speed up that separation. They need only to wait. Why are you trying to separate Stewart and his wife, Evelyn?"

"Julian! I jest wonder the Lord don't strike you dead."

"Still the same Evelyn. Age cannot wither her nor custom stale her infinite impiety. But you'll do it, you know, whether you try or not."

"You mean you'll do it?" She was thoroughly alarmed now and he saw his advantage.

"I might. If it was to my advantage."

"You mean—unless I made it worth your while not to?"

"Intercourse with trappers and hunters has improved your wits if not your subtlety, my dear."

The thin ironic voice seemed something that she could not bear another moment. She sprang up, clenching her bony hands.

"My! Julian if you don't make me tired! You're not goin' to get a cent out of me that way an' you better believe it. I know Tamsin. She's good. An' I know you. You're nothin' but a permanent dry-rot an' I jest wonder I keep on listenin'
to you. But you listen here for once. If young Regard gets up to his tricks an' I find you backin' him you can starve up at Aroya for me. I've had enough . . . and then some."

"I think," said O'Kane, rising and dusting his clothes with delicate fingers as though dusting Miss Tinney off, "that I shall go up and see Tamsin."

"I'll send Tommy Tom right along there when he comes," said his wife, unmoving.

"Always considerate," he said, going out with a little bow.

Miss Tinney drew a deep breath and rubbed her hands hard over her face. "I been a fool again, Ida," she said. "I'm always bein' a fool, I guess. But after all, what can he do?"
She pushed her hair back with the same hard blows and went briskly out to the kitchen.

Walking up the one street of Knife under the long pink twilight of the summer night O'Kane cackled with laughter now and then. It was so easy to agitate Evelyn, and she would never cast him off. He knew that type of woman whose bark is always worse than her bite. It's those who don't bark that a man has cause to fear, he thought. Tamsin never barked, and he was not sure of Tamsin. She had deep-rooted passions which might make her capable of huge sacrifices or huge sins and Regard was just the man to provoke them. Forty years earlier, he thought, and I would have been the man. But he knew that the little grace left in life would be blotted out if Tamsin failed. She stood for something that he liked to think of now and then: liked, in his ironic sophisticated way, to look up to.

And this crude harsh eternal North with its mysterious beauty stood for something too. As he limped along the uneven boards he looked on the sunken sleeping river, on the sunburned silent hills. The North had an inevitableness good for man to contemplate. Its character never changed. For each season it had its schedule mapped and it did not depart from it. Few humans could measure up to such a magnificent
standard. Humans? What were they? Sticks drifting together in a current, rubbing sides for a while and drifting on, often never to meet again. Men with their strange heats of bodies and brains going through the endless round of love and labour, lust and sleep. Women, over- or under-sexed, demanding too much of their mates or trying to lead the same lives . . . running a business, using a gun, mushing a team. Strange, purposeless and desolate the scheme of human life. . . . But always the hills stood firm.

O’Kane found Tamsin with Challis and Stewart in the Store. Kirk was not there, nor had she seen him yet. O’Kane had encountered that suppressed waiting look on women before and although she greeted him warmly it did not leave her. She stood in the green cotton gown that left bare her fresh young arms and neck and talked with O’Kane and Challis, but she was listening all the time; listening for a light step, a careless whistle coming through the summer night.

O’Kane considered her closely. Yes, she had changed with more than the ordinary changes marriage brings. She had no matronly look. Rather something wilder, something fundamentally disturbed, for all her quiet.

“Hell,” he thought, dismayed and yet amused, “she doesn’t love the fellow. Here’s a nice ploy preparing.”

Stewart, gaunt as ever, yet giving a queer suggestion of added trimmings like a cock-bird new-feathered for his mate, was arguing with a dirty and tattered white hunter.

“No, Crichton; I’m through with you and so I told you yesterday. You’re owing me too much already and you make no effort to pay off.”

“If you’d be good enough to extend my account a little, Mr. Stewart——”

“He would sooner be rich than good,” explained O’Kane, suavely. Stewart did not smile.

“He’s known all over the Kanana and no one can make anything of him. You belong on the brush-pile, Crichton,
and the quicker you reach it the better for a whole heap of us who are spending good money keeping you off it."

"But I sure am up against it, Mr. Stewart."

"Did you ever try work for it? But I know you haven’t . . . nor ever will so long as we’re fools enough to let you suck us dry. Good-night."

"Little Mary has spoken," said Challis. "She doesn’t often, but when she does . . . my land!"

He was interested and a little amused; for Stewart’s voice had been cold with a venom directed, one might almost think, against someone more formidable than the shiftless Crichton. He was not pleased, Challis knew, at the return of Kirk Regard, and now a flush went up his hard face.

"With some people one has to make a stand. Are you coming, Tamsin? Jasper can finish here."

"In a minute. Just go and put the kettle on, will you?" said Tamsin. She seemed to have become suddenly alive, lips parted, eyes shining.

"She hears him," thought O’Kane, but it was another half-minute before Kirk came from the shadows beyond the open door and during that time she had quite forgotten the two men watching her.

Kirk had eaten supper gaily with the Coloms, and then old Mat took him out into the yard.

"It’s all right now, boy," he said, earnestly. "Tamsin she’s married to Stewart now, you know, an’ so I cancel my oath an’ I sure am glad to do it. Nor I don’t guess thar’ll ever be anythin’ found out now. I guess as your Spectre around you night an’ day like a wild beast guards your way, as the Great Blake says."

"Sure, it’s all right," said Kirk, heartily. But he meant more than Mat did. Those long slow hours of passing through the hushed eternal heights of Yukon had exorcised much of the cardsharper of cities and reinstated the man conscious of the hills and the power thereof. The old lurking threat was there
and always had been, and where would he find strength to
defy it except through Tamsin? He had a vague superstitious
feeling that if he dragged her down her colossal gods of the
hills would fall on them both and bear them lower into hell.

"I mean to act right to her. I surely do," he said half-
a loud when going up to the Store later. And in the strength of
that recent propitiation to the gods he managed to greet her
with a friendly frankness.

The moment was harder for Tamsin, but she met it well,
moving forward so that the watching men should not see her
face in the lamplight.

"Tamsin!" called Stewart from the house, and Tamsin
cried a little breathlessly:

"Come in, all of you. Come, Kirk. Come, Doctor O'Kane."

Now, she thought, the worst is over and Rab didn't see.
It's all right.

She felt a little dizzy through the forced talk and laughter
that followed. Neither Kirk nor O'Kane were welcome now in
this house where the MacDonalds had made everyone welcome,
and Stewart did not try very much to hide his feelings. When
they were gone and he sat with his pipe in the window while
Tamsin got her sewing there was a silence which neither cared
to break. Long ago Tamsin had discovered that there are
many kinds of silence. Her own and MacDonald's were
usually fructifying, Rab's resentful, and Aggie Colom's dour.
But Kirk's had always been dynamic; and when just now he
had sat there on the piano-box, his yellow shirt-sleeves rolled
high on the brown arms, his black hair a little unruly and
his bright dark eyes watching, she had felt that dynamic
power in him pumping along her veins, unsteadying her
heart-beats.

And yet there had been nothing in look or manner to suggest
that he was not ready to pick up the old friendship again
where he had left it. No; not that. There could never be again
the long bright days of holiday, the music of mysterious nights,
the intimacy and laughter and that strange fantastic flicker, like heat lightning, to illumine all they did. There could only be that rather solemn and improving way of the spirit which she had so much relied on. Stooped over her sewing with her colour flushing and fading, Tamsin felt that the way of the spirit, noble though it was, lacked something.

Stewart stood up stiffly, knocking out his pipe.

"Time to turn in. Come, dear," he said.

His voice was cold, but long since it had lost what ardency it had. He had settled down into a comfortable married complacency befitting his years, and usually dozed in the evenings. Tamsin followed him, consciously keeping her eyes from the piano-box as though a laughing ghost still sat there.

Going along the moonlit boardwalk with Challis and O'Kane, Kirk was very silent. Tamsin had done well for herself. MacDonald had evidently settled everything on the new-married couple, and a comfortable future was assured her with probable widowhood before she grew too old. "Maybe she'd like me to wait for that," thought Kirk with a short cracking laugh that brought the eyes of the others on him sharply. Challis was feeling sharp to-night. Eager. He was definitely puzzled by what he considered the impudence of young Regard's return, but he meant to turn it to account just the same.

"If I go cautiously I'll get something incriminating out of him presently," he thought. "Staying with the Coloms, of course, aren't you, Regard?"

"I suppose," said Kirk, absently.

"See you to-morrow, then. Good-night."

He turned off over the sandy way to the Police shack, and O'Kane stood still. He too had done some thinking since he watched Tamsin's face while she listened for Kirk Regard, and now he said:

"I'm inclined to ask you to extend your friendship to me for a few days further, Kirk, and help me to settle down at
Aroya again. It will feel very lonely at first, and I'm an old man now."

Such pleas rarely failed with Kirk; but he hesitated now, staring at the shrunken river that ran silver among the great reed-patches under the moon. It had angered and distressed him immensely to see Tamsin with Stewart, and he knew enough of his own temper to realize that it would take him a few days to get his bearings here. "I don't just know what I'm feeling or what I'd do," he thought. Then: "Why, sure, Doc. I'll come for a couple of days, anyway."

O'Kane was grateful, and said so. This would prove to Evelyn that he did not wish Kirk to unsettle Tamsin and would probably open the gate to easier terms from her.

"All right," said Kirk, already half-regretting his promise. "There's Tommy Tom's launch at the wharf now. You go right on down while I get my kit."

At the fox-farm Aggie, like cosmos rising on inadequate wings, buzzed about him with loud protests.

"It's all that Tamsin's doin', you goin' off like this. She as ugly a girl as ever I knew. Been makin' love to you again, I'll swear . . . ."

"You shut up," shouted Kirk, turning on her for the first time in his grown life. "It's nothing to do with Tamsin an' never was."

"Now, now, now," cried Aggie, frightened. "I'll lay goin' Outside ain't done you no good. You're lookin' sick too. Yep, you are . . . around the eyes. And your mouth . . . now, you stay right here, Kirk boy, an' let me look after you good."

"I don't want lookin' after. I'm all right, I tell you."

Already he was wondering if he might not stay on at Aroya. He would escape this daily nagging and have more chance of seeing Tamsin without the gaunt shadow of Stewart behind her. She might come up to consult O'Kane about her medicines. She would go along the river to the various Indian camps. . . .

*The World is Yours.*
Hardly knowing what he wanted, what he hoped, he was silent among his emotions as he walked down with old Mat to the launch. Mat said, timidly:

"Tamsin didn't say nothin' to you, boy, did she?"

"Say! What should she say? Strikes me you're all loony about Tamsin."

"Well, well, that's all right," said Mat, vaguely. "I jest wanted to know. You'll be back in two-three days, boy?"

"Sure."

Mat went home to open Blake and read without interest of Los and Enitharmon, prompters of human passions and desires. Still his old body could tell them that poor humanity has no need of their vicarious promptings. "Plenty in us by natur', I guess," he thought, aware how that unconscious tempestuous charm of Tamsin's could move him yet in some ways and how likely it was to move the hot youth in Kirk. Rab Stewart was old bones, and youth must to youth. Tangled among his philosophies Mat had lost a good deal of his grasp on human nature, but some vibration in Kirk's voice to-night, a look in his eyes had warned the old man.

"I guess I got to take a hand in things again," he thought. "I put 'em straight that time on the Kluane and again when I sent Kirk away. I reckon it's up to me to kip right on workin' at him. If he don't come down in couple o' days I'll go right up to Aroya."

He sat, his white head between his withered hands, thinking. Tamsin and Kirk... he scarcely knew by now which was dearest. And he had had a power over their lives from the very beginning. But for me, he thought, his humbleness shot through with a little quiver of pride, they might have died the deaths of ten thousand year built round with desolation. But I guess they got to tread in the winepress, the vintage o' human passions, an' I better go up to Aroya and explain that to Kirk proper... leastways, if he don't come back in couple o' days.
Kirk did not come, and Tamsin told herself that she did not expect it.

"So that's over," she thought with an anguish that she had not believed would come again. "He doesn't want anything of me, not even friendship. I spoiled my life for nothing."

And then she was ashamed. For whatever motive she had married him she was certainly making Rab happy. She began telling herself a dozen times a day what a good husband he was; so kind, so considerate; and if he was a little exacting he certainly required no more of her than of himself. Rigorously overcoming temptations Rab had made himself into a good man... and what had happened to her with her high dreams and aspirations that she was falling so far below him? "I've failed badly in some way with Kirk," she thought, bewildered. "I mustn't fail with Rab. I've been too sure of myself... thinking that I could help people... ."

And now again she dared not go upon the hills. She scrubbed and washed and swept herself into a weariness that made her limbs twitch through the nights while Stewart slept soundly at her side and shadows on the moonlit wall had Kirk's black brows, Kirk's head stooping to hers. Sometimes she thought she heard his voice, but it was only the long murmur from the river.

For three days Kirk did not go out of Aroya. To him there was something ghoulish in O'Kane's calm appropriation of the houses and belongings of those men who would never return, but he had to own that the old sybarite knew how to make himself comfortable. He fixed at last on a large framehouse rising yellow-painted and long-fronted from the froth of rose-bushes and goldenrod and having a great clump of pines to shade its wide porch. And then he went up and down the town, from cellars to attics, taking what he required. From a cache somewhere he produced a box of good china and silver which he had used before, and winked a red eye at Kirk.
"The niceties of life are a distinct aid to high thinking," he observed, "and as I shall probably spend the rest of my days here I intend to do the requisite amount of high thinking daily."

"'Bout time," retorted Kirk. He was hating O'Kane as much as he hated himself just now. O'Kane pulled his moustache until the roots turned bloodless.

"Just so. I have read that we also need the attrition of vulgar minds to keep our edges sharp. Stay with me, Kirk."

Kirk laughed shortly. This independent old villain attracted him in spite of everything; but like all young people he was almost completely occupied with his own thoughts and found these becoming more complex the more he tried to classify them.

What had Tamsin been about? What was she about still? That she did not love Stewart he knew as a man does know these things. Then had she married him because of those lies of Aggie Colom's? It did not sound like Tamsin to let herself be stamped in that way, but one never could tell with a girl. And if she had been what could Kirk do to make amends? "Let her alone," said Reason, but he knew that he would not listen long to that. He knew that any fine and unreal notions of platonic friendship were already slipping away.

"I want to take her from Stewart right now. That's what I want," he thought, smoking his pipe along the beach while an Indian dug-out rowed slowly up the river, the oars dragging long lines of delicate lavender on the soft mouse-grey. Across the river, up and down the length of it, rising to all the edges of the sky stood the mountains that were the bones of Yukon; beaten and burned by rain and sun, scarified by wind, numbed by frost and still invincible. They looked at him down their naked ironstone heights as though reminding him that they were there. Kirk felt that half-human life in them which Tamsin loved and he had always dreaded. The flicker of wind and cloud-shadow along their faces was more than half-
human. A big fellow lying on the south horizon was like a man asleep, and in the red light still quivering on the tops he seemed about to sit up and laugh at Kirk, snapping stony fingers. Kirk thought: "I wonder if Tamsin dare go on the hills and talk to 'em now."

A launch came noisily up river and presently veered in to the broken wharf with old Mat and Challis aboard. Ostensibly Challis had come to speak to the Indians at the lower fishing-village about forest-fires, but as he landed Mat and chugged off again he shouted: "I'll be back in a few minutes, Regard."

He had very carefully worked out what he meant to say to Kirk and fully expected to trick him into some kind of confession, for he had always great confidence in his own powers . . . and this is a chance I can't miss, he thought, comfortably.

Mat also had come to see Kirk; and they sat together on an old driftlog with their backs to the dead town and talked in casual sentences, for Kirk would not ask about Tamsin, and Mat did not know how to begin. He looked at this strong hot-blooded boy of his sitting with supple brown hands between his knees and breaking dead sticks into inch-long pieces as though nothing else concerned him and burst out suddenly:

"What is the price of experience? Do men buy it for a song, or wisdom for a dance in the street? No, it is bought with the price of all that a man hath. You look like you been buyin' that way, Kirk. An' with a dance in the street, too."

"You're right, I have." Kirk shot a dark glance at him. "But what's life without experience, Uncle Mat?"

"Weell, pretty soft mush, I guess. But you sure been doin' some piratin' around Outside, an' that's what Tamsin was afeared of."

"What's she got to do with it?"

He heard the jar in his voice and did not look up. Mat rambled on:

"Why . . . she thinks a whole heap of you, boy. She do
so. You been friends so long, an' she's not one to change . . . never was. She's a good wife, too. The things fellers bring her to the Store—furs an' nuggets an' fiddledaddles—you'd never believe. An' she don't take a one of 'em, for all your Auntie Ag says. No; she don't give Stewart no cause to be jealous, an' I'll say I hope as you won't, neither, boy."

"Why should I? She's shown me where I get off plain enough."

"Now," said Mat eagerly, "that's jest what I come up to explain, for I was feared you wasn't gettin' in right someway. Truth has bounds an' error none, as the Great Blake says, an' I been boundin' along the road to Truth this long time now. You see, boy, it's this way. I told her as you'd not come back till she was married . . . that was 'cause of Olafssen, o' course, but I didn't tell her that. I have spoke wi' many sperrits an' they all warned me not to tell her one word o' that. So I didn't."

Kirk had dropped the bits of stick. His hands were still now. His voice sounded strange to himself in this wild place of shadows. He asked:

"Why did you tell her I couldn't come back unless she married?"

"Cause you couldn't, boy. Don't you remember? I told you I wouldn't let you marry Tamsin, an' con-fermed it wi' a soundin' oath. I did so." The soft old wondering face turned to him, pale in the dim light. "You couldn't marry her, boy, wi' that hangin' over you, an' I sure do dream about it sometimes in the night. So I jest told her you couldn't marry her, but you'd like to keep her friendship an' mebbe you'd come back if she took Stewart. It was makin' things sure all round, you see, boy. So apparently she thought it over and took him. So now you can be friends wi' her all right, boy. She expects it. She come to me one night when I was boilin' mush in the shed and said so. Now he can come back, she said. And you've come, sure enough."
Still Kirk did not move. It was all curiously real to him, that night in the shed. The old soft familiar voice and pottering movements. The rank smell of foxes and of boiling mush, the general sense of contrivance and common-place... and Tamsin there in the dark little place, defying him with all the power and pride at her command. Old Mat had told her that Kirk would not marry her, and so she had thrown her glove in his face by marrying Stewart. That was clear, and what was also clearer was the passion and grief that must have been tearing Tamsin when she did it.

He thought: "She'd not have done a crazy thing like that unless she cared like hell. And she cares like hell still."

He sat, gripping his hands for they wanted to take old Mat by his soft wrinkled throat. Again and again and again had he broken the lives of Kirk and Tamsin, this old man who loved him, who would have died for him.

"Aw," said Kirk with sudden incoherence, "what's the use?"

"Why," said Mat, innocently, "it sure was the right thing, I guess. Tamsin's a good girl. She an' me read the Great Blake and the Bible a whole heap... ."

"The devil you do," cried Kirk with sudden laughter. He got up, feeling himself rocking on his feet. "Well, all right. All right. All right. Now let's go up and find O'Kane." But after a few steps he stopped. He could not face O'Kane's ferreting little red eyes yet. Not while seeing those dark ghosts which—he had read somewhere—dwell in the souls of passionate men like bats in the dead trees. He could feel them fluttering and banging in his brain until nothing else seemed real.

"You go on. I guess I'll wait for Challis," he said, and dropped down on the log again and forgot Challis until that young man came with two cigars and proffered one as he sat down beside Kirk. It was a better opportunity for private conference than Challis had hoped for and he did not mean
to miss it. His man was taciturn, even sulky, but Challis put
that down to fear and began at once:

"There were several Loucheux down at that camp. I wonder
where they hail from."

Kirk smoked in silence.

"That girl Ooket—the girl we’re all trying to find—she
was going with a Loucheux, you know."

"She’ll always be going with somebody while she’s above
ground."

"Likely. Well, I wondered if you’d seen him again . . . the
big Loucheux who came with her to old Colom’s the night
you left Knife."

He rapped it out sharply, watching Kirk’s face in the moon-
light. But at this late day Kirk knew better than to betray
himself by looks or voice, although he was startled. He said,
grudgingly:

"I may have. Guess I wouldn’t know him again."

"Then Ooket did come to Colom’s that night?"

"Haven’t you just said so?"

"Oh, yes. But I . . . I thought . . . perhaps . . ." He
floundered and was silent, trying to see how to go on. Inter-
views so rarely proceeded as he expected.

Smoking quietly Kirk looked at the shore. The pebble
beach and the tall pines and the old forgotten buildings stood
quietly back into the gloom like the past years. Further down
was a new Indian camp, mysterious with its odours of burning
wood and half-lights and moving shadows. A girl in a light
dress stood on the beach, rapt in that immobility which is so
curiously Indian. A symbol, was she? A defiance? An appeal?
Alone there, facing those eternal mountains, she suggested
Tamsin, and Kirk again forgot Challis. Olafsson and all he
stood for had lived with Kirk so long that now, like a lame
foot, he was accepted as part of the nature of things. Challis
knew nothing about the business or he would have acted
long ago.
“Do you know why Ooket went to Colom’s that night, Regard?”
“Sure. To show me her new man.”
“Then she knew Olafsson was dead?” cried Challis, triumphantly.
“Likely. But if she didn’t I guess morals wouldn’t trouble Ooket any. You don’t reckon she’s still toting that same Loucheux around, do you?”
“How would she be likely to know that he was dead?”
“Oh.” Kirk sat up and looked round, his black brows cocked. “I hadn’t realized this was an interrogation. Are you expectin’ to get out o’ me somethin’ that Dawson don’t know, Challis?”
“I was just wondering.”
“So’s Dawson. So’m I. So’s everybody who’s interested, I guess. But as Dawson didn’t get any satisfaction out of her I don’t reckon you or I will. You know Injuns.”
Challis wanted to say: “Dawson didn’t discover that Ooket had the ear-rings,” but he was afraid of ruining the slight structure that he had built with such labour. He must first catch the girl and make her produce those earrings and then he could confront Regard who seemed as slippery as any Indian himself. He had not been prepared for the ready admissions which had taken all the wind out of his sails, but he tried again.
“It seemed queer to me—your clearing out so soon after you saw the girl.”
“Well, I imagine a Mountie gets so he feels he ought to see things queer,” said Kirk, tolerantly. As a hunter who has stalked grizzly and the shy Mountain Sheep he was amused at this clumsy stalking.
“There was no connection then, Regard?”
“You got to show me your right to ask a private question like that, I guess.”
Challis hesitated. Short of arresting Regard on suspicion
he could do nothing more, and he was not prepared to do
that. It all hung on Ooket. "My sakes! if I could only find that
damned girl," he thought. Aloud he said, lamely:
"Oh, I was just wondering . . . thought I might happen
on something Dawson had overlooked. One sometimes does."
"Sure. Well, I guess I can't add any more to what I told
Dawson. Sorry."

He continued to sit still, feeling that Challis might interpret
any movement as flight. In any case he was not much troubled
about Challis. The information left him by old Colom was
boiling in him and he only wanted the Policeman to go away
and leave him to fight it out.

The Indian girl was walking slowly along the beach, lifting
her feet in a light way unusual to the race. Kirk felt vaguely
that he ought to know that step, and then, as she came nearer,
his saw that it was Ooket. For a moment his brain dizzied and
then became very clear. Challis would take her, now. He would
have the warrant for that; and Ooket, at first coaxing and
then dismayed, would almost certainly accuse Kirk.

"Well, I guess I'm in for it," he thought.

Ooket came up slowly, regarding them with the indolent
insolent stare common to all Indian girls who have been much
in contact with white men. She almost halted, but not quite.
Challis took no notice, and she passed on. Kirk felt the blood
begin to run again in his veins. Challis did not know her.
Such information as he had was second or perhaps third-
hand. Ooket, now dragging her feet, began to turn over wood
and flotsam along the beach. Challis got up abruptly.

"Well. Guess I must go and hunt old Colom," he said.

Kirk rose with him. Behind them Ooket turned slowly and
walked back to the camp. The two young men went whistling
and talking up into dark Aroya.
Chapter Fifteen

Old Mat Colom was feeling very happy this hot morning. Again, he thought, he had put things straight between those two whom he so dearly loved, and last night, with the Bible and the Great Blake and Sam Butler before him, he had at last discovered the real meaning of life. And, like all great things, it was so simple after all.

_Love your enemies._ That was it. Love your enemies—even your wife. That would for ever put an end to all cruelty and backbiting and murder and revenge; and if—as Blake said—a thistle is a man’s brother, how much more another man should be so. Mat felt that as the apostle of a long-neglected creed he must begin by loving Aggie, who was and always had been his most determined enemy. He sat on a box while the mush for the foxes was cooling in the outhouse and tried to discover something to love in Aggie; and it was there she found him an hour later, with the mush gone cold and the foxes yelping in the yards. She came up like an overheated steam-engine and gave him a slap on the ear that knocked his hat off.

“You old heathen,” she shouted. “Seems like I can’t go out the house a minit but you get wastin’ your time. Put that mush on again! Jump to it! My! What was I ever about to tie myself up to a thing like you!”

“Now, Aggie! Now, Aggie . . . dear . . .”

“Don’t you get callin’ me dear, you impudent old beast! Think I’m one o’ your Lily Mauds or Tamsins, I guess . . .”

“Now, Aggie, I won’t have . . .”

“Quit it wi’ yer Now Aggies! That don’t feed the foxes—though I’ll own they’re not wuth feedin’ at that. Mrs. Sheridan she says as they’re gettin’ that coarse in the hair you’ll turn ’em inter llamas or suthin’ before you’re through wi’ yer silly experiments. Get busy, will yer!”
She bounced off into the house, where Mat heard her attacking the stove with a poker. Silently he heated up the mush and fed the foxes. They looked sadly enough with their summer coats felted into rusty patches; but they came to him, down from their boxes and up from their sandy burrows, like lovers, nuzzling his hands, blinking friendly eyes in the strong light.

"I love you, you dumb critters," said Mat. "But I am damned ef I'm goin' to love Aggie fer any man." Then he sighed. Here he was failing at the very outset of his great discovery. "Guess I gotta go to Tamsin," he said. "She can most gen'ally put things right." He sighed again. "And I sure did think I'd come to a conclusion at last," he thought, disconsolately. "I wonder did Sam Butler have a wife? Or the Great Blake?"

He went down to the Store a little later, but no bright head shone in the shady place, no loving voice welcomed. Tamsin, said Stewart, had gone up the river, and he went on shaking out the raw pelts brought in by Indians and calculating concerning past grub-staking and future loans as though nothing else mattered. Stewart, thought Mat, drifting away again, was not an attractive man, and the Store was not the same since MacDonald went away. He missed Mac keenly, despite the frequent letters which Tamsin read him, but he felt a glow of content now at the thought that Tamsin had certainly gone to see Kirk.

"He'll come back now," he thought. "I guess I sure did handle that business well. Mebbe to-night I'll have 'em both to help me puzzle out that thing. Love your enemies. Well, the Lord is askin' a whole heap of me, and that's a fact."

Tamsin had not the least intention of going to Kirk. Even in the face of his indifference it would be hard to see him again. She only desired to drive the ache out of her heart through the ache of her body, and she rowed fast through the still heat of the morning up to the Indian camp just beyond
the Asulkum with some remedies prescribed by O’Kane on
the night he came to Knife. She would still be three or four
miles below Aroya; and if Kirk, out fishing or hunting,
happened to see her he would not, she thought, want to come
near.

“He has shown his feelings plainly enough all the time,”
she said, aloud. “It’s only that I have been blind.”

The click of the oars as she rowed seemed to keep time to
the word. Blind. Blind. Blind. The river, low and level now
that the spate of melting snows was past, ran without obvious
current. She moved on its broad glassy surface as if on a
lake, seeing ironstone ranges and tree-filled draws and the
burning blue of sky doubled below her everywhere. The
world was so richly still that she could hear the howling of
sled-dogs in their various summer corrals, the splash of fish
rising among reeds a great way off, the faint far call of a bird.
As she neared the further bank a fragrance of roses and
sun-warmed leaves and new-turned earth where some small
creature left its burrow came to meet her. Over all the earth
was a sense of repose, of full completeness and rest before
that great arming for the winter struggle began again.

There was nothing at all of that repose in Tamsin. Under
Rab’s cool kiss that morning she had wanted to scream. She
wanted to scream still, bending her back to the oars with
long steady sweeps, setting her lips. She wished again and
again that her father were home. Like Tall Thing he had
seemed to give stability and permanence to the landscape.
Without him everything was in flux. She leaned on the oars,
looking back on Tall Thing splendid against the dazzle of
blue. A slight drift yet lay in a high hollow, signalling to her
of purity, peace, calm. . . .

“That’s what I’ve got to hold on to,” she thought. “That’s
what I mustn’t let go of for one minute. Not ever.”

She distributed her medicines at the fishing-camp; begged
for the release of some miserable dogs who would be tied up
again the moment her back was turned, and towed on up to
the Asulkum. Here she stubbed the boat to a dead tree and
went up the bank. The silence of the hot midday had here
its own music. Grouse were drumming in the warm juniper
up the hill. There was a stir of young leaves, a rumour of
little hastening wild creatures, the flutter of unseen wings. In
the russet top of a spruce a squirrel chattered as she climbed
into the old boat and made her way to the saloon with its
tattered hangings and tarnished gildings. It was full of Kirk,
this place, and it was not strange that Kirk should presently
find her there, for he had been haunting the fishing-camps
for days, waiting for her to come.

She heard his feet on the companion and stood still, looking
with wide eyes. And Kirk did not speak, did not hesitate.
He came stumbling through the wreckage on the floor and
took her in his arms.

It seemed, she felt wildly, that never, never would they be
able to stop kissing, clinging to each other, murmuring broken
words. But in time they were sitting together on the rotting
cushions of the transom, holding hands, trying to explain.
“I had to go, darling. I was coming back. I was coming
when I heard——”

“Kirk, Kirk! I thought you didn’t want me any more.
Uncle Mat said . . .”

She wept now, this Tamsin who so seldom cried. She was
very weak, sobbing in his arms. But when he said with that
queer savagery she had always loved in him:
“That’s enough. I guess we’re through with all this business.
You’re coming away with me right now,” she cried, poignantly,
knowing that it was true:
“Lover, lover; you’re asking what I can’t do.”

“Sakes! Morals an’ all that! Eh? Well, get it out of your
system, honey, an’ then we’ll light out for China or Australia
or someplace right away.”

He was laughing in her face; warm, brilliant, love-provoking,
the same heedless, reckless, enchanting Kirk she had always known.

"I was to blame," she cried. "It was never Rab's fault. Only mine. I made him do it. I . . ." She stumbled on, striving to make it clear, holding his eyes anxiously. He said on a deep note:

"That Mat Colom! Blast him for ever! It's his hornin' in has made us all the trouble way back to the Kluane days."

"Oh, Kirk! He does love us both so much."

"With too many folk love's another name for interference. Now, see here, Tamsin. You can rule him out and you can rule Stewart out. They don't belong any more. I guess if you never saw 'em again it would be too soon."

They argued it up and down, yet something stronger than Tamsin stood between them. She was MacDonald's daughter, but there was more than that. Although her God, her gods had hidden their faces of late, she acknowledged them still and the strength of the hills was hers also.

"It's not possible, my dear, my dear." Her voice, always more Scotch in emotion, was shaken although she stood firm. "Had I been feared and forced into it maybe . . . I don't know. But I chose my own way to get what I wanted, and I can't make Rab suffer for that . . . not more than I must."

"A lot he'll suffer wi' you lyin' in his arms this night!"

"Don't." She drew a little away from him. "It doesn't help for you to be a brute, Kirk."

"I want to make you realize what . . .""I do realize." The tears were running down her face where the bright healthy colour had faded in these last months. "He's not to blame . . . poor Rab. I don't know what I will do yet, but I'll find out. I'm going home, now."

"You'll come back here to-morrow, Tamsin?"

"I don't know."

"I'll come for you if you don't."

"I'll come."
She let him hold her again, but as the pressure grew greater she wrenched herself away.

"No. I can't have that. . . . Good-bye, Kirk."

"Good-bye."

He stood still, watching her climb the companion and disappear. At the back of his mind something was saying: "If I can persuade her I'll never believe in anything again."
And he answered it fiercely: "I will persuade her. By God, I will. All this is rot. . . . rot. . . ."

On the days when Tamsin went up the river she left Stewart's midday meal prepared for him; but on this night he had to get his own supper also, and he was growing uneasy and suspicious long before the hour when he saw her walking up from the river under the moon. There was splendour in the moonlight and she moved, he thought, splendidly, with her gallant step and her head high. Like one of the tall Norse women who walked with the ancient gods was Tamsin, and Stewart felt suddenly ashamed of his petty imaginings.

"Where have you been, you wild thing?" he asked fondly.
"Coming back at this hour with your arms full of moonbeams!"

"I have been with Kirk Regard," said Tamsin quietly.

She passed into the house and he followed in the sick chill of an uneasy conscience. Presently she would accuse him of betraying her childhood friend to Challis, and what answer had he to that? Tamsin threw off her hat and turned to him. It was many hours since she had left Kirk, but only Tall Thing and herself knew where she had been since. And she was not sure. A jagged tear on her sleeve caught her eye and she tried vaguely to brush it off, saying, slowly:

"Rab, you must be good to me. You must help me say what I've got to say."

In sudden revulsion from his own fear suspicion woke in him more strongly, turning him by natural corollary into the accuser.

"Well? You've said already that you were with Regard.
I think that needs some explaining considering the time of night it is."

"I'll . . . tell you," said Tamsin.

In the twilight of the house their bodies were as misty to each other as their souls. Stewart said:

"What have you got to tell me?"

"I went up to the Indian camp at Pomachee. Then I went on to the Asulkum because it was so hot in the sun. And . . . he came . . . ."

Her voice faltered and stopped. She was tired almost to exhaustion, although neither realized it. Stewart struck a match with a jerk and lit the lamp. He spoke on a harsh and hectoring note.

"Well? Get on with it. They told me he was your lover long ago. Is that what you have to say . . . that he's your lover still?"

His gaunt hand grasped a chair-back as though he needed steadying. He stooped to her, and his grey face had almost a wolfish look, with the lips drawn back from the yellowed teeth. Tamsin lifted her eyes to him. Then she shrugged faintly.

"You men! You're all alike! I wonder any of you dare say you love a woman when you're always so ready to think ill of her."

"I'll believe what you tell me, Tamsin," he said, after a moment's pause.

"Thank you, Rab. I haven't been untrue to you in that way. But . . . ."

She turned from him, struggling with herself, her head low. She said, harshly, as though the words burst from her: "I can't help it. I loved him when we were little. I've loved him all my life. He's a part of me that I can't tear out. Nobody else matters." She caught her breath. "Nobody else matters," she repeated intensely.

"But you married me. You must have loved me when you married me! Tamsin!" It was a cry she could not meet. She
shook her head, standing still. "But you must have! You wouldn’t have married me otherwise. Not you."

"I didn’t realize. I have done you a great wrong. . . ."

Her knees gave way and she dropped into a chair. Stewart came hurriedly, putting a hand on her shoulder, drawing her bent head against him.

"Tamsin, what is it, my own darling? I’m not a child. I know what complex creatures we all are. You thought you’d forgotten him, and now you have found that you have not, although he has forgotten you. Is that it? But I love you still, dearest . . . dear one, and you’ll love me in time. You know I always said I’d be content with . . . a very little . . . love . . . ."

He held her fast, almost piteously. She said with difficulty:

"Don’t, please. Oh, please. Be as angry as you like, but not that."

"Angry? I’m not angry, love. I always realized that I was an old man, and that perhaps you couldn’t give me quite the kind of love you might have given . . . someone younger. But I’ve been grateful, Tamsin. If I have never told you how grateful I’ll tell you now. . . ."

"Don’t, I tell you!" She sprang up, stamping her foot at him. "You ought to be angry. You ought to hate me as I hate myself."

"I’m too old for those kinds of angers," said Stewart. He looked at her, pushing his hand back through his thin hair as though trying to rub some thought clear in his brain. "Don’t talk nonsense about my hating you. I never thought anything could be so dear. Why do you hate yourself? Because you have found out that you . . . you care for Regard most?"

"I always knew it," cried Tamsin, desperately. "There’s no good in half-saying things now. I married you because I was told he wouldn’t come back unless I was married, and I had to have him back any way I could get. I had to."

Stewart seemed to go stiff all over. He said in a thin voice:
"Then I must be more abhorrent to you than anything on God’s earth?"

"You were for a time."

He walked to a chair and sat down, leaning back with hands limp on his knees. He looked very old. Tamsin said, half-stifled:

"I’m not so good as you imagined. I planned and planned to get my own way, and I only thought of myself, though I tried to believe I was thinking of other people. Then I began to realize how kind you were and . . . how very deeply I’d wronged you and . . . how I deserved everything. So I tried to be a good wife to you. I did try . . . hard."

"For God’s sake don’t say that kind of thing to me any more, Tamsin. There are some things a man can’t . . . should not have to hear."

He sat still, looking down at his hands with their swollen veins of age. It was just that, he felt dully. There were some things a man should not have to hear. Tamsin said:

"Kirk wanted me to go away with him, but I wouldn’t. It is for you to decide what I shall do, Rab. I owe you that. I’ve messed up all our lives beyond bearing and it’s all my fault. I didn’t realize . . . but that’s no excuse. If you care to have me I’ll stay here and do all I can for you, Rab. I think I want to do that, only . . . I . . . I can’t live with you as your wife any more . . . ."

She faltered into silence and it was he broke it at last.

"You want to stay, Tamsin?"

"If you want me. Yes, I do. Under that condition."

"As a penance?"

His voice was very bitter and very tired. Her eyes filled suddenly.

"Oh, Rab . . . No. I want to do it. If you’ll keep me."

"What about Regard?"

"I shan’t see him more than I have to. I’m being honest with you at last, Rab. I’m not so strong as I thought."
"And he's stronger," thought the man. He tried to steady his mind. Old and seasoned as he had believed himself he had been stampeded by a moment of jealousy into an admission that might bring young Regard to the gallows yet. He could not blame Tamsin's wild impetuosity as another might have done. He could almost understand it. Love is madness, and at times it must rule. But his own life so suddenly crashed about him in ruins had left him stunned. He said, heavily:

"I can't see clear to-night. Perhaps I will in the morning. I think we'd better leave it now and go to bed."

"Yes," said Tamsin. She stood up and crossed the room, looking down on him. She tried to say something, to beg his forgiveness, but the strain on her had been too great. She lingered a moment. Then there was a sigh, a soft rustle like a bird leaving its nest. The door of her little room shut. Tamsin was gone.

But Stewart sat on in his chair until the dawn. He could not face his empty room.

The new camp had not been long at Pomachee before Mrs. Sheridan conceived it her duty to go up and hold a prayer-meeting, and this time she coaxed Miss Tinney to go with her and play the portable harmonium. Miss Tinney consented because there was just a chance that Kirk Regard might be somewhere about and she was anxious to discover how matters stood between him and Tamsin.

Tamsin, she thought, was looking very beautiful just now. She had a sad look and yet a glad look; Miss Tinney could not describe it, but she suspected that those gods of hers which Tamsin went daily to meet upon the hills meant more to her than God does to most people. But—being quite human—Miss Tinney doubted if those gods did not sometimes take the shape of young Regard, and this was what she hoped to find out at Pomachee.

"It's just too bad we don't have a resident preacher at Knife," complained Mrs. Sheridan, as a couple of reluctant
Indian boys carried the little harmonium ashore and set it down among the litter of tents and the half-dozen permanent houses. "But I surely do do the best I can."

Miss Tinney grunted a bleak assent, holding her skirts away from the heaps of refuse and the scratching children. No one would regret the advent of a resident preacher more than Mrs. Sheridan, who—like many other people—usually did her best, although the world seemed in no way improved by it. A stubborn old sinner, this world, and yet so wonderful. For all her sixty years Miss Tinney could not get used to the wonder and the terror and the beauty of it.

She followed Mrs. Sheridan up broken steps into the first house, which was crowded with men and women and with the babies who were destined to proceed still further with this tangle the whole world was knotting together all the time.

"Oh, my! it sure is a puzzle to my poor head," thought Miss Tinney as Mrs. Sheridan, black-eyed and chirpy, began persuading the Indians to come out to the prayer-meeting. The packed room was very hot. A half-built canoe filled most of the space, with three young bucks working among the piles of shavings. At the dirty little windows old women sewed on skin garments and young ones on the silk and bead ornamentations. There was a baby wrapped in an orange shawl, which made a gay note among these duns and browns, and Mrs. Sheridan attacked the mother.

"You'll bring him to the meeting? You surely want him to grow up a good Christian, don't you?"

"Aha," said the mother indifferently.

"My! He's a fine boy all right. Where's your husband?"

"Down river someplace. He got to make more money now, I guess."

There it was again, thought Miss Tinney. Each generation caught up into the same old round . . . and what for, anyway? Maybe God expected more help of us than He got. Maybe
He needed more help, for He didn’t seem to be making an entire success of the world as it was. An old woman said:

“You leaving Weeti wit me, Ooket.”

She spoke in slurring English out of compliment to her guests, but the name startled both of them. It had been posted up on the Police Barracks at Knife for so long.

“Is your name Ooket?” cried Mrs. Sheridan, fluttering.

“Aha.”

“Do you come from Dawson?”

A guarded look flickered over the round eyes, turning them blank.

“Not understanding,” said Ooket.

Mrs. Sheridan knew more about Indians than many people. She said no more, only whispering to Miss Tinney as they opened the hymn books:

“I’ll tell Challis the first minute I get back.”

Ooket did not attend the prayer-meeting, but to the white women she seemed the only person present. Mrs. Sheridan was thinking: I sure ought to get that reward, an’ I will, too, and Miss Tinney was thinking how Ooket and Kirk Regard were mixed in that old story of the Winter Patrol and hoping there would be no trouble for Tamsin come of it.

“I jest wish I’d never got that fellow up here,” she thought, anxiously.

Mrs. Sheridan found Challis in his shack reading a letter from Dorothy which, although loving, was sufficiently desponding to add quite considerably to his usual despondency. News of Ooket revived him to a proportionate extent.

“My word, Mrs. Sheridan, you surely have done one fine day’s work. I’ll go up to Pomachee right now. Did she say anything about Regard? Did she . . . ?”

Mrs. Sheridan reluctantly confessed the weakness of her information, but Challis was not damped.

“Ooket’s not a common name among mission-taught Indians. They’re mostly Lydia or Sarah or something. Likely
she was caught late . . . and that would account for her morals, too. Well, I'm much obliged to you, certainly, and I guess that reward's going to be yours. I'll start right away."

Dragging on his boots and giving a cock to his stetson he presently went out to find Stewart. Stewart would be necessary to identify the girl, and although he might object he could not refuse to come. Never very quick in observation, Challis did not see, as women did, the change that had come over Stewart in this last week. He was as competent and definite as ever, but he moved wearily, attended to the white woman off the Creeks whom he was serving as though she did not particularly matter. Challis, too excited to keep still, roamed about, inspected saws, rolls of ribbon and barrels of molasses without seeing them until Stewart was free and called over the counter:

"Wanting anything, Challis?"

There were almost twenty-three hours of daylight just now, but the Store had always its rich brown shadows, and Stewart, stiff in the midst of them, looked thin and grey. Challis swung himself on to the counter, grinning. He looked, thought Stewart, remarkably tough and trim and well-kept and his voice had an almost commanding ring.

"Yep. You. I want you right away up at Pomachee to identify an Indian."

"Is it Ooket?"

Stewart heard the fear in his own voice, if Challis did not. "Well, I just don't know," he said, candidly. "I guess so, from Mrs. Sheridan's report . . . and the Whiskey-Jack generally sees all that's going. But you would recognize her, Stewart. And then I'll get that signed report from you regarding the ear-rings before I take her to Dawson."

Stewart pressed his hands hard on the counter to subdue their trembling. "I'd rather not be mixed up in this at all, Challis."

"So you said before. But it's too late, my friend. Too late
by chalks. You have important evidence and I want it. See?"

"Supposing I can't identify her?"

Challis' jovial manner changed. He looked at the other man a moment, caressing his chin. Then he said, slowly:

"I'd advise you to think twice about that. I shall take the girl anyway, on the chance. They'll know her in Dawson. And I shall subpoena you as witness. You're the most important one I've got."

"There is . . . Regard," said Stewart after a pause.

"I'll subpoena him too, of course, so he can't leave the country. I think I'd best leave it at that just now. And I wouldn't advise you to warn him any, Stewart. It can't help him, and you'd do yourself considerable harm."

"You're mighty keen to hoodoo this business on to him, Challis."

"Why, I guess I'm just putting it where it belongs. Can you be ready in an hour?"

"Very well," said Stewart.

He stood on at the counter after Challis had gone whistling down the street, and his eyes saw the people passing on the boardwalk: unkempt Indians in disreputable store clothes, gnarled prospectors, keen-glancing hunters setting their feet one before the other like men used to narrow trails, and they seemed to him ghosts just as he was a ghost.

"What do you see, Shadow, in the Shadows that pass?" he thought, and knew that he saw them all, like himself, walking blindly forward into pits digged by their own hands.

When Tamsin called him to supper he found himself looking at her furtively. "What will she do when she knows?" he thought: "for this is the beginning of the end." And then the food she set before him was tasteless in his mouth; for he knew that he had never loved her more dearly, never realized more fully the gallant courage with which she was meeting her life.
Before he went he took her hand, drawing her near and kissing her forehead. What he was going to do would separate them finally, and he knew it. But she smiled at him, holding his hand in her firm young one.

"Thank you, Rab . . . for everything," she said, softly, and he knew that she was grateful because he had kept from touch and kiss every sense of possession.

He went out silently, and he was silent still when he returned from Aroya some hours later. Challis had been unusually tactful, and there had been no trouble with Ooket, who merely saw in the Dawson trip a pleasant interlude of easier travel than she was used to. She could fool those Dawson Mounties as she had fooled them before—Stewart saw her thinking it, and she guessed nothing of those trump cards which Challis had up his trim red sleeve. Stewart had supplied the winning ace when he signed his name to the short statement Challis drew up after Ooket and her baby had been lodged at Miss Timney’s for the night to await the coming of the Tahkina next day, and he did not feel that he could go into the house and face Tamsin directly after. He went to the Store and worked late on his accounts, seeing now and again in the gloom the mocking tilt of young Regard’s brows when Challis had served his subpoena. If Regard was alarmed he hid it well. "Oh, God," thought Stewart, weighed down by his own guilt, "if only the fellow could be innocent!"

When Mat Colom saw Ooket go out next day in charge of Challis he was seized with a blind terror; a terror all the greater because he had come to believe that the danger was past.

"I guess I got to help Kirk make his get-away right now before that girl spills anythin’," he thought. But hard on the heels of that came a worse fear. Supposing that Ooket was tried at Dawson and found guilty? Kirk could not leave her to face that. No; his boy jest couldn’t be that kind of skunk. He’d have to tell. "My! I jest dunno what to do," he thought,
desperately. "I guess I'll have to tell Tamsin. I guess that ain't no sense in hidin' it up from her any longer."

Bewildered and terrified he went hastily up the dusty track to the Store and found Tamsin at work in the washing-tent. She did not sing now as she once was used to do, but her greeting smile was very sweet. Sweeter than when she was a girl, thought Mat. And stronger. Feeling the balm of her strength already he sat on a bench to mop his hot face.

"Darlin'," he said, earnestly, "I guess hell's hard on the heels o' us right now. I sure dunno what to do an' I guess you got to see straight for the both of us in this."

"Ololon been naughty again? Or is it Sam Butler?" Tamsin, with her brown hands in blueing-water, smiled whimsically. "I'm not such a one at seeing straight myself, you know, Uncle Mat."

"I sure dunno where is seeing straight an' I dunno where is the Truth; but we sure got to do something mighty quick an' I don't rightly know what it is. Tamsin, Challis has took Ooket down to Dawson to answer what the Police want to know about Olafssen bein' found dead—if it is Olafssen."

"Why, I'm glad for Challis," cried Tamsin. "Here's the chance he has been waiting so long. And the Mounties were bound to get her soon or late. They never give up. Oh, I'm glad for Challis."

"Well, darlin', I'm not an' that's a fac', for mebbe it'll all come out now. An', you see, Tamsin, it weren't Ooket killed Olafssen. Kirk did it."

"What's that you say?" Tamsin came swiftly round the tub, her arms dripping from the elbows. "What's that you say? I don't understand."

"Kirk did it. He killed Olafssen. He told me. He's a good boy, but I guess he sorter slipped up that time. He . . . ."

"Uncle Mat!" Tamsin gripped his fat shoulders, shaking him. "You don't know what you're saying. You're crazy! Uncle Mat . . . ."
“He did it sure enough, dearie. He told me. Self-defence, he said, but I dunno will Dawson b’lieve that after this long time. He oughter of told right away, an’ I allers said . . .”

“Tell me what you know . . . Wait a minute . . .” She went to the tent door and glanced out. “No one there. It’s quite safe. Now . . . tell me.”

She dropped on the bench beside him, feeling her limbs like water. But her mind was sharp as Mat told in his rambling way; and she did not interrupt, not even when she realized that it was this blind old blundering man who had parted her from Kirk when he needed her most.

“. . . So I couldn’t let him marry you, dearie, wi’ that hangin’ over him. It wouldn’t of bin right. So I sent him off. He didn’t want to go, but I made him. He’s a good boy, Tamsin. . . . I said I’d give him up if he stayed, an’ I would of. I had to think o’ you. I’d of give him up to save you, darlin’. I would so.”

“Save me!” said Tamsin. Her voice was low and harsh, and Mat sighed, rubbing his fat hands over his broad fat knees.

“When Sin claps his wings over the battle an’ sails rejoicin’ on the flood o’ Death . . . oh, who can stand? The Great Blake says that, an’ guess he’s about right. He sinned . . . Kirk did, an’ he’s got to pay now, I reckon. But I wasn’t goin’ to have you pay with him, dearie . . . not as you’d of had to do if you’d married him.”

Tamsin sat motionless, staring before her, her wet hands in her lap. Mat touched one of them timidly.

“I dunno what to do now, dearie. I’m a silly old man, I guess, but I did save you that, anyways. It’ll be a comfort to me all my days to know that I’ve saved you . . . more than once.”

“Will it?” said Tamsin, half-strangled. She felt that if she moved she would beat him with her fists, trample on him, scream at him: Don’t you see what you’ve done, you stupid
terrible old man? Don’t you see that you’ve taken away the only comfort I might have had? If I were his wife I’d have the right to fight for him . . . the right . . . and you’ve taken it from me. . . .

“What are we to do, darlin’?” asked Mat’s soft old voice.


“First thing I thought was helpin’ him make his get-away. But he can’t do that if Ooket is charged . . .”

“Uncle Mat!” Tamsin stood up. “I can’t talk to you now, Uncle Mat. I want to be by myself. That’s it,” she cried, wildly. “I must be by myself . . . .”

“The Great Blake says . . . .”

“I’ll come over and see you later, Uncle Mat. I must be by myself now.”

She clung to that formula as though it would help her, but when he was gone she looked about the tent and saw no help. There was nothing in her but a wild crying need to put her arms about Kirk and shield him . . . shield him with all she had and was. . . .

She tidied away her washing mechanically and went out to the bright day and the growing grass where a little flock of North-going birds were pecking and twittering and fluffing-up soft-coloured feathers in the sun. Splendid-breasted against the blue sky Tall Thing beckoned, but she could not go to him. Moving on limbs as weak as though she had come through a bad illness she went to her room and fell on the bed. Her door was locked against Stewart by stronger forces than a key, but she did not think of Stewart. There was no room in her mind for anyone but the man whom she so loved.

At last she rose and went out to cook her husband’s supper, and it seemed to her then that her mind had been made up from the first minute. She was going to Kirk. She was going because he needed her and because she had belonged to him from the very beginning. Before the stars were made or the
mountains stood naked against the floods two motes wandering
in the bright ether had trembled, feeling each other. And they
were herself and Kirk. Before this life, and after this death,
it would be the same. Motes cannot die. They only change,
and it was not change that Tamsin feared. A great trumpet-
phrase was blaring through her mind. The eternal wreckage of
his soul, it said, and that was what she feared.

"It shall not come to that," she thought, setting a smoking
dish before Stewart. "It shall not."

Perhaps it was that Stewart’s unease had sharpened his
senses, or perhaps Tamsin’s manner told more than she knew.
It is certain that he felt the coming crisis, so that his food
half-choked him and he was almost glad when Tamsin cleared
the air at last by saying:

"I am going to Aroya to-night, Rab. I don’t know when I
will be back. I am going to Kirk."

"So you know at last?" said Stewart, looking under grey
brows.

"Know what?" she said, sharply.

"About Regard. That he is supposed to have killed
Olasssen."

Tamsin stared at him with wide eyes that seemed as though
they would never close again.

"How long have you known this?"

"I have suspected it for a very long while, Tamsin." He
hesitated. Since she must know soon he would not have
another man tell her. "... Challis and I found out ..."

"Challis and you? What do you mean? Have you and
Challis been working together ... against him?" Her voice,
low and controlled, had a deadly bitterness. "What have you
and Challis made up between you about ... Kirk?"

Stewart flushed. Instinctively he took out his pipe and put
it unlit between his teeth, biting on the stem as thrashed men
used to bite on the bullet.

"There is no need to take that tone to me, Tamsin."
"What have you and Challis . . . made up . . . between you?"

"Nothing," he said, goaded into defiance. "We noticed little things from time to time, and compared them. That was before . . . ."

"So this is how you have been amusing yourself? Spying on a man!"

"I don't think you can exactly call it amusement," said Stewart, dryly. He got up, walking away to the window. "Probably you don't know that some of your friends were rather eager to find a good reason for Regard's leaving you as he did. That was how it began."

"Who gave my friends a right to that impertinence?"

"Aggie Colom set some very ugly stories going . . . ."

"Aggie Colom!" Tamsin's lip curled contemptuously. "Are you telling me that you helped Challis hunt Kirk because of anything Aggie Colom might say! I don't believe it! You helped because you hated Kirk. You wanted me yourself, and you wanted him out of the way. . . ."

"Tamsin! You're unjust!"

"God's unjust," cried Tamsin, passionately. She sat bent in her chair, with her hands clenched together. "Life's unjust. What have we done—any of us—that things should happen like this!"


Tamsin sat silent for a few moments. Then, more gently, she said:

"Will you tell me just how much you know, please?"

Flatly, and without emotion, Stewart told. When he spoke of seeing the ear-rings on Ooket Tamsin gave a slight shiver, and he added, hastily: "I didn't tell Challis about that until long after."

"Why not?"

"For God's sake, don't be so cruel, Tamsin."
“Why didn’t you tell Challis at once?”
“I don’t know. Why do people do some things and not others? I think I was sorry already that I’d ever touched the thing.”

They were silent, considering the implacable forces which such slight touches had set in motion. Stewart said with an effort:
“I . . . I thought then that you had stopped loving him.”
Tamsin turned her head, regarding him gravely. Her stern young face softened.
“Poor Rab! Oh, Rab, I have done you a great wrong.”
“That doesn’t make my own sin any the less, Tamsin.”
“I don’t know. Perhaps it does. Anyway——” She sprang up with sudden nervous energy. “I can’t think about that now. I must go to him.”
“You can’t get him away. Challis has seen to that. Unless he can lie himself out of it . . .”
“Do you think I want him to do that! Don’t you know that I realize now that one can’t escape a thing by running away from it? We’ve got to turn around . . . and face it . . . and see it through . . . and take what it brings. I see now that that’s what being immortal means. Perhaps it’s the only way of making ourselves immortal. I don’t know.”

She stood very still, her head up, her wide grey eyes looking away through the window to Tall Thing where the cloud-shadows played and ran. Stewart watched her silently. A big goddess of a girl, scarcely yet come to woman’s years and yet with a big god-like conception of life. She was accepting her destiny as he found it hard to accept his. He felt that if there had been less courage in Tamsin there might have been more in himself. He said, trying to keep his voice steady:
“You—you will come back?”

She looked at him with strange dignity, as though seeing him from very far off.
“You oughtn’t to want me, Rab. Whether Kirk lives or dies
I belong to him. I always have. A heart's like the wind, I guess. We can't control it . . . the wild thing." She moved near, laying her hand for a moment on his arm. "I've treated you ill, Rab. So ill that I daren't ask your forgiveness for that. And you've got to suffer for what you did as well. We are all being drawn into this whirlpool, and we have to fight our own ways out. That's all I can see now—for any of us."

She broke suddenly into deep hard sobs and ran out of the room. And when Stewart saw her again she was in the stern of Tommy Tom's launch, heading across the track of the moonlight for dark Aroya. He ran down to the bank and waved, and she stood up, raising her hand.

She kept it so until the tall reeds hid her in the twilight. And it was so that he always liked best to remember MacDonald's Tamsin who had been his wife.
Chapter Sixteen

"You smell of the wind," said Kirk, smiling up at Tamsin from where he squatted on the floor by the open fireplace. "Bruised leaves too—and the earth, just as if they were all part of you."

"So they are," retorted Tamsin, coming in and shutting the door. "Just as you are."

"Don't fool," he said, with sudden roughness. "You keep me farther off than you do that old beast O'Kane."

"He's never been a beast to me. And he's our chaperon," said Tamsin, lightly. She sat on the floor beside him, stretching her moccasined feet to the blaze, for winds still blew cold up at Aroya.

Kirk turned on his stomach and watched her moodily with chin in his palms. During the three days she had been at Aroya they had squabbled almost incessantly, and it was because she had sent him away that he was here alone. And so she had come after him. A usual woman's way, this, but one never could tell with Tamsin. She was rock. She was the Yukon with its strengths and mysteries and terrors. He believed that in the end she would make him do what she wanted and probably give him no reward. But he meant to fight her for it, even if it had to be done with that damned cynical old O'Kane looking on.

Tamsin battered the logs with a stick until the sparks flew up.

"Play for me since you can't talk," she said, but even as he reached for his flute she regretted the suggestion. Kirk the man she could brace herself against; but not Kirk the wizard, wooing and coaxing with music until it seemed that the very stars of the sky must long to be human and come down to sit at his feet in shining rows.

By the shadowy wall Kirk sat cross-legged as he had been

The World is Yours.  

M
used to do on Kluane, on Sagish Hill, up the juniper-slopes of Tall Thing, and in the dancing firelight he looked young and irresponsible as he had done then. It was this irresponsibility which was so lovable, so terrible, so difficult to meet. Now he was letting himself go drunken on melody, passing by gradations into the seductively-hesitant yet passionate La Paloma, with which the Spanish-American gallants woo their ladies at latticed moonlit windows. He fancied himself before that moonlit window which was Tamsin's spirit, suing for entrance, and he watched her still face with bright eyes, ready to turn to account any weakness he saw there.

But he saw none, and in irritated defiance he struck with his whole force into the sombre majesty of The Dead March in Saul.

"Don't!" she cried then, sharply, and he put the flute down, laughing a little.

"Why not? Haven't you been hammering into me every day that death is only another phase of life?"

"It isn't death matters. It's the way we die. I don't fear death."

"I guess I don't, either. Saw too much of it in France. Pop. Wop. Another good man gone. Likely me next time. No. I'd hate to die, of course, like any other chap who loves life, but I promise you I'll make a good end—if I have to."

"You can't make an end. You have to go on for ever."

"That's as may be."

"Your not believing doesn't alter the fact."

"I don't see where your belief is likely to be truer than mine."

"Yes, you do. You're afraid of the things you can't see. I'm not, because I know they'll help us later on just as things do here."

"Help! Shucks!"

There was a silence, with wind beating pine branches on
the roof. They scratched like creatures with claws trying to get in. Tamsin said, softly:

"Kirk, do you really mean to let Ooket stand this alone?"

Kirk drew a long breath. Now it was up again, this damnable ghost that she would not let rest.

"How the devil can I say till I know what's going to come of it all? She's lied up and down and around, an' I guess no one can believe a word she says, anyways. A few years of confinement would do that girl a lot of good, and that's all she'd get, especially with her baby around. If I was convicted I'd swing. You know that, or if you don't you ought to. I've told you often enough."

"Not if you went to Dawson right away and gave yourself up and told the whole truth . . ."

"Who'd believe it now . . . after all these years? If I'd told at the time, yes . . . maybe. And I've lied, too. Don't forget that."

She sat unmoving, her arms about her knees, her bright head bent. Kirk looked at her resentfully. When he had seen her walking up the dead street of Aroya on that first night he had believed that she had come to bring him all the joy that might be left him. And she had come only to torture. After the excesses of Outside physical desires were still strong in him, and he knew that they were strong in Tamsin. But there was something stronger. Something that he was trying with all his forces to break down.

"I believe you'd rather have me swing than not," he said.

"I would . . . if losing your soul is the price of your safety," she answered almost inaudibly.

He came over, sitting close with his arm about her shoulders.

"See here, honey. I want you to get this straight. Of course, if Ooket is sentenced I'll speak out right away. I'm not quite the skunk you seem to fancy. But it's not a case of a life for a life, Tamsin. She'll get it light, anyways. But I would get it so heavy."
"I know. But... oh, Kirk... somehow to me that isn't the question. Just living and dying's not much. Any fool body can do that—and has to. It's what we are going to get out of it all. ... Kirk, you do understand that if I could die for you I'd do it gladly? You do believe that?"

"I believe it, Tamsin."

"But if I could it would hurt you more than help. That's what I want to get at. Oh!" she cried, beating her hands together. "If I could only say what I know. It seems to me that maybe we're not born immortal or we wouldn't have to struggle so. I reckon we've got to fight and fight to make ourselves immortal souls... and that would account for all the waste... people wasting themselves, snuffing themselves out through sheer laziness. This is such a much bigger thing than the other that I think it must be true; for God always thinks of the big things, and there is nothing we can't make ourselves big enough to do, really. Don't you in your own heart want to do the biggest thing?"

"Give myself up, you mean?"

"Just that, lover."

He drew her closer, and his voice had a sudden warmth.

"That's what you won't let me be, Tamsin."

"But you are! You will be through thousands of worlds yet. If..."

"If I go and chuck my life away now?"

She leaned against him with closed eyes. But he felt her shudder and saw her tears run down. All of human passion and woe was in her, but she was accepting what was a grief much worse than death because she saw as he could not the Vision beyond.

"So many have died gloriously for the best that it is in them," she said at last. "And so many have died meanly for the worst. It isn't dying that matters. That's a necessary part of life. It's the... non-insulating of ourselves, so that we're out of touch with what does matter. There's the awful part.
I did it, and so I know. But I’m trying to get back. There is a way if we choose to take it. Courage . . . that’s it, I think. It’s only what of courage that keeps us from going right ahead . . . spiritually, I mean.”

“You’re always full of theories! Maybe you’re right. I dunno. Why do we do such fool things all our lives, I wonder. Things just seem to happen, someways. Little lies grow into big ones before you know where you are . . . reproduce their own beastly brood in a night. Before a man guesses it he has set in motion forces he can’t stop. . . .”

His voice died away. They sat silent, while the wind whistled and branches clawed on the roof. Kirk tried to think where her thoughts surely were, but he could only think of roses. Roses pink on the hillside; forget-me-nots and columbines, and Tamsin laughing among them with both arms full. He held her tight in a sudden passion.

“Tamsin, Tamsin, don’t leave me now. We’ve lost enough. Stay with me now. Tamsin . . . I’ll do what you want if you’ll stay with me now. . . .”

“Oh! Oh!” she cried with the anguish that gave her; an anguish that he did not understand. And then her tears fell again, wrung from her drop by drop, slow and bitter as blood. He was almost glad to see them, for they proved her weak at last, and in their encounters along the years it had always been Tamsin who was stronger than he. He held her, stroking her hair, murmuring love-words, and presently she looked at him with her stricken face, but her eyes were faintly smiling.

“Poor Kirk . . . and poor Tamsin. Eh, lad, we’ve a lang, lang road to travel yet afore we’re fit to company with the gods.”

“I don’t want the gods, blast ’em. I want you. And here I’ve got you . . . and here you’ll stay.”

For a moment she was silent. Then suddenly, violently, almost as though she spoke not to him but to a greater Tempter, she cried:
"Let me go!" and freed herself with one swift twist of her body and stood up.

Kirk sprang to the door and set his back to it.

"Here you'll stay," he said, savagely, and for the first time she saw evil in his face and turned her own from it, standing still.

"Well?" he jeered. "Goin' to call on your gods to strike me dead as you used to do when we were kids?"

Except for that dark hot man's face he seemed equally a child now in his fury against what he instinctively felt to be too strong for him, and the woman knew that the real danger lay not with him but with herself. It seemed that she had never fully known what life and love meant until she was called upon to recognize and renounce them both in a breath. She stared through the broken window-space on the windy night which held those old gods he spoke of. The river shrunken and patient between its limiting walls; the dark ranges lifting their aching and frozen brows, their deep-scarred sides for ever to the cruelty of the elements; the torn and cloudy sky where a thin slip of moon trod uncertainly among faint stars. They fulfilled their duty, kept their ancient places. Where was the soul in her if it could not do the same?

She stood a moment with fingers pressed against her temples, and then she turned, looking at him.

"I'm trying to remember . . . there's that old Hindoo story . . . or is it Mahommedan? There's a battle. All the hurry and red chaos of battle and men fighting blind and not understanding why. Then . . . a hush and the chariot of the god driven up between the lines, slowly so that every man may see. Just one breathless instant to realize the meaning of the struggle . . . the high vision beyond. Then back to the blood and torment again . . . but not the same. I can't tell it, but I've seen . . ." She flung out her hands, and walked back to the fire. "Of course one can't tell it. But afterwards . . . one knows. It is there, that Immortal Thing. . . ."
Almost more than her words the broken cadences of her voice moved him. He said, slowly:

"Maybe I could feel like that once... long ago. Now I'm different. I just want what I can get now, Tamsin. And you know I mightn't be able to have it for many days."

"You will... so long as you don't get it now."

"For Heaven's sake! If you're not the damnedest preacher! Why don't you turn missionary?"

"Seemingly I have, I'm going now. Good-night, Kirk."

"Good-night."

He watched her out of the door sullenly; then ran after her.

"Tamsin, why do I have to be a brute to you when you're the only thing I really love? I'm sorry... sorry..."

"Oh, my dear... my dearie, what need of that between you and me? Do you think I don't understand? Life is hitting us both so hard that we can only hold on."

"I'll see you back. Will O'Kane be there?"

"Yes. With a fire and hot drink ready. He looks after me well."

They walked together through a dark and windy world that clattered with dried sticks and flapping window-frames and smelled of water and pine-trees. A wild and ghostly world Kirk felt it; full of unexplainable mysteries and fleshless threats and lonelinesses and fears. Fear itself seemed to row past him on black wings, and he stopped, startled and sweating in the presence of a terror that seemed flowing from those endless immovable chains of mountains, those secret lakes and rivers.

Tamsin stopped too; but in the dim light he saw that she had her head up, her lips parted as though she drank in sustenance from these things which frightened him. Unconsciously his hand sought hers as it had so often done when he was a little boy; and after a moment her grasp tightened on it, and they went on silently together up the broken and weedy streets that men had once trodden so hopefully.

Kirk left her at the door of the long yellow-painted house
where O’Kane had fitted up the whole top storey for her with a lavishness that had made her smile. She called up a smile now as he rose from a big chair by the fire and pushed her into it.

“You’re cold, my dear. Well, creature comforts appeal to the young more than their dignity will let them allow. Which’ll you have? Tea or coffee?”

“Coffee, please.”

She leaned back with closed eyes and let him wait on her. And this man who had so rarely waited on anyone in his long and selfish life did it with deftness and delight. He talked on at random as she drank the coffee, and a little colour returned to her white face.

“May Regard get his deservings for what he’s giving her,” he thought. “Well, Tamsin, are you still enamoured of Nature up here? I consider that the outrageous force of her has shouldered the spirit of fastidious perception clean off the map. She puts all her goods in the window and advertises them with a dictaphone. Hear her blaring now.”

“There’s no wind in Fall,” said Tamsin.

“The Fall fills me with repugnance. Then you see her wallowing in colour without the slightest modesty . . . her vacant face smeared with great daubs of orange and apricot and raspberry-red as a child’s is smeared with jam. No selection, no grouping, no composition. An effort disgracing the art of the Cave-dwellers of Crō-Magnon. . . .”

He went on in his thin brittle old voice while she finished the coffee and ate a cracker. She knew that she need not answer him and wondered as so often before why this man who had been so cruel to Miss Tinney should treat her with such delicacy and kindness. That matter had never been spoken between them, and never would be, any more than they would speak of herself and Kirk. But she guessed that he knew more than a little concerning that. Over his pipe he said presently:
"I am used to Aroya now. Like the shellfish we secrete a habitation for ourselves and take its shape. But this is too small a shell for you, Tamsin. You must not stay here long, although it is extremely altruistic of me to say so. I shall miss you exceedingly."

"It depends on Kirk," she said, with sudden frankness.

"Pardon me. It depends on you. On when you allow him to break down whatever barrier you may have set between you. He's a strong man."

"He will never break it down. I'm a strong woman." She sat up, pushing the heavy waves of hair back from her forehead and looking at him with burning eyes. "I'm strong... strong."

"That is not the same thing." He watched her with his red-rimmed eyes, thinking: If she fails I'll say there's no such thing as a moral woman. I don't believe there is....

"No, no, my dear. A strong man correlates mind and body, but the stronger a woman is the more she has to divide them. Don't you yet realize that? The best a woman can do is to accept the fact that she must make her choice and in choosing lose the rest. She must limit her ministrations... or her administrations. A woman can't have it both ways. Usually a man can... and does."

"I have chosen," said Tamsin, very low. She got up. "Good-night, Doc. I'm going to bed. And—thank you for being so good to me."

O'Kane rose and bowed in his old-time courtly manner.

"The pleasure is mine, my dear."

He opened the door and watched her up the naked stair. Then returned with a sigh to the empty room.

"'I have sat by Thebes below the wall, and walked among the lowest of the dead,'" he thought. "But I thank God I never had a daughter... so far as I know."

Two days later there was a storm. Tamsin had gone down the lake on a bright and breezy morning to visit some Indian
camp, but before noon the water was a grey smother of leaping waves and the sky a wrack of cloud. Kirk haunted the shore telling himself that she would have sense and stay at the camp, and yet knowing her too well to believe it. When at last he saw her canoe like a bobbing cork on the tumbling waters he stripped and swam out to her. She was too busy with the paddle to scold him until they reached the shore, but then she cried:

"I thought I was crazy. Now I know I'm sensible compared with you."

"Tamsin," he said, standing before her, his soul as naked to her as his body. "I thought I'd lost you once. I can't risk losing you for a thousand lives yet. I'll go to Dawson whenever you say."

"Kirk . . . not for that reason."

"You just got to be glad I'll go for any, I guess. I'm not a saint. An' I'm not asking any reward here, for I know I won't get it. But if you don't make it up to me later on . . . my, I'll be peeved."

It was the old Kirk, hiding his emotions behind jests. Tamsin said, quietly: "I'm coming to Dawson with you. We will be together as long as we can," and went on up into the town.

O'Kane, wandering uneasily in the streets and listening to the roar of the wind, saw her at last, walking unsteadily. He spoke, but she did not notice him. She passed into the house, and he thought: "She's got what she wants, and now she's afraid of it. How like a woman."

Kirk came up later. He, too, was a little strange, excited, defiant.

"You're losing me, Doc.," he said. "Me an' Tamsin. We're goin' right away."

"Not in this storm?"

"Why, a row-boat's all right, I guess. We'll get Tommy Tom's launch at Knife and send your boat back by somebody."
O’Kane asked no more questions. He did not need to. The confused radiance and distress of Tamsin’s soul had found expression in her face, telling the old man that she was making Kirk measure up to her standard and not submitting her high beliefs to his.

"Wherever they go or whatever they do she’s all right," he thought. "A justification of moral conflict—supposing that there is such a thing." He felt a prick of pride at his own perspicacity, a weary feeling of age. Whatever might come to these two young things they had achieved a triumph over self before they were old such as all his years had never attained to. "What would it feel like," he thought, "to suffer for one’s beliefs? It must be a fine thing. ‘Sweet it is to have done the thing one ought’ . . . or so says some poet who probably never did it even once."

When they met at the next meal it was Kirk showed all the gaiety. He had been packing his kit, and the sense of movement and change stimulated him as it always did. He was feeling it very true that there is no devil but fear, and so long as he had heard the feet of Fear behind he had run from it. But now he was turned to face it and the grisly dread was gone. Although he knew better than Tamsin what probably awaited him in Dawson he felt steadied, even eager now. His streak of fantastic superstition served him well. He had none of Tamsin’s assurance of immortality, but he felt vaguely that she would arrange it somehow with her gods. It was up to them to do something, he thought, seeing that Tamsin was requiring so many sacrifices of him. He thought of Dierdre’s black thin body shadowed on the wall; of Ooket’s fat little greedy fingers, of Gladys . . . and then he looked across the table at Tamsin and was startled. She looked as though she had passed through fires. She looked a thousand miles away. And then she met his eyes and smiled, and the poignancy of acceptance and grief in her smile filled his eyes up suddenly.

"I’m not worth it," he thought. "I’ve never been worth it."
He said as much when—their few bundles in the bottom of the boat and O’Kane standing on the broken pier to wave good-bye—they pushed off at last into a wind that was moderating rapidly. She glanced round, fitting her oar to the rowlock.

"Always you were the one to shift responsibility, my lad, but ye canna do it now. It’s your own self will be facing the music . . . and you’re glad to be doing it at last, too."

"Why . . . maybe I am," he admitted, staring at her.

This was not the Tamsin who had so lately sat with them at meat. She had had her dark hour and come through it to her heights again, and what she saw from there had put a still and shining glory on her face. Kirk felt a sudden warming content throughout his whole body. He felt safer with Tamsin than he had ever done with himself. She would see him through, keep him a stiff upper lip, go on with him . . . somewhere. Anywhere would be a good place so that he had Tamsin. And she would not fail him.

He bent to the oars, beginning to sing in his strong voice:

"There’s one more river,
And that’s the river of Jordan. . . ."

Tamsin joined him as they pulled out, the boat leaping like a mettlesome pony to their powerful strokes:

"There’s one more river,
One more river to cross."

From the beach of lonely Aroya O’Kane stood watching them until the singing was lost in the beat of the waves on the rocks.

"Good-bye, young blood," he said aloud. And then repeated it. Young blood? Yes, that was it. Young blood, challenging, conquering, expectant, undismayed. It was only weak and chilly blood like his that dreaded the time when that thin trickle should cease. Youth is nearer the eternities from which it comes; hears yet faint echoes of its magic.
“Good-bye,” said O’Kane again, and trod his slow way back into the town.

Although the wind had dropped the lake was rough yet, trying even Tamsin’s practised arms. An hour later, when the lake had narrowed to the river scarlet under a wild sky, she saw the battered hulk of the old Asulkum brown above the green scrub and called to Kirk:

“Let’s stop there a few minutes. Just to stretch our legs.”

“Right-o.”

There was relief from the fitful wind close under the cut-bank, but the heave of the water drove the boat in and out interminably. Kirk waited, whistling between his teeth and managing the oars while Tamsin stood up, the long looped mooring-rope in her hand, ready to jump ashore. She jumped when next the boat swung in; but it leapt back before Kirk could control it, jerking her by the rope into the water. It ran very deep under the bank, and she went right down.

Kirk watched to see her rise laughing and tossing her wet hair from her face as he had seen her so many times. But she did not rise. She stayed down and the rope-end with her. A moment more and he was tearing off his coat, crying: “Tamsin! Tamsin!” And then he dived after her.

An Indian up the river heard that cry blow by him on the wind and saw Kirk dive. But by the time he had paddled his leaky dug-out to the place there was nothing but that tossing boat anchored fast to something unseen below, and so he went on down to Knife and there gave the alarm.

As many as Sheridan would allow came with him in Tommy Tom’s launch, and they did not talk at all. Nor was there more speech than was necessary when, stripping and going down in relays, they chopped and sawed away the fallen tree whose roots and branches had entangled Tamsin. The rope which had slipped round her wrist and caught in a root had done the rest. Kirk’s arms were about her waist and his face showed the strain of his efforts to free her. They had loosed
her from the branches, but nothing short of using that saw on his desperate arms would take her from Kirk now.

"Let her be," said Stewart when they were laid at last on the table in the living-room, with Tamsin’s piano pushed aside and the familiar little Psyche watching them, poised and white, from its top. "Let her be. She belongs to him. Not to me."

Old Mat came crying, and Aggie Colom vociferous, and Mrs. Sheridan set all the Indian children to gathering wild roses.

"The Lord have mercy," she said, her genuine sorrow tempered comfortably with triumph. "I always said she’d leave Stewart, but I was never one to cast stones. I'll give them roses."

The scent of the roses came out to Stewart all night where he sat grey and bleak on the back porch, but not once did he rise and go into the living-room. At dawn he saw a launch come up the river bringing MacDonald, who had been on his way back ever since he heard that Tamsin had gone to Aroya. There were many to meet MacDonald at the landing, but Stewart was not there. He sat where he was until MacDonald, having stayed only a few minutes in the living-room, came out to him. Then he stood up.

"This is your house, MacDonald. I'll go..."

The two gaunt and stricken men looked at each other.

"It’s true, Stewart? She left ye for him, did she?"

"Yes."

"She sinned, then, and the Lord hae been swift tae punish. . . . What wull ye hae dune noo, Stewart? It is your richt tae say."

"I say nothing," said Stewart. "And I have no rights."

"Then I’ll tak them doon tae Carcross. I mind Tamsin said aince that she’d like michty weel tae be buried there."

He went off with his head up. The corner of the washing-tent caught his eye, with a bird singing on the ridge-pole, and
he staggered a moment as though hit by an unseen bullet. "Eh . . . Tamsin . . ." he said, and presently straightened up and marched on.

The old Carcross cemetery is a windy place. Skookum Jim’s white marble monument is well-nigh buried in sand, and the unpainted wood railing round the other graves is all down. But the rabbits still hop and burrow there as Tamsin remembered them, and go at twilight, twitching their long ears, to nibble the pink buds of spring. MacDonald came yearly there while he lived, to clear away the sand and briars from the plain slab of granite with the two names:

MACDONALD’S TAMSIN.

KIRK REGARD.

Once old Mat Colom went with him, and got down on his stiff knees and prayed.

"Lord," he said, "he was a good boy. I made him. I sure did do the best I could for ’em both. Forgive ter them their trespasses, Lord."

But MacDonald’s rigid Puritan creed had no Amen for that.

"As they sowed so wull they reap," he said, "The Lord is just."

It was only Miss Tinney who protested against the kind of reaping which all those who had so loved Tamsin naturally assigned to her. And Knife, going about its business as before, smiled wisely.

"An old maid," they said. "What can she know!"

O’Kane, who came down later to give evidence to a dismayed and sulky Challis cheated of his great coup, had a bland suggestion to make.

"My dear good people! Supposing you abstract the beam from your own eyes before looking for the mote which was
not in theirs," he said, and turned about to hear Miss Tinney saying with a new warmth in her voice:

"I guess you can come along to the road-house an' get a meal, Doctor O'Kane."

O'Kane never left the road-house any more. With his lean limbs wrapped in bearskins he sits by the window, winter and summer, looking out on Tall Thing crowned with snow or burnt by sun. Sometimes he thinks he sees two figures walking on the crest of it, big and shining. But it is only the mist. Sometimes he thinks he hears Tamsin call as he heard her once at Aroya. "I am coming, lover," she says.

But it is only Miss Tinney with his evening basin of gruel. And then they sit and talk of Tamsin.

"I'm a sinful old man, Evelyn, and you're a woman with every right to think the world rather worse than it really is. And yet it appears that we are the only two who understood her. I'll lay she's pulled Regard into heaven by the hair. And got leave for him to play his flute there, too."

"It's always folks as never was tempted is the hardest," remarked Miss Tinney, with the air of one who discovers a new principle in life. "I guess Ida must have been tempted a whole heap, she's that sympathisin', you don't know. . . ."