

***MARAH
ELLIS RYAN***



***THAT
GIRL
MONTANA***

Marah Ellis Ryan

That Girl Montana

Western Novel

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Prologue

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“That girl the murderer of a man—of Lee Holly! That pretty little girl? Bosh! I don’t believe it.”

“I did not say she killed him; I said she was suspected. And even though she was cleared, the death of that renegade adds one more to the mysteries of our new West. But I think the mere suspicion that she did it entitles her to a medal, or an ovation of some sort.”

The speakers were two men in complete hunting costume. That they were strangers in the Northwest was evidenced by the very lively interest they took in each bit of local color in landscape or native humanity. Of the latter, there was a most picturesque variety. There were the Northern red men in their bright blankets, and women, too, with their beadwork and tanned skins for sale. A good market-place for these was this spot where the Kootenai River is touched by the iron road that drives from the lakes to the Pacific. The road runs along our Northern boundary so close that it is called the “Great Northern,” and verily the land it touches is great in its wildness and its beauty.

The two men, with their trophies of elk-horn and beaver paws, with their scarred outfit and a general air of elation gained from a successful “outing,” tramped down to the little station after a last lingering view toward far hunting grounds. While waiting for the train bound eastward, they employed their time in dickering with the Indian moccasin-makers, of whom they bought arrows and gaily painted bows of ash, with which to deck the wall of some far-away city home.

While thus engaged, a little fleet of canoes was sighted skimming down the river from that greater wilderness of the

North, penetrated at that time only by the prospector, or a chance hunter; for the wealth of gold in those high valleys had not yet been more than hinted at, and the hint had not reached the ears of the world.

Even the Indians were aroused from their lethargy, and watched with keen curiosity the approaching canoes. When from the largest there stepped forth a young girl—a rather remarkable-looking young girl—there was a name spoken by a tall Indian boatman, who stood near the two strangers. The Indians nodded their heads, and the name was passed from one to the other—the name 'Tana—a soft, musical name as they pronounced it. One of the strangers, hearing it, turned quickly to a white ranchman, who had a ferry at that turn of the river, and asked if that was the young girl who had helped locate the new gold find at the Twin Springs.

“Likely,” agreed the ranchman. “Word came that she was to cut the diggings and go to school a spell. A Mr. Haydon, who represents a company that’s to work the mine, sent down word that a special party was to go East over the road from here to-day; so I guess she’s one of the specials. She came near going on a special to the New Jerusalem, she did, not many days ago. I reckon you folks heard how Lee Holly—toughest man in the length of the Columbia—was wiped off the living earth by her last week.”

“We heard she was cleared of it,” assented the stranger.

“Yes, so she was, so she was—cleared by an alibi, sworn to by Dan Overton. You don’t know Dan, I suppose? Squarest man you ever met! And he don’t have to scratch gravel any more, either, for he has a third interest in that Twin Spring find, and it pans out big. They say the girl sold her share for two hundred thousand. She doesn’t look top-heavy over it, either.”

And she did not. She walked between two men—one a short, rather pompous elderly man, who bore a slight resemblance to her, and whom she treated rather coolly.

“Of course I am not tired,” she said, in a strong, musical voice. “I have been brought all the way on cushions, so how could I be? Why, I have gone alone in a canoe on a longer trail than we floated over, and I think I will again some day. Max, there is one thing I want in this world, and want bad; that is, to get Mr. Haydon out on a trip where we can’t eat until we kill and cook our dinner. He doesn’t know anything about real comfort; he wants too many cushions.”

The man she called Max bent his head and whispered something to her, at which her face flushed just a little and a tiny wrinkle crept between her straight, beautiful brows.

“I told you not to say pretty things that way, just because you think girls like to hear them. I don’t. Maybe I will when I get civilized; but Mr. Haydon thinks that is a long ways ahead, doesn’t he?” The wrinkle was gone—vanished in a quizzical smile, as she looked up into the very handsome face of the young fellow.

“So do I,” he acknowledged. “I have a strong desire, especially when you snub me, to be the man to take you on a lone trail like that. I will, too, some day.”

“Maybe you will,” she agreed. “But I feel sorry for you beforehand.”

She seemed a tantalizing specimen of girlhood, as she stood there, a slight, brown slip of a thing, dressed in a plain flannel suit, the color of her golden-brown short curls. In her brown cloth hat the wings of a redbird gleamed—the feathers and her lips having all there was of bright color about her; for her face was singularly colorless for so young a girl. The creamy skin suggested a pale-tinted blossom, but not a fragile one; and the eyes—full eyes of wine-brown—looked out with frank daring on the world.

But for all the daring brightness of her glances, it was not a joyous face, such as one would wish a girl of seventeen to possess. A little cynical curve of the red mouth, a little contemptuous glance from those brown eyes, showed one that she took her measurements of individuals by a gauge

of her own, and that she had not that guileless trust in human nature that is supposed to belong to young womanhood. The full expression indicated an independence that seemed a breath caught from the wild beauty of those Northern hills.

Her gaze rested lightly on the two strangers and their trophies of the chase, on the careless ferryman, and the few stragglers from the ranch and the cabins. These last had gathered there to view the train and its people as they passed, for the ties on which the iron rails rested were still of green wood, and the iron engines of transportation were recent additions to those lands of the far North, and were yet a novelty.

Over the faces of the white men her eyes passed carelessly. She did not seem much interested in civilized men, even though decked in finer raiment than was usual in that locality; and, after a cool glance at them all, she walked directly past them and spoke to the tall Indian who had first uttered her name to the others.

His face brightened when she addressed him; but their words were low, as are ever the words of an Indian in converse, low and softly modulated; and the girl did not laugh in the face of the native as she had when the handsome young white man had spoken to her in softened tones.

The two sportsmen gave quickened attention to her as they perceived she was addressing the Indian in his own language. Many gestures of her slim brown hands aided her speech, and as he watched her face, one of the sportsmen uttered the impulsive exclamation at the beginning of this story. It seemed past belief that she could have committed the deed with which her name had been connected, and of which the Kootenai valley had heard a great deal during the week just passed. That it had become the one topic of general interest in the community was due partly to the personality of the girl, and partly to the fact that the

murdered man had been one of the most notorious in all that wild land extending north and west into British Columbia.

Looking at the frank face of the girl and hearing her musical, decided tones, the man had a reasonable warrant for deciding that she was not guilty.

"She is one of the most strongly interesting girls of her age I have ever seen," he decided. "Girls of that age generally lack character. She does not; it impresses itself on a man though she never speak a word to him. Wish she'd favor me with as much of her attention as she gives that hulking redskin."

"It's a 'case,' isn't it?" asked his friend. "You'll be wanting to use her as a centerpiece for your next novel; but you can't make an orthodox heroine of her, for there must have been some reason for the suspicion that she helped him 'over the range,' as they say out here. There must have been something socially and morally wrong about the fact that he was found dead in her cabin. No, Harvey; you'd better write up the inert, inoffensive red man on his native heath, and let this remarkable young lady enjoy her thousands in modest content—if the ghosts let her."

"Nonsense!" said the other man, with a sort of impatience. "You jump too quickly to the conclusion that there must be wrong where there is suspicion. But you have put an idea into my mind as to the story. If I can ever learn the whole history of this affair, I will make use of it, and I'm not afraid of finding my pretty girl in the wrong, either."

"I knew from the moment we heard who she was that your impressionable nature would fall a victim, but you can't write a story of her alone; you will want your hero and one or two other people. I suppose, now, that very handsome young fellow with the fastidious get-up will about suit you for the hero. He does look rather lover-like when he addresses your girl with the history. Will you pair them off?"

"I will let you know a year from now," returned the man called Harvey. "But just now I am going to pay my respects to the very well-fed looking elderly gentleman. He seems to be the chaperon of the party. I have acquired a taste for trailing things during our thirty days hunt in these hills, and I'm going to trail this trio, with the expectation of bagging a romance."

His friend watched him approach the elder gentleman, and was obviously doubtful of the reception he would get, for the portly, prosperous-looking individual did not seem to have been educated in that generous Western atmosphere, where a man is a brother if he acts square and speaks fair. Conservatism was stamped in the deep corners of his small mouth, on the clean-shaven lips, and the correctly cut side-whiskers that added width to his fat face.

But the journalist proper, the world over, is ever a bit of a diplomat. He has won victories over so many conservative things, and is daunted by few. When Harvey found himself confronted by a monocle through which he was coolly surveyed, it did not disturb him in the least (beyond making it difficult to retain a grave demeanor at the lively interest shown by the Indians in that fashionable toy).

"Yes, sir—yes, sir; I am T. J. Haydon, of Philadelphia," acknowledged he of the glass disc, "but I don't know you, sir."

"I shall be pleased to remedy that if you will allow me," returned the other, suavely, producing a card which he offered for examination. "You are, no doubt, acquainted with the syndicate I represent, even if my name tells you nothing. I have been hunting here with a friend for a month, and intend writing up the resources of this district. I have a letter of introduction to your partner, Mr. Seldon, but did not follow the river so far as to reach your works, though I've heard a good deal about them, and imagine them interesting."

“Yes, indeed; very interesting—very interesting from a sportsman’s or mineralogist’s point of view,” agreed the older man, as he twirled the card in a disturbed, uncertain way. “Do you travel East, Mr.—Mr. Harvey? Yes? Well, let me introduce Mr. Seldon’s nephew—he’s a New Yorker—Max Lyster. Wait a minute and I’ll get him away from those beastly Indians. I never can understand the attraction they have for the average tourist.”

But when he reached Lyster he said not a word of the despised reds; he had other matters more important.

“Here, Max! A most annoying thing has happened,” he said, hurriedly. “Those two men are newspaper fellows, and one is going East on our train. Worse still—the one knows people I know. Gad! I’d rather lose a thousand dollars than meet them now! And you must come over and get acquainted. They’ve been here a month, and are to write accounts of the life and country. That means they have been here long enough to hear all about ‘Tana and that Holly. Do you understand? You’ll have to treat them well,—the best possible—pull wires even if it costs money, and fix it so that a record of this does not get into the Eastern papers. And, above and beyond everything else, so long as we are in this depraved corner of the country, you must keep them from noticing that girl Montana.”

The young man looked across at the girl, and smiled doubtfully.

“I’m willing to undertake any possible thing for you,” he said; “but, my dear sir, to keep people from noticing ‘Tana is one of the things beyond my power. And if she gives notice to all the men who will notice her, I’ve an idea jealousy will turn my hair gray early. But come on and introduce your man, and don’t get in a fever over the meeting. I am so fortunate as to know more of the journalistic fraternity than you, and I happen to be aware that they are generally gentlemen. Therefore, you’d better not drop any hints to them of monetary advantages in exchange for silence

unless you want to be beautifully roasted by a process only possible in printer's ink."

The older man uttered an exclamation of impatience, as he led his young companion over to the sportsmen, who had joined each other again; and as he effected the introduction, his mind was sorely upset by dread of the two gentlemanly strangers and 'Tana.

'Tana was most shamelessly continuing her confidences with the tall Indian, despite the fact that she knew it was a decided annoyance to her principal escort. Altogether the evening was a trying one to Mr. T. J. Haydon.

The sun had passed far to the west, and the shadows were growing longer under the hills there by the river. Clear, red glints fell across the cool ripples of the water, and slight chill breaths drifted down the ravines and told that the death of summer was approaching.

Some sense of the beauty of the dying October day seemed to touch the girl, for she walked a little apart and picked a spray of scarlet maple leaves and looked from them to the hills and the beautiful valley, where the red and the yellow were beginning to crowd out the greens. Yes, the summer was dying—dying! Other summers would come in their turn, but none quite the same. The girl showed all the feeling of its loss in her face. In her eyes the quick tears came, as she looked at the mountains. The summer was dying; it was autumn's colors she held in her hand, and she shivered, though she stood in the sunshine.

As she turned toward the group again, she met the eyes of the stranger to whom Max was talking. He seemed to have been watching her with a great deal of interest, and her hand was raised to her eyes, lest a trace of tears should prove food for curiosity.

"It was to one of Akkomi's relations I was talking," she remarked to Mr. Haydon, when he questioned her. "His little grandson is sick, and I would like to send him something. I

haven't money enough in my pocket, and wish you would get me some."

After taking some money out of his purse for her, he eyed the tall savage with disfavor.

"He'll buy bad whisky with it," he grumbled.

"No, he will not," contradicted the girl. "If a person treats these Indians square, he can trust them. But if a lie is told them, or a promise broken—well, they get even by tricking you if they can, and I can't say that I blame them. But they won't trick me, so don't worry; and I'm as sure the things will go to that little fellow safely as though I took them."

She was giving the money and some directions to the Indian, when a word from a squaw drew her attention to the river.

A canoe had just turned the bend not a quarter of a mile away, and was skimming the water with the swiftness of a swallow's dart. Only one man was in it, and he was coming straight for the landing.

"Some miner rushing down to see the train go by," remarked Mr. Haydon; but the girl did not answer. Her face grew even more pale, and her hands clasped each other nervously.

"Yes," said the Indian beside her, and nodded to her assuringly. Then the color swept upward over her face as she met his kindly glance, and drawing herself a little straighter, she walked indifferently away.

The stolid red man did not look at all snubbed; he only pocketed the money she had given him, and looked after her with a slight smile, accented more by the deepening wrinkles around his black eyes than by any change about the lips.

Then there was a low rumbling sound borne on the air, and as the muffled whistle of the unseen train came to them from the wilderness to the west, with one accord the Indians turned their attention to their wares, and the white people to their baggage. When the train slowed up Mr. Haydon,

barely waiting for the last revolution of the wheels, energetically hastened the young girl up the steps of the car nearest them.

“What’s the hurry?” she asked, with a slight impatience.

“I think,” he replied quickly, “there is but a short stop made at this station, and as there are several vacant seats in this car, please occupy one of them until I have seen the conductor. There may be some changes made as to the compartments engaged for us. Until that is decided, will you be so kind as to remain in this coach?”

She nodded rather indifferently, and looked around for Max. He was gathering up some robes and satchels when the older man joined him.

“We are not going to make the trip to Chicago in the car with those fellows if it can be helped, Max,” he insisted, fussily; “we’ll wait and see what car they are booked for, and I’ll arrange for another. Sorry I did not get a special, as I first intended.”

“But see here; they are first-class fellows—worth one’s while to meet,” protested Max; but the other shook his head.

“Look after the baggage while I see the conductor. ‘Tana is in one of the cars—don’t know which. We’ll go for her when we get settled. Now, don’t argue. Time is too precious.”

And ‘Tana! She seated herself rather sulkily, as she was told, and looked at once toward the river.

The canoe was landing, and the man jumped to the shore. With quick, determined strides, he came across the land to the train. She tried to follow him with her eyes, but he crossed to the other side of the track.

There was rather a boisterous party in the car—two men and two women. One of the latter, a flaxen-haired, petite creature, was flitting from one side of the car to the other, making remarks about the Indians, admiring particularly one

boy's beaded dress, and garnishing her remarks with a good deal of slang.

"Say, Chub! that boy's suit would be a great 'make-up' for me in that new turn—the jig, you know; new, too. There isn't a song-and-dance on the boards done with Indian make-up. Knock them silly in the East, where they don't see reds. Now sing out, and tell me if it wouldn't make a hit."

"Aw, Goldie, give us a rest on shop talk," growled the gentleman called Chub. "If you'd put a little more ginger into the good specialty you have, instead of depending on wardrobe, you'd hit 'em hard enough. It ain't plans that count, girly—it's work."

The "girly" addressed accepted the criticism with easy indifference, and her fair, dissipated face was only twisted in a grimace, while she held one hand aloft and jingled the bangles on her bracelets as though poising a tambourine.

"Better hustle yourself into the smoker again, Chubby dear. It will take a half-dozen more cigars to put you in your usual sweet frame of mind. Run along now. Ta-ta!"

The other woman seemed to think their remarks very witty, especially when Chub really did arise and make his way toward the smoker. Goldie then went back to the window, where the Indians were to be seen. The quartet were, to judge by their own frank remarks, a party of variety singers and dancers who had been doing the Pacific circuit, and were now booked for some Eastern houses, of which they spoke as "solid."

Some of the passengers had got out and were buying little things from the Indians, as souvenirs of the country. 'Tana saw Mr. Haydon among them, in earnest conversation with the conductor; saw Max, with his hand full of satchels, suddenly reach out the other hand with a great deal of heartiness and meet the man of the canoe.

He was not so handsome a man as Max, yet would have been noticeable anywhere—tall, olive-skinned, and dark-haired. His dress had not the fashionable cut of the young

fellow he spoke to. But he wore his buckskin jacket with a grace that bespoke physical strength and independence; and when he pushed his broad-brimmed gray hat back from his face, he showed a pair of dark eyes that had a very direct glance. They were serious, contemplative eyes, that to some might look even moody.

"There is a fellow with a great figure," remarked the other woman of the quartet; "that fellow with the sombrero; built right up from the ground, and looks like a picture; don't he, Charlie?"

"I can't see him," complained Goldie, "but suppose it's one of the ranchmen who live about here." Then she turned and donated a brief survey to 'Tana. "Do you live in this region?" she asked.

After a deliberate, contemptuous glance from the questioner's frizzed head to her little feet, 'Tana answered:

"No; do you?"

With this curt reply, she turned her shoulder very coolly on the searcher for information.

Vexation sent the angry blood up into the little woman's face. She looked as though about to retort, when a gentleman who had just taken possession of a compartment, and noted all that had passed, came forward and addressed our heroine.

"Until your friends come in, will you not take my seat?" he asked, courteously. "I will gladly make the exchange, or go for Mr. Lyster or Mr. Haydon, if you desire it."

"Thank you; I will take your seat," she agreed. "It is good of you to offer it."

"Say, folks, I'm going outside to take in this free Wild West show," called the variety actress to her companions. "Come along?"

But they declined. She had reached the platform alone, when, coming toward the car, she saw the man of the sombrero, and shrank back with a gasp of utter dismay.

"Oh, good Heaven!" she muttered, and all the color and bravado were gone from her face, as she shrank back out of his range of vision and almost into the arms of the man Harvey, who had given the other girl his seat.

"What's up?" he asked, bluntly.

She only gave a muttered, unintelligible reply, pushed past him to her own seat, where her feather-laden hat was donned with astonishing rapidity, a great cloak was thrown around her, and she sank into a corner, a huddled mass of wraps and feathers. Any one could have walked along the aisle without catching even a glimpse of her flaxen hair.

'Tana and the stranger exchanged looks of utter wonder at the lightning change effected before their eyes.

At that moment a tap-tap sounded on the window beside 'Tana, and, looking around, she met the dark eyes of the man with the sombrero gazing kindly upward at her.

The people were getting aboard the train again—the time was so short—so short! and how can one speak through a double glass? The fingers were all unequal to the fastening of the window, and she turned an imploring, flushed face to the helpful stranger.

"Can you—oh, will you, please?" she asked, breathlessly. "Thank you, I'm very much obliged."

Then the window was raised, and her hand thrust out to the man, who was bareheaded now, and who looked very much as though he held the wealth of the world when he clasped only 'Tana's fingers.

"Oh, it is you, is it?" she asked, with a rather lame attempt at careless speech. "I thought you had forgotten to say good-by to me."

"You knew better," he contradicted. "You knew—you know now it wasn't because I forgot."

He looked at her moodily from under his dark brows, and noticed the color flutter over her cheek and throat in an adorable way. She had drawn her hand from him, and it rested on the window—a slim brown hand, with a curious

ring on one finger—two tiny snakes whose jeweled heads formed the central point of attraction.

“You said you would not wear that again. If it’s a hoodoo, as you thought, why not throw it away?” he asked.

“Oh—I’ve changed my mind. I need to wear it so that I will be reminded of something—something important as a hoodoo,” she said, with a strange, bitter smile.

“Give it back to me, ‘Tana,” he urged. “I will—No—Max will have something much prettier for you. And listen, my girl. You are going away; don’t ever come back; forget everything here but the money that will be yours for the claim. Do you understand me? Forget all I said to you when—you know. I had no right to say it; I must have been drunk. I—I lied, anyway.”

“Oh, you lied, did you?” she asked, cynically, and her hands were clasped closely, so close the ring must have hurt her. He noticed it, and kept his eyes on her hand as he continued, doggedly:

“Yes. You see, little girl, I thought I’d own up before you left, so you wouldn’t be wasting any good time in being sorry about the folks back here. It wasn’t square for me to trouble you as I did. And—I lied. I came down to say that.”

“You needn’t have troubled yourself,” she said, curtly. “But I see you can tell lies. I never would have believed it if I hadn’t heard you. But I guess, after all, I will give you the ring. You might want it to give to some one else—perhaps your wife.”

The bell was ringing and the wheels began slowly to revolve. She pulled the circlet from her finger and almost flung it at him.

“‘Tana!” and all of keen appeal was in his voice and his eyes, “little girl—good-by!”

But she turned away her head. Her hand, however, reached out and the spray of autumn leaves fluttered to his feet where the ring lay.

Then the rumble of the moving train sounded through the valley, and the girl turned to find Max, Mr. Haydon and a porter approaching, to convey her to the car ahead. Mr. Haydon's face was a study of dismay at the sight of Mr. Harvey closing the window and showing evident interest in 'Tana's comfort.

"So Dan did get down to see you off, 'Tana?" observed Max, as he led her along the aisle. "Dear old fellow! how I did try to coax him into coming East later; but it was of no use. He gave me some flowers for you—wild beauties. He never seemed to say much, 'Tana, but I've an idea you'll never have a better friend in your life than that same old Dan."

Mr. Harvey watched their exit, and smiled a little concerning Mr. Haydon's evident annoyance. He watched, also, the flaxen-haired bundle in the corner, and saw the curious, malignant look with which she followed 'Tana, and to his friend he laughed over his triumph in exchanging speech with the pretty, peculiar girl in brown.

"And the old party looked terribly fussy over it. In fact, I've about sifted out the reason. He imagines me a newspaper reporter on the alert for sensations. He's afraid his stupidly respectable self may be mentioned in a newspaper article concerning this local tragedy they all talk about. Why, bless his pocket-book! if I ever use pen and ink on that girl's story, it will not be for a newspaper article."

"Then you intend to tell it?" asked his friend. "How will you learn it?"

"I do not know yet. The 'how' does not matter; I'll tell you on paper some day."

"And write up that handsome Lyster as the hero?"

"Perhaps."

Then a bend of the road brought them again in sight of the river of the Kootenais. Here and there the canoes of the Indians were speeding across at the ferry. But one canoe

alone was moving north; not very swiftly, but almost as though drifting with the current.

Using his field-glass, Harvey found it was as he had thought. The occupant of the solitary canoe was the tall man whose dark face had impressed the theatrical lady so strongly. He was not using the paddle, and his chin was resting on one clenched hand, while in the other he held something to which he was giving earnest attention.

It was a spray of bright-colored leaves, and the watcher dropped his glass with a guilty feeling.

"He brings her flowers, and gets in return only dead leaves," Harvey thought, grimly. "I didn't hear a word he said to her; but his eyes spoke strongly enough, poor devil! I wonder if she sees him, too."

And all through the evening, and for many a day, the picture remained in his mind. Even when he wrote the story that is told in these pages, he could never find words to express the utter loneliness of that life, as it seemed to drift away past the sun-touched ripples of water into that vast, shadowy wilderness to the north.

Chapter I.

A Strange Girl

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“Well, by the help of either her red gods or devils, she can swim, anyway!”

This explosive statement was made one June morning on the banks of the Kootenai, and the speaker, after a steady gaze, relinquished his field-glass to the man beside him.

“Can she make it?” he asked.

A grunt was the only reply given him. The silent watcher was too much interested in the scene across the water.

Shouts came to them—the yells of frightened Indian children; and from the cone-shaped dwellings, up from the water, the Indian women were hurrying. One, reaching the shore first, sent up a shrill cry, as she perceived that, from the canoe where the children played, one had fallen over, and was being swept away by that swift-rushing, chill water, far out from the reaching hands of the others.

Then a figure lolling on the shore farther down stream than the canoe sprang erect at the frightened scream.

One quick glance showed the helplessness of those above, and another the struggling little form there in the water—the little one who turned such wild eyes toward the shore, and was the only one of them all who was not making some outcry.

The white men, who were watching from the opposite side, could see shoes flung aside quickly; a jacket dropped on the shore; and then down into the water a slight figure darted with the swiftness of a kingfisher, and swam out to the little fellow who had struggled to keep his head above water, but was fast growing helpless in the chill of the mountain river.

Then it was that Mr. Maxwell Lyster commented on the physical help lent by the gods of the red people, as the ability of any female to swim thus lustily in spite of that icy current seemed to his civilized understanding a thing superhuman. Of course, bears and other animals of the woods swam it at all seasons, when it was open; but to see a woman dash into it like that! Well, it sent a shiver over him to think of it.

"They'll both get chilled and drop to the bottom!" he remarked, with irritated concern. "Of course there are enough of the red vagabonds in this new El Dorado of yours, without that particular squaw. But it would be a pity that so plucky a one should be translated."

Then a yell of triumph came from the other shore. A canoe had been loosened, and was fairly flying over the water to where the child had been dragged to the surface, and the rescuer was holding herself up by the slow efforts of one arm, but could make no progress with her burden.

"That's no squaw!" commented the other man, who had been looking through the glass.

"Why, Dan!"

"It's no squaw, I tell you," insisted the other, with the superior knowledge of a native. "Thought so the minute I saw her drop the shoes and jacket that way. She didn't make a single Indian move. It's a white woman!"

"Queer place for a white woman, isn't it?"

The man called Dan did not answer. The canoe had reached that figure in the water and the squaw in it lifted the now senseless child and laid him in the bottom of the light craft.

A slight altercation seemed going on between the woman in the water and the one in the boat. The former was protesting against being helped on board—the men could see that by their gestures. She finally gained her point, for the squaw seized the paddle and sent the boat shoreward with all the strength of her brown arms, while the one in the

water held on to the canoe and was thus towed back, where half the Indian village had now swarmed to receive them.

"She's got sand and sense," and Dan nodded his appreciation of the towing process; "for, chilled as she must be, the canoe would more than likely have turned over if she had tried to climb into it. Look at the pow-wow they are kicking up! That little red devil must count for big stakes with them."

"But the woman who swam after him. See! they try to stand her on her feet, but she can't walk. There! she's on the ground again. I'd give half my supper to know if she has killed herself with that ice-bath."

"Maybe you can eat all your supper and find out, too," observed the other, with a shrug of his shoulders, and a quizzical glance at his companion, "unless even the glimpse of a petticoat has chased away your appetite. You had better take some advice from an old man, Max, and swear off approaching females in this country, for the specimens you'll find here aren't things to make you proud they're human."

"An old man!" repeated Mr. Lyster with a smile of derision. "You must be pretty near twenty-eight years old—aren't you, Dan? and just about five years older than myself. And what airs you do assume in consequence! With all the weight of those years," he added, slowly, "I doubt, Mr. Dan Overton, if you have really *lived* as much as I have."

One glance of the dark eyes was turned on the speaker for an instant, and then the old felt hat again shaded them as he continued watching the group on the far shore. The swimmer had been picked up by a stalwart Indian woman, and was carried bodily up to one of the lodges, while another squaw—evidently the mother—carried the little redskin who had caused all the commotion.

"I suppose, by living, you mean the life of settlements—or, to condense the question still more, the life of cities," continued Overton, stretching himself lazily on the bank.

“You mean the life of a certain set in one certain city—New York, for instance,” and he grinned at the expression of impatience on the face of the other. “Yes, I reckon New York is about the one, and a certain part of the town to live in. A certain gang of partners, who have a certain man to make their clothes and boots and hats, and stamp his name on the inside of them, so that other folks can see, when you take off your coat, or your hat, or your gloves, that they were made at just the right place. This makes you a man worth knowing—isn’t that about the idea? And in the afternoon, at just about the right hour, you rig yourself out in a certain cut of coat, and stroll for an hour or so on a certain street! In the evening—if a man wants to understand just what it is to live—he must get into other clothes and drop into the theater, making a point of being introduced to any heavy swell within reach, so you can speak of it afterward, you know. Just as your chums like to say they had a supper with a pretty actress, after the curtain went down; but they don’t go into details, and own up that the ‘actress’ maybe never did anything on a stage but walk on in armor and carry a banner. Oh, scowl if you want to! Of course it sounds shoddy when a trapper outlines it; but it doesn’t seem shoddy to the people who live like that. Then, about the time that all good girls are asleep, it is just the hour for a supper to be ordered, at just the right place for the wine to be good, and the dishes served in A1 shape, with a convenient waiter who knows how dim to make the lights, and how to efface himself, and let you wait on your ‘lady’ with your own hands. And she’ll go home wearing a ring of yours—two, if you have them; and you’ll wake up at noon next day, and think what a jolly time you had, but with your head so muddled that you can’t remember where it was you were to meet her the next night, or whether it was the next night that her husband was to be home, and she couldn’t see you at all.” Overton rolled over on his face and grunted

disdainfully, saying: "That's about the style of thing you call *living*, don't you, sonny?"

"Great Scott, Dan!" and the "sonny" addressed stared at him in perplexity, "one never knows what to expect of you. Of course there is *some* truth in the sketch you make; but—but I thought you had never ranged to the East?"

"Did you? Well, I don't look as if I'd ever ranged beyond the timber, do I?" and he stretched out his long legs with their shabby coverings, and stuck his fingers through a hole in his hat. "This outfit doesn't look as if the hands of a Broadway tailor had ever touched it. But, my boy, the sketch you speak of would be just as true to life among a certain set in any large city of the States; only in the West, or even in the South, those ambitious sports would know enough to buy a horse on their own judgment, if they wanted to ride. Or would bet on the races without hustling around to find some played-out jockey who would give them tips."

"Well, to say the least, your opinion is not very flattering to us," remarked the young man, moodily. "You've got some grudge against the East, I guess."

"Grudge? Not any. And you're all right, Max. You will find thousands willing to keep to your idea of life, so we won't split on that wedge. My old stepdad would chime in with you if he were here. He prates about civilization and Eastern culture till I get weary sometimes. Culture! Wait till you see him. He's all right in his way, of course; but as I cut loose from home when only fifteen, and never ran across the old man again until two years ago—well, you see, I can make my estimates in that direction without being biased by family feeling. And I reckon he does the same thing. I don't know what to expect when I go back this time; but, from signs around camp when I left, I wouldn't be surprised if he presented me with a stepmother on my return."

"A stepmother? Whew!" whistled the other. "Well, that shows there are some white women in your region,

anyway."

"Oh, yes, we have several. This particular one is a Pennsylvania product; talks through her nose, and eats with her knife, and will maybe try to make eyes at you and keep you in practice. But she is a good, square woman; simply one of the many specimens that drift out here. Came up from Helena with the 'boom,' and started a milliner store—a milliner store in the bush, mind you! But after the Indians had bought all the bright feathers and artificial flowers, she changed her sign, and keeps an eating-house now. It is the high-toned corner of the camp. She can cook some; and I reckon that's what catches the old man."

"Any more interesting specimens like that?"

"Not like that," returned Overton; "but there are some more."

Then he arose, and stood listening to sounds back in the wild forests.

"I hear the 'cayuse' bell," he remarked; "so the others are coming. We'll go back up to the camp, and, after 'chuck,' we'll go over and give you a nearer view of the tribe on the other shore, if you want to add them to the list of your sight-seeing."

"Certainly I do. They'll be a relief after the squads of railroad section hands we've been having for company lately. They knocked all the romance out of the wildly beautiful country we've been coming through since we left the Columbia River."

"Come back next year; then a boat will be puffing up here to the landing, and you can cross to the Columbia in a few hours, for the road will be completed then."

"And you—will you be here then?"

"Well—yes; I reckon so. I never anchor anywhere very long; but this country suits me, and the company seems to need me."

The young fellow looked at him and laughed, and dropped his hand on the broad shoulder with a certain

degree of affection.

"Seems to need you?" he repeated. "Well, Mr. Dan Overton, if the day ever comes when *I'm* necessary to the welfare of a section as large as a good-sized State, I hope I'll know enough to appreciate my own importance."

"Hope you will," said Overton, with a kindly smile. "No reason why you should not be of use. Every man with a fair share of health and strength ought to be of use somewhere."

"Yes, that sounds all right and is easy to grasp, if you have been brought up with the idea. But suppose you had been trained by a couple of maiden aunts who only thought to give you the manners of a gentleman, and leave you their money to get through the world with? I guess, under such circumstances, you, too, might have settled into the feathery nest prepared for you, and thought you were doing your duty to the world if you were only ornamental," and the dubious smile on his really handsome face robbed the speech of any vanity.

"You're all right, I tell you," returned the other. "Don't growl at yourself so much. You'll find your work and buckle down to it, some of these days. Maybe you'll find it out here—who knows? Of course Mr. Seldon would see to it that you got any post you would want in this district."

"Yes, he's a jolly old fellow, and has shown me a lot of favors. Seems to me relatives mean more to folks out here than they do East, because so few have their families or relatives along, I guess. If it had not been for Seldon, I rather think I would not have had the chance of this wild trip with you."

"Likely not. I don't generally want a tenderfoot along when I've work to do. No offense, Max; but they are too often a hindrance. Now that you have come, though, I'll confess I'm glad of it. The lonely trips over this wild region tend to make a man silent—a bear among people when he does reach a camp. But we've talked most of the time, and I

reckon I feel the better of it. I know I'll miss you when I go over this route again. You'll be on your way East by that time."

The "cayuse" bell sounded nearer and nearer, and directly from the dense forest a packhorse came stepping with care over the fallen logs, where the sign of a trail was yet dim to any eyes but those of a woodsman. A bell at its neck tinkled as it walked, and after it four others followed, all with heavy loads bound to their backs. It looked strange to see the patient animals thus walk without guide or driver through the dense timber of the mountains; but a little later voices were heard, and two horsemen came out of the shadows of the wood, and followed the horses upward along the bank of the river to where a little stream of fresh water tumbled down to the Kootenai. There a little camp was located, an insignificant gathering of tents, but one that meant a promising event to the country, for it was to be the connecting point of the boats that would one day float from the States on the river, and the railroad that would ere long lead westward over the trail from which the packhorses were bringing supplies.

The sun was setting and all the ripples of the river shone red in its reflected light. Forests of pine loomed up black and shadowy above the shores; and there, higher up—up where the snow was, all tips of the river range were tinged a warm pink, and where the shadows lay, the lavender and faint purples drifted into each other, and bit by bit crowded the pink line higher and higher until it dared touch only the topmost peaks with its lingering kiss.

Lyster halted to look over the wild beauty of the wilderness, and from the harmony of river and hills and sky his eyes turned to Overton.

"You are right, Dan," he said, with an appreciative smile, a smile that opened his lips and showed how perfect the mouth was under the brown mustache—"you are right enough to keep close to all these beauties. You seem in

some way to belong to them—not that you are so much ‘a thing of beauty’ yourself,” and the smile widened a little; “but you have in you all the strength of the hills and the patience of the wilderness. You know what I mean.”

“Yes, I guess so,” answered Overton. “You want some one to spout verses to or make love to, and there is no subject handy. I can make allowances for you, though. Those tendencies are apt to stick to a man for about a year after a trip to Southern California. I don’t know whether it’s the girls down there, or the wine that is accountable for it; but whatever it is, you have been back from there only three months. You’ve three-quarters of a year to run yet—maybe more; for I’ve a notion that you have a leaning in that direction even in your most sensible moments.”

“H’m! You must have made a trip to that wine country yourself sometime,” observed Lyster. “Your theory suggests practice. Were there girls and wine there then?”

“Plenty,” returned Overton, briefly. “Come on. There’s the cook shouting supper.”

“And after supper we’re to go over to the Kootenai camp. Say! what is the meaning of that name, anyway? You know all their jargons up here; do you know that, too?”

“Nobody does, I reckon; there are lots of theories flying around. The generally accepted one is that they were called the ‘*Court Nez*’ by the French trappers long ago, and that Kootenai is the result, after generations of Indian pronunciation. They named the ‘*Nez Perces*,’ too—the ‘pierced noses,’ you know; but that name has kept its meaning better. You’ll find the trail of the French all through the Indian tribes up here.”

“Think that was a Frenchwoman in the river back there? You said she was white.”

“Yes, I did. But it’s generally the Frenchmen you find among the reds, and not the women; though I do know some square white women across the line who have married educated Indians.”

“But they are generally a lazy, shiftless set?”

The tone was half inquiring, and Overton grimaced and smiled.

“They are not behind the rest, when it comes to a fight,” he answered. “And as to lazy—well, there are several colors of people who are that, under some circumstances. I have an Indian friend across in the States, who made eight thousand dollars in a cattle deal last year, and didn’t sell out, either. Now, when you and I can do as well on capital we’ve earned ourselves, then maybe we’ll have a right to criticise some of the rest for indolence. But you can’t do much to improve Indians, or any one else, by penning them up in so many square miles and bribing them to be good. The Indian cattleman I speak of kept clear of the reservation, and after drifting around for a while, settled down to the most natural civilized calling possible to an Indian—stock-raising. Dig in the ground? No; they won’t do much of that, just at first. But I’ve eaten some pretty good garden truck they’ve raised.”

Lyster whistled and arched his handsome brows significantly.

“So your sympathies run in that direction, do they? Is there a Kootenai Pocahontas somewhere in the wilderness accountable for your ideas? That is about the only ground I could excuse you on, for I think they are beastly, except in pictures.”

They had reached a gathering of men who were seated at a table in the open air—some long boards laid on trestles.

Overton and his friend were called to seats at the head of the table, where the “boss” of the construction gang sat. The rough pleasantries of the men, and the way they made room for him, showed that the big bronzed ranger was a favorite visitor along the “works.”

They looked with some curiosity at his more finely garbed companion, but he returned their regard with a good deal of careless audacity, and won their liking by his

independence. But in the midst of the social studies he was making of them, he heard Overton say:

“And you have not heard of a white girl in this vicinity?”

“Never a girl. Are you looking for one? Old Akkomi, the Indian, has gone into camp across the river, and he might have a red one to spare.”

“Perhaps,” agreed Overton. “He’s an old acquaintance of mine—a year old. But I’m not looking for red girls just now, and I’m going to tell the old man to keep the families clear of your gang, too.” Then to Lyster he remarked:

“Whether these people know it or not, there is a white girl in the Indian camp—a young girl, too; and before we sleep, we’ll see who she is.”