



CHAPTER I.—John Gale is a trader at Flambeau, a rough outpost of civilization in Alaska. His daughter Necla is a beautiful young girl, generally believed to be a half breed, daughter of Gale and the Indian squaw Alluna, with whom he lives. Some hidden burden weighs continually on the trader's mind, and he views with apprehension the arrival of a squad of soldiers at Flambeau. "That means the law," he says uneasily to Necla, who has become acquainted with and admired by Lieutenant Burrell, commander of the soldiers. II.—It becomes known that Napoleon Doret, an honest, faithful French Canadian employed by Gale, is deeply in love with Necla. One Runnion, a dissolute gambler and "bad man," arrives at Flambeau with steamer and in a fight with Burrell is worsted and forced to leave the town. On the departing steamer's deck he menacingly says, "I will return to take a hand in the game." III.—Doret gives Necla a handsome silk gown brought by him from Dawson City for her. Arrayed in this, she meets Lieutenant Burrell, who falls madly in love with her, and he wonders if her blood is really tainted. Gale reassures that she is the illegitimate daughter of himself and the squaw. IV.—Runnion returns with Ben Stark, a professional gambler and man killer with plenty of money. Stark builds a saloon and dance hall at Flambeau. "No Creek" Lee discovers gold in a valley some miles distant, and Necla persuades Burrell to take her there and locate a claim for her, their trip requiring a day and a night in the forest. V., VI. and VII.—Gale, Lee, Runnion and Stark have gone together to the site of Lee's discovery to locate claims. They are met by Necla and Burrell

and a bitter quarrel ensues. Runnion and Stark conspire to rob Necla of her claims. Runnion wants the girl, and Stark finds that Necla has a strange, unexplainable fascination for him. His baby daughter had been stolen years before. Burrell becomes the declared enemy of both Stark and Runnion. A gun held by Gale is discharged, the bullet accidentally, he claims, narrowly missing Stark. VIII.—Gale knows Stark to be an old enemy of his and father of Necla, and Alluna, his squaw, says "Kill Stark. Take the knife of my father. To kill is the law." IX., X., XI., XII. and XIII.—Necla, believing herself a half breed, fears she cannot marry Burrell, whom she loves, as she learns that her tainted blood will bar her from meeting the people he naturally associates with, and she overhears Burrell say he may not marry her after all. Stark persuades her to leave Flambeau after he discovers her to be his daughter. XIV.—Gale tells Burrell of Necla's past and that Stark has hounded him from one section of the country to another and that Stark does not now recognize him as Gale. XV. and XVI.—Stark sends Necla away in a boat with a man she later discovers to be the villain Runnion, and Stark, learning Gale's identity, wants Burrell to arrest him. Stark goes to his own house and there, meeting Gale, engages in a fearful duel in the dark and is nearly killed by the trader. XVII.—Napoleon Doret rescues Necla from Runnion and leaves the latter to die a horrible death. XVIII.—Father Barnum arrives and marries Necla and Burrell. XIX.—Doret, "the man with the big heart," sails away alone to forget his sorrows in the wilderness.

CHAPTER XI. WHERE THE PATH LED. AND now began a new era for Flambeau—an era of industry such as the frontier town had never known. The woods behind rang with the resounding discords of axes and saws and crashing timber, and new cabins appeared on every hand, rising in a day. A dozen tents were pitched on Lee's discovery claim, for the owner had been besieged by men who clamored to lease a part of his ground, and, yielding finally, he had allotted to each of them a hundred feet. Forthwith they set about opening their portions, for the ground was shallow and the gold so near the surface that winter would interfere with its extraction, wherefore they made haste. The owner oversaw them all, complacent in the certainty of a steady royalty accruing from the working of his allotments. Burrell sought Necla at an early day and, in presence of her father, told

Burrell entered into a season of penance and flagellation of spirit, lightened only by the moments when he was with Necla and when she made him forget all else. This damnable indecision goaded him to self contempt. He despised himself for his weakness. His social instincts and training, his sense of duty and the amenities of life that proud men hold dear tugged steadily, untiringly at his reason, while the little imp of impulse sat grinning wickedly, ready to pop out and upset all his high resolutions. It was on a heavenly day, spiced with the faintest hint of autumn, that Necla received the news of her good fortune. One of her leasers came into the post to show her and Poleon a bag of dust. He and his partner had found the pay streak finally, and he had come to notify her that it gave promise of being very rich, and now that its location was demonstrated no doubt the other "laymen" would have it within a fortnight. As all of them were ready to begin sluicing as soon as the ground could be stripped, undoubtedly they would be able to take out a substantial stake before winter settled and the first frost closed them down. She took the news quietly, but with shining eyes, though her pleasure was no greater or more genuine than Poleon's, who grasped both her hands in his and shouted gleefully: "Blen! I'm glad! You'll be rich gal for sure now an' wear plaineet fine dress lak I fetch you. Jus' t'ink, you fin' gol' on your place more queecker dan your fader, an' he's good miner too. Ha! Dat's bully!" "Oh, well, they will find it on your claims very soon," she replied. He shook his head. "You better knock wood w'en you say dat. Mebbe I draw de blank again. Nobody can't tell. I've do de sam' t'ing before, an' dose men w'at been workin' my groun' dey're gettin' purty blue."



her that he had been approached by men who wished to lease the claims he held for her. It would prove an inexpensive way to develop her holdings, he said, and she would run no risks. Moreover, it would be rapid and insure a quick return, for a lease so near to proved territory was in great demand. After some discussion this was arranged, and Meade as trustee allotted her ground in tracts, as Lee had done. Poleon followed suit, but the trader chose to prospect his own claims and to that end called in a train of stiff backed Indian packers, moved a substantial outfit to the creek and thereafter spent much of his time in the hills, leaving the store to Doret. He seemed anxious to get away from the camp and hide himself in the woods. Stark was almost constantly occupied at his saloon, for it was a mint and ran day and night. Runnion was busy with the erection of a substantial structure of squared logs, larger than the trading post, destined as a dance hall, theater and gambling house.

"Why, it's the land of content. You'll never discover it by travel. I'll tell you a secret, Poleon. I've found it—yes, I have. It lies here." She laid her hand on her breast. "Father Barnum told me the story of your people and how it lives in your blood—that hunger to find the far places. It's what drove the voyageur and coureur du bois from Quebec to Vancouver and from the Mississippi to Hudson bay. The wanderlust was their heritage, and they pushed on and on without rest, like the salmon in the spring, but they were different in this—that they never came back to die." There was a look of great tenderness in his eyes as he bent toward her and searched her face, but she was not thinking of him, and at length he continued: "Fader Barnum he's goin' be here nex' Sunday for cheer up dem Injun. Constantine she's got de letter." "Do you know," said Necla wistfully, "I've always wanted him to marry me." "You t'inkin' 'bout marry on some feller, eh?" said the other, with an odd grin. "Waal, w'y not? He'll be here all day an' night. S'pose you do it. Mos' anybody w'at ain' got some wife already will be glad for marry on you, an' mebbe some feller w'at has got wife too! If you don't lak dem an' if you're goin' marry on somebody you can be wife to me." Necla laughed lightly. "I believe you would marry me if I wanted you to. You've done everything else I've ever asked. But you needn't be afraid. I won't take you up." In all her life this man had never spoken of love to her, and she had no hint of the dream he cherished. While they were talking a boat had drawn inshore and made fast to the bank in front of them. An Indian landed and, approaching, entered into talk with the Frenchman. By and by Poleon turned to the girl and said: "Dere's hundred marten skin come in. You min' de store w'ile I make trade wit' dis man." Together the two went down to the boat, leaving Necla behind, and not long after Runnion sauntered up to the store and addressed her familiarly. "Hello, Necla! I just heard about the strike on your claim. That's fine and dandy." She acknowledged his congratulations curtly, for, although it was customary for most of the old timers to call her by her Christian name, she resented it from this man. She chose to let it pass, however. "I had some good news last night myself," he continued. "One of my men has hit some good dirt, and we'll know what it means in a day or so. I'll gamble we're into the money big, though, for I always was a lucky cuss. Say, where's your father?" "He's out at the mine." "We've used up all of our bar sugar at the saloon, and I want to buy what you've got." "Very well; I'll get it for you." He followed her inside, watching her graceful movements and attempting, with his free and easy insolence, to make friendly advances; but, seeing that she refused to notice him, he became plucked and grew bolder. "Look here, Necla; you're a mighty pretty girl. I've had my eye on you ever since I landed, and the more I see of you the better I like you." "It isn't necessary to tell me that," she replied. "The price of sugar will be just the same." "Yes, and you're bright, too," he declared. "That's what I like in a woman—good looks and brains. I believe in strong methods and straight talk, too—nothin' of this serenading and moonlight mush for me. When I see a girl I like I go and get her. That's me. I make love like a man ought to." The girl laughed derisively in his face. "Now, don't get sore. I mean business. I'm no soft talking southerner with gold buttons and highfalutin ways. I don't care if you are a squaw, I'll take you." "Don't talk to me!" she cried in disgust, her voice hot with anger and resentment. But he continued, unheeding: "Now, cut out these airs and get down to cases. I mean what I say. I know you've been casting sheep's eyes at Burrell, but, Lord, he wouldn't have you, no matter how rich you get! Of course you acted careless in going off alone with him, but I don't mind what they're saying around camp, for I've made little slips like that myself, and we'd get along." "I'll have you killed!" she hissed through her clenched teeth, while her whole body vibrated with passion. "I'll call Poleon and have him shoot you!" She pointed to the river bank a hundred yards away, where the Canadian was busy assorting skins. But he only laughed at her show of temper and shrugged his shoulders as he answered her roughly: "Understand me, I'm on the square. So think it over and don't go up in the air like a skyrocket." She cried out at him "Go—go—go!" and finally he took up his bundle, saying as he stepped out slowly: "All right! But I'm coming back, and you'll have to listen to me. I don't mind being called a squaw man. You're pretty near white, and you're good enough for me. I'll treat you right. Why, I'll even marry you if you're dead set on it. Sure!" She could scarcely breathe, but checked her first inclination to call Poleon, knowing that it needed only a word from her to set that nut brown savage at Runnion's throat. Other thoughts began to crowd her brain and to stifle her. The fellow's words had stabbed her consciousness and done

something for her that gentler means would not have accomplished. They had opened her eyes to a thing that she had forgotten—a hideous thing that had reared its fangs once before to strike, but that her dreams of happiness had driven out of her Eden. All at once she saw the wrong that had been done her and realized from this brute's insult that those early fears had been well grounded. It suddenly occurred to her that in all the hours she had spent with her lover, in all those unspeakably sweet and intimate hours, there had never been one word of marriage. He had looked into her eyes and vowed he could not live without her, and yet he had never said the words he should have said, the words that would bind her to him. His arms and his lips had comforted her and stilled her fears; but, after all, he had merely made love. A cold fear crept over the girl. She recalled the old corporal's words of a few weeks ago, and her conversation with Stark came back to her. What if it were true—that which Runnion implied? What if he did not intend to ask her, after all? What if he had only been amusing himself? She cried out sharply at this, and when Doret staggered in beneath a great load of skins he found her in a strange excitement. When he had finished his accounting with the Indian and dismissed him she turned an agitated face to the Frenchman. "Poleon," she said, "I'm in trouble. Oh, I'm in such awful trouble!" "It's dat Runnion! I seen 'im pass on de store w'ile I'm down below." His brows knit in a black scowl, and his voice slid off a pitch in tone. "W'at he say, eh?" "No, no, it's not that. He paid me a great compliment." She laughed harshly. "Why, he asked me to marry him." The man beside her cursed at this, but she continued: "Don't blame him for liking me. I'm the only woman for 500 miles around—or I was until this crowd came—so how could he help himself? No; he merely showed me what a fool I've been." "I guess you better tell me all 'bout dis t'ing," said Poleon gravely. "You know I'm all tam' ready for help you, Necla. W'en you was little feller an' got bust your finger you run to me queeck, an' I feex it." "Yes, I know, dear Poleon," she assented gratefully. "You've been a brother to me, and I need you now more than I ever needed you before. I can't go to father. He wouldn't understand, or else he would understand too much and spoil it all, his temper is so quick. Don't think I'm unwomanly, Poleon, for I'm not. I may be foolish and faithful and too trusting, but I'm not—unmildly. You see, I've never been like other girls, and he was so fine, so different, he made me love him. It's part of a soldier's training, I suppose. It was so sweet to be near him and to hear him tell of himself and all the world he knows. I just let myself drift. I'm afraid—I'm afraid I listened too well and my ears heard more than he said. My head is so full of books, you know." "He should have know' dat, too," said Poleon. "Yes," she flared up. "He knew I was only an Indian girl." The only color in Doret's face lay now in his cheeks, where the sun had put it, but he smiled at her—his warm, engaging smile—and laid his great brown hand upon her shoulder softly. "I've look' in hees eye an' I'm always t'ink he's good man. I don't never t'ink he'll mak' fun of poor little gal." "But he has, Poleon. That's just what he has done." She came near to breaking down and finished pathetically. "They're telling the story on the street, so Runnion says." "Dat's easy t'ing for feex," he said. "Runnion she don't spread no more story lak' dat." "I don't care what they say. I want the truth. I want to know what he means, what his intentions are. He swears he loves me, and yet he has never asked me to marry him. He has gone too far. He has made a fool of me to amuse himself, and—and I couldn't see it until today. He's laughing at me, Poleon; he's laughing at me now! Oh, I can't bear it!" The Frenchman took up his wide hat from the counter and placed it carefully upon his head, but she stopped him as he moved toward the door, for she read the meaning of the glare in his eyes. "Wait till you understand—wait, I say! He hasn't done anything yet." "Dat's de trouble. I'm givin' msk' 'im do somet'ing!" "No, no! It isn't that. It's these doubts that are killing me. I'm not sure!" "I hear plaineet," he said. "Dere's no tam' for monkey roun'." "I tell you he may be honest," she declared. "He may mean to marry me, but I've got to know. That's why I came to you. That's what you must find out for me." "I'm good trader, Necla," said the Canadian after a moment. "I'll mak' bargain wit' you now. If 'ny say he'll marry you I don't ask no more, but if he say no you grieve 'im to me. Is it go?" She hesitated, while he continued musingly. "I don't see how no man on all dis worl' could lef' you go," then to her, "Waal, is it bargain?" "Yes," she said, the Indian blood speaking now, "but you must learn the truth. There must be no mistake. That would be terrible." "Dere ain' goin' be no mistak'." "If he should refuse I—I'll marry some one quick. I won't be laughed at by this camp. I won't be a joke. Oh, Poleon! I've given myself to him just as truly as if—well, he—he has taken my first kiss." Doret smote his hands together at this and began to roll his head back-

ward from side to side as if in some great pain, but his lips were dry and silent. After a moment the spell left him, the fire died down, leaving only a dumb agony in its place. She came closer and continued: "I'll never let them point at me and say, 'There goes the squaw that—he threw away.'" "You mak' dis very hard t'ing for me," he said wearily. "Listen," she went on, lashing herself with pity and scorn. "You say Father Barnum will be here on Sunday. Well, I'll marry some one, I don't care who!" Then, with a sudden inspiration, she cried: "I'll marry you. You said I could be a wife to you!" He uttered a sharp cry. "You mean dat, Necla?" "Yes," she declared. "Why not? You'll do it for my sake, won't you?" "Would you stan' up wit' me 'long-side of de pries', lovin' dat oder feller all de tam'?" he asked queerly. "Yes, yes! I'd rather it was you than anybody, but married I'll be on Sunday. I'll never let them laugh at me." Doret held his silence for a moment; then he looked up and said in level tones: "It's easy t'ing for go an' ask 'im, but you mus' hear hees answer wit' your own ears; den you can't t'ink I'm lyin'. I'll fetch 'im 'ere on dis place if you feex it for hide youse'f befin' dose post." He indicated a bundle of furs that were suspended against a pillar and that offered ample room for concealment. "Dere's goin' be no lies today." He pulled himself together and went out with the tired gait of an old man, his great shock head bowed low. A few moments later he returned. "I've sent 'im Jean for 'im. You get in dere out of sight—an' wait." (Continued)

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