

A LAW UNTO HERSELF.

PART II.

THE events of the year immediately succeeding Roy Mason's departure I shall leave unchronicled, inasmuch as they have no direct bearing upon this little history. True, they were important to myself, as ushering in the beginning of a golden harvest from which, eventually, I garnered sheaves sufficient for the wants of all my days to come. But as in these pages I am no central figure, and claim no higher place than that of humble chronicler of the lives and fates of others, I shall step with one sweeping stride, from March to March, and make my bow to the reader once more, in the door of my small mountain home, wherein Damocles and myself had found shelter from the blasts of another winter.

Time had touched the little edifice as lightly as could be expected, and although the onslaught of Jupiter Pluvius had penetrated the thatch in one or two places, and washed the mud plaster from between the sticks of the tall chimney, the fireplace roared as cheerily as of yore, and the much-lamented downward slope of the floor now proved itself a blessing in disguise, by promptly carrying off the leakage from the roof.

Upon this particular March morning to which I call the reader's attention, the sun was shining brightly, with a suggestion of springtime warmth in its beams; the snow had almost entirely disappeared from the level of the valley below, and even the mountains were rapidly baring their brown breasts to the kiss of the southern sun.

Damocles, unchanged, so far as I could see, in either voice, manner or appearance, stood sturdily in the foreground, with his pack strapped to his back, quietly taking note of my movements, for he knew as well as I that the time had come for us to abandon our vine and fig tree, and betake us to deeper mountain fastnesses. Indeed, he sniffed the morning breeze with inflated nostrils, and gave every evidence of having imbibed much of the adventurous spirit of the gold hunter, in his long and intimate association with myself.

I had nailed a wooden shutter over the little window, heaped ashes over the coals in the fireplace, and set everything to rights in preparation for a summer's absence, and at last stood in the open doorway, lighting my pipe in a leisurely way, when Damocles suddenly turned his face to the southward, in the direction of the valley, and pointed his long ears forward in a listening attitude. That was simply his way of intimating that somebody was coming up the trail.

"All right, old boy," I said, as I locked the door and dropped the big iron key into my pocket, "Come along, sir; if we fall in with company on our tramp, all the better for us."

Skirting a thicket of young firs that intervened to screen my cabin from the gaze of passing wayfarers, we struck the trail, and as approaching hoof beats were now plainly audible, we both paused, as if by mutual consent, and glanced downward to see who or what was coming. In an instant Damocles lifted up his voice in a glad bray of welcome to a small, dun-colored Cayuse, which just then hove in sight, spasmodically picking its way up the trail, beneath the weight of a short, fat, roly-poly, little man, whom, to my surprise, I at once recognized as the jolly, Teutonic proprietor of Yum Yum's solitary hotel.

"Ah, Meester Plake," he panted, as the poor, little, over-burdened pony slowly drew near us, "I dink you got a wrong name; of I name you, I call you after dot leedle blant dot lif high oop on der moundain dop, und ees so hard to reach—dot edelweiss."

I smiled at what struck me as a poetic idea from a very unexpected source.

"Thanks, Mr. Gracht," I answered. "Am I to understand that I am the edelweiss of which you have come in search this morning?"

"I haf come in search of you, Mr. Plake, und so hardt time I haf, I vould gone mit myzelf pack, if I only got some oxuse for dot leedle vooman. You see, Meester Plake, dis vas how it vas: Dot leedle vooman she comes mit der stage at my house last night, und she pegins rightt off to ask me questions, und I—"

"Questions about me?" I echoed, with a sudden accession of interest in the little man's gibberish. "What little woman? Who is she?"

"Dot leedle vooman vot comes to my house py der stage. Who is she, I don'd know. She yust comes mit der stage, und prings mit her a plack vooman und a pig dog, und she got my pest rooms, und den she ask me questions about Meester Plake—Charles Plake—don'd I knows him? Does he got a vamly? Vere does he lif? und efer so much. Ven I dold her as Meester Plake lifs more as dree miles away, oop glose py der sky py der moundain dop, she drob down on der chair, und look like she vas goin' to gry mit herself. Den I feels veak about der knees, like I vands to run, put I say to myzelf, 'Yawcob Gracht, of you makes dot leedle voomans gry, I kicks you down stairs.' Den I say somedings gost to her, und after avile she shmile, und say vot vould I gost to come und pring you py my house, und here I vas; und now, Meester Plake, of you vould pe so kind as to come along mit me—"