

"But who is the woman? Where is she from?" I interrupted, once more, in a state of mystification difficult to describe.

"Don'd I yust dells you who she vas I don'd know? Und vere she gomes from, py golly I don'd ask her."

"But what does she want with me? Surely, she must have given you some hint as to the nature of her business with me," I persisted, desperately.

"Dot peeze she don'd dalk about, und Meester Plake, I am a yentleman, und I don'd shtick my nose mit dot leedle vooan's peeze."

"Oh, certainly, I know you are a gentleman, Mr. Gracht; I only thought she might have given you some hint as to the nature of her business with me," I hastened to answer.

"No, she gif me no hint; she yust say 'Dell Meester Plake a lady vrom a var gountry haf gome many miles to see him.'"

"Many miles," I mused, trying to imagine what lady would come many miles to see me. Surely it could not be Laura, my affianced wife, for only the week previous I had received a letter from her, guiltless of any hint of such a move on her part. Besides, Laura was too sensible, modest and thoroughly lady-like to have been guilty of planning such a surprise for me. She never did anything in questionable taste. Still, who could it be!

"What is she like, Mr. Gracht?" I asked. "Is she small and slender, with rosy cheeks and bright, laughing, brown eyes?"

"Yah," responded Mr. Gracht, but I imagined there was a doubtful look in his eye. "Yah, dot ees drue, she vas shmall, about so high, und shlim, und she haf loffy eyes, bud nod brown, I dink, und not in dem much laugh. She look in dose eyes like she haf some droubles, und her face vas whide, like der whide lillies dot grow in der Faderland."

A startling thought came to me—could Laura be in trouble! Laura, with the light gone from her face! The mere thought startled me into action. In a very short space of time, poor, disappointed Damocles had been remanded to his stable, and I was on my way down the mountain with Mr. Gracht.

A dozen times, on the way, I decided that it could not possibly be Laura. Even if some sudden great trouble had come to Laura, and she could not wait to communicate with me by mail, she had two brothers, both older than herself, manly young fellows, who would never have let their sister wander off alone to the wilds of Eastern Oregon, with no other escort than a black woman and a big dog—at such a season of the year, too, when the stages had to be transformed into bob sleds in order to get across the

mountains at all. No, surely it could not be my Laura; but then, on the other hand, who could it be!

So persistently did this problem present itself to my mind, unattended by any shadow of solution, that by the time I reached the little hotel in Yum Yum I felt as though my brain were rapidly resolving itself into a huge interrogation point.

Without any delay mine host ushered me into his diminutive parlor, and went away to "pring dot leedle vooan."

Scarcely three minutes elapsed ere the door opened, and a lady entered. I use the word "lady" in its finest sense, for in that first instant, the very way in which she entered the room and closed the door conveyed that intangible something which bespeaks a creature born and bred within the magic circles of refinement.

One or two other convictions were borne in upon me in that brief instant, while she closed the door. First, that she was not Laura; and second, that I had never seen her before.

I arose and bowed, as she came forward with her eyes fixed earnestly on my face.

"Are you Mr. Charles Blake?"

Her voice was low and melodious as the tinkle of bells softened by distance, yet there was an undertone of intensity that told of strong feeling held in restraint by an effort of the will.

"That is my name, madam," I replied, adding quickly, as I saw the soft eyes fill with tears, "In what way can I serve you?"

For reply, she drew a letter from her pocket, which she unfolded and tremulously held toward me.

"Did you send me this, Mr. Blake?"

I took the sheet in my hand, wonderingly, and held it up that the light from the one window might fall upon it. With one glance I recognized the letter—the one I had written at Roy Mason's dictation a year before.

I staggered, and leaned on my chair for support, while everything in the little room seemed swaying and swimming about me in confusion.

"You are—you are—" I stammered, my lips refusing to frame the name.

"I am Edith Mason," she answered, in the same low, restrained tone, "and you are the writer of this letter, are you not? You were with my—my—husband in his last hours?"

I nodded; I could not speak.

"You can tell me where he lies; you can take me to his grave, can you not, Mr. Blake?"

If the tremulous, appealing words had been drops of molten iron they could not have seared my heart more keenly.