

our way up the mountain trail, Edith Mason, her sable attendant, and myself, and stood beside the grave that bore Roy Mason's name above it.

The poor little wife knelt and rested her pale forehead on the rough stone wall. I turned away. Whether she was praying, or recalling happy, by-gone hours, I could not tell; I only knew that to look upon her sorrow was to feel my soul consumed with guilty remorse. I walked away and sat down on a moss-covered rock by the bank of the stream, looking down, with eyes that saw not, upon the lovely, undulating valley that lay far below, like a beautiful painting, in its misty blue frame of encircling mountains.

After a time Mrs. Mason joined me, and stood for some moments regarding the scene with silent, rapt solemnity; then, turning to me, she said, slowly—

"There is something grandly beautiful in the thought of being laid to rest in a stony grave, high among these rugged, eternal mountains, with such a scene as that beneath, and naught but waving pines and heaven's blue canopy above. It seems almost a pity that I have come all this way only to disturb his rest, to take him from the ever-renewing beauties of Nature's grandest solitudes, and give him, instead, only a musty corner in the family vault at home? I am almost sorry that I came; but now that I am here, I never can go back without him—the picture of this lonely mound on the mountain side would haunt me, waking and dreaming, through all my years to come."

I listened to these words like one but half awake, and a moment passed before I fully gathered their meaning. When, at length, their full import came to me, when I realized that she was speaking of taking the dead body that lay buried there, and bearing it with her to the far East, I sat stunned, silent and almost as breathless as the great rock beneath me.

In imagination I saw the stones rolled away, the grave opened, and the rough coffin brought from its tomb. I even saw the lid lifted, and the stricken wife bending for one more look on earth at her dead. But at that point even imagination faltered, and I sprang to my feet with a desperate impulse upon me to run away—to never cease my flight until hundreds of miles should lie between me and the scene of that dread deception.

Looking back now, I can only wonder that I had not, until that moment, divined her real mission in coming to the far West. But I had not; I had simply taken for granted that she wished to see her husband's resting place, and, perhaps, erect a stone to his memory.

She was still looking dreamily away toward the horizon line, and did not seem to notice my agitation. I turned my face from her, and for a minute or two did some wonderfully rapid thinking. "Oh, Roy

Mason," I reflected, desperately, "if I could but get my hands on you, I'd make you face this music."

One thing was quite clear, and needed no debating in my mind—Roy Mason's whereabouts must be ascertained without loss of time, and he must be made aware of the state of affairs. But, in the meantime, what could I do to prevent, or at least, delay, the opening of the grave!

Acting upon a swift impulse, I turned, with another lie upon my lips, to the poor, defenseless, unsuspecting little woman at my side.

"Mrs. Mason, I trust I have misinterpreted the meaning of your last words. I hope it is not your intention to—to—remove your husband's remains."

She turned and looked at me wonderingly, with eyes blue as the heavens above, clear and pure as the limpid waters that tinkled over the pebbles at our feet.

"Why, certainly, Mr. Blake," she answered, slowly, "that is what I came for. I thought you understood."

I groaned inwardly, but outwardly adjusted my mask for the part I was compelled to play. Assuming an expression of sorrowful commiseration, I laid my hand on hers, and said—

"Then, my poor little woman, it becomes my painful duty to tell you that you can only do so by violating the last wish of your husband."

She started, and shrank, as if hurt.

"Then he—did not wish me to—take him home?"

"No, he did not," I answered, firmly, while my heart ached for her. "Forgive me if, hitherto, I have not been entirely frank with you. The truth is, that before your husband's de—death (I had almost said departure), he and I became near and dear friends, and I had from his lips a history of his sad past. He said to me, 'God bless her! There is but one way that I can free her from the galling chains that bind her to me, and that way is, at last, within my grasp. My death will release her, and that is near at hand. Bury me here on the mountain side, where the little stream can prattle above me, and the moaning pines whisper my dirge. Let no one disturb my repose, for no mortal can give me a grander mausoleum.'"

She was looking straight into my eyes while I spoke, but at my concluding words her head dropped, and I saw tears falling on her clasped hands.

"Do you think his words referred to me, Mr. Blake? Could it be that he meant I was not to disturb him?"

Trying not to see the tears, not to hear the vibrations of pain in the gentle voice, I answered—

"My dear Mrs. Mason! Who else could he have meant? Who else would be likely to undertake his removal?"