

At last, however, I grew so exhausted with my long, unbroken run, that I almost ceased to think, and bent all my energies to the task of keeping up physical locomotion. Heart and brain were throbbing painfully, every vein in my body seemed flowing with molten metal, and my breath was coming in quick, short gasps. Dark shadows seemed to settle before my eyes, and when I tried to scan the trail ahead, trees and rocks were mingled in one quivering, indistinguishable mass. At last, came the moment when the limit of physical endurance was reached, and I sank to the ground.

Whether it was seconds, or minutes, that elapsed before I lifted my head and drew a free breath, I can not say. When I did so, I glanced instinctively up the trail. About a hundred yards ahead, was the narrow pass around the jutting crag, where poor Morris had lost his life. I gazed at it now, in my helplessness, with a certain vindictiveness of feeling, reflecting that it was the fatal spot whence had sprung the seedling shoot of all this entanglement.

Gradually, as my vision cleared, lesser objects became visible, and suddenly a wild thrill ran through me, as I made out the outlines of a man's figure, quietly seated on a rock, a few steps from the pass. True, I had no assurance that the figure was that of Roy Mason, but my heart told me it was—it must be.

Struggling to my feet, scarcely able to stand, but buoyed up by the most intense nervous excitement I have ever experienced, I endeavored to run toward him, shouting, hoarsely, "Morris! Morris!" and gesticulating to attract his attention. Even in that exciting moment, I had sufficient presence of mind to remember that the cabin was in close proximity, and it would be unsafe to shout his own name upon the rarified mountain air. To my joy, he turned at the first sound of my voice, and rose to his feet in a slow, wondering way, as if struck with astonishment at my queer conduct. At the same instant I sank again to my knees, unable to take another step. But I beckoned him wildly, and frantically shouted: "Come here! In heaven's name, come here!"

He started toward me instantly, but had scarcely taken three steps, when around the crag came another form bounding into view. It was Bayard. My heart sank, for I knew that Bayard never started down the trail except in the capacity of advance guard for his mistress. For one brief instant, the noble, intelligent animal paused, with his eyes fixed on the unexpected figure before him, then, with a cry of almost human joy, he sprang forward and leaped frantically about his long-lost master, making use, I think, of the entire canine vocabulary of barks, whines, kisses and tail wags, to give expression to the joy that overwhelmed him.

Again I shouted to Mason in a frenzy of anxiety, and strove to rise to my feet; but he was on his knees now, with his arms around the old dog's neck, and did not hear me. Then, in a moment more, two other forms came into view around the crag. I saw Edith Mason pause, and stand, for one instant, as if turned to stone; then, without a word or gesture, she fell to the ground. Seeing, that, despite all my efforts, the worst had come, and I could do no more, the intense strain of nervous excitement that had upheld me thus far, suddenly snapped asunder, and I gave myself up to an interval of welcome, restful oblivion.

I wish to say here—parenthetically, as it were—that never before nor since that day have I been guilty of the unmanly weakness of swooning; and to add, in self justification, that it was more the stupor induced by extreme physical exhaustion, than laxity of nervous force.

When consciousness returned, I found Roy Mason bending over me, dribbling water in my eyes and down my neck, from an old oyster can that the poor fellow had picked up on the bank of the stream. I sat up and grasped both his hands in mine, but all I could say was, "Where is she?"

He sprang up at the words, and nodded in the direction of the cabin.

"Do all you can for her, Blake," he said, huskily, as he turned away, "I'm off for a doctor."

He bounded away down the trail, I calling after him: "There's a doctor in Yum Yum now. Ask at the post office, and they'll tell you where to find him."

Then I made my way, in rather a stiff-legged manner, to the cabin, where I found Edith Mason lying on my bed, still and white, in a swoon so death-like that I thought it was death until I bent over and felt a faint—oh, so faint!—little flutter in the region of the heart. Poor black Martha was working desperately to restore the flitting life-breath, and ignored all my questions and suggestions as utterly as a stone image might have done. Martha was not, at any time, much given to speech. All that I had ever heard from her lips was an occasional monosyllable, in reply to a direct question. Now, however, I found that I could not frame a question so directly as to elicit a reply. Only one expression of her feeling did she vouchsafe me, and that she did by straightening up her Amazonian figure once, and fixing her great, rolling, black eyes on me, with an expression that made me feel like a detected murderer. I shrank away, and stood around outside the cabin, in a miserable state of mind, until Mason and the doctor arrived. After that came another half hour of suspense, while the physician made his examination and tried his re-