

So she lay there, thinking—thinking always, but of what she could not have told you; only that, as she thought, the song in her heart grew louder and stronger, and seemed to thrill her whole being with its melody. Her lips were always silent at these times. To have trilled out one note in expression of the music that lived within her soul, would have destroyed her exquisite pleasure in it as surely as the careless hand destroys the bloom of the poppy it has gathered.

To lie in the soft grass, to be all alone and free—ah! that was it, to be free, to see only the blue sky and the little valley lying in the yellow sunlight, and to hear only the sounds of the forest—the wind stirring the pine trees, the faint voices of a million insects so blended together in the clear air as to form one vast, thrilling hum, that set the whole universe to throbbing, the dull whir of the bluebird's wings as they cleft the air, and the clear ring of the woodpecker's beak beating against a tree—give her these and the song swelled, sweet and strong, in her heart.

But as she lay there, suddenly the music stopped—so suddenly that it confused her—and for a moment she could not understand the cause of it. Then she lifted her head and listened.

Down the hard road that wound along the canyon, over the mountain and into the valley below, came a low rumble and the ring of horses' hoofs, distant and low at first, but growing nearer and clearer as she listened. Presently, around a curve came dashing along a low traveling carriage, such as had never been seen before in those mountains, drawn by four magnificent dappled-gray horses. Inside were two gentlemen and a lady, the latter lying back among soft cushions, and flecking the dust from her face with a bunch of crimson roses.

Like a wild, young animal, Nil bounded to her feet, and stood, trembling violently, with swelling nostril and dilated eye, till the carriage should pass. She scarcely saw the gentlemen; her gaze was fixed upon the lady. Never, never had she seen or dreamed of anything like her—anything that could live and speak like the people about her, and still be so fair, so dainty, so beautiful, so full of grace.

Suddenly, though carelessly, the lady lifted her eyes and glanced in Nil's direction, then instantly started up, making a quick, imperative sign to one of the gentlemen, and, so abruptly that the horses were thrown upon their haunches, the carriage was stopped. The lady leaned out, and Nil, with her heart fluttering up into her throat with a delight that was almost painful, stood looking at her in silent ecstasy. Never had she seen anything half so lovely. All the poetry in her nature struggled for expression. Looking into those deep, dark eyes, she thought of a place out in

the forest where the river was so narrow that the trees met over it, their branches crossing and interlacing in a net-work so strengthened by years that it now defied winds and storms and shut out the sun. Underneath, the water ran, deep and still and black, but with such a smooth, shining surface that Nil always loved to look into it; and those black, shining eyes made her think of it now. And her hair! It was like the gold that the men dug out of the mountains; like the yellow marigolds that grew on the hillside; like the sunlight that lay over the valley.

"Come here, child," said the lady, in a sweet, rich voice, and with a gracious smile.

Nil approached the carriage, forgetting the poor apparel, of which she was always so ashamed, and never removing her eyes from the lady's face.

"What is it, child? Why do you look at me in that way?"

"Because I have never seen anything so beautiful," said Nil, simply, but with terrible earnestness.

The lady laughed and cast a glance of playful reproach at the two gentlemen. "Must I come to the wilds of Oregon for compliments? Who ever said anything nearly so pretty to me before?"

"You have forbidden me," said the tall, fair man, bending swiftly to kiss the hand that held the roses.

"Be careful," she cried, looking at him with half-veiled eyes. "There is a thorn beneath that kiss," and as she spoke she gave a soft glance at the dark, sullen man beside him.

"Child," she said, then turning to Nil, "we are hungry and tired, and," laughing a little, "thirsty. Can you entertain us till the moon rises? I should like to see that valley by moonlight."

"Can I—what?" said Nil, doubtfully.

"What simplicity! What purity!" cried the lady, with a bitter, but soft, laugh. "Can you, then, give us something to eat, something to—" again she laughed, and, in truth, it seemed to Nil that she must be a happy woman, as she laughed so often, while she, poor child, never found anything to even make her wish to be merry—"to drink? And is there any cool place where we could rest?"

"If you could wait till we cooked some fowls," said Nil, looking troubled. "An' there's the thickest cream an' strawberries, but—but there's not much else—only you could rest in th' shade o' th' big rock."

So they walked up the narrow path, the lady talking all the while to Nil, with a little, amused, scornful smile on her face, the two gentlemen following, but never speaking to each other. When the lady—Carmen, they called her—dropped her roses, they both sprang forward, but it was the tall, fair one who recovered them. When they reached the deep shade of the "big rock" they spread soft rugs and cushions