

"Open the door, Jamie," she said, imperiously, "I want you."

Force of habit caused him to obey the command, and in a moment he stood in her presence, with haggard, drawn features and bloodshot eyes.

"What is it, Jamie?" asked the girl, kindly, putting out her hand. "Are you ill?"

All the strong feeling that he had been trying to suppress shook him to the soul, at her kind tone and touch. He cast himself prone at her feet, kissing the hem of her gown. Convulsive sobs burst from him. In another man it would have been absurd, but in this poor, broken reed of humanity it was pathetic. The girl, cold and coquettish as was her nature, felt vaguely moved, and bending toward him, laid her soft hand upon his coarse hair, which no woman had ever caressed before.

"Jamie," she said, gently.

He heard her low whisper and he felt her cool hand, and a passion akin to madness rushed through him. With sudden strength he leaped to his feet and made a movement as if to clasp her. Then all the repugnance she had ever felt for him, but which she had successfully concealed because of his usefulness to her, and because, also, of her careless pity for his infirmity, burst into expression on her face. She shrank violently from him.

"How dare you!" she exclaimed, in a low, terrible voice, her face white with anger and fear. "What would he say if he knew what one like you had—had even dared—"

She stopped, struck dumb by the look in his eyes. Like an animal wounded unto death, he staggered backward to his room.

"O, God!" she heard him moan, as she closed the door between them.

Late that night there came a violent rapping at Jamie's door. He dressed hurriedly and opened it. There stood Jennie. She wore a loose flannel wrapper, and her lovely hair fell to her waist. Her feet, thrust into warm slippers, were bare and white. She threw herself at his feet, upon the rough, unclean floor; her bosom swelled so she could scarcely speak.

"Save—him!" she whispered, at last, almost inaudibly. Tremblingly Jamie lifted her to her feet.

"What d'ye mean?" he asked, in an agitated tone. Something told him whom she meant.

"He went up—to the mine—on horseback," she said, pressing her hands to her throat, and speaking slowly and with difficulty, "and his horse—came back, just now—alone. I can not get through the snow, myself—O, Jamie, take his horse and go for me. I can not live through the night without knowing what has happened!"

"Ye want me to save him!" said Jamie, drawing in his breath silently.

The girl bowed her head, sobbing.

"I cudn't do 't," said he, shuddering, and turning his eyes away from her. "Anything else—but that. Save him! Good Lord! I cud kill 'im an' never feel sorry fer it."

The girl came close to him and put both shaking hands on his arm. He trembled violently beneath her touch.

"Jamie," she said, earnestly, "for the love of heaven—"

"I won't!" he interrupted, hoarsely.

"For the love of God—"

"It's no use—I won't."

She leaned nearer; she slipped her bare, soft arms up to his shoulders, almost to his throat; her breath came to him, warm and hurried.

"For the love of—me!" she whispered, her pale lips close to his.

A mighty struggle passed over him; his white face worked convulsively; his hands clenched.

"I can't," he groaned, at last, dropping his arms to his sides, "not even—"

She fell away from him and covered his face with her hands. She sobbed chokingly; her chest heaved with the force of her emotion. Jamie watched her in silence for a moment, then the struggle ended. He fell down clumsily at her feet, and once more kissed the hem of her gown.

"Fergive me!" he cried, brokenly, "ye can do anything with me ye want to. I can't bear it t' see ye suffer; but, O, it tears my very heart t' do anything fer him. I hate 'im—hate 'im! I cud kill 'im an' never feel sorry fer it. But I'll do it—fer you."

"O, Jamie," said the girl, fervently, "I almost love you for that."

Three hours later, half way up the mountain the cayuse Jamie was riding paused suddenly and gave a low neigh. It was moonlight, but bitterly cold, and Jamie was blinded by the glitter of the snow, but he presently discerned a tall figure partly covered by the snow, lying in the middle of the road where he had fallen, exhausted, from his horse.

Jamie, weak and faint from cold, dismounted, and poured a quantity of brandy between the locked teeth, and chafed the stiffening limbs. After a long time the man aroused sufficiently to mount the horse again with assistance.

"I'll lay down here in the snow," said Jamie, in a wistful tone. "Fer God's sake, send somebody back as soon as ye can. I can't stan' it very long, fer I'm mos' froze now."

"I will," said his rival, heartily. "I can never repay you, as it is, my good fellow."