Chapter VI

It was Jim who roused first in the chilly, drizzling daybreak, two mornings later. He came instantly wide awake all over, as he always did, and from long habit glanced first at his rifle, then at his horse. Both were safe.

Then he looked toward the river. Today they would start through the gorge.

He got up and walked to the end of the wagon, stroking Buckskin's beautiful arched neck and gazing thoughtfully into the gorge. He'd traversed it once, last summer. In a good canoe. It was bad enough even then—fifty miles of the roughest, most treacherous river he'd ever laid eyes on, full of rapids and tearing currents, winding, bending, boiling, crammed with submerged obstacles, any one of which could rip your craft and you wide open. But the walls of the mountains that had crowded the mighty Columbia into this narrow space rose sheer and black from the water's depths, and for wagons there was no other possible entry into the valley, between here and California.

His eyes moved from the river to the heights above, toward which he and Dan'l would soon be starting with the animals. That would be a new trail to him. He and Tom had crossed south of Mount Hood, and if this was anything like that—

Two nights ago Rutledge and his son Ned had appeared

after supper, and the six of them had made what plans they could for a journey that was at best a wild gamble. They would build the raft large enough for both families, but what about the animals? Hire these Injuns around here to drive them over the mountain and you turned up missing a few head —say about half! But you couldn't take critters on a raft.

"I'll take 'em over," Jim had spoken up.

They'd all looked at him with a mixture of hope and doubt. "That trail," Rutledge said, "I've heerd it ain't wuth the name. It's winter up yonder, boy."

"I reckon I kin get 'em through. I'll take Dan'l to help out. That'll leave you and Jonnie and Ned to pole the raft."

It was the only way out, and they had decided on it. The raft was built and ready now. They'd worked all day yesterday cutting small trees and lashing them together. The remaining problem was food.

Jim turned away from the river and moved silently to his pack. The prime pelt he had captured and rough dressed last week on Powder River had sunned on its willow hoop all the way to the Dalles, and now lay folded with the others among his possibles. Shielding it with his body from the light rain, he shook it out and examined it carefully for signs of dampness, almost surprised that it looked so fresh. It seemed years since that morning he had said good-by to Tom. He wrapped it in a piece of old buffalo robe and tucked it under his arm. It galled him to spend good beaver just for food, but his meat was gone now and there was no time to hunt. Winter was already breathing down their necks.

Summoning Moki with a soft guttural, he started for the Indian lodges that fringed the settlement. These Chinooks up here must have something more sensible than potatoes.

When he returned half an hour later, Jonathan was up, padding awkwardly about the feeble remnants of last night's fire in Jim's other moccasins, which since yesterday had replaced

the blanket bandages. Jim watched him and shook his head. Jonnie had a good deal to learn about walking in moccasins.

And about staying alive, thought Jim as he came closer and closer, unnoticed. When he was almost on top of his brother, he let out a piercing war whoop, then grinned at Jonathan's dash toward the wagon and his rifle.

"It's only me," he drawled.

Jonnie whirled, then sagged against the wagon's tailpiece. "Lord a'mighty! Your idee of a joke—!"

"By gor, it wouldn't've been much of a joke fer you, if I'd been a Cayuse," Jim retorted. "I could've tuck yer hair twict over. You better learn to keep yer eyes skinned." As Jonnie shrugged and started back to the fire, he added, "Say, why you walkin' that-a-way?"

Jonathan turned a face like a thundercloud. "These moccasins! Troublesomest things I ever had on."

Jim relented. "Ain't you ever taken no notice of Injun's footprints, Jonnie?"

"Footprints? No."

"It might come in handy right now if you was to notice mine."

He walked across a stretch of thin mud to make it easy, but Jonathan only stared blankly at the tracks until Jim made him put a row of his own right beside them. "By golly!" Jonnie said then. "Yours are pigeon toed!"

"And yours ain't. Now do you git it?"

"You talk like I was half witted! I reckon you mean I should start toein' in."

"You reckon right."

"By golly, the things a feller's got to do to get along in this country!"

Jim grinned and stooping beside his sack, took out his knife to loosen the thongs that sewed the top of the parfleche together.

"What's that?" inquired Jonathan.

"Pemmican."

"That's a new one on me."

"You've eat jerky, ain't you?"

"You mean that dried buffalo meat? Lord, yes, we lived on that, once we left the Plains."

"Well, this here's jerky, only they pound it all up fine and pack it in a parfleche and pour melted fat over. This stuff's got body to it. Sticks to yer ribs."

"Well I'll swear. How d'you cook it?"

Jim shrugged. "Any old way you want. Fry it, roast it, boil it—or jest dig out a hunk and start chewin'."

"That'll likely be it! If this rain keeps up we can't make no fire. Think that bagful'll last us through the gorge?"

Again Jim shrugged. "You gotta make it last. Weather'll hold, all right enough, or else git worse."

Sally and Dan'l appeared a moment later, and with only one doubtful sniff at the contents of the bag, Sally produced her skillet and started following directions without protest. Maybe she'd been thinking things over. Jim smiled to himself as he remembered her reactions of last night, when they'd been eating the last of the haunch. He'd remarked, with enjoyment, that panther meat knocked the hindsights off of every other kind, even buffalo. Sally's eyes had flown wide open; the bite halfway to her mouth ended up in the fire. "Panther! Is *that* what this is? Why, I'd as soon eat cat! Or *dog!*"

And when Jim had inquired what was wrong with dog, she'd acted as if he'd said something revolting. Jonnie'd taken it as a huge joke, but to a mountain man it wasn't funny. "Meat's meat," Jim had told them flatly. "You'll find out if you ever git hungry enough."

It wasn't unlikely they'd find it out before they reached Fort Vancouver, he thought now as he walked down to where his animals were tethered. At Sally's summons to break-

fast he merely grunted, "I've eat a'ready." No sense using any more of that pemmican than necessary, before they even started. Hunger was nothing new in his life, and he was in far better shape than the others to begin with. He could live off short rations and his reserve strength for a good long while; and off the parfleche soles of his moccasins after that, if need be. He'd done it before. He wondered, with a flicker of amusement, what Sally would think of boiled moccasin for dinner.

By the time he'd divided his pack into two loads, one for Buckskin and one for the mule, the others had finished eating. As he started back around the wagon they were standing there together, Jonnie kicking dirt over the fire, Sally scrubbing at the skillet with a bunch of leaves and talking in a low, emphatic voice, Dan'l looking from one face to the other.

". . . just *wish* there was some other way!" Sally was saying. "I don't see how I can get on that old raft and just go off and leave him— Oh Jonnie, can't we find some other way?"

"Sis, I don't see how. Don't think I ain't racked my brain! I feel the same as you. But it'll take Mr. Rutledge and Ned and me, all three to manage that raft, and the cattle's no one-man job—"

"Aw, shucks!" Dan'l's voice sounded disgusted. "You talk like I was a baby! Jim'll be with me, anyhow!"

"That's half what I'm worryin' about!" snapped Sally. She dropped the skillet and grabbed the boy by the shoulders. "Don't you listen to that Injun talk of his, you hear me? Don't you—" She broke off, gave her head a quick little shake, and suddenly pulled Dan'l to her and hugged him with all her might.

"Sis," said Jonathan. He turned her gently and put the skillet in her hands, giving her an awkward pat. "Go on now and finish stowin' things away. Ain't no good to think too much." As she started for the wagon, wiping her eyes fiercely on a corner of her apron, he turned back to the little boy. "We ain't

thinkin' you're a baby. It's just— Crimeny, be careful, Dan'l! Will you?"

"Aw, cracky, Jonnie! There ain't nothin' to— Why this ain't—" The swagger drained out of Dan'l. In a small voice he finished, "Yeah, sure, Jonnie. I'll—be careful."

"All right." Jonnie straightened, wiping his palms on his thighs. "You'll be fine. Safe as a church, prob'ly. Go on and help sis pack." He turned away swiftly and kicked a last covering of dirt over the coals, while Jim watched grimly. Easy to see how much they trusted him! When he stepped at last out of the shelter of the wagon, Jonnie snapped almost angrily. "Come on, let's get this wagon to the river."

The next couple of hours were furiously busy. At the river bank they were joined by Bob Rutledge and his son Ned, a lanky, freckled-faced boy with big hands and his father's warm smile. Together the four dismantled both wagons and loaded them onto the raft, along with a mountain of household goods. Jim wondered what anybody could want with all that fooforaw. Crowds of other emigrants up and down the river's edge were loading up too, and every few minutes one of the clumsy craft would push off into the water, to start its long and perilous journey through the gorge.

The weather grew steadily worse, huge slushy snowflakes alternating with the chilling rain. Mr. Rutledge glared up at the sky as the last boxes were made fast. "Crimeny! Maybe we better hold off for a day or two. Wait for better weather."

"Wait fer better weather and you'll be here till spring," Jim said bluntly.

Rutledge sighed and nodded, and sent Ned to the post after his wife, his twin daughters, and Sally. Jim eyed the twins curiously as they scrambled down the rocky bank in the wake of the large, comfortable, breathless woman with pink cheeks who must be Mrs. Rutledge. They were sturdily built fourteen-year-olds with their father's red hair; Bess neat and timid,

Maggie mussed and talkative. Under cover of her chatter, Jonnie turned anxiously to Dan'l. "Now keep wrapped up good, you hear?" As Sally rushed over to hug the boy once more, Jonnie faced Jim with a look that was like a threat. But all he said was, "Take care of that young 'un."

"You mind the raft!" Jim flung at him. "I'll handle my end."

"Yeah," said Jonnie slowly. A grin flicked over his face and was gone. "Guess we'll both have our hands full. We'll meet you at the Cascades."

He turned abruptly and leaped aboard the raft. Weighted down with people and possessions, it was already awash, but Rutledge settled the womenfolk in the crude shelter formed by baggage and wagon top, and shouted to Ned and Jonathan to look sharp. All three grasped their poles and braced themselves, and with Jim and Dan'l shoving and straining on the bank, the unwieldy craft began to shudder free.

"Oh, Dan'l, good-by Dan'l, good-by honey!" cried Sally. "Oh, Jonnie, what are we doin'! We *can't* leave him here."

But at that moment the roaring current caught the raft at last and swung it free. Immediately it was bobbing and twisting down the dark river, and a moment later had careened around a rocky point and vanished.

"Cracky!" gulped Dan'l, and Jim, glancing down at him, saw near panic on his face. "They—they went awful fast, didn't they? One minute they was here, right with us, and the next—" He broke off, his lower lip shaking uncontrollably.

"We ain't hangin' around neither," Jim said. "Come on."

"But what if I never see 'em again? What if we don't *get there?*"

Jim grabbed the boy by the shoulders, hard. For a moment the desperate loneliness of the small figure in its bunchy wraps filled him with pity. But he kept his voice rough. "I'll git you there, understand? I'll git you there!"

He waited only until the panic had faded from the boy's face, then turned him firmly away from the raging waters and toward the campsite, where Buckskin and the mule waited among the milling stock. One strong swing and Dan'l was on Bad Medicine's back atop the divided pack, before the beast had time to get temperamental. Calling Moki to stand guard beside the mule, Jim set about convincing the indignant Buckskin that she was going to carry the other half of the pack and him too, whether she liked it or not. Eventually the new order of things was accepted by both animals, and they were starting up the slope toward the snowy heights two thousand feet above the gorge. Ahead of them wandered four skinny oxen, two cows and a heifer, Rutledge's saddle horse, and a furiously busy Moki.

"Jim, d'you think they'll make it through the rapids on that big old raft?" came Dan'l's small voice. "D'you think they'll get there, Jim? I—gee, I never even said good-by to sis."

"You'll be sayin' hello to her afore too long. Shut up, now, we got a mountain to climb."

Dan'l said no more, and presently both were too occupied with the problems of bewildered cattle, steep and slippery footings, and their own discomfort, to talk had they wanted to. Before noon it was snowing in earnest. The afternoon was a steady climb through a world they could not see for the swirling flakes. The wind howled constantly at their backs. The cattle, bawling their protests, kept floundering off the incredibly rough trail.

"Say, you reckon we *can* get these critters through here?" shouted Dan'l at one point, after they had struggled half an hour to free one of the oxen from a drift.

"Stop jawin' and pull," grunted Jim. He tightened his knees about Buckskin's shivering sides and hauled again on the oxen's lead rope, putting all the rawhide strength of his shoulders and

back into the pull. This time, with Bad Medicine and Dan'l straining on another rope, the beast scrambled free.

"There, you ornery, moth-eaten old piece of cussedness, you!" panted Jim, yanking the ropes loose. "Git off the trail onct more and I'll leave you to freeze solid!"

He pulled the hood of the grizzly cloak up over his head and fastened it with fingers stiff from cold, narrowing his eyes to slits as he faced once more into the wind. Freezing solid would be no trick at all in this weather.

It snowed steadily for five days of struggle.

By noon of the sixth the storm let up enough for them to see the treetops, and an hour or so later the snow stopped entirely. But the skies did not clear.

They made camp that night in the dubious shelter of an overhanging rock ledge, wrapping themselves cocoonlike in buffalo robes and huddling close to the animals and each other. Jim gave Dan'l a portion of the pemmican he had kept out of the bigger sack, but contented himself with a few handfuls of snow, as he had done every second night so far. There was no way of telling, yet, how long the crossing would take, and how much colder it would get. Better make this food stretch as far as possible.

He tightened his belt and thrust his hands into the warmth of his armpits. It was a bleak enough scene framed by the rock ledge—trees weighted with snow, the dark shapes of the cattle huddling with their backs to the wind, a little stream running black and wickedly cold through a white world.

"Jim?"

"Uh?"

"Kin I ask you somethin'?"

With an effort Jim got his mind off a fire and a hot meal. "Yeah, sure."

"Well—" Dan'l clenched his teeth to stop their chattering, and spoke jerkily through them. "That grizzly you killed that

time when you was only my age. How'd you kill him, Jim?"

"Oh, that. Why, I strangled 'im."

"Cracky!" Dan'l shot upright, jaw agape.

"With my bare hands," Jim added.

Slowly a grin spread over Dan'l's wind-chapped face. "You're foxin' me. What happened, honest?"

"Put a little lead in his brain, that's all."

"Was it a big 'un?"

Jim indicated the silver-tipped cloak with a bob of his head. "That big."

"Cracky. Wasn't nobody there to help you?"

"I'll say there warn't! I was the only one fool enough to light out upwind."

Dan'l pondered this a minute, then stirred and sighed. "What d'you wear that feather for, Jim?"

" 'Cause I risked my neck gettin' it. Means I've counted coup."

"How d'you count coup?"

"Oh, they's quite a few ways. You hit a enemy with a quirt or yer coupstick afore you've hurt him—while he's still armed to the teeth. Or you touch the first one kilt in a battle. Or steal a horse some risky way."

All at once the old life was all around him, blotting out this world of snow and darkening skies. Involuntarily his fingers crept up underneath his cloak to touch the necklace lying warm against his throat.

"Are you a Injun now, Jim?" Dan'l's voice came softly out of the gloom. "Sally says you are."

The necklace seemed to lose its warmth. Jim stirred impatiently. He wasn't going to fret about what Sally and Jonnie thought!

"Jim," said Dan'l dreamily. "I don't care if you are a Injun. I wisht I'd killed a grizzly. I wisht I was just like you."

"*Wagh!* You don't know what you're talkin' about."

"Yes I do."

Jim turned. The boy was watching him solemnly, his eyes clear and earnest in his shadowed face. A deep comfort stole over Jim. "Jonnie wouldn't like that," he said softly. "Now shut up and go to sleep."

But for a long time after Dan'l's breathing was quiet and steady, Jim lay there wakeful, thinking of the vicious river far below him, of the raft and its occupants. And when he awoke in the gray dawn Jonnie was still on his mind.

In the same dawn, miles away, Jonathan uncurled his stiff muscles and sat up, peering about him through the dim light. Sally was still sleeping there at the other end of the wagon bed on her lumpy arrangement of boxes and soggy bedclothes, looking as uncomfortable as he felt. Through the arch of the wagon top he could see Rutledge moving about outside.

"Wake up, sis," he muttered. "Time to get started."

He edged his way out of the cramped interior of the wagon, feeling weary, dirty, and as cold as death. It was raining again —of course. It had rained every minute it was not snowing, this whole six days. And each day the river seemed to grow more treacherous, the beating wind stronger, their progress slower, and their condition more desperate. Sally's feet were so swollen she could no longer wear her sodden shoes. Ned Rutledge's boots had disintegrated altogether from the constant soakings, as had his father's and Maggie's; they stumbled about in wrappings of old rags. Bess, the other twin, had been ill.

Fifty miles of this! thought Jonathan. Wonder how many of 'em we've covered by now? Not many, with that wind allus beatin' us back. Lord, how I wish we was through with this blasted gorge.

He stepped down reluctantly over the wagon's tailpiece

into the two inches of water that covered the logs of the raft. It would be awash ankle-deep as soon as they cast off and pushed into the current, he knew. Only the trick of resting the wagon boxes on top of the dismantled wheels had kept their beds from being flooded instead of merely sodden.

Flexing his sore shoulders he waded toward Rutledge. "How do we know this ain't yesterday?" he inquired. "Or the day before, or the day before that? Same rain and wind, same nasty-lookin' rapids up ahead, same fine, level campsite—" He jerked his head toward the tumbled black boulders that constituted the bank, around one of which strained their anchoring rope.

"Well, I got muscles I didn't know about yesterday," grunted Rutledge. "Seems like the same old ordinary ones I been usin' all my life ain't enough for this here Columbia. I been breakin' out a new set ever' mornin'."

Jonathan returned his sour grin. Then as Sally appeared, shivering, at the opening of the wagon, he sloshed back to get the bag of pemmican and dole out breakfast.

"I wish Dan'l was here with us, 'stead of up in that snow somewheres," murmured Sally. "Oh, Jonnie, I can't feel easy about James. He's so *Injun*—"

"Funny thing is," said Jonathan carefully, "we still look alike, him and me, same as when we was little fellers. Remember that picture?"

"Why, Jonnie Keath! James don't any more look like that picture—or like you—than—than—"

"I know, I know, he wears braids and he's—well, he's changed, all right." Jonathan thought of the lean, wild grace of Jim's body, the eagle feather aslant above his scar-licked face. "Still and all, Mr. Rutledge said he suspicioned who Jim was, minute he pulled that letter out, 'cause he—we resembled."

"Well, I can't see it!" declared Sally. "And I don't want to see it, what's more. He's a savage! Eats dogmeat, wipes his knife on his shirt, can't even read—"

"Lots of folks can't read, sis." Jonathan got up wearily, pulling the thongs tight over the remaining pemmican. What made him defend Jim? Everything she said was true, more than true. The way he threw that knife! And then there was the matter of that heathen little buckskin bundle Jonnie'd spotted tied to Jim's braid the first night he'd come. Jonnie knew what it was. He hoped Sally didn't, she'd disown Jim completely. But then she didn't remember the Jim he'd known when they were children together, hadn't been lonesome for him all these years, and wanting him back . . . He shook off the mood irritably. "Best we worry about Jim later. Right now we got plenty on our hands just stayin' alive."

Before the murky dawn had given way to bleak daylight, they were casting off. The wind seemed to be falling off a little—of course, thought Jonathan grimly, since we got rapids ahead. Half their fight had been against that wind, which seemed obstinately set on keeping them in the same place; one day they'd made scarcely a mile in eight long hours. But let the water grow white with hidden obstacles, let rapids and whirlpools loom up in their path, and the wind was sure to vanish, leaving them to race headlong over the swift current, fighting to control the raft's progress by thrusting with their poles at the rocks that jutted out of the swirling water like bared fangs. With the next smooth stretch, back would come the wind and they'd be fighting just as hard to keep moving at all.

Since the first day, all of them had ceased to think of the river as a mere body of water, rushing through natural causes to the sea. It was a monster, intent on their destruction, roaring with fury at their presence in his black-walled gorge, call-

ing the rain to drench them and the snow to blind them and the wind to madden them and the rapids to drown them. Every mile negotiated, every obstacle dodged, was a cheating of the giant.

Along toward noon Ned Rutledge, stationed at the foremost corner as the raft swung around a bend, let out a shout of alarm. "Watch it, Pa! This side, this side—!"

Through the veil of rain Jonathan saw Rutledge splash across the pitching logs, sending up fans of water with every step. At the same moment he glimpsed on his own side a dark shape looming under the surface just ahead. As the raft jarred against whatever obstacle Ned had sighted, both Rutledges thrust hard, causing the whole clumsy craft to swing in a semicircle.

"Take it easy!" yelled Jonathan. He aimed his pole toward the looming shape ahead and braced himself. An instant later there was a grinding jolt that seemed to tear his arm from its socket. The logs under his feet tilted perilously, then bounded free, drenching him with icy spray. Before he had time to do more than catch his breath, the raft was careening forward again, leaping like a live thing, smacking down on the black, running current with bone-jarring force.

From the Rutledge's wagon top, under which the four women huddled through the long, chilling hours, he heard the familiar sound of Maggie's cheering. In spite of his throbbing arm he grinned.

You didn't get us that time! he told the giant.

"Hungry?" Sally shouted in his ear a few moments later.

He nodded without turning, as the raft skimmed dangerously close to a jumble of wagon bows, soaked canvas, and logs, ruined goods—the wreckage of just such a craft as their own. "Lord a'mighty!" he grated, feeling his flesh crawl as they swept past. "There's one didn't make it."

"There was another near where we tied up last night," Sally said. "Well, that's only two so far. Think how many there was startin' off from the Dalles!"

He felt her steady herself against his shoulder as she shoved pemmican into his mouth. "Wonder why we don't see none of the others?" he mumbled. They had sighted only three other emigrant rafts in the whole six days.

"Well, some's ahead of us, and the rest's behind. We'll crowd up again at the Cascades, I reckon." Suddenly her determined cheerfulness deserted her. "Oh Jonnie, I wonder if Dan'l— It must be powerful cold up yonder."

"Yeah." Jonathan raised his eyes to the snow-swept heights, then looked away fast. "They'll get through. They *got* to get through. By golly, if Jim don't get Dan'l back safe, I'll—"

"Hush," said Sally fiercely. "Open your mouth."

Jonathan obeyed, getting almost as much rain in it as he did pemmican, and choking as a result. At the same moment he heard a hoarse shout from Rutledge and the raft lifted as if it meant to fly, then gave a heavy lurch and came down with a crash. Through the sheet of spray that shot out from under it, Jonathan caught a glimpse of Sally's white and desperate face as she fell headlong on the pitching logs, still clinging tight to the bag of pemmican. With an exclamation of pity he bent to help her.

"Crimeny, sis! Any bones broke?"

"No. No. Get back to your polin', Jonnie, I'm all right." She got up, one hand pressed to her side. "Dratted old river! Here, Jonnie, the bag got wet, but—"

"I'll eat tonight. Go on in the shelter, you ain't safe here."

It ain't fair, it's too rough for her, he thought incoherently. She had come mighty near to going overboard.

But there was no time to nurse his fright and no time to worry. The river was still tossing them about with malicious force, and fresh rapids boiled up ahead. Jonathan thrust hard

and harder with the pole, his thoughts veering again to those white-drifted slopes above, and the two who were up there somewhere in the snow and wind. The raft edged past a rocky little beach late that afternoon, and his heart leaped at sight of a group of scrawny cattle, coats roughened with cold, hunched miserably in the wind. But there was no sign of a mule or a beautiful wild mare—or a small boy. It was some other emigrant's cattle; Jonnie spotted the burly drover just as the whole scene vanished around a twist of the river. What were they doing down here at the water's level? Was the high trail impassable after all?

Oh, crimeny, why did I ever let Dan'l out of my sight! he thought. I never should've, I never should've.

Then even his fear faded in the weary confusion of rocks and drenching spray. The whole world narrowed itself finally to the ache in his shoulders, the wet, the cold, the next rock.

Chapter VII

A couple of days later Jim and Dan'l scrambled down the steep embankment to the same rocky little beach, driving before them the skinny cattle, who lowed dispiritedly as they faced the churning river. They could be driven no farther on this side; the mountains were impassable.

An emigrant raft appeared around a bend, the men fighting wind, rocks, and hidden obstacles like demons. Had Jonnie's raft passed yet? Both Jim and Dan'l shouted questions as the vessel whirled by, but the wind tore their words to shreds.

"What'll we do?" yelled Dan'l finally over the thunder of the water. "Stock can't ford this!"

Jim shook his head. Nothing could ford this, certainly not these half-starved animals. They would have to ferry the beasts across somehow or other, and it would cost them days of delay. The pemmican was already ominously low.

"Jim?"

He looked down into Dan'l's anxious face. "I'll git you there," he repeated stubbornly. "Go git the hatchet out'n my possibles. We're gonna build another raft."

It was three days before the last terrified animal was across the river. Mud coated and exhausted, Jim and Dan'l slept among tumbled boulders, and next morning strained upward again, into the teeth of fresh snow. The trail on this side was

rougher, steeper, more strewn with pitfalls than the one they had already come over, if that were possible. Only the dwindling food supply enabled Jim to distinguish one day from the next, as they struggled through a white and swirling world where they could see ahead only a few feet at a time, where the gusty wind drove the snowflakes into their sleeves and down their necks, stung tears into their eyes, and then froze them on their lashes. Every branch, every twig was laden and bent with snow, and the stumbling animals wore inch-thick caps and cloaks of white.

But what worried Jim was the increasing weakness of himself and the boy. He had dared take no more than a few mouthfuls of food for several days now, and had cut even Dan'l's rations by half. Surely they would reach the Cascades tomorrow, or the next day! How long could fifty miles be? But still the trail led on, still the snow fell from the dirty sky.

At last one evening as they halted for the night in a rough little clearing, Jim dug into his pouch to find only one small morsel of the pemmican left. His eyes went to Rutledge's half-starved little heifer, then away again. It outraged his pride to have to kill for food one of the very animals he had contracted to deliver safely.

Automatically he set about making camp, but there was a slow drowsiness about his motions. The air was deathly still this evening, and so cold his nostrils stuck together when he breathed. His fingers felt like wood, his feet like stumps. Clumsily he dug a rude cave out of the side of a snowbank, and motioned Dan'l into it. The boy was groggy with fatigue and hunger. Well, from now on it would have to be the moccasin soles, or that scrawny heifer—or nothing.

As Jim turned to pull Dan'l's buffalo robe from his pack, the landscape seemed to lurch as he staggered, and the boy's voice, murmuring something about roast buffalo ribs, faded to a great distance. By gor! thought Jim. Maybe I best start

on them moccasins tonight. But he leaned against Bad Medicine's bony side for a moment, swallowing hard, and the lightheadedness passed. He tugged the robe free and flung it to Dan'l, then tossed the last chunk of pemmican on top of it—a chunk no bigger than his thumb.

"Ain't you eatin'?" asked Dan'l sharply.

"Not tonight."

"Didn't eat last night, neither," Dan'l said.

"Don't matter. I'm used to goin' empty."

"For two and three days in a row? You're lyin'."

"Shut up and eat your own," Jim growled. It was a momentous task to drag his own robe off Buckskin, to loosen her pack, to make his fingers move, to lift his arms.

Dan'l had become very still. "Jim," he faltered. "Are we runnin' out of food?"

"We got plenty."

"You're lyin', Jim Keath!" Dan'l's voice rose weak but shrill. "It's gettin' low and you been starvin' yourself so's you can give it to me."

Jim turned on him. "Fergit that and eat! I said I'd git you there, didn't I?"

An expression of stubbornness settled over Dan'l's snub-nosed face. "Not gonna eat unless you do."

"By gor, you eat that or I'll lay into you!"

"Go ahead. I still won't." Dan'l lay back, his fist tight about the scrap of pemmican, tears of weakness and protest spilling over.

Panic touched Jim. He dropped to his knees beside the boy. "Why won't you?"

"I just won't. I can't! Cracky, Jim, *you* wouldn't! We—We're *brothers!*"

Slowly Jim sank back onto his heels. "Yeah, brothers," he murmured.

After a long, still moment he reached for Dan'l's chunk of pemmican and meticulously divided it into equal parts.

It was then that Moki struggled into view through breast-deep snow. From his mouth dangled the limp carcass of some small animal.

"Wait, Dan'l! Don't eat yet!" Jim pushed both scraps of pemmican into the boy's hand. "'Moki! Here!"

The dog growled deep in his throat.

"*Moki!*" snarled Jim. The sight of the fresh dark blood on the snow turned him savage with hunger. He rose slowly, letting the robe fall, and stepped past the wide-eyed Dan'l.

Moki retreated, his growls unmistakably hostile, his lifted lip revealing a row of wolfish, sharp white teeth.

Jim forced himself to halt. The dog stopped too. Slowly Jim dragged his eyes away from the meat and turned aside. It took all his will. He stood there fighting to keep his head, waiting until he felt Moki's tenseness relax, and heard the growls die away. At the soft sound of slavering, he looked around. The dog's attention was now on the meat, which he was tearing as he held it with a forepaw. It stained the snow around it vivid red.

Jim gathered his tired muscles. Soundlessly, with infinite caution, he began to approach. One foot was lifted with slow, elaborate care, put down soundlessly; after a long, tense wait, the other. His jaws ached from clenching, and craving blurred his vision until the coveted meat seemed to dance crazily. But each step brought him nearer, and Moki did not know yet. When he was still three paces from the dog, he got a whiff of blood. It sent saliva flooding into his mouth, cracked his patience. He sprang.

He heard Moki's yelp, felt a bright flash of pain as he seized the meat; the dog's jaws had closed on his hand. Under him the hairy steel-muscled body thrashed and clawed as

they struggled together, filling the air with snow. Moki's savage snarls mingled with his own no less savage Crow cursing. Gradually he became aware that he was doing all he could, and it was not enough, the dog was stronger than he. For lack of the smallest margin of strength he would have to watch his own dog eat while he starved. Fury sent strength to him from somewhere, that last spurt needed to force aside those flailing paws and sink his own teeth into Moki's ear. Hair filled his mouth; he bit down with all his strength, at the same time twisting his captured hand until the dog's head was forced into an unendurable angle. At last the traplike jaws snapped open, freeing him and the meat he still clutched. He rolled clear and staggered to his feet, sending Moki sprawling with a cuff as he did so.

As the dog tumbled away, yelping, Jim grabbed for the branch of a low pine and clung there. He was crusted with snow, his knees sagged under him, his lungs ached. The struggle had all but finished him. But it was strength itself he held now in his torn hand. Meat.

"Jim, you're bleedin'," quavered Dan'l.

Jim lifted his hand. The wound was a nasty one.

"It don't—matter. Don't—be scared, Dan'l. I'll fix it."

He stumbled back through the trampled snow to the dugout, pausing to gasp a last insulting "Squaw!" over his shoulder at Moki. Then he fell down beside Dan'l to examine his prize. It was far from choice; a small and considerably chewed-up mink, its wet fur already freezing into stiff little points. But it was meat.

He skinned it raggedly, his knife made unskilled by the trembling of his hands. Returning the two morsels of pemmican to his pouch, he gave Dan'l a haunch of the mink and hacked off the other for himself. Chewing it ravenously, he felt warmth and life flow back into him. They'd get there now, heifer and all, with any luck.

By the time he had cracked the cleaned bone and sucked out the marrow, the scenery had stopped dancing and blurring before his eyes. Trees and snow-capped rocks were firmly anchored to the ground again, their outlines distinct, their shapes normal. He felt a surge of triumph as he began to bandage his throbbing hand with matted buffalo hair and a strip of buckskin. Jim Keath hadn't gone under yet, not by a long chalk.

Turning at the sound of a soft whine, he watched Moki slink closer, his plumed tail raising little clouds of snow as it thumped in apology.

"Thought you'd keep it all for yourself, by gor!" Jim muttered. He glared at the dog a moment, then reached out to ruffle his ears and push his nose into the snow, finally tossing him the scrawny remainder of the mink.

"Jim," said a small tense voice at his side. He looked around to see Dan'l still holding his piece of meat.

"What's wrong? Eat!"

Dan'l swallowed. "I—I'm goin' to."

Jim softened. Poor kid, he thought, it's rough doin's fer your first winter in the mountains, anyway you lay your sights. Rough and small and lonesome.

But all he said was, "We best save the pemmican. You guessed it. It's the last we got."

Dan'l's eyes met his for a moment. Then suddenly he stuffed the haunch into his mouth. He tore off a bite and chewed fast, his breath hard and uneven but his young face stern. At last he swallowed.

"How was it?" said Jim.

For answer Dan'l took another bite. Around it he muttered, "Meat's meat."

Jim grinned for the first time in days. "By gor," he said, "I'll make a mountain man out'n you yet!"

There was a long silence in which the darkness crept down

over their still white world. Moki slipped through the dusk like a shadow and dropped down against Jim, who buried his fingers in the dog's ice-stiff hair. Scratching gently, he sat listening to the soft, desperate sounds of crunching and tearing as the cattle tried to make a meal off twigs and bark.

"They say," finally came Dan'l's small, yearning voice at his side, "they say that valley's same as paradise, where we're headin'. Hardly ever snows there, nor freezes, nor nothin'. They say it's like spring all year 'round, with berries and nuts growin' wild all over the place, and game a-plenty—" He drew a deep breath, and tossed away the mink bone, picked clean. "I'm mighty anxious to get to that valley, Jim."

Jim only grunted. He was anxious to get to that valley too. He was more anxious than he cared to admit, just to get to the Cascades and find out if Jonathan and Sally were all right. They must be there by now, if they'd made it at all—they must have been waiting for days. Maybe, he thought, they'll be gladder to see me this time, if I git Dan'l there safe.

"Jim," Dan'l said, "Jonnie don't think you mean to stay with us, once we get settled. I heard him tell sis. He thinks you're just gonna claim the land and then go off again, and live like you been livin'. But you ain't gonna do that, are you?"

And Jim found himself answering slowly, "No. I'm gonna stay."

Dan'l heaved a relieved sigh and snuggled against him. Brothers, Jim thought. He hesitated, then put his arms around the shivering child. After a while his shoulder grew stiff, and one of his legs went to sleep. But he never moved throughout the long night.

Two days later they reached the Cascades. It was none too soon. The cattle were skin and bones; years ago—could it have been only yesterday?—the brothers had eaten the tiny lump of pemmican, and since then there had been nothing.

Jim's eyes had not focused properly for hours; he swayed with Buckskin's every stumble, barely able to cling to her emaciated back. Dan'l lay stretched along Bad Medicine's neck, strapped on with a length of rawhide; he had not yet reached the state of total weakness, thanks to the extra rations earlier on the journey, but it had been a task almost beyond Jim's strength to hoist him up that morning, and he knew they dared not risk a fall. Well, it was over now. The trail was descending, and he could hear the roar of the Cascades.

Emerging from timber halfway down the last rock-strewn slope, he halted involuntarily at the chaotic sight below. Here at the brink of those falls no vessel could navigate, the rafts had landed, the scattered emigrants gathered once more for the portage ahead. Over a jumble of rafts, wagon parts, baggage, milling people, and animals, Jim could see a few sway-backed canvas tops already jolting over the hub-deep ruts that led westward through the mud. Where was the Keaths' wagon? The Rutledges'? How to find them in this shifting confusion?

All the disasters he had pictured during the long two weeks flashed through his mind once more. Then Dan'l pointed.

"There's sis!" he croaked. "There's our wagon!"

There it was, with the big triangular stain on its canvas, beside it the blue splash of Sally's dress. Mud, cold, hunger ceased to matter. Dan'l turned—a shapeless small bundle of bedraggled wrappings, incredibly dirty, but with the ghost of his old grin curving his cracked lips.

"Let's surprise 'em!" he said.

He urged his mule down past the straggling cattle, Jim following. It was no trick to hurry unnoticed through the jumble of wagons below and halt their tired mounts beside their own.

Sally's back was to them. She was bent over a box, listlessly pulling out sodden garments and hanging them over

the great wheel. Her rag-bound feet were caked with mud, her hair spilled untended over her drooping shoulders; every move she made was heavy with fatigue.

"Sis—" quavered Dan'l.

She whirled. For an instant she stood transfixed, her face twisting with such blinding, painful joy that Jim turned away his eyes. She gave one wild scream—"*Jonnie, come quick!*" then stumbled forward, laughing, sobbing, flinging herself against Bad Medicine's side to seize as much of Dan'l as she could reach. She pressed her cheek against his dirt-encrusted thigh. "Oh, Dan'l you're here, you're safe, you ain't dead. *Jonnie!* He's come, he's come—!"

At that minute Jonnie hurtled, white faced, around the end of the wagon, a hammer in one hand and a wagon tire in the other. At sight of Dan'l he dropped both and lunged forward. Eager hands tore at the thongs that lashed the boy to the mule; he was pulled down and hugged again and clung to. His voice rose shrill with weakness and excitement.

"Cracky, sis, you still got pemmican? I'm most cavin' in—you oughta seen us, we ate raw mink meat! Moki hunted it and Jim fought him for it—fought Moki—and we ate it, and I'm a real *hivernant* now 'cause I wintered out, but we ain't had *nothin'* for a couple days, and—"

Jim, unnoticed, stood silent beside Buckskin. Then Jonnie turned. "Couple of days! Good crimeny! Looks like Jim ain't eat for a month!"

"Fought Moki?" Sally cried. "My stars above, look at that filthy bandage! Jonnie, run quick and borry some chewin' tobacco from Mr. Rutledge and I'll make a poultice."

Jim was ashamed of the warmth that swept through him. *Wagh!* Look at him standing there waiting and hoping for their attention, like any squaw! Had it shown on his face?

It was the impassive son of Scalp Necklace who followed them to the wagon, and food.

Later, when Jim had eaten, been doctored, slept, and was sitting beside the tall wagon wheel, eating again, he heard Jonnie's footsteps, hard and eager, coming up behind him.

"Jim. Dan'l says you told him you meant to stay on with us, after we get the claim. Is that right?"

Jim answered guardedly. "Oh, I reckon."

"Crimeny! You mean it?"

"Sure. Got to winter somewheres."

There was a pause before Jonathan said, "Oh."

At the tone of his voice Jim looked up, then rose quickly. "Wait, Jonnie. I figger to stay longer than just a winter. If I'm wanted."

"Wanted? Why, blast it, of course you're wanted."

Sally, folding and repacking the soggy garments, was listening tensely to every word. It would suit her better, Jim knew, if he'd just sign that claim and then get out. Well, he wasn't trying to suit her. "All right, I'm stayin', then," he told Jonnie.

He turned away and began to yank tight the drawstring on the bag of pemmican. Jonnie strode off to finish mending his tire, murmuring, "We'll leave at daybreak. By golly, we're almost there!"

There remained only five miles of portage before they were through with the gorge.

Five miles. The worst miles of the two thousand that stretched back to Missouri. From sunrise next day until well after dark they waded knee deep in snow and mud and water while the heavens continuously pelted them with more. Everyone was afoot now, and half of them barefooted.

Dan'l and Ned Rutledge walked first, driving the animals; the women followed, Maggie and her mother half carrying Bess, who appeared to be near collapse. Sally stumbled beside them until she was hysterical with the pain of her tired and

frozen feet. Jim swung her atop Bad Medicine, who wavered a moment and then staggered on. The reassembled wagons brought up the rear of the procession, Jonathan and Mr. Rutledge grimly forcing their oxen over an incredible trail in which the mud lay so deep that no one dared look behind for fear of seeing the wagons overturned and lost forever.

Yet other wagons had got through somehow. There was a top-heavy shape, only half glimpsed through the curtain of rain, rocking and swaying ahead of them right now, and more were following. The trick was to keep moving, not think or feel or hope or count the hours, but only keep moving.

And at last it was finished, the portage was made, the five miles were behind them. Soaked through and almost dead with cold, the two families crowded into their battered wagons and somehow fell into exhausted slumber. It was more than a day later when they could gather strength to build the raft that would take them the last lap. But this time there was no fear in the parting as Dan'l and Jim, onshore, shoved the raft free into the current. It was easy poling now, on into the valley, and the animals would find food in the descending hills. The gorge was licked.

As they took the trail once more, Jim turned for a moment toward that vicious cleft which had so nearly succeeded in keeping them forever. Behind it, like a world infinitely far away, lay Powder River and Absaroka, the Plains and Taos, and Tom—all his old, familiar haunts and his free-roaming life. He was cut off from all that now, every mile of that snowbound trail rose a separate barrier. What was ahead?

Uneasily he fingered the medicine bundle tied to his braid. A glimpse of Dan'l's bright head moving along the boulder-strewn trail reassured him a little, but before Jim followed he fished a small bag of kinnikinnick and a scrap of red cloth from his pouch, and hung them on a low branch as an offering to

his helpers. Then he nudged Buckskin with his heels, and headed west.

West, to another reunion with Jonnie and the others at Fort Vancouver, where man and beast could rest a day or two, where the trail-weary emigrants replenished supplies on credit, had horses shod and wheels mended, or merely wandered about the huge stockade basking in the pale sunshine that was like heaven after the gorge and staring at the bustling, well-fed people—blacksmiths, coopers, Hudson's Bay clerks in black cloth coats, Indians, traders, gaily dressed voyageurs.

West, then south—along the broad, silver-gray Willamette, into a new land; a rain-misted valley lush with promise, each rise crested with timber, every hollow deep with grass.

Good country, reflected Jim, as he held Buckskin to a walk beside the squealing wagon. A man could find food and clothing here year in and year out, though he'd have to cross the mountains for buffalo if he wanted the best lodge skins. Oregon. Oyer-un-gun, Place of Plenty, the Shoshones called it.

Clyde Burke, a spare, middle-aged man from the next wagon back, spurred alongside Jonnie to shout enthusiastic prophecies. Had Jonnie noticed how rank the ferns grew, how many creeks there were? No droughts in this country, no sir! They'd all grow rich from wheat and lumber—just wait a few years, more and more people would come, there'd be sawmills, flour mills, villages, towns, great cities.

Jim rode forward out of earshot and out of sight, consulting meanwhile that portion of his brain which was an accurate map of every peak, forest, canyon, watercourse, and ridge within a thousand square miles. Another river should open out from this one not far ahead, and westward along its banks a couple of miles was a place he and Tom had camped one night last summer.

He was back in an hour or so, wheeling Buckskin in a flurry of tail and hoofs beside the lumbering wagon. "Place over west'ard a piece might do you," he told Jonnie.

"Where? How far?" Sally called down eagerly from the tall wagon seat.

"How's the water?" added Jonathan.

"It ain't fur. They's a creek and two springs, I think. And it's on a little river. I fergit the name."

"On a river! Is there much timber to clear?"

"No more'n anywheres else around here."

Jim could sense Jonathan's excitement, and see him firmly control it. "How about—does it lay pretty level?"

"Rolls a little, is all. They's camus and blackberry on the glades, and fish in the river."

Sally drew a long, tremulous breath. "Sounds mighty good."

"Come on, then."

An hour later the wagon creaked into a little clearing lighted by the pale rays of sunshine now breaking through the clouds. The wheels slowed, made their final squealing revolution, and came to a halt under a towering oak tree. The oxen reached eagerly for the grass.

For a moment no one moved or spoke. There was the river, willow edged and tranquil, filling the silence with low music. There were the dark firs rising yonder, just where one might build a cabin, and emerald grass sweeping down from them. Beyond lay gently rolling glades, a tangle of blackberry and hazel, a wooded hillside—a whole, peaceful, untouched little valley drowsing there in the late afternoon sun, just waiting for the Keaths. Certainty, and a deep content, stole over Jonnie. Five long months of journeying were done.

"Sally," he said. He looked up at her, sitting tense and straight beside Dan'l under the weather-beaten arch of the

old wagon top. Quite suddenly his eyes were brimming with tears. "Sally, come on and get down. We're home."

"You're sure, Jonnie?"

"Well, ain't you?"

Sally drew a long, deep breath and came to her feet, pointing. "I want to build the house right there, in front of them big trees. And I want to plant them rose slips I brought yonder by the front door. And mother's lilac. We can have a real table to eat off of again, and real chairs, and a fireplace—"

"Cracky!" yelled Dan'l suddenly. "Lookit that fish jump! I bet that river's crawlin' with 'em! I'm gonna cut me a pole, by cracky, I'm gonna—"

He scrambled to the ground, talking faster and faster, and Sally followed. The clearing rang now with their excitement, and weariness fell away like a discarded garment.

"It'll be just one room at first," Jonathan was saying. "But we'll add on. And look! Yonder's a good space for the garden, soon's I get it cleared some. Let's walk over that ridge and down to the glades, Jim says they's two springs and a creek. I bet this soil'd grow *anything!*"

Jim watched them hurry across the clearing, skirt the timber and vanish over the ridge, then reappear a few moments later in the sunlit glades beyond. Dan'l clambered up the slope from the river, yelling incoherently about ten-foot trout, and dashed after them.

An impatient tug on the bridle aroused Jim. Buckskin was reaching for the lush grass. He slid off and let her have it. For a moment he stood still, breathing the clean, moist air and watching the breeze dance in the fir trees. Then he walked slowly down to the water's edge. *Still waters, green pastures . . .*

Easing down on his haunches, he watched the minnows darting about in the clear brown shallows; noted a longer,

darker shadow that might be a trout lurking there where the trailing branches of a willow stirred lazily in the current. Yonder up the bank was a trampled place where deer had sometimes come to drink, and there was a scarred tree—old beaver sign.

Yes, it was a good place. They'd ruin it now, of course. They'd ruin the whole valley, Jonnie and Rutledge and all those others. Cut down the forests and scare away the game and spread fields and houses and cattle and sheds and wagons and clotheslines over the whole face of this wild and beautiful country—tame it and plow it and fill it with people.

He listened to the soft, running whisper of the river and remembered its whispering Indian name—the Tualatin. Then he rose abruptly, walked back up the bank, and began to unload his mule.

Chapter VIII

Jim slapped a big chunk of elk meat onto the spread-out hide and hacked off a slice with his knife. He cut this into strips about an inch thick, scored them crisscross, and carried them over to the high willow-sapling rack he had built near the big oak tree.

Squaw's work, he thought grumpily, as he added the elk strips to the venison already spread out on the rack. Meat making was not his favorite occupation. He'd done plenty of it, during the years with Tom, when there was no squaw handy to do it for them. But he'd never quite got over the feeling that he was demeaning himself. A man hunted the meat and made his kills; later he ate all the jerky he wanted. But the chore that took place between times was none of his affair.

Still, he reflected as he poked damp fir branches into the slow, smoky fire burning under the rack, it wasn't as bad as the sort of thing Jonnie had been busy with ever since they found the claim a week ago. Swamping brush, cleaning stray saplings out of the clearing, digging up the stumps afterward. What did they want so much open space for? The cabin wasn't going to take all that room.

Jim saw no sense in bothering with a cabin anyway—

counting the new hides, they'd soon have enough to make a good snug tepee, and that forest was full of lodge poles. But Jonnie and Sally wouldn't think much of that idea. He grinned fleetingly at the notion of Sally keeping house in a Crow lodge. No, it had to be a cabin. There was already a growing stack of logs yonder by the fir trees, and he could hear the clear *whack—whack!* of Jonnie's ax back in the woods, trimming another. From the direction of the river came the sound of vigorous splashing and slapping and singing as Sally scrubbed the last grime of the trail out of jeans and petticoats.

Jim turned from the fire as Dan'l emerged from the woods —Moki, almost invisible beneath a load of firewood, stalking sulkily at his side.

Jim laughed aloud at the expression on the dog's face. That morning, to Dan'l's fascinated delight, he had rigged a travois —two poles harnessed to the dog's shoulders and lashed together at the far ends to trail the ground, forming a crude sled —and it was on this the wood was piled. Moki hadn't suffered this indignity since he'd carried Red Deer's wood in Absaroka, and there was lugubrious self-pity in every line of his body.

Jim leaned against the meat rack, shaking with mirth. "*Wagh!* Ain't you mistreated!"

Moki whined piteously, making a terrific show of effort as he staggered forward, straining at his load. Jim only laughed harder, but Dan'l looked worried.

"Honest, Jim, I'm scared I piled too much on him. I know you said he could pull a lot, but, gee, lookit the way he's walkin'! You reckon I've hurt him?"

"He'll live," drawled Jim. He reached out and took a piece of elk off the meat rack, dropping it to the ground. The effect on Moki was instantaneous. He trotted forward as springily as if the pile of branches was so many feathers, sank to the grass between his shafts, and began gnawing the tidbit.

"Well lookit that!" exclaimed Dan'l in disgust. "Here I been feelin' so sorry for him—!"

"He ain't nothin' but a old faker," Jim chuckled, leaning over to loosen the dog's harness and drag the travois aside. "Him and that cussed mule, they don't take to work no more'n I do."

He turned ruefully to the spot sheltered by the spreading branches of the big oak, where he had a couple of hides pegged out on the ground. More squaw's work! But they were good hides, and he didn't trust these sloppy Multonomah Indians around here to do a decent job of tanning them.

"Want a chore?" he asked Dan'l.

"If it's *your* kind of chore!"

Jim grinned at him and pointed to the graining tool lying on the ground nearby—a curved bone in which an iron blade had been seated. "See how that fits yer fist."

He walked to the oak tree and squatted by the nearest hide, looking it over critically. Then he pegged out the new elk skin beside it, hair side down, and set Dan'l to work, happily scraping off all the flesh and sinew.

As Jim went back to his meat making he was again conscious of the sounds of bourgeway activity from all directions. There was a muffled crash from the woods that meant another tree was down. From the water's edge rose the sound of splashing paddles, and voices shouting greetings. The Rutledges, to the twins' and Sally's mutual delight, had settled directly across the river, and a day seldom passed without the scrape of a canoe prow or the bump of a log raft against one bank or the other as the two families shuttled back and forth on neighborly errands. Jim's knife slashed irritably into the elk carcass. All this banging and whacking and chattering and coming and going—a man couldn't hear himself think.

But Sally and Jonnie thrived on this life. Both of them worked every day from sunrise to dark and never seemed to

mind. They were bursting with plans. Any free minute Jonnie had, he spent striding about the glades and along the creek, planning the cattle shed here, the first wheat field there. In the evenings he sprawled beside the supper fire ciphering in the dirt with a stick to find out how many bushels to the acre he'd have to get to pay their debt at the Hudson's Bay post in Willamette Falls.

Sally was the same. Chattering vigorously, to anyone who would listen, of a future cozy with rose bushes, kitchen curtains, and quilted counterpanes, she dealt just as vigorously meanwhile with the drudgeries of the present—scrubbing and mending, making candles and soap out of the by-products of Jim's hunting, airing blankets and patching shirts. Jim marveled at her. Nothing daunted her; she'd put up with any hardship or tackle any chore, so long as it had to do with making a home. And she still found energy for determined little attacks on the more uncivilized of Jim's ways—his erratic notions of when it was time to eat, his habit of cleaning his knife on his shirt front, his persistence in wearing at his belt that little horn of castoreum, which she declared made him smell like a whole passel of wild animals. She reminded Jim of a hummingbird—tiny, beautiful, and fierce.

He was just finishing with the elk when she appeared on the steep path from the river, lugging the big basket of wrung-out clothes. Even Jim, unaccustomed as he was to taking thought for any squaw, could see that it was too heavy for her. Somewhat sheepishly he walked down and hoisted it to his shoulder, carrying it up to the oak whose spreading branches she used for clothesline.

"Well, thanks," she said in surprise. Then she flapped out a shirt and tossed it over the branch. "Dan'l honey, did you catch any fish this mornin'?"

"Too busy totin' wood," the boy answered, pointing to the travois.

"Then we'll eat the rest of the deer haunch. Run fetch it out of the wagon while I finish hangin' these things, then call Jonnie in. It's most noon. My stars, don't the days fly."

Half an hour later, as the four of them sat together finishing the last of the cold haunch, Jim frowned and looked around to the east. In a moment he got up and walked to the edge of the clearing to stare downriver.

"What's wrong?" Jonnie asked him.

"Somebody comin'."

"Why, I don't hear nothin'."

"Use yer eyes, Jonnie! That mule stopped chewin' five minutes ago."

Every head turned to Bad Medicine, who had been grazing up near the fir trees. He was standing motionless, his ears upright and every muscle quivering.

"Well, shucks!" said Jonnie. "Who sets around watchin' a mule chew, anyhow?" He walked over to stand beside Jim, adding, "You ain't serious?"

"Sure, I'm serious." Jim saw the mule's ears go down. "White man," he told Jonnie. And as he noticed birds spurting out of a thicket downstream, and heard a distant chattering of squirrels, "Probably a wagon, too. No more'n half a mile away."

Dan'l dashed up to them. "Say, lookit how Moki's actin'! I think he heard something too!"

"Did he describe it?" inquired Jonathan drily. "Accordin' to the mule, it's a white man with a wagon."

Even Jim had to grin, but he went back to his eating unperturbed by Sally's giggled "I'll believe all that when I see it!"

Ten minutes later a tall gray horse cantered into the clearing, bearing a big, tow-headed, square-shouldered boy with a sack of corn meal under his arm and an air of holiday making.

"Fetch out that banjo, Jonnie!" he yelled. "You're about to have a passel of company!"

Jonnie let out a whoop and ran toward him, Sally and Dan'l right behind. "Sam Mullins, by all that's holy! Ain't seen you since The Dalles—how's your mother? Where's your claim at?"

"Company, Sam? My stars, what company?"

"Ever'body you know! They's a wagonload right behind me—Dan'l, how's the boy? Miss Sally, I got a little present for you. Just some ol' meal, but it'll fill these folks up. Don't you worry, they're bringin' their own grub . . ."

Everybody talked at once as they pulled Sam off his tall gray and towed him across the grass. Jonnie's face was flushed with delight, his long arms swept this way and that as he showed off his property. Sam admired, and commented, and complained about Oregon rain and his own poverty, lugubriously pulling his pockets inside out while Jonnie flung back his dark head and roared with laughter.

"Man, you ain't the only one! Sis, here, she's got patchin' down to a fine art. Sam, you gotta meet my brother. Jim, hey Jim! Shake hands with the best doggone coyote shooter and cattle doctor ever come out of Kentucky! Dan'l, run fast and yell for the Rutledges to hustle on over here. Sis, you and me better hunt up somethin' for all them folks to set on."

Jim shook hands, hearing the squeal of wagon wheels even as he did so. He liked Sam's looks and self-conscious grin, but found himself tongue tied. Sam was too, suddenly; he shifted his feet and darted glances at Jim's necklace, and a few moments later loped off hastily as his trail-widowed mother arrived with the Millses.

Behind the Millses came the Howards, the Burkes, the young Selways—all the others of the wagon train who had settled within a twenty-mile radius of the Kea hs. To Jim,

it seemed that the whole world was suddenly converging on the clearing. But Jonnie and Sally were in their element, pumping hands and shouting delighted greetings, dragging out crates and boxes and blankets in lieu of chairs. The glades became cluttered with wagons and saddle horses. Shouts rang from the river as canoes were beached, and children tumbled out of them to run whooping and chasing through the fir grove and over the glades. Men slapped each other on the back and reminisced about the Plains and the Snake crossing, talked crops and plans and bushels to the acre; women swapped bread recipes and croup remedies and rose slips until Jim was ready to cut loose and run. Jonnie kept pulling him forward to shake hands with somebody, then turning to welcome somebody else, leaving Jim surrounded by stares. Jim stood it about half an hour, then disappeared.

Rutledge discovered him a little later, lurking on the farthest outskirts of the crowd, prowling nervously between woods and river and keeping a sharp eye on Moki, who was as jumpy as he was.

"Why, son, I was wonderin' where you'd got to," said the man kindly. "No need to be shy of these folks, you know."

"Make too thunderin' much racket!" mumbled Jim.

Rutledge laughed. "They're a mite noisy, I'll give you that. But it's the first time we've all been together since The Dalles, and they's a lot to catch up on. A lot to celebrate, too, by golly! Besides, there ain't no danger around here, these valley Injuns are friendly. Folks are safe when they's this many of 'em together."

"Safe. *Wagh!* I feel safer when they ain't a bourgeway within twenty mile! Look there—what's Jonnie fixin' to do now?"

"Why, he's gonna give us a tune or two!" Rutledge spoke reminiscently. "Dunno how we'd've got acrost them prairies

without that youngster and his banjo. We had some mighty fine times around the fire at night, with the wagons drawn around close."

He ambled away a moment later, but Jim didn't notice. He was too busy watching Jonnie, perched on the tailpiece of a wagon with one knee cocked up and the banjo slanted across his tough, lean body. He was laughing, and the curly black lock that always fell over his forehead jiggled in time to the melody he was plucking from the strings.

Jim caught only a few notes through the fresh wave of merriment that rose as Ned Rutledge drew Sally to her feet, called out something to the crowd that was gathering in a laughing, clapping circle around him. In an instant three more couples were in the center of the circle and a dance had started —the gayest, most rollicking dance Jim had ever seen.

The heavy-booted men suddenly found a lusty grace, stamping and pivoting and swinging their partners in response to the orders Jonnie was chanting as he strummed out the music. The watchers clapped and roared encouragement, the dancers circled and spun, crossed and recrossed and wove in and out, the women's skirts swirling like opened flowers, the patterns of movement flashing swift and intricate but always coming out just right.

Jim had forgotten all about watching for danger; his rifle trailed useless from his hand and his ears were full of the banjo. Jonnie's medicine was powerful indeed, for it could make folks forget the miles ahead and the miles behind, forget trouble and a strange land and loneliness at least for a while.

With a final whirl the dance broke up into a flurry of laughter and panting people. New squares formed, and Jim, absorbed in the rhythms of a different tune, did not see Sally detach herself from a chattering group and start in his direc-

tion. She was within a few yards of him before he noticed her. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright.

"James—come dance with us!"

"Me?" He took an involuntary step backward. "No. I— I— No."

"It's fun, I'll teach you. I will, James." She hesitated, then moved toward him tentatively and stretched out one hand—her first gesture across that invisible line. "You're just standin' here all alone—"

He longed to grasp the slim hand held out to him, let it draw him into that charmed circle where the others lived. Could he—? Then a fresh burst of merriment from the dancers brought all his shyness back. He turned and fled through the trees, plunging deeper and deeper into the tangle of oak and wild plum and hazel until both music and laughter had faded and there came to his ears only the small, secret noises he knew and trusted—the whir of a wing, a crow's call, the wind.

Let them go on and dance, he wasn't going to go back there and be stared at. Let them all crowd around Jonnie—

He stayed away, prowling aimlessly among the trees or hurling pebbles into the dark, clear river, until the night dropped down and he knew the last wagon would be gone. And the next morning, spotting the Rutledge twins paddling across bursting to talk it all over with Sally, he abruptly went off hunting.

Jim spent much of his time hunting, those first few weeks. But even as he rode through virgin forest and along the banks of wild little streams he could hear the ring of axes, the distant shouts of men to their oxen, from the other claims round about.

In spite of himself, he grew more and more curious about the bourgeways and their ideas, their hard-bitten, good-humored faces and their ceaseless labors. Why did they want to

fight this good country so? Why did they insist on growing wheat and raising potatoes, when they could fill their stew pots every day in the year from woods and streams? Why must they mark off a tiny space of ground and chain themselves to it, when they could have a thousand square miles to wander in?

He could not quite put down the queer fascination he felt for these peoples' clothes and belongings. He would lurk in the trees surrounding a new-built cabin, watching a man sharpening a plow or uncrating a massive sideboard, or a sunbonneted woman unpacking cups and plates and pewter spoons. Then he would ride slowly on to his deer tracking.

One day it was a smell that stirred him. He had made his kill—a good young buck—and was riding home at his leisure, eating a chunk of warm raw liver off the point of his knife, with Moki trotting alongside and the laden mule clopping behind. He had just splashed across the stream that bordered the Mills' claim when an enticing, oddly familiar odor drifted to his nostrils. What was that? Something from long ago.

He left the animals in a thicket and crept forward. Through the trees he could see the Mills' half-finished cabin, and the cook fire that smoldered near a battered wagon. He watched a woman take a steaming skillet from the ashes; then, unbearably attracted by that half-remembered fragrance, he left the trees and moved across the clearing, still chewing the last of the liver. He had no thought of sneaking up on her, but his moccasins made no sound, and when she turned she found a feathered Indian at her elbow, his face, hands, and carelessly held knife smeared with blood.

She dropped the skillet and let out a screech that frightened Jim fully as much as he had frightened her.

"What the Sam Hill—" gasped Mr. Mills, stumbling around

the corner of the cabin. He stiffened at sight of Jim, then suddenly relaxed. "Oh, lordy, it's Jonnie Keath's brother. What d'you want, son? It's all right, Martha, will you hush? Nobody's gonna scalp you."

Jim spoke warily. "What's that in the skillet thar?"

"In the skillet? Why, it's hoecake. Good jumpin' jiminy, boy, lookit the blood on you! What you been doin'?"

"Just eatin'."

Mills' wife edged rapidly toward the cabin, motioning back her children, who had appeared from all directions.

"For the land sakes, Ben, give him some hoecake, if that's what he wants. Give him anything!"

Jim rode homeward wondering angrily if they thought he'd been eating bourgeway babies. "Jonnie Keath's brother!" He'd never yet walked into the post at Willamette Falls without hearing that phrase, without feeling curious or doubtful or suspicious eyes follow him down the room.

"Don't worry about it, Jim," Jonnie always advised when he complained about it. "They don't trust you because they don't know you yet. And they've heard a lot of tales—about you keep wolves for pets, and held up the trader at The Dalles with a knife at his throat, and—" Jonnie's white grin would flash. "I do my best to squash all that fool talk, but the truth is, I don't know you very well myself . . ."

Would they ever get to know each other, Jim wondered. He often caught Jonnie studying him as they sat around the supper fire at night, staring at his necklace or his braids or his scars as if trying to penetrate the barrier of those nine years by sheer will power. And Jim did his share of watching and puzzling too, wishing he knew how to make medicine like Jonnie made it—with a warm smile, a banjo, a pair of candid, steady black eyes. Jonnie didn't know how to trap or steal horses or even read sign, but there was never a man who didn't like and trust him on sight.

When Jim reached home with the tale of his bloody hands and Mrs. Mills' reactions, Jonathan laughed until he shook. But then he grew thoughtful. "That'll go the rounds," he said. "Why'n't you steer clear of the other folks for a while, Jim? I can sure use you here." He jerked a thumb toward the meat rack, now dark with much smoking, and the fresh-killed buck and the numerous pegged hides. "Ain't you about through with that job by now?"

"Them hides? No, they got to be sunned some more and then twisted—"

"I mean the huntin'."

Jim looked at him in surprise. "Why, thunder, Jonnie, you don't never git through with huntin', no more'n you git through with eatin'."

"Well, sure. But we got enough meat to last a good while, and we can always get squirrels or fish to fill in. Seems to me the important thing right now is to get our cabin up. With you and me both loggin' . . ."

"You mean you want me to start choppin' trees too?"

"Yeah. Anything wrong with that?"

"No," admitted Jim glumly. "But lookee here. S'pos'n we chop all them trees and sweat a couple weeks more to git this cabin built, and then we want to move on. We can't fold up no cabin and take it with us."

"Move *on?* Good lord a'mighty, who wants to do any more movin'? I had a bellyful of that last summer!" He came around the fire and dropped down on the grass beside Jim. "Why, this is *home*. It's what we come all this way to get. Now we got it we can take root like one of them old fir trees! Don't you get that feelin', Jim? Look yonder at the glades. We'll have them knee-deep in grain by summertime, and a kitchen garden by the woods there, and smoke comin' from our own chimney. This place is *ours*, Jim, soon's the surveyor's been around and you sign that claim. Six hundred and forty acres of it,

debt free! Man, I ain't doin' no movin', I'll tell you that! We're stayin' put!"

Jim listened dubiously, envying the glow in his brother's dark face. "I'll help you, Jonnie," he said finally. "I'll start loggin' tomorrow."

Chapter IX

But the next day the surveyor made his appearance, and tree chopping was halted on both Keath and Rutledge claims while the official staking out began. This was entirely all right with Jim. He enjoyed his reprieve until he realized that Jonnie had something on his mind, and the nearer the day drew for signing the papers, the larger that something seemed to grow.

Jim didn't find out what it was until the final day of the surveyor's activities. Everyone gathered at Rutledges' for the noon meal, and Jonnie, Rutledge, and the surveyor left immediately afterward for the measuring and staking of Rutledge's last few acres. Jim hung around restlessly awhile, listening to the girls chatter, then called Moki and started off through the woods that covered half the claim. A few minutes later he heard the men's voices and the clank of the chain, swerved away from them—and suddenly caught the sound of his own name. He stopped, halting Moki. Then, soundless as a shadow, he drifted closer.

". . . ain't had the chance to keep in practice," Jonnie was saying stiffly. "Like he says, there wasn't no books where he was. But it's him got to sign them papers, so I wondered . . ."

"I see. No, he don't have to sign in actual writing," the sur-

veyor answered. "He can make his mark, and the clerk can witness. It'll be just as legal."

"Sure it will, sure it will!" That was Rutledge's voice, deep and reassuring. "Now don't be frettin' about that, Jonnie."

The quiet tones faded, along with the sound of the chain. After a moment Jim wheeled and went his way.

So Jonnie was ashamed of him because he couldn't read and write. Because he hadn't stuck around that farm and worried his head with Pa's figures and ABCs every night long after sensible people had eaten their buffalo ribs and gone to sleep. Well, by gor, there was plenty of learning that couldn't be found in bourgeway books! How to stalk a panther or steal a horse, how to keep the man smell off a trap and throw a knife and know what kind of Injuns were coming before they got there, how to live well and comfortable for years in a country where bourgeways starved or froze or lost their hair to the first 'Rappahoe—!

But suddenly it was unendurable not to be able to write his name too. Maybe he could print it? *Wagh!* A man wouldn't forget a simple thing like that, even if he hadn't tried it for years.

Would he?

Scowling to keep away a prickle of uncertainty, Jim stopped in his tracks and ripped a piece of bark off a nearby tree. Then he drew out his knife and without allowing himself to wonder if it would come out right, he scratched a big "J."

He looked at it belligerently. There. He hadn't forgotten at all. Jonnie Keath's brother could do anything a bourgeway could do.

Now what came next, if you wanted to write "Jim"? Must be *m* from the way the word sounded. But it seemed like there ought to be something in the middle, just "Jm" was too short, wasn't it? He puzzled over it awhile, then decided uneasily

that "Jm" were likely enough letters for a name that only took one grunt to say. Now for Keath. K—K—K— *Wagh!* How did you write that sound?

Ten minutes later he flung the much scratched bark against a tree trunk, sheathed his knife, and set off furiously for the river. With a few quick, practiced motions he made a little raft of branches, and stripping, piled his clothes on it. Then he plunged into the cold-running current, the raft trailing from a piece of vine clamped in his teeth and Moki swimming by his side.

But the thing was still nagging at him when he and the dripping dog climbed the bank on the Keath side. He dressed, fished a lump of charcoal out of the dead fire and sat for half an hour making scratchings on the back of a piece of old buffalo hide. Finally he flung the hide away and stalked down through the willows and caught trout in brooding silence until the others poled back across the river late in the afternoon.

"Well I'll swear!" exploded Jonathan when Jim appeared suddenly wading toward them through the shallows. "How'd you get over *here?* Where'd you go? We looked, and called—"

"What'd you do that fer?" Jim grabbed the towline of the raft and beached it with a jolt, hitching the rope around the nearest tree.

"Well, how'd *we* know where you was?" demanded Sally. "You might've told somebody—!"

"I ain't used to tellin' nobody where I go or what I do. Don't reckon to git used to it, neither!"

Jonathan and Sally headed up the slope to the clearing. But Dan'l hung back. "Hey, Jim, your hair's all wet. Didja swim that river?"

"Sure."

"Cracky! I bet I could do it too, you know it? But sis'd never let me go swimmin' in winter."

"*Wagh!* What's winter got to do with it? In Absaroka, warn't a week went by all year that the boys warn't called out."

"Called out?"

Jim nodded. "They was rivers thar, too. Fast ones. Cold ones. Somebody'd stick his head in your tepee—it might be black night—and he'd say 'Follow.' "

The picture sprang, vivid, into his mind, and the sensations. Creeping out, shivering with fearful excitement, to join the gathering crowd of boys. No telling where the strong young man ahead was leading so silently, or what he would require of you. It would be Eye of the Bear, or Steals Horses, or maybe Hides His Face, who always wore a buckskin mask to conceal his battletorn jaws.

"He'd strip, at the edge of the woods, and so would we," Jim went on huskily. "Then he'd start runnin' and never stop till he done a flip-flop into the river and swim a mile upstream. And by gor, we better follow! Winter or not. We learnt to swim dodgin' ice floes."

"Ice! But why?"

"Makes you quick and tough. Besides," Jim added, "it's handy to know how. Sometimes when you git older you gotta dodge other things in rivers."

"Like what?"

"Like Sioux bullets."

"Cracky!" Dan'l glanced uncertainly at the water. "I wanta be quick and tough too. But it looks awful cold."

"Why, thunder, this weather ain't nothin'!" Jim started up the bank toward the clearing. "I've trapped beaver streams so cold yer leggins would freeze to the float stick if you warn't careful."

"Float stick? What's that?"

Jim halted. "Why—why the float stick! Ain't you never even seen a beaver trap?"

"No, you got one, Jim? Show me, will ya?"

The sun had sunk into a low bank of clouds, and the woods were dusky. It was just the right hour.

"Come on," Jim said suddenly. "We're gonna hunt up along that creek back yonder till we find beaver sign. Then we're gonna sink us a trap."

He found his traps where he had cached them, in the dry hollow of a stump near the big oak tree. As he crossed the clearing to head for the woods, Dan'l cavorting breathless with excitement at his heels, Jonathan looked up from the fire he was building.

"Dan'l! Where you off to?"

"Just up the creek. It's awright, I'm with Jim."

"But it's supper time!" protested Sally.

Jim frowned impatiently and kept walking. "It ain't supper time till you're hungry. I ain't hungry."

"But you will be, later!"

"Then I'll eat later!"

"Me too," chimed in Dan'l loftily. "I ain't hungry neither. Me and Jim, we got trappin' to tend to."

Jim plunged into the woods. Likely he ought to make the boy do like Sally wanted. *Wagh!* forgit it, he told himself. I hardly seen the boy lately.

He took his time moving up the creek, teaching Dan'l to watch for tooth marks on bark, for collections of twigs and mud, for any sign of a slide on the edge of a pool. He began the boy's training in walking silently, too, in the fine new moccasins—the gaudiest in Willamette Falls. Jim had paid a plew for them the other day over Sally's disapproving protests.

They were half a mile upcreek from the river when he spotted unmistakably fresh beaver sign. He stopped. This was not the half-demolished old dam or deserted lodge he'd expected to show Dan'l. That branch wedged between two rocks in midstream had been gnawed, not broken—and no

earlier than yesterday. He moved on quickly, almost forgetting the boy behind him, and found a track, and a moment later a slide entering a half-dammed pool. Dan'l was tugging at his sleeve now, pointing excitedly. Jim nodded approval; the boy's eye was quick. He beckoned and led the way into the stream, unslinging one of the traps. Beaver still left, in this valley trapped and retrapped for years by Hudson's Bay Frenchmen! He could hardly believe it.

He motioned the boy to watch while he sank the first trap, made it fast with the trap pole and attached a float stick. The pungent smell of castoreum rose on the air as he uncorked his horn and smeared the bait onto the bent twig. Splashing all the man scent into oblivion, he went on upstream to another likely spot, and this time handed the trap to Dan'l.

"Do it all by myself?" breathed the boy in a tense whisper. When Jim nodded he looked scared, then fell resolutely to work.

Jim grinned, wondering if a thing had ever been done more carefully. He helped Dan'l jam the trap pole firmly into the mud of the creek bottom, then smiled as the boy surreptitiously rubbed a little castoreum onto himself as he baited the twig. One person, at least, liked the way Jim Keath smelled!

When they had again splashed out their tracks and were a safe distance away downstream, Dan'l let out his breath in a tremulous sigh of excitement. "Did I do it right?" he asked anxiously.

"Yeah."

"Just *exactly* right? I didn't forget nothin'?"

"Nope."

Dan'l took another long breath. He sounded—and looked—as if he were about to explode. "I've learned a sight of things from you, Jim," he said, his voice solemn with pride. "I betcha I wouldn't'a learned half as much in a whole year of doin' arithmetic."

Jim walked awhile in silence, then slowed his steps to a loiter. "Pa teach you to do 'rithmetic?" he asked idly.

"Oh, cracky yes!" groaned Dan'l. "And then Jonnie, after Pa died. I bet I spent more good time workin' long division than anybody in the world."

"I don't reckon you're much good at writin', though."

"Say, I reckon I am too! That's lots easier'n figgers."

"It is, huh? Let's see you write yer name."

Jim found a loose strip of bark and tore it off, handing it to Dan'l with the lump of charcoal he'd dropped into his pouch earlier. Dan'l rose to the bait instantly, seizing the charcoal with a swagger and scrawling "Daniel Keath" in bold flourishes on the smooth underside of the bark.

"Not bad," admitted Jim. It was actual writing there before him instead of the block printing he had expected. As far as he was concerned, it might as well have been Chinese. Very casually, he added, "Let's see you write mine now."

He didn't breathe again until Dan'l had finished and the bark was in his own hands. "Reckon you'll grow up to be a jedge," he commented.

"Shucks," said Dan'l. "I'd ruther grow up to be a trapper, like you. You think I could, Jim?"

"Mebbe. You learn fast. Come on, we best get movin'."

The bark went into his pouch as soon as the boy's back was turned. It burned there like a hot coal all the time they were walking back to the clearing, all the time he was frying fish for their belated supper, all the time they were eating. He barely heard Sally's fuming about Dan'l's being off in the woods after dark, or noticed Jonathan's thoughtful manner. He waited, outwardly calm, until they had all gone to bed, and until all sounds of restlessness from the wagon had quieted.

Then he moved to the fire, shoved in the logs until the blaze sprang up bright, and fetched the piece if buffalo hide he'd

flung away in anger that afternoon. Rubbing off the scrawled markings, he took the bark and charcoal from his pouch, and set grimly to work. The first rays of dawn were in the sky before he unfolded his cramped legs and crept wearily under the grizzly robe.

The following afternoon when he stood with Jonathan in the crude log structure that served as recording office in Willamette Falls, he wondered if he'd been a fool. There were no beaver in the traps this morning, which was a poor omen. In spite of the medicine bundle tied securely to his braid, he wasn't sure he could carry this off.

He listened nervously to the clerk's questions, the agreements, heard the rustle of papers and the scratching of the quill as the forms were made out. But all he was aware of was Jonnie's labored pose of indifference, the clerk's curious eyes, and his own sweating stage fright.

The devil with it! I'll make the mark, he thought. Better to do that much right than make a mess of this other. What's the difference anyway? Don't matter to me what Jonnie thinks.

No use. It mattered.

He took the pen, felt his fingers close over it convulsively. If Jonnie would only quit watching—

Wagh! Yer a squaw! he told himself angrily. You've counted coup on 'Rappahoe and Sioux, you've killed a grizzly. You gonna run from a piece of paper?

Violently he plunged the quill into the ink and bent over those hateful papers. Next minute he had signed a bold, black "JIM KEATH" at the bottom of the page—in writing, with every one of Dan'l's flourishes preserved and embellished.

Jonnie's quick-drawn breath was the most beautiful music he had ever heard. He straightened to meet his brother's eyes. The look in them was worth every moment of that grim and sleepless night.

Jonnie flushed to the hairline suddenly and headed for the door. Outside, he turned a face split by a wide and sheepish grin. "They's times when I wish you didn't walk so quiet. I s'pose you was somewheres in the woods yesterday, hearin' ever' word I said."

"I heerd enough."

"And I s'pose—" Jonnie's smile twisted. "I s'pose you got your own private opinion of me for carin' how the blasted thing was signed?"

"Mebbe. But so long as you did care— Ain't no bourgeway gonna show me up at nothin'! What they kin do, I kin do."

For a moment Jonathan studied him as if he were a riddle without an answer. "Why *did* you do it, anyhow? This time yesterday you didn't know A from Z, and I didn't think you cared. And how did you do it?" As Jim only grinned, he nodded and started toward the horses, laughing. "All right, don't tell me. I'm plenty satisfied just the way things are. Plenty!" He swung himself onto Bad Medicine, catching Buckskin's halter as Jim started past. "Man, do you realize what you just done? That land is *ours* now—ever' tree and bush and stick and stone of it! A whole square mile—"

He dropped Jim's halter suddenly and grasped his own, giving the mule a kick that made him squeal indignantly. "Come on!" he yelled. "Good crimeny, let's get on home! We got a cabin to build!"

Jonnie's excitement was contagious. In a burst of high resolve Jim plunged vigorously into the tedious labor of felling trees, trimming and notching the logs, and dragging them by means of oxen to the cabin site. For a time he did well, and it all seemed worth while, if it earned Jonnie's approval.

But prolonged toil was a foreign thing to him, and since Jonnie did not praise him nor marvel each day at his unaccustomed efforts, but only took them cheerfully for granted, his

enthusiasm soon began to wane. The log pile grew with disheartening slowness; meanwhile the river called him, and the unexplored places of the hills. Every time he caught sight of Dan'l he'd think of something else he could teach the boy—games and skills young Talks Alone had learned in Absaroka. He began to drift away from the job whenever a vagrant thought beckoned.

"Lookee there, Dan'l, see them birds shoot up out'n that thicket downstream? They don't act that way less'n they're scared. They's likely a bobcat somewheres close."

"Hey, Dan'l, come up the creek with me a minute. I want to show you a brown bear's track."

More and more he enjoyed the boy's eager companionship, and more and more it cut in on the work both of them were supposed to be doing. Dan'l would vanish upriver in response to Jim's hail, and Sally would have to tote baskets of wash or buckets of water by herself, panting under the load and fuming that a body could never find that boy these days when there was work to be done. Or Jim would drag a new log to the heaping pile and then let the oxen stand idle while he showed Dan'l a medicine root he had found, or sniffed a changing wind, or followed the free circling of a hawk far overhead.

One day he was lounging against the log pile aimlessly tossing a small white object in his hand, when Dan'l glanced up from his whittling.

"Hey, Jim, what is that little thing? C'n I see it?"

"Sure. It's a little magic bone."

"A what?" Dan'l dropped the trencher he was supposed to finish by noontime, and ran over for a closer look. "Why, it is a bone, ain't it? All carved and polished. What's it for?"

"To play a game with. You try to guess which hand I'm holdin' it in, and I try to keep you from knowin'. Here, I'll show you."

So Jim arranged sticks and pebbles for wagers, telling of the trappers he'd seen lose a whole season's catch in half an hour, or the Indians who'd gambled themselves horseless, penniless, and even wifeless, playing the hand game. But it could make you rich, too, just as quick. You might go back to your lodge piled with hides and beads and weapons. "All depends on how you make the magic," he confided, his voice dropping cautiously. "The spirits'll work fer you if you sing to 'em just so—"

Stretching his hands toward the boy, he worked them against each other, chanting softly. "Natinachabena, ni nananaechana! Ni nananaechana! Na—tinacha—ben—ahh!"

He flung his closed fists wide part, and Dan'l, who had been watching breathlessly to discover in which direction the agile brown fingers had maneuvered the bone, shouted "That one!" and pointed to the right fist.

Jim grinned and scooped in the "bet" with a moccasined toe, revealing the bone in his left hand. "Watch closer. I'll do it agin and then you kin try."

Jonnie found them still at it when he strode in from the woods half an hour later in search of the overdue oxen. Dan'l stood triumphant guard over a growing pile of sticks and pebbles, and from his lips came a crooning, guttural chant.

"For the lova creation, what's goin' on around here, anyhow?" Jonathan exploded. "Is that young'un talkin' Injun?"

Dan'l turned eagerly. "It's the hand-game song, Jonnie. See all my horses and war shields on the ground there? Jim's got to guess which hand I've got the bone in, see, and—"

"Yeah, I see, all right." Jonnie's black eyes moved from the little hoard of rubbish to Jim's face. "Teachin' the boy to gamble?"

"Why not?" Beneath his outward carelessness Jim was puzzled and a little worried. Jonnie was angry, but why? In Absaroka everybody played the hand game; ponies changed

hands so often no boy rode the same one two days in a row. "What's wrong with a game, Jonnie?"

But Jonathan didn't answer him directly. He turned instead to the boy. "Listen to me, Dan'l," he said gently. "They's plenty of old-fashioned American ways to throw away your money without learnin' any Injun ones."

"But shucks, Jonnie—"

"Wait. I ain't through. Dan'l, remember the mornin' after Mother died? When you and me talked? Remember what I said we had to do?"

"Sure! You said we must take care of sis."

"What else?"

"Well, and get us all out here where Mama wanted us to be, and build us a house, and all, and—"

"Yeah." Jonnie was nodding gravely. "And we ain't done yet, are we? I'm still countin' on you. Now you pick up that clasp knife and trencher and start earnin' your keep!" His voice was stern, but he reached out to rumple the bright hair before he turned back to Jim. "I've had a log finished and waitin' back yonder for a good thirty minutes. Let's get them oxen back to work."

"*Wagh!* Let 'em rest for onct. What's the hurry? Come on upriver with me, we'll git us a squirrel or two fer supper."

Jonnie's palms rubbed slowly against his jeans. "Sorry. I got a cabin to build," he said briefly, and headed for the woods.

Jim followed, irritably aware of his own promise to help. But why did everything have to be done Jonnie's way? Promise or no promise, a fellow had to cut loose sometimes and just be himself!

At length the tedious chore was done, the last log dumped on the pile, the last shake split for shingling, innumerable pegs whittled to substitute for unobtainable nails. The Rutledges had not been idle either, and the two families planned to join

forces in raising the cabins now all was ready. It took brawn and numbers to lift the heavy ridge poles into place and weight the loose-laid shakes of the roof with braced poles. One evening Ned Rutledge crossed the river to announce that they were all set.

"So're we," Jonnie told him triumphantly. "But they's more of you, so we'll start on yours first. We'll be over bright and early in the mornin'."

They were astir at daybreak. The delicate rose of the sky over the fir trees promised a clear day, the air was mild, and Jim found himself whistling softly as he gathered wood. The younger Keaths were bustling here and there, filled with the happy urgency of much to be done.

Then Dan'l, on his way back to the breakfast fire with a bucket of water, noticed Jim's bow hanging on a branch of the oak tree under which were spread the grizzly robe and pack.

"Hey, Jim!" yelled the boy, running up the slope waving the bow excitedly while water splashed in every direction. "Can you shoot this thing?"

"Shoot it? Sure, if I got arrers."

"You got any?"

"Yeah."

"Where? I never seen 'em. I never even seen this before! Where's it been all this time?"

"Slung underneath my possibles. I keep it wrapped up in a hide when I ain't usin' it, that's why you never seen it. They's arrers yonder, in that quiver. Here, have some jerky."

"In a minute. I want to go get them arrows."

Dan'l dropped the bucket and dashed off again, leaving the stout, gaily decorated bow on the ground between Jonnie and Sally. "What'd you carry that thing around for?" Jonathan demanded.

"I use it."

"Use a bow and arrow when you've got a rifle?"

Jim shrugged. "They's times when a bow's handier. You kin let fly a arrer while yer thinkin' about loadin' a rifle."

"Oh, shucks, it don't take so long to load a rifle. Besides, they got sights. You can aim 'em."

Something in Jonathan's tone provoked Jim to argument. "What makes you think you can't aim this? I got plenty nicks in me says different. Let's have that thing, Dan'l."

He slung the quiver to his back, picked up his bow, and rose, scanning the sky. Across the pink and gold of the dawn a crow was flapping. Jim reached over his shoulder. All in the same smooth motion he plucked a feathered shaft from the quiver, flipped it into place, and let fly. As the bowstring twanged, every head craned up. Next instant the crow gave a convulsive jerk and dropped like a stone.

"Cracky!" yelped Dan'l. "Nothin' wrong with that shot! Who says he can't aim it?" he jeered at Jonathan. "Why, Injuns get all the buffalo they want with just a bow and arrow. Injuns can—"

"We ain't Injuns!" snapped Jonathan. "And don't you forget it!"

He got up abruptly, walked with his quick, wading stride over to the wagon, and began gathering tools together. After a moment Jim flung quiver and bow to the ground and followed.

"What's so thunderin' bad about Injuns?" he demanded.

Jonnie's hands slowed, then stopped. Suddenly Jim's anger was gone. In its place was a breathless waiting, a terrible anxiety to hear what Jonathan would say.

The answer came without hedging.

"They're savages. They're murderin', heathen savages."

For a moment Jim was too stunned to say a word. So that's what they thought of the people who'd raised him—what they thought of *him!* But how could anybody think that? Sally was watching him with that same steady, grave regard. She

believed it too. And Dan'l's small face was creased with confusion.

Suddenly everything in Jim rose in rebellion. He remembered the deep, quiet eyes of old Many Horses, the Wise One; the patient training of Scalp Necklace, the laughter of the young men around the feast fire. He could almost feel Red Deer's gentle brown hands changing the leaf poultice on his torn chest, see her seamed and smiling face.

He opened his mouth to protest, then stopped abruptly. All unbidden, other pictures flashed into his mind—those same wrinkled brown hands reaching indifferently for a stone to crush the skull of a wounded pet dog; one of those laughing young men brandishing bloody yellow hair on a coupstick; the grim necklace of scalps from which a proud and patient old chieftain had got his name.

He swung away, profoundly shaken. "They was good to me," he insisted. "Warn't fer them I'd be wolf's meat."

"They wasn't so good to some of the folks in our wagon train."

"Sioux, maybe!" Jim burst out. "Comanches! Not Crows!"

"Injuns," said Jonathan relentlessly.

Out of the painful confusion of Jim's thoughts one fact rose clear, and he had to say it. "They're my people, Jonnie. My people."

"No, Jim. *We're* your people. Sally and Dan'l and me. And all the others in this valley."

Jim's face became impassive. He was more Crow than Keath, and he knew it. Maybe he always would be.