

A Study in Scarlet

All night their course lay through intricate defiles and over irregular and rock-strewn paths. More than once they lost their way, but Hope's intimate knowledge of the mountains enabled them to regain the track once more. When morning broke, a scene of marvelous, though savage, beauty lay before them. In every direction the great snow-capped peaks hemmed them in, peeping over one another's shoulders to the far horizon. So steep were the rocky banks on either side of them that the Icearch and the Pine seemed to be suspended over their heads, and to need only a gust of wind to come hurtling down upon them. Nor was the fear entirely an illusion, for the barren valley was thickly-strewn with trees and boulders which had fallen in a similar manner. Even as they passed, a great rock came thundering down with a hoarse rattle which woke the echoes in the silent gorges and startled the weary horses into a gallop.

As the sun rose slowly above the eastern horizon, the caps of the great mountains lighted up one after the other, like lamps at a festival, until they were all ruddy and glowing. The magnificent spectacle cheered the hearts of the three fugitives and gave them fresh energy. At a wild torrent which swept out of a ravine they called a halt and watered their horses, while they partook of a hasty breakfast. Lucy and her father would fain have rested longer, but Jefferson Hope was inexorable.

"They will be upon our track by this time," he said. "Everything depends upon our speed. Once safe in Carson, we may rest for the remainder of our lives."

During the whole of that day they struggled on through the defiles, and by evening they calculated that they were over thirty-miles from their enemies. At night-time they chose the base of a beetling crag, where the rocks offered some

protection from the chill wind, and there, huddled together for warmth, they enjoyed a few hours sleep. Before daybreak, however, they were up and on their way once more. They had seen no signs of any pursuers, and Jefferson Hope began to think that they were fairly out of the reach of the terrible organization whose enmity they had incurred. He little knew how far that iron grasp could reach, or how soon it was to close upon them and crush them.

About the middle of the second day of their flight, their scanty store of provisions began to run out. This gave the hunter little easiness, however, for there was game to be had among the mountains, and he had frequently before had to depend upon his rifle for the needs of life. Choosing a sheltered nook, he piled together a few dry branches and made a blazing fire, at which his companions might warm themselves, for they were now nearly five-thousand feet above the sea-level, and the air was bitter and keen.