

THE GREAT ASCENT

in it? Any more coming along—or are the others only effete onlookers?”

“Just a notion of my own,” replied Sam, and (his system all thought out beforehand) slid with a ducking, sidewise motion into a passing bucket, and drifted instantly off into the air.

The sensation was as if the power-house moved away from him, and for a moment the inclination was to stretch out and grab the platform's edge. Sam took that as a hint that there might be other sensations in the escapade, sensations that must all be ignored. If he got through the adventure they could be recalled; but for the time being he must not lose his balance. The core of the whole adventure was to sit tight. At first the bucket swayed, and he accepted that, as a man in the water, flinging back to float, accepts the swirling over ears and face, confident in the buoyancy of that element. The oscillation of the bucket had ceased before he came to the first trestle, but the warning of carefulness regarding optical illusions, that he had received when the power-house seemed to drift away, he took to heart. He watched the trestle tower apparently advancing on him. He lowered his head like a man in a barber's chair when the neck is being shaven, lowered his head gently, chin on chest, passed under the arm, slowly raised his head again—and soared on up the hill.

The feeling there was that he would inevitably collide with the crest. Hill and wire seemed to be menacingly drifting together. He told himself