

We were getting above the forest now and out upon the barer mountain-side. Gravel rattled under the ponies' hoofs and once in a while a larger stone rolled down with an echoing crash. The trail ascended in a leisurely zig-zag and through that clear, still air the eye could follow other trails hanging like eyelashes on the mountain's face. The second part of our journey was the shorter and soon the sound of falling water told us that we neared the water-fall which is the overflow of Lake Agnes, the highest of these lakes in the clouds.

Pedro, who had appeared in front of us without anyone realizing just how he got there, explained that our small remaining climb must be made on foot.

"Ponies wait here," he said, pointing to the steps which would take the rest of us to the level of the small plateau above. "Steps very easy," he added patronizingly.

It was astonishing how safe and dependable one's own legs felt. We all tried to look as if we noticed no difference, but the manner of the whole party became perceptibly easier.

It was very pleasant on the plateau above the waterfall. Lake Agnes lay there, sun-steeped, open to the nearer sky, the top-most jewel in this mountain diadem. The trees were thinner here with open vistas through which the descending valleys lay spread out beneath us; Mirror Lake, dark and tiny now; the flash of blue so far below which was Lake Louise. Yet still the mountains held and shadowed us, their unreachd peaks serene and distant through their drifting clouds.

There were other climbers here; climbers with perhaps more right to the name, since they had taken the trail without the aid of ponies. Very content they looked resting on the smooth and sun-warmed moss of the rocks, close to the pleasant music of the waterfall and with some of the most beautiful scenery of the world their own for the trouble of looking at it.

"It is lovely, lovely, lovely!" sighed Una. "And oh, see! a darling cloud—a tiny, baby cloud. Perhaps this is one of their nurseries? If we walk over there we can touch it. Fancy, shaking hands with a cloud!"

Unfortunately Una's voice carries well and the Obliging Traveller was just around the next rock. Very kindly he explained that what we beheld was more or less of an illusion. If we walked over there, he said, the cloud, as a cloud, would exist no longer. We would walk through a slight mist merely. "We are now," he declared, "at an altitude of 6,875 feet and mist of a cloud-like formation is to be expected. At a still higher altitude of—" but why bore you as we were bored.

As soon as we could we excused ourselves and walked sadly away, reflecting upon the limitations of civilization.

"I wonder," mused Una, "if when stout Cortez stood with eagle eye 'silent upon a peak in Darien' he had someone near to remind him of the altitude."

"If so," I answered, "knowing Cortez as I do, I feel sure that no one would have regretted the altitude more than the man who mentioned it. But those good old days are gone."

"And now that the romance of the scene is dissipated," went on Una, "what really worries me is getting down again. If Bingo is as perpendicular downwards as he was upwards, what is to prevent me sliding gently off his neck? I can hardly embrace his tail. I feel it is not done in equestrian circles."

"Perhaps," hopefully, "they are trained to go down backwards."

But they weren't. One of our party was already engaged in a heated discussion with Pedro over just this point. Pedro smiled his flashing, yellow smile and was gently firm.

"Pony use to go down head first," he explained. "Very safe pony. No stumble, all *cushy*—yes."

"I wish I understood foreign languages," fretted the nervous lady.