

THE GREAT ASCENT

rope walkers balance with, if it were no more than a Japanese umbrella! "Sit tight!" he murmured tensely, and then giggled to himself over the thought of the umbrella; but the strained giggle ended as a bird swept below him above the tree-tops. He looked down on its back. It was sailing up the gorge, and it seemed to send the scenery ribboning behind it. He wanted to lean forward, to catch the reeling world.

"Sit tight!" he said again. "Sit tight!"

And then came cramp, the tendons in his thighs knotting up so that he grit his teeth, made faces to himself up in the air there. As he so contorted his visage, the farther declivity of the gulch came stretching out to meet him holding forth the arm of a trestle perched on the dizzy edge. He put chin on chest, lowered his head, passed under that arm, then raised his head, moving his neck to and fro in agony at being unable to move his legs—came to the next trestle, bowed again, grimacing, looked up and saw (with the intensest satisfaction) the platform where the bucket wheel and descend again. And propped beside the ore-dump was Marsden, one leg drawn up as though he were crippled, face distorted, hands kneading, massaging. A man who bent over him rose abruptly and, facing Sam, struck the attitude of a baseball player ready to catch.

"Easy!" he shouted as Sam sailed to the platform (or, as it seemed, the platform to Sam). "You quit your bucket when you catch holt here and I'll grab you. That's it! Up with you!"