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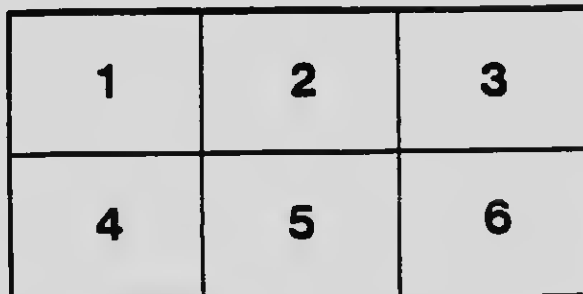
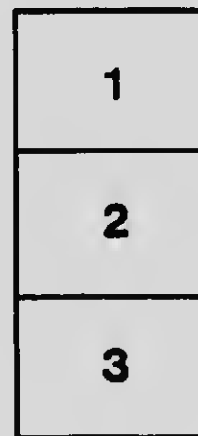
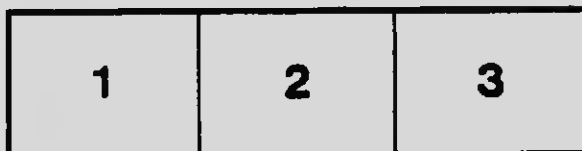
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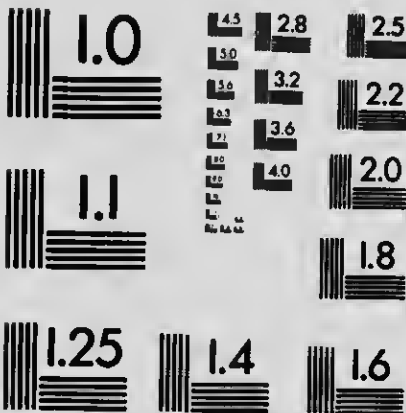
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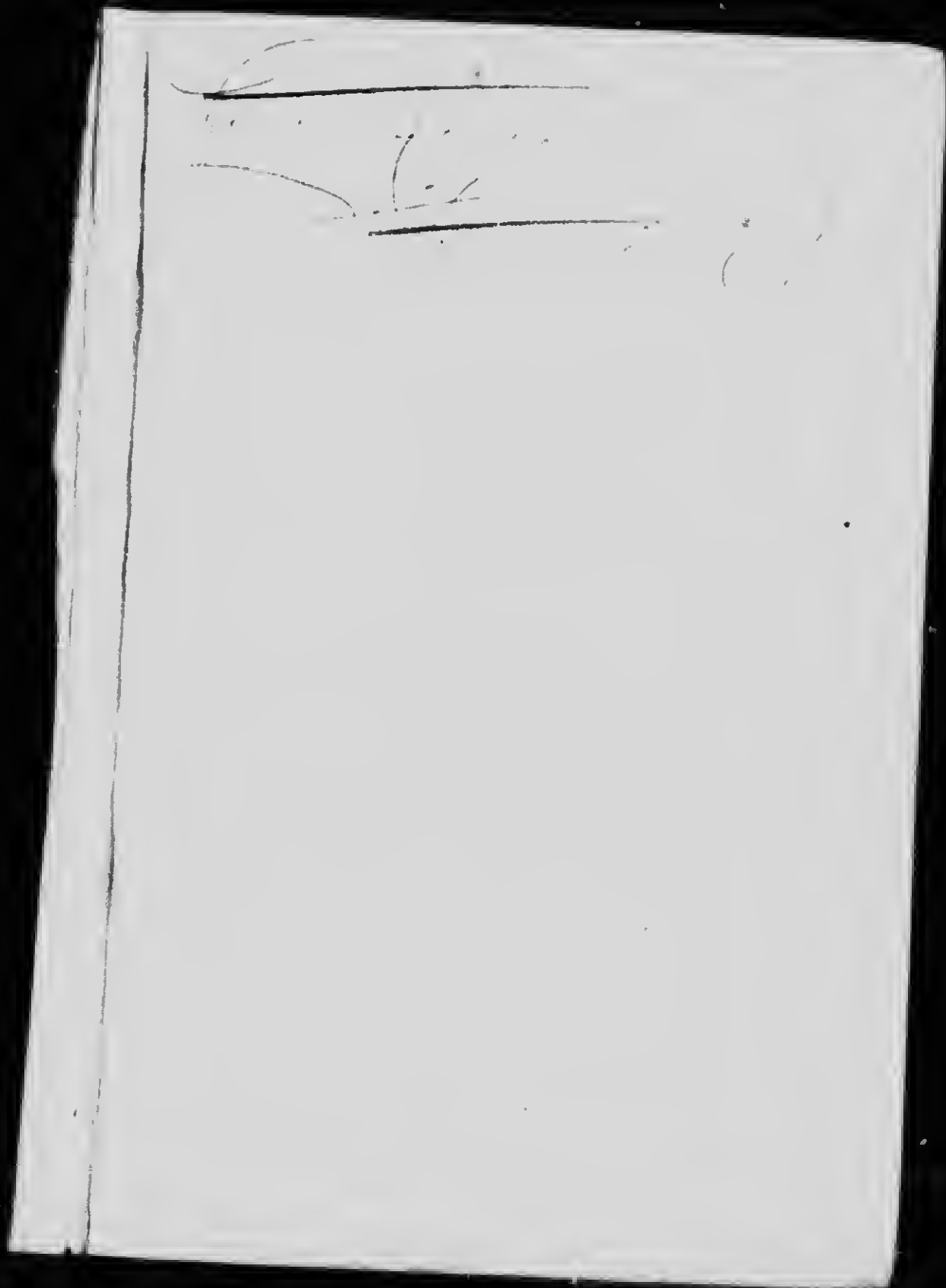


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THE LADY OF THE
CROSSING

FREDERIC NIVEN





THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS—

THE LOST CABIN MINE
THE ISLAND PROVIDENCE
A WILDERNESS OF MONKEYS
DEAD MEN'S BELLS
THE PORCELAIN LADY
HANDS UP!
ELLEN ADAIR
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE
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THE S.S. "GLORY"

AN IDYLL—

CINDERELLA OF SKOOKUM CREEK

VERSES—

MAPLE-LEAF SONGS

845

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING;

A Novel of the New West,

BY

FREDERICK NIVEN

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

PS2527

I 96134

257757

Printed in 1919.

TO
EX-QUARTER-MASTER SERGEANT JAMES MILROY
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA AND NEUVE CHAPELLE



FOREWORD

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

ALTHOUGH the scene of this book is the West of America and, on cursorily flipping the pages, one's eye does not encounter the words *Florence, Venice, Simla, Quartier Latin, Shepheard's Hotel, or Café de la Paix*, it is not a novel of revolver-shots. A story can be written of Western America in which revolvers are in abeyance.

There is much to be said for Gilbert's

"Hearts just as pure and fair
May beat in Belgrave Square
As in the lowly air
Of Seven Dials!"

It is a whimsical plea for the open mind. Formulæ for books may make the writing of a certain kind of book easier, may make reviewing of a certain kind easier, and the life of the harassed assistant librarian easier; but they won't do for me and, I trust, for you. One should go everywhere with an open mind, meet everybody with an open mind.

The point is that one never knows. One day we may even read of a novel that "no thinking man can ignore this work," or that "here we have

FOREWORD

a reading of Life," and on taking the volume up find that, after all, despite such phrases, it is not a special *Lancet* article gone astray.

Foregone conclusions regarding Books, Men, and Women are surely sometimes wrong. So far from realising that Western America does not always connote Dime Novel, there are those who appear to think it has a monopoly of Dime Novel to the extinction of the possibilities in that vein of all other lands. So strong is this belief, in the minds of those who would stereotype all, that the novelist who may gaily and seriously attempt a Dime Novel with the scene laid in, let us say, Malaysia runs high risk of knowing the pang it is commonly said Great Men know, the pang of being misunderstood; and of experiencing the consternation of seeing his beloved Shocker put on a shelf otherwise labelled.

I write my foreword with only one plea—that this story may be read without assumption regarding what a book of Western America must be about. We live in grim and unbalanced times. Later one may write lots of thoughts that just now one ponders over. This book has no "purpose" in the cant, or accepted, sense of the word; and maybe so much preface may seem out of place for a story that is neither inherently salacious nor avowedly philosophical.

May it please you at least for an hour or two in these days.

FREDERICK NIVEN.

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PART I
AGITATO
CHAPTER I

THE CHERUB WITH THE ARROWS

It was Sam Haig's intention to start afresh, an intention common enough to frail, yet hopeful, human beings. Into his past, upon which he had shut the door, we need not inquire here, but may take him under observation as he drew near to his Mecca, the Western Mecca, the last Mecca of the moment. The conductor announced it, strolling down the aisle of the swinging Pullman car, swinging because of the many curves the train takes on that last lap from Columbia Junction, by Galena and Placer and Opal Falls, into Kootenay.

"Next stop Kootenay! Kootenay next stop!" intoned the conductor in accents of finality; for at Kootenay the spur-line ends, running right down into the lake, so that the freight-trains can stand alongside the big barges whatever the state of the lake's fullness or shrinkage.

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

On this train, far from the main line, there was no porter to flick over the travellers with a switch, trying, as some one has described these attentions, to discover if a tip was also to be flicked off. The men rose, shook down their wrinkled pants, and stretched; the ladies smoothed crumpled pleats, rubbed their faces with little handfuls of cambric and lace or, more defiantly, dabbed on powder, peering at their reflections in the mirrors set in those plush or velvet bags ("vanity satchels" is the sale catalogue name) that hold puffs, powder, and spare hairpins. Some of the passengers sat still, to be chugged on later another quarter of a mile or so, beyond the town depot, to the side of the big stern-wheeler at the lake shore, their tired minds, glutted with scenery and train rumble, occupied with visions of what awaited them there—white painted and mirrored dining-saloon; waiters in white duck, on the breast of each a brass tag that bore the number of his table; white tablecloths, on which were menu cards set in holders that if not silver at least shone like silver; and there would be soups and salads and iced coffees.

But Sam Haig was detraining at Kootenay. A stern-wheeler's dining-room he needed not to visualise. He needed not to visualise anything; his task was to go forth and discover what was here. What he found, stepping from the car to the depot platform, was a fresh air of which he took a deep breath to relieve him of the stale headiness that the train forced upon him—a headiness compounded of aroma of oranges and apples, acrid tang of locomotive smoke, whiff of

THE CHERUB WITH THE ARROWS

boot polish, Parma violet scents (several kinds), patchouli (one or two), blatant peppery mint drop scent (of an elderly commercial traveller), and the odour of dusty, padded seats for base of all. They made a sum total of an atmosphere somewhat like that which engulfs the alert *débutante* on her entrance to a theatre; but this one offered a different thrill, the thrill of travel. For into the midst of it had come, subtly and bewitchingly, scents of hot cranberry patches, of sunburnt hillsides, of pine and fir.

On the depot platform Sam drew a deep breath, shook down his pants a second time, pulled his waistcoat down at the back, and felt for his baggage-check. His baggage he could see coming out of the car—one suit-case in a cascade of suit-cases, cabin-trunks, hold-alls, "grips," that had been started a-going inside the car by an invisible sprite, licensed, it would appear, thus to test the strength of locks, buckles and straps. All this impedimenta of the travellers was only saved from destruction on the platform by a hilarious youth who wrestled with a wagging truck.

A resigned group of detained pilgrims watched the avalanche of luggage. None contested (whether the straps snapped or held, whether the locks burst asunder or remained intact) the baggage-man's evident assumption of right thus to pass through ordeal the baggage in his care. Then, when his brief and gloriously crowded moment was over, they followed him and his assistant and the trundled load to claim their victorious or vanquished belongings in the baggage-room.

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

Hotel touts hung upon the heels of the travellers, each of whom, as he claimed his kit, was claimed by two or three of these touts until he exercised the right of a free man and made swift choice of one, for the sake of peace. It was the *Grand Western* that angled Sam and his suit-case. *Grand Western, Gold Nugget, Hotel Kootenay*—it was all the same to Sam. Had he arrived with a great deal of luggage the driver of the rig might have opened its rear door and told him to step inside; but one suit-case suggests a young man looking for a start. It was an occasion for sociability.

"Pop up beside me if you like," said the driver; so, with his feet on the suit-case, high-perched beside the genial driver and tout, Sam was driven up the hill from the depot, fringes of the overhead awning dancing before him.

It was at the time of small flies, and the horses' ears were ensheathed in cloth coverings, tasselled at the top—reminiscent of the ears of the wild-cat. Over their withers, too, were light cloths, also with pendant tassels, to worry away the worrying flies, and there were bells hung to the collars to make a silvery melody. Sam took stock of the "city"—remarked the first hotels that they passed, with their clients at the doors, big, hefty men of the kind that set one wondering where they obtain the money to allow of them loafing in town "three sheets in the wind." He remarked the log-shacks in town-lots overgrown by grasses and wild flowers, tangles of blue and pale blue, and now and then a soaring purple or yellow. Then came granite fronts, and next to them shacks again. Five-

THE CHERUB WITH THE ARROWS

storey store-blocks made more diminutive and quaint the crude wooden neighbour with stove-pipe perkily projecting from the roof. The centre of the road was all deep dust. Hotel rigs made a procession up hill, and on the level of the main street continued with subdued sound—the loudest note being that of the harness bells. They came to the city's core, with the blackboards of the employment agents leaning against the walls, much chalk-writing on them, which gladdened the heart of Sam Haig.

Fruit-stores, barbers' emporia, soda-fountains, book-and-drug stores, hardware stores—and the same again—and the same again—told him that here was "some town." It had a holiday air. Not a hotel but was topped by a flag-pole. Men swaggered on the side-walks, smoking cigars or eating cherries. Young women in cheerful raiment (some chewing gum, some not chewing gum) walked as if it was all a play and they the leading ladies, looking at none, desiring only to be looked at, carrying vanity bags before them on tip of extended forefinger, apparently pointing the way for themselves; or maybe the action was to indicate to the uncouth men in which direction they were walking, so that the path might be clear before them.

Other women, who looked as though they found life less tense, but who were also fond of bright hues, moved to and fro, women less like appendages of their own chateclaines, middle-aged women who had jolly laughs.

Away and away overhead the sky arched, suggestive of shimmering silk from Peking, and on

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

either hand—always visible at the corners of the streets, often visible without even aid of a corner—the hills stretched back and up, the tone of brown bearskins. Here was another piece of the globe of which one might say: "God gave to men all earth to love."

So thought Sam Haig. And thus thinking, instead of viewing all cursorily, he suddenly drew a deep breath, was aware that his heart could expand with abruptness upon occasion. For at the crossing of Dawson and Hoskins (or Dawson Street and Hoskins Avenue, as the purists would say) a dart of some kind—cherub's or imp's—went into him as if he was posing there for the figure in a valentine.

"Get up, Sal—get over, Bess," said the driver, and swung the team down Hoskins Avenue, nearly pitching Sam off, for his gaze was on a girl. As it was he kinked his neck, and only partly the kink and partly a sense of propriety prevented him (the wheeling into Hoskins Avenue thus wheeling the lady right out of his vision) from turning round the other way next, and craning for a second view—"rubber-necking" as they call such behaviour there.

He had been caught by a pose, a movement, a curve of neck, flash of eyes, turn of wrist; he had been, all in a fraction of a second, enraptured by a hand that gathered a flounee as the wearer of the adorable confection stepped from the side-walk to cross Hoskins Avenue, walking upon Dawson Street. But the rig rocked on down hill and drew up at the *Grand Western*. Sam perceived

THE CHERUB WITH THE ARROWS

that what might be called his choice of hotel was a cheerful one—though it is a slack way of speech, and a calm onlooker at the body-snatching game that takes place at the depot when the trains come in might be inclined to speak here of his destiny rather than of his choice, to consider rather that he had been culled than that he had chosen.

The *Kootenay* upon the opposite corner was in the way of being magnificent, with tiled entrance-way and palms in tubs in the rotunda, as one could see in passing; and the outside was painted red all over, and under each balcony were decorations in gold-leaf. But the *Grand Western* was bright white, new white, inviolate as the dining-saloon on the lake steamers that some of his fellow-passengers had pictured for their spirit's ease, and would now be enjoying—white from side-walk to attic, nay, to flag-pole, even to the flag, a white flag of the kind called pennant, that fluttered and folded and, against a sky that made it good to be alive, announced in black letters GNDWN; or GRANDWT; or GADESTN—all manner of unintelligible combinations for one who did not know it was the *Grand Western* flag fluttering and flapping and billowing.

Sam watched it aimlessly as they came down that last lap of Hoskins Avenue, his mind still really employed with the vision of the young woman at the crossing of Dawson and Hoskins, with a pose captured, and fixed on his retina, as one might recall a memory of a wave, between curving and breaking, or the admirable swerve and careen of a swallow, seen and gone, glimpsed and lost.

CHAPTER II

ALEXANDER FRANKLIN, OF THE "GRAND WESTERN"

THE proprietor of the *Grand Western* was a cadaverous man, his ashen face relieved by hectic spot of red on either cheek. He did not, as the custom of some hotel proprietors is, keep a six-foot person in evening dress in the vestibule, behind a sickle of counter, a grim monster hired to scowl at the doorway and intimidate intending guests. Instead, he strolled about on the hither or public side of the desk or counter, hat on, so that a stranger could not be certain he was the proprietor, and could discover his ownership, make certain of him, only by walking into the vestibule and looking puzzled.

He announced himself to Sam, when that young man entered the main hall, suit-case in hand, by taking a cigar from his mouth and shouting: "George—this gentleman!" At that summons "George" rose from his reclension in a low-set easy chair behind the counter, consulted a book on the counter, swung it round and held forth a pen. Sam made attempt to write his name on the line indicated by the clerk's finger.

ALEXANDER FRANKLIN

"Oh!" said George, and scratched his head.
"Ink!"

He snatched the pen back, glanced round, found the ink, dipped the pen and again proffered it to Sam, who indited his name. George swung the book back again, considered the calligraphy, critically it seemed, but probably only absently, and next took down, from off a nail on the wall, a piece of steel a foot long and two inches broad, with a small key affixed at one end, and a number cut out, steneil fashion, at the other. He growled forth the number, dived from sight, threw open a low door under the counter, and came to the surface again on the outer side with "Come this way." He grabbed up Sam's suit-case and, gaily whistling, led the way upstairs, put key in lock, opened, took key out and, handing it (foot-rule affixed) to the stranger, grunted the number again and departed.

Sam's number was forty-eight, and closing the door he was confronted by the card of regulations and admonitions regarding conduct and procedure, all about the number of rings for hot water, for cold water, down to the comment: "Rope in case of fire under bed. Hook to ring on floor beside window if necessity arises." Breakfast, dinner, and supper hours were also set forth in no uncertain terms. From 6.30 till 9 "guests" could have breakfast, the house evidently catering for early and late risers; from 12 till 2, *prompt* (the italics are not mine), they could have dinner; supper from 6.30 till 8 *prompt*.

It seemed, by the card, to be a house of prompti-

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tude, but though Sam rang thrice for hot water no reply came. He consulted the direction card again. Once was for iced water, twice for cold water, thrice for hot. Perhaps, thought he, some one downstairs was trying to decide whether he rang once thrice, or thrice once. Actually no one downstairs was thinking of him at all. He was simply left alone to read the rules and regulations and to try to live up to them. As a matter of fact people objected to being rung for at all in this booming town. He was out West--where the guests are expected to observe the rules that relate to their conduct, but to remember that they are out West if the hotel-staff ignores printed promises made to them. He wondered if he might break the rules that were for him to fulfil as lightly as the house broke the promises it made regarding itself on its table of information. Another card over the wash-hand-stand announced: "There is an ablution room at end of corridor," and in the ewer, set in the basin, there was no water; so taking the flimsy towel from the rail, a towel one might have read through, he prepared to depart in search of that ablution room.

One of the laws of the card (so he noticed, delaying his departure, listening acutely for footsteps that might herald the coming of the hot water) decreed *no smoking in bed*. He would be interested to know if some one had the duty of sniffer along these corridors in the dark hours. He considered, noticing that over his door, in the fanlight space, was no glass, that the duty of such a possible serf of the house should be fairly easy.

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There came no hopeful sound of footsteps, so he opened his door and went out fully expecting to have difficulty in finding the wash-room, but the label was large enough for the most shortsighted, and with cold water and soap of the washing-day order he refreshed himself. He ignored the comb that hung affixed to the wall, under the mirror, by a steel chain and, returning to his bedroom, opened the suit-case in quest of his own. It is wonderful how soon an adaptable person can feel at home. A few minutes later, groomed, he came forth again and (obeying the rules upon his card) locked the door, holding the foot of steel in one hand, the attached key in the other, considering to himself that George's one-handed smartness in unlocking was matter of practice.

The corridor was long, the staircase of several flights, and on the way down, feeling a fool carrying that foot of steel, he thrust as much as he could into his hip pocket, the key folding down at one end like the small blade of a knife. On reaching the ground floor the odour of soups and frying meat led him to the dining-room across the vestibule, and the clerk, standing behind his counter, did not ask if he had locked his door, and if so where was the key. After all perhaps all the rules could be ignored! Or was it that the foot of steel was supposed to be sufficient to prevent the absent-minded from passing the comptoir without handing it over? All that George said was:

"Are you going to eat?"

"Yes," replied Sam.

"What's your number?"

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"Forty-eight," said Sam.

"Forty-eight—supper—go right ahead," chanted George.

And Sam forgot all about the key until, sitting back at the end of the meal, the steel propped him in the waist. He was in absent-minded mood. If he was really going to begin afresh in this hustling new town he would have to blink his eyes, wipe the dreaminess from them, focus them coldly, alert for the main chance. As it was, he did not entirely please the waitress at his table. He saw her but seemed unimpressed. Her coiffing and powdering, her red lips, her rigidity from just under shoulders to knees (a wondrous rigidity that forced her to go tip-tapping in little mincing high-heeled steps upon her beat across the polished floor between pantry and table)—all these charms, that made some clients bashful and others bold, did not banish his air of abstraction.

As he sat there over supper he glanced from time to time through the window, less in a condition of hoping to see again the lady of the crossing than of thinking: "Perhaps she might make another transit here." In his imagination she made the transit. He still perceived the sweep of neck, flash of eyes, turn of wrist, and the hand that gathered the flounces of her adorable wrappings.

Supper over, the Salvation Army band platoon put her at least temporarily out of his mind. It came up the street with great to-do under the last of the witching sunset and the first of the genial lamps, the colonel—in great form—now dancing before it leading, anon turning his back in the

ALEXANDER FRANKLIN

direction of progress and skipping backwards, waving his arms in the manner of a riotous concert-conductor. As in pontifical processions there spreads a sense of resentment or of acquiescence toward the assumption of majesty, so now spread the sense of *laissez-faire* toward the gaiety. There were those who carried cornets in the procession, and there were mandolines, and guitars, and a violin, as well as many tambourines.

The platoon paused at the corner of Dawson Street and Hoskins Avenue, and after the colonel had shouted a prayer to the fading and dreamy blue of the sky over that mountain city, the man with the guitar (a very rollicking blade) strummed, and broke into an adaptation of a song: "Just tell her that you saw me . . ."—a popular lilt of the moment. A man who looked like a hanger-on, a demented bit of human flotsam, stood forth and harangued on and on, a note as of terror in his voice. Up and up it went, the colonel cycling him—then suddenly drowning him out with another song. The demented one, stunned, moved backward, snuffed out by the volley of popular catch adapted. After that was over a pretty fair-haired Swede girl played the violin and, her solo finished, stepped amid the audience with a collecting tambourine, while one of the subalterns, with great verve, twanged his banjo and broke forth in some new rendering of "Who's that a-calling?" Farther up the street the closed opera-house looked down with mute expression. It had been built to be photographed for the boom pamphlets, but so far no touring company had entered it.

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From the vestibule of the *Grand Western* Sam looked out and marvelled. He had seen Salvation Army bands before, but he had never seen the crack corps of the boom towns, designed to cope with the attractions of visiting vaudeville crowds, of lively saloons, of faro-banks and poker-tables—thinly disguised on the front as skittle-alleys. At the rear of these skittle-alleys, by the way, you could, if you wished, lose your month's wages in five minutes. On either side of the entrance stood a man skilled in the study of physiognomy; and if anyone with a detective's eye entered he clapped his hands, and the place was at once a skittle-alley and nothing more. But Sam, in his innocence, strolling round after supper, thought the skittle-alleys were only what they professed to be.

The Salvation Army platoon was as full of verve as ever when he returned to the corner of Hoskins Avenue after his first survey of his new town. A vigorous turn had just ended, and the colonel bawled forth an invitation to all those standin' around to come right up to the hall. The big drum went boom, boom; the platoon marched away, briskly, in a quick-step, the *laissez-faire* crowd melted; the show was over. The platoon—at a kind of acceleration of the quick-step—veered away uphill to its hall, the demented plain-clothes person who had given testimony borne along in its midst like a cork on a wave. And now, the band gone, Sam discovered that all the town was pouring forth music. There came to his ears a multitude of sound—of automatic piano-players, of gramophones and, thinly, amid these other sounds,

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tinkling of pianos, and ever and again, up and down the street, single notes as of fairy bells. If one listened one could hear a click before and a clang after each of these single notes, for money changed hands ceaselessly in the booming city, and every store had its automatic check-your-assistant till, against which every assistant (fired with the get-rich-quick spirit) pitted his brains, to evolve a "system." You can see the assistants, when the boss is not near, looking sideways at the strange device, mouths twisting, eyes considering.

The din and laughter and rub-a-dub of heels went on like an orchestration. The cool, nay the cold, of evening came down; scents of the surrounding mountains poured through the streets with the light night breeze. Though the "city" was still wide awake, Sam, after his journey, was ready to sleep; so he turned into the hotel. George, behind the counter, rose to find his key.

"Forty-eight you are, ain't you?" he asked.

"Forty-eight. Why it ain't here!"

"No, I have it," answered Sam, producing the foot of steel with the dangling key from his pocket. George stared.

"Well," he commented, "that foot of steel ain't long enough to worry you, then. If the boss knew he'd have two-foot pieces cut. There's no breaking some men from putting a key in their pocket. I believe you're that absent-minded you'd carry a thirty-foot rail around town."

Responding to that sally with a sleepy smile Sam mounted to his room. It struck him as stuffy, despite the fact that the window was raised and

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held open by an oblong frame of wood enclosing mosquito netting. Perhaps the netting should have been at the top to allow of freer ventilation. His room being at the rear of the house, looking out through the window he could forget the murmuring city. The *Grand Western* stood on the edge of a steep hill, and he considered that a guest, caught by fire, and resorting to the rope under his bed, could lower himself from a front window with nonchalance, but that here it would be a difficult matter. At the rear of the house, so steeply did the slope fall away, it would be like lowering oneself over a cliff.

The cleared flats below were marked out in lots. Sam could dimly see the lines of streets or avenues, but as yet no houses were built there. Beyond the flats the long arm of lake lay tapering westward—a lake, at that hour, of the last thin tint of blue, backed by a tremendous haunch of dark mountain, the silhouetted undulations of which were lost in the night. High up in that silhouette a light twinkled, telling of some prospector's camp, and looking at it Sam wondered what was before him, what he was to find in his search—if this new city was to be his Eldorado.

When he turned back again from considering that big night outside, the room was in dusk, with only faint shimmer of reflected last light; and the brightest spot in his room was the brass knob of the electric light switch. He pressed it down, flooding box number forty-eight with the hard, eye-stabbing glare. As he unpacked his suit-case, setting out his pyjamas and shaving

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tackle for the morning, flying beetles and giant moths dashed against the window, crackled and rebounded on the mosquito netting. Box forty-eight seemed too stuffy to tempt him yet; he found that he was more woolly-headed than sleepy after his journey, so, the unpacking over, he put out the light, locked his door, and carrying the foot of steel with pendant key, passed downstairs and sought a balcony at the house's front. Women's voices came from an open door, big moths flew to and fro in the harsh-lit corridors, dancing against the ceiling, dashing against the electric globes, swerving in and out of the lit rooms.

"Good-night! I'll ring you up in the morning," he heard, and the speaker appeared before him, making exit from one of the many rooms.

Evidently the lady of the crossing had affected him, for he thought this was she, took a deep breath, was as one meeting his Fate—and the girl who rustled past him wasn't a bit like her! But he was sure, until she was absolutely level, tripping past, that this was She. He gulped his heart back under the proper rib and continued along the corridor to the open door at the end. There, at his approach, some one looked inwards to discover who came—the proprietor enjoying a quiet smoke.

"Good-evening," said he. "Pleasant to have a bit of coolness after the hot day."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Sam, stepping out beside him. "By the way, what is your tariff?"

"Three dollars a day," replied the proprietor casually.

"Oh, yes," said Sam, also casually, but he told

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himself that it was premature for him to be a-thrill at the passing of any lady in any city in all his lack-luere world. For dalliance with fair damosels one requires dollars as well as a smart suit. This place might—or might not—be his Eldorado; but he had arrived with the irresponsible sum of nine dollars. He glanced at the jowl of the proprietor, a non-committal jowl, and plunged.

"Look here," he said, "I've come to this town with nine dollars. At the end of three days I shall be broke——"

"Unless you make some money before then. There's to-morrow and the day after," said the proprietor, giving him a flicker of a sidelong glance and drawing afresh on his cigar.

"True," said Sam.

"You shouldn't stay here, though," went on the proprietor.

"That's just what I was thinking. But if three dollars a day is the rate of your town ——"

"Oh, you can pay four—five—six if you like. I'm not the top-price hotel. But I'm not the bottom-price either. Let me see—nine dollars, you say? Well, when did you come here? You had supper, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"You could leave to-night, and that would be only two bits" (twenty-five cents) "out of your nine dollars. You can get cheaper tariffs in one or two other hotels, and in most boarding-houses."

"It's rather late to go out looking for a boarding-house, isn't it?" Sam asked.

"All right! If you look at it that way, stay

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here to-night and go in the morning after breakfast. Supper—bed—breakfast will be two dollars. That leaves you seven. You can go to a seven dollar a week, cut-rate boarding-house. There are such joints in town. There's a whole week ahead of you. That's what I would do if I were you. This house is too expensive," he ended, but without a hint of sarcasm, charmingly, almost naïvely impersonal for the hotel's proprietor.

Sam glanced at him to see if he should smile, but the proprietor was serious, and friendly. Clearly he had detached himself from the hotel and was considering Sam's ways and means in purely objective manner.

"I shall never forget your kindness," said Sam.

Franklin stared, clearly puzzled. "I shall remember you during the next week and hope you've got on velvet somewhere," he replied. For himself—he had failed so often, bought so many hotels and lost on them, that he had long since banished worry over finances; and having thus answered his guest's speech of appreciation he looked over the balcony railing, tossed away his cigar-end, and departed, leaving Sam to imagine that each feminine form that appeared among the men on the street below was that of the bewitching lady of the crossing and then, with a pang, to see that it was not.

"I'm going to bed!" he growled at last, and went.

In the morning, when he descended from his sleeping-box, George was not behind the segment of counter, but in his place was a hair-rumpled

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youth wearily chewing gum and staring into the street with red and sleepy eyes. To him Sam, suit-case in one hand, foot of steel in the other, advanced.

"Pulling out?" asked the red-eyed youth.
"What's your number?"

"Forty-eight—but I'm going to have breakfast first."

"Good. Had your drink?"

"My drink?" repeated Sam.

The red-eyed one stared. "Yap. Free drink."

"No," said Sam, doubtfully.

"Don't see why you shouldn't have your drink—entitled to it. You can have one free tot a day here; it's a good class house. We don't go in for the three free drinks racket, trying to put our guests on the drunk—just the one, in a sociable way."

"Oh, no, thank you," said Sam. "I wouldn't have it anyhow—I only came last night and I'm going to-day."

"Well, I guessed you only came last night. Never saw you before. I'm on here night shift—till" (he glanced at the clock) "later'n this every morning." He paused and then—"A drink is always a drink," declared the young man, turning the pages of the guest-book before him. "There's a name for a man with your way of looking at things. What is it? I forget. Quix-something."

But a whistle blew in air behind him, like a ventriloquial trick, and renouncing Sam he put ear to a hole in the wall.

"Yap?" he said, munching on his gum. "Eh?"

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Yap, he's here right now, I guess. All right. All right. Forty-eight, ain't you?" Ear against the tube's end that slightly protruded from the wall, he glanced at Sam. "The boss is in bed. He's been up half the night, but he wants me to tell you that you ought to try Timpkin's Boarding House on Bunyan Street, third up Hoskins Avenue, counting one from Dawson Street. Where? Eh? . . . Eh?" His head veered back to the wall. "Oh! Second or third house from the corner." "That's very kind of the boss, I'm sure," said Sam.

"He says it's very kind of you," the red-eyed one addressed the hole in the wall. "Are you there? Huh—gone. Turned over, I guess. All right, give me your grip in here until you eat breakfast."

It seemed a quaint new world to Sam as he sat at breakfast, staring at the lower half of the glazed door and reading over and over again the rubric thereon:

D I N I N G R O O M

Early breakfasters here and there bent over the meal, and the two young women like mannequins stiffly tip-tapped over their morning reflections on the polished floor, between tables and pantry, each with right hand raised, palm up, fingers backward, tray balanced on the palm held so, on a level with her head. The place seemed a temple for them—and they a kind of high-heeled, immobile, powdered nuns.

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Sam considered, aslant, the nun who ministered to him, and thought, rightly or wrongly, that under her powder and corsets there was a simple little soul. He experienced a touch of anxiety for her lest she might sprain an ankle by a fall with all her dishes on that slippery floor, treading it in those high-heeled shoes. He thought she was in some ways reminiscent—just reminiscent—of the lady of the corner crossing, but not, of course, “a patch on her.”

There were men breakfasting who wore black shirts, men in white shirts. There was one in Mackinaw coat, despite the summer weather; one in black frock coat. Silk handkerchiefs or collars for neck-wear made no difference to the tip-tapping damosels. They stood beside the tables and drooped their lids to take orders and, the order given, tripped away, eyes unblinking. And all the men ate demurely, as if in a church.

The ritual fascinated Sam. He was storing up a memory of the *Grand Western* hard-wood floor, the scattered tables, the drifting and tapping marionettes. He was in the half-dreamy, half-tense state of one upon the edge of great doings. Breakfast over he stepped carefully across the room, as though afraid of his own foot-fall, swung the door open, and came forth with a subdued air into the vestibule where the tousled clerk was remarking to George, newly down with smoothed hair:

“Well, I’ll get to bed.” He espied Sam. “Give this gentleman his grip, George,” said he, and departed.

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George hoisted the suit-case on to the counter, and Sam swung it to the floor, then brought forth his small wad of bills—if four bills can rightly be said to constitute a wad.

“Haven’t you paid yet?” asked George.

“No.”

“I see—thought perhaps you’d paid the night clerk before you went in. Forty-eight. Two dollars, please. Leaving town?”

“No. Going to a boarding-house.” He handed over a five-dollar bill. “I have only seven dollars left and must go easy.”

“Seven!” exclaimed George. “Why, that’s all right. I’ve been there often. That’s nothing. There’s nothing singular about you.” He rang open his till, frowned at it, tendered the change. “So-long.”

Somehow Sam wished there was something singular about having only seven dollars in the world. In a way George cheered, but in another he did not cheer by that comment. To be “there” often did not appeal! However, out in the street a optimistic air laved him. At the far end of climbing Hoskins Avenue was brown hillside, and away above the hillside mountains rose resolutely against a clear morning sky—a sky nearly white, just shot subtly with hints of blue and primrose.

CHAPTER III

ENTER JACK MARSDEN

SAM felt a thrill of hope as he carried his suit-case up Dawson Avenue. It would scarce have surprised him had he stumbled over a gold brick at the corner of Bunyan Street. And that he did not do so brought no dejection. He was again "starting afresh." At Timpkin's Boarding House, which stood back from the strip of green that bore the sign, as he suddenly discovered, "CITIZENS, PROTECT YOUR BOULEVARDS!" (that green strip on which, for the pleasure of grass under-foot instead of echoing plank side-walk, Sam had been walking, unaware that it was a boulevard—or the part of it that was not to be walked on, but especially protected) he found he had to take the first steps in the art of tight-rope walking. He had not come the length of a wire rope. Here was a plank—from the street proper to the house over a little gulch. In due course the intervening gulch would be filled in; but for the nonce the house stood as on an island, entirely surrounded by a moat.

Still, even the series of planks, laid on spidery trestles, from boulevard to porch, aided in the creation of a sense of verve; for the mere stepping on them set them a-quiver. The lithe rejuvenated

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step with which Sam approached the house caused them almost to bounce, and the result was that he made, very definitely, a dancing arrival on the verandah of Timpkin's Boarding House. The gaiety of step with which he came to the steadfast footing of the porch suggested great gaiety of mind. It would require some fortitude to live up to that jocund exterior, if dollars were not soon forthcoming.

The house seemed to be deserted. The guests were all gone forth to their day's labour; but a Chinaman with a face like smoked ivory appeared in the interior and sang a stave which sounded like: "Mishatim a gemaln!" Next moment appeared before Sam one who was to be to him, if he had only known it—but that is to anticipate. Enough to say that there appeared before him a man somewhat after the cast of Alexander Franklin, but with a difference. Timpkin was a kind of Franklin without a licence to sell spirits. He had to keep alert for such news as did not interest the proprietor of the *Grand Western*, news of shell-rubbed hams, or of cases of eggs that had been dropped in handling and were offered at catchy prices to sportsmen; and then he had to cajole his boarders to partake of scrambled eggs after they had ordered boiled.

"Good-morning," said Timpkin.

"Good-morning," said Sam. "Can you put me up?"

Timpkin surveyed him and shot a soiled cuff.

"Oh, I guess," he answered. "Let me see—first floor, two dollars a day."

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“Well—have you another floor?” stammered Sam.

“Yap—got a floor above at a dollar and a half. That’s my cheapest, and it’s surely cheap. It can’t be done without Chinese labour and that’s a fact.”

“I must be honest with you,” stammered Sam afresh, “I have—I have only seven dollars.”

“That’s four days at a dollar and a half,” returned Timpkin, his eyes twinkling, “and a dollar left over at the end of the week to hire a canoe on the lake, and go paddling out so far from shore that you couldn’t swim back.”

Sam stared, then smiled a smile so greatly stoical that Timpkin saw the tale of seven dollars was true—was no fable put forward in an attempt to get the cut-rate under false pretences. Wherefore Timpkin continued:

“I don’t know! Maybe I could fix you up if you don’t mind sharing a bedroom.”

Much rather would Sam Haig have owned town-lots instead of sharing bedrooms; but there he was!

“That will do quite well for the time being,” said he, heroically refusing himself the sigh of one hurt by circumstance, expressing himself agreeable in cheerful tones.

“That’s it,” replied Timpkin soothingly. “And when you rustle a job you can go into a room by yourself. But I leave that to you.”

So, his suit-case deposited beside one of the beds in a biscuit-box of a room, with window minus mosquito netting—taking mental note of that lack,

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but philosophically informing himself that at a cut-rate of seven dollars a week in a boom town one can't have everything—Sam went forth again in quest of fortune. Walking the plank to the boulevard he experienced a new emotion—of annoyance at Poverty. He was slightly dashed by the sense of cheeseparing, frugality, parsimony, carefulness, economy—call it what you will, by a word that praises or a word that condemns or a word that seems to state without opinion. All were the same to him. They all condemned.

To antidote that sense of skimpiness coming into his life he pulled his hat down brigandishly over one eye, clamped his lips shut, and tightened his chin. Arrived at Dawson Street (named after a great trail-breaker of the land who must have known hardships of a different kind from sharing a room, and have slept easier on scented "fir-feathers," under fir-trees and stars, than Sam was to sleep in that room that seemed so necessary although so mean) he turned west, unconsciously obeying the maxim of Horace Greeley. He did not walk with dulled eyes. His eyes roved left and right for clues that might lead to dollars—not that he wished to be a millionaire, not that he was fired by the aim to "get rich quick," but because dollars are tokens for food, and for bed and for clothes. He perceived that one trade of high importance in town was that of carpenter. Hammers went rub-a-dub all round him; but he noticed a carpenter applying for work showing a boss what was clearly a union ticket.

"I," thought Sam, "am not even in the carpenters'

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union, to say naught of the less important point that I am not even a carpenter!"

He raised his eyes to the fronts of the houses that were built and occupied—and decided that he could neither open a rival establishment to the painless extractor of teeth, nor offer his services to the existing one. He could not pull a tooth, even painfully. Someone, it occurred to him, must write the signs. Could he dare to procure palette and brushes, and tout round the new and legendless offices as a sign-writer? A faint smile puckered the corners of his mouth as he dismissed that scheme, reflecting that they who ordered a sign might come forth to look at it before payment; for he was not of those who think that all they need to be artist are the tools.

At the doors of the employment agents he paused and read their announcements with a naïf expression that proclaimed to any who might care to be interested in the new arrival that he had not come to Kootenay to fill a ready-made berth. He discovered that the men wanted energetically enough to ask for them on blackboards with white chalk, instead of waiting for them to offer their services, were:

MINERS.	BARBER'S ASSISTANTS.	SWAMPERS.
MUCKERS.	TANT.	TEAMSTERS.
COOK.	RAILROAD MEN.	SASH AND DOOR
ASSISTANT COOK.	CARPENTERS.	MEN.
		WAITER.

No one wanted a manager, or an organiser, or a sleeping partner. *Sleeping partner* was a phrase

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that always delighted Sam. It suggested unlimited leisure to potter in the sun while the dividends rolled in.

What the street offered in the negative way was as little hopeful: *Quick shave*; *Fresh fruit*; *Raspberry drinks*; *Parisian cut lounge-suits*; *Dungarces for a dollar*; nominal *Panama hats* for obviously not Panama hat prices; others at Panama hat prices; and all the way along every other window offered to sell him town-lots. It helped him greatly that, when he paused for a moment to look at a photograph in a real-estate office show-case, he was immediately accosted by a man in a blouse and cummerbund, smart blue jacket, wide blue pants, knobbly toed and shining shoes, modern fob suspended from under the sash, and a gold tooth.

"Evidently," Sam communed, while the real-estate man reeled off his patter, "I do not look like a paltry seven dollars' worth!"

He listened to the New Arabian tale, then said he would think about it, and tore himself away. He did think about it; it was a romance that led to the verge of depression for a man with only seven dollars to buy anything; so he thought of something else—looked on the bright side, considered how he owned half a room and a whole bed for a week, and had twenty-one meals as good as under his belt. In this happier frame of mind he arrived at the extreme end of Dawson Street, and looked down at the depot where he had arrived.

Only last night! It seemed ages ago. He had had two addresses since then.

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There is a creek called Astley Creek brawls down out of the mountains at the west end of Dawson Street, and on the city side a road turns south to follow its upward course. Sam puckered his lips, and again tugging down the hat-brim (which tried to twist up and make him look like an intending missionary, although he felt more like a possible hold-up man) he also turned aside—for no reason in the world. With a banking account a man has a reason for his actions; with none he is in the condition to follow emotions, whims, to go in the direction indicated by a pin lying on the road, or to decide which path to take at the cross-roads by the toss of his last coin.

The road, cooled by the proximity of the creek, led up hill. Where the spray broke and smoked there were fragments of rainbow over the gulch in which the stream brawled to the lake. Shacks were perched by the roadside, some of log, caulked, very old for this city, dating from its "camp" days, if not from the "fort" period. Sam climbed upward, thinking over those "good old days," and considering how excellent it must have been to go out and shoot one's dinner, to make one's tent from the hide that covered it, to shape one's knives from its picked bones. He was a very human young man, and such are the thoughts of youths with only seven dollars in the world.

It was while turning over these vain fancies that he found himself, coming abruptly back to the present, higher in the world than he had imagined. He must have been wool-gathering for many steep paces. Stopping to survey his path he discovered

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that he was now at an altitude whence he could look down on the roofs of a great part of the city, and he spoke aloud, feeling aloof from men and their dollar-hunting energies. What he said was :

" Huh ! "

It was called forth by observing that on the roofs of many of the stores the proprietors had taken the trouble to have their names and occupations painted in letters that must, he thought, be a yard tall. But for whom to read ? He looked upward. There was nothing beyond but forest, with the road on which he walked twinkling away into it under the feathery lower branches. He might have turned there, where he paused to survey the landscape, had it not been for the printing on the roofs. There must surely, thought he, be some upper city hid by this belt of trees—otherwise, why advertise ? It would be a poor little jest to make to the stars—to inform them of the existence of the Idaho Hardware Company. Or why should Signor Madrazo tell the heedless heavens what he told on a roof down there ? It was told with black, waterproof paint—

**P. MADRAZO'S COFFEE MAKES YOU THINK
OF HOME
AND
MOTHER.**

Perhaps it was not intended for the heedless heavens, perhaps not even for the heedless squirrels. Deserted though this road was at that precise moment it must be a thoroughfare. It must really go somewhere, he trod by people likely to buy hardware,

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and people likely to be touched by references to—his eyes, roving the roofs again, saw that P. Madrazo had a rival—their mothers :—

SIMS' COFFEE IS LIKE MOTHER USED TO MAKE.

He laughed to himself, wondered whether Sims or the Dago had been first in the field, and turning his back on the roofs he marched on into the woods, passed out of the blaze of sun into the shadow-patterned dust of old pine-needles and fir-cones. The trees stood majestic, and untroubled by the lumberman. Higher up, he surmised, the lumberjacks had played havoc ; but this belt stood as it must have stood for æons. Maybe it was really within the city limits, city property—and the State government ordered, or the State, or city, magnates had the right to say : " Woodman, spare these trees." They were wonderful trees. They were trees that a financier would like to hear his cross-saw humming through and a poet could take off his hat to.

Somebody had used one for an advertisement hoarding, nailed up on its venerable trunk a board that announced :

JONES SELLS BACON.

NO DERN SOW-BELLY.

You should have seen Sam's face under the down-tugged hat-brim. It was expressive of amusement and indignation. That vulgarity of Jones, however, convinced him that the road must be travelled on

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by people who ate bacon, as well as frisked over (they were all round him now) by the little striped chipmunks. So he held on. Maybe beyond the belt of timber was another town, an Upper Kootenay, and perhaps there was something there awaiting a seven-dollar man.

On he trudged, as one trudging in a fantasy. Not a sound did he make. His shoes were powdered grey. He raised a faint dust as he walked, and it had an odour of Eternity. Strange that no one has invented an Attar of the Rocky Mountains. It would revolutionise the back-cast drawing-rooms; patchouli would go out before it like a candle in sunlight. He breathed deep of that exuberant scent and it simply did not matter to Sam that he possessed only seven dollars. He had calculated that of that small sum he dare not spend a cent or else he would have to go on the dollar-fifty a day system, and have only four days of the unknown future prepared for instead of seven; were he to break his seven dollars at all, by so much as ten cents, he would have but four of these vague days ahead—four days at a dollar fifty amounting to six dollars. There was no doubt that the cut-rate of a week for seven dollars was *some* cut-rate, looking at it this way. Still—it was a skimpy, cheescparing, frugal, penurious, abominable business, and he longed for a cheroot. With a bracing of his shoulders he exorcised again the spirit of melancholy that tried to rout his natural good cheer, breathed deep of the mountain air, and was happier.

Never mind. No matter. Round the corner

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might be a gold brick. The path twined to right, swerved to left, and then before him he saw a great red card on a tree, and on the red card was the black statement and command :

SMALL-POX.

KEEP OUT.

And, at that, hopeful Sam raised his hat from his head, ran his palm over his dank looks, and exclaimed : " Well, I'll be ——— ! " It has to be admitted that he felt a sensation of creepiness although he carried it off to himself with that ejaculation. The callous proclamation was like a buffet in the face. He wondered how many young men who had come to this town to " make good," who had partaken with good appetites of Sims' and Madrazo's coffee, and eaten Jones' bacon that was no dern sow-belly, had been brought up this very road, seeing its tree-trunks through delirium and ———

A jingle of advancing harness brought him from his musings, and he saw that the road did not end here, but that it wound again, that the entrance to the small-pox hospital was at the bend, a mere trail through the woods. He must not be encountered standing there as one frozen by a mere printed card. On he posted until he was close enough to the sign to observe the rusted head of the nail that impaled it to the tree. On the next sweep of road above, coming down towards him, was a mighty four-horse wagon laden with chunks of a sparkling rock. The horses came plunging on,

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and high overhead, foot on brake, the teamster waggled in his seat.

Sam stepped aside to avoid the dust raised by wheels and hoofs, and having felt a touch of "white feather" over the unexpected announcement of that horrid plague, to atone to himself for that momentary touch of funk, he even left the wagon-road and pried a bit down the trail, beyond the grim card, for a glimpse of the house of isolation. But he need not have flattered himself that he was doing anything singularly plucky; for a few yards onward he had evidence that the hospital guardians fully expected fools of his kind either not to be intimidated by the first sign, or to be intimidated and (in shame over the intimidation) to try to comfort themselves, to themselves, by ignoring it and adventuring closer. There was another card of the same hue, and with the same broad, black lettering, on a tree before him. It gave no command. It but made an announcement:

PEST-HOUSE

and left the rest to the sense of the possible reader.

There, between the fir boles, Sam could see a house, a frame house in a clearing of the woods, its dismality not, he thought, entirely due to his imagination being at play on it—to his knowledge of what kind of house it was. No smoke rose from it. The windows were blank. Passing here at twilight one might expect an ashen face to be visible for a moment, pressed to a pane of one of these windows, and then gone.

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Sam turned back, and saw that the driver of the great rocking wagon was twisting about on his seat, curiously surveying him; and when he showed upon the road again the man, with a movement as of satisfaction, settled down, rubbing his neck as though he had kinked it in his anxiety to know why the lone pilgrim afoot on the road should turn aside to "rubber-neck" at that inauspicious place. On Sam plodded, and felt as great a sense of pleasure now in the sun-splashed treeless hill ahead showing beyond a tunnel-like curve of branches, as he had felt on entering the cool shadows of the wood out of the hot sun. Coming on to the bare hillside what first caught his eye was the sloping and unfenced expanse to left. He looked across and along a slope that dropped down in rolls and precipices, wild terraces, and slides of rubble to Astley Creek.

It was a sound that drew his gaze to right and up—a little chirping noise—and there, emerging from the wood through which he had come, but a stone's throw further up hill, was a big black bucket, like the scoop buckets on dredgers, drifting through the void, coming out of the wood about fifty feet above ground. That was his first impression—of something fantastic—as his eye was drawn to it by the movement. Next moment, of course, he saw that the bucket was not performing any Mahomet's coffin miracle. It was suspended from a wire, and the wire in turn was suspended from a pulley set into an iron arm which protruded from the top of a skeleton-like wooden tower. And on and on, up the hill, towers dotted the slope, each

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with an arm a-top to left, and an arm to right. He had never before seen an aerial tramway, and he paused to consider this one. It fascinated him. There went one wire ceaselessly moving upward, dotted with the black buckets; and, parallel, there came other buckets at the same regular intervals, moving down hill toward town.

Those descending, he could see, were heavily-laden, full of chunks of ore; the ascending ones were empty. No—not all. As he watched, one came sailing out of the wood with a couple of boxes in it, and he could see, gazing up with puckered eyes (for the sky was all a-shimmer with heat and sun), that they were cases containing condensed milk tins. Then out of the belt of woods came another laden bucket—this one containing egg-boxes. Evidently food was going up to sustain those who, away yonder on the summit, blasted the rich galena from the mountain's spine.

He was about to turn aside from the road to inspect more closely the stratagem, or invention, by which the buckets were affixed to the wire rope so as to allow of them comfortably passing the pulleys that upheld the rope at the towers, when he noticed that the road ahead would, swerving upward further on, lead him directly under the tramway, and close to one of the towers. So on he trudged, scores of chipmunks darting to and fro, and chirping to him, up and down, on either hand—and the buckets swinging along in air with occasional little creakings as they passed the upholding arms.

His curiosity satisfied regarding the simple

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device, he marched on, the tramway now close, now distant, as the road wound. At last he crested a knoll and saw ahead of him a cluster of new frame houses that seemed deserted save for a young man who had divested himself of coat and waistcoat for coolness, and sat upon the step of one of the houses trying to tempt toward him, with fragments of bread, a very dainty specimen of chipmunk that, sitting on haunches, fore-paws dangling, fixed the would-be tamer with a half-friendly, half-suspicious eye. The young man looked up as Sam approached, nodded affably, informed him that the day was warm; to which Sam agreed and slackened pace, wondering who should inaugurate conversation.

"He took a piece of punk from my hand yesterday," said the young man, glancing toward the chipmunk. "There's a chap up at the Lanyon mine has got one so tame that it comes every day to be fed. He can lift it up by its tail and it will eat out of his hand like that."

As he said "Lanyon mine" he nodded not in the direction of the peak immediately above, but toward a more distant range that limited the view southward.

"Is there a mine up there, then?" asked Sam.

"Wny, yes—this is only the store and bunk-house of the Fraser mines. You're really there; the shaft is just above you. The Lanyon is on that crest, where the buckets go to. They belong to the Lanyon; we team all our ore down. Didn't you meet a load?"

"Yes," said Sam, and his eyes followed the line

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of tram-towers that dropped from sight into a gorge a little way ahead. The hill beyond was timbered, but he could distinguish the cleared lane through the woods over there—obviously the distant path of the tramway. It was a grim sort of device, this, of trestle towers and crawling wires, and dangling buckets, up and down the grand mountain-slopes.

"Yap, we haul by wagon," continued the young man in the white shirt, bringing Sam back from his survey of these scrabblings and puny defacings of ant-like man. "All the machinery we need is just that." *That*, to which he nodded, was a line of narrow-gauge railway up the steep incline to right. Between the rails lay a wire rope. "Are you looking for a job?" he added.

"Yes."

"Miner?"

"No."

"I'm the cashier, book-keeper, pay-clerk, store-keeper for the Fraser mine. The only other jobs you can ever get here, apart from straight mining, are cook and hash-slinger; and we're full up in these lines."

"Do you know if there is anything in the way of work to be had at the Lanyon mine?" asked Sam.

"Don't think so. A couple of men went up yesterday, and on the way back they told me there was nothing doing there either. I think you can take it as useless. How are you on horses?"

"I can handle them a bit," acknowledged Sam.

"I believe they're going to put on another wagon," said the cashier. "You see they haul

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from here. We don't have the tramway at all. The contractor for the hauling might be up to-day. Marsden is his name—you should meet him when you're going down again, but if you don't, go into the office when you get back to town."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome, and good luck."

Sam turned again to the road and was soon settled into a swinging pace down hill. Life is not all climbing mountains. He swung along with easy strides, the chipmunks commenting on him one to another, chirping and frisking, adventuring near to him, waiting in the middle of the road until he was almost on them, then dancing off with eyes twinkling in merriment. And at every stride the hill-crests alongside went bob, bob, bobbing down. Looking back, after a space of travel, he found that he had paused just in time to see the last of the roofs of the Fraser mine houses. Another step and they had disappeared, and he was alone on the great fanning slopes. To left the towers stood up at their measured intervals. Hobgoblin things, it struck him, they would look after dark. Always the buckets, like beads on a string, drifted up on the hither wire and down on the farther one. Sam thought how much more easy it would be to ride up the hills in a bucket—but considered that anyone so travelling would have to be careful at each trestle to crouch low, so as not to be decapitated by the projecting arm.

He walked with head sideways, looking at the towers, pondering the possibility of such a journey, loose stones on the road flying from his feet. Yes;

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it could be done. One could sit in the bucket, legs dangling over, and duck at each arm; but one would have to duck with caution, for fear of tilting the bucket and dropping out. Looking ahead he found that, as he had walked along weighing the pros and cons of aerial travel, something that moved had come out of the strip of woods below.

He peered at it, and could make nothing human of it. It looked like a new creature—or some prehistoric one uncannily surviving. He peered again under the shadow of his hat-brim, and was puzzled. It looked like a pterodactyl about to soar; then suddenly he untangled it—saw that what came up toward him was a man leading a horse. Sam surmised that here was Marsden, of whom he had heard above. Not profitless, after all, might be his trudge.

Yes, this must be Marsden—this heavy man, yet agile for all his heaviness, who advanced upon him. It was a grim jaw that he presently took note of; those were calculating brows under the wideawake hat. Their gaze met, and Sam perceived a cold glint in the eyes of the other man. Maybe what Marsden saw on Sam's face was uncertainty, for to be sure Sam was trying to decide whether to "flag him," in the cook's phrase, or not; whether to say: "Excuse me, are you Mr. Marsden?" or to let him go by.

Marsden, if this was Marsden, did not appeal to Sam. It was not that Sam had ever considered himself a student of physiognomy. It was not that this big man intimidated him. Sam was not easily intimidated; he was, indeed, of a tendency

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to respond to intimidation with something of grimness in himself. He could not, any more than another, see Marsden's aura, but—he simply was not appealed to. His inclination was to pass on, to offer even salutation only if this man saluted him in passing.

It has already been remarked that a man near the end of his tether is more apt to follow impulse than to carry out a ponderous scheme, more apt to toss a coin for a decision than when he has a banking account. When almost abreast of the man with the cold, grey eyes Sam delivered a direct glance on him.

Presumably on this lonely hill-side, so far from town, men meeting on the road would exchange some kind of greeting as they passed. But Haig had no desire to have his salute ignored. One with his pocket full of money can shrug his shoulders over lack of civility upon the road; but with only seven dollars to his name, if a passer-by ignores his greeting, he is apt (the average man—or the man like Sam) to brood upon the fact that he has only seven dollars. And this man's face was not effusive by a long way.

Suddenly he concentrated his gaze on Sam. Those eyes puckered even more than the afternoon sunlight warranted. He came to a halt, the horse stopping short behind him, its broad forehead within an inch of his back.

"Say," he said, "do you want to make a dollar?"

Sam had to think about that. He thought rapidly, meeting the gaze of his interlocutor, who

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had not prefaced the proposal with so much as a "good afternoon."

"I wouldn't object to making a thousand dollars," he admitted, and smiled slightly upon the forward-thrust face before him.

The steely eyes were hidden briefly by a drooping of the lids, and then—

"It's like this," said the man with the led horse, "my horse has gone lame. I can't ride him up to the Fraser, and I've to go up there now. It seems cruel to take him all that way if there's a chance of getting him down. If you're going into town—and I guess you are," he interjected with a sudden hard intonation, "you might—"

It stuck in Sam's mind that the man had fired off a dollar offer at him. Had he had fifty dollars in his pocket he might have taken the lines in one hand and cheerily held out the other with: "Put your dollar there and tell me where to leave the horse." But, with a knowledge of the mere seven dollars, he resented being sized up for a man willing to make an off-hand dollar on a vacant hill-side. Here was a rough set-back to the pleasure he had felt, only that morning, on being taken for an affluent person by the real-estate tout.

"Never mind the dollar," he said, stretching out his hand to the reins. "If the horse is lame it's too long a climb to the Fraser, and I don't know but what coming down would be worse. I'll lead him for you,"—his voice changed as the man, instead of showing understanding and gratitude, showed but a grimmer aspect—"seeing you're in

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too great a hurry to get up the mountain to turn back with him and ride up on another horse."

The man's head went slightly on one side, and with something nigh insolence, or so it seemed to Sam, he delivered a final, long, calculating examination. Then—

"Thank you," he said quietly. "He might find his own way down if I tied the lines loose to the horn, and turned him about—but on the other hand he might grouch over his hurt pastern and mope around on the way. Thank you. You might just hand him over to one of the men at Marsden's stables. You know where they are, I suppose?"

"No. Where are they?" enquired Sam, thrusting his fingers against the horse's neck to indicate to him that he was to turn.

It seemed that there was a slight curl on the man's lips as he replied: "Astley Street." And then: "Do you know Astley Street?" he asked in a tone that irritated Sam—who was glad he hadn't accepted that dollar.

"I'll find it," he said. "Come along—get up, boy," and he turned away, aware that the man to whom (or to whose horse) he did this favour stood stock still looking after him until he was well under way.

Anyhow he had a companion now, and a good companion too—a friendly companion who seemed to understand that he was being led home and had met a good Samaritan. Sam walked back easily, found Astley Street, could not fail to see the big name-board:

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J. MARSDEN.

CONTRACTOR LIVERY-STABLES

led the horse in, and was greeted with :

“What’s the matter? Something happened to Marsden?”

“No, just the horse,” said Sam. “Mr. Marsden—if it was Mr. Marsden I met on the hill—asked me to do him the favour of bringing the beast home. He’s gone lame. Good-day.”

“Good-day,” replied the livery-man, gazing after the precipitate Sam.

CHAPTER IV

REGARDING TIMPKIN'S GOAT

TIMPKIN, Mrs. Timpkin, and a Chinaman called Sing were fluttering round the dozen tables in the dining-room attending to their guests, these guests that were inevitably of three kinds; the mean, making good money but desiring to save as much as possible because of stinginess; or those who had someone to support elsewhere, for whose sake they selected a dollar-and-a-half a day house (cut-rate seven dollars a week) instead of a two or three dollar a day house; or the misfits in the world of Kootenay city, immigrants from a different system, who found that the boom wages, and boom opportunities, did not come their way.

His horse-delivery over, Sam came home and washed the horse-smell from his hands, then descended to the supper-room. He tapped the worried atmosphere. Fervently did he hope that he might soon encounter some dollars, so as to be able to say to Timpkin: "Now let us call a halt to cut rate and enter into the one-and-a-half a day system—yea, with extras, if you please, to two dollars." He saw something pathetic in the fluttering to and fro of Mrs. Timpkin. Timpkin,

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with left arm crooked, and a row of saucers perched thereon from biceps to wrist, each with its cup featly balanced, slithered from kitchen door to dining tables like a desperate clown. Waiters pride themselves on capacity to do these things, but Timpkin did not look like a waiter glorying in his adroitness and being paid, monthly, the union of waiters' wages. He looked what he was—a slightly harassed proprietor of a boarding-house that offered cut-rates in a boom town where, if boom wages were to be earned, boom prices were also asked for merchandise, food, and raiment. With crooked arm he glided round, stooping to each client in turn and demanding, in tones like that of "Your money or your life!"—"What do you drink?" Now and then, for variety's sake (because habits appalled him, and he kicked against routine), he would say: "What's yours?" Being told the drink desired he curved a trifle more that already curved arm with the cups resting along it, and bending his head he smelt rapidly down the steaming line. Someone asked for coffee—so sniff, sniff, sniff he went along his arm-load. Coffee was the last in the row; there was one final cup of coffee after five of tea. Evidently the cook in the kitchen kept pouring out tea and coffee without method, unless, indeed, he believed that the demand for tea was greater than for coffee. Timpkin, however, felt annoyance. If somebody else asked for coffee now he would have to go balancing back for it.

But he was not bereft of humour if lacking in a sense of refinement regarding a waiter's manners,

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and as he put down the cup of the desired o'our he caught Sam's eye. Sam was amused, and showed it, and Timpkin responded to the twinkle of that gay and poverty-stricken guest with a pucker and elongation of his lips that seemed to imply: "Yes, I'm a bit comic, I expect—desperately comic!" Sam found himself wondering how the boarding-house paid. Perhaps symbol of how this establishment paid was to be found in the toothpicks in the centre of each table—toothpicks of wood, not of quill as in the two-dollar houses, to say naught of quill neatly tucked into little tissue paper envelopes as in the three-dollar houses. And even that arithmetical comparison might not work out as expected, for not every two-dollar and three-dollar guest wields a toothpick, though every dollar-and-a-half a day one does so. Sam had arrived a trifle late, and was leisurely finishing his meal, last of the guests present, when Mr. and Mrs. Timpkin sat down, the Chinaman coming to attend to their wants.

"Well, there's that rush over," said Timpkin, evidently to Sam, for the remark was repeated a second time.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Haig. "Yes—quite a rush."

"There are some terrors all right," continued Timpkin. "Did you spot that blue-nosed swine —"

"Sssh!" admonished his wife, but laughing though remonstrative.

"That's all right," growled Timpkin in appeasing accents. "I'm on to him. If there's a dish of

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anything that's for the table in general, instead of just for one man, I notice he always takes more than his share and then clamps the dish opposite someone else, and when I take it up to refill it he looks at the man he clamped it in front of as if he was thinking: 'Well, you are a mean fellow!' That's what gets my goat!"

Mrs. Timpkin buttered her biscuit and laughed again.

"I'm on to him—I'm on to them," asserted Timpkin. "You should see them at breakfast, that breed. I used to put the milk for the tea and coffee on the tables when I was setting, but I stopped that, for they would collar the jug with the milk that was supposed to be for the tea and coffee, as well as emptying the big one, and smother their porridge with milk. They get sufficient for their porridge without that. I tell you what these fellows are——"

"Sssh!" said Mrs. Timpkin.

"All right, all right," he murmured soothingly. "No more milk on the table now at dinner and supper. They get the milk put in their tea and coffee for them now, at dinner-time and supper-time, instead of having it in a jug. If it's in a jug on the table they pour it into their soup. Some of them—some of them, by heck——"

"Sssh!"

"Yes, some of them," he went on, paying no heed to his wife's warning, "had the gall to call my play and sing out: 'Some milk, please, Mr. Timpkins!' Can't even get my name! It's Timpkin—not Timpkins. There ain't two of me!"

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I tell you what it is," he ended, "it's hard on the decent sorts among them. It's liable to make a man give up being decent and say: 'What's the good of being decent and an honourable man and remembering there's other folks in the world when it only ends in another fellow eating all the spuds and clamping an empty dish before me?' No, siree! That's what gets my goat."

"You'll make this new gentleman scared to eat anything, Herbert Lincoln," Mrs. Timpkin interposed.

"Not at all," said Sam, graciously reassuring.

"Not at all!" echoed Timpkin. "He's got the savvy."

"He'll think you call down your guests to each other."

"Not at all," said Sam.

"Not at all!" exploded Timpkin. "I can gauge a man when I see him. Which reminds me"—and he addressed his wife—"that fellow in room six is going to pull out to-night without paying his bill."

"What! Did he tell you? Did he ask you—"

"Tell me! Ask me if he might go and send the cash by mail? You bet you! No! But he looked at me as he went out just now after he took his toothpick. I know that look. I was a fool to let him run his face for a fortnight. Good-bye Fourteen Dollars," he said with grim gaiety, and waved his hand, and kissed his finger-tips to the door.

"I hope you're mistaken," said Mrs. Timpkin.

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"I'm not mistaken! Yes, sir," he looked at his pipe which he now drew forth and filled, "I tell you what it is, this running a——"

"Sssh! Oh do be careful, Lincoln."

"Well, this running a plain boarding-house," he substituted, "is——"

"Sssh!"

Timpkin laughed and shook his head.

"That's it," he said. "It's a careful job all right, and it don't suit us. We're naturally the kind of folk, Mrs. Timpkin and I, to let her whiz. And here we have to scrimp. That's what gets my goat! - Give me another cup of coffee, Sing—if it was coffee I had."

Timpkin leaned back to sip his second cup at ease, and Sam, feeling that he intruded, rose, made his bow, and left them to enjoy their after-supper ease alone. The other boarders had all departed by the time he appeared on the verandah—some to listen to the Salvation Army turns, others to put nickels in the slots of automatic machines that might return the nickel in a cup at the side, or might not. There had formerly, when Kootenay was a little younger, been another kind of automatic machine, one that might return the five cent piece put in and some others as well, but the mayor of the moment had "closed" Kootenay—which means that he had decreed that it was not a gambling town; but he was not an extremist, so he allowed the machines to remain that merely sported with the nickel put in, barring only those of wider speculation.

Perhaps part of Sam's freedom from worry that

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evening, although he was still poor, was due to the presence in town of many young men of the roving breed, the wanderers who fly from "Excitement" to "Excitement"—for thus they use the word: "I hear there's an Excitement in the Klondyke"—or it may be "at Nome" or "at Reno" or "at a place they call Wild Horse Creek," or "I see there's an Excitement in West Australia. I wonder if a man could get there before it fades." They were becoming a little restless in Kootenay, the boom on the ebb; but still they were there.

Perhaps Sam tapped the telepathic waves of gaiety they set in motion. Or it may have been the mountain air that kept him cheerful, despite the fact that this was Franklin's "to-morrow" and that he had not yet tripped over a gold brick. On the verandah of Timpkin's he sat down to look at the last of the sunset, and the rise of the moon over Mount Drew behind the town, to listen to the little winds running in the slender birch-trees the town planners had left standing here and there, and to consider hopefully that there was still a hopeful "day after."

Ever and again the face of Marsden came up before him. Should he have asked him for a job? But why question now? If he met Marsden again to-morrow, as he had met him to-day, the meeting would befall just in the same way. He would lead the horse home for charity toward horses; Marsden could keep his paltry dollar, and Sam would not ask him for employment, or for advice as to where employment could be obtained. So why worry? He tilted his chair

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and drew forth his pipe, and his pouch, untouched all day, for it contained but one fill. To see him prime the bowl you might have thought there was something sacerdotal in the use of pipe and tobacco. He had just blown the first slow cloud when Timpkin came strolling into the twilight and said :
" Ha ! "

" A-ha ! " said Sam.

At that Timpkin sat down, corn-cob in hand, and for a little space nothing was said. Each attended to the drifting forth of the tobacco incense. Anon Timpkin spoke, taking pipe from mouth, and leant head against his chair-back.

" It's a peculiar world," said Timpkin. " I mean the people. Also I mean the rules of the game. Brains or muscle, muscle or brains ? Which is it to be ? " he enquired of the moon that now swam clear of Mount Drew and, after having briefly silhouetted the fringes of topmost trees, lit the tips of the tallest all down the slope—picked them out and turned them to pale green spires amid the general blue-black. " Did you ever go and look at the fellows working in the smelter ? "

" No."

" Well, you should. There are a lot of Swedes there, all same draught-horses. There ain't one under six foot, and there's a little bit of a sawed-off cuss of an Englishman bossing them. They have to be told everything. Things it would take six of their boss to lift, one of them lifts as casual as he puts his pipe in his mouth. The boss says to two of them : ' Lift that, and take it over

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there.' But he tells me that if he forgot to add 'And set it down there!' they'd go and stand with their load where he pointed until he sees them and shouts 'Set it down!' You might think, to excuse them, it is a kind of faithfulness and sense of discipline gone wrong; but it ain't. It's just them lacking brains. And look at the mayor of this town! When he went around electioneering, and harangued a bunch of lumber-jacks, he looked like a match alongside fir-trees. They're getting threc-and-a-half dollars a day, and he's building houses and standing people off for payment of materials. How's that?"

"Very good," replied Sam, laughing.

"It cuts both ways, though," said Timpkin. "Brains are going cheap in this town now, because too much of them has come in. The boom has brought crowds, and a lot of the arrivals ain't accustomed to swinging a hammer underground, or an axe above-ground, for a living. They try for jobs in offices and stores, and the competition has brought down wages. You see there's no union of the clerk types. The miners may pile in too thick, but they have a strong union. The wages won't come down. The surplus miners just get out; that's all. The surplus clerks and accountants and so forth say: 'No, siree, I won't work for such wages as you offer!' and then they go out in the street feeling big, and get a whiff of lamb fricassee out of some restaurant door, and back they go, feeling up against it and small, and say: 'On second thoughts, if that job is still open . . .'"

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All this had a personal application for Sam. But as Timpkin was thus speaking some of the boarders began to drop in, and after casual chatter with them on their bedward way (labourers most of these, going early to rest, ready for sound sleep), Timpkin departed to the little private sitting-room to talk to his wife. Sam stretched, rose, and climbed the stairs to his room.

The lamp was out, the yellow blind was drawn down on its roller three-quarters of the length of the window, and the window raised at the bottom. He struck a match, found the lamp, touched the chimney gingerly to discover if it was sufficiently cooled, lest his room-mate had had it alight, found it not too hot to the touch, and lit up, so as to have illumination to undress. The light no sooner pranked the room than moths and flying beetles flocked in at the window and ricocheted from wall to wall, while flies that had been asleep on the ceiling wakened to dance to and fro up there, droning peevishly. At cut-rates mosquito-netting can't be expected. One moth fell into the lamp and gave a scream, finding voice at the moment of its fiery death, as mutes do, sometimes, under stress of great excitement or shock. His room-mate lay there deeply breathing, now and again shaking his head as a fly walked on nose or forehead. He was a stolid-faced man; almost pathetic he looked to Sam, asleep there. Flies, mosquitoes, flying beetles, and moths are not ravening monsters, to be sure, but there is something to be said for mosquito-netting on windows in mid-summer. Sam was glad to extin-

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guish the light, thus settling at least the flies, and suggesting to the moths to flutter off out of the window. But the mosquitoes gathered round, their hum mounting up in exultation ever and again when they drew blood.

It was a troubled sleep that came to him. The people of the city moved in his dreams. Marsden was the leading man of that higgledy-piggledy, fantastic play. He eclipsed the stableman, and the cashier of the Lanyon mine. In that confused dream Sam was mixed up in some trouble over a lame horse, hired from Marsden by none other than the girl who had smitten him for an hour or two, seen at the crossing of Dawson and Hoskins on his arrival—but who had faded from his mind during the preoccupation of trying to discover how to get along in a three-dollar-a-day town with but three bills in the world, one of three dollars and two of two.

CHAPTER V

THE DAY AFTER

It was now "the day after," according to Franklin's estimate of his affairs, and it behoved Sam, breakfast over, to bestir himself. As he went forth into the town men in blue dungarees were everywhere. They congregated beside the tool-boxes in the half-made avenues and streets; they made irregular queues in front of livery stables, they clustered before buildings in course of erection. The morning was clear, fresh. If no one had been near, Haig might have whooped for joy in the genial and merry tang of it—despite his seven dollars state.

Suddenly amid the male crowds he saw (thus unexpectedly early) a fair damsel swinging past, and his heart beat. Think not it leapt to every whirl of lace and cambric. This was She of the crossing, and along Dawson Street westward she now tripped as though her feet were gossamer. Sam followed. It was doubtless a physical allure, for he had not heard her speak; he knew naught of her outlook, her views.

He followed, just for the joy in her pliant back, the rhythm of her going; and at the moment that he felt ashamed of himself for thus sleuthing

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after her she deflected into a grocery store. Looking neither to right nor left, Sam walked on. Never mind! She had set his direction for the day. A man without a banking account, it has been remarked, will let a pin on the road decide the direction of his day's journey. This was a more thrilling indication than a pin's. Ahead of him, at end of Dawson Street, he had a glimpse of the edge of the smelter dump, a desolate, unsightly heap of rubble against the hills that there closed the view. It occurred to him to go on to the smelter and inquire if there was any need of labour there. There were certainly signs of labour in that hideous and unattractive dump and, as he drew nearer, in the hideous and unattractive black harn-like buildings, the furnace towers, the reeking chimneys.

One way to the smelter turned off abruptly, close to the depot, and as he came there he saw three men on the freight-shed platform struggling with a load that clearly called for four men; and one of the three wrestlers, by his attire, was the boss—who shouldn't have been wrestling at all, only directing—organising. Impulse came to Sam—and he complied.

“Don't you want another hand?” he hailed.

The boss turned and eyed him.

“Jump right up!” said he. “Jump right up, for any sake, and lay hold here. Peel off your Sunday coat and waistcoat. Look—there's an old pair of dungaree overalls you can have for the time being.”

“What are the wages?” asked Sam.

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"Wages!" roared the boss, as if disgusted by such a mercenary question at such a pressed moment, and the two assistants laughed. "Forty-five a month—overtime fifteen cents an hour—fifty cents a month deducted for doctors."

Sam hauled on the tattered overalls that the boss had pointed out, and "laid hold."

To Timpkin that night he said: "By the way, regarding the cut-rate of seven dollars a week—I would prefer to pay the normal dollar-and-a-half a day."

Timpkin gazed at him, head hent.

"But I saw you at the freight-shed to-day," said he. "I know where you are working. The wages there are only forty-five. That means you'll spend all your earnings on hoard and bed."

"There's overtime also," Sam pointed out. "Fifteen cents an hour."

"Um!" said Timpkin.

"And I have my seven dollars now for pocket-money for the month."

"Um!" said Timpkin.

"And it is only a stepping-stone. If I arrange to pay a month's wages for a month's board, look at the incentive to have a new job next month, with double the wages."

Timpkin still gazed at him, then gave voice.

"I have a partiality for men who are slightly crazy," said he, "Frankly, I'm taking no more cut-rate boarders. Priees are too high for grub, and too many of them bolt without paying. I hadn't reckoned on them being so numerous—the fellows who run their face and then skip; I

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had allowed for them, but not enough. I won't fire out any of my cut-raters, but when they go—no more."

"Good," said Sam. "Then put me down for the straight dollar-and-a-half a day."

Timpkin shook his head.

"No," he said, "no. I'm a little bit crazy myself. Let us say a dollar twenty-five."

"Very well."

Timpkin wheeled, departed, and presently appeared again in the doorway beckoning to Sam, who, wondering what was afoot, approached.

"You have room five to-night," said the landlord. "I've moved your grip in. It's a single bed room."

"Oh, but—" began Sam, when suddenly, behind Timpkin, appeared Mrs. Timpkin.

"Say, young man," said she, "I think you're a white person. Lincoln has told me what you said. I wish there were more like you."

Looking at her radiant face, her jack-easy (or should it be jane-easy?) face, Sam saw that her eyes were full of tears. He realised that he was not the only one in the boom town who found how to live a problem. Sufficient atonement (or reward) for his "craziness" was her expression of belief in him.

"There is to-morrow—and the day after," he recalled, as he went to bed that night, and he mused: "This was the day after, and I have at least obtained some kind of job."

As for that work at the freight-shed, he enjoyed it. The fact that it was unskilled labour brought

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to it a quaint assortment of men. They were not of one type but of many. Sam, more interested in people than in dollars, found these, his trucking and weight-lifting fellows, fascinating. There was a little fellow of the navy order, who said "dis here" and "dat dere"; there was an Englishman who hummed snatches of Beethoven, and talked with an appalling accent—founded on bad Charter-house—a kind of travesty of speech; but it had come to be second-nature to him, wherefore one listened to what he said and tried to keep placid toward the manner; there was a hooligan youth from some back-block of Chicago who, when that Englishman spoke to him, was wont to say: "Whistle it, and I'll tell you what you're asking." There was an Englishman of the quiet type (he, too, handicapped in this town by being a member of no union), whose eyes twinkled over such comments, but who appeared to be at ease equally with the accentuated Englishman and the swamp-tene-ment Chicago kid.

These stayed longest. Others came and worked a day or two, and departed, merely working for money to procure meals until a better billet offered. It was the simultaneous failure to appear of no less than four of such casuals that had made Webley (the boss) so eagerly respond to Sam's inquiry, and invite him to "jump in." The boss did not blame them for their non-appearance. In lulls in the work he was wont to raise his eyes to heaven, and, taking off his hat as if to show how deep, to the point of sacred, were his feelings, he would condemn to the uttermost part of Hades

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first the load of goods with which his men had been wrestling, and lastly, after a wondrous journey, the president of the railroad system and all the shareholders. Then, refreshed, he would put his hat on again, and his staff would once more draw breath.

It was an education to see what imports came to that town. There were carloads of stoves—"and for any sake, you fellows, easy on these ——— stoves. They're brittle as glass. If you drop one of the ring tops the ——— thing will crack, and there's a B.O." (bad order) "to write down, and we must take the blame. We can't blame the last packers and the yard switchmen for everything." There were flat-cars with machines for the mines. "This has got to be jiu-jutsued, you fellows. We can't yo-heave-ho this ——— centrifugal pump off the car. See, bring that scantling, you. Bring a pinch-bar, you, and slip it in here. Oh ———! What kind of a pinch-bar is that? For any sake, isn't there a pinch-bar with a heel to it? Oh!" apostrophising heaven, "what a blank of a railway company is this blank, blank railway company. A pinch-bar without a heel! More jiu-jutsu! More ji-u-jutsu-you!"

There was that carload of oil cans, on a day of sweltering heat at the freight-shed. O memorable oil-cans! The procession of truckers passed down the platform—Shorty in the lead, then the Englishman whose talk was interesting enough, but whose grimaces, with mouth hanging open between the words, and whose sighing utterances

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were so painful; then the tolerable Englishman, one of the name of London, which made some suspect it was not his name, and that he had a past; then came the tenement kid, saying: "O gee, get a move on, you plugs!" although there was "a lady passing," as Shorty reminded him in hoarse whisper, and last of all there was Sam.

He had remarked her long before the procession came level. It was the lady of the crossing. She paid no heed to the men; grimy truckers were outside her knowledge. There was thus the more opportunity for Sam to feast his eyes upon her without fear of meeting hers and being esteemed rude. So he feasted—with but a tearing of his glance away the while he breathed vehemently to the profane Chicago youth in front: "Shut up!" For the Chicago kid, when he spoke, might say anything.

Sam saw her now, in full face, whom he had first seen in profile, and again in rear. She strolled slowly along the platform while the trucks rattled toward her. She was young. She was tall. She was slender. She carried her inches as though she were responsible for them. A tall man is apt to slouch; there is often a suggestion in his stoop that he does not wish to taunt his shorter fellows; a tall woman generally takes the inches given her as though alone had she made them, and adds high heels to them if a taller comes into the neighbourhood. She makes the most of her inches; she forgets them not. She drapes herself to accentuate them.

This one carried hers well. She made him think

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of poplars and lilies, of the stately bay-trees that artists, millionaires, and café proprietors alike have often fondness for—or perhaps it is the artist, who designs the millionaire's porch and the café front, who advises the finish of the bays for them. He was in the condition for thinking of flowers and plants in connection with her, it would seem. Her cheeks were roses, her lips cherry-stained. Herrick could have helped him at that moment. And her hair was a new hue of ebony, a blue-tinted ebony under the shadow of her hat.

I am afraid Marcus Stone might have wished to paint her had there been a sundial near by; but she ravished Sam here, with no sundial within hundreds of miles for all he knew, but with a daring background of the glaring red and yellow buildings of the passenger depot. He feasted his eyes upon her as directly as he would on a woman in a play behind the footlights, for the procession of truckers was so very evidently nothing to her. They were to her, he surmised, so many shadowy figures, upholding a train of noisy, joggling oil-cans beside her.

Then abruptly her eyes swept to him, met his—and held them. The young man's heart was stabbed through. He went on in a daze, a haze. The coal-oil-cans were unladen with much clatter; the queue turned right about—but "the lady" had gone. It was the last load of the day.

"All right, boys," said Webley, changing from boss to fellow human being in a way he had. "Six o'clock. Run the trucks in and close the doors."

CHAPTER VI

BURNING HIS BOATS

IN those days the caste-less young men were in the majority in Kootenay and a freight-shed trucker might (for all one knew to the contrary) be the Grand Duke of Somewhere in the disguise of dungarces. That was just the place to find him, seeing that trucking is not skilled labour. And thus it was, with the spirit of bonhomie and something in the nature of democracy still vital in the land, that Grosset, the star-boarder at Timpkin's—Grosset, manager of the Kootenay Clothing Company—was willing to sit down and chat to Sam. Thus it was? Well, perhaps there were other motives, for certainly Grosset used to say: "A-ha! These rough diamonds! Why some of the fellows with patched pants, and such hats—hats that back-East you would turn upside down and put in a bush for birds to nest in—are worth thousands. I've seen old prospectors here that, if you met them back-East, would make you squint round to see that the policeman on the corner had an eye on them—and them worth thousands! It is a good scheme to be civil to a man here even if his hat-brim has lost the stiffening.

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He may have money to spend. I always remember that when these fellows come into the store."

The chronicler, recalling that speech, fears that Grosset was *democrat with a difference*. However, he is in the story, mixed up with Marsden, Sam, and the bucket-tramway, so he is now introduced. He did not eat at Timpkin's, except at breakfast. He rented a room, one with netting on the windows, the largest room on the first floor, a kind of sitting-room with a bed in a niche. He found it more like a home, he said, to live there than in a hotel; and he wandered from restaurant to restaurant as fancy ordered, or a new waitress arriving in town claimed inspection, for his dinner and his supper. Not often did he sit on the verandah with the boys. He did not make a practice of it. But he could do it.

To-night, after supper, he looked as does the kind of man whose own society is too much for him when his one crony is out of town. Finding Sam alone on the balcony he sat down and cast forth for sociability with some remark on the air. He was not banal. He did not say "It has been a fine day." He made an appeal by something less trite, by: "Well, sir, this is a climate, and an evening, to make a man glad he was born." An elated young man like Sam did not have to be told so twice before responding with voice of agreement.

That Grosset's face did not attract him was neither here nor there. The massive cheek bones, the under-lip that seemed not pouting but as if rolled over, the upper-lip squared and thrust out by large teeth—all these items might, thought

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Sam, have been bequeathed to him by his father and mother. It was just when Sam decided to like him against his instinct—for, "hang it all," thought he, "it's a short life and if we only chatter with those beside whom we feel that we could put our backs to the wall, with men in whose company we could die for the same cause, we would often be mute"—it was just then, when Sam decided to be reciprocatingly pleasant, that Grosset nudged him in the side with his elbow and, bending forward, wore the air of one on the point of making a disclosure. Sam looked sidewise at him, awaiting the meaning of this pantomime. He felt the nudge as a familiarity, and was annoyed at himself for what he promptly called his lack of sociability.

"There's a girl in town," said Grosset softly, wagging his head. "I can't tell you how she upsets me. I don't look it, maybe, but I'm in a ferment. That's right. That's the word. Restless—Oh!" he gave his head a slight toss. "I'm *persona grata* at her folks' house, but—I don't quite know where I am. I don't know if advances are expected, or if the fur would fly if they were offered. I feel—whoo!—I feel like that."

Humour came to Sam's aid. His inclination was to throw back his head and laugh, but the intense seriousness of Grosset caused him to dismiss hilarity. Further—he knew that if he laughed like that the description of symptoms would be over, and he wanted to know what Grosset had on his mind.

"You see," said Grosset, "she might turn me down. On the other hand she may be thinking

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I'm scared to come to business. Oh, I can't tell you how I feel. I sometimes think I shall go off my head. After every visit I go over it all and try to find out if she's giving me openings accidentally, if they aren't openings, if they are just natural innocence—I can't express myself. Do you know what I mean?"

"You admire innocence?" asked Sam, casually.

"Tremendously! Immensely!" Grosset tucked his chin back in his collar in a manner intended to show sense of appreciation of innocence. "None more so! But if anyone could whisper to me that this woman is saying the things she has said so as to give me a hint—you see—" he wagged his head, and left the rest of that consideration in air, breathed a great breath and began at a new place: "I think—I think—whoo! d——d if I know what I think. I don't know what to do. I feel so that I sometimes almost decide to go and call with the definite intention of proposing," and he turned and glared at Sam, and Sam looking at him—well, Sam was Sam, and he wanted to laugh. He did not laugh, however, though he showed merriment in his eyes maybe. Grosset sighed.

"Whoo!" he said again. "I think I shall go and have a walk. I don't know where I am there," and rising he departed along the plank in the dusk, leaving Sam, after the retiring Grosset had vanished, to contemplate the black bulk of the mountains, and the lights of the scattered homes twinkling along and up the hill. Timpkin appeared in the doorway as Grosset went away, and sitting down said:

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"That fellow Grosset been speaking to you?"

"Grosset? I don't know his name. I only see him here at breakfast."

"Yes, that's him. He's a bit batty—crazy—loco—bug-house."

"I quite believe it," said Sam.

"Comes in some nights with his eyes shining like lamps and buttonholes me to tell me about some woman he don't know where he is with. What does she mean by this? What does she mean by that? Can I help him? He's surely got her on the brain."

"He may imagine half of it," suggested Sam.

"That's half his trouble!" Timpkin chuckled.

"He knows he's got into that state. He said to me a night or two ago: 'I've got into such a condition that I wonder if I imagine half of it.' Huh! He don't imagine it. He should quit walking in a circle. But women are surely funny! He would find out what she meant right smart if he didn't go near her for a little while. That would be such a right change in him that she would show her hand definite, and start in to lead him on more clear, thinking him a blind owl, and do it so obvious that he would propose on the jump. Expect she's one of these women who like to have a fellow on a string. He's surely full with this here amative dementia."

But the rest of what Timpkin had to say, theorising on the case, was lost to Sam; for that young man was comparing Grosset with himself, himself with Grosset. Had he a touch of the same malady? Was this stir that came to him from the eyes, and

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the passing, and the God knows what, of the lady of the crossing, the lady of the depot platform, the same malady? Was he a self-righteous prig? Whatever it was, it was turning the non-self-conscious Sam Haig into a self-conscious young man.

The idiocy of Grosset, with sweet women in the world, he considered; and he thought how that unknown young woman who had so moved him down at the freight-shed as he trucked the noisy cans might be pestered by a Grosset, and he, a pauper, be unable to protect her, away out of her sphere, in a cut-rate boarding-house—eating all his meals there! On forty-five dollars a month no man, Sam mused, can make love; on forty-five dollars a month a man does not live; he exists. Why had he not served apprenticeship to some trade that had a strong union instead of trying to educate himself? What a world! He dismissed his private thoughts and turned to Timpkin.

“You,” he remarked, “seem to be in a strange mood to-night.”

“Me? I’m desperate. Boom town—boom wages—boom prices. I tell you what it is—if a hotel man wants to make money he’s got to sell them booze. I believe it’s the same with everything. It’s the booze, so to speak, that pays. I’m nearly crazy owing to bills—owing bills—owing to owing bills! Well, I’ve got to go. Mrs. Timpkin is crying. It’s hell when you got a wife crying. That’s what gets my goat! Went in and found her weeping, and she keeps smilin’ all the time, too, when I’m around. Good-night. Keep smilin’. It’s a great world all the same.”

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Sam sat on there while one by one the boarders returned from their evening's outing. In a broad verandah of a house up the hill, under a Chinese lantern faintly lit, a man sat beside a woman who reclined in a hammock. They sat out there in the night in a pool of mellow radiance. They suggested to him the joy of love. He considered the lady of the crossing—the lady of the freight-shed procession. Moths wavered past in the darkness, abruptly appeared in the rays of light from the door, oscillated along that beam and rebounded on the mosquito netting at the doorway. At least Timpkin could afford mosquito netting there—for the sake of appearances. But as mosquitoes got in at many of the windows it was to no great purpose.

The mountains, away above the hillside homes, loomed up black and tremendous; and the scattering of houses (the simple thought came to simple Sam) were full of people planning and hoping, flirting and loving. He gazed up at the towering Mount Drew. The lights went out one by one in the houses.

"Think of it—a hundred years hence and not one of the people here will be alive," he mused—mused also of those eyes that had met his, and been aware, to-day, at the freight-shed. Oh, she had been aware. She had been aware as well as he!

He looked up almost furtively at the mountain's looming bulk, and when he rose and passed indoors it was almost as though he slunk away from Mount Drew and the moon coming over. Indoors the moths fluttered round the lamp, and fell

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among the checker-men that some untidy players had left out of the box, on the board and beside the board, as the game had ended, one set victorious, the other frazzled. Later Mr. Timpkin would come in, put the draughts away in the box, and turn down the lamp, and, if he noticed them, with a puff of his breath blow the dead moths on to the floor that Sing would sweep over next morning. Sam stole on, up to bed, past doors whence came the sounds of snoring and deep breathing. But the long rest in the open air had made him sleepy, and half an hour later he was as deeply unaware of life as the mountain that had overawed him. When he awoke the hilarious sun-rays were flooding the chamber and it was a new day.

There was a sense of something wrong in the dining-room when Sam entered that morning. You know the way in which you can "tap" a state of affairs on going into a room—feel that something is afoot, some surprise in store, some trouble ahead, or some fun in the background to be produced at the fitting moment? The nominal "tapping" is doubtless unconscious observation, but the cumulative hints are caught so subtly that it seems to be a psychic matter.

Mrs. Timpkin smiled, gave her cheerful "Good-morning" all round. The Chinaman's expression could not, of course, be read at all. That was beyond the power of Caucasian to fathom. Timpkin attended to his guests with vigour. You have been behind the scenes and know that Mrs. Timpkin's tears had grieved her husband. He was furious for her sake with all the cut-raters. That was all.

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He banged down their porridge with indignation. "Mush? There's your mush!" he blustered at them. Mrs. Timpkin had wept; that was his grievance toward the world.

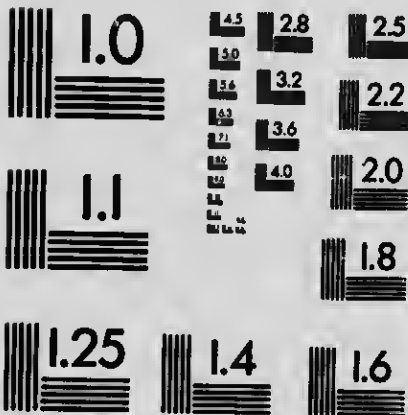
"There is something wrong with the domestic arrangements," surmised those birds of passage that had alighted at Timpkin's, recalling, perhaps, memories of little bits of morning friction in their own homes; and those touched with home-sickness were speedily cured. It may be hazarded that it is less often to escape Trouble (with a capital) than to escape merely from little niggle-nagglings and harmoniums and things like that that most young men flee from urban homes to "excitements" on mountain-sides across the sea, or to deserts, or unfenced prairies, or to such young cities as Kootenay that one can see from end to end, standing in the main street, places small as a forgotten village yet more palpitating with life and youth and hope than any metropolis. Yet it seemed not, after all, to be a tiff between the proprietor and his wife that occasioned this morning's impression of upset. Those who suspected that something was wrong and cynically opined "Been having a row!" noticed the glances Timpkin gave his wife now and then, realised that they were glances of anxiety, but not the anxiety of a henpecked man who had received a curtain lecture. They were the glances of a man worried for—not by—his spouse.

When Timpkin pounced on a boarder who was notoriously stingy and exclaimed, "Excuse me, sir, but that is your neighbour's portion. If you want a second helping will you kindly ask for it—



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and the price will be put on your bill?"—then the boarders suspected that the air of irritability was due to dollars and not to connubial misery. Quite understandable! Prices were not coming down—yet every day attempts were made in town to bring wages down. Doubtless Timpkin had his money troubles too, as well as they, the parallel troubles of a boarding-house keeper.

Sam, knowing the cause of the air of friction, reminded by it of the everlasting money-basis of life, had a renewal of his annoyance over the undeniable fact that he had not yet found his gold brick. When he rose to leave and bowed to Mrs. Timpkin her eyes brightened, her face beamed, but her lips trembled. Arrived at the freight-shed the day's work began with Webley—he too with his worries—glaring at a pile of way-bills clipped to his checking board.

"All right, boys—trucks, boys, trucks. Here's a string to get the innards out of. ———
——! Stoves! Stoves! Handle them gently."

Till noon the gang toiled unceasingly, unloading from the freight-car string, rattling through the freight-shed, and reloading on to the wagons that came rocking down from town. The Chicago kid climbed to the top of a refrigerator car and opening the ice-safe eased up and out a bit of ice to put in the drinking pail. They perspired for five hours, and drank iced water in snatches as they passed the big bucket with the tin dipper.

All the while the dear, middle-aged face of Mrs. Timpkin was before Sam.

"They are up against it," he thought. And a

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little later, still seeing her : " They've got it in the neck ! " he murmured ; and later still : " They are nearly *on their uppers*." In the Land of the Almighty Dollar there are many phrases to imply lack of dollars, perhaps the secret being that where big fortunes are often made with more celerity than in the land we may call the Land of the Almighty Quid—for money very definitely " talks " in the little old island too—there are also fortunes lost—and also many fortunes not made at all.

It occurred to Sam that he had been over four weeks at Timpkin's boarding-house. He had arranged to pay monthly after that first cut-rate week, and to-night he should settle his bill. It did not enter his head to ask for an advance from the railway ; he did not realise that the money was already due, and his ; he merely mused, as he trucked and sweated, on Mrs. Timpkin's tears, and upon the fact of his promise to pay monthly. There was something else as well to move him toward the decision to leave the freight-shed. There generally is *something else*. I don't mean to say that the *something else* is always, or even generally, the main reason for our nominally good deeds, if only we'd own up. I don't think it was in this case. He wouldn't have flung up his billet simply through boredom at the sight of stoves, at the sound of rattling trucks, at the flies in the water-pail—tepid water as soon as the ice melted. He wanted to pay his bill, for Mrs. Timpkin's sake, and he added : " It's a poor enough job anyhow ! " Honestly it was not the other way round that he arrived, by noon, at the decision that caused him,

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when Webley broke out, "All right, boys, go and lunch. Twelve o'clock," to ask if he might have his time-check to present in the office. Hot and irritable, Webley seemed not greatly astonished, not greatly interested.

"What? Going?" he said. "Oh, very well. Got a better job, I suppose. That's it! That's it! Soon as a man knows the ropes here of he goes. Yes, I'll make out your time."

Thus it was that Sam had the glorious experience of standing under heaven, a few minutes after noon, feeling himself a free man—bossing nobody, bossed by nobody, a free man—a sensation he clung to ardently, ousting from his mind the month-old memory of facing life with seven dollars, ousting from his mind the calculation of forty-five dollars (for there had been no overtime so far) less thirty-seven-fifty for Timpkin, and trying to enjoy, without these distractions and detractions, that sense of being free, of being alive, of being tied to nothing.

But as he returned along Dawson Street the calculation was made in his mind willy-nilly, clear as if he saw it on a blackboard:

\$45.00.

\$87.50.

\$ 7.50.

Of the future he knew nothing. The seven-fifty would dwindle. He needed a new pair of trousers, and passing the Kootenay Clothing Stores he was

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reminded of the fact on seeing a window-card with the legend :

READY-MADE PANTS OF EVERY KIND
FIVE DOLLARS — FIVE DOLLARS.

So he entered, and Grosset, standing at the back of the store, advanced to meet him, toying with a quill toothpick.

"Huh!" he said. "Bad—I feel bad to-day. Didn't call last night—up there. You know where I mean. What do you think? I saw her to-day, and she said she had expected me. 'How?' I asked. Didn't know—just sort of expected me. O God, O God! I wish I could make sure. You see, if I plunged and was turned down—" his gaze gloomed past Sam on to the side-walk.

"I should like to buy a pair of pants," said Sam.

"Ah! Pants!" exclaimed Grosset. "Yes. Pants! Just let me run this tape round your waist for size. Ah yes! What would you make of a woman saying she expected me? I can't make out if she's laughing at me, or laughing—O my God—to me, to me as it were. You know what I mean?" and he glared redly at Sam, and laid upon the counter, plucking them with professional thumb and forefinger (but with abstracted air), the desired pants. "That's a good quality. Fine cut. Couldn't do better. O my God—that's how I feel. Whoo, if I found she was playing with some other fellow——"

With his new trousers packed up, and a word of

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formal sympathy to Grosset, Sam strolled homewards, washed, descended to the dining-room. On the stairs he almost turned because of the sounds coming from below; but hunger urged him, instead, to make a heralding noise and proceed. Evidently the last diners had gone, and Mr. Timpkin was trying to amuse his wife by imitating none other than Grosset.

"Whoo! That's how I feel!" he was whooping. "Yes, if I could only be sure which way the cat would jump—whoo! That's what's the matter with me."

"Oh, Lincoln, Lincoln, you do make me laugh!" came the voice of Mrs. Timpkin, but it seemed as though instead of laughing she might weep.

Sam trod heavily on the stairs, advanced with heavy plod worthy of a "shovel-stiff." When he entered the dining room he found that Mr. and Mrs. Timpkin were at dinner, one at either end of the far table.

"Hullo! You're late," said Timpkin.

Mrs. Timpkin sat staring at the remains of her repast, while her husband, coffee-cup before him, looked at Sam with a searching face, fearful lest the young man had heard his nonsense.

"Sing!" he shouted. "Sing!"

The cook opened the kitchen door and put his head round.

"Sing he go sweep-up top-side. You wantum?" he asked.

"Any more dinner? Gentleman late here."

"Oh yes. Livah and bacon—steak an' onion—po-ak and bean, vely good, hee-hee!"

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Sam made his choice of the least unutterable combination for that hot day, and sat down.

"You are late, Mr. Haig," said Mrs. Timpkin.

"Yes—I must apologise."

"Oh, that's all right."

"I may as well settle up while I'm waiting," continued Sam. "I owe you a month's money now."

He took the wad from his pocket and counted out the notes. Having counted, he glanced up, and found that Timpkin and Mrs. Timpkin had apparently been fossilised, or had fallen into the state of Lot's wife. The raising of his head resuscitated them. He rose and stepped across to their table.

"There's the thirty-seven dollars fifty cents," he said.

"The what?" asked Mrs. Timpkin, her voice quivering.

"The thirty-seven-fifty," said her husband grimly.

At that she broke down. By one of those coincidences that often happen, it was exactly the sum necessary to add to a sum already scraped together to liquidate a debt that hung over them, menacing the business with extinction. Part payment had failed to satisfy; all was demanded.

The cook, with velvet tread, entered the room, glanced at the bills on the table, with the fifty-cent piece atop, glanced at Mrs. Timpkin, and understood. For once his expression was clear to Occidental eyes. As he looked, and looked away, sympathy was on his podgy face—he was

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of the podgy type. He addressed himself to Sam :

" You eat heal ? You sit this table ? Oh yes. You likee licee puddin' ? You likee stewed ploon ? "

" You give him the rice pudding, Tom, and the stewed prunes also," said Timpkin.

" Vely good. Oh vely good."

Sam turned abruptly to his table, and paid heed to nothing in the world except the dishes before him.

PART II
CAPRICCIOSO

CHAPTER I

" THAT NOT IMPOSSIBLE SHE "

It happened that the day after Sam left the freight-shed a brother of Mrs. Timpkin's (one Smith if you will pardon the ubiquitous name) came to Kootenay on his way to a railway construction camp, and Sam was introduced. Doubtless his honesty in paying his bill when he drew his month's wages, instead of running away, was belauded to Smith by the appreciative Mrs. Timpkin; for though virtues, to be sure, seemed just right to her, and no more, in contrast with vices they seemed to be more. So many trusted boarders had put thumbs to noses at the trust, and "skipped" when it suited them, that Sam's mere decency had aureoled him in the eyes of the Timpkins.

That brother inveigled the young man to talk of his prospects, and eventually asked him why he did not go in for some skilled work, such as

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engineering. Sam, being that last hope of America, a young man who would not call himself an engineer unless he could either build a bridge or set a-going and stop a Transatlantic liner (who did not understand that the great way to get on is to call yourself an engineer if you have ever put on a kettle to boil and stayed beside it till steam came), replied that he wasn't an engineer. Now Smith was an engineer. He was the engineer of a steam-shovel.

"You could learn," said he. "You come with me. I'll take you as a wiper on my steam-shovel."

"I might blow it up!" Sam pointed out.

"That ain't likely," answered Smith. "All you have to do is to say you're an engineer, and I'll show you the rest. There's nothing to it. You'll get your sixty a month as a wiper, and within a fortnight you'll be able to drive that steam-shovel into a bank as if you was drivin' a spoon into jam."

So Sam departed to the head waters of Astley Creek, away back of Mount Drew. Near to the camp, upon a front of wild hill, along which passed the new "grade," was a board a-top a post, and on the board was the word Henderson. It would figure in the time-tables when the railroad was completed, and some day there might really be a town there. At the moment there was but the board, a tribute to one Henderson, ranchman, whose ranch lay three miles back in the rolling waste. A sociable man was Henderson, and one Sunday he rode over to "rubber-neck" at the construction camp, to see what the steam-ploughs,

" THAT NOT IMPOSSIBLE SHE "

and dynamite, and shovel-stiffs were doing to the old hills along there—and also to see if there was anyone with whom he might pow-wow. He was no mixer. He used to say: "I ain't no mixer. I carry a riddle in my head, and I pop persons into it, and shake it a trifle till I know who's who. And I'm willing for other men to sift me some before asking me to put my knees under their table."

He sifted Sam. And almost every Sunday that young man was to be seen of the bald-headed eagles and coyotes (for human inhabitants there were none between the camp and the ranch) stepping out for Henderson's—with an eye alert for any roaming cows, the only dangerous creatures, perhaps, on that bit of rolling country. Men on foot have been glad to shin up a tree there from cows that either resented (or were curious to danger point regarding) two-legged strangers. A horse with a man a-top they understood to be a kind of super-horse; but a man without a horse—well, it was wise to step lively in places where the trees thinned out.

On the first of July, when all the ranch hands were in town with their June wages, it was suddenly remembered that Henderson's sister had been invited to come to the ranch for a change of air, and had fixed that day for her coming; and Mrs. Henderson wondered if it would be imposing on Sam's friendliness to ask him to drive over to Cranberry to meet the expected guest? "Tall and dark," was Henderson's description. "Wish I could go myself, but with all the boys away I'm kind of in a fix. Mildred's likely to be the only

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female to come off the cars. Don't be scared to flag them all if there are more than one."

Sam acquiesced, and was soon enjoying the feel of reins in his hand again, spinning along the wagon-road in the high "democrat." Only one "female" alighted from the cars; but if there had been hundreds Sam would have taken the opportunity to step up to her, as she appeared on the platform and, hat in hand, enquire if she were Henderson's sister. For this was She, this was She. His advance and bow, as it happened, were all above-board, not strategical, she being the only "female," indeed she was the only passenger, to alight at Cranberry, that little "jerk-water" town of a store, a hotel, the operator's house and a shack or two where bronzed section-men lived, and, on either side of the track, whitewashed cattle-corral. You can imagine what kind of a sense of things happening Sam experienced. Here, to him, was Destiny interested in his life.

Her voice was in keeping with her eyes and her hair and the frocks she wore and the motions of her carriage—each asking to be captured in a line or two by some artist, or taken impression of by crafty modeller.

"You have come to meet me from my brother?" she hazarded, as Sam swept hat from head.

He bowed assent, and indicated the rig at the end of the diminutive depot-house, where the horses were trying to bolt, running forward as far as the hitching-rope would allow, then backing till neck and out-thrust head of the near horse were in a line with the taut line of the tethering

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rope. The locomotive clanged away, the string of cars snaked after it, and the horses glared at the retreating train as beasts amazed that so terrible an alligator of a monster should renounce the attempt to swallow them—harness, demioerat and all. Sam stowed away her two suit-cases, and with great anxiety, having unhitched, held the lines in one hand the while he prepared to aid her to climb to the seat.

"Steady, boys, steady!" he implored.

He caught her elbow as she raised a foot to attempt embarkation. That cryptic smile that haunted him was on her face. It intrigued him, as they use the word in these days—Oh amazingly. But he could not dote upon it at that moment; it had to be side-issue. With a graceful whirl of draperies she stepped into her place and he, gathering the lines, swiftly swung up beside her, again considering that here was the hand of Destiny. By the deliberate, collected way in which he managed the unnerved horses she might, had she been interested in him, have hazarded an opinion that he had some kind of determination, that he might, upon occasion, handle a situation strongly. What she did perceive presently was that he was absurdly, deliciously, glad that he could handle his restive charges. He drove with a faint edge of swagger. He sat up to the task firmly. Yes, she was sure that her driver was just on the verge of showing off. Perched up here beside the woman that Destiny had dropped in the seat, he felt as if he were on a mountain-top. The conveyance had grown, it would appear,

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another foot or two while he went on to the platform to meet her. When they spoke they spoke together.

"I have seen you before," said he.

"Haven't I seen you before?" she asked.

They had turned their heads one to the other, he to make his statement, she her interrogation, and her eyes were bright, very much alive, as he looked into them.

"I saw you the first day I came to Kootenay," said he, "as I drove up from the depot. You were crossing Hoskins Avenue, at the corner of Dawson Street, on the south side, and the rig I was in turned north."

She looked far off, as though noting the long tranquil undulations of the brown and green and yellow-splashed foot-hills to left.

"Fancy remembering!" she murmured, and he caught another expression of her face—one sweetly pensive.

"And then I saw you one morning on Dawson Street. You were just ahead of me. You went into a grocery store."

She gave a little inclination of her head, raised her brows, but said nothing.

"Then you were on the depot-platform once, when I was trucking——"

Her eyes danced.

"That's where I saw you," she said. "I remember thinking what different kinds of men there were there—just for something to do, I suppose, till they——"

"Yes, till they look round," said Sam. "You

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had on a light blue frock. You had a sun-shade."

Her eyes were full of fun now, or *joie de vivre*. Turning her head she smiled at him as though he were telling some humorous or delightful story.

"Did you like the *Hotel Kootenay*?" she enquired; and he frowned, trying to take her meaning.

"Oh!" he said, understanding—for the *Kootenay* was also on Hoskins Avenue, opposite the *Grand Western*. Evidently she thought he had been bound thither on the occasion of his first sight of her. "I didn't put up at the *Kootenay*. No—I saw you as the rig turned down Hoskins Avenue, but it was the *Grand Western* rig I was on."

"Oh yes," said she.

She must surely, thought Sam, look upon him as a wealthy crank, with a foible for trucking, if she imagined that he had put up at the *Kootenay*!

"You can handle horses," she remarked with admiration.

He had wanted her to note that fact; she made him aware of his masculinity.

"Do you like driving?" he asked.

"I don't think I could trust myself with these," she owned up. "My brother won't have horses without what he calls 'gip and ginger.' I like driving, but——"

"Try if you like," he suggested. "They are pulling hard."

"Are they? I can see they are fresh. They know they're going home, too."

She had her eyes on the lines.

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"If you put your hand in front of mine you can feel the pull," he said.

Smiling, she glanced at him, a sidelong smile that brought up in his memory all his glimpses of her. Oh yes—this was veritably She. The miracle had happened. Sixty miles from Kootenay, here she was sitting by him—nay, more, was now putting her daintily gloved hand before his, and slipping her fingers over the reins to feel the pull. That horseman's sense of being *en rapport* with the horses through the leather lines was suddenly eclipsed by something else. She had her hand there only a few moments, but he had time to wish that she would hold them long, to fear she would release, to exult that she did not, and then to draw a deep breath as she sat back again, hands in lap.

CHAPTER II

HENDERSON'S RANCH

SMITH, at the construction camp, wondered why his wiper was so careful in his shaving and brushing and general grooming on the Sunday mornings; he considered that though Mrs. Henderson—wife of the big bluff rancher who had visited them and invited Sam to spend any Sunday he could at the ranch—was doubtless a charming lady, she was not eligible for attentions, and suspected that some neighbouring rancher must be blessed with engaging daughters. He knew the Hendersons had no daughters, for he had one day casually asked: "They got any family, these friends you've made?" and had been told no. Breakfast over, the young man went off with alacrity, and Smith saw no more of him till Monday morning, when, wakening, there would he be in his bunk, evidently having stolen in quietly to the sleeping camp on the late Sunday night. Smith noticed, too, the brighter (and at the same time dreamful) expression of Sam's eyes. When it came to scrubbing clean with high speed on a certain Wednesday evening (as well as on Sunday mornings), after a hot day's work, and going off smartly along the grade,

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scrambling up to the bluff top and fading off from camp, Smith knew—"sure thing"—there was a woman in it.

So far from the notion being to give her sister-in-law a quiet time, Mrs. Henderson saw to it that, from up and down the valley, neighbours were culled to meet the young and pretty relative. She would give her a "good time."

On arriving that Wednesday evening Sam found Mildred discussing some of the recent callers, and engaged in trimming hats.

"They've fairly fallen in love with her," declared Mrs. Henderson, with a kind of elderly roguish glance at Mildred; and Sam wondered if he should reply "Inevitably!" so as to inform Mildred, obliquely, of his own allegiance. But even as the word was on his tongue he feared it sounded mere compliment—a touch flippant; so it remained unspoken, and he had not the consolation of knowing that she had read his glance, and as good as heard the comment he had not voiced.

"Always doing something for somebody," continued Mrs. Henderson. "The Gillies girls down the valley couldn't take their eyes off her hat. Wherever had she got it? They just screamed when she told them she'd made it herself, didn't they?"

Mildred Henderson looked up and laughed, her long fingers manipulating the pieces of millinery; but it was not the hat but the deft hands Sam admired.

"Of course she had to offer to trim hats for them," said Mrs. Henderson. "That's Mildred!"

"I shall have my head turned," broke forth

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Mildred, glancing up with laughing protest at Sam. "Can't you stop her? There!" and she held up the hat, finished for their contemplation.

"Exquisite!" cried her sister-in-law. "You've certainly trimmed a hat. It's prettier than your own that they saw and envied."

"I believe it is," said Mildred, slowly. "Well, that won't do! I'll just take out this rose from the side. It's too chic a finish altogether. There! That's good enough."

"It's surely pretty," said Mrs. Henderson, "though that one rose you've taken off again just finished it."

"I'll remember it for another time," remarked Mildred.

"Where do you get the flowers?" asked Sam.

"From a French woman I know. She came from a village in France where everybody seems to make artificial flowers."

"But do you carry a store of them with you when you go holidaying?"

"That's Mildred!" explained Mrs. Henderson again. "She brought some as a present for me—knew I'd like them."

"And now I'm thinking of using up my presents on other folks' hats!" said Mildred, making a *moue* at herself. "That's generous of me, isn't it?"

Henderson rose and felt for his pipe. If a man does not idolise his sister and think her perfection he is apt to find a little of her society go a long way. He feels for the nepenthe in his pocket.

"Say, Haig, I want you to come and look at a new tree-sprayer I got," said he.

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"D—n the tree-sprayer," thought Sam.

But he was not always thus plucked away from worship. Five minutes of looking at a tree-sprayer with Mildred's elder brother—but Mildred not accompanying them—and seeing how it worked, seemed like half-an-hour, while half-an-hour with Mildred seemed but a fugitive five minutes. That was one of the symptoms of the malady.

Those were glamorous days on which he saw her, came into the radius of her spell. There was the day of their meeting when he drove her to her brother's ranch. There were the red-letter Sundays; there was the evening of the hat-trimming, when he hated Henderson for coarsely and unfeelingly carrying him off from watching the play of her hands to look at a gross commercial pump with the patent number stencilled triumphantly on it.

There was another time of seeing her and talking to her—when the Gillies girls were there, and young Gillies, and—but what matter their names and ages, the colour of their hair and eyes, and where were the dimples of the ladies, and what were the qualities of the males. It was "a party." That was all that could be said. And, at a party, a man enamoured has to be more circumspect than when alone with the near relatives of his idol. There is a high chivalric generosity in these matters. When the crowd comes, and other males are there, the perfect and altruistic male does not make it appear that he has "fixed things up" with the girl; he gives her scope to select—he doesn't run the risk of embarrassing her (lest she have no

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use for him) by making it seem to others that all is arranged between them.

It was a party—that is all (as has been said) that could be said of it—a party from which Sam went home in a condition of elation, in a blend of hopefulness and hopelessness. His quickest way back was across the ranch pasture field—the home-field where they put up hay, for this is not a tale of the old long-horn free-range days—and there was a gate there. On the first Sunday he had climbed over it slowly; on the second he had vaulted it; on the night of the party—but this is to anticipate.

He left the camp without supper, on that evening, to the vast amusement of Smith. The fun would be in full swing at Henderson's by the time they blew off steam and chanted "Knock off, boys, six o'clock," at the construction camp. So Sam washed and shaved, but tarried not to eat.

"Living upon some kind of love, sure thing," murmured Smith.

At high speed did Sam hit the trail his comings and goings were wearing across the hills. The juniors would be dancing in the big hall-way, despite the hot season; Henderson would be dealing the cards with his cronies, or they would be gathered on the screen porch damning the railway company, or discussing weight of wool, or pitting size against succulence (or crispness against softness) of apples; and the elder ladies would be saying it was nice to see the young people enjoying themselves. Left, right, Sam swung on, collar in hand to don at the last rise so as to arrive looking

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fresh. The last light lay on the world and lengthy shadows of the hill-crests on the grass, amid which grasshoppers crackled in that faint fashion that heralds the day's end.

Supper was to be delayed—not for Sam alone, but for several of the guests. They came from near and far; from five miles off—from sixty miles off. Not all had automobiles, but those that had picked up the others. The party began to gather at that most distant point, sixty miles away, in the afternoon, and people were laughing over the question of how to pack together into a four-seater, and who was to ride on the step, while Mrs. Henderson still wore a cotton wrapper over her silk gown, superintending the culinary arrangements.

By the time Sam came to the ranch, and the dogs gave tongue, all had settled down to the evening's merriment. In the dining-room there were half-a-dozen little tables ready for the guests, and after he had shaken the great welcoming hand of Henderson, and made a bow here and there, a lull came between dance and song, and between dissertation on wool and "shop-talk" on grazing rights. It was the lull for which Mrs. Henderson had been waiting, to shepherd her guests into their places. To Sam it was a romantic supper-room, because his reality over at the camp was so different. His home there was an old box-car; or, to be precise, a third part of it, the engineers' end being partitioned off from the two-thirds where the shovel-gang slept. It contained a couple of bunks, a small table, and nails had been hammered into the rickety partition on which to hang their ward-

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robe. Meals were served in two-thirds of another car, the remaining third of which was the cook's quarters. The dining-table was of deal, covered with sheeny cloth, streaked with blue veins in some wild aim to look like marble. The communal serving dishes were tin basins, the cups were nigh half-an-inch thick when of china, but most were of enamelled tin, and on many the enamel was chipped. To one living on caviare and reclining on cushions the camp might have seemed romantic, for one man's romance is another man's reality. But Henderson's supper-room was a dream to the second engineer of the steam-shovel.

Think not Sam failed to enjoy life at the camp—but it made the more delectable this successful rancher's spread, made the more wonderful the big polished floor-space here, with the bear rugs under foot, the array of little tables so tastefully decorated. Maybe the dollar question did crop up again in his mind when he found that he was not to sit at the table where Mildred queened, and that one of the attentive males beside her was young Gillies, owner of a big automobile that Sam had espied by the gable when he arrived. Maybe he had a momentary doubt if Destiny, after all, had sent him up into these hills in entirely kindly mood.

Yet if Destiny had sent him to Camp Henderson—to be invited to this ranch—to meet Mildred Henderson, then perhaps it was Destiny (aware now of his pang) that caused the lady on his left at the table where he was planted to touch his forearm gently. She was a matronly lady of fifty, or thereby, whom he liked, with beautiful eyes, tender

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and shrewd, indulgent and ironic. The hand on his sleeve was friendly, with little wrinkles and folds. He liked her; he liked her gesture; it took him into her comfortable, hard-fought life; it made the hard-upness of his present state seem an accident, for he felt, in some ridiculous way, that she recognised in him the stuff that arrives at something and does not grow old in camps where one should only rough it in youth.

"Don't you think," she said, in low mellow voice, thus drawing his head toward her to listen to the quiet comment, "that they are an excellent match?"

The drift of her glance was intended to signify to him of whom she talked, and he looked to the table where Mildred sat, then back, wide-eyed, to the lady at his side.

"Young Gillics and Nora Ray," she amplified.

He was so happy, after the anxiety occasioned by her pause, on discovery of whom it was that she was thus hopeful, that he responded with alacrity: "Yes, indeed!"

"He's clever. It's not his father's backing that made him, though he's here in the valley visiting Mr. Gillies just now. He has the gift for seeing where openings are." (Sam wished he had the gift too.) "He's a delightful boy. He had a row with his father, you see, and went off to Sonora—at the end of it. It was up to him to pull through somewhere. He told his father afterwards, when the row was made up, that he struck Sonora, where he hoped to find a fortune, with only seven dollars. Think of that! Seven dollars!"

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Sam opened his eyes wide, and wagged his head slowly, in an attempt to show astonishment. But the supper was drawing to an end. The folk were rising, ready for more reels, or poker, or gossip. The lady of the wrinkled hands turned to speak to Mrs. Henderson; and Sam, moving a step away, caught Mildred's eye. Her smile brought him to her side. He had been very good. He had not thrust himself upon her.

"It's hot in here to-night," she said.

"There is a screen-porch outside, and a big verandah as well, where you could get some cool air, if the mosquitoes are not too bad," he reminded her.

"It had just occurred to me," she replied, as she dabbed her face with a little bunched handkerchief.

"You arrived just in time for supper?" Her lips and eyes entranced him. Her glance seemed to hold a private invitation as she turned; there was a subtle "come hither" in her pose. He drew more erect, debonair.

They moved on easily out to the broad, deck-like verandah, Sam thrusting open the mosquito-door for her, but her hand on it also—a most pleasingly mutual business, and a pliant and pleasing hand.

"I've chatted with everybody," she said, as the door clicked back. "Everybody is charming here. They have surely given me a good time."

"And you them," he answered.

"That's very complimentary," said Mildred, and leant against the broad upright beam of the verandah roof, looking over the rolling, starlit hills. "I saw you talking to Mrs. Spiers."

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"I did not know her name," said Sam, "for we were not introduced. I'm glad to know it now. She's very sweet."

"You've fallen in love with her!"

"She's tremendously, and unconsciously, stimulating," he replied, ignoring her banter.

"Do you need to be stimulated?" Mildred asked, as if astonished, turning to look at him in the light sprayed out from the house.

He met her gaze and merely, as it were, surveyed her eyes, enquiring slightly, not utterly lost in them.

"She was telling me about young Gillies—how he had a row with his father, and left home to *make good* for himself, and landed in a boom town that was just at the bad stage beyond the real boom, and before the first stability—with seven dollars!"

"Seven dollars!" she exclaimed.

"Seven dollars," repeated Sam. "And now he's engaged to the girl who sat beside him at your table."

"Oh-h!" said Mildred, slowly. "Oh, is he? I didn't know that."

"Yes."

"Did he make it up with his father, then?"

"No—Mrs. Spiers made a point of that. He did it all himself."

"He must have the gift," said Mildred.

Sam would not let his trail be travelled from.

"What I wonder," said he, "is this: If he proposed to the girl when he had only seven dollars or if he waited until the following speculations made good."

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Mildred stared thoughtfully away into the pale-green distance where the hills were faintly lit by the thin moon and the big stars.

"You're sentimentalising about them, perhaps?" she suggested, her voice going up in a note of gentle interrogation. "Maybe she set her cap at him when he came home to see his father again, with a banking-account."

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Sam.

"You would like to think well of everybody." This she spoke so evenly it was more of statement of a discovery than a question.

"I would. And I know one person—I"—he hesitated—"well," he tried again, "I would like people to think well of me in that sort of way."

She stepped back from the verandah front and sank into a chair.

"You're thinking about yourself!" she declared.

"Oh no. I'm talking about Gillies and how he made good 'way down in Mexico!"

"You're making comparisons between yourself and Gillies!"

Sam drew a long breath, and might have plunged had she not added:

"You went into Kootenay to make good at the top of the boom. You're wondering if you will have that boy's luck."

With rapt eyes he looked down at her. She put up a hand and felt the coils of her dark hair.

"For all I know you've had a row with your father too," she said. "Why should you not do what Gillies has done?"

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"If I did——" he paused; "I would be happy."
"There is more than money in life," she commented.

With back against the rail, head bent, Sam gazed down on her. "That's what interests me in the story of Gillies," said he. "I don't agree with you that the girl would——"

"I don't say she did! I was only joshing—perhaps. Or maybe I was wanting to keep you from being more romantic than might be good for you. You might come down kerflop!"

"Yes," he said, and smiled wryly. "But, as you say, there is more than the dollar side of life. I like you for saying that." She was expressionless. "I like to think," he went on, "that there are women who feel that way. It's fine! But life is hard."

"It is," she agreed, and sighed, and he looked down tenderly on her; and she, glancing up, seemed to see and appreciate. But here was another theme about to draw him from his urgent and difficult trail of that night; and time was flying. Regarding Time, there were no "leaden feet" when he talked to this young woman, there were only "wings." If he stayed out here very long with Mildred, the going back would perhaps make her feel uncomfortable. There might be glances at them—something like that of Mrs. Spiers at Gillies and his girl, or at least wondering glances. He must remember that, for her sake.

"Yes," he said, "I like to believe—I do believe—there are women who would be hurt if a man

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came waltzing up to them and said: 'Look here, I've got a business with a turnover of so-and-so, a yacht on the Hudson, a home in New York, a cottage in the Adirondacks, and—well, I want you to marry me!' How's that?"

She gave a little laugh.

"Oh dear, what a lover you would make," she said. "That would be a very definite proposal indeed."

"And a woman would be right to resent it?"

"I think so," said Mildred Henderson.

"But there's the other side——"

"You mean the man's?" she asked.

"Yes."

Her hand tapped a chair beside her; and, hardly knowing, he sat down. There was a pause, and then she spoke again.

"I believe you're asking me" (his heart felt as if it had stopped) "for advice," she said.

"Yes," he acknowledged, and his voice changed oddly. Then—"God knows," he added.

He saw, sitting there, the chip of moon as it were sailing in the sky, and he felt as though a ray of it had got into his head. This was not what he had meant to say. He was crazy. His quandary was that he wanted to tell her he adored her—without telling her, seeing that he was poor. And that, as Euclid might say, is an impossible proposition.

"My advice," said she, "seeing you have asked—practically asked—now, honestly, that's it?"

He merely nodded, and wondered how honest he was.

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"Well, my advice is—don't worry. Rustle yourself a job while you're thinking of her. That's what's *up to you*. Don't you think so?"

It seemed to him that she solved the whole question. It seemed to him that she was wisdom incarnate. Wonderful woman—wiser than Solomon! Then the door opened, and some of the others came out, and easily she turned to speak to them. He was left with the wonder if she had any suspicion of who the She was at the back of his mind! It was almost as if he had managed to pull off his impossible proposition, that would have baffled Euclid. But whether or not—the thrill of it—the romance of it—the magic of it! She (who was the She, aware or unaware) had advised. He would "rustle" that job, he would "rustle" that job—for her.

It was not easy to say good-bye that night, for she was returning to Kootenay the next day. They were all saying good-bye together. Auto-lights were blazing; the girls were singing out what a joy-ride it would be home through the night, with the lights rushing ahead. Henderson brought Sam a stable lamp to light him back to camp. It struck the young man, as he took it, that when he brought it back next Sunday Mildred would be gone. Everybody was saying good-bye at once. The adieux overlapped. When he took her hand he could only murmur: "It will be queer not to see you here when I come again."

She let her hand rest a moment in his. Perhaps it was only that she felt very friendly toward him after that disclosure, or that—well, that request for advice.

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"I hope to hear," said she, "that you've rustled a job such as she——" and there she left it. Her eyes utterly enraptured him. "I'll ask my brother for news of you," she added, turning away to say good-bye to another guest; and big Henderson, with an aloof geniality, a smile that might be friendly or cynical or amused, was at his side again.

"Good-night, Sam," said Henderson. "Mind you come over on Sunday, or else we shall think it's Mildred was the attraction and not us."

When Sam came to the fence-rail that night—which was almost told of out of place—he must surely have been mightily hopeful and elated, for he did not climb it; he did not even put a hand on it and vault over. He ran, he leapt, he cleared it at a bound, so that the lamp on his arm went out and he did not trouble to relight it, but went home by the light of that splinter of setting moon and the stars.

CHAPTER III

A NEW-WORLD GARDEN

"I SEE Sam Haig is back in town. He's got a job at the smelter to drive the tram-engine, he tells me," said Webley to his wife—Webley the one-time freight boss, who had, during Sam's absence from Kootenay to study engineering on the steam-shovel, been created agent at Kootenay, the former agent having stepped into the place of the superintendent who had been suddenly spurned forth because of some omission or commission (very probably commission) outside of this story.

"That's the young man who worked with you for a month," said Mrs. Webley, recalling the name. "Will you invite him up?"

They had been talking over who was to come to their garden tea, a pleasant gathering being called to extol and admire, and pay homage to, Webley's roses, before they were clipped, the best of them, and sent to the Kootenay Horticultural Fair. It was to be a kind of private view of the flowers. Webley was an easy man to get along with in his "fair bungalow home"—to use the phrase of the town-boosters. He used to leave his strings of oaths at the freight-shed, padlock them inside

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every evening; and such cuss-words as he required at the agent's office similarly did he leave there, though to be sure he found less need for vivid language as agent than as freight boss. There was worry still, but there was not sweat of the brow as well.

"Guess I'll ask Mathers" (Mathers, by the way—and you will note the possibility for the plot "thickening"—was the husband of Mildred Henderson's sister, with whom Mildred dwelt when visiting Kootenay) "as a matter of business," he went on. "Hate to mix up business and roses, but he's handy; and as he's the kind of man who looks at other people to see if they are handy, it's all right."

Others, so far unknown to the reader, were mentioned—the customs man, and his charming Californian wife; a doctor, big and brawny (you would hazard, to see him, that he never had need in all his life to look into the medicine chest for himself), and his wife—the fit feminine for him, a woman who spent most of the summer in a tent with her children five miles down the lake, who could sing you a song at an evening party, or roast you a duck at her camp to perfection; the newspaper editor, slightly handicapped by a belief (and he would have been more tolerable could he have discarded it) that he had to exert a critical faculty or opinion. It was at times as if he carried his blue pencil into society, instead of leaving it on the office desk. There was also invited a foolish little lady who was wont to go to Europe every other year and flirt on the way, so that her little

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boy declared: "I don't want to go to Eurup with you again. You leave me alone too much, and go laughing around with other men. It don't seem white to pop!"—"Ssh! You mustn't speak to your mother like that!" She had a tendency to look tense about her subjects, and ask, with tensity, what one thought of Maeterlinek, or Bergson, or Yeats, or Butler, or Shaw, or R. J. Campbell, or Maud Allan, or Strauss—or any other name she caught when in England, and could look and feel exotic about. She was a flimsy thing; but she was invited. And there was an elderly doctor who, when he met her, was wont to look at her heavily as she rippled her nonsense, and make up mild prescriptions in his mind, giving private thanks that his wife was what she was, not a worrier about distant "movements," but a cheerful, ageing lady, her silver hair helped out with a switch (my feminine readers may know what that is), about which she made no pretence, acknowledging its falseness with engaging honesty—a charming lady with clear eyes, and plump cheeks with roses in them instead of eigarette hollows.

Sam saw all these when he responded to Webley's invitation, came up hill to the fair bungalow home, and helped to hand—and to deplete—the store of sandwiches (sandwiches of cucumber and lettuce, sandwiches of ground nuts, salad-dressing and cheese) the store of cakes baked by Mrs. Webley and her only child, Nance, and by other ladies present, for each brought a cake, all being artificers in fancy cooking. No one could be sad in this garden on the slope above Kootenay

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Lake, with the thin winds rustling the ranks of the roses. There were roses by the bushful dotting the lawn; roses over a pergola; rambler roses on the new palings. The cropped grass caused someone to tell the story of the American who, asking of an English gardener his recipe for an admired lawn, in that land of lawns and gardens and ivied houses, was told to roll it, and mow it, and water it, and roll it and mow it and water it for about five hundred years. Webley commented that his lawn was a product of about as many days.

Someone asked Sam what his special niche in life might be, and he replied (the teachings of Timpkin and Smith taken to mind) that he was an engineer; but when his questioner thereupon plunged into talk about bridge-building Sam dropped that he was not that kind of engineer, and doubted if Timpkin's advice was good after all.

"My engineering is limited to running a steam-shovel," he confessed.

"Ah-ha! Keep your thumb on it, then," was the answer. "I had no suspicion. If you can bluff that way you ought to get on here. Hullo—here's a beautiful girl arriving with Mrs. Mathers. Who's she, I wonder? Younger, and still more heart-beat-accelerating sister, I should say! Eh?"

Mildred had arrived. Mildred was here! She advanced with her wonderful smile; and what with her dark, dancing eyes, and chiselled features, and flush among the slight powder on her cheeks (concession to the hot day), her thin, modelled lips (no cruelty visible here for Sam's eyes) and her

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lustrous hair, the shadows massing into black . . . he broke off to admire her lilac muslin dress, and was caught by the whole glamour of her.

It was the first time he had seen her since that evening "crush" at Henderson's, for he had only come back to town yesterday, had intended to call upon her this very afternoon, but Webley, seeing him at the depot, had claimed him for the garden-party. How his heart beat tattoo now when he saw her! Surely his state was observed by the elderly doctor, with whom he chatted. He looked—and saw her as it were in the space of one heart-beat, from modelled neck to instep, as she strolled across the youthful lawn. Some of the guests she knew, some she knew not. To Sam she said "You here!" with a pleased elevation of her eyebrows.

"You have met before?" asked Mrs. Webley.

"We are old friends," answered Mildred. She was tremendously charming, radiant. Sam hoped it was from her heart, and not merely in superficial graciousness, that she made that statement.

"In that case," Mrs. Webley said to him, "will you please see to Mrs. Mathers' and Miss Henderson's wants, and ply them with the strawberries while I pour tea."

At a private view of roses the talk can be no more intimate than at a private view of pictures. There was too much chatter to please Sam. It gave confusion to his talk with Mildred when, her wants supplied, she sat finicking with sandwiches, twiddling her little finger over strawberries. It seemed to go like this:

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"I was coming to see you—yes, I like the pink ones—Oh no, I only arrived yesterday—there is a beauty over there; it will surely get a prize—why have I come back?—because the work is finished there, and I wanted to come back where—the dark purple ones are wonderful—a credit to Kootenay."

Webley, pointing out some special favourites among the blooms, led the way to the top of his garden, and suddenly stretching up on tiptoe said, over the flower-tops and fence-tops: "Hullo! What are you doing there?"

A voice came unintelligibly to the others from the far side.

"Well, come in—come in here," Webley invited. "Come up that way—to the top, and slip in at the wicket." He turned back to his guests, releasing himself from the prickly clutch of a thorn. "It's my neighbour, Marsden," he explained.

"Oh, Marsden!" said one or two.

"I didn't know he was a settler," remarked the big doctor, looking at his wife as over some private joke.

"I always say we're married but not settled," she explained. "Most married folks are married *and* settled!"

"Settled—settled, by Jehoshaphat!" the doctor declared.

"He's not," said Webley. "Marsden is neither. It's just his notion to build a house."

"It's a very nice residence," said Mildred Henderson, who, having finished her refreshment, was strolling round with Sam.

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"It is," agreed Webley. "Why shouldn't he have a house and a garden of his own, he says, to loaf in, when he's not working, instead of only a hotel rotunda? Here he comes."

When Sam was introduced he met Marsden's eyes fully, and both men came to the same decision—to acknowledge that strained meeting on the mountain wagon-road.

"We have met before," they said simultaneously, and shook hands.

"There are still some things left to eat," said Webley. "Here you are, Marsden—have a snack at this table."

"I'll get some fresh tea," said Nance, and ran off across the lawn, silver teapot in hand, Marsden calling after her not to trouble, for the Marsdens don't take kindly to afternoon tea. Never ask a man like Marsden if he has ever partaken of afternoon tea; for, if he has, you are merely putting before him one of the biggest temptations to lie promptly and vigorously that it is possible to put before man. He looked now as one horribly trapped.

"That's all right," he called out, but Webley was determined to be neighbourly, whether Marsden cared for tea in a garden or looked upon it as an effete introduction from the old mother island, insidiously drifting across the American continent. A canful in a camp after a day on the trail is another matter.

The guests walked about, or sat down, as they were minded. They talked shop—or rather they talked horticultural fairs. They expressed their

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opinion on the trick of labelling fruit one had not grown, but purchased on purpose, with the name of one's own ranch. A bobolink, frisking into their midst, and forth again with a start, caused them to speak of a book called *Little Girl-Bird in the Poppies*, and some one wondered if there would be a sequel called *The Little Boy-Bird in the Oats*.

Over in a corner an old-timer whispered the true story of how MacPherson came to own the Atlin mine, and those who listened murmured "Careful! Careful!" when he reached the bit about: ". . . so he pulled his gun, and said, 'You son of a——'!" ". . ." Marsden was telling Mrs. Mathers and Mildred all about the new motor-boats. He had just bought one; it would be the first on the lake. Deserted by Mildred, Sam was taken over by Nance Webley, a simple and somehow, pictorially, early-Victorian-looking little lady, with the most candid eyes you could wish to see. Finding Sam as if "out of it" she inveigled him into conversation with the old-timer and his wife, who whispered: "Do remember, Tom, when you tell that story about MacPherson to leave out the son of a you know expression." And just when they were beginning to fall into groups to talk about what interested them it was time to go.

"Don't hurry off," said Webley to Sam. "You wait. I want to hear how you're making out."

So Sam (entirely willing) stayed on; he bowed farewells where bows were offered, shook hands when hands were extended, and watched the party ebb away. Nance Webley, in these last

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moments, had been talking to him again; and in the circulation of adieux, between attention to what she said, and dread of not holding Mildred's hand for at least one fugitive second, of not looking in her eyes again, to search nimbly for some flicker of friendship, he was almost distraught.

"Good-bye, Mr. Haig," she called, and smiled, and nodded from a distance.

The expression was cryptic to him. As Nance turned to shake hands with the old-timer and his wife Sam hastened to Mildred's side.

"Good-bye," he said. "May I call——"

"Will you be there on Saturday?" she asked.

"There?" enquired Sam, puzzled.

"Didn't you hear? You were so engrossed on something else that you lost the invitation," and her eyes flashed—flashed and smiled. There were moments when he wondered if she had Latin blood in her veins! A little red gleam would show in those velvety pupils. But what the invitation was that he had missed she did not say, swirled lissom away with a last distracting glance over her shoulder. He tried to call after her, or rather he tried to collect some words to call after her. "Where is *there*?" came to his lips, but sounded absurd. "Where is *there*? What invitation did I lose? What——" While he was trying to find words and voice she, who so ridiculously perturbed him, was gone.

CHAPTER IV

MARSDEN EXPLAINS HIS ACTIONS

WHEN Sam found himself alone in the garden with neighbour Marsden and Nance Webley, and the crumbs of the feast, and the scattered cups, in the interval of waiting for the return of Mrs. Webley from the house, and of Webley from the front door, he had a troubled expression in his eyes. Marsden strolled a few paces back and forth.

"You have a nice home here, Miss Webley," he announced, "nice home. Good location. Oh yes."

Then he fixed his cold eyes on Sam, and, head on side, gloomed upon him. Nance did not know what to say, for Marsden seemed preoccupied, and Haig comatose. A cigarette-box on one of the garden tables suggested means whereby to resuscitate.

"Won't you smoke, Mr. Haig?" said she.

Between the abstracting of the cigarette from the box and the blowing of the first smoke, Sam, with an effort, brought his gaze back from a kind of wraith of Mildred Henderson and became really present. Then Webley joined them, also took a

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cigarette, lit up, dragged a chair toward Sam, and throwing himself into another said: "Well, squat down, Haig, and give me your news. Camp, Marsden, camp—and have a cigar."

Thus relieved, Nance turned to the tables, and would allow none of the men to aid her in clearing away the litter and remnants of the repast. Sam carried one trayload into the scullery; Marsden followed with hands full of plates in a kind of cumbersome but clever balancing feat; but Nance said she'd be really downright annoyed if they did any more. So they drew their chairs closer, blew occasional smoke, and Webley demanded that his younger guest should tell how things were "panning out" with him.

Here were new surroundings to Sam. He had seen the hotel life of Kootenay, for a night on his arrival; the boarding-house life for several weeks he had known; camp life he had sampled of late, and also tasted a little of ranch life at the home of Mildred's brother. Very clear to him still was the construction camp. His ears had not yet forgotten the coughing and chugging of the steam-shovel; the smell of the turned earth was still with him; and here he was in a scented garden, the garden of a real home. It was peaceful, tranquil—high on the slopes, the garden of one of the highest-set houses. Beyond it, among the bush, stood a shack or two, elbowing stove-pipe upthrust. Away up yonder, to South and West, the rolls of the mountains urged backwards toward the crest (a dun blue under the sky, a dun blue serrated cliff suggestive of profound quiet,

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elemental peace and strength), that crest under which the Fraser miners toiled, while beyond, visible from the big, padded cane chair in which he sat, was the spur where the Lanyon miners burrowed and blasted, its topmost peak seeming to peer over the other ridges upon them, a sparkling blue, lit by the sun. Past the corner of the house, far below, he could see the sky-mirroring arm of the Lake. Little breezes ruffled the roses, and fluttered the tobacco smoke. Nance Webley drifted to and fro, tidying up, and her father's eyes followed her with content.

"You two have met before, then," he said, trying a new theme, for Sam seemed restrained regarding his work, and how things were "panning out."

"We have surely," answered Marsden.

"Yes," said Sam. "I was coming down the mountain one day and met Mr. Marsden leading a lame horse."

"And I sized him up as looking for a job," continued Marsden, "and asked him to lead it home for a dollar—seeing he was going down anyhow."

Webley glanced leisurely, but interestedly, from one to the other.

"What," he enquired, "is the story?"

"He didn't like my tone," said Marsden, and smiled on Sam in a fashion that seemed meant for genial.

"Oh, I don't know that there is anything to be revealed about it," declared Sam. "Put it that I hadn't met Mr. Marsden before, and was new to the West. For all I could tell it might be quite

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a usual proceeding, in the West, to ask a total stranger to relieve one of a horse, and take it home—for a dollar."

"Dignified!" said Marsden. "I tell you he was surely dignified!" This he commented to Webley, who again looked from one to the other with roving and non-committal gaze. Marsden seemed friendly, yet Sam was uncertain of him, even meeting him thus in the home of a common friend.

"Why didn't you flag me for a job that day?" asked Marsden, jerking out the question abruptly, his eyes like gimlets on Haig—who frankly met the scrutiny, mouth corners puckering in the slightest smile.

"You heard when you got to the mine, then, that I'd been advised to flag you?" he suggested.

"Yes. What was the trouble anyhow? You had every chance. It wasn't as if we passed each other with no more than a nod."

Webley, who had gathered sufficient of the incident from their remarks, broke in laughing: "Marsden wants to know," and he wagged his head at his neighbour, "why in thunder Sam Haig," and he wagged his head at his other guest, "didn't like the look of him."

Marsden gave a low gruff chuckle, and changed his attitude, one might say his attitudes, mental and physical; for with a big motion he took a new and easier posture in his chair and—

"I was only thinking," said he, "that Mr. Haig must have been pretty near broke then—sort of clinging on to his dignity seeing that his dollars

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were evaporating—didn't want to be without both." Then his chin went on his chest and under his brows he gloomed in a way typical of him. "There are men in this town," he went on, addressing his host, "—we don't need to mention names—who have such a jag of dollars that they don't bother about dignity. They'll take another odd dollar and toss it on top of the pile, as readily as Mr. Haig turned down my offer" (he paused), "and the man that offered it too," he added. "I admit"—he turned to Sam—"that I made a mistake about you. I thought you were an all-brain man, by the look of you at first. I didn't know you understood horses, for one thing."

"You don't know that yet!" replied Sam.

"Oh yes I do! I knew the moment you took the lines from me and turned that lame horse around. I don't need any more indication than that," and he nodded.

"All very well," thought Sam, "for him to chatter thus"; but he recalled, as if it had been said only the day before, that "Say, do you want to make a dollar?" And he resented it still. He could have reminded Marsden of the exact words and asked him, directly, if he thought that was the way to accost a stranger by the roadside; but he did not—seeing that they had foregathered here in a friend's house, and the amenities had to be considered.

Webley, head on hand, elbow on chair-arm, gave a little sigh.

"Clearly you have met before," said he, then

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added: "It's good you have this opportunity of coming to an understanding."

To that neither responded. There was a spell of quiet. Marsden slew a mosquito with a clap on the back of his hand; Sam drew hard on his pipe, which he had produced when the cigarette was finished, and blew smoke at a persistent wasp that balanced before him like a small winged battering-ram.

"It's a hard world," remarked Marsden at length. "It's a hard proposition of a world. A man has to be awake to it. Frills are of little use. Kindly sentiments are all very well——" he waved his hand to bring into the discussion the many-hued roses. "Flowers!" he ejaculated. "All right! But they come out of this," and he tapped the ground with his foot.

"There's good green grass on that," said Webley.

"True. But if there wasn't rock somewhere below you wouldn't be here long. You'd have a mountain of mud. No, sir! Life is no How-do-you-do? Glad-to-see-you. We're-all-friends-here proposition. Life's hard."

Perhaps these comments, by way of metaphorical or symbolistic, were intended by Marsden as explanation to Sam of his brusquerie that day on the wagon-road. At any rate, with an effort toward broad-mindedness, Sam considered them so; and bethought him that, if these were the man's views, here was unbending indeed.

All rose then, for Mrs. Webley came out, turning and calling to Nance to follow when she could. But she was not a woman who asked men to change

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their conversation when she joined them, to go on parade.

"Do be seated again," she begged, and herself sitting down, enquired: "What is the pow-wow?"

"Marsden was telling Haig," her husband elucidated, "or warning him—it sounded grim enough for a warning—that the world is a stiff proposition, and that the lambs and the lions don't lie down together."

"Not by a long way!" murmured Marsden.

"No, they don't lie down together by a long way!"

"What is that stanza about the good old rule, the simple plan?" Mrs. Webley enquired, looking from one to another, and Sam supplied it:

"The good old rule
Sufficeth them, the simple plan,
That they should take who have the power——"

"That's right!" cried Marsden.

"And they should keep who can!"

Sam finished in a dry voice, after allowing a pause to follow the other's appreciation. He spoke the *dénouement* directly at him, too.

The picture presented to Nance, coming across the lawn to join them at that juncture, was arresting. Sam had his head up, and there was a hint of the combative about him. Mrs. Webley was not aware of it. Webley noted, at least, that slight suggestive of, if not enmity, preparation to attack enmity. He was more sure now that a suspicion drifting in upon him (like a waveless tide) had reason with it. Or perhaps he should not call it a suspicion. We often say we *feel* when really

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we have *observed*. And he had the evidence thrust upon him. There was something, as they say, *in* that meeting of Sam and Marsden on the wagon-road; and there leapt up before Webley memory of glances he had seen Marsden cast upon Haig when the latter was talking to Mildred Henderson.

He had, it seemed, not searched out the woman in the case, but had had her indicated to him. And, of course, feeling himself so astute, he surmised that there was a meeting before the one on the wagon-road to which neither referred—and was wrong. However—that's often the way suspicions affect people; they are clever—and a shade too clever. It was moreover, Webley considered, none of his affair. He changed the position of his long legs, and dismissed the whole matter as nothing to do with him; though to be sure he was interested, in "the proper study of mankind is man" sort of way. Nance farther helped in the dismissal by now announcing that supper was ready.

Lighter themes than Marsden's opinion of life occupied them during the meal; and after supper Nance played, so that the close of the evening had the bloom on it that music loved for its own sake gives. Sam, as he listened, was like another musical instrument himself, played on by the playing; all sorts of dreams and plans accompanied the rippling of the notes.

CHAPTER V

A TRIP UP THE LAKE

It was at the moment of departure that Sam had the meaning of Mildred's parting speech explained to him.

"We will see you on Saturday, then?" said Webley, on the front porch with his guests, his tone suggesting that this was a reminder of an earlier arrangement.

"Saturday?" asked Sam, at a loss.

"Yes—the motor-boat trip," explained Webley.

"Didn't you hear Mr. Marsden invite us all for a trip in his new boat?"

"Oh! I heard something—I didn't catch——"

"Yes," said Webley. "Mr. Marsden wants all our guests of to-day to be at the jetty on Saturday. That's it, isn't it, Marsden?"

Marsden inclined his head.

"Very kind indeed," said Sam. "Delighted." He had a belief that Marsden had not really invited him, that Webley was extending the invitation—a proxy, without full authority. He certainly had not heard the invitation—doubted if it had been intended for his ears—doubted if he should not, instead of saying "Delighted,"

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be saying: "But I don't think Mr. Marsden made it as general as all that." He was almost certain that he was allowing himself to be thrust upon Marsden for the boat-trip—but to see Mildred he allowed himself to be what the normal Sam Haig would have called "a kind of mean cuss." But Marsden, so he excused himself, was so queer a dry stick of a man that he could not make certain of him. He just might have intended to include Sam. Yet he was certainly not demonstrative in agreeing that he had included Sam! So thought that young man, and then—"You know the jetty?" asked Marsden. "Just to the east of the stern-wheeler wharf."

It struck him that Marsden, preacher of the view of the hardness of the world, would not be hounded into inviting a man he didn't want; for Sam held no theory regarding the discrepancy between the average man's creed and his life.

"Oh yes," replied Sam, glad that the host of that prospective trip did at last speak.

"I hope they all turn up," said Webley. "Very good of you to ask them."

In his anxiety to see Mildred, Sam fretted next day. Should he ring her up to ask if she had meant that he was to call at her home on Saturday, or if her meaning, in reference to that day, was that she would see him with the motor-boat trippers? Had she heard the invitation which he had not heard? After having his hair cut on Friday morning he stood bemused, considering the telephone-box in the barber's, getting into a panic lest, by joining the others, he should offend her;

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lest, on the other hand, if he called at her home on Saturday he would find she was gone down the lake. There was no doubt that Mildred Henderson had an upsetting influence on him. This vacillation before the telephone-box was but symptomatic of his condition. No, he would not telephone to her; he would not let her know what a flutter and uncertainty he was in! But after dinner at Timpkin's (for he had returned there, for bed and board, on his return to town, no cut-rater this time) he stepped over to the telephone at the rear of the entrance passage. The Chinaman, Sing, was passing.

"You got telephone book, Sing?" he asked.

"Ohhhh!" moaned Sing, and shook his head, beaming.

"You catchum tel-e-phone book? You savvey tel-e-phone book?"

"No savvey. I ask Missatim."

Timpkin, summoned by Sing, explained that the telephone had been disconnected in the cut-rate period that hadn't worked, and now—he shrugged his shoulders—now he put off getting connected again, for he had his eye on another house, a real hotel, with a licence, booze—nothing like booze to make money; these tarnation drunkards would cut-rate in everything except booze. Mrs. Timpkin didn't like the notion, feared that the purveying of booze would recoil on his own head, that he might turn into a drunkard. Shucks! But all the same a man couldn't make a living off beds and meals; they ate so much! No—no telephone.

Sam left it at that, as though in the hands of

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fate, and tried to settle for the evening with a book. His post at the smelter-bucket engine he was not to take over for a day or two. He wondered if his restlessness was due to workless days and to the looking forward to a new employment. Perhaps that was it! Over the book he wondered if he should call upon Mildred that night, seeing the telephone was cut off, and thus make sure about the morrow. No, that wouldn't do. She had said something about Saturday. To call would be more stupid than to telephone. How would it do to stroll along Dawson Street in the morning and look down between the houses there (he knew a gap where the lake-side jetty could be glimpsed) to see if Mildred was of the party? If she was there he would go down; if she was not he would turn back. But that smacked of meanness, paltriness, of spying on his host and on those who might be his fellow-guests. Besides, he might be seen by them, as well as seeing them. Then he would look a fool!

Oh, Jehoshaphat! What a tendency to quandary this ravishing beauty brought him. How the spell often fogged initiative! Perhaps it would be better to go down early in the morning to the jetty, make himself agreeable to Marsden and the others; and if she did not come he could plead sudden indisposition at the last moment. Oh no! That would be childish! Besides, Marsden would peer at him with those cold eyes. Did her "Will you be there on Saturday?" imply that they would meet *there*? Or did it mean: "Come on Saturday if you are not going. I'm not"?

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He wished he had heard the original invitation in Webley's garden—not now to know if he had been invited, but if Mildred was going. His brain was turned into a sort of juggling contraption. He was in a condition that makes one understand the phrase: "So-and-so is crazy about that girl!" In the event, when Saturday came, some sane part of him took care of the insane parts, groomed him, clothed him, carried him down to the jetty in decent time—and there they were all coming from their homes, all the gay guests, and there was the rig from the café, laden with luncheon baskets. Marsden, genial, yet grim as ever, saluted them from the stern of his craft, where he was oiling and cleaning against any possibility of hitch. Most of those who had been at Webley's rose-view were here now, shaking hands, laughing, chattering, very buoyant in the airy morning. And suddenly, as if out of nowhere, there was Mildred, in an enthralling arrangement of voile, glinting at him in the most intoxicating way. "We know each other," her glance seemed to say. "We need not shake hands. We are old friends. We have been confidential." "All aboard! All aboard!" hailed Marsden with heavy geniality, and in a few seconds they were settled on the divans that ran round the natively fitted hull, and in the deck chairs. Then they were off, the trig craft chugging down the lake, disturbing the reflections of the mountains, as happy a pleasure-party as one could wish to see, under the tasselled awning.

To those in the boat who did not trouble, but

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took everything for granted, nothing was afoot except a picnic. They were in mood for light talk, banter, persiflage. But much was happening—if only they had known. There was an expression, to Sam's mind, on the face of their entertainer, like that a man wears when he has taken the first trick, and believes he can take the next. A fine big man, for physique, was Jack Marsden. But Sam, although highly appreciative of thew and physique, saw something distasteful in this man's force and weight. He resented Marsden's thew; he resented the way he carried himself. While chatting to those beside him, Sam had an eye, ever and again, for his host. He noted that Marsden had given Mrs. Mathers a chair on his left, where he could talk to her while steering and watching the engine; and he was suspicious of Marsden's intentions.

There! It was what he thought! Sam's eyes wavered; his attention was distracted from his immediate acquaintances; for Mrs. Mathers turned to Mildred as if for her view upon something she and Marsden discussed, and Mildred was drawn into the conversation. But anon the vacillating young man thought that perhaps he misjudged; for Mildred dropped out again from that conference, and returned to her smiling contemplation of the wake that fanned out clean-cut behind them.

Sam would have looked much like a setter dog in the boat had not Mrs. Webley engaged him in talk. He had to change his seat, nearer to her, to hear what she said, above the chug of the motor. It was during a lull in that conversation that he

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noticed Mildred (to whom his eyes frequently drifted) smile across to little Nance, a most friendly smile. And no sooner had she looked away again than Nance dived to her mother's side.

"I do wish I was as tall as Miss Henderson," quoth she.

"You're not a stub!" Mrs. Webley declared, clapping her daughter's shoulder.

Again the glances of Mildred and Nance met, and the ingenuous Nance had to exclaim: "I was just saying I wish I was as tall as you."

"That's very nice of you," replied Mildred, who, though for her part she had no desire to shrink, would have been horror-stricken had she overheard the sudden exchange of opinion between Webley and his wife.

Said Mrs. Webley: "Did you hear that? Nance says she wishes she was as tall as Miss Henderson."

"As long and lank, did you say?" he muttered.

"Miss Henderson is a very pretty woman," said Mrs. Webley. "You can't say she's not pretty."

Webley merely said nothing.

"You wouldn't say she's not pretty," persisted his wife.

"Neither would she!" he responded.

"She's a very pretty woman," said Mrs. Webley.

All the women said so, among themselves, some time or another during the trip. Mildred, indeed, was radiant—radiant in the trig boat, radiant when, on a strip of sunny shingle beyond Five Mile Point, they all lay ashore, and the

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men built a fire, and laid out a cloth with a stone on each corner to hold it down. All gave thanks for the refreshing breeze, and while the women set out the contents of the luncheon baskets Marsden was complimented on his boat and his enterprise.

"No more canoe for me!" said the customs man. "What! Paddle down here on a hot day when you can be squirted along like that! I'm for the life of ease."

"And softness?" asked Marsden.

"I'll risk that," was the reply.

Sam, at this, expected Marsden to let himself loose again upon a dissertation on the hardness of things, but Marsden did not. That was the nearest approach (that "And softness?") to his creed, or obsession. The lake rippled gently, the sun shone out, the smell of the forests was all round them. They laughed and were merry over the jesting nothings that make such picnics pleasanter than deep *séances* where opinions clash. The fir-tops peeped over, and high and glittering, amethyst and silver, with rock ridge and snow-fissure, the peaks stood majestic under cloudless sky. By the time the flies sought them out the repast was far enough advanced for the men to smoke and drive them away.

"That's easier than making a smudge of the fire," said Marsden, handing round cigars.

The word "smudge" set the men a-going with stories of their travels—travellers all—and all well-stocked with mosquito yarns. It was just a sunny (yea, a flippant) picnic; it was a relaxation from dollar-hunting for folks who could remember

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their childhood, and who welcomed a day of letting the chink of golden eagles and the rustle of bills go unheeded.

To Sam it was an ordeal. Soon he would be earning ninety dollars a month; but the man who had given him this outing was not of the order of man to buy a motor-boat on his capital and rely on the odd dollars of current income for gasoline. He had a bank-balance. He had already "made good." Further—Sam, himself infatuated, knew the symptoms that showed upon Jack Marsden. He had observed that his host did not invite Mildred to sit beside him in the boat; but here, where they all grouped round the cloth, it struck him that Marsden did too greatly show his admiration. It seemed that there was occasional appropriation in his manner. Sam shuddered inwardly, and swung to the other extreme. If some plates were empty, and one of these belonged to Mildred, it was to the others he attended first. He was almost offhand, by comparison, when he attended to her. And she, glancing up at him, smiled with understanding. If this was Love, then Love was truly a malady. If this was Love, then Love endowed him with a sense of subtleties that begat agony. He felt as if Mildred had gone far from him. He wondered, agonisingly, if there had been, on her side, any personal hint of at least something in the nature of caring for him ("Wow!" that was how he felt!—Tangled, stupefied, turned into a flushed idiot) when she gave advice to him, up at Henderson's, to "rustle" a good job in the first instance, and then wait and see how Fortune

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played in the matter of the nameless lady whose existence he had confessed to her. Had she a suspicion regarding the She of his distraction? Surely at any rate a suspicion! Had she known?

On the way back to Kootenay, in the last of the day, through deep purple and green waters, with the mountains casting awesome black shadows down into the depths, instead of launching their tranquil and sunlit and blue-shadowed reflections, he thought that perhaps she made no attempt to chat with him on this occasion because of the same reasons that had made him attend to her last, instead of first, when playing waiter. But that was impossible; that was to credit himself with gifts of casting a spell, to flatter himself that his feelings were reciprocated—and deeply. He took advantage of the dusk, under the awning, to give her more than a casual glance, to look long and admiring at her ivory profile, to note her graceful pose where she sat silhouetted between thwart and awning's edge, against the deep waters that they flurried through; and as he looked she turned her head slowly.

He sat motionless, head on hand, gazing at her, and in her eyes, when they met his in that dusk, he read understanding—at least understanding of his, shall we say plight? With as great deliberation as she had turned her gaze on him she slowly moved her eyes away again.

They came back to the jetty where lights were already being lit and sending down long waving and twining golden reflections into the water that still held a last glow of day. It was an exquisite

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hour. In the churning of the water as they drew to shore the reflected lights fell into loose rings that joined like chain-mail, and parted and were broken and formed again. The boat was moored, the party clustered ashore, and then (when their host had made all snug) they strolled toward town, detachments dropping off at each corner with final thanks to Marsden for the day's outing. It would have been presumptuous, as things were, for Sam to fasten himself on to Mildred; or so he decided, trudging up hill looking pleasant in a sociable sort of way, but deeply occupied in his own private story. Marsden was their host—and Marsden had over his arm the rug that Mrs. Mathers had brought with her lest the homeward run at night might prove chilly. Sam was carrying the luncheon-baskets. He had eagerly offered to carry them, ostensibly in a gracious mood, but really so as to have excuse to walk along with Marsden, Mrs. Mathers, and Mildred—with a stress upon the "and"—who (if only by the fact that Marsden had taken Mrs. Mathers' rug over his arm) were evidently going up-hill together. When they reached Dawson Street Mrs. Mathers held out her hand to Marsden for the rug.

"We go along Astley Street," she said.

"That's all right," replied Marsden. "I'll walk up there with you—it's not much out of my way."

There seemed nothing for Sam to say, seeing Marsden had evidently forgotten the baskets, but: "Shall I leave the baskets at the café, then,

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Mr. Marsden?" He expected Marsden to say: "Oh I forgot! I can't have a guest carrying that load to the café for me." What Marsden did say was:

"Oh, the baskets! Say—well, that's very good of you, Mr. Haig, seeing you're going that way anyhow."

Sam wanted to answer: "Confound you, I'm not going that way!" But Mildred, and Mrs. Mathers, and Mr. and Mrs.—I think the name was Johns (who would leave the others a block on this side of the Mathers' home) were ready to move on. So Sam just said good-night to all in a series of beams and bows—"and thank you for the trip, Mr. Marsden,"—and off he trudged alone along Dawson Street to the café where Marsden had procured the lunch, an empty basket under one arm, and under the other a full one laden with dirty dishes.

Alone on Dawson Street (labouring in the direction of a projecting lit sign that announced: "Kootenay Café—Soda Fountain—Iced Drinks") he woefully considered to himself: "A fine end to this day! Now I'm the baggage-man! That's what I am!"

CHAPTER VI

AN ENCOUNTER WITH GROSSET

FLY day—hasten night ! Roll on, Phaëthon-wheel. Aurora and the rest of them, in Meredithian maze and high-falutin, *get a move on!* Thus felt Sam, wondering when he should see her again. It was a seven days a week job he went to now, and an oily one. He could not be washed and fed and free for social life before eight-thirty in the evening. No more pleasure-trips on the lake ! No more sunny afternoons in her presence ! But to work was the ideal—to work for her. The advice she had given him, at Henderson's ranch, to rustle a good job, he recalled—or rather he never forgot. On forty-five dollars a month in town who could save ? On sixty a month, in that railroad construction camp beyond reach of the lure of the stores, he had been able to lay aside a few dollars ; and now, on ninety a month, even in town, he would save more. After the first hundred or two dollars were gathered—thus did he build his castle in Spain—he could invest. These thoughts took him daily to work, and gave rhythm to his task.

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On a Sunday morning, shortly before lunch-time, when he had been at the tram-engine a week, the "tipper" (he who emptied the buckets) dipped his hand into one that came sailing forward on the wire, an apparently empty one that followed a laden sequence, and took out a note at which he glanced; then he handed it to Sam through the open window of the engine-room.

"Last for to-day," the paper announced.

So Sam shut off and strolled over to the office to enter the morning's tally. On the way thither he encountered the chief, who told him: "You may as well knock off, then." In his flimsy engineer's coat, blue dungarees, black-faced and business-like, he went gaily home—an eyesore to the church-goers. They blocked his way, and he made no more than one attempt to get passage on the side-walk, or thrust his way through, but accepted the inference of the heinousness of his state in contrast with theirs, stepped into the road, and trudged along homeward in the dust.

It was a relief to come to non-sectarian, irreligious Dawson Street, where were the loungers and cigar-smokers for whom the conflicting church-bells tinkled in vain. Their objection to Sunday labour was physical—"A man can't do it month in and month out. He wants a long holiday every quarter, working like that; so he may as well have one day a week instead." If they noted Sam specially they would consider that there went a man who would need a rest sooner

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or later, not that there went a man whom the Deity advised them to evil-eye.

In a great bath to rearward of one of the barbers' "joints" he plunged and blew and refreshed; and in the afternoon went to call on Mildred whose address he had discovered from her brother before leaving the construction camp. Arrived at her home he was told she had gone for a walk.

"Gone long?" he enquired.

"About ten minutes."

He realised that had she gone down-hill he would surely have met her, so he walked on upward, in the direction of that road on which he had trudged, exploring, on the day following his arrival in the city. Recalling his way of crediting Destiny with interest in him, it does not surprise to know that he thanked Destiny when he descried Mildred strolling (with her slow, lingering swing) upon the sunlit and dusty road beyond the last houses, backed by the russet wall of the pine and fir wood. He hastened his steps to make up on her, but she stopped at the first bend, and there halting and turning about—as though to take easy breath and consider the view—saw him advancing. She was most radiant in her greeting; there seemed no mockery ambushed in her eyes as she waited for him.

"I called at your home," he said, "and was told you had gone for a walk."

"A lonely walk!" she exclaimed. "I just had to stop here. It doesn't entice me; it looks

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so desolate out of the sun in that bit of wood. I hate coming all alone up to that card on the tree with 'Pest House' on it. And there's no one above for miles and miles."

"Only the Chinamen," said Sam.

"Oh, yes," she replied, "of course," and her brows arched. "I've heard of them. I tell you what I would just love, Mr. Haig—I would just love to see their farms, but I wouldn't like to go alone."

"Let me take you," he promptly offered—and in her glance was no rebuff to the excess of his eagerness.

"Thank you," she accepted. "I've heard that they run about like rats, tending their fields. I believe it would scare me to find myself up there all alone. Ever since I read a story of a girl who was kidnapped in 'Cisco I feel sort of frightened of something about a Chink."

"Was that a story by Frank Norris?" he asked, as they walked on.

"Oh, don't ask me!" cried Mildred. "I never remember names of authors!"

They passed into the wood's shadow.

"It's interesting," said Sam, presently. "They can raise things anywhere. I went up there once with an Englishman I worked with when I first came to Kootenay; he had been all over the world, and he had seen Chinamen where they grow——"

"By the bushel-full, I should think," she remarked. "They always look as if they swarmed

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like bees when one sees them together—always make me think of bees, or ants."

The mere man in him had the sense of paladin, or protector, as he led the way up the road, turning aside at the trail that debouched West. Suddenly she paused.

"What's that?" she asked.

"What?"

"That thing ahead, among the trees."

"Oh that!" He gave an easy laugh. "It's one of the trestles of the bucket tramway. I run that for a living now. I'll explain it when we get underneath."

"Is that what it is? I took it for a Hoodoo I say, it is certainly quiet here."

He was thinking so to himself. He could hear his heart beat, and wondered if she also heard it. Once again they were together, and this time there was a sense of seclusion. Next minute it was dissipated; for they came out on the plateau that buttressed the mountain—and before them were the Chinamen, and the Chinamen's homes. A little town was perched up there. To the pilgrim adventuring thither, if he had not been informed of its existence in advance, the sight of the place might well have brought something of the thrill that comes on suddenly seeing a mountain-top lake. Quaint houses, reminiscent of prints of villages in China, clustered around the patchwork fields, astonishingly trig and "just so"; and across these perfect paddocks came the thin sound of an Oriental fiddle being played

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upon in one of the shanties. From another rose a kind of single-string singing, a touch plaintive, somewhat eerie, and of a thinness like that of a mosquito-hum.

"They're creepy!" said Mildred. "But we'll go ahead. I don't feel unpleasant too much with a man with me, but I just couldn't come up here without——" he hung on her words. He wanted her to say "you," and not "a man" again—"a man," she ended.

"There's not the slightest call to be scared. You're all right with me," he declared.

Her ears caught a note of something like diffident plaint in his tones; it wasn't that he stressed the "me"—it was rather that his voice dropped there. She thought he "had it bad," and gave him a sidelong look, not bantering but languishing. But all these Mongolians, hoeing and ditching and weeding, and pottering along on the tiny narrow paths between the beds, with bamboo poles on their shoulders, buckets of water depending therefrom, made her smile brief. Her gaze roved over the settlement. The top of an ivory pagoda, it seemed, should have loomed up behind, instead of the long, last hump of Astley Mountain, menacing, uncouth, grim, forbidding.

"There certainly is something creepy about them," she repeated.

"Like mites in cheese," suggested Sam.

"Yes."

"Look—not a blade of grass, not a single weed left to combat the growth of a vegetable," he

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commented, pointing to the plots as he picked a way for her.

At their doors the Chinamen watched, their eyes moving like the eyes of lemurs, following the movements of the uninvited visitors, saying nothing. Now and then one came near, pausing, on gardening intent. "How-do, John!" Sam would say. "O-h! How-do!" John would reply, his face lighting up and the smile of smiles appearing. Then there came toward them one of the kind that doesn't smile. He said "Hullo!"

"Hullo!" Sam responded.

"What you want?" asked the Chinaman.

"Come look see," said Sam, a deeper tone in his voice. It was intended to imply, and it did imply, for John understood: "I am an American. You are a foreigner, and a squatter at that. I have certainly as great a right to be here as you! Don't forget!"

The Chinaman fell behind, but followed close on their heels. Sam paid no further apparent heed to him, continued slowly in his peregrinations and delivered his comments, like a Cook's guide.

"You see, down there, they've carried earth even on to that boulder in the middle of the creek, stuck up bits of packing-case to hold it all intact, and so they've made a vegetable garden to grow six cabbages, or a peck of peas—always something."

He turned round casually and glanced at the Chinaman, somewhat as Cobbett glanced at the Squire at Trotton (if one is allowed a "literary

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allusion"), and the Chinaman drifted away along a tributary path between the beds.

"It's very interesting, but they do just make me shudder," she said. "It must be fine to be a strong man! I like the way you managed that fellow."

"Oh he was easy. I like to be friendly with all men, but when a man puts up that kind of intimidating bluff on me—— He's all right!" he ended.

A dozen paces more, and there at their feet, as the guide-books say, lay Kootenay, giving a quaint object-lesson in perspective with its ranged side-walks. The sight of that less recondite town, the pleasant white-man town, that seemed to have no secrets, was good to Mildred. She felt more at ease, stopped to look down at the lake and the roofs of the robustly planned homes.

"I can see our residence," she said. "Where are you living?"

"At the same old place—Timpkin's Boarding House."

"Not the *Grand Western*?"

"No. See down there—that's where I work now, just below. If you follow the trestle-tops of the bucket-tram, where it comes out of the woods, you can pick out the power-house, to the right of the furnaces." He turned toward her. "Do you remember telling me to rustle myself a good job?" he enquired.

It was either inspiration or abandonment on his part, that question. Its unexpectedness at

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that juncture (although she had expected something of the kind) startled Mildred.

"Yes—when you told me about some girl—didn't think you should speak to her till you were making good—Yes, I remember. How is she?"

Serious Sam looked in her face, and in response her eyes flashed with what might be banter, or might be—she baffled him. She turned her head away, giving him only a vision of fascinating neck; but instead of being fascinated downright he was fascinated, as it were, with the brake on. He was also annoyed. And that annoyance she tapped. They had been walking on along the path that cuts downhill from the Chinese farms (it is a white man's ranch now, by the way, but the path on the slope there remains as it was then), with the twist of the smelter road visible just beneath them; and a big granite slab inviting, she stopped. She leant against the granite boulder and deliberately contemplated the panorama. To that so deliberate, not to say histrionic contemplation, he left her, till she was pleased to acknowledge his presence and remember that they were in the midst of a talk.

Suddenly she said: "Why are you so serious?"

"Because I am serious," he replied, stressing the "am." Then—"I am very serious," stressing the "very." Then—"Sometimes I am desperately serious."

"But not at the moment, surely! Not here!"

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He didn't understand. He wondered if she was merely being flippant toward him.

"The desperation isn't so evident now, perhaps," he said. "But afterwards—it is always so—I feel as desperate as ever if I don't——" and he stuck.

"If you don't what?" she enquired, anxious to hear more, though a few minutes before she had seemed desirous to fob him off.

He frowned. He looked this way and that as if for aid; and Mildred's eyes rested on him.

"—— if I don't know your view on that—that case I postulated at your brother's, on the veranda that evening."

"I gave you my view then," she said. "Are you not in touch with her yet?"

As she spoke she moved slightly, as though grown stiff in her long-held position there, and her hand brushed his sleeve.

Sam gazed at her, had impulse to grasp her, and something restrained him—something outside himself. It was not the same kind of restraint that he had exercised on the veranda at Henderson's ranch. Something exterior, not interior, it seemed, advised him not to say: "You are the woman of my trouble." He was divided, and one part of him advised the other to call a halt, at least for the time being. Voices also, at this crisis, came to their ears; and on the path along the edge of the bluff, the path into which the trail from the Chinese ranches debouched, there ap-

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peared, between the close-drawn bush, none other than Webley, his wife behind.

"Spectacles!" Webley was saying. "Not love you in spectacles! Why, — —, Jess, I'd love you in blinkers. You go to the oculist first time we—no, you go to-morrow. Oh!"

He saw Mildred and Sam, whipped off his hat, and there was a criss-cross of greetings.

Sam was oddly moved. That love-speech of Webley's, apropos of spectacles, was like the sounding of a tuning fork over his own love-lyric. He found that he was just a hint ashamed of himself. And as he showed that hint of shame, Webley felt, on his side, a touch of embarrassment over the inadvertent publicity he had given his declaration to his wife. So neither noticed the other's confusion. It struck Sam, remembering Grosset's description of symptoms inspired by some woman or another after whom he fluttered that there was in him a good deal of the "Whoo! That's how I feel!" spirit.

"Well," said Mrs. Webley, the chatter about nothing in particular coming to a sudden end, "we'll leave you to enjoy the view."

Again bows, smiles, and Mildred and Sam were alone, in a self-conscious sort of way looking after Webley's hat, visible above the tangle of shrub, drifting away. From watching its disappearance Sam turned to find Mildred's eyes on him again.

"I suppose you know," he said slowly, "that I think an awful lot of you."

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"Silly boy!" she exclaimed, and gave him a playful tap on the shoulder. "You mustn't forget the other girl," and she laughed gaily.

He bore the expression of one tangled, looked like a wistful, pathetic infant. Privately he was distressed by the interior clash he felt of impulses and reasoning—of impulse and impulse, of reasonings and reasonings. There was the sound of breaking branches again.

"Here are some more people," said Mildred. "Let us go on."

From leaning against the great grey-blue granite boulder, she came erect, with a lithe spring, and led off, Sam beside her. They passed under the bucket-tram-lines, where they swung overhead from the woods above to the power-house below.

"I wonder," she said, looking up, "if a man could ride in one of those buckets?"

Sam came out of his grim meditation with a jar, and had to reconstruct what she had said—had as it were to ask his ears to register again.

"No. Yes. Yes—I should think one could, for a bet, or for devilment."

"Or to show one wasn't scared to try," Mildred murmured.

"Yes. Once would be enough, I should think. It doesn't travel quickly, and if the escapade got on a man's nerves it would be a prolonged agony. Look here, we can go down this way—on to the smelter road, and cross the creek by the smelter bridge."

He went before her down the steep path, holding

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up a hand to support her in the descent. Once down on the road it was but a stone's throw to the bridge—and there she was almost home. But Sam was hardly aware of his surroundings. Road, bridge, creek, windows of the houses on the town side—all seemed in another world. He was outwardly calm, inwardly in a ferment. The holding of Mildred's hand, the aiding of her on the path, had disturbed and distressed him again. He could have cried to her: "What is it all about—all this between you and me? Help me! Tell me! Play the game!" Or he could almost have rushed away from her, to be rid of a distraction that she invoked but did not appease. At the corner she paused.

"It was sweet of you to take me upon that personally conducted tour," she said.

"I can't tell you what a pleasure it has been to me," he replied. "But you know that."

"I think I understand you pretty well," she said. "I must get back now; I've been gone for much more than a short stroll."

She held forth her hand. He took it; he held it; he renounced it; and she turned away. There was nothing for it but to go home, in a haze, in a daze, the pressure of her hand seeming to linger in his as he strode east to Timpkin's. But abruptly he was brought out of his heady state by a hail from someone who came tramping down one of the steep hill streets that dissect this one on which he walked. It was the last man in the world with whom he wished to renew acquaintance

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at that moment; it was Grosset, one-time domiciled at Timpkin's, now removed elsewhere because of bugs—the wood in the boarding-house having gone the way of too much wood. To the hypersensitive reader who objects to mention of these pests—an apology. But there they were; and they are unavoidable local colour. Poor Timpkin! He was “up against it” always, somehow, it seems. The vermin may have been in the wood from the beginning. No one can tell; but there they were anyhow; and any day Sam might discover them, as Grosset had discovered them. In a city of wooden houses such things will happen, and the people there are not prudish about mentioning them. They say “bug” as easily as they say “house.” They don't say: “There are what-you-may-call-'ems in that house!” They say: “Bugs! Not in mine!” and go elsewhere.

“You are a stranger,” said Grosset. “You been out of town?”

“Yes,” answered Sam, monosyllabic.

“Back for a holiday, or working here?” Grosset asked, head up and canted back, expression pleasant.

“Working here!” snapped Sam, unpleasant.

He looked directly at Grosset and took new stock of him. Yes, he was a coarse-looking man—affluent and vulgar; but doubtless, the young man tried to tell himself, he had his good points. What made Sam specially worried about meeting him now was the feeling he had of being, in him-

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self, too much and abominably kin with Grosset ! He recalled him simply as the man who had been off his head ("Whoo! That's how I feel!") about some girl. He was hurt somewhat as persons have put on record that they are hurt on entering a monkey-house—hurt by the sense of similarities. And, on top of that, he hated himself for his attitude toward this other human being, this Grosset, even while it possessed him. He didn't like to feel a suggestion of priggishness in himself.

"It's a pleasure to see you again," remarked Grosset, and beamed broader. In spite of Haig's desire to be sociable and kindly, and all that sort of thing, he detected a leer in that smile. "Saw you with a flame of mine!" Grosset added.

Sam's brows puckered.

"Mistaken, I think," he said coldly.

"Don't think so," replied Grosset. "I saw you coming down to the smelter road."

"I've been up looking at the Chinese farms with a *friend*," said Sam. "I don't think she was ever what you might call a flame——"

"That tallies!" cried Grosset, gaily interrupting, cheerily bland and oblivious of Sam's warning colour and expression. "You came down one of the old trails on the other side of the creek. I was having a loaf along in the bush up there when you stopped at the edge of the bluff."

"Your eyes don't play you fair at long range," suggested Sam.

"Tut, tut! Don't get ragged! Why, I know

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her every movement as I know—as I know—
what shall I say ? ”

“ Cut out similes,” said Sam. “ I expect your trouble is that you imagine every woman you see is your old flame, as you call her.” He spoke from experience. “ And anyhow ”—he glared at Grosset, who was canting his head afresh and producing once more the bland smile that seemed to Sam worse than the Chinese specimens he had recently seen—“ I don’t like you to talk about my friend like this. The lady you saw me with is Miss Henderson, sister-in-law of Mathers, of this town, and you——” he had really no need to bring in a slur at Grosset’s trade, but he did ; he was beginning to be in a temper, instead of having a temper in him—“ you damned yard-stick wielder—— ”

“ I won’t have you talk to me in that way ! ” growled Grosset, and made a downward telescopic motion of his head, that further shortened his short neck. “ Do you think I can’t hit ? Do you think because I spend most of my time in a store that I can’t play chucker-out to the toughest tough that ever comes in to my place ? Do you think I—— ”

Sam stopped him dead.

“ If you want to scare me,” he said, in dangerously low tone, “ you’d better know that after you’ve got through the attempt I shall ask you to make good on it.”

“ Oh I can make good all right. You’re a sanctimonious fool, Mr. Haig. I don’t object to

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you butting in there. Not I. I was only going to wish you better luck than I've had—so far. Miss Henderson is the woman I told you of months ago—months ago——”

At that Sam hit! His fist went hooking under Grosset's jaw, and Grosset reeled back, grabbed the thin stem of one of the boulevard trees beside which they had halted, recovered equilibrium, and shot out a fist at his opponent. But Sam ducked, and Grosset hit empty air. With nostrils dilating Haig smote him again, sent him on his back, and waited, breathing deeply, for him to rise—was thus waiting, pulling up his sleeves to give his hands full play in the next round, when steps sounded close, and a stout, sunburnt man in blue serge made a three-some of the two-some affair. This man, who seemed to have evolved there, gave a little brushing movement to his coat, thereby disclosing a silver tag. Piqued by this interposition of law-and-order, Sam comically (or when he was cool it would be comically, maybe) broke out with:

“This has nothing to do with you! This is a private business! And say—something more: I don't want it in the papers! Neither does he,” he added, indicating Grosset at his feet in semi-recumbent attitude. “That's all right. You can let us go. Come on, Grosset, get up. Shake a leg. This is our scrap.”

Grosset rose and dusted himself with great dignity. The man in blue, with the silver tag on his chest, contemplated Sam Haig curiously.

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"I want him arrested for assault," said Grosset.

"Get away!" cried Sam. "I wish I had you up at Camp Henderson for a week. There's no policeman there." He flattered himself that the servant of the law might be moved by his "gift of the gab." He even began to back away. "Go on, Grosset, walk—shake a leg. You don't want publicity about this!" He turned again to the upholder of the public peace. "It's all right. It's nothing at all."

"You come here," said the policeman, making after him; and he clearly thought he had encountered a tough specimen, to judge by the way he put hand to hip under his jacket.

"I assure you," declared Sam, "that there's nothing in it. He only got a bit of what he deserves, and——"

Then he suddenly found himself looking into the barrel of the policeman's revolver that put an end to debate, and handcuffs were nipped on his wrists.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHAIN-GANG

Now it has to be told that Kootenay was passing through the period of *cutting things out*. Visiting the town at the time of this story, the chronicler of it, who looked on at it all, saw it taking place, asked a friend (for he had known it in earlier days): "Do you ever now have fellows coming rolling into town and standing on the side-walk announcing: 'I'm a son of a gun from Omaha'?"

"No," was the reply; "we cut that out long ago."

They were, indeed, cutting out more than that by the time of this narrative. The arresting policeman had seen enough of the fight on Astley Street to bear witness, without any hint of perjury, that Sam was assaulting and battering. Out of his own mouth he also proved himself untouched by remorse; he had even boasted of some place, whence he had come, that there were no police there. The police all the world over have the better of it. If you state your case vigorously they say: "Prisoner was excited." If you keep

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a grip on yourself they say: "Prisoner seemed callous." One of Grosset's eyes was shut, to bear witness that, whether he had been trying to assault and batter or not, he had been battered; and Sam had no bruise to show. If thus he behaved in a town with police to protect the public, what would he not do if let loose at such places as he had mentioned, where, in his rage, he desired to meet Grosset? It was all against him fairly and unfairly, rightly and wrongly.

The joke of the thing is that the policeman who arrested the young man had doubtless admiration for his views; for the policemen of Kootenay were apt to be men like that. But they were *cutting things out* in the little mountain town, so Sam was very briefly sentenced to seven days of hard labour. Had he only had the sense to ask that a note be sent to his friend Webley, he might have fared otherwise; the police over all the world are much the same in various particulars, and Webley could have pulled wires. But Sam took the affair philosophically. He neither railed against his sentence nor thought of pulling wires. Seven days' hard labour was apparently what Fortune—or Misfortune—had in store for him. When there came upon him a tendency to object, to resent, he told himself that the experience would be interesting. Everything is interesting in this world, thought he; even the tedious can be interesting. The flight of time adds a glamour to the joys and gives consolation during tortures. That was his attitude; but he did not realise

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all that the phrase "hard labour" was to mean.

If Destiny was in this episode, then Destiny was kind in one particular only—that it left him ignorant of what his sentence meant till he had managed to take easily the first fact, the fact of incarceration. The ignominy of coming in contact with the police was neither here nor there to him. There are those who feel contact with the police so ignominious that they dislike to have a constable call on them to say that they are innocent of some charge laid against them by people who have merely used the police as a means to annoy. Sam was otherwise. He found his position only tedious, not ignominious, and decided to take it easily. What he had done was right in his own eyes; it was wrong in the eyes of the law—that was all. He did not so much as rebel against the law; in his cell he even spoke to himself a little homily on the necessity for order.

The day of the trial counted as one of the days of the sentence. Of this Sam, back in his cell, was informed by a friendly warder who chatted to him through the grilled door, and remarked that it was "sure worth a week's hard labour to pound that oily son of a gun!" This was very mollifying; and the friendliness of the man in uniform on the free side of the grille cast a new light, for Sam, on prison life as it is in such a place as Kootenay. The warder had his own opinion of the seriousness of the crime for which the prisoner was being punished.

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

"I suppose there was a woman in it?" he ventured.

Sam merely glanced at him and closed his eyes.

"That will be all right," declared the warder. "Everything blows over. Why, a week ain't nothing. I was in bed myself, once, for two-three weeks—with small-pox. Ever been up the road to the Frashier mine?"

"Yes."

"You can see the pest-house through the trees. It was built because of me. I'm the only small-pox case there has ever been in Kootenay. They rushed up a little shack for me there, away off a bit through the timber, and had a nurse over from the hospital, and all the time I was lying ill they were building a right smart infectious diseases hospital alongside. I never hear of small-pox but I think of carpenters. I ain't what you would call an imagining man, but one day when I was a bit light-headed I got it on my mind that they were whanging nails into my coffin. They just put the last paint on the swell hospital when I got better in the shack. So then they burnt down the shack me and the nurse had been isolated in. Here's someone coming. I'll see you later."

This chat helped to philosophise Sam, and to remind him that great men, and happy men, had in their time been in prison. There was no need to get bitter about his incarceration just because of the popular distaste

THE CHAIN-GANG

for gaol-birds! But when on the Thursday morning he was ordered to fall-in in the corridor, while a man with a Winchester rifle stood at the end, and the friendly warder put an iron ring round his ankle, he began to be worried. There was a string of seven men in the corridor, and they all stood there, each looking at the back of the head of the man in front (except number one of course, who merely stared along the white passage) calm as tandem horses awaiting the harness. From the ring on each man's ankle to the ring worn by the next man there was affixed a steel bar with a swivel arrangement, so as to allow of them walking.

"All right!" said the warder, after the last in the string had been harnessed.

"All right! Quick march!" rasped the lean man who carried the rifle.

Sam wanted to yell. He wanted to refuse to march. He wanted to bend down and try to wrench that steel bar away.

"Grosset has something to answer for when I get out," he muttered; for he realised what kind of "hard labour" was in store.

He was in the Chain Gang—to be marched through the streets under the gaze of all men; and suddenly, despite his protestations to himself that he had been right to bruise Grosset, he flinched from the publicity that would be thrust on him when he passed out of the corridor into the streets of Kootenay. Bringing up the réar he looked, now consumed with rage, about as tough a char-

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

acter as the old-timer who herded them and had been given the duty of taking out the chain-gang because of his repute as a fighter. He was a man who could not settle to any simple work in which there was little hope of never having to wrestle with anyone, to hit anyone, or to speed a bullet into anyone. He had known Kootenay when it was Fort Kootenay and every man wore a Colt on his hip. Thirty years before, had he been in Sam's shoes and felled a Grosset, he would probably have pulled a gun on any interfering gentleman, even one adorned with a silver badge.

Outside the new granite building called prison Sam walked with eyes staring fixedly at the back of the head of the man in front. He suffered at first from what scientists call "psychical blindness." Although it was a clear, resplendent morning, the street was a blur, the passing faces were blurs. When he did deflect his gaze from the neck before him, he distinguished no features of any passer-by; he recognised no one. But presently, through other sense than that of sight, he was touched by the people—the free, the unmanacled people on the side-walks. Telepathy, maybe, or something of the kind, conveyed their commiseration, or the fact that they lacked censorious opinion, to him. He blinked his eyes over the psychical blur and looked about deliberately, very deliberately; and it seemed to him that the chain-gang was surveyed (that is by those who paid any attention at all to it) much as folks look at soldiers going by. Many, he noticed, were just aware

THE CHAIN-GANG

of it and no more—not interested. Some dropped their eyes to the side-walk, as who should say: "I won't stare, and make your punishment, for whatever your crime, more unpleasant." One opened a newspaper, buried his face in its wide-held pages—in great haste, after his first glimpse of the prisoners. A humanistic thrill came to Sam and eased him. He was amazed at the number of winks he received from young men going along to free work. Hilarity suddenly came to him, and it evidently came to the others as well; for all at once the whole string broke into a kind of cake-walk, jangling the fetters.

"None of that! None of that, now!" growled the antique man with the Winchester, pacing at their side, butt of rifle tucked between his body and biceps; and the cake-walking immediately stopped, after its three brief steps.

"Gee! Pretty tough!" Sam heard a voice comment, whether of the warder or the wards he was uncertain—and careless.

"Get it for?" he heard another, evidently replying to someone who had asked what manner of crimes were punished by chain-gang work. "Oh—nothing. Drunks, I expect. They don't put anything much more serious . . ."

He lost the rest as the clinking queue quick-stepped forward. At the crossing of Dawson Street, city's centre, because of the crowds (and because of self-consciousness coming again there) he fell once more abruptly into the "psychical blindness" condition. Glad indeed, was he, when

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at last they came to the tramp's end on one of the newest upper avenues, and were ordered to halt beside a vacant lot that showed signs of recent labour.

"You can stand easy now, boys," said he of the Winchester, "till the boss arrives. And don't let me hear you talking."

So saying he strolled away to some distance, nursing his rifle, watching them, but in no glaring and full-faced manner. He went far enough to allow of talk, if they wished to talk, not reaching his ears.

"Who's this fellow at the end?" asked one quickly.

"What are you in for, partner?" asked another.

"I hit a man," replied Sam. "The policeman who came on the scene couldn't see that it was purely a personal affair."

"No laughing!" ordered the guardian, for at that naïf explanation one had giggled an octave too high.

"Does he want us to weep?" the culprit growled.

"Oh, he's all right," said one. "You know who he is, partner, don't you?"

This was presumably meant for Sam.

"No, I don't," said he.

"He's old Jack MacDonald. You must have heard of him. He was through here before we were hatched. He used to be a buffalo hunter in the old days—out on the Plains. I guess he's about eighty. Why, he's an old Indian fighter! We're nothing to him—we're a Sunday-school

THE CHAIN-GANG

class out for a walk to him. That's how he really looks on us. When he leans against the wall and thinks his private think there, while we're shovelling, or when he sits down on a log and fills his pipe, with the rifle across his knees, he's thinking of no ten cents' worth of black eye, and one biff on the jaw! He's thinking about the men he *scalped!*"

The last word was too energetic.

"I can hear you talking!" cried old Jack MacDonald. "Don't you get me irritated so early in the morning. You be careful, or after you get loose to work I'll shoot somebody for an example, and take the string home one shy! I will! All I got to say is that one o' you tried to escape. Don't forget. If I go away a little ways from you I don't expect to hear talkin'. You're surely a bum crowd, you fellows, if you don't know when you're well off. Good-morning to you."

But this last was not a quaint way of ending his speech. It was addressed to a surly person who appeared on the scene, lurching down on the chain-gang with a "here's at you!" air. If this man had possessed horns he would assuredly have tossed up a hunk of earth as he hove (or is it heaved?) down on them. But even he, fierce though was his appearance, was no tyrant all day. He unlocked the steel rods from the anklets, then unlocked a tool-chest.

"Tumble in now! Get your picks and shovels!" he snapped, making the words sound like the fiercest invective.

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

The old-timer lounged beside the tool-chest, stuck out his chin, frowned his old eyebrows down over his eyes. Men had been known to set upon their warders even in chain-gangs (and even short-sentence men), when the feel of a shovel in their hands made them, in a mad moment, suddenly and emotionally think they might as well smite out at their shepherds and make a rush for immediate liberty. But this was a genial throng, and soon all were down in a ditch—digging out a basement for the city drill-hall, or fire-hall, or what-not; 'tis a detail. The day was not bereft of fun. Once a man drew near, stood looking down, and then they heard him say: "Good-day, boss. Is there any chance of a job here?"

They all laughed as they shovelled, Sam included. Then they listened for the reply.

"You'd better go and do something if you want a job here, mister," said the boss. "Nothing too desperate or you'll overdo it. These gentlemen down there have a right to work in God's open air because they took a drop too much, or something like that. One of them pulled a Chinaman's pigtail, from brooding over cheap labour with three fingers of nose-paint in him, and we've got to guard against inter-national . . ."

He stopped abruptly. Evidently the man who had been looking for work departed with alacrity when the significance of the devastating reply pierced his intellect. It is wonderful, even when one is "up against it," how far the genial interludes will atone for the hours of gloom. By skilful

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self-delusion one can crawl into a condition of believing that all woe is but the setting for the little jewels of jollity and joy, to make the frail jollity, or the rich joy, jollier and more joyful. At any rate, when one is in a chain-gang (by the way, this is not necessarily autobiographical!) one tries to look at life so. Sam certainly slept well that night, and to the popular adjectival objections to prison life he would have said "pshaw!" at any time. *Cold* cell, *hard* bed, *stone* floor, were neither here nor there, "cut no ice." At Camp Henderson, which was not a prison, but a camp full of free men drawing wages of two to four dollars a day, the beds were hard—just planks with a sack of straw flung on them; the nights were cold, the old box-cars verminous. The bed in the cell was good enough for any man who did not demand the enervation of feathers; and there were no vermin. Work in the open air was all the sleeping draught Sam required.

To be sure, as an experience (for that was how he had decided to look upon it), one day in the chain-gang would have sufficed; but a week was decreed, and to fret would do no good. The young man, who so recently, under the spell of a lady, had lain awake o' nights to argue over every facet of his chats with her, like the village idiot plucking petals from a flower and chanting "She loves me, she loves me not"—this young man had suddenly "side-tracked" all considerations of pros and cons. He dismissed, at each appearance, the horrid sprite that whispered:

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

"Argue it out. Examine it. You do feel this is unjust, ignominious and undeserved." He just stretched out on his *hard* bed, in his *cold* cell, in the *hard* world, and dropped tranquilly to sleep.

On the next day there befell an incident. It was afternoon, and Sam was digging away at the foundations down in a six-foot cleft, putting foot to shovel, driving it home, with back of right hand to inside of bent knees, rhythmic, steady, and slinging up the earth well over the sides, working as though he was receiving wages for his labour, when he was aware of someone looking down at him. He was on the point of glancing up, when a packet of cigarettes fell at his feet, followed by splinters off a block of sulphur matches. Instead of stooping at once to lift this treasure-trove he looked up, all eagerness to discover who befriended him out of the world of free men. Possibly it was some crank with a turn for promiscuous pity; perhaps it was someone he knew. Perhaps—perhaps it was—but no, surely it could not be She! It might be some emissary from her.

He had only a glimpse of a back, no more. Pressed against one side of the ditch, and tiptoeing up, he was only just in time. If he had stopped to lift the gifts he would have been too late. It was Marsden. There was no doubt of it—Marsden. And on the instant he forgave Marsden every slight. His uncouth "Do you want to make a dollar?"; his grim pronouncement, in Webley's garden, that it was a hard world—a pronouncement made with an edge to it, as though

THE CHAIN-GANG

to imply that Sam was of the effete—these fell away and were forgotten. Soon he would be able to say his thanks. It was a fine little thing that Marsden had done. And then Sam knew how much this chain-gang episode really galled him. He hugged to himself the significance of this friendliness. He rejoiced to think that the folks in the world from which he had been culled by that man in blue would not ostracise him. He had not seen Marsden's face—only his back as he strolled on, and disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII

MARSDEN'S FIRST CARD

MARSDEN'S face was grim, grim and smiling, as he walked very deliberately past the gang, and with utter regularity of tread progressed along Astley Street to his destination—Mrs. Mathers' spreading-eaved home at the top of Manson Avenue. He opened and closed the gate as one performing a tremendous action; it was as if no gates would ever open or close again. Still with that deliberate tread and bearing, he walked to the door, put finger to the bell-push, and pressed it in a way calculated to make even so metallic a thing as a bell announce: "There is someone without who has his way." When Mrs. Mathers' Irish help answered that peremptory summons, Marsden said: "Is Mrs. Mathers to home?" And he noticed, as soon as it was out, that he had said *to* home instead of *at* home. He hadn't said *to* home for years. He came from those regions Eastward where folk do speak like that, but he had discarded *to* long ago for the preposition more widely used. It was a sign to him, however, that

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he was not as calm as he believed; and a small sign was sufficient for Marsden.

"Mrs. Mathers is not at home," replied the help, as Marsden knew she would say. He was well aware that Mrs. Mathers had gone out with her husband on a visit to Seattle. The *Kootenay News* had announced the departure in the Social Gossip column.

"I had better see Miss Henderson, then," he replied.

"Step insoide."

He was taken to a rearward room with windows looking out on the Western fold of the big valley.

"Miss Henderson you want to see?" enquired the hefty door-opener, puzzling Marsden by her brainlessness.

"Yes—Miss Henderson. Tell her it is business. Marsden is my name"; and then, as the girl departed, he strolled over to a window and stood there gazing out until the door opened, till the door closed, till Mildred's voice said: "Well, Mr. Marsden?" He turned, and stepped slowly toward her as she advanced to him—a hint of curiosity in her eyes as well as the smile of a hostess welcoming.

"How do you do? Sit down. I hear it is a business call."

"Yes," he said, and as Mildred sank down, clapping a cushion, he drew a chair nearer and seated himself with a large leisurely movement. "Well, yes, business is the only way to describe it, though I believe it will turn out pleasure."

THE LADY OF THE 'CROSSING

"I'm glad to hear that," Mildred responded, bright as ever, expectant, awaiting disclosures.

"How have you been since we last met?" he asked.

"Very well," she said. "That was at your picnic trip up the lake, wasn't it? I think you must have introduced motor-boats to Kootenay, for I've seen several others since."

"That's right. That was the last time we met," agreed Marsden. "The first time—huh! I wonder if you remember it?"

"Why yes—I remember it well." His eyes were steady on her and for a moment she hesitated.

"It was at Mrs. Innes'—at that house-warming they gave."

"Sure?" he asked, smiling, but his gaze still probing.

"Wasn't it?" said Mildred. "I remember being introduced to you there."

"That's so," he replied, "that was the introduction, as it is called. But there are other things in the world besides introductions."

Her eyes considered a corner of the ceiling.

This man, too, it appeared, had been shot by some roving glance of her eye and had marked the day of his first sight of her with a red letter.

"Do you remember going along Front Street in the spring?" he suggested, gently. "One day in May, it was, when we had that sudden kind of advanced summer, and the bugs and flies came out before their time, and the parasols too—light blue; and blue frocks; and you were walking alone down

MARSDEN'S FIRST CARD

to the lake where the Western Hardware Company has its warehouse now. It was just vacant lots then. That was the first time we met. We were introduced by Innes about a week later. Innes didn't know, but I *worked* that; I got him to ask me so as to meet you. I guessed you'd be there, and I just put myself in his way three days before, when I heard he was giving a house-warm and a hop, so that he couldn't help inviting me. And I can tell you every time we've met since then. And every time I've had proof that I was right that day on Front Street when you came along and saw me."

She gave no reply; only her dress fluttered over her heart as though a bird moved there. Marsden changed his position slightly.

"Now, Miss Henderson," said he. "I know I'm not the only one that admires you. You have a lot of admirers, and some you like—they're not bad fellows. And some aren't worthy of you a little bit."

She regained her breath. "Do you know, Mr. Marsden, that this is a most unusual visit?" she asked.

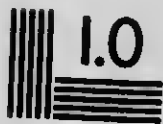
"I do," said he. "But I ask you to tell me when it shows any sign of being an impertinent one. If it seems that way to you, all you got to do is to ask me to quit, and I quit. So far I don't think I've said anything you could call lacking in manners."

"You began to speak of my friends," she remarked, an odd note in her voice. It was



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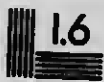
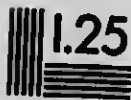


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THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

steady, but she had to make an effort to keep it so.

"We'll cut that out, then, if it seems bordering on rudeness," said Marsden. "And you just tell me when I'm what you would call impertinent, Miss Henderson. I'm surely not here to eat you, nor to vex you. I'm here to tell you this—that I love every inch of you. You're a woman. You're a woman who has seen a bit of the world. I'm going to give you just what's in my heart as well as I can get the words to carry it out to you."

Mildred's eyes showed a sudden softening; evidently she would listen to this man who came so "unusually" to her.

"I saw the turn of your wrist," said he, "that day when you passed—when we saw each other on Front Street. It looked good to me. It certainly looked good to me. It seemed to say things, that little wrist of yours. Oh yes, you're a big tall woman, but your wrist is dainty to me. And the bones under the bloom of your face—I know them. I know the shape of them, and they look good to me. The build of you, the framing of you, the curve of your instep when I helped you out of the motor-boat—it was your instep, it was *you*. Do you get me, Miss Henderson? I'll go right ahead if you won't pretend shocked. If you feel shocked say so, but you won't say it if you only think it's the thing to say. That night at Innes' I saw your shoulders, and they looked good to me—it was your framework again, and nobody else's but yours. One of them I could hold in my hand," and he

MARSDEN'S FIRST CARD

slightly raised a hand. "I'm no big brute," he went on, speaking a trifle more quickly after what had just preceded. "If I'm talking of your body it is because you caught me with that before I heard your voice. And your voice—it was yours all right, it sounded good to me."

Mildred's eyes were strangely bright and cloudy all at once.

"And what's inside that fascinating frame of yours—I surely think about that," continued Marsden. "I admit I don't know much of it; but I know enough to know, that the more I get to know it, it's going to seem good to me—right along, right along."

She stared before her as if not seeing him, as if looking through him, and her heart beat very fast.

"Mr. Marsden," she said, "I never in all my life had any such speech made to me."

Marsden nodded.

"You are an extraordinary man!" she added.

"Do you care for me at all?" he asked.

She raised her head, then shook it to and fro. She was feeling for support, with a palm flat on either side of her on the cushions to hold herself up.

"Is that honest?" he persisted. "I don't mean you'd lie to me knowingly, but isn't there something just kind of feminine in shaking your head at me and giving me 'No' with your head shaking—the way a woman is liable to say 'no' at first with a man talking to her like this—according to the story-book rules of the game instead of just the game? Do you get me, Miss Henderson?"

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

Isn't the truth of it that you saw me on Front Street, and that we never meet—never once meet—but you feel I'm around?"

She did not answer.

"It's a hard world, Miss Henderson. I'll call you Mildred when you say I may—but I'm not here to be insulting, nor to go a step beyond a man's right with a woman. I'm not here to eat you. I'm here to tell you a lot of things. One man makes a bid—so does another, so does another. And there they go crowding. One of them falls out, gets an accident, maybe; another crows to himself and jumps in. But it's still a hard world, still overcrowded. The basis of the world is rocks——"

"I thought it was fire!" Mildred found herself saying, why she knew not.

Marsden considered that.

"Is that so?" he said. "Now you mention it—yes, I see—maybe it is fire. Well, that's at the core, and we know nothing about it. It's only a guess, a scientist's hazard. As far down as we can go we get to rock, and there we quit. Why, didn't you ever hear of bed-rock? Hard—yes, hard. When you've found that, and built on it, you can go easy. Miss Henderson—you'll go easy if—well, if you go through the world with me."

Mildred was pale now.

"I will have to think," she said.

"I don't see the need," he replied. "You know you saw me on Front Street that day, and we've seen each other every time since. If you were on

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one side of the street, and I was on the other, our eyes always jumped—couldn't miss. It's happened often, and you know all about it. Why, if we both get into the same crowded corral on Judgment Day, if there is a Judgment Day, I'd see you right away."

She smiled faintly at that; then again suddenly sober, once more considered the ceiling.

"You look a bit kind of strained after this talk," he said. "I can understand that this kind of thing might upset a woman. Your answer is Yes, but I'm going away now and I'll come back some other time for you to say it." He rose to his feet. "You're going to marry me all right, all right," he informed her.

She drooped her eyes, stared at the carpet, and her whole aspect changed. Her expression seemed to say: "Don't be too sure!" Then she rose and walked toward the door, he at her side. Without another word, having thus crossed the room, Marsden opened the door, and Mildred stepped into the hall. They passed straight out into the mosquito-netted porch, and there both halted.

"You're going to marry me," he repeated. "I'm no kid—I'm no man for sentimentality. It's a hard world, and you want a man to lean on. You don't want a man who thinks the world is green grass, and blush roses, and all that sort of thing. And you don't want a man that thinks it's a heart of fire, either; that's because you've got plenty of fire yourself. I'm the man who will let that fire go on burning. I know all this is not

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

usual, but you can't say I've been familiar. I've given you as near myself as I know how. I've not called you anything but 'Miss Henderson'; but next time we meet it is up to you to say: 'Jack Marsden, I'm Mildred to you!'"

Without looking round, hat in hand, he swung open the mosquito-door and marched down the steps, walked to the gate, turned there and bowed—and in the doorway, motionless like a statue, very pale but with spots of bright red in either cheek, Mildred gazed at him, inclined her head in response to his bow. Then she closed the door, and Marsden departed—haunted by that last long look.

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CHAPTER IX

MARSDEN'S CREED AGAIN

THERE was no hint of "psychical blindness" when Sam found himself once more free, bereft of the disgraceful leg-iron. He saw all things with tremendous accuracy; and took rapid survey, block by block, as he crept home, of everybody in the streets, lest anyone he knew might be abroad and see him. His legs felt as if they were still manacled. His instinct was to hide. What, he wondered now, newly free from the prison, would his old friends think of the gaol-bird? It did not occur to him to ask himself how he would treat a friend who had been incarcerated and publicly punished for giving a leering and familiar scandal-monger, who traduced a lady, one black eye and one bruised jaw. Nor did he, with deep philosophical peace, inform himself: "Now you will know who your friends are!" Instead he thought that he could blame none if he were passed by as though unseen. Halfway home, irked by this desire to efface himself, to skulk along, he inhaled and blew forth a deep breath, slackened pace, and considered that he had done nothing criminal; he had but disturbed

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the peace when a highly genteel mayor was in office, a man whose aim was to turn Kootenay from an "excitement" into a "married man's town." That was what it was! So Sam squared his shoulders, and took balm from the thought that he had, maybe, affronted a municipality, but had not horrified man. Some natural refusal to be broken—above all broken by a prejudice, when the reason for the prejudice was, as in his case, surely tenuous—some refusal to be broken, and a whiff of pride, as well as joy of life as he breathed the air, free again, made him renounce the apologetic air, or carriage. He threw back his head and swung along, meeting the eyes of every man who, passing by, looked at him. Those who recognised him as one who had been in the chain-gang would see that he could look in their faces, not in the braggart way of a vagabond who refuses to admit error, but in the easy way of one who has nothing of which to be ashamed.

To this condition, in the rapid sequence of conditions following on his exit from prison, he had come when he saw Webley's daughter, Nance, advancing. A woman! He wished that the first known face to be encountered could have been a man's. Next moment he perceived a good point, veered mentally, or emotionally, and was glad to meet a woman first instead of a man; for a man—whether he have just come on to the street out of gaol or out of chapel—gives a lady precedence in the matter of salutation. She saw him. He glanced at her, ready to be acknowledged or cut dead. If

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he met a man he would be in a quandary, but this encounter was simple. In another three paces the matter would be solved.

The three paces were taken—and Nance Webley not only bowed but smiled, not only smiled but smiled in friendly welcome; also she stopped, not content to let him bow (a grateful bow it was too, pathetically so it seemed to her) and pass.

"Oh Mr. Haig!" she said, and gave him her white-gloved hand. "Everyone is so angry—disgusted. I don't want to know what your row with Mr. Grosset was about—it doesn't matter—but he's thick with the sheriff, and the sheriff and the mayor are as thick as thieves, and there it is. People say it's a scandal that you were chain-ganged with a lot of fellows who had been drunk and incapable, or were found beating their way into the depot on the trains. I call it—well, I don't know what to call it! In new towns the sheriff seems to do pretty much as he likes." She diverged from his case to conversation *apropos*: "My father says he was in a town in Oregon once, and two hoboos were caught as they came off the rods of a freight. The sheriff was in bed, but a policeman knocked at his door, and he looked out of the window and said: 'Who's there?' The policeman said: 'It's me—Rafferty, the policeman, with two hoboos.' Said the sheriff: 'Oi'm drunk, and Oi can't see them. Pwhat are they loike?' And the policeman replied: 'There's a long thin drink of a felly, and a little bit of a stub.' So the sheriff said: 'Put the long thin drink in

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the lock-up for a fortnight, and the little bit of a stub for a week ! ' ”

Sam laughed—and realised that he hadn't laughed (at least not that way) for seven days. Then suddenly he fell solemn.

“ But, Miss Webley,” he said with anxiety, “ should you—er—don't you mind being seen talking to me ? ”

“ Whatever for ? ”

“ Well—won't Mrs. Webley be worried when she knows you were standing talking to a man who—— ”

“ You don't know my mother, Mr. Haig. And, if she was like that, mother and daughter would not see eye to eye,” and her brows went up, and her head came down in a slow nod. “ It happens that we do see eye to eye about your case, however. Mother can't *stand* Grosset, and neither can I. She says she is sure that he would be the better of a little prison fare ! I'm glad to see you, Mr. Haig, and to see you smiling—— ”

“ It's not only because of your funny story,” he said. “ I know that I'm smiling now. It's the way you welcomed me. You're the first person I've met. It's tremendously reassuring to know I'm not turned down.”

“ I expect you would like to give the sheriff what you gave Grosset,” she said.

“ Funny you should think of that,” he remarked. “ All the time I was in—in gaol—I kept constantly thinking how I would get hold of Grosset again and give him another dose. When I came out this

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morning that ambition oozed away. He didn't seem to matter. All that mattered was being alive—the sky, the lake, and the hope that my friends would not turn me down. As for going to look for him to biff him again—why, I'm just tired of Grosset."

"I can understand that," said Nanee. "Well, once again, I'm glad to see you. I must get on. Come in and see us soon."

And there, in sight of all men, Miss Webley's hand was in his for the second time. He gave her a salaam, as she turned away, that was a sight to see.

"God bless her," he said to himself, as he continued along the side-walk.

As he turned off from Hoskins Avenue he noticed someone slip into the doorway of Timpkin's boarding-house, saw a head look out again, then bob back. Maybe a carpenter was at work, he thought, for he could also see an arm wielding a hammer. But when he came to the tributary side-walk that led to Timpkin's (no mere plank now, for the little gulch between house and street was all levelled up), he had to swallow and swallow again, had to blink and blink. Lump in his throat, face beaming, he could have blessed the world. Those two hard-up, gay-hearted, though diabolically dollar-harassed people had nailed up a foot of white cotton with the word

"WELCOME"

blazoned thereon in blue wool. And just within,

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peeping from the sitting-room door, they waited to see the effect of their bit of bunting.

"Hallo, you gaol-bird!" said Timpkin.

"It's a scandal!" cried Mrs. Timpkin. "It's that fool sheriff, and that crank of a close-up-the-town mayor. Have you any scheme for getting level with them?"

"No," said Sam. "I did think for some days of wading into Grosset again. Oddly enough he doesn't matter this morning."

Mrs. Timpkin wagged her head.

"If it was me," she declared, "I'd stay right in this town, work right *up* in it, *lay* for that sheriff, and get him *fired* some day. Yes, I *would*. Oh I'm not the kindly soul you think, looking at me that ways. I'd stay right here, and rustle along, and I'd—I'd buy up the town, and when I'd bought it up I'd burn the——"

"Now, then, now then! Sssh! It's my turn. Sssh! You'd do nothing of the kind," said her husband. "The sheriff's wife would go sick, and the mayor would come by a corn in them tight shoes of his, and you'd be running around to nurse the poor woman, and to introduce the mayor to a corn-salve! I know you." He paused, and considered Sam keenly. "But all the same," he observed, "I could understand Haig wanting to quit the burg—or I could understand it making him want to stay till the local papers had a heading: 'Once in Kootenay's Chain-Gang—Now Runs the Show!'"

"Wrecks the show!" snapped his wife.

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"Sssh!"

"That's how I'd feel if I was him!" said Mrs. Timpkin.

"Sssh!"

Sam laughed.

"Whether wreck or run the show," said he, "I'm going to stay, when I have such good friends."

Thus he shook into his place again, and later it eased him farther to find that there were men in this very house unaware of the cause of his week's absence.

"Good-day," saluted one. "Been up in the hills?"

"Been away on holiday or business?" another enquired.

"Sort of half and half," he made answer to that.

Mildred's face came up before him, and he wondered if she had heard of his plight. Should he tell her the cause of it? Should he tell her that an ass of a man had mistaken her for someone else, and insulted her name? Or should he, chivalric to the utmost, not sully her with the story? He knew not what to do regarding Mildred Henderson. There had been something wrong in that Sunday walk, something he could not put a name on. His instinct now was to take again the advice she had given at Henderson's—to wait and see. Again he wondered if she knew who the girl was of whom he spoke—guessed that it was herself. The onlooker has no uncertainty, but Sam was

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uncertain. That was how he felt! In the free world the main thing at present, it struck him, taking stock of his life, was to get back to work.

He must drop in at Marsden's and thank him for that gift of cigarettes. He had smoked them; and it amused him to remember how. His warder had come along and looked in at him through the grille, and he had said: "I could do with a smoke."

"A smoke is surcly consoling," the warder had replied.

"Is it prohibited in prison?" Sam had asked.

"Our orders," was the answer, "are to take all articles from prisoners, search for concealed weapons,"—and he pattered off a list of articles to be specially searched for—"and to see that men employed without the prison are not handed things by friends. Sometimes," he added, "boys get a bit a chewing tobacco. A buddy slips it to them cunning on the street. Cigarettes too! Poor smokes, cigarettes. Silly smokes, I call them; but when they're finished they're finished, whereas a pipe remains. Of course if I smelt tobacco smoke I got to investigate. But I got a cold in my head to-day," and he had moved on. Sam had required no further hints; he had smoked, but not too carelessly, standing close up to his little barred window out of which the smoke veered and eddied.

Yes, he must call on Marsden. Jingling money in his pocket (for pleasant is the chink of coin to a man who has been "up against it") he set off

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upon that mission after lunch, pondering on the way what a queer position he was in toward Marsden. He recalled their first meeting on the wagon-road; the second, in Webley's garden, when Marsden expounded his views on life, gave summary of the philosophy by which he lived—or imagined he lived. A packet of smokes! The money value was nothing; the fact of the giving, and the kind thought behind the deed, were all. He remembered the lake picnic, and Marsden's attitude to Mildred. But here was the heavy and yet simple sign, over the stables. Sam entered the office and asked if the proprietor was in. The clerk in charge glanced up at the clock.

"Nope," he said. "Can I do anything?"

"No, thank you. I'll call again."

"He should be back soon. Say, didn't I see you in the chain-gang not long ago?"

Sam's eyelids drew a little together and his gaze was keen on the questioner.

"Yes."

"What was that for?"

O glorious West, thought Sam, where a man does not take opinion ready-made, but exercises his own capacity to read character and to decide points of conduct.

"I knocked a man down, and it seems they are trying to make the place peaceful—so they ran me in!"

"What did you knock him down for? Called you a son of a something, I suppose?"

"No—not that."

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"Excuse my asking, but I'm interested. Tried to steal a lady friend, perhaps?"

"Well, insulted a lady I know," Sam allowed; "or not exactly that—made a mistake, thought she was an old 'flame' of his, as he called her."

The clerk shrewdly studied Sam, with a suggestion of pity in his eyes.

"And said things that——" Sam continued.

"Well—I hit!"

"I see. You come back later on. Marsden will be here in less than an hour."

The notion came to Sam to go down to the depot, and call on Webley. He believed in Webley; but he wanted to make sure that his belief was not chimerical. Miss Webley's views might not be her father's. So he passed on along the street, cut across the road that ran from the smelter entrance to the depot, and as he walked down there he saw Marsden on horseback, riding uphill toward him. They came level at the end of the bridge that led across Astley Creek—the bridge on which he and Mildred had crossed two Sundays ago. It was the identical spot at which he had said good-bye to her. Marsden, sitting back in the saddle, brought his horse to a standstill, and then settled easily to chat.

"How do, Mr. Haig?" said he.

"How do you do, Mr. Marsden? I have to thank you for a little gift that meant much to me," said Sam. "I have just been to your office and left word that I would call again. I can assure you I appreciated. How you thought to do it I

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don't know, but I did certainly appreciate the gift—and the spirit behind it.”

Marsden gloomed down on him, and then—

“I'll dismount,” he said. “There's a saying to the effect that some folk are very big when they're on horseback.” He slid from the saddle and stood with lines in hand. “I don't know that *good* is the word. I owed you a debt, anyhow, for you had put such a face on Grosset that he was out of the running for as long as you. He hasn't shown himself since you lambasted him, and let me tell you, in case you don't know—I didn't see the scrap—that Grosset can, or could, anyhow, last I heard of him in that line, use his fists. Maybe he's a bit slack now with his way of living. He used to say he could tackle any looking-for-trouble-I'm-a-son-of-a-gun-from-Missouri person who came into his store celebrating. And it wasn't bluff. Well, you put him out of the running. Queer thing, a woman's tastes for men, according to other men. Why, I knew a man once—little fellow, and like most little fellows full of conceit—little, and mean-looking, and dirty. But he was the limit. He could put the come-hither on beauties—yes, beauties. They lost their heads to him.”

But Sam was not listening to the description of this impossible charmer of beauties. He was putting these words of Marsden's about a woman's taste for men, and about Grosset being out of the running, alongside of a glance given him by the clerk at the livery-stable when he acknowledged that a woman was in the case, a glance hardly

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noticed at the time but recalled now, or popping up now. And he had not failed to remark that gloomy and troubled expression on Marsden's face when thanked for the spirit behind his gift. He had an unpleasant suspicion that this man was deeper than he had realised.

"You appeal to her," said Marsden. "That's different. You're a man of sentiment. I thought there was little more to you, but I take that back. But you're not the man for her any more than Grosset—only she don't see that exactly. She's playing with the lot of us. She'll puzzle herself up so that she won't know where she is, all right, all right. You and Grosset were to be absent for a week. I don't hold with 'absence makes the heart grow fonder.' It depends; every proverb depends."

He was a conundrum. Sam did not know how to handle him; and for the sake of the gift of smokes he kept calm. After a short spell of silence—

"But Grosset——" he began.

"Yes, I know," Marsden interrupted. "A man like you, an admirer of flowers—I saw the way you pried around in Webley's garden that day, Oh fair charmed!—a man like you feels bad about Grosset admiring where you admire, or"—he looked very knowing—"being allowed by the lady to admire, maybe!"

"You don't understand me at all, Marsden" (Marsden's eyes jumped); "you don't know your way through the tunnels inside my head, though you think you do. I was going to say that Grosset does not know her at all. At any rate, that's why

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I punched him, if you care to know, instead of trying to theorise and piece it together. I punched him because he persisted in saying he'd seen me with an old flame of his, and it just sickened me to hear him talk."

"O—h!" said Marsden. "Well, yes—I see. It's just like you to go and wade into a man for a sentiment of that kind. You didn't think he was talking about her."

"I knew!" flared Sam.

"All right, all right. Put it that way. You *knew*. You *knew* he had made a mistake, and waded into him on general principles. I do know you after all! That's you, all right. That's you! And if you care to know, instead of trying to theorise—" he paused; he left the rest in air. "Oh, well," he growled, and smiled grimly. "You go on knowing, Mr. Haig."

Sam half turned away.

"Thank you for dropping me the smokes, Mr. Marsden," he said. "That was what I wanted to say—and to thank you also for not being one of those who would cut me afterwards, because I'd worn an anklet."

Marsden laughed.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed. "A man like me that has mixed up in cattle and sheep troubles in two States—and that not so long ago—doesn't think much of a gaol, just for the form of it. It depends on what you're there for!"

He held out his hand, and Sam took it.

"Good-bye," they said together.

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Then abruptly Sam wheeled. He refused to let Marsden see on his face any sign of doubt that perhaps—that perhaps—he had punched Grosset under misapprehension. That doubt rankled horribly as he thought of all Grosset had horribly hovered to him, and to Timpkin; he stared stonily in front of him and was some distance off when he heard Marsden call him back. A thought had come to that big man as he swung to the saddle.

“What made you so sure that Grosset was making a mistake?” he enquired when they were level again. “Why shouldn’t she have him on a string? I guess he can be amusing.”

Sam showed a heavy countenance, and had no reply. He was irritated with this man, but he had larger irritations in him, more deep. He still felt grateful for the cigarettes, did not realise in what a queer spirit they had been offered. Sam could never have acted from a similar impulse, and lacked the capacity to understand. Here was an example of the philosopher’s comment that a mind understands only what it brings with it the power of understanding. Marsden put up his head and laughed gently.

“Well, so-long,” he said, and he spurred uphill in a flurry of dust, leaving Sam mute, and in such a condition of depression that he decided to defer the visit to Webley. He was over-miserable to make visits. The sooner he got to work the better.

He crossed the bridge and walked on toward the

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smelter. In the office window he espied a notice that made him more hopeful about his job :

MEN WANTED FOR CRUSHER.

YOUTH TO STENCIL SACKS.

VACANCY FOR ENGINEER.

He shook his head the way a man does when there are flies about, though there were none annoying him at the moment. Puzzled and worried in his position toward other existences around him, he knew, in a kind of second-nature, subconscious way, he had to get to work again. That last announcement—"Vacancy for Engineer"—made him hopeful that luck had not utterly deserted him. Maybe they had been unable to find anyone to take his place. The office, as to exterior, was a plain, unpainted barrack of a place, built on piles, but the interior was well fitted, and furnished with polished counter, desks, tall stools, tables and swivel chairs. Inside, the deafening din of the crushers sounded a trifle muffled. Inside, the eye had something else to look upon than unsightly slag-heaps.

Sam, asking for the manager, was told to "go right ahead," and was informed: "He's expecting you." So right ahead he went, opened the door of the room labelled "Private"; and the chief, glancing over his shoulder, gave a chuckle when he saw who entered.

"Hullo!" he said. "Been on the drunk?"

"No—been in gaol."

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"What for?"

"Knocking a man down."

"Oh, well!" The big man at the desk shrugged his shoulders. "What do you expect? Who was it?"

"Grosset is his name."

"So! Did you give it him good? I suppose so, to get jugged for it."

"I gave him something."

"Good! Grosset! Huh! Started in town here as haberdasher; began playing with town-lots, no end, on the side, I know him. He's in with the present 'pull.' No matter; there are other 'pulls.' This is a country of rival 'pulls.' That chain-gang is a scandal. The mayor tried to bring it in long ago for building work, and all the carpenters in town went on strike. He was a little premature. Strong union. And they were 'kickers' in those days. Unions are a nuisance in some ways, in others they are good. But when the boom began to drop he had his way and started a chain-gang—on unskilled work. There's no union for shovel-stiffs! Want your old job back?"

"That's what I'm here for," replied Sam.

"We've only got a temporary hand there—over from the furnaces," the manager admitted, "so——"

Five minutes later Sam was in the power-house again, see-sawing back to a belief in humanity, once more engineer of the bucket-tramway.

When he returned over that bridge into town again he was no longer at a loose end. But regarding

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other matters than those of the mere stoking and maintenance side of life, he was far from cased. After supper the convolutions and tormenting twistings of his thoughts were too much for him. He must see Mildred Henderson—as a moth must investigate a candle. Arrayed in his best, he sallied forth to call on her, hoping most fervently that Mathers might be absent on business, and that—better still—Mrs. Mather might be gone with her husband. She often “went out” with him—to Portland, Seattle, Victoria, as his business carried him. He came to the house on the hill, he rang the bell, and the Irish maid (not yet wedded for some reason, and still unaccountably here) opened.

“Is Miss Henderson at home?” he asked.

“She told me to say she was not at home,” was the astounding reply—whether imbecile or insolent mattered not.

Sam stared.

“She told you to say that?”

“Yes!” with vigour.

“I mean did she tell you to say that she *told* you to say—oh!” He was almost in a stammering condition. He felt illiterate. His power of expression was fogged.

“She told me to say that she was not at home to you!”

“But not like that, surely!” began Sam, and then: “Oh, no matter,” for this arguing with a wild Irishwoman in the porch was too paltry to continue. “I will write.”

“Indade, ye can plase yirsilf!” she said.

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The servant problem out West is a servant problem indeed. Articles have been written on it, books could be written on it, also on the savage who, coming in touch with the Democratic Spirit, does not rightly understand it, and is eventually dispensed with. The young woman had looked all the while as if on the point of slamming the door in his face—would have done so, doubtless, had there not been possibility that the altercation might continue, and to shut the door on him would have been to end it.

It was just as he informed the blazing door-opener that he would write that there came from the interior a laugh. It was a man's laugh. And it sounded like Grosset's. Sam looked at the "help," but she had her ignorant and exulting little head in the air, flaunting. He turned away, and walked down the path, in despondency. It was Grosset who was there! Feverishly he tried to be true to his divinity. This proved that Grosset did know her, but (he clutched the argument) it did not prove that she was the lady of his confessions of months ago, the lady of whom Timpkin, reading between the lines, had been suspicious, the lady whose intentions Sam also had doubted.

Yet Mildred, and none other, had given an order that he was to be told she was not at home. When had she given that order? Marsden said that Grosset had not shown his face for a week. Was not the solution of the order of expulsion, maybe, that Grosset had only now gone to her with his

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version—some lying version—of the scrap of that Sunday? Was it not due to her, due to himself, to get face to face with her and ask why --why— why she had closed her door on him? He would be content with no mere "Surely you know!" She must tell him, and in the telling much would be revealed. It was a tangle that could be unravelled, and would surely show itself in the unravelling to be comedy, not tragedy. So he told himself—and wasn't assured, simple Sam though he was.

Suddenly he stopped. Turning over those details of his plight, he had subconsciously walked back to Timpkin's. He found himself there without any recollection of having walked thither. But he could not enter; he could not settle; he could not go indoors. To go within four walls would be maddening. Space was what he needed, space to think in, to try to come to some comprehension of where he stood.

"I feel as if I was doped!" he said to himself.
"*Doped!* That's how I feel! *Doped!* *Doped!*"

CHAPTER X

BALM IN GILEAD

THE end of his weighings and considerations brought him to a decision to leave the whole matter to Fortune. As the wise man of New England said: "Be at rest from seeking after your Destiny. Your Destiny is seeking after you." On the evening of the second day of freedom from the chain-gang, when his stride was again normal, less definitely short, staccato, exactly measured, he climbed the hill to Webley's flowery home. The Chinaman in white ducks who answered his ring told him to go straight through the house, as Mr. Webley was at work in the flower-beds; and Sam took his way through the peaceful, dusky, gleaming-floored rooms, and out into the garden at the rear of the house. A tenuous light was over the place, the last of the mountain day, a light that seemed to be made up of reflections from the peaks and from the sky. The year-old lawn in that tranquil hour had glamorous qualities; hints of antiquity and eternity lurked in the enclosure as surely as in any old-world garden. Dickens, in a chuckling phrase, commented once, regarding the

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family tree of one of his characters, that we are all descended from Adam; and so is all the world, whether groomed or wilderness, of a piece, born out of the original nebulae and whirl. The *genius loci* here, on this year-old lawn, with the non-old mountains for back-cloth, was as hushing and tranquilising to Sam as any venerable plot rolled and tended for centuries, and looked down upon by merely old walls. At the far end, with sticks and gardeners' bass, Webley was busy. On Sam's arrival he looked over his shoulder and suddenly struck an attitude.

"How dare you, sir!" he cried. "Who admitted you? I can have no gaol-bird coming to my home!"

"What a shame!" came the voice of Mrs. Webley. "What a shame. I say, it's cruel to joei him!"

Sam glanced round, and saw her sitting close to the house in the rear porch, two others with her, Nance the one, and the second a tall fair-haired girl, wearing now the non-committal expression of one not yet introduced. But to her Sam was duly presented.

"Tell us about the chain-gang," said Webley, abruptly, his eyes dancing.

"Oh my dear! Perhaps——" began his wife, looking from Sam to their guest. But that young lady, Miss Walters by name (a tall girl, with bronze hair and graceful, unaffected poise, and eyes that told of capacity for fun and for seriousness), allayed Mrs. Webley's doubts—and Sam's.

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"I'm not a bit shocked," she said, laughing. "I'm greatly interested. I've never been in a chain-gang; I know nothing about it."

"Well, I can tell you about this!" Webley ejaculated. "It was a crime! I don't mean the chain-gang. I mean putting Mr. Haig in it."

Miss Walters stared.

"I'm not joshing!" said her host. "He's really been in the chain-gang."

Once more Mrs. Webley looked perturbed. She still feared Sam might be hurt at this disclosure to a stranger—perhaps feared Miss Walters might be horrified. But Nance, whose friend Miss Walters was, reassured her mother on the latter point: "She doesn't mind. Tell her about it all."

"It's that mayor of ours," Webley promptly told her, "and that bombastic sheriff! Imagine putting a man in the chain-gang who only—huh!" He seemed bereft of speech. He raised his hat from his head, said "Huh!" again, and put his hat on. "He only knocked down a man who has been asking to be knocked down for some time," he growled vehemently, putting the whole trouble in a sentence. "By the way, Haig, I didn't tell you—and I don't suppose you've heard—I'm a City Father now, a guardian of our progressive town."

"Oh! Congratulations!"

Webley bowed.

"They are surely a sweet crowd!" he said. "One City Father has a lot to sell, so at the town

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meeting we decide to build the school just where his lot is. It's the ideal spot. At the next meeting he proposes a site for the new fire-station. Must have it. Just the right place. No other location suitable. And another City Father sells it to the city—his handful of lots—at a good price too. I don't see why I should be out of all that. One thing I can tell you is that we've all joshed Grosset about his crumpled face. It would have consoled you in your hard cell to have heard us enquiring kindly as to what he'd hit. 'You look as though you'd walked into something in the dark!' That sort of thing."

"What was the trouble?" asked Miss Walters, looking at Sam, who interested her.

He cleared his throat.

"*Cherchez la femme?*" she suggested, a roguish twinkle in her eyes. He decided that he liked the Webleys' friend.

"I'm afraid it was all very foolish," he replied, and Nance looked gravely upon him. She thought he affected this tone of considering his action all very foolish.

"I met him," he explained, "and he said things about a girl I know, so I hit—and when he got up I hit again. And then a man in blue came along, and showed me first his badge and then his six-shooter. It becomes all the more inane when I tell you that I hit this Grosset person not because he was maligning the girl I had in mind, but because he—well—er—he confused her with someone else."

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"Just a kid, you are," said Mrs. Webley.

"And now you find he wasn't confusing her after all," suggested Miss Walters. "That should be the end of the story."

At that they all looked at nothing in particular. There was an air of restraint—which Webley relieved.

"I tell you what, Haig," he said. "You must stay with this town—get on to the board of City Fathers, venerable City Fathers, and bust the mayor and have the sheriff booted out, invent some scheme for getting Grosset to buy a hunk of land with a view to selling it to the city, and then move a resolution that will land him with a white elephant."

"Can a man who has been in gaol stand for election as one of those who play with towns?" enquired Sam.

"Ah! We must find that out. I don't know the law. No matter—these are just the imaginings of a melo-novelist gone wrong. How do you feel yourself?"

"I felt hot enough to slay Grosset once, but that's past. Now I feel that he doesn't amount to a string of beads."

"That's the way to talk!" cried Nance. "I don't believe," she was vehement in stating her belief, "that a man like Grosset is happy. He may get along, but it's not just money that makes one happy. A millionaire may be the most miserable man in the world—and I don't think he does amount to a row of beads!"

BALM IN GILEAD

"Everyone has been very good about it," said Sam.

"Why should they be otherwise?" asked Nance.

"They know it is all due to a whim of our mayor, and because that horrible Grosset is a friend of his."

"Some of them did kick," said Webley. "It was brought up at our weekly meeting, but we can't upset a sentence like that once it's passed, and if we had appealed in the formal way your week would have been over before half the forms had been filled in and signed."

"Say no more about it," begged Sam. "All I care for is that my friends—people I am glad to consider as friends—are so——"

"Quit!" snapped Webley. "You want neighbour Marsden to come in and tell you that life's hard, and cut out this talk of gratitude. We're dam—dern glad to see you again. I beg your pardon, Miss Walters."

Miss Walters laughed.

"You will notice," observed Mrs. Webley, "that he apologises to you. We don't count!"

Sam smiled, recalling a certain love-speech he had overheard Webley make to his wife, with something more forcible than a mere idiotic "damndern" in it. At any rate, one result of his miserable martyrdom in the chain-gang was to make him more at home than ever in Kootenay. In Webley's garden, as the stars came out, he recovered a sense of ease. The sweet reasonableness of the household was balm to him. These people, whether they knew

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it or not, set him on his feet again ; and when, at a late hour, he came hammering down hill home his humming of a snatch of song was no bluff to keep himself buoyant. He was hopeful, beginning afresh yet again.

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CHAPTER XI

"KILLED FOR TWO BITS"*

ONE day, as Sam tended his tram-plant, and the ore from the descending buckets was tipped and went roaring down the iron chutes to the stamp-mill, a man came strolling across from the offices, carrying a blanket-roll and a suit-case, climbed to the engine-house platform, and slammed out a cheery: "Good-morning, Mr. Engineer!"

"Good-morning," replied Sam.

"I'm to start on at the Lanyon Mine. I guess I can put my blankets and grip in one of the buckets going up?" asked the man.

"Go ahead," said Sam.

This was not the first miner he had so obliged. It was all a matter of use and wont. To tramp up the mountains to the Lanyon Mine was arduous enough without a roll of blankets and a suit-case.

* For the benefit of readers who handle shillings instead of quarters: There used to be, colloquially, a "long bit" (fifteen cents) and a "short bit" (ten cents), terms now very seldom heard. "Two bits" not only survives but is frequently heard. Out West it is more common than "twenty-five cents" or "a quarter." "Two bits" is about equal to a shilling—or, in the slang for that, a "bob."

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The man dropped his belongings into a bucket as it passed on its way.

"Guess I'll go up in a bucket myself," said he.

Then it was that East (in the person of Sam Haig) and West (in the person of the miner) clashed. An order, in the East, is to be obeyed; but Sam had noticed, in the West, that it is to be read, to be considered, and to be looked upon rather as advice than order; the reader of the proclamation on the wall decides whether to obey or not. A tang of frontier individuality hangs about the further prairie and the mountain towns. To be sure the smelter company had printed rules tacked up in various places. One was at the furnaces, prohibiting the coming beyond a certain point of any man not on business in that department. But men not on business often went there. The whole scheme, or such was the general opinion, was that if they were hurt when disobeying orders the company was not responsible. As for the bucket-tramway's printed rules and regulations, there was an "order" against climbing on a trestle, or getting into a bucket. When the head engineer first showed Sam his work he cursorily pointed to that table of regulations on the wall, fulfilling his part by drawing Sam's attention to it. "They do it sometimes," he remarked. Blanket-rolls and suit-cases he had, before this, dropped into the ascending buckets for men. This was the first occasion on which anyone had suggested using the bucket-tramway as a kind of overhead passenger service.

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"It's not allowed," said Sam.

"Oh pshaw!" answered the cheerful miner. "You can be oiling your cranks, or looking at the water-gauge, and not noticing me"; and as a bucket slipped round to begin the upward journey, he dropped adroitly into it, despite his rather hefty bulk, and smartly drew his knees up under his chin, and balanced. The bucket swayed slightly, but there he was already soaring away toward the first tower.

"Watch your head at the trestle!" shouted Sam.

"You bet you!" the miner hailed, gently lowered his head as he drew near the projecting arm, and passed safely. "If they stop sending down the ore," he called, "don't leave me stuck up. You gauge where I am before you shut off. I don't want to be left hanging between two towers where I can't climb down or . . ." he was sailing away, and Sam more guessed the rest than was sure of it: ". . . gorge up above . . . wouldn't like . . . left hanging . . ." and then he raised a hand, wagged it gaily, but carefully (not to upset his balance), in gesture of farewell.

Sam saw him lower his head at the trestle on top of the last roll visible from the engine-house, and then drift from sight. He wondered how many times that man would have to duck and carefully raise his head, passing trestle-tower after trestle-tower. "Bit of nerve about it!" he murmured. Still, it was doubtless safe enough if a man was sober and not subject to vertigo. All he had to

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do was to sit tranquil, and lower his head from time to time. A fine view was to be had. It would, considered Sam, doubtless be all right, and he went on with the routine of his somewhat monotonous work.

When the whistle blew at noon the ore was still coming down, and Sam made a rough calculation that the man had had ample time to reach the loading platform at the Lanyon Mine. As we know, the buckets did not by any means go at fever heat; they but glided slowly. It struck him now that it would have been a good plan to chalk-mark a bucket after the miner went up, and to have watched for its return. Its return would, to be sure, have announced that the man could have not only gone up, but also returned; yet the chalking of a bucket was the only method that occurred to him (though occurring now too late) by which to make certain that the man had reached the top. He blamed himself for his lack of arithmetical interest in his work, considered that he should have known how long it took for a bucket to make the journey. He could, as it was, only make a rough guess by watching a bucket cover a section of journey and then visualising the slopes beyond, on and on, out of sight. "Oh, he's surely there long ago," he murmured. But though he was satisfied that sufficient time had passed for the journey, he was anxious to know of the man's safety, to know that he had not been decapitated at one of the trestles, to be sure he had not fallen out. Sam was not comfortable about him; so,

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as the men came thronging to dinner, he walked over to the office.

"I want to 'phone to the top," he said to a clerk who was just leaving.

"All right. You know your way."

Sam passed inside and took up the receiver.

"Hullo!" he said. "Hullo!" Then he gave ear. "That the mine? . . . Yes . . . yes . . . no, tram-engineer speaking. I say, I don't want to get anyone into trouble, but I'm a bit anxious. Can you tell me if a miner who rode up in the buckets arrived O.K.? Are you there? . . . Eh? . . . No! . . . My God! . . . Is he . . . what? . . . No! You said *no*? . . . My God! Why didn't I stop him! Yes . . . yes . . . I know, I know."

He did not go home to dinner that day. Instead he sat where he was, chin in hand, staring out at the depressing slag-heaps, the black sheds, the rickety-looking spider-work of plank bridges that spanned from building to building. A clerk, whose duty it was to remain in the office during the lunch-hour, overheard the hither end of the conversation and, with Sam's attitude for climax to it, he realised what had happened and what was wrong with Haig. But he was young and felt unfit to minister to the engineer of the bucket-tram. Out he went in search of the chief engineer, found him in a corner of the unwontedly-hushed engine-room enquiring into a luncheon pail, and brought him across to see Haig.

Sam had scarcely noticed the clerk's exit, but

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looked round when he returned with the chief. The latter surveyed the tram-engineer's face with something of the aspect of a physician.

"It's all right," he said. "You didn't do it. They often go up. They take the risk themselves—that's all. It's bad for you, I know; but you didn't do it."

Sam sat back, hands clenched on the table.

"But if you'd seen him!" he broke out. "He was such a jolly-looking fellow——" he failed for further speech.

"All right! All right! But you mustn't double up like this. It's been done often." ("Occasionally" would have been more near to accurate, but the chief thought "often" was better at the moment.) "There was a fellow killed once before—when I had your job. It made me feel bad. I think he'd been-drinking, and he seemed to have lost his head going over a gorge at the top."

"That's where this man fell. It's an awful drop, they tell me."

"It's surely a big fall, but he's only got himself to blame. Say! You pull yourself together. You go home and eat dinner. You've only three-quarters of an hour now, and so have I. You go along."

Sam rose, blank of aspect, and passed like an automaton along the road and over the bridge into town. In the grass, and across the dusty road, the last grasshoppers were chirping, still merrily, as they chirped ages ago to Theocritus and his friends upon their way to Pyxus. Sam noted them not; or, if he heard them, even their thin chirpings

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were melancholy because of the living face of a dead man before him. He could not touch food. They wondered at Timpkin's what was wrong with him, surmised that maybe he had contracted a touch of fever, autumn being on the way, with the ills it is apt to bring to these new mountain-enclosed towns. He left the table and went out again, dinnerless. The blast of the smelter whistle at one o'clock drew him from his abstraction, and he arrived ten minutes late at the engine-house. Perhaps he could have managed to start the engine a-going if no one had been there who could act as proxy for the work; but, as it happened, the chief, as much anxious about him as that the buckets should begin their afternoon drift on time, had come over to the tram-plant house.

"You pull out," he said to Sam. "Take tomorrow off too, if you don't feel fit. I expect it does fray you—having seen him. I'll send over a man from the stamps to tend her. You go home."

Sam turned and headed again for the town, and on the bridge a young man, of curious appearance, suggestive of bland inclination toward excitement and capacity for calm, stepped forward, intercepting him, and said: "Excuse me. Are you Mr. Haig?"

"Yes," said Sam.

"I'm *The Kootenay News*," the young man introduced himself. "I got some good copy once about you and discarded it, because Doctor Smythe and Miss Webley asked me to." (Sam couldn't for the life of him recall Doctor Smythe. He frowned.

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He considered. He suddenly remembered him as one of the guests at Webley's garden-party and at Marsden's picnic.) "They had me cinched," went on *The Kootenay News*, "both of them. Doc' Smythe pulled me through fever last fall, and Miss Webley—well, she's Miss Webley. She's white. They got me to keep it out of the papers about your fist-fight with that guy Grosset. You owe me something, you see? I want you to talk now. Did the poor feller that went up in the bucket tell you what he was doing it for?"

Sam shook his head. It seemed untrue, this making a column out of the last crazy jaunt of the young man he had seen waggle a hand so cheerily a few hours ago.

"Didn't he say he was too gol-darned lazy? Didn't he say he would wrastle you if you tried to stop him?" suggested the reporter, trying to make a beginning, but only touching Sam in a sore place.

"I should have stopped him," said Sam, in a level voice, and the alert youth had a jump in his eyes, all attention.

"Feels bad—Engineer cut up," he made mental note. "Didn't say anything?" he asked aloud. "Didn't suggest it was for a wager, eh? Small bet—big bet—didn't say anything like that? 'Killed for two bits' would make a dandy heading," he murmured to himself.

"He said nothing," replied Sam. "He was so cheery. He waved his hand from the ridge just before he disappeared. Don't write it up. Don't

“ KILLED FOR TWO BITS ”

write it up ! ” he besought, realising that in talking he was helping to make a “ story ” out of the dead man. “ I feel as if he was looking at me yet—and laughing.”

“ Say ! ” exclaimed the reporter, re-focussing his gaze, “ you come along with me. We’ll say no more about that ; but I promise you I’ll write it up touching. I’ll write it so that if his folks see a copy it will give them the relief of tears. You come with me. I know what you want. You’re too sensitive. Funny—you knocked Grosset’s ear into the top of his head only the other day, and yet this frazzles you. Temperament ; that’s what it is. I got a recipe for a cocktail that will delight you for once, and bill you if you stay with it. It goes down the sciatic nerve like a song, and into the head like a polka. I’ll fix you up. You come with me.”

He wheeled and led off, Sam at his side. He believed in his capacity to make a “ story ” out of what he had heard already, so was not too greatly downcast.

“ Here we are,” he said. “ Come in here, and let me feed you a drink—and give thanks you ain’t in a dry town.”

CHAPTER XII

A "GET-RICH-QUICK" CHAPTER

It was a somewhat stunned Sam Haig who wandered out from Timpkin's to the little library that afternoon, impelled thither by some instinct, some hope of winning back (or forward) to a solid footing in the world by aid of a book. As in the turning of a kaleidoscope the little bits of glass slide and click into new positions, somewhat so moved before him many faces. Mildred Henderson, and Marsden, and the dead miner; the scraggy, cynical, kindly reporter; sweet little Nance Webley, of whom the newspaper man had given him a wondrous glimpse; and Doctor Smythe, by the same wizard drawn back again out of what seemed a distant past (for the chain-gang episode had made everything that befell before feel far away)—these all came before him. Events and disclosures had crowded one upon another during these last days. Events and disclosures—and suppositions—dazed him somewhat. It came to him that Mildred Henderson, who cast so great a spell on him, was not in his life at all, was out of his orbit. A sense of the sacredness of life had come to him on hearing

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that the cheery miner was dead—the sacredness, the antiquity, the brevity. On that day he could have killed not so much as a fly. And deep down, within that mood, was resentment against Mildred, a resentment against her way of making persiflage out of everything.

He was indeed an interesting case, as the *Kootenay News* man had noticed. Less than a fortnight ago he was (in Marsden's word) "lambasting" Grosset; to-day he was thrown out of gear because a man he knew nothing of (beyond that he had a cheery face) was dead. Self-condemnation had much to do with his condition; for on and on at the back of his mind persisted the thought that he should have refused the man his ride. There! That was it! That was the crux of his anguish over the affair. And then there was Mildred Henderson. He was at sixes and sevens with her. Sinuous, smiling, provocative, she was in his mind's eye all the time.

The library was no grand edifice. There were those, indeed, who called it the "library shack." It contained a little room with a table on which lay the weekly picture papers and a few monthlies, and behind that a larger room with book-laden shelves on all sides. The librarian was the only occupant, almost hidden behind a roll-top desk in a corner, the back of the desk outwards, so as to make it serve also the purpose of a partition, the space behind which was apology for a librarian's office. Sam wandered round, looking at the backs of the books, and between him and

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them drifted the cheery miner and Mildred Henderson, and Grosset and Marsden, and within him was a sense of tanglement.

A little to his amazement, a blunted kind of amazement, he saw a Horace on a shelf and took it out in memory of college days when he had learnt what had been, it seemed, of scant service later. But he thrust it back again. The classics only served to remind him of his late quest for employment as one of the "unskilled." *Te semper anteit saeva Necessitas* he recalled, and then wondered if perhaps it was *serva* and withdrew the volume again to verify. But his eye falling upon "*. . . vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam*" he replaced the book, adread lest tears should come. Certainly he was unstrung. He was as a ship without a rudder, or without compass.

One wall was stocked with volumes on mineralogy, and he glanced at these—especially the ones with titles that informed him of his ignorance. There was one on the way to file claims, and all about staking, and registering, and proving assays, about the rights of miners, their legal position over nuggets, over veins of precious ore, over alluvial deposits.

This tome Sam conned in an absent fashion, dipping into the pages, and was arrested by the phrase, centred in a page:

"GOLD IN PLACE."

He glanced down the page, and saw it dotted with the same phrase again, in italics: "*gold in place*";

A "GET-RICH-QUICK" CHAPTER

and farther on was "*mineral in place.*" He commenced to read purely as an abstraction from his sensitiveness regarding that life suddenly shut out, and from other matters too, it would appear, by the way that Mildred and Nance Webley, Grosset and Marsden haunted him—Nance coming into his mind persistently, as though in contrast with Mildred. After finishing the chapter, standing before the shelves, he carried the book to the sitting-room and set it on the table, drew out a chair, clamped himself down studiously to re-read certain pages again with high concentration. Concentration was required, because between the lines so far there had been all sorts of interjections, such as: "It's impossible that she knows the truth. If she knew why I hit Grosset she would never have given the order that she was not at home to me." Or again: "I shall write to her—I shall 'phone to her—demanding explanation." Or again, at long last: "No, I won't! I should show some proper pride!" There was, as you see, need for concentration to read about mineralogy.

The miracle happened. He succeeded. He more than succeeded; for after this second—and keen—perusal he rose, returned the book to its shelf, and departed with a new and resolute step. Behold Sam Haig another creature! Coming to the Timpkins' boarding-house he knocked on the private sitting-room door. None answered. There was no one there. So he passed upstairs; but Timpkin, below, in the kitchen or dining-room,

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had heard the knocking and came to enquire, craning upward.

"I want to have a chat with you," said Sam, mysteriously.

"Sure," replied Timpkin. "Come in here. I saw there was something the matter. Come in here," and he led the way back to the sitting-room, thrusting a chair toward Sam. "Feeling bad? In trouble? What's the name to it?"

"Sit down!" said Sam forcefully, and when Timpkin had obeyed, astonished at his boarder's new vigour, the young man seated himself. "You have done something in mining?" he asked.

"I have," said Timpkin.

"All kinds?" inquired Sam.

"Well," answered Timpkin, "I've never gone in for turning over tailings like a Chinaman, but I've a prospect to my name on the main range, and have put in my assessment on it—or swore to it, anyhow; and I have washed for gold once or twice in my span of days," he shook his head, "and put too much of what I got on the creek-bars over the hotel-bars, too; but that was before I met Mrs. Timpkin."

"Look here," said Sam, "I have a scheme. It seems to me, reading up about the business, that if one finds certain minerals what is called *in place* one can file a mineral claim and go to work."

"That's right," Timpkin agreed. "That's the simple fact." But he stared wide-eyed at Sam, wondering if it was fever or really a scheme that had assailed his curious boarder.

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"Further," continued Sam, "it doesn't matter what the first assay is like so long as the mineral is there—it doesn't matter how rich nor how poor?"

"Sure," replied Timpkin. "If it's rich you'll go on working. If it's too poor to work you'll just naturally quit."

"Exactly," said Sam, "unless you can sell to someone else."

Timpkin gave a laugh.

"That too is done," he said, staring at Haig, a trifle more strained. "It is generally done by what is known as *salting*. It can be done otherwise, by plain lying, by selling out to a man by showing him mineral that came from somewhere else altogether. But if he wants to look at your prospect—then you *salt* it, as I tell you. But who's the sucker you've got in your mind? And where's your prospect, anyhow?"

"I'm not thinking of that," replied Sam, showing irritation. "Of course I've heard of that sort of thing! This is something new I've got. Tell me this, before I go any further: I heard somebody say that this State is rich in minerals. One man told me it is possible even to get a kind of lead-poisoning from drinking from some creeks when the water is low."

"It may be so," said Timpkin. "Or it might be something else. A low creek that has maybe a dead coyote in it somewhere above ain't healthful, but I've heard them say you can get lead-poisoned that way too."

"And sometimes you might be able to wash gold

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

in a creek—not enough to pay, but just to show it's there, although too slightly to work as a financial proposition ? ”

“ Well, I guess if a loco man cared to wash the little odd handfuls of dust in Astley Creek, for example, he'd find a few grains,” replied Timpkin.

“ And if one washed the banks would there be——”

Timpkin looked troubled.

“ You might find something if you were crazy enough to spend dollars on getting cents,” he said. “ Say, Mr. Haig—hadn't you better go up to bed and let me ask Mrs. Timpkin to have a look at you ? Don't you feel your pulse kind of——”

Sam gave a forlorn laugh.

“ No, no,” he said. “ Look here—I'm not light-headed. Listen. In prospecting you look for what are called *floats*, don't you, and then prospect on to find where they've come from ? ”

“ If you find 'em ! Sure ! ”

“ Then do you think that possibly right in Kootenay here, if one looked for it, one could find any precious mineral—in rock or in sand ? I don't mean in quantities to pay for working, but——”

“ What's the game ? ” asked Timpkin ; for Sam's manner, he decided at last, was neither of a man crazy nor of a man fevered. He drew his chair closer.

Quietly the scheme was disclosed, and when Sam finished Timpkin rose with an air of forced calm.

“ I'm your experienced mineralogist,” he said.

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"But you want a legal man on this—a man we can rely on, who will come in with us, not play against us, and who is in with the city 'push.' Now there's a hotel proprietor in town here—he's done some placering too, in his time, but he was trained as a lawyer. Franklin, of——"

"*The Grand Western?*"

"Of course—you know him. I remember you told me once how he advised you when you were nearly broke. Look you here, Mr. Haig. We'll go down and pow-wow and confer with Franklin. He won't give away this stunt even if he won't come in on it. He's a bit of a wag, and I guess he's liable to come in, that is if he sees the legal side has any grip to it at all." He stepped to the top of the stairs and hailed: "Caroline! Caroline! I'm going out on a bit of business."

"Whatever is it?" she called back.

"With Mr. Haig," he answered. "He's got a bit of business he wants witnesses to. We'll be home later on. Come along, Haig, and say—don't you talk about it on the streets walking down."

Kootenay wore a different aspect to Sam now. These strong, shoulder-swinging men, these slight, lithely-tripping men; these powdered young ladies carrying chatelaines—they all seemed people of a world he looked on at. Not that he felt divorced from them. All was changed because he had a scheme. And doubtless all had their schemes. At the corner post-office he glimpsed the folks before the wickets, taking turn for letters—A to F, G to M, M to P, P to Z—all leading their own

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lives, all maybe with schemes. In the vestibule those who had received letters opened them and read, stepping a step at a time to the door, being dodged round by those who entered. Perhaps they were reading about schemes, or perhaps they were reading love-letters. Better were schemes than love episodes, if love only meant tangling oneself up, getting into a maze, not knowing where one was.

Crossing Dawson Street it looked to him like a street in a dream, but a very clear dream—with its business signs, its revolving barbers' poles in glass cases on the side-walk's edge, its throng coming and going. The mountains stood to West, their great bases fanning out, and bits of smelter dump insulting them. To East the bluffs swept round, tawny in the sun-glow, ending the direct view. Suddenly it struck Sam that any of these people who came and went might be dead in half an hour. He might be! And here he was scheming to make dollars, to make dollars quickly, in approved American manner—if possible; and he was doing it all in a kind of trance, doing it because it was the thing to do, despite the looming Reaper, because in a world of dollar-hunting there had entered his mind (at a moment when the dollar was far from it) a scheme.

Halfway down Hoskins Avenue he caught sight of two girls—petite Nance Webley and her tall fair friend. They bowed in passing, and as he acknowledged their salutation he considered what a sweet nature Miss Webley had. He had to tell

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Timpkin all about meeting her on the morning he came out of gaol, how she stopped, what she said. Timpkin made no comment, just walked along, head sideways, staring aslant at Sam as if he thought him a likeable and interesting imbecile, a kind of inspired idiot. He knew the story of the assault on Grosset, or perhaps it should be said, to avoid possible shadow of misstatement, that he knew a story—or a version of the story. He knew it as told him by Sam Haig; and only a kind of courtesy kept him from expressing his private view of it. He had not taken it upon himself to suggest that the young woman was very likely, most probably (he was willing to bet on it that she was) the same girl that Grosset had maundered about on that veranda of his.

"It's as plain as plain," he had said to himself. "Here's Sam Haig after the same identical old flame of that son of a gun. You'd think he would tumble to it."

Sam was "tumbling to it." It was his "tumbling to it" that was the chief cause of his misery to-day. His nerves were frayed thereby, and the death of the cheery mincr had broken down a man over-tense. What made Timpkin stare as he did now, however, was to hear Sam's easy tones in speaking of Nance Webley's goodness.

"This feller," mused Timpkin, "is sure crazy. He don't understand anything. He tells how a girl treats him white as if it was nothing, and he gets himself into the chain-gang all over the head of another girl who would have anybody on a

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string. Beats me! And by the look of him he would, if he could, cough out more details about his hanging after that fee-male that would let any man but himself see that the whole proposition is a two-spot. That's what gets my goat!" That, however, was his private opinion. He didn't say all that. "Oh, them petticoats! Gee-whiz!" he ended his thoughts, and unconsciously spoke the last words.

"What did you say?" asked Sam.

"I said 'Gee-whiz!'"

"What about? Our scheme?"

"Nothing. Here's the *Grand Western*, and they say God looks after fools and kids."

Alexander Franklin remembered Sam. It was not necessary to reintroduce these two. Having shaken hands with Timpkin, Franklin turned to the younger man with: "You went to his boarding-house, then—and you're still there!"

"We want a private corner to talk," said Timpkin.

"Come over here," replied Franklin, and led the way to a corner of his front sitting-room, the big half-hall place, where guests can sit in rows and look out at the people going past, and be looked at by them as if they were in a glass case, on show. But Sam had said no more than a few words when Franklin interrupted with:

"It's not a quiet corner you want. It's my private room. Come upstairs."

An hour later Timpkin and Sam came forth from the *Grand Western* wearing an air so greatly of

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studied blankness that an acute observer might have surmised they were hopeful about the value of some secret they shared.

During the next day, while Sam was at work (for he forced himself back to the tram-engine-house, determined to refuse to allow anyone to ride up in the buckets, if anyone again purposed to do so), Timpkin and Franklin strolled in the environs of Kootenay as though taking constitutinals and admiring the flora, up and down, to and fro. Now and then they picked up bits of rocks, tossed them away, and pretended, lest watched, that they were making pot-shots at chipmunks. They even scrambled up and down the steep banks of Astley Creek like rollicking schoolboys. A second day they behaved in the same queer way—and on the third entered the Government office in Dawson Street, accompanied by Sam, and three mineral claims were duly registered, in the names of Franklin, Timpkin, and Haig.

Mr. Derwent, the registrar (he had made one in Marsden's trial trip with the first motor-boat on the lake), was a man accustomed to many twists and turns. One does not act as a registrar, and that sort of thing, without observing many stratagems for skinning. But here was something new. The assay of the finds placed before him was of no more value than salt—but it was an assay. It took him all the time of registering the claims to puzzle out the sense of it; for he knew there must be some sense in it. These three men were not characters out of *Alice in Wonderland*. It was

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when he spread out the town-plan on his desk that he, as they say, "cottoned" to it. Franklin's claim was staked out on the hill above Kootenay—where it was suggested that the waterworks should be; he had a piece of rock he called galena to show—there was lead in it; there was silver. He spoke in glowing accents of his hope that, with opening up, he might even chance on pockets with gold—"like what they have struck on at the Lanyon." Derwent listened to this, leaning on his desk, and looked up at Franklin from under tangled brows, then without a word thrust him the requisite papers to fill in. Next door to Franklin, as it were, Timpkin had found gold.

"This," remarked Derwent, "is not such a rich prospect as the one you have for sale up in the mountains."

"Oh, I don't know," said Timpkin. "That remains to be seen."

Sam filed a claim alongside of his landlord, but closer to town, and for him Derwent had a long, knowing look.

"I see you're planning to get even with Grosset," he said. "I don't know how it will work, and I don't know who has given you the tip."

"Tip?" asked Sam.

"Oh, come!" Derwent wagged his head.

"We're in the dark," said Franklin. "What is it?"

"You're surely not utterly in the dark," declared Derwent. "You have some glimmerings. You perhaps don't know who is to play with which

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bit of land, but you do know that this strip is to come into the town sooner or later, and it will be wanted, and no other strip will do."

"Well," said Sam, "we allow we know that much. But where does Grosset come in?"

"I'll tell you then, seeing you don't know," Derwent answered. "It will make you happier. We are going to take all that into the town-limit, and Grosset was to buy the lots and—well, 'nough said."

For those present enough was said. One recalls all that Webley had let out regarding the pickings of the "City Fathers." Grosset's turn was coming to get his plum out of the town; he was to buy for himself the bit of land on which Sam, it appeared, had found "mineral in place," and sell it to the City Fathers when the scheme for the new electric light power-house should be tabled.

"I don't object personally to you fellows butting in," said Derwent, laughing. "They are just playing with the town. They see the end of boom, and the settling down to a steady existence, and so they are determined to feather their nests. If I wasn't the registrar I would join in with you, to see if I could not find mineral on the one bit you've left that they might want to play with. I expect you've got the legal side all right," he added. "There may be some way of firing you off as three conspirators. Good-bye, sports, and good luck to you!"

Sam was in ecstasy. In the corridor outside he even thumped his partners' backs and chuckled:

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"Grosset! Grosset, by heck! And I never knew. Say! It's a sign that we'll pull it off. Say! This is my Destiny!"

They still talk of it in Kootenay. The little affair is history. They tell of these three frauds bucking the other frauds. They tell of these three frauds shovelling and washing, digging and shovelling afresh. They tell of how old-timer prospectors came to watch them and, leaning on the fence they put up, roared with delight on seeing them solemnly extracting microscopic grains of gold from mountains of earth. Franklin, up above, was on a seam of rock, and made the town hysterical by threatening to use dynamite. They talked of it in the hotel sitting-rooms; it was discussed by the man with his head back and his chin soaped, and the man bending over him scraping, in every barber's "joint"; it was discussed at "At Homes." It was, in a word, the talk of the town.

"If these three smart Alecks pull it off," was the opinion at the street-corners, "there's liable to be some law brought in to keep anybody from ever being able to do it again—unless the law-makers think, maybe, they might try it themselves somewhere else where folks won't be wise to it."

"It's only a smart fellow would hit the notion; and I say good luck to him," most men summed up.

"The three rōgues," as they were called by the City Fathers, were (in the word for the next movement) "approached." The newspaper reporter—Higgins, he of the devastating cock-tail that might

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buck you once, but would kill you if persisted in— danced on one leg with sheer joy. Here was a "story," in his estimation, to cause every man to buy the *News*. It seemed that all three were affable beyond description, when "approached."

"You go ahead," they said. "We don't want to stand in the way of the town. You turn the whole strip into town-lots, if you like."

But how can the town-planners turn into town-lots land that is being shovelled and re-shovelled, washed and re-washed—and is filed as mineral land? When one of the City Fathers, losing his temper, used threats and said he would agitate and have the Government get on to the scandal and boot them off, he was told to go right ahead. "Larkin Gets Heated. The Noble Three Keep Cool," wrote Higgins for the *News*. But the incident took a turn toward the best by the town offering each man twelve thousand dollars for the surrender of his rights.

"Stay with it," counselled Sam. "I saw Grosset to-day. He looks like Mephistopheles. I tell you Destiny is in this."

So they demanded fifteen thousand. Then came talk of arbitration; but Webley, a City Father not unknown to us, had a friendly interest, if not monetary, in the matter. He moved a vote to compromise, to offer them fourteen thousand, and also, dropping casually into the *Grand Western* for a cigar, he murmured to Franklin: "If I were you I'd close with the offer you'll get to-morrow."

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"Yes, it is a pleasant evening," said Franklin.
"You would?" he murmured.

"Sure. They're in a hurry."

They were, as a matter of fact. There were others with much to reap on that slope and creek-side. They wanted the reservoir to be built; they wanted to set up the electric light station, to utilise the force of the creek. And on the morrow the three closed with the city's offer. It would have been too blatant then, publicity having been brought to the wedge of earth, for Grosset to buy the ground, and the city to buy it back again anon. Grosset dared not offer to buy. There are limits to "gall." There are also limits beyond which enquiries are demanded by the most cheerful and lenient and humour-perceiving of town-folk.

The city purchased from the three outsiders—and that was all. But they were in the public eye ever after. It was realised that there were three more men of political turn in town than had been imagined, three more claimants for civic honours, three more men fired with the public spirit, with the interest of their fellows, and of their country, at heart. They had the right stuff in them.

Leaning back in his chair in the private sitting-room, Timpkin, after his return from the bank on that day of his life, leant loose, slack—as one who has longed for rest, and won it, at long last.

"Now I get out," he said to Sam. "This little wad will remove us. I hear there's a boom on in Reno—and that's where we'll go, Mrs. T. and I, and maybe we'll make good there. What one

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needs is just the initial capital. We've got to leave this hutch on Bunyan Avenue anyhow, and we may as well go to some town where money is circulating good."

"Why must you leave?" asked Sam.

"Bugs!" replied Timpkin. "Have you never seen them?"

"I have, as a matter of fact," said Sam, laughing, "but I didn't tell you, as I thought you had troubles enough."

"Tell me!" murmured Timpkin.

Franklin, on whom they called later, too gay to sit still, advised Timpkin to desist from boarding-houses and to go in for produce-raising.

"Here?" enquired Timpkin. "Here—where the Chinamen can sell a cabbage for about nothing?"

"You wait a bit," Franklin advised. "All we want is a produce-raiser or two on the town council, and the Chinks will get the tip either to up-prices or to pull out. This little episode has interested me in the public good and weal, so to speak. That Innes fellow, who has a good-going fruit-ranch down the lake, should go on the council. He's got dough, and he'd have a pull, and the say-so. I feel I could learn the ropes myself."

As for Sam—Franklin's notion had been at the back of his own mind for many moons, and, his dollars safely in the bank, he scanned the *Kootenay News* under the heading "Land for Sale." He had had a glimpse of a fruit-ranch once, that day of Marsden's picnic, just a glimpse between the

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tangled branches of the foreshore. But it had remained with him.

"I've thought of that myself," he said.

"Well, if you ever get to the verge of acting I'll go shares," said Franklin. "If I had a thousand or two in a going concern of a fruit-ranch—no mere home, supporting itself, but a live ranch with a market at its doors—all the more incentive to me to get elected sanitary inspector and find the Chinks' village up there unsanitary, and a menace to the waterworks!"

"So you aspire to civic honours!" said Timpkin.

"*And emoluments,*" replied Franklin.

* * * * *

"I feel," said Sam to himself, as he laid his head on the pillow that night, "as if I am getting into the swim at last"; and in his dream he saw Grosset electrocuted, and had a duel with Marsden for possession of Mildred Henderson, in which Marsden fell; and then Sam got into a train with Mildred and she turned into Nance Webley on sitting down; and they looked out of the car-window at a depot and read the name on it—"North Pole"—and got out to look at the pole and found themselves in New York; and when he turned to Miss Webley to express astonishment she had changed into Miss Walters. But dreams are often like that.

PART III
GRAZIOSO
CHAPTER I

THE FRUIT-RANCH

THERE is a tragic (or a poignant) note to be dropped a moment in this sunny book, but perhaps it will do no harm. Life is not all amusing hardship, buoyant hope, jolly triumph; even under skies of lapis-lazuli, of two men working in a field (as the Scripture says) one is taken and another left; and if the one who is left cared for the other he is silenced by the Mystery—and the sky is blurred; for he has lost a friend. Down Kootenay Lake, at Ten Mile Point, there had been for some time a man called Irvine making a home for his wife, and she had died while that home was a-making. It is a long way from Kootenay to Taxeda, Illinois, and she had only sufficient strength to hold on till he got back in response to a telegram—and then she died in his arms. He

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came back again but found that, whatever way he looked at it, he could not stay on his ranch home. If she had ever seen the place, lived in it herself, belike the thought that she was no longer there would have been too much for him; he would have wanted to leave because of that. After his return he discovered that he must leave because she had never seen it. He had been building and clearing and making a home only for her.

He heard from Franklin that Sam and Timpkin were looking for a ranch, and came to them at the boarding-house, on Hoskins Avenue one day to say that his was on the market.

"It's a beautiful place," he said. "You go down and see it, and make me an offer. You'll find me at the *Grand Western*. Nothing wrong with it. It's a peach. I'm only pulling out because—well, it's a bit lonesome."

Next day, in Franklin's motor-boat, they churned down to view the prospect, and realised it was what they wanted, realised also that it was hardly the spot for a man with anything on his mind.

"Yes, siree," said Timpkin, "I can understand that man Irvine wanting to pull out. If Mrs. Timpkin happened to pass in her checks ahead of me I don't mind telling you I couldn't stay around in a lonesome place like this. It ain't as if one was living in time down here at all. It is surely as if one was in Eternity already. I'd get it into my head that it was always to be like this—me here, her somewhere else. When you've had your ups and downs with a woman and know every crease

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in her face—no siree," he broke off, "I can understand that Irvine couldn't stand it."

"*Pallida mors aequo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas regumque turris,*" Sam recalled from his college days and a recent random reading in the library. "*O beate Sesti, vitae summa brevis spes nos vetat incohare longam,*" he might have murmured. The words came to his mind, and those others of the shears that "slit the thin-spun life." In that quiet neighbourhood the slight wind in the tree-tops (a mere whisper) and the lapping of the waves (a mere murmur here) seemed to be pitched in a key for threnodies. In the vim of life one failed to perceive; the ear was not attuned; but at a hint of death it seemed there went on always, in the voices of nature, loud or low, an elegiac note, a gentle lamentation. He had heard the same note in the light winds among the trees at Timpkin's door on the evening of the day the miner crashed from the bucket. He heaved a sigh.

Together they stood silent, looking round the scene, and it was one of great beauty. *Natura Benigna* and *Natura Maligna*, it has been said, walk hand in hand on the one mountain-side. But if we only knew all perhaps we would not make them two, and after all (despite our terms of severance) they are one—and benign. The woods were a fringe of green and gold and scarlet along the blue lake side, beyond the border of the beach, Indian Summer begun. The opposite mountain surged skyward in noble rolls, feathered with firs, decked with stately pines. The cold blue

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treeless crests broke out high above and stood stately in the midst of a sky like a clear crystal globe.

After that spell of silence it was Timpkin who spoke.

"It's sure a peach of a place," said he, "to make a home in with a partner, and friends droppin' down the lake to visit now and then; but with nothing but the lapping of the water all day, and the stars above the trees all night—I tell you what: if I was that Irvine man I'd start in hollering like a kid in a dark room for somebody to come. We ain't going to——" he paused.

"Take advantage of his desire to get away," suggested Sam.

"Put it there," said Timpkin, and held forth his bony hand. "Aye-heigh-ho!" His gaze roved round.

"The way I look at this fruit-ranching," he broke out, "is like this: it ain't as remunerative as politics, which is of course the *nulli secundum* game. Nobody expects any visible means of support to touch invisible politics. It ain't as remunerative as buying and selling town-lots, even if you haven't seen the lots you're selling, apart from the plan in the estate office; and of course apples ain't as remunerative as gold-mines—which come after politics and after town-lots. But a man has got to live somewhere, and if the garden of his home, so to speak, can pay for wear and tear—well, it's more than hotel-running does. It's a wonderful world, and wonderful what a man

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can do when he feels his home is safe anyhow. I guess I'll have more faith in apple-trees around me in my home than hard-eating boarders. That's looking at it at the worst."

"Look at it at the best," suggested hopeful Sam.

"No, sir!" ejaculated Timpkin. "I looked at hotel-running that way—and it was hotel-running all right! It was nothing but dead heats from the kitchen around the tables, feeding them gorging shovel-stiffs! Anyhow, your apple-trees can't suddenly pull up their roots and skedaddle just when they're due to hand over their keep and maybe a few cents margin. Why, man, don't look at me like that! I'm right hopeful about it all. We may pull off half what we're planning to pull off. Always scheme high! Anyhow, here's a home at last. Yes, sir, here's a home at last! Here's what we've wanted. No more running from the kitchen to the dining-room feeding guys who eat the profit while you're running. No more acting as half-cook half-waitress for Mrs. Timpkin. What used to get my goat was the way she had to hustle too."

"Never mind now," said Sam. "Your goat is dead."

In that frame of mind they chugged back to Kootenay and sought out Irvine again.

"Well?" said he.

"We like it," said Timpkin.

"You can have it for what I paid," answered Irvine. "And that's three thousand."

Less Quixotic men than these two "rogues," Timpkin and Sam Haig, would have beaten him

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down—or at the best might have given him what he asked. But it is one thing to hutt-in upon a town's affairs and take pickings, without being a member elected by the people, with the ancient prerogative, to do so ; and quite another thing to take advantage of a stricken man's melancholy. So they behaved like fools in hooks, or shall we say like lovable persons in real life ? There are men and women like that, wise or unwise. They told him he must make some profit on the sale, and forced him to take five thousand. The *blast* man of affairs may smile, but thus it was.

Sleeping partner Franklin, walking round the place with Sam and Timpkin, about a fortnight later, broke out with : " Well, the original owner left no spirit of sadness behind. It's just peace here—just plumh peace."

" You het you ! " agreed Timpkin, and led on to a semi-cleared patch where his one-time waiter and chamberman and his one-time cook were now further burning and clearing. Roots of felled pines, set alight, spluttered with blue flames on the borders of the ranch and an aromatic haze of smoke hung in the still air. " This Chinese cheap labour," Timpkin explained, " cuts two ways. What is cheap labour in the eyes of the Occident is well-paid labour in the eyes of the Orient. Here are Sing and Tom laying up treasure for themselves. *On your uppers* in the Western States is *on velvet* in Canton. Queer fellows, Chinks. Imagine Tom heing with me all this time and never telling me that he could garden as well as cook. What's

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the name," he inquired, turning to Sam, whom he looked upon as encyclopædic, "for this here system—this here system of giving them each one row of trees out of a dozen and them tilling the lot for the profits of their own row?"

"*Feudal*, I should think," said Franklin.

"Yes, I should think *feudal* would be the word for it," said Sam. "*Run-rig* I believe they used to call it in old England, where our language came from."

"Guess the Pilgrim Fathers ran it a spell after they landed," opined Timpkin, "till the spirit of Get Rich Quick, under the name of Freedom, upset the game. I expect that the labourers, when they were white men, made out that they owned the trees, as well as the produce of them in lieu of wages, and yanked them up when their time expired, and went and planted them somewhere else for themselves."

"Quite likely," said Franklin. "Say, have any of you seen Marsden lately?"

"No," they replied as one.

"You should see him, then," remarked Franklin.

"Something is wrong with him, if I'm any judge. Some folks don't seem to have eyes in their heads, though. He acts queer all the time, and yet when I mentioned it to a man who had been talking to him for half an hour—'Didn't notice,' he said. He strikes me as a man who's going loco about a woman. I've seen the same kind of thing before. He gets on to discussions about sentiment and heart *versus* intellect. It's clear to me some girl

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has twisted his brain for him. I can't understand it. The world is full of good women, but writers of history seem to select the B-B-B's to be remembered (beastly bad beauties), the women that tangle men up, and make them do crazy things. Some people would think Marsden had been over-drinking. It's as plain as Drew Mountain that he hasn't."

"I tell you this," interjected Timpkin. "A man that in love looks as if he was in liquor should cut it out—cut it out. Do you remember that guy Grosset, Sam? Of course you do! Well, look at the way he used to sit around and whisper about some female: 'Wow! That's how I feel!'"

"Yes, yes," said Sam, and looked put out, had a sudden interest in the young apple-trees. He did not know that this little chat was a "put-up job" between Franklin and Timpkin—put-up because of his own queer preoccupied manner of late. Sing interrupted the talk.

"Hullo!" he hailed. "Mishatimkins—she hollah!"

Looking round they saw Mrs. Timpkin coming toward them from the bungalow, with the hopeless air of one who had long been "hollering," and had given it up as a useless strain upon the thorax. Now, being seen, she beckoned to the men. She was a jollier-looking Mrs. Timpkin than when Sam first saw her in his own necessitous days. Apologetically they all hastened to her.

"Here's Mr. Webley," she told them, "with a party in his motor-boat—broken down."

"Where?" demanded Sam.

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"Oh, they're all right," said Mrs. Timpkin reassuringly, with a flick of a glance toward her husband. "They paddled inshore, using their hands for oars, and he came up to see if anyone was around who could fix him. I told him I'd find you, and he's gone back to the beach to cheer the others. You go down, Lincoln, and bring the women right up to the ranch. I expect the tinkering on that boat will call for some accompaniment of language."

"We'll all go down," said Franklin, while Sam, without speaking, strode off. "I know you're an engineer, Haig, and I've had experience of gasoline tubs. Webley!" he chuckled. "Webley is just the man to say 'to the devil with it' if anything goes wrong. I remember when he was freight-shed boss. He managed it all right. He had the savvy of how to move tons of machinery with only three hands to help him, but he hated the job. 'Here's jiu-jutsu, boys!' he used to say. 'Here's—'" (they were out of earshot of Mrs. Timpkin by now, so it was safe to repeat)— "here's some more ——— jiu-jutsu." I used to stroll past slow when any business took me near, just to hear him." Sam was thrusting a way through the foreshore jungle of wild berry-bushes and scrub, left there when the ranchman cleared, Timpkin at his heels, just far enough behind, having had experience in the woods, not to be whipped in the face by back-springing tendrils after Sam's passing. "There he is. There they are."

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In a motor-boat that lay alongside a projecting tree that served as jetty were Mrs. Webley, Nance, and her friend Miss Walters. Out of the tangle the three men came cracking through, and appeared to the stranded boaters as the Portuguese appeared to Crusoe. Greetings over, and Timpkin introduced, the ladies were invited ashore to inspect the ranch while Franklin and Sam advised upon the deranged engine.

"Mrs. Timpkin has put the kettle on," said Timpkin, "and though we didn't expect visitors we can rustle you some kind of a meal."

"It's a shame to foist ourselves upon you," said Mrs. Webley. "Perhaps the engine can be set a-going soon."

"Your break-down is our good fortune," replied Sam quickly, and Timpkin had the air (if it may be put so of a human being) of cocking his ears, wondering if here was the note of merely formal or really sincere hospitality. "You would have to see the place anyhow before long, so you may just as well stay now."

"We'll make it a surprise party, then!" cried Nance. "There's a luncheon-basket here somewhere."

"Why, so there is!" exclaimed her mother. "I'd quite forgotten. Pass out that basket, and we'll go up and call on Mrs. Timpkin, and introduce ourselves. We've heard of her often," and she beamed on Timpkin, who beamed in return.

The basket was lifted out with great care, and away they trudged, Timpkin first, Mrs. Webley

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at his heels, the girls tarrying a little while to peer over the backs of Franklin, Sam and Webley that bent beside the engine; then (when the men's pose of interest turned to pose of irritation) following Mrs. Webley; and over their shoulders they delivered parting admonitions of patience and calm.

While the mechanics were employed on their tinkering a long motor-boat came coughing round the tip of Ten Mile Point, and Franklin, looking up, said: "Who's boat is this now?"

Webley, in shirt-sleeves, his hair all ruffled, and in his eyes a red glint, glanced up.

"It looks like Marsden's," said Sam.

"It is his," growled Webley. "Got a party on board too! A whole ——— party, and they'll come alongside and look on, and ——— anyhow!" It was as if he was back at freightshed work.

The boat swept into the bay, leaving a fine sickle of a wake behind it on the cold green and amber of the water, and, engine off, glided to Innes' jetty.

"There!" said Webley. "That's got it. We'll just trial trip it. I thought they were coming over here, but they've gone to see your neighbour. Let go, Haig—push her off," and out they went from their primitive landing place.

Watching the engine for any fresh sign of trouble kept them from being aware of the movements of the party across the bay, but as they came to land again they saw a group of men and women dis-

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appearing in the direction of Innes' ranch, scrambling over the beach, with much laughter, and rattling of boulders. Innes was standing at the landing place, waiting for Marsden, who was making snug, seeing that the cork fenders were out, and the painter fast; and on seeing them look toward him he waved his hand gaily in air, jumped to the beach, and strolled along toward them.

"How-do?" he hailed, coming near.

To Sam he seemed not a bad fellow; he was a youthful, eager figure of a man with what is called "snap" in his manner. Franklin and Webley he already knew, and hardly needed introduction to Sam. He was the kind of young man to whom a boat or an apple could play the part of introduction. He extended his hand.

"You're a new neighbour of mine, I believe," he said. "How are you?" and then, more quietly, as though he had known Sam for years: "Say, take my tip. Don't go in for the entertaining stunt; it bores me stiff. My place isn't a home; it's a gol-darn hotel. I invite folks down because I think it's good for business, and they eat and drink the profits, and they bore me so that I want to insult them and tell them to get home. Here's Marsden. D'ye know Marsden? Meet my friend Mr. Marsden, Mr.——"

Marsden had followed him, and now stood a few feet behind, looking at the boats instead of at the men, gave three nods—one for each presumably—and said: "How-do—how-do—how-do, gentle-

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men?" It was not offensive. It was, as Franklin would say, "queer." It did not suggest that there was anything wrong with them in his estimation. It suggested that there was something wrong with him. The man seemed dazed. Innes stopped in the middle of his introduction and stared at him, not with a frown as some men do when puzzled by another's behaviour, but with wide eyes that suggested a kind of naif half-amusement, half-astonishment.

"I was just saying," said Innes, blinking at him, in an attempt to draw him into conversation, "that it lores me stiff. What is the good of entertaining the man you know is to be chief judge at the Horticultural Show when you know that somebody else is entertaining him too—and when he knows you are only trying to throw the con* into him? If I had to start produce-raising again I'd start on the principle of: 'I can raise fruit. I don't entertain judges of shows, and I don't lay myself out to give good times to buyers for export. I don't need to. My fruit is good enough without that!' What do you think, Marsden? I know what I know, but what do you think?"

"That's the way of it, all right, all right," replied Marsden, heavily. The look of alertness that showed for a flicker on his face was foreed.

Innes glanced puzzled at him again.

"What is the way to do it?" he asked. He suspected that Marsden had not been listening.

* "Throwing the con." Derivation: "Throwing the connecting line."

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"As you say," returned Marsden.

Innes shook his head at the others as one hopeless.

"It's a proposition all right," said Marsden, drawing a hand slowly down his jaw, his lips puckering.

"I don't believe you're thinking of my proposition at all," said Innes bluntly. "It's no proposition to me. I say if I had to begin again I'd attend to my fruit. All I'd have to remark to the buyers would be: 'My apples are good. It don't cut any ice what whisky I keep.' Sounds simple, don't it? A lot of people miss the point, and think that the basis of any business is throwing the con into possible buyers, and giving free lunches and picnics to show-adjudicators." He nodded his head. "What do you know about it, Marsden? Wake up and look intelligent!"

"That's right," said Marsden. "A man is apt to forget the basis of things."

Innes prodded him in the midriff.

"Come along, old man," he said, "and have a cocktail. I've got to look after my guests, if you will excuse me, friends. Come through and have a look around. I'm no dog in the manger. I've got Peters down here to-day—you know him, buys for two or three of the big Seattle firms. You come through, you boys, and be introduced casually. Handy to know. He buys big, and he can buy from you as well as from me. May be useful to you," and he turned away.

"Sort of leaves an impression of gay and irre-

THE FRUIT-RANCH

sponsible," said Franklin. "But say—what did I tell you about Marsden? That boat's all right, Webley, don't you worry. These fenders are all right. The hull's made of steel, not egg-shell. Come along. The ladies will think we're never going to get through."

CHAPTER II

MILDRED THROWS DOWN THE GLOVE

THEY were delighted with the location, the aspect, the house--fairly built as a home for summer and winter, with sleeping-porches and heating apparatus. To west, a strip of jungle, left as The First Cause had left it, hid Innes' domain. To east, beyond the rows of fruit-trees that Irvine had cleared the way for and planted, still rose the blue whorls and eddies of smoke where Sing and Tom had set alight the remaining stumps out toward the point, and still would there be blue smoke-haze by day and dancing little flames by night for a week maybe, while the resinous roots spluttered on. To inland, south, beyond the avenues of orderly trees, converging in perspective, a belt of scrub ribboned along at the foot of the mountain range that was all stately pine and feathery fir, balancing the mountain across the lake. A limit was set to competition by the lie of the land, for only a little way to west, beyond Innes' ranch, and a little way to east, beyond Ten Mile Point, the mountains pushed forward, came steeply down

MILDRED THROWS DOWN THE GLOVE

to the lake, with no offering of rich bottom-lands at all. Sam felt that he would never get over the pleasure of owning such a place; though to be sure he did not want to get over it. He was in the mood of wanting to sit up with it all night. Sleepy from work, he yet found it difficult to go to bed down there, was not inclined to leave the pleasure of ownership. For the moment he was relishing the further pleasure of showing it to his first visitors.

"This is certainly a difference," said Webley when, after washing oil and petrol-odour from their hands, the men joined the women and announced the boat again in action, "this is a difference from forty-five dollars a month at the freight-shed, Haig. And it's no wild-cat," he added, his eyes roving round.

Then they fell to on the viands, those of the lunch-basket, and those Mrs. Timpkin had called upon Sing to "rustle," and were, in the words of Defoe, "all innocently merry."

"And of course," said Miss Walters, "you have all kinds of big schemes for the future?"

"I have one little scheme just now," replied Sam. "It sprang into my head I don't know where from." He turned to Franklin. "Listen to this," he said. "I read some time ago about a ranch that specialises on supplying fruit to the Mandarins of Europe, and the Money-gluttons of New York. Pieces of paper, cut like stencils, to form initials, are pasted on to the apples when they are green, and when they ripen the paper is torn off, and there's your very own apple, stamped with your

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

monogram or your own crest—yellow initials on red fruit.”

“What a fine notion!” cried Nance.

“My idea,” continued Sam, “is this: Why don’t we arrange with our local hotels here for that kind of thing? To make fruit-farming pay fruit-ranchers must club together or invent schemes, hustle one way or another; otherwise cost of transport cuts down the profits. This is only a small notion; but all such notions help. It catches me. Kings and railroad-magnates are not the only people capable of seeing the fun of eating a crested, or monogrammed, or personally-identified apple.”

“I shall start it at the *Grand Western*,” replied Franklin. “It will be talked about. ‘Where do your apples come from?’ they’ll ask, and I shall say, ‘Like the idea? I can book your order for a barrel-full with your own monogram on each apple.’”

“It is just a lot of little things like that,” said Mrs. Timpkin, “that count. You’ll have a live business if you go on thinking in these lines.”

The talk went on, to and fro, till suddenly there was a noise of someone breaking through the brush that was frontier between the two ranches, and Innes came into sight, while behind him—in a hesitating fashion—advancing, delaying, and waiting to be seen and invited, his guests followed, a slightly flushed throng.

“Can we come up?” Innes hailed.

“Come right along,” answered Timpkin.

MILDRED THROWS DOWN THE GLOVE

Innes, ahead of his party, bowed to the ladies, and in a hasty aside—"Thought I'd bring them over," he murmured. "Glad you're here, Mr. Webley. I've got two of the judges for the coming fair down to-day. I'll wedge in a word or two somehow about your sweet-peas. May as well use people, once you know them. Bored stiff, though. Yes, oh yes. Quite so. Fine location. Some orchard. Some apples. Don't know if you've met Mr. Peters. Mr. Peters, meet the man who raises the smartest sweet-peas in the country. Mr. Peters is an authority on sweet-peas. Shake hands with Mr. Webley—Mr. Peters."

Followed other introductions or renewals of acquaintanceship. Some had met before, others had not, and those on the porch were anon all on their feet, bowing and smiling like marionettes to those grouped below.

"Have some tea," suggested Mrs. Timpkin. "We've just got through, but——"

"Oh, we're just through some refreshment ourselves," replied Innes; "we only came over to see your location. Fine, isn't it, Peters? There is going to be no jealousy or envy here. I tell you what it is—this belt right along here is going to raise fruit. It ain't going to raise discord. We're not going to cut each other out at all, not going to try to. There's room for everybody. How's that, Deering? It's simply lake fruit you'll buy, not Innes' fruit, or Timpkin's fruit, or Haig's fruit. You want to keep your eye on this new bunch."

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

Innes had evidently the same views regarding the necessity for combination as Sam had recently voiced.

"Oh, I shall do that," said Deering, and gave a little bow to Timpkin, the eldest—or the eldest-looking—man to whom he was thus introduced.

To all this Sam listened with a tremendous show of attention, not only because he was interested, but because among Innes' friends was Mildred Henderson, and in the tangle of introducing, and re-introducing, she had managed to evade him altogether. As the people nodded and smiled one to another she had just dodged him; and the young man was as proud as Satan, or, at any rate, as proud as Milton said Satan was. That was why he was suddenly so tremendously engrossed in listening to what someone else had to say when she broke out in some comment on the place. If she couldn't see him, he didn't see her. The last time they had met (or had not met, for she had sent him from her door with a "Not at home") must not be forgotten, no matter what allure she might exercise over him. That was how he felt now!

The whole bevy, thus unceremoniously brought together, was presently strolling toward the prepared orchard. They clustered along in a sequence of groups. Sam caught fragments of conversation from before and behind, but having Mrs. Webley by his side he had little talking to do, she being loquacious. Deering appeared to think she was the mother-hen of the new ranch owners, and

MILDRED THROWS DOWN THE GLOVE

devoted his attention to her. He was a man who liked to honour the ladies. On this occasion he was super-courteous and somewhat elated. The whole party, indeed, exuded a subtle suggestion that their afternoon refreshment had come out of decanters instead of a tea-pot. But when one wants a man to award a medal to one's fruit, wine is generally a greater incentive than tea. Sam heard the voluble Innes gaily congratulating Franklin: ". . . didn't know you were interested in this sort of thing."

"Just for a lake home," said the deep Franklin, casually. "I'm going to build a bungalow along there by the point."

"Very good, very good. Fine. Hotel business is a worry. Want a rest now and then. Never told you I was once in that line—hotels. Oh yes; that's where I got wise to the game of life. I bought a hotel once and thought it was all right. It seemed to me it kept on running itself; but one day a man said to me: 'I hope you don't mind my mentioning it, but I've put up at your joint every time I've been in town. I'm a business man; I see; I know; I get the hang of places I come to.' Thought he was going to add that he conquered, but he went on very solemn and friendly: 'I simply have got to tell you that if you don't look out your two bar-keeps will buy your hotel before the year is out—on the knock-downs.' It made me stare. I had a punch and hit the bell till, and things like that. They were in the shack when I bought it. Seemed to me

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that the bar-keeps couldn't skin me ; but they had their system. No—they didn't buy the hotel from me. I went and sat in the bar myself for a week, and compared that week's takings with previous weeks ; and the result was that I fired 'em. I fired 'em and sold up—and they bought the hotel from the man I sold to ! What do you know about that ? ”

Marsden, who had been dragging along alone, between cluster and cluster, came out of his muse.

“ That's it,” he said. “ That's the game. The bar-keeps skinned you under your nose. You were too trustful—too trustful.”

“ Oh, I learnt,” commented Innes, glancing over his shoulder.

“ That's it,” repeated Marsden. “ The man who keeps his eyes skinned is the man who's going to come out on top. I don't say the man who knows how to play a mean game better than his neighbour, but the man who keeps his eyes skinned.”

“ All right,” said Innes. “ All right. Don't harp on it. I'm a light weight, and I've got your views without having to have them thundered at me. You'll blow me off my feet, all same feather, one of these days, shouting your philosophy of life at me ! ”

Thus they came, in their sequence of groups, clear to the point, breaking through the bushes and stepping out on to the shingle like discoverers, the wind from the lake blowing fresh in their faces, plucking at the men's coat-tails (or blowing them

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flat when they turned their backs), billowing out the women's frocks. Mildred tilted back, hands raised to hat-brim, head held up, the loose ends of the veil that was tied under her chin a flutter, a figure intriguing (as they use the word in these days) to the eye, if not necessarily (because of her conscious, too greatly obvious, certainty in herself and her pose) altogether attractive. She stood a trifle apart, and her eyes roved to Miss Walters—tall as she, fair for her dark, graceful but attempting no conspiracy with the wind.

"Well, you have a fine place!" exclaimed Mrs. Peters. "If I got the offer of New York or of this I guess I'd have this."

"O woman!" chanted her husband. "If you owned New York you could *have* this."

"Not if the owner wouldn't sell," she replied quickly. "I'd have this, as I say; and I'd have a board printed ready to stick up when I wanted just to be left alone: 'Not at home.' Anybody motor-boating along could just read that, down helm, and turn around."

"That's dead," said Mrs. Timpkin, who had resented Mr. Peters' remark that the place could be bought, was of small financial worth compared with New York (true though the statement was), and considered a little slap at Mrs. Peters as good as one at Peters. "In the best society they don't say 'Not at home' now."

Mildred glanced at her, shrewdly, calculating—and decided (wrongly) that Sam had sought a confidante. She thought the hint of an edge in

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Mrs. Timpkin's remark was for her ; in such little ways do erroneous conceptions arise.

Aware that Sam now looked at her, Mildred tilted her head a shade more, and a smile—just a hint supercilious—was on her lips.

He wanted to say : " I didn't tell her. You're wrong ! " How this girl provoked him ! How painfully subtle she made him ! A man with broad-gauge instincts, she made him narrow-gauge. Once she had lured ; now she came nigh irritating. Devoutly did he wish she had no effect at all. Peters, who always had a storyette to tell, plunged into that one about the Irish landowner who ordered his man to give visitors an evasive answer if they called when he was busy. The yarn ended with an account of how, one evening, the man had been asked : " Did anyone call ? "—" Yes, yer honour."—" And what did you do ? "—" I gave them an evasive answer."—" What did you say ? "—" They asked me was your honour at home, and I asked was their grandmother a monkey." As they laughed over it Sam turned, and very deliberately met Mildred's eyes. She couldn't smile a secret half-supercilious smile now. Peters was a stranger to him. She had seen them introduced but a few minutes ago. She could not suggest, with drooping eyelids, and a certain unworthy smile, intended for him, that he had sought sympathy over the rebuff of " Not at home " from Peters ! But she was gazing with rapt expression at the sky, did not seem to see him, slowly turned her back as he looked.

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"Irish helps are apt to be a bit uncouth," said Mrs. Peters. "Coons are better. They haven't such a mania for disturbing the peace—they're more civil to your friends when they call."

"True," said Mildred, suddenly. "And if your Irish servant has a grievance against you, she'll be rude to your friends, just to spite you."

She turned again as she spoke, and her face was inscrutable to the young man. Was that rebuff at her brother-in-law's door, he wondered (as maybe she intended him to wonder), all an error of the door-opener's who had confused him with someone else or misunderstood an order? Had Mildred not decreed it, but only heard of it from the scullion later? Was it he who was in the wrong? Was she hurt that he had not tried again to communicate with her—had not had belief in her friendliness, had not been sure it was a mistake?

He stood rigid a moment; but the next his eyes fell on Nance Webley, standing with Mrs. Peters, and it struck him that there was a girl who would not plunge a man into a fever, who would give him, instead, a straight deal. He had been free of his infatuation for some time, anger having ousted it; and he knew, at that moment, that he preferred the state of freedom—at that very moment when, all unexpected, he was almost whelmed again.

Suddenly Marsden spoke to Nance Webley.

"Oh, Miss Webley," he said, "thank you for ordering the lunch-basket," referring, belike, to some request of his over the garden fence for her service.

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“It was down in time, then?”

“It was down all right—and your selection is all right. Thank you very much. I never know what to order. A pleasure trip is different from a prospecting outfit.”

“It was nothing,” she declared. “I was going in for our basket anyhow.”

Sam gathered from this that she had seen to the provisioning on Marsden's behalf, and for a few moments was filled with excitations somewhat in the vein of those that afflict the—if not match-maker—match-suspector. Perhaps that deep card Marsden, acting upon some confounded theories of it being a cunning world instead of a hard world, pretending to be in pursuit of Mildred Henderson, would really astonish Kootenay by proposing to his neighbour's daughter! Our hero, or it should be said, this being a tale of to-day, our protagonist, was a trifle unhinged. Such a contretemps, thought he, would not be novel in the history of wooings and marriage. Deep man, Marsden! Sam blazed inwardly over his imaginings, and without any proof worthy the name of proof, he was angry with Marsden, looked upon him as a middle-aged ogre. It would be scandalous—criminal, and all the rest of it. Sam was in a bad way.

The conversation became less general. The party fell into two-somes and three-somes again. Sam was alert to notice the sneer with which Mildred Henderson glanced at Nance's flounces, and her shoes, and her hat, and then turned away, posing once more in the breeze. He peered sharply

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at her ; and the chiselled lines of her face seemed to him to indicate a superficial nature, a superficial beauty. Her surface was fair enough, but what shone through no longer held him. He furrowed his brows, surveyed her coldly, critically, as though he had never seen her before. She was the kind of woman who is called beautiful, he thought, but he was of the opinion that this kind of beauty should not be allowed the name. It was a usurpation—it was "brass," "cheek," "gall." Diagnose that so-called charm and it was mere skin and bone and cosmetics.

There was a cruel glamour on her face. He recalled a phrase of Schopenhauer about the necessity for the existence of sexual passion for one who would attain appreciation of some kinds of beauty. He came to the decision that she was not beautiful ! It was a thin, hard mouth ; it was the tightened chin of one aiming at a chiselled aspect ; the great soft eyes had a glint in them that belied all their apparent gentleness. She looked abruptly toward him, and he was at once engrossed upon the lake, watching the tiny waves that broke at the shingle's edge. But the scene was blurred for him by his inner communings. Something was happening, so deep that he did not plumb all the depths. It was one of those cross-road days, or one of those stock-taking days, or one of those days for sloughing old conceptions and beginning afresh. And the sun shone, and the water broke, lap-lapping on the beach, and eternal breezes fanned the cheeks of the little bunch of humanity.

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The party turned and strolled back from the shore. Innes brought Sam to attention.

"Come over with us," Innes invited, and it struck Sam, looking at the young rancher, they thus *vis-à-vis*, that he had maybe taken a cocktail too many. "Come and have a look round, Mr. Haig. You'll come over too, Mr. Webley? I've a flower-pot or two along there—interest you."

"We really must be going," replied Webley. "We did not even set out to call on Mr. Haig."

The talk of the various groups lulled as each watched for the sign to make final salaams and depart. Only one cluster was still vivacious. Mildred Henderson was with that one, and they all heard her voice raised at the end of some argument in which her immediate circle had evidently participated. It was clear to Sam that she spoke "at" him.

"I like a man to have grit," she said, and gave her most engaging smile. "Grit to do things, I mean," she added.

Innes slapped Sam's shoulder.

"Here's a man that should please you!" he cried. "You don't mind my telling?" and he plunged on before Sam could say *yes* or *no*. "Knocked the face off a man in town one day. Peaceful Sabbath afternoon, wasn't it? There was some woman in that, Mr. Haig—eh?" and he wagged a playful finger at Sam.

"But *that's* not grit!" said Mildred. "That's jealousy—granted that there was a woman in it. I never heard about Mr. Haig's little brawl."

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Marsden, who had been standing heavy and gloomy, listening, said now in rumbling voice: "Put a name on it, Miss Henderson. What would you like a man to do?"

She favoured him with a melting smile, centre of the stage now, very radiant.

"I tell you what I would call gritty," she said.

"A man rode up to the Lanyon Mine the other day in one of the buckets——"

Sam suddenly interrupted. He had to control himself.

"I was working the machine then," he said, "and the man who rode up fell out—if that's the occasion you refer to. He was killed. It cut me up so that I had to quit work for the day."

"You don't say!" Mildred Henderson exclaimed.

"Never mind," said Innes, very friendly. "That's tribute to your sense of feeling things, Mr. Haig. Never mind. You knocked another man's face in. I heard about that. I had you pointed out to me. Recognised you as soon as I saw you to-day. Pleased to meet you. Pleased to meet you."

"Well, I would like a man to ride up in the buckets," said Mildred, and gave just a flicker of a glance of annoyance at Innes.

Nance Webley had her eyes on Marsden.

"I think men do so much for women," she said in a quiet voice, "that it's not fair to ask them to do dangerous things only for a whim."

Mildred's eyes flashed, and then with a gracious

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smile toward Nance she said, looking at her as though only now aware of her presence: "What a nice thought! And so men do enough for you already—or is it the story of the Fox and the Grapes?" and she wrapped her words up in a laugh. "But though I am a woman myself," she added, "I can say, because I am not speaking personally, that there are women for whose sake men do things without being asked."

"That's so, that's so," agreed Innes, bowing low to nobody in particular, genially "oiled," it would appear, tapping unpleasantness, and desiring to make things pleasant. "O the power of woman! Helen of Troy, and that sort of thing. Cleopatra, and—and——" he tailed off, "and Potiphar's wife, you know," he murmured to Sam, who stood beside him. "Whoo—I must sober up! I had two or three shots before we came over, and they're operating now. I feel squiffy. Well, come along, you people."

They drifted away, nodding adieux, and as the last of them disappeared in the strip of jungle between the ranches, Miss Walters giggled.

"That was supposed to be a smack at you, Nance," she said. "I miss a lot of these sort of remarks that members of my sex sometimes go in for, but you are evidently supposed to know nothing about men doing things for women. Her face added *that!*"

"Oh, it's nothing," answered Nance. "I'm sorry for Mr. Marsden. He's getting quite upset. He comes in and talks to us sometimes at home,

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and though he never mentions her directly we can tell he's just crazy about Miss Henderson. I wouldn't like a man to be crazy like that about me. I'd be sorry if any man was ever crazy about me. I said what I did to hint to her that she might play the game with him. I believe he's made up his mind to ride up in one of the buckets."

"Never!" exclaimed Miss Walters.

"He's a queer man," said Nance, opening her eyes very wide, and delivering upon them a slow nod in a way she had.

"Well, what about us going also?" suggested Webley.

"Up in a bucket?" Mrs. Webley exclaimed.

"No—no. Home."

"Oh, no—you stay," said Sam. "These people have only interrupted, that's all."

Timpkin winked at his wife.

"Yes—you stay," she urged. "I told Tom to see about rustling some supper."

Tom, as if conjured up, appeared behind them.

"I make suppah," he said. "Vely good. I hustle suppah. You all stop, eh? How many now?"

"There's an invitation," said Mrs. Timpkin.

"You'll have to stay, to please Tom."

So they stayed. And it was wondrously and largely peaceful after their neighbour's party had withdrawn, and the aura, or whatever you may call it, left behind by that mixed crowd had evaporated. Nervous uncertainties in relationship, or attitude, were all gone. The polished

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floors and beamed ceilings (designed in generous spirit) lent themselves more to quiet than to agitations.

When Sing brought in the lamps and hung them up there was a jewel-like quality in the floor space, a dull gold and amber effect. Through wide-open windows the lapping of water along the lake front sounded restful, and kindly, and friendly. Sing, slipping about behind the supper-party, in a white jacket, imitating on his own initiative the stewards on the lake-steamers, smiled no cryptic smile, but that of a servant well pleased. Here was no more rushing and fluttering to serve and feed hungry cut-rate boarders. Timpkin was at ease; no more did his leanness seem to border on the cadaverous. The hint of desperation had gone from the corners of his eyes. When he glanced at his wife now it was not with that questioning look—wondering how she was standing the strain—but with a look of satisfaction that she was free from it.

“I’m glad that crowd didn’t stay to supper,” said Webley. “We couldn’t have enjoyed this with them here,” and he held up a finger.

“You mean the sounds?” asked Miss Walters.

“Everything,” he replied.

“That’s wind in the tree-tops we can hear,” said she.

Sam had a sudden thought that a pretty woman not obsessed by her prettiness can be very pleasant. The non-analytic young man, who had of late been so unwontedly sensitive, had no idea that he was

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instituting comparisons ; but they were assuredly being instituted for him. After supper was over Mrs. Timpkin asked if anyone played, and Nance went to the piano, and they kept her there until a distant crackling brought Mrs. Webley up in her chair, alert.

"What's that ?" she asked.

"It's all right, it is only our neighbours going off. That's Marsden starting his boat."

"Then it's late," said Webley. "We shall have to look out for snags going home. That's the one trouble in this wilderness lake boating. Is there a moon to-night ? You never know when some creek has chucked out a fallen tree and set it adrift in the lake. Yes, we must go."

"The moon will be up in another hour," said Sam.

"How do you know so well ?" inquired Webley.

"Have you started a local meteorological station ?"

Sam laughed, and—"I own up," he replied, "that I'm so struck on the place that I can't sleep some nights for sheer enjoyment of it. I can hardly believe it's true. Last night I got up again to look out. Bright ! It was wonderful. It was so bright that you could see the apples all picked out on the trees, right down the rows. I had to go out and stroll down to the point."

"You'll be meeting a bear or a wild-cat if you do that sort of thing in the middle of the night !" Franklin interjected, smiling at the young man's enthusiasm.

Miss Walters rose, and walking to the door passed

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into the porch. "Isn't that great!" she said. "There's the moon just rising. Come and look."

Clustering at the door they looked out, and enjoyed the display, saw the slabs of brightness breaking on the peaks, the great wedges of black-purple shadows; the taller pine-tops well lit up; the sudden dart of a moon-path across the lake, twinkling ghostly, with its effect of wavering silver discs, between the boundary bushes and scrub. The girls walked along the veranda; Sam strolled after them. Miss Walters descended the steps and stood below. To Sam there came a sense of having formerly lived that part of his life, of:

"I have been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell."

No one spoke. Nance stood beside him, the queer blanching moonlight on her; and then there came to his mind that night on the veranda at Henderson's with Mildred, and inwardly he writhed. That night belonged to another life, a drugged life.

"You're very quiet, Nance," Miss Walters said, looking up.

"I'm thinking," replied Nance. "I can't get out of my head the way Mr. Marsden looked at Miss Henderson when she was talking about *grit*. I believe he's so crazy about her that he'll go and ride up in a bucket. I do. I'm almost sure about it."

"What I didn't like was the way she spoke to you," said her friend. "That man Marsden shouldn't be such a fool!"

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"She's such a beautiful woman," said Nance.

"Oh, she's beautiful," replied Miss Walters.

"Do you think so?" asked Sam, for picturing her now he saw her as repellent. The eyes, recalled, were treacherous, the lips cruel, the face hard.

"There's no doubt about it," said Nance.

"And I don't trouble about the way she spoke to me. But I don't see what kind of pleasure it can give her to make a man do fool things for her—for nothing!"

"That's because you're not built that way," remarked Miss Walters.

From the porch Mrs. Webley called softly: "We'll be getting down to the boat, you people"; and a few minutes later they were clattering over the slope of shingle, lanterns (thoughtfully provided by Sing) in hand, lanterns that they hardly needed because of the soaring moon. Franklin stepped into his boat and got ready. Webley bent over his engine.

"We've got Mr. Franklin with us," said Mrs. Webley, "so if it breaks down we can have a tow!"

"Break down nothing!" growled her husband in tones that set them all smiling. "We'll have a race home."

"Not with the ladies on board," pleaded Sam.

"All right?" asked Franklin.

"All right," responded Webley.

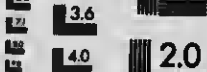
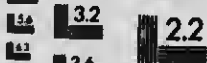
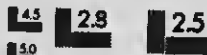
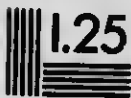
"Thanks for a good time," said Mrs. Webley.

"And congratulations on your home," added Webley.



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"And thanks for the music," said Sam.

As he held forth a hand to help Nancee to embark he suddenly remembered that Sunday on the path below the Chinese ranches, when he had helped Mildred down the steep part—and he had a rush of annoyance at himself for that infatuation. The two boats chugged off, breaking the ripples in the dark water; rapidly, such was the effect, the strip of lake between them and the beach widened; the lamps sent a dance of lights down into the deep, dark purple.

"Isn't it pretty?" came Nancee's voice. "Look at the glow of the windows through the brush."

"Come back soon again," called Mrs. Timpkin.

"Sure. Thank you!" the others replied.

As the Timpkins and Sam walked back they looked round now and then at the two lights shining out on the lake, each accompanied by its reflection—changing flakes of gold forming and fading in the water.

As they watched, one went out round the point; then the next was eclipsed.

"Say, what lovely hair Miss Walters has!" exclaimed Mrs. Timpkin. "I don't know whether I like it best in sunlight or lamplight."

"What's the matter with Miss Webley?" asked Timpkin.

"Oh, she's a peach. But say, wasn't that Miss Henderson jealous of Miss Walters?"

"I didn't notice," said Timpkin.

"She didn't like her being tall. I saw it. She kept on measuring her, downright angered, when

MILDRED THROWS DOWN THE GLOVE

we were out there at the point. And say, doesn't she just pose! Well!"

"O woman, woman!" said Timpkin. "I never noticed all that."

"No, of course you didn't. You didn't either, did you, Mr. Haig?"

"I don't know," replied Sam. "Perhaps. Our supper-party has made me forget the earlier visitors a bit."

"Sure," agreed Timpkin. "All I saw, in that way, was that Miss Henderson hated Nance Webley on sight."

"Do you know," said Mrs. Timpkin, "I admit that Miss Henderson is what they call beautiful, but her face strikes me like a skull. I don't like to remember it; and yet she's handsome enough. But I seem to see into her eyes, instead of just the colour of them; and I don't like what's in them; and she has mighty cruel lips. Now Mrs. Peters is what I call pretty—though she ain't got anything to commend in the way of what you might call points."

"Points!" thought Sam, feeling far off. "That's it—points! The way one talks of the lower animals!" But he said nothing. Moving before him, he in a retrospective mood, natural to him, was the face of Nance Webley as he had seen it in the moonlight when she stood at the top of the steps, so still that her friend commented upon her silence. It was, for some reason, a picture that would abide with him. He still felt her hand resting in his—and he was furious with himself.

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

Not so long ago he had gone along a-dreaming of another girl's hand—not so long ago he had been all a-fever over Mildred Henderson, and now (it made him ashamed) he was—no, not a-fever, maybe in the difference there was solace for his shame!—but most sweetly haunted by Nance Webley. Yet out of respect for her (you already know him as a highly honourable man) he refused to dream of her. He did not think that he was worthy. He looked beyond all women's eyes, and faces, and their various glamour, to the ever-changing silver discs of the moonlight on the lake, and noted the effect of quiescence on the soaring moon-blanchèd mountain. The sheen of the moon drifted over it like an aura.

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CHAPTER III

THE GREAT ASCENT

THE engineer who had taken Sam Haig's place at the smelter (when the lucky scheme of "mineral in place" transformed Sam into a fruit-farmer) was a happy and careless kid. "Chance it" was his motto in life.

When, next day, Mr. Marsden appeared on the engine-house platform, considering the buckets as they glided down and were tipped, he jocularly remarked: "Want a ride?" He did not think that Marsden really wanted a ride; this was only his gaiety. But when the big man glared at him and said "That's the notion!" he observed that there was little pleasantry in Marsden's eyes. The celebrated contractor was grim to the point of strained. So the youthful engineer desisted from levity and kept the tail of his eye, as they say, on the visitor, awaiting developments.

Suddenly Marsden went down frog-like on the platform and, as an empty bucket passed under him, flopped into it in the manner his examination had decided as most scientific. The young engineer

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

opened his mouth, grinned and stared. He saw something comical in the bulk of Marsden jammed in that bucket and swaying off into air.

"Look out at the trestles," he shouted, recovering from his amazement. "And say—don't look down when you get to the gulch."

Between the arriving and tipping of each of the descending buckets he watched the progress of Marsden, his grin fading, sign of anxiety taking its place; but as he saw the contractor pass the third trestle, atop of the first-rise, all steady, featly balanced, he opined: "He'll do it!" and then, looking down to the bridge, he saw another man coming along toward the engine-house, a man most businesslike. He watched him curiously from under the scoop cap that he wore raffishly on the side of his head.

The man who came posting under the bluffs, as Marsden disappeared, left the road when opposite the machine-house, crossed to it, climbed up the ladder, and—"Good-morning," he said.

"Why, it's my predecessor!" exclaimed the youth. "I didn't recognise you washed clean. I never saw you before but when you were black. How are you?"

"I'm all right," said Sam. "I want you to do me a favour."

"Yap?"

"I want to go up in one of the buckets."

"The —— you do! It seems to be catchin'! Still, where there's a bet concerned I won't stand in the way and bust the game. How many are

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

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

again that all he had to do was to sit tight, to imitate a roll of blankets, or a sack of potatoes, and forget all misleading perspective. Away he soared, and experienced a certain thrill on the crest as he found himself (instead of brained against the face of the hill) level with the lower tree-tops. He sat looking towards the east, and could thus see the streets of Kootenay laid out like a plan, or like a model city at an exposition—with only the difference that the men and vehicles moved. There suddenly came to him a tremendous impulse to perform what are called stunts. He wanted to screw his neck round, to discover if he could glimpse the Chinese farms from here among the last trees; but the bucket gently and admonitorily swayed. So he renounced that curiosity, and found himself now in the slit of avenue that had been cut for the tram through the belt of woods—swam out of that cleft, and saw the twist in the road coming up from the bend at which one turned off (or rather did not turn off) to the Pest House. Trestle by trestle he put chin on chest at the requisite intervals, kept it so the requisite length of time, even got this periodic bowing down to a system—counting ten from the moment he lowered till the moment he raised his head. It was methodical as a military salute—three paces before, and sustained till three paces past, so that there could be no doubt of its performance. He had not seen this upper spreading and falling valley, into which he now floated bird-like, since the day when he first encountered Marsden. And there, indeed, might be the spot

THE GREAT ASCENT

where that meeting took place. Yes, just about there!

Hullo! Something seen out of the corner of his eye drew his head round. Was it a bird? No—it was an arm of a support, arrived at before he was aware. Down ducked his head. He must not be so easy about it all. He must not try to pick out objects. A pretty position to be sight-seeing in!

As he passed over the bunk-houses of the Fraser Mine a man came out of one of the doors, saw him, called over his shoulder into the black interior and was joined by someone else, perhaps the cashier. It looked like his shape. Both shouted to him, but what they said he could not hear. Both pointed ahead, made unintelligible gestures. If they had only run up-hill, nearer to him, he might have heard the words, but they did not trouble to do so. They merely shouted and pointed. Yet when he looked in the direction they indicated he could see nothing to cause the excitement. The wires swung on to the next crest; that was all.

Perhaps they were only trying to tell him that he would be met at his journey's end by an irate boss. Perhaps they were warning him of the gulch ahead—that he had not seen but, as we know, of which he had heard. No matter. He was impelled to this escapade. Not all the irate bosses in the world were of any moment. The sudden falling away of the hill below him, in the other direction from the sweep he had met mounting, cautioned a reconstruction of his mental balances. He said to himself yet

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again "Sit tight, my boy," then carefully looked ahead, and hanging as he was in air, held out beyond the trestles, they did not impede his view. He could see the buckets, depending from the same wire as his, gliding down and down—had an inclination, despite his admonitions to himself to sit tight, to assist the balance of the bucket by moving to the side, as one moves to windward of a sailing-boat, forgetful that the bucket, and his dead-weight, would be plummet enough without any aid from him. Hardly had he reminded himself again that he was to be as impersonal as a sack of potatoes than he saw, down hill, the row of buckets suddenly stop descending and run straight out from the slope.

His eyes followed them. He glared, he stared. There was a man in one of them out there—no doubt about it. That was not a load of groceries going up to the mine. It was a man. He could see the humped position, could see the face; and even as he watched he was drifted suddenly from the downward motion into the horizontal, and his breath came out of his chest in a little "Ugh!" For he looked down on the tops of trees that stood precariously on the almost perpendicular sides of a hideous cleft of the mountains. He was being carried over them. It was here that he was assailed not by one menace alone, but by two, by three. Vertigo, or something akin to vertigo, caught him. He was seized with the urgent need to hold something, to grasp something with his hands, if it were no more than a pole such as tight-

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!"

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

Grab holt ! I've got ye ! Out with ye ! There ye are ! ”

On his knees on the loading platform Sam rolled over and rubbed his legs. He lay on his side, twisted up like a kneeling figure knocked off a plinth. He rubbed and grunted and at last managed to rise from his ignominious position ; and as he rose Marsden, still moving one leg gingerly, held out his hand.

“ Mr. Haig—Sam Haig,” he said, “ put it there. Put it there ! ”

Sam took the hand extended to him and grasped it firmly.

CHAPTER IV

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

EVERYONE at the Lanyon Mine took it for granted that the ascent had been made for a wager. Marsden was known by those at the summit camp, if not hail-fellow-well-met, known as a figure in Kootenay; and the boss of the shift that was coming off for dinner demanded that he, and his friend (as Sam now found himself styled, in the curious progress of his fortune) stay and eat. Hospitably were they led to the big barn-like room where were long tables covered with that kind of lacquered cloth, sight of which brought back, for Sam, memories of the construction camp and days at Henderson's ranch.

Agile "hash-slingers" clapped down mighty platefuls before the mighty men who came shouldering in from the ablution-room scented with yellow soap, and rosy from its use. The travellers by bucket-tram sat on either side of the boss, who, in the midst of chat and stuffing of himself with steak, leant back and chuckled and announced

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

that it beat cock-fighting. At the back of his mind (that was what the twinkle implied) was the thought that the escapade would be talked of; Marsden, city contractor, riding up on the tramway for a wager! "Say! It beats cock-fighting!"

"I suppose you knew there was a man killed doing that stunt not long ago?" he enquired.

"You bet you," said Marsden.

"Did you know?" said the boss, turning to Sam.

He nodded. "I was working the tram-engine when he came up," he replied. "Awful! I was cut up more than I can say. I had to quit work for the rest of the day when I knew."

"You! Well, that beats cock-fighting!" The boss stoked more steak, and as he munched, bent over his plate, he had another thought. "Anyone that said you lost nerve over that affair can look cheap now. You lost nerve over another man falling out of a bucket when you were tending the engine, but you did it yourself. That's *ver-ry* interesting, right interesting. Is it a big stake you gents had on it?"

"Trifling," replied Marsden quickly. "Yes—trifling, all right, all right." He bent forward and glanced abruptly past the boss, at his rival, with an expression beyond Sam to fathom.

Haig made no response, allowed Marsden's reply to suffice, merely thanked the bouncing "hash-slinger" for peaches and custard at that moment placed before him. When the shaft-whistle blew they shook hands with the boss and with those

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

men who pushed round them for the honour of grasping the hands of adventurers. Then Marsden turned to Sam.

"I suppose you don't mind hitting the road with me, Haig?" he asked gloomily, and in a tone for Sam's ear alone.

"Not at all," said Sam. "A pleasure."

"Good!" growled Marsden, and led off on the wagon-road, where they turned to wave to the platform man who had played masseur to them.

"Ain't you going down this way?" he hailed, beaming upon them. "All the buckets ain't full."

They shook their heads, laughing.

"No, thanks!" cried Marsden.

"Once will do," said Sam. "It might get monotonous."

Away they plunged, left, right, left, right, on the uneven road.

Sam was deep in thought; Marsden too; but when the latter spoke it was only to make expression of relishing these high altitudes, not to say aught of his mad prank or the cause of it.

"Say, it seems good to me up here," he rumbled.

It was good. There was no doubt it was good. Summit after summit, range after range, marched away into distance, slashed and sculptured by the ages, with high lonely cliffs staring blankly at the passage of the seasons, unexpected upland valleys with their foaming creeks and scattered boulders. Ragged summits of their own particular mountain were close above them, awesome, compelling, with

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

a sense of wild everlastingness. Sam mused upon a thought that drifted into his mind, a thought of the million snows that had powdered these peaks, the uncouth gales that had charged upon them, the rains that had danced on them with none to see, storms that had flashed, lighting them up on pitchy nights with sudden blaze. The air was keen, exhilarating. The view awoke a quiet, natural ecstasy, a view over crests that in Kootenay were looked up to. There was no humidity in the air. Over all that expanse was no blur of any local rain-storm; no steam ascended to the sun from any of those unseen valleys between the ridges. The mountains all stood up in their immutable ranks under a cold blue sky that seemed higher than ever, at this high altitude, instead of more approachable.

For response to Marsden's remark that it was good up here Sam had only a preoccupied grunt; but it sufficed. It was better than any other response could have been. This wagon-road on which they walked was little used, because of the tram, though once upon a time much machinery must have been hauled upon it by teams of straining horses. It was now little more than a highway for the miners descending and ascending, once in three months or so, to and from town. As for town—town was nothing at all from here, all that was visible being a few houses at the east end and, jutting into the lake, the steam-boat jetty, of no more apparent consequence than a match that, floating by, had been caught by a projection of the

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

shore. The road did not descend abruptly, the sides of the gorge below being more precipitous than the steepest roof; it took a leisurely sweep, turned away to left, running at some places almost level, coasting the top of the cleft over which the aerial tramway was flung. As they came to the apex of the gulch, trudging on, Marsden spoke.

"The carpenters," he said, "that put up the towers, right on the tip there, surely needed to have clear heads."

"Um!" said Sam. "Look at the birds down there."

"And they're flying below the trams at that," replied Marsden. "Crows."

"There was one flew up the gulch as I crossed over," said Sam. "It passed right under me."

"Wanted to dive after it, did you?" asked Marsden.

"Uh-hu," said Sam.

"Uh-hu!" said Marsden.

A stone, spurned by his feet, bounced aside, seemed to leap, as with its own volition, out and down; and they paused to watch it. It was too small to note all the way, but a slight wave of a tree-top below showed where it had hit, and there rose up two ragged-winged birds, shrieking as though in vituperation, circling up and out of the gorge, sweeping up and up and then over them—birds that looked as though they had recently had a dispute, and plucked the feathers from each other's head.

"I guess the thud with which a man would go

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

down there," remarked Marsden, "would bang him into a kind of grave of his own making. Nothing to do but pile stones over him to keep bald-headed eagles and coyotes off." He considered the place, a frown between his brows. "Guess they get wolf up here," he said. "Last year, away below the Fraser Mine, I came on a bear and two cubs. Fortunately, I wasn't between the old lady and the kids."

"Oh! What did they do?"

"They were picking berries. Just sat up and watched me. I took a circumbend off the wagon-road to pass them. They watched me like this"—and he showed—"as far as they could, looking that way, and then they all gave their heads a jerk round the other way—like this—and pieked me up over the other shoulder. Kind o' weird. After I got away a good bit, me looking round, they began eatin' berries again. 'Well, good-bye to that gorge," he finished, for the road veered away again to lead over the lower summit to the Fraser mine.

He did not speak again until they came to a place where the tramway passes over the road. One of the buckets was then sliding under the arm of the nearest trestle.

"Sam Haig," Marsden broke out, "you can have her. I've been figuring out what to say to you, and that's it. You can have her. To say anything else would be out of place. But you can have her, all right—all right."

"Have who?" said Sam, very quietly.

Marsden, very puzzled (and can one wonder at

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

it ?), took dumfounded survey of the young man.

"Why, the woman we did it for!" he answered.

"Didn't you ride up in that bucket to-day to show Mildred Henderson you weren't scared to do it?"

"Not on your life!" exclaimed Sam.

CHAPTER V

WHY THEY DID IT

"WELL, you do surprise me!" ejaculated Marsden; and after a pause—"You certainly do surprise me, all right, all right," he muttered, and was engrossed upon some private consideration. Sam, who had been in mute mood ever since scrambling out of the bucket, said nothing, but anon Marsden gave further voice to his thoughts. "It is one more proof of how I have been tangling myself up," he said. "She didn't make you do it? You didn't do it for her? Well, it beats me!"

He was on the point of asking Sam why he had done it, if not at her instigation; but his own side abruptly and deeply occupied him.

"She's a storm-centre," he continued, "that's what she is. But I always thought you were after her, Haig. I admit it. Guess I was half crazy right along. I guess it was some kind of jealousy. I guess I was a specimen of jealous man all right. Too far back to tell how it was! I've got mixed and tangled up terrible. I don't like it. Candidly,

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Haig, I don't like it. I've been off my sleep even, thinking about her, thinking also about why I should be all mixed up because of her anyhow. You see she's a kind of storm-centre! And she enjoys being a storm-centre. I can't describe it, but if ever any woman has mixed you up trying to find out where you are with her, you'll know what I'm trying to tell you. You think things are going along swimming, and suddenly she turns a new way round to you, and puts up a proposition you never could have guessed was coming. Then you're up against it. She'll leave you one day with a kind of understanding how things are—and next day she sets you wondering if you didn't dream about the last meeting! I don't know if you can understand, seeing I was mistaken—seeing—perhaps some other woman—perhaps you can kind of understand, anyhow."

"Perfectly," said Sam. "Quite."

"Well, that's me! And I've cut it out—cut it out, all right, all right. When I was soaring over Dead Man Gulch up there I saw the whole thing, and I said: 'I cut it out right now. A woman has no special licence, or title'—you get me?—'to put it up to a man to do a crazy thing like this for her.' I would do crazier things for folks, but that's not the point. The point is that there was nothing to it. There ain't no sense in doing crazy things to satisfy somebody else's whim. A man who was too lazy to walk up, and rode up that way, would be riding in a better cause. He'd just be lazy—not crazy! No, sir, when I looked at myself

THE LADY OF THE CROSSING

sitting in that bucket like a toad and going over Dead Man Gulch, where more than one has lost his head and plunked down, and hit the Noo Jerusalem summary, I tell you, I said to myself: 'Marsden, you're a fool!' That was one side. And I also said: 'She had no right to put it up to you to do it.'" He paused. "Say," he spoke diffidently, "I can't help being curious why you did it. I want to treat you according to Hoyle, Mr. Haig, for I got to respect you. Would-it be according to Hoyle to ask why you did it, anyhow? All I know is that you were there yesterday when she talked about it. You must have heard."

"I did hear," said Sam.

"Oh, you did! Well, that's something. Look here, then, tell me this: Do you think it is just the state she put me into that's responsible for the way I took her remark? Do you think it was just my fancy that she meant it as a challenge? I get fogged. If I asked her now I guess she'd be liable to say she never meant it. But I'm asking you. You heard—you were there, whatever you've done it for. That she flung that out as a whet to you and me was my notion of it. You say you didn't do it for her. But you heard her. Do you think it was meant as a challenge to me, then?"

"It was intended so," replied Sam. "You're not wrong there. It was. And I thought then that she had no right to say it."

"That's what I think now! But say—can't you tell me why in thunder you came up?"

"I came up," said Sam slowly, "to let her see

WHY THEY DID IT

that a man would do it—and not for her. You perhaps didn't notice that Miss Webley was exasperated with her, and questioned a woman's right to——”

“I did!” exclaimed Marsden, vehemently interrupting.

“Then you perhaps noticed the suggestion Mildred Henderson dropped was that a man might not do things for Miss Webley—that she was jealous of them doing things for other women, but that—there you are! She left the rest in abeyance.”

Marsden nodded his head up and down slowly.

“You got her,” he said. “You got her fixed in your mind all right, all right. Women are queer that way. They seem to be running bluffs on each other, but it's a kind of game all played under the table instead of on top.”

“Well, I saw it,” said Sam, “and it made me hot. I believe now,” and he laughed at himself, “that it was a little knoll of a matter that I turned into a mountain. But no matter—it was there all the same. And I've done it. And I'm alive. And Nance Webley is worth two or three Miss Hendersons——”

A smile showed, and spread, on Marsden's face.

“What—I—fail—to—see,” he drawled, “is how you are going to tell Mildred Henderson you did it for that reason!”

Sam's face showed gloom.

“I know!” he said, and then—“I'm a hot-headed sort of fool in some ways. You were quite

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right when you told me, a long time ago, that I was moved by sentiment."

"When did I say that?"

"Don't you recall a lecture you delivered in Webley's garden?"

"Oh, sure! But that was no lecture! I was trying to tell you, on the side, that I meant to win Mildred Henderson!"

"What—I—fail—to—see," said Sam, slowly, "is how you are going to act when you go down again. Everyone will be talking of it, and she'll be sure to think you did it for her, and——"

"So I did!" commented Marsden with a grim chuckle. "She'll be sure to think we both did it for her. But I'm not going to leave it like that. I'm going to call. I'm going to call and say to her: 'Miss Henderson, I've been up to the top, squatted in a bucket like a fool kid. I did it because you kind of challenged. I've done it, and it was a crazy thing for you to want a man to do just to flatter you. And I've called to tell you, so as to let you know my mind now, same as I've let you know it all along, that—I—won't—trouble—you—any—more!'"

He paused, staring ahead.

"And she will make a twist," replied Sam, "or a move—neither you nor I can hazard a guess at what kind of twist or move—but it will put you off your base again, and you'll come away all tangled up."

"You surely seem to know a lot about it!" said Marsden. "You seem to be a whole lot con-

WHY THEY DID IT

versant with her. But you can throw that opinion of how I'll act in the discard. I'm through! Here we are at the belt of woods. If I go and see her at all I go right now, and get the thing finished, put the tombstone up over the darned silly episode, so to speak."

Despite his companion's gravity, Sam laughed gently. Marsden glared; but the glare was play-acting, for next moment his keen eyes, that had recently been troubled at the core, twinkled. As they came down to the corner of Astley Street, where it debouches into the wagon-road, Sam saw a wizened and springy youth dancing uphill.

"Here's the interviewer," he said, "the reporter man of the *News*!"

"So it is," said Marsden; "Hell bent for election! Guess he's after us, heard about it from the engineer at the power-house after we started. Well, I did it for fun, and you did it to show a certain lady who asked you to do it that you could do it for another——"

"Good life, no!" Sam implored. "You mustn't say anything like that!"

The newspaper man was almost level. He waved his hand cheerily.

"What do you think?" he cried. "You know that fellow Grosset—Kootenay Clothing Company—the chap," he nodded to Haig, "you lambasted?"

"Yes?"

"He's bolted out of town!"

"Not a bit surprised!" said Sam.

THE BODY OF THE CROSSING

"With Miss Henderson, Mathers' sister-in-law!" announced *The Koolenay News*.

Sam stared, for a second or two bereft of speech, and then—"Not a bit surprised!" he said again. Marsden emulated his calm exterior, and succeeded so well that the reporter thought it necessary to add explanation. His news seemed to fall flat.

"Didn't you know her?" he asked. "You must have seen her around—tall, dark, bit of gyp about her, terribly pretty, but spoilt by being too sure."

"I guess I know the woman you mean," said Marsden.

"Thought you would!" declared the reporter.

"So-long!"

He fled upon his exciting business, and when he had gone Sam's head turned slowly toward Marsden, Marsden's turned slowly toward Sam. Their eyes met. They both spoke the same phrase—and it was entirely Western.

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CHAPTER VI

AU REVOIR

"How would it be," began Sam, after a long silence, "seeing we're so near, to step across the bridge and let the engineer boy know we're all right. He may have worried."

Marsden smiled. He had expected some suggestion more to the point, intimate, main-line, instead of side-track or spur-line; however—Sam Haig was a man of sentiment. Such a thought, at such a moment, was entirely in his character.

"He's not a worrying kid from what I saw of him," answered Marsden. "I maybe don't know all men as well as I reckoned, but I'm sure he's no worrying kid. You give him credit for feeling the way you might——"

"Or discredit," said Sam, "for feeling the way I felt once."

Marsden launched him his sidelong stab of a glance.

"Anyone who says such a thing to me about you I surely ain't going to be patient with," he announced. "And if ever I talked to you as if I thought you were unfit for a hard world I take it

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all back." And then, as if astonished at hearing his voice thus, and suddenly shy, he added: "All right. You go over and tell him. I'll see you later. I must get on to the office. So-long."

Crossing the road Sam came to the smelter bridge, and as he stepped on to it he heard feet running behind him, and the fluttering sound of skirts.

"Mr. Haig! Mr. Haig!" someone called.

He wheeled, and saw Nance Webley.

"Oh, please don't think me interfering," she said, plunging into talk at end of her run, "or mad, or anything, but would you mind telling me what you are going across this bridge for?"

"Why, certainly," he answered, looking down at her worried little face with an expression on his such as Mildred never saw there. "I'm going to show the engineer that I'm quite safe." (Her clear and candid eyes were wide upon him.) "I've just come down from the summit after riding up in one of the buckets. I'm going to tell the engineer that we're both——"

"Both?"

"—Marsden and I—we're both all right."

She looked ever so solemnly at him.

"You've been!" she said. "You've done it already!"

"Yes. But what do you know about it?"

"Only that I couldn't get out of my head what Miss Henderson said yesterday at your ranch. I knew it was meant for Marsden, and—and—well, I wondered if——"

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"If it was up to me to go too," suggested Sam, "because of the way she slung it at you that a man wouldn't do things for you?" Nance stared, as in horror. "She had no right to dare a man to do such a thing. But when she hinted about you—why then I went up. I thought and thought about it, till it seemed all that mattered. What a woman asks a man to do just to flatter her, men can do—for the sake of the other women that she's turned up her chin at!"

Nance did not understand; or perhaps she did, but wouldn't allow herself to.

"You did it for someone else?" she asked.

"I did it for you," he said.

"But——" she began, and stuck.

"But what?" he enquired.

"Never mind." Her eyes were full of tears.

"Something is wrong with you," he persisted.

"What's the matter?"

"No, nothing," she answered. "I thought you were going up too, but I didn't dream you'd go up for—for that reason. I don't know what to say."

"Say nothing," said Sam. "It was *up to me*."

"I don't see why. And you might have been killed! How I have worried this day! If you knew the grit I had to get up to set out to make sure I just couldn't stay at home not sure either way. I rang up Mr. Franklin to ask if you were in town. That was about ten o'clock. He was out. Then I rang up Mr. Marsden's office, and asked if he was in. He wasn't. So I knew no

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more. I was no wiser than before, and a whole lot more restless. At eleven o'clock it was awful, so I rang up Mr. Franklin again."

"At eleven I went up," said Sam.

They looked at each other, and their gaze lingered.

"Half an hour ago I rang up Franklin again, with the queerest feeling that whatever might happen had happened by then! He was in at last, and told me he had heard you were in town, but that you hadn't called at the *Grand Western*. And then—well, then I thought I'd come right along to the smelter. I didn't know what I'd ask them here when I arrived. I was trying to think that out on the way."

She stopped speaking, and found Sam looking tenderly down on her.

"Well, you see how it is," said he. "It's all right."

"I can't tell you how glad I am," said she.

"And I can't tell you how I appreciate—though you shouldn't have done it—your reason for going up. I can hardly believe it. Father always said you were crazy about——" she blushed, perceiving that if she went upon that vein she might appear to be making what she had no desire to make—a comparison.

"Crazy about Miss Henderson," Sam supplied the rest.

"Yes," said Nance.

"Maybe I was in a way," he admitted. "Guess I ought to tell you about that. Guess it's your

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right to hear—though it will make me seem—I don't know what, in your eyes."

"It's not my due at all!" she contradicted.

"I've only *butted in*; that's what I've done!"

"You've not butted in," he assured her, shaking his head. "All the way down the mountain I've hardly been able to answer Marsden's talk for thinking—for thinking about you. And say! There was nothing in that Miss Henderson business. Do you believe me? There was nothing in it."

"She's the most beautiful woman in Kootenay," said Nance, "and I can quite easily understand——"

"Rubbish!" Sam interrupted. "She's not beautiful, not even pretty, when you look right at her. But you are. And I only wish I was good enough to think I could go right home to the ranch and know I was working for"—her eyes were directly on him—"you."

It seemed he must work for somebody other than himself.

Till his last day he would never forget how simply, standing there on the smelter bridge of all places—which would surely worry the pseudo-romanticists who can only relish a proposal in a gondola—she slipped her hand into his, and said: "I am certainly very proud of you, Mr. Haig."

"Sam," he corrected.

"Sam," said she, and he had never known his name could sound as it sounded on her lips.

"I'll call you Nance when I feel half good

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enough," he said, and she thrilled at the sound of her name. His voice went into her heart.

"I would like you to call me Nance right now," she told him.

So there's the story of Sam Haig and Nance Webley, though it all began with the lure of Mildred Henderson. I think I adopted the best way to tell of both. I wanted to write it down as an on-looker; and Grosset on the veranda of Timpkin's boarding-house was passable, but Grosset in Mildred's boudoir, when the Mathers were away, is not in my vein. Telling it this way I was able to tell considerably more about these other people—and they are the people I like.

The reporter inserted six lines in the *Kootenay News* to say that Sam and Marsden had, for a wager, gone up in the buckets—and he believed that was all the story too. There were a couple of columns every day for a week about Grosset, and the dollars of the Clothing Company that he had appropriated. He and Mildred can be in Chihuahua for all I care, tired of each other, but I am glad (as they say out West) to keep track of the rest. Marsden is now Mayor of Kootenay, and is one of Sam's best friends. Innes has the plateau ranch where the Chinese squatters used to be, and the lake one he sold to Franklin. The Chinamen have gone off to "squat" somewhere else, or to clear some parcel of land for a white man and make it fit for his uses, sitting rent free the while, and laying aside a nest-egg for China on what they raise on it

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while clearing it and preparing it, as the method is—a method which seems to give satisfaction to both parties to such deals, the white and the yellow.

One sometimes wonders if the fruit-farms do, what is called, tremendously "pay"; one has a surmise that the fruit perhaps (unless there be high system and combination) only pays for the running of the home round which the trees stand, for the fruit-growers have other interests besides apples—town-lots and "politics," as Timpkin said. Not fruit alone, not hay alone, not silver-lead, not gold-mine—so Timpkin tells me—not petroleum-gusher, not real estate, not even (and he smiles) bogus estate can pay like "politics"—which is a saying hard to fathom, as one does not see politics growing, nor find it anywhere "in place." But no matter. In a light book one must not enquire too seriously. These fruit-growers, at any rate, have joined forces. Be Kootenay, with the country in which it is set, the Golconda of the boest-pamphlets, or the "bogus proposition" of the "knockers" (as those who decry are called out West), or be it somewhere between—which is probable—I would go back to that enchanting land, and see the folks again. If it be the will of the gods I shall go back, back again to Kootenay, hire a launch, and chug down to Ten Mile Point. It will be in the Spring, if possible, when in the cleared space under the evergreen pines the white foam of fruit breaks on the trees.

And yet the season does not matter. I know the

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autumn pine woods, the autumn peaks, the autumn orchards with the apples, as Marvell said of oranges in the Bermudas, like golden lamps in a green night, quaint oases among the fixed and eternal tumult of the mountains and their wilder foliage. The season does not signify to me, so be it I can see these old friends again: Sam Haig, and Nance his wife—with her kindly hazel eyes, her utterly unaffected charm—that wistful, joyful, sensitive little soul who would hurt no living thing; Timpkin, whose goat is to-day seldom got, and his wife, her face now blend of shrewd and tender, her hands more restful, with little wrinkles now on their backs; Franklin, who has a seedy look as of yore, until you draw near and find, as of yore, that it is his manner; Webley, superintendent of the line, and his wife, contented with him and not offended when he swears over nothings; Sing, too; Tom has gone back to Canton, but Sing says: “'Melica good enough for me. My friends all gone in China. Oh yes; no wi', no lillun.” Agnostic Sing cares not if at the end his ashes blend with dust of China or dust of “'Melica.” He realises that all the world is one small star.

Yes, I would like to see them again—those folks who have happened upon this planet in the same brief space of time as I. For this is in a way a real story, though it may read like romance.

FINIS

TITLES OF SOME OTHER BOOKS BY MR. NIVEN—AND PRESS OPINIONS.

ELLEN ADAIR.

"Astonishingly exact in its drawing . . . never intemperate or tactless or at a loss."—Dixon Scott, in *The Liverpool Post*.

"Mr. Niven has written several other fine stories, but he has not done anything previously so good as this."—William Purvis, in *The Sunday Chronicle*.

A WILDERNESS OF MONKEYS.

"An original and fascinating book."—C. K. B., in *T.P.'s Weekly*.

"Mr. Niven, a slender David, goes forth to war with the pebble of wit and the pebble of style and the pebble of exquisite scorn. In the result we have one of the most graceful books imaginable in a subject that seems to call for the loud mouths of the prophets. . . . His book is of rare excellence. It is distinguished in its laughter, and its charm, serious in its imagination and its morals; it unites the grace of the minor poets to the frankness of the old satires."—Robert Lynd, in *The Daily News*.

"If it should seem . . . that the book is overweighted with the sense of sex, we can only say that any such fault is more than balanced by its cleverness, humour, and love of beauty."—F. A. B., in *The Observer*.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE.

"Mr. Niven has done it. He has written a novel . . . which is a genuine novel of ideas; and not a mere brilliantly accurate essay in observation . . . Mr. Niven knows with the best of them what he is writing about. . . . It is a blessed relief to meet a first-rate novel in which one is not told everything; where even the author is not omniscient, and is content to leave his reader

something to be amazed at a remarkable novel."
—R. Ellis Roberts, in *The Daily News*.

THE PORCELAIN LADY.

"If the book is light, its title alone would show us that it was meant to be so; the chief quality of the book is its readableness, and it is full of kindness and cleverness too."—B. S., in *The Manchester Guardian*.

HANDS UP!

"It is all that a book of this kind should be it has a flavour of its own that makes it memorable."—
Edwin Pugh, in *The Bookman*.

TWO GENERATIONS.

"Mr. Niven moves from strength to strength. His 'Justice of the Peace,' with its powerful analysis of conflicting temperaments, its deep consciousness of family life, and its pathos, attracted well-merited notice. His 'Two Generations,' cast in the same mould, shows an even firmer grip of realities."—W. L. Courtney, in *The Daily Telegraph*.

DEAD MEN'S BELLS.

"Written with insight and distinction of style. Uncle Walter, Mr. Wylie, and delightful Cousin Effie are creations we shall not easily forget."—John F. Harris, in *The Bookman*.

THE S.S. GLORY.

. . . . "I don't see how you can
Fail to enjoy the 'S.S. Glory.'"

Mr. Punch.

PENNY SCOT'S TREASURE.

"This is not just a blazing adventure story of conventional fiction, but a fine narrative of adventure. The journeying through the enchanted woods will appeal to the judicious reader."—A. N. M., in *The Manchester Guardian*.

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